

It's kids' party as 'Big Blue House' goes live

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AS parents are well aware, children's entertainment walks a fine line between actual entertainment and big-bucks marketing.

When a beloved TV show jumps from the small screen to a live stage show, there's a huge risk for families considering a trip to the theater.

In addition to ticket prices, which can range from \$15 to \$30, you just know there will be other temptations: expensive programs, sweet treats and, of course, the souvenir cart.

One of the latest TV shows to hit the theater circuit is the Disney Channel's pre-school hit "Bear in the Big Blue House."

The toddler-friendly stage show,

REVIEW

"Bear in the Big Blue House" ★★★ Big "Bear" hugs

subtitled "Surprise Party," runs through Sunday at the Orpheum Theatre in San Francisco.

Heading into the theater, sure enough, there's the cart loaded with Bear flashlights, "bear"noculars and stuffed animals. A plush Bear will set you back a hefty \$30. And before the show even starts, an announcer broadcasts a commercial for kid-friendly yogurt.

During intermission at Thursday afternoon's performance, a vendor brought in a huge bouquet of Mylar

balloons and was nearly sold out 15 minutes later.

If you and the wriggly little ones can withstand the commercial onslaught, "Bear in the Big Blue House Live!" does deliver on the entertainment promise.

For those unfamiliar with Bear, he's a Jim Henson Muppet creation along the lines of Big Bird. Voiced by Noel MacNeal, who has reassuring, Kermit-like tones, Bear is 7 feet tall and covered with golden fur. He lopes gently around the stage, spreading beneficence in his wake.

He dances and sings songs (a mix of taped and live vocals with pre-recorded music tracks), cavorts with his puppet friends and, for the live

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