

From a Broadway Chat, 10/3

I just got in from seeing this evening's performance of *Max Understood*, and **wow. I'm speechless** in a good way. With *Max* you enter the world of a moderate to severely autistic seven year old boy as well as that of his parents as they try to deal with life with a special child. **And it is done brilliantly and with poignancy and true heart.** I was not surprised at all to learn that this comes from the creators' life experience as they perfectly capture our best guess at the mind of an autistic child. (Autism is growing in prevalence and with the new DSMV (which will be published in 2012), it is likely to be as high as 1 in 100 children will be diagnosed somewhere along the spectrum.)

The cast is brilliant. Marlon Sherman portrays Max, and he blew me away with how completely he became autistic for this performance; so much so that even as he left the theater, he had difficulty making and maintaining eye contact. Mary Mossberg and Michael Winther play Max's parents who are truly at the end of their ropes trying to cope with their special child and what his presence in their lives means; and how they come to appreciate exactly what Max does mean to them. Tricia Burns, Ramiz Monsef, Everett Quinton, and Ali Stroker make up the ensemble and they portray kids and others in the neighborhood who, in a parallel to *The Wizard of Oz*, Max's favorite movie, become "others" who help Max along on his journey from his home.

The music ranges from more traditional ballad to rap (including an amazing recitation of all the presidents of the United States up through Obama by Max - well-earned mid-song applause on that one!), and it's largely soundscaped to really take us into Max's world.

I found myself on the verge of and in tears on more than one occasion through this brief, 70-minute show. I honestly don't remember being this moved and affected by a first viewing of a show in a long time.

There are two performances left - tomorrow at 1pm and Wednesday at 8pm. I'd definitely recommend checking this one out. Brilliant!

xoSS