

Theatre Review...

at DCT's Rabbit, the paw that refreshes

By Elaine Liner

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Every child loves to believe that when nobody's looking, toys come to life and talk to each other. In *The Velveteen Rabbit*, they do. Margery Williams' beloved storybook has been adapted into an enchanting light musical for Dallas Children's Theater by the company's in-house playwright, Linda Daugherty, and composer B. Wolf.

Directed by DCT's founder Robyn Flatt, *The Velveteen Rabbit* blends adult and child actors with hand puppets and marionettes, leaving the black-clad puppeteers in full view. The technique works wonderfully, and at the performance I attended seemed to be completely acceptable to the scads of tiny theatergoers around me. We all bought the premise, start to finish.

The tale of the toy bunny that yearns to become "real" is among the first productions in the annual holiday show onslaught. But the Christmas theme in this one is only incidental to the plot. The Boy, played with an authentic-sounding English accent by St. Mark's sixth-grader Will Altabef at the performance reviewed, receives the rabbit as a stocking stuffer and makes it his favorite companion, much to the envy of his other playthings, the Skin Horse (James Kille), the Elephant (Patricia Long) and the Captain of the tin soldiers (Johnny Sequenzia).

When they're left alone up in the nursery, the toys gossip about the people in the house and become concerned about their own well-being when The Boy falls ill with scarlet fever and is bedridden. Sure enough, when The Boy recovers, his doctor orders that all the toys be burned to keep the illness at bay. Is this the end of the well-worn rabbit (played sweetly by puppeteer/actor/dancer Derik Webb)? Or will he be spared and find a way to join the real rabbits out in the garden?



Guiding us through the two-act scenario is the graceful Nursery Fairy (**Amanda Doskocil**), who twinkles and twirls across the stage like a music box ballerina. She sings B. Wolf's simple, repetitive lyrics in a bell-clear soprano, casting quite a spell.

And when the show waltzes, or more accurately, hippity-hops toward its happy ending, white flakes float softly down onto designer Zak Herring's elegant scenery. It all looks as pretty and serene as a snow-shaker tableau.