

Two moms motivate kids with music

Linda Lombroso | The Journal News | January 22, 2008

Kids can take forever to put on their clothes, brush their teeth or climb into bed. But with a new CD aimed at helping children through their daily routines, two local mothers are hoping to turn slowpokes into happily efficient members of the household.



Music by Mommies' "Songs for Your Busy Day" - a collaboration between Barbara Fine Buxbaum of Chappaqua and Michele Purcell of Glen Head, Long Island - offers eight original tunes dealing with everything from taking a bath to getting in the car. And so far, it's worked wonders with the women's own kids.

"For me, the idea was to motivate," says Purcell, a stay-at-home mom, singer and pianist whose 5- and 8-year-old sons are on the autistic spectrum.

After seeing how music seemed to help her boys complete daily tasks, Purcell - who's worked for a record company and performed in several bar bands - set out to write her own songs. The first day she put a "lyricist wanted" ad on craigslist, Buxbaum responded.

As a stay-at-home mother of a 4-year-old daughter and 6-year-old son without special needs, Buxbaum knew well the frustration of getting active kids to complete daily tasks. She'd also found that singing to her children seemed to work better than yelling - and was struck by the apparent similarities in Purcell's experience.

"It was so quick the way it happened," says Buxbaum, who'd been searching online for writing jobs while her two children were in school. "There must have been 20 e-mails that first week back and forth."

That was in December 2006. Once the two met, they got to work immediately, jumping first into putting words to a bedtime ballad called "Sleep."

"When I first heard it, I sat down and did not get up for an hour," says Buxbaum. "I just wrote and wrote. It almost brought tears to my eyes. I said, 'This is going to be something.'"

Purcell still marvels at how easily their friendship evolved - and how they managed to cobble together an album's worth of songs by sending partially completed cassette tapes back and forth through the mail.

It's a credit to Purcell's efficiency, says Buxbaum, that the pair stayed on schedule, wrapping up the songwriting by spring 2007 and recording the album last summer in a studio on Long Island - with all four children singing backup.

Yet even after they finished the album, Purcell wasn't yet confident it would go over well with its intended audience. "I said to a friend, 'Play it for your daughter, and if she runs screaming from the room, let me know,'" she says with a laugh. "I've heard CDs that are really annoying and talk down to kids."

This one doesn't.

With peppy tunes like "Brush Your Teeth" and "Let's Take a Bath," kids and parents might easily find themselves singing along even when the music stops.

Deb Donaldson, technical director of the Chappaqua Library, has already ordered two copies of "Songs for Your Busy Day": one for the Children's Room and one for the Learning Center, a section of the library

devoted to children and adults with special needs. "The great thing about it is it's a very practical sort of thing to do with children, and there aren't a lot of songs out there like that," she says. "(They've) really brought together some things that work, as far as really little children and children who need rhythm and sequences, and it's pretty good."

Dawn Pagano, a special educator in Stony Brook who's worked with Purcell's son, has already started using the album with other children who are autistic. "Children like this sometimes need prompting to get through things," she says. "So when they know something by rote in their mind, it's easier to get through certain activities."

While Buxbaum and Purcell hope their music helps parents with special-needs children, they're confident its sound has a universal appeal. As for their own kids, there's no question "Songs for Your Busy Day" remains a family favorite, even when everybody's sitting in the car.

"My little guy says, 'Turn it up! I can't hear it,'" says Purcell with a smile.