

American Music History Was Never This Much Fun

Theater Review

By LYNNE HEFFLEY
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Mix a bunch of juggling, clowning and just plain goofing around, throw in a lot of nifty singing and guitar and banjo playing, then add a dash of history and you've got "200 Years of American Music"—albeit much abridged—a dandy little family show presented by the Razzle Bam Boom duo at the Secret Rose Theatre in North Hollywood.

Ziping by in under an hour, with more comic zest and celebratory spirit than historical heft, the show is pretty nigh impossible not to clap and sing along with as the entertaining duo—Mark Beckwith and Obediah Thomas—serves up a sampling of songs from "Yankee Doodle Dandy" to "The Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B," and the 1980s disco anthem, "YMCA."

A longtime children's recording artist and educational performer, the button-down Beckwith provides a strong, versatile baritone and slick instrumentals on acoustic and electric guitar and banjo. He's straight man to Thomas, a professional stand-up, juggler and trumpet player, a likable and polished performer whose wacky song interpretations include a juggling, hambone-slapping Cajun grandpa and a high-kicking, top-hatted Broadway belter. He's the visual aid—in enormous, pillowy shoes—when Beckwith sings Fats Waller's sassy "Your Feet's Too Big" and in one of the best bits, Thomas meets Beckwith's challenge to juggle in various musical styles, from punk rock to Hawaiian.

A couple of adult volunteers are recruited for other funny bits, and they've got to be as game as the dad and mom types who took the



Razzle Bam Boom duo: Obediah Thomas, left, and Mark Beckwith.

stage during the opening matinee, because one joins Beckwith and Thomas for an Andrews Sisters number in blond wigs and skirts, and another partners Thomas in an energetic disco dance medley.

Two minor irritants at Saturday's opener: the pint-sized heckler, apparently unsupervised, who sounded off periodically during the duo's "Smothers Brothers-style" banter and could have used a stronger squelching from the good-natured pair, and Beckwith's two mid-show plugs for the upcoming release of his and Thomas' related CD. A mention at the end of the show would be classier.

All in all, however, this is one kids' show that's as much fun for adults as their offspring.

"200 Years of American Music," Secret Rose Theatre, 11246 Magnolia Blvd., North Hollywood, Saturdays at 1:30 p.m. Ends Jan. 26. Adults, \$10; children, \$7; PTA parents receive a 50% discount. (818) 766-3691, Ext. 5. Running time: 50 minutes.