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## THEATER REVIEW

### Lessons to Be Learned Amid the Laughs

By ANITA GATES

Mom, Dad and Sis are taken a little aback when, after eating alphabet soup, their dog, Martha, can talk. She has nice things to say (she loves Mom's meat loaf) but spends a lot of time on the telephone and is soon demanding play dates with a particular poodle. Martha redeems herself when a burglar creeps into the house and she's the only one home. Boy, is he surprised when she calls 911!

Many parents are already familiar with the children's book "Martha Speaks," by Susan Meddaugh, but the story takes on new musical life in the

*"If You Give a Mouse a Cookie & Other Story Books" continues through Aug. 18 at the Lucille Lortel Theater, 121 Christopher Street, Greenwich Village, (212) 642-9033.*

#### If You Give a Mouse a Cookie & Other Story Books

Lucille Lortel Theater

adorable hourlong children's show at the Lucille Lortel Theater. "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie & Other Story Books" consists of 10 musical skits based on 8 books, and everything about it is winning.

The six-person cast — Farah Alvin, David A. Austin, Nick Blaemire, Stephanie D'Abruzzo, Aurelia Williams and Carla Woods — is uniformly excellent. These are real pros who, at a recent performance, made the adults in the audience laugh just as much as the children. Ms. D'Abruzzo, who plays Martha and other characters, was Kate Monster on Broadway in "Avenue Q."

There are lessons to be learned, ef-

fortlessly. "Borreguita and the Coyote" teaches children how a clever little lamb can outwit a big, bad predator. And it throws in a little Spanish. "Owen," about a boy who refuses to give up his favorite blanket, demonstrates a clever solution. "Amazing Grace," about a little girl who wants to try out for the role of Peter Pan in a school production (although, as classmates tell her, Peter was neither female nor black), is an ode to pursuing your dream.

The music, written by a total of 14 composers and lyricists, comes in all styles. "Borreguita," predictably, has a Spanish accent. "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie," the title sketch, is a Western number. "Master Man," about a braggart who declares himself the strongest man in the world, is light hip-hop.

The show is free and recommended for children 4 and older.



Joan Marcus

Nick Blaemire as a mouse in "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie & Other Story Books."