

Goodnight beautiful, wonderful MTYP production

By Alison Mayes

THEY'RE two of the best-loved children's books of the 20th century.

Generations of preschoolers and their parents have cherished Margaret Wise Brown's *Goodnight Moon* and *The Runaway Bunny* since they were published in the 1940s.

As the season-ender at Manitoba Theatre for Young People, Nova Scotia's acclaimed Mermaid Theatre is presenting rod-puppet versions of the two classics, combined into a 45-minute show.

Running on weekends to April 25, it's recommended for ages 3 to 7. But never mind whether you've got a child to take along. This entrancingly beautiful, masterfully designed production will touch anyone who appreciates theatrical excellence.

Regardless of whether you've shared these gentle stories with your own children or grandchildren, you may find yourself needing Kleenex. Seeing the bunny characters hop around, tenderly embrace or snuggle into bed as "live" creatures is moving in a way that goes to the heart of theatre's mythic power.

The lovely recorded music by Steven Naylor is a key ingredient. Employing

TheatreReview

Goodnight Moon & The Runaway Bunny

■ Manitoba Theatre for Young People
 ■ To April 25
 ■ Tickets: \$13.60 at 942-8898
 ★★★★★ out of five

instruments such as guitar, accordion, harp and various flutes, it has an understated folkloric quality. A woman's warm voice is heard reading each story as it unfolds visually.

The bedtime favourite *Goodnight Moon* is told second. It's a blacklight production, so the painted set and the characters glow vividly, while the three black-clad puppeteers essentially disappear.

Clement Hurd's iconic illustrations of the "great green room" — a little bunny's nursery — are reproduced in three dimensions with amazing accuracy. There's genius in the way each familiar element comes gliding in, creating a sort of bedtime ballet.

There's the pair of mittens, the two charming kittens, the comb and the brush, the bowlful of mush, the little toy house, the scampering mouse...

When the "quiet old lady" bunny enters as a puppet of human-adult size, there's a gasp from the audience. She's a primal embodiment of loving comfort and security.

As the little bunny in the blue-and-white jammies ritually says goodnight to the peaceful room, the visuals become dreamlike, poetically evoking a sleepy child's small universe. It's breathtaking.

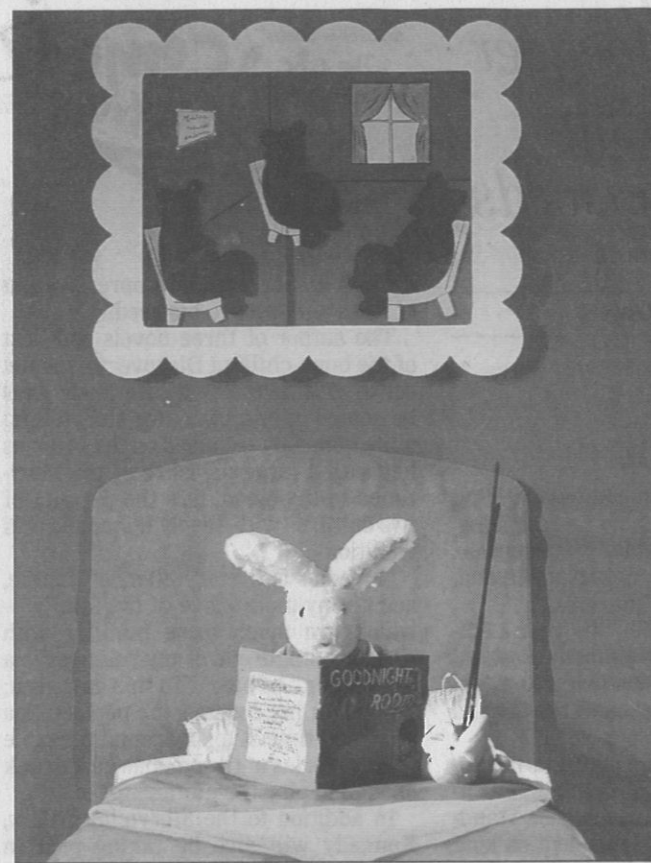
The Runaway Bunny is told in more traditional puppet-theatre style, also with the puppeteers in view, but barely noticeable. Hurd's illustrations are rendered with great cleverness, while the child and mother bunny puppets could not be more endearing.

The book speaks metaphorically about the unbreakable bond between parent and child. No matter where the child roams or how he transforms himself, the parent will follow, adapt and support him.

If the child becomes a sailboat, the mother becomes the wind. If the child runs away to the circus, the mother becomes a tightrope-walker to reach him.

I'm tearing up again, just writing about it! This is everything family theatre should be, and an exquisite way to bid goodnight to the season.

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SUPPLIED PHOTO

Nova Scotia's Mermaid Theatre uses rod puppets in its entrancing production of *Goodnight Moon* and *The Runaway Bunny*.