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No-Frills Red Herring Puppets Full of Charm

FAMILY

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The shabby little black box East Theatre in Hollywood may look like an unlikely place to take young children for an hour's entertainment, but appearances can be deceiving.

The **Red Herring Puppets'** opening matinee there on Sunday suffered a few mishaps—the tops of the puppeteers' heads made a few inadvertent appearances, a smoke effect was a scene too early, the opening act was briefly in the dark thanks to tardy spotlights and a few unintentional thuds sounded behind the curtain.

But nothing spoiled the show's

comfortable, relaxed charm and creative whimsy. Puppeteer Bill Frischman and artistic director, puppeteer and puppet builder Lisa A. Sturz put on a quintet of humorous vignettes, using varied hand and rod puppets, painted and quilted backdrops and taped music and narration. Oscar Ostrich, a hand puppet with a fluffy top knot, a wry wit and an occasional air of distraction, bantered with the audience between plays.

In the show opener, "Dogs," a tribute to filmmaker and comic actor Jacques Tati, people and their canine pets take a stroll in the park. Created by French animator Francois Manavit, the short piece is a parade of comical, unexpected cartoon characters on rods.

In addition to two other shorter works—"The Three Little Pigs" and "Alpha," a hip presentation of

the alphabet song—two longer pieces round out the program. "The Drum," an adaptation of a Himalayan folk tale with music by Lynn Anderson, uses brightly costumed wooden puppets. A Celtic "Jack in the Beanstalk," by popular storyteller-musician Robin Williamson, uses hand puppets, including a satisfyingly giant Giant.

The no-frills, family-friendly show's only real problem? It's over too soon.

■ *Red Herring Puppets, East Theatre, 6468 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood, Sundays at 3 p.m. through Nov. 6. \$6. (213) 466-1767.*