

Music: Feature

Rock the cradle

Dan Zanes brings real music to the toddler crowd

Published 12.07.05

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IF YOU'RE HAPPY AND YOU KNOW IT,
CLAP YOUR HANDS: Dan Zanes

Dan Zanes wore a chauffeur's hat and a scowl when he was in the Boston garage-rock band the Del Fuegos. Now he sports chronically disheveled hair, sunglass-inducing suits, and an eternally smiling face as he sings kids' songs. "We can have a wild dance party before lunchtime," says Zanes. "I could never say that before."

Back in '85, the Fuegos had a hit single with "Don't Run Wild," but disbanded in 1990 when sales fell at the same rate that the band's egos and jealousies rose. "We didn't realize there was room for everyone," says Zanes.

Zanes married Paula Greif, who had directed a Fuegos video, moved to the Catskills, and began working on a solo album. Then their daughter, Anna, was born. The family moved to New York City, where Dan went to work searching out music for her.

"I was happy with so many things that I found in the children's music domain, but I really didn't find what I heard in my head, which was this updated folk music, 21st-century folk music," he says. "It wouldn't be like the Pete Seeger and Leadbelly and Woodie Guthrie records, but it would be an updated version of that."

Not able to find what he was looking for, Zanes recorded the songs in his home with some friends. He made some copies and passed the cassettes out to friends in the neighborhood. He found that kids may dig Raffi and the bubble-gum pop that Disney throws at them, but the parents were starving for music that contained more substance. Both parents and kids devoured Zanes' soulful and organic renditions of classic folk and gospel songs, as well as his originals. "Pop music was a lot of work, but it was the only work I'd ever really known," says Zanes. "It just felt like I had to work really hard to get things going, and meanwhile, I just went and had fun with my friends and recorded [kids' music], and people seemed to really like it."

When Zanes releases *Social Music* early next year, it will be his sixth release in the family-music genre, along with two books and a concert DVD. All his CDs include appearances from friends, ranging from sourpusses like Lou "Walk on the Wild Side" Reed and Aimee "The Forgotten Arm" Mann, to experimentalist Phillip Glass. In the liner notes, Zanes includes histories of songs, sometimes guitar chords, and whimsical illustrations done by brother-in-law Donald Saaf. It's all part of his master plan.

"My goal may be different from other people's, but my goal is to try and spread my enthusiasm for music-making," Zanes says. "True success for me would be if other people heard it and said, 'This sounds like fun. I can do this, too.' Because that's really the case. This is something anybody can do. I think we're at this crazy point with our society now where people become very passive with their relationship to music, and I always try to take the opportunity to say, 'You know, this is really a lot of fun, you shouldn't miss out on it. Don't try and leave this to the professionals.'"

Meanwhile, Zanes' own daughter, Anna, has recently turned 10. She is currently heavily into Neil Diamond and OutKast. Zanes doesn't worry about Anna running around in crop tops and makeup singing songs like "Baby One More Time," though she did have a fleeting fascination with Britney Spears. "I think with kids, the more they're exposed to organic music, the more likely they are to seek it out, or know what it is and recognize it," says Zanes. "So the super-inflated pop music may not have as much of a hold on them." But he admits that he wouldn't mind much if Anna jammed with her friends to Spears, "just as long as she was singing."

For Zanes, just like those kids in the Coke commercial, all that's important is teaching the world to sing, if not in perfect harmony, at least some type of fractured one. He didn't get a chance to do that with the

Fuegos. "We lost touch with what can make music fun, which is the wild, communal spirit, when it feels like everyone's there together and it's a big party. I'm really happy that I've had another chance to get that, because that's what's really made these last several years so much fun for me."

Make your own Kids' CD

If Raffi makes you want to ralph and Barney makes you want to barf, rest assured that there is music out there for kids that parents can listen to repeatedly without the need to ingest mega-doses of lithium. It's as easy as downloading some of your favorite songs, making sure there's nothing objectionable in them, and putting them together in themes. Who knew rock could be so educational?

ANIMAL SONGS

"Lion Sleeps Tonight" -- the Tokens

"Monkey to Man" -- Elvis Costello

"Spider" -- They Might Be Giants

"Apeman" -- the Kinks

"Surfin' Bird" -- the Trashmen

"Three Little Birds" -- Bob Marley & the Wailers

"Pony Boy" -- Bruce Springsteen

"Walkin' the Dog" -- Rufus Thomas

"Rockin' Robin" -- Bobby Day

"Pony" -- Kasey Chambers

"Octopus's Garden" -- the Beatles

"Boris the Spider" -- the Who

TRAVEL SONGS

"Road to Nowhere" -- Talking Heads

"Can't Get There from Here" -- R.E.M.

"Drive My Car" -- the Beatles

"I've Been Everywhere" -- Johnny Cash

"People Get Ready" -- Curtis Mayfield

"City of New Orleans" -- Arlo Guthrie

"Downtown Train" -- Tom Waits

"On the Road Again" -- Willie Nelson

"Ticket to Ride" -- the Beatles

"Roadrunner" -- Modern Lovers

"Stand" -- REM

SEASON Songs

"Season Cycle" -- XTC

"Our First Bluebonnet Spring" -- Junior Brown

"Summer of Love" -- the B-52's

"Summer in the City" -- the Lovin' Spoonful

"Autumn Almanac" -- the Kinks

"Autumn in New York" -- Louis Armstrong or Ella Fitzgerald

"Hazy Shade of Winter" -- Simon & Garfunkle or the Bangles

"Artificial Winter" -- Rusted Root

"Winter" -- Rolling Stones

"Dogwood Winter" -- NRBQ

"27 Degrees" -- the Mosquitoes

LULLABIES

"Hush Little Baby" -- Bobby McFerrin and Yo-Yo Ma

"Shenandoah Lullaby" -- Jerry Garcia
"Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy)" -- John Lennon
"Big Day, Little Boat" -- Edie Brickell
"St. Judy's Comet" -- Paul Simon
"Lullabye" -- the BoDeans
"Beautiful Child" -- Eurythmics
"You're Just a Baby" -- Belle & Sebastian
"Child of Mine" -- Emmylou Harris
"Goodnight Little One" -- Ric Ocasek
"Katie Belle" -- Townes Van Zandt
"West Texas Lullaby" -- Toni Price
"Forever Young" -- Joan Baez
"MLK" -- U2