

STEVE DYKES / Los Angeles Times



Terri Girvin, left, Ken Holt and Lisa Gates in "Max &amp; Zoey."

**KID BEAT**

## 'Max & Zoey' Keeps Action Moving for Young Children

By LYNNE HEFFLEY

Toddler-friendly, as simple as a four-page baby book, "Max & Zoey, Zoey & Max" at the Back Alley Theatre is a pleasant, professional action play—actually two plays in one—for the youngest members of the family.

Husband-and-wife writing team Dion Alden Holt and Will Holt offer the adventures of two 4-year-olds (portrayed by adult actors Terri Girvin and Ken Holt) as they discover the world of chicken pox and the mystery of seary night noises. Lisa Gates is both narrator and mom.

The cast is polished—any parent would recognize Girvin's 4-year-old fidgets—and the Holt's musical score is humorous, if not particularly tuneful. Action is the key ingredient.

While waiting for the show to begin, children are invited to come up on a small, T-shaped runway

and make building-block towers with the actors. Participation continues during the play as audience members answer questions from the cast, play tug of war onstage and join a high-spirited chorus of sound effects.

The simplicity of Gretchen Corbett's staging keeps things free-flowing (an accomplishment of some note, since she has had to use the florid purple barroom setting designed by Deborah Raymond and Dorian Vernacchio for the theater's current adult play, "Gloria Duplex: An Erotic Worship Service for Theatre"). Lawrence Oberman provided the atmospheric lighting.

It all lasts about 45 minutes—short and sweet enough not to challenge the staying power of young children or their parents.

At 15231 Burbank Blvd. in Van Nuys, Saturdays and Sundays at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. through Aug. 6. Reopens Aug. 26 through Sept. 17. Tickets are \$6.50. (818) 780-2240.