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Reviews

Max and Ruby

Reviewed By: [Andy Propst](#) · Dec 11, 2007 · New York

With apologies to Sheldon Harnick: A children's show with music and lyrics by Carol Hall (who wrote *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*) and a book by Glen Berger (who wrote the downtown hit *Underneath the Lintel*) sounds crazy, no? Well, actually the fruits of their collaboration, [Max and Ruby](#), being presented by Theaterworks/USA at the Lucille Lortel Theatre, might be a little crazy, but only in a way that will delight and enthrall the children in the audience.

Randy White's fleet, 45-minute production, aided by Tracy Beasley's sprightly choreography, takes place on Luisa Thompson's imaginative set, which contains more than a few surprises as it revolves and opens like a pop-up book. Max (Lee Markham) and Ruby (Keely Felthous), the two popular furry bunny creations from author Rosemary Wells, set off on a kind of usual day. Max just wants to sort of while away the day as he normally would -- making mud and worm pies, chasing dragonflies, and playing cowboy. His older sister Ruby has a different agenda. She wants to put on a show for their grandmother (Nancy Slusser).



Lee Markham and Kelly Felthous
in *Max and Ruby*
(© Joan Marcus)

What happens while she tries to come up with a show in the space of the day and attempts to keep little brother Max either out of her hair or focused on her plans is the crux of this giddy piece, which is filled with a smorgasbord of musical styles. Hall includes everything from a march that sounds like it comes from John Philip Sousa to a sultry jazz number for a monstrous tarantula that Max imagines might be coming to get him while he's supposed to be taking a nap. In between, the kids are treated to a spicy Latin number, a country-and-western tune, and just some plain old Broadway razzamatazz.

Along the way, the kids also get some good life-lessons -- here about cooperation mostly, and without knowing it, a healthy introduction to the joys of musical theater. Especially fun is a

dream ballet of sorts when Max's toys -- including a windup lobster and glow-in-the-dark eel (the whimsical costumes are from Junghyun Georgia Lee) -- come to life and dance with him as just as he wants them to in his imagination. The eel (Karla Mosley) even gets a tap specialty in the center of the number.

Felthous and Markham give performances that thoroughly charm and endear. Felthous makes sure that bossy Ruby never becomes too overbearing or annoying even as she delivers Hall's numbers with power. Meanwhile, Markham proves to be a deft physical comedian; his rubber-faced grimaces (particularly when Ruby's demanding that he not take a frog to grandma's house) induce squeals of delight from even the youngest of theatergoers. Slusser imbues Grandma with a warmth and feistiness that seems reassuring to not only the kids, but to adults with memories of their own dotting grandparents. The rest of the cast -- including Mosley, Amelia Morgan-Rothschild and Jonathan Monk -- is endearing.

Hall and Berger tuck a few surprises into the book and lyrics that garner appreciative chuckles from the adults in the house. But *Max and Ruby* is ultimately for the younger set, who surely won't be disappointed by this introduction to theater from two very grownup writers.

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