

# BACKSTAGE east

## MAX & RUBY

### Theatreworks USA at the Lucille Lortel Theatre

By Harry Forbes

This musical adaptation of the popular animated children's TV show from Nick Jr. and Noggin about a pair of young bunny rabbits may clock in at less than an hour — just right in kiddie time — but it proves a breezy charmer.

Nick's website says the series "offers an empowering message for children by showing Max and Ruby playing together and resolving their differences in ways that are respectful and supportive." And that is more

or less the message of Glen Berger's stage book, which has Ruby (Kelly Felthous) sitting down to write a letter to Grandma (Nancy Slusser), then deciding that putting on a play for the sweet lady might be an even better idea. With the help of Max (Lee Markham) and their fellow bunny scouts (Karla Mosley, Amelia Morgan-Rothschild, and Jonathan Monk), she manages to amass rudimentary sets, props, costumes, and even refreshments, but there just isn't time to write the darn thing, not with Max getting so constantly distracted by frogs, blue tarantulas, and dancing toys.

The latter, including a wind-up lobster, come to life thanks to Tracy Bersley's choreography and one of composer-lyricist Carol Hall's most felicitous tunes, the western-sounding "Cowboy," one of nine toe-tapping ditties.

With the help of Louisa Thompson's cartoon sets and Junghyun Georgia Lee's brightly colored costumes, most fans of the show should be able to suspend their disbelief — even if some see the personable cast as merely adults with bunny ears (the tyke beside me cried out, "That's not the real Max in the movie!" at the first sight of Markham, but by the end he was clapping madly).

This pintsize *Bunnies in Arms* should please the young 'uns and, under Randy White's fast-paced direction, prove more than tolerable for everyone else.

JOAN MARCUS



Lee Markham and Kelly Felthous in *Max & Ruby*