

CALENDAR

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KID BEAT

'Gift Rap': A Fun Package

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Giving is better than getting? Even young skeptics will get the message in "Gift Rap," a bubbly rock-style musical for ages 4 to 14 at the Encino Playhouse.

Three preteens (played by adult actors) go to the Epic Supermall to redeem certificates for the perfect gift. Vera (Liz Hewitt) wants the new debutante Boopsie doll to add to her 42 other Boopsies. Chuck (Erik Chorlton) hopes for yet another book and lonely Dave (Scott Guy) just wants something special.

Guiding the proceedings is the Gift Rapper (Sharon Thompson), a super-cool, mysterious figure who shows the youths that the gift they receive is only a means to attain "the perfect gift of giving."

Laced with humor and an irresistible musical beat, Richard Helsen's unpreachy play, directed by Peter Ellenstein, is performed by an above-average cast. The eye-catching set, designed by South Coast Repertory's Dwight Richard Odle (the show was originally a South Coast Repertory Touring Production), starts out as a huge gift-wrapped package that keeps unfolding into different mall areas and even a pirate boat.

The score, by prolific Disney composer Michael Silversher, is hand-clapping, toe-tapping stuff, particularly suited to Thompson's full-throated, melodious delivery.

This first offering of the newly founded Encino Playhouse's children's theater series, with its unusual appeal to young teens as well as preschoolers, is a winner.

At 4935 Balboa Blvd., Saturdays and Sundays at 1 p.m. through Oct. 21. Tickets, \$5; (818) 990-1613.

