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FAMILY FARE

Just One of Those Days

By LAUREL GRAEBER

Most parents would tell their children that it's wrong to delight in another person's misery. But if that person is Alexander, they usually make an exception.

He's the hero of "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day," Judith Viorst's picture-book classic about the trials of an elementary school pupil. Fictional pain is a legitimate source of laughter, and that's a relief, because Ms. Viorst has turned her story into a musical (she wrote the book and lyrics; Shelly Markham, the score), and the results are even funnier onstage.

The book's fans will recall that everything goes wrong for Alexander, from the gum in his hair in the morning to his broken nightlight at bedtime. The show, directed by J. Brandon Thompson and presented by Atlantic for Kids, a branch of the Atlantic Theater Company, features those crises and more. No wonder Alexander wants to move to Australia.

The songs, though, are not all complaints. In the hilarious "Lizzie Pitofsky," Dennis Tseng as Paul, a boy whose interests are obviously precocious, sings "I can't get enoughsky" of this girl. The other members of the talented ensemble — Renee Delio, Heather Oakley and Liz Elkins — offer musical tributes to subjects like baby sisters and dog ownership.

Ryan Ross is an appealing Alexander, who earns sympathy as

well as giggles as he suffers the discomfort of a dentist's appointment, the indignities of a shoe-buying trip and the embarrassment of ruining his father's new office copier. His parents (Kate Gradner and Joshua Dickens) offer comfort but no illusions that awful days are things you outgrow.

But there is one consolation: this particular terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day is a terrific, humorous, well done and very good show.

"Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day," through Nov. 2 at the Atlantic Theater Company, 336 West 20th Street, Chelsea. Saturdays and Sundays at 10:30 a.m. Tickets: \$10; under 12, \$5. Reservations: (212) 691-5919, Ext. 180.

Loving Their Neighbors

On Sunday children are invited to hear a Danish fairy tale. It recalls that once upon a time Denmark was invaded by an evil spirit. When this brute tried to devour the land, the narrator says, "every Dane became a pain and refused to be digested."

The tale is true. The time was the 1940's, and the evil spirit was Nazism. Alerted to Hitler's planned deportation of all the nation's Jews, other Danes hid Jewish citizens and smuggled them in fishing boats to neutral Sweden. Of Denmark's 8,000 Jews, almost 7,500 were saved.

To commemorate the rescue's 60th anniversary, the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust will present "The Legend," Victor Borge's 15-minute dramatization of those events. Accompanied by a violinist, an actress relates the history as if she were telling a bedtime story. But the fairy-tale format in no way diminishes its emotional force.

"Children of all ages can enjoy this," said Elissa Schein, the museum's manager of public programs. Immediately after, the museum will offer a voice-and-movement theater workshop for ages 7 and up in a nearby classroom and a panel discussion for

older children and adults. The Danish consul general, Michael Metz Morch, will lead the panel, which will include Nadia Jensen, a volunteer helping to restore the Gerda III, a boat that smuggled the Jews; Rasmus Koster-Rasmussen, whose grandfather was part of the rescue; and Jorgen Kieler, a fisherman who transported many refugees. The program will show, as Borge's script states, that "the legend lives on."

"The Legend," Sunday at 2:30 p.m. at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Place, near the southern tip of Battery Park City, Lower Manhattan, (212) 786-0820. Free; donations suggested. Workshop reservations advised.

Take That, Blockhead!

A lot of people are hit over the head in "Los Títeres de Cachiporra/The Billy-Club Puppets." But this is hardly PG-13 theater: the heads are largely wooden.

The latest production of Teatro SEA, "The Billy-Club Puppets" is by Federico García Lorca, hardly thought of as a children's author. But this hourlong show — actually excerpts from the play — is a classic farce involving a familiar triangle: a damsel, a poor but ardent young suitor and a hideous old codger whose money leads the heroine's father to choose him as her husband.

And hideous he is: Don Cristóbal (Roberto Cancel) is a fat grump who carries a billy club — it looks like a toilet plunger — to bop his adversaries. Rosita (Yaremis Félix Colón in the performance I saw) is a breathless innocent, and her lover, Figaro (Manuel A. Morán), is also childlike.

Víctor Navarro, who designed the production, has made the actors look like marionettes, with yarn wigs and buttons the size of dinner plates. With deliberately wooden movements, the stars complement inventively styled real puppets.

Although bilingual, the production, directed by Luis Dorrego, can be hard to follow, with songs almost entirely in Spanish. But none of this seems to bother children, who shriek with glee over

the Grand Guignol action. As the publicity material indicates, this is very much Punch and Judy, though with a Spanish accent.

"The Billy-Club Puppets," through Nov. 8 at Los Kabayitos Puppet and Children's Theater, 107 Suffolk Street (between Rivington and Delancey), second floor, Lower East Side. Fridays at 8 p.m.; Saturdays at 3 p.m. Tickets: \$12; children, \$10.