

Business of Parenting:

Created by parents, for parents

MUSIC BY MOMMIES:

A Musical Score for Everyday Life

By Mirna Martinez Santiago



They say that necessity is the mother of invention. The adage could not be truer than for Michele Purcell, a Long Island mother of two children on the autism spectrum. She, along with musical partner and fellow mother of two, Chappaqua resident Barbara Fine Buxbaum, created *Music by Mommies* after Purcell noticed that singing seemed to soothe her two children, ages 5 and 8, and help them transition easier from task to task.

Before recording their CD, both Purcell and Buxbaum had tried independently to find an album of children's songs that would serve such a purpose, but couldn't find a single one that was appropriate. Thus, the idea for "Songs for your Busy Day" was born, clearly inspired by Purcell's two boys. For children with special needs, who often require constancy and repetition, the songs work wonderfully as part of a daily routine. "Music can be therapeutic and soothing for children with developmental disorders," says Purcell. But these



songs work just as well with children without special needs. These days, Buxbaum notes, when her daughter, 4, and son, 6, hear the opening strands of the "Clean Up" song, they know that it is time to clean up.

"Music by Mommies is a concept," says Buxbaum. "It's a tool that caretakers can use to assist in children's daily activities." As conceived, the songs on the duo's CD are intended to guide children from one activity to the next. The titles say it all: "Get Up"; "Get Dressed"; "Eat"; "We're

Music...

continued from page B2

Going"; "Clean Up"; "Let's Take a Bath"; "Brush Your Teeth"; and "Sleep". The tunes are catchy and the words are simple. Before long, both you and your child will be singing along.

When Buxbaum moved to Chappaqua from Manhattan's West Village four years ago, she had no idea that recording a CD would be in her future. Although Purcell sang with a band, Buxbaum considered herself a "closet singer". But that did not stop her from responding to Purcell's ad in 2006 seeking a lyricist and collaborator. The result is *Music by Mommies*.

For Purcell, the idea was intuitive — she had been singing to her children for years and knew that they responded better to music than other methods she had tried to refocus them on tasks. For Buxbaum, music replaced repetition or scolding. "These are words that all mothers use on a daily

required recruiting musicians and scheduling rehearsals. Each song was recorded several times before a final version was selected. To make the process more fun, the duo's children sang back-up on some of the tracks.

With the final product in hand, the difficult task of getting the recording into the proper distribution channels began. Since they completed the CD in 2007, Purcell and Buxbaum have spent countless hours promoting the project and knocking on doors. Both remain undaunted.

"Children can inspire you to be who you were always meant to be," says Buxbaum, adding that the project commenced as, and continues to be, a labor of love for their four children and for children everywhere. "If something feels right, you won't be tempted to give it up mid-stream," she says.

Their tenacity has been worthwhile. "Songs for your Busy Day" is garnering attention. The Chappaqua public library has ordered copies to add to its circulation list; the autism consultant who works with Purcell

“Life is not a dress rehearsal,” Buxbaum says. “Parents should not have to spend all their ‘quality time’ repeating themselves.”

basis,” Buxbaum notes. “But they’re set to music.” Lyrics from “Clean Up,” such as “Your trains are blocking the door/there are crayons on the floor/I tripped over your stuffed animal before” cannot help but resonate with both parents and children, she believes.

Buxbaum notes that their recordings “focus is on fun,” while Purcell says that the goal is to “motivate and entertain.” In all, the songs were designed to make otherwise mundane tasks a little more enjoyable for children; it's like having a musical score for everyday life. “Life is not a dress rehearsal,” Buxbaum adds. Parents should not have to spend all their “quality time” repeating themselves.

Although the creative and collaborative parts of “Songs for your Busy Day” seemed somewhat effortless, the business end of things proved more challenging. Granted, Purcell had worked for a major record label, while Buxbaum was a marketing director in the health care industry; however, neither had experience on the front end of the music industry. Once the lyrics were in place and the music perfected, recording the songs

and her two children has begun utilizing the songs in her work with other autistic children; and a well-known educational website has endorsed the recording and added it to its roster. Additionally, *Music by Mommies*, as the duo is known, has been asked to perform at local events and is planning to schedule more over the coming months.

As to what the future holds for the two collaborators, in addition to live performances, next up is a CD about emotions. Purcell has noticed that her children have difficulty recognizing social cues about other people's emotions; Buxbaum says that her children sometimes cannot reconcile their own emotions. The list of concepts to reduce to song is endless. It is the beginning of a long journey.

To find out more about *Music by Mommies*, or to hear snippets of the tunes from “Songs for your Busy Day,” go to www.musicbymommies.com. The CD is also available on www.cdbaby.com and www.amazon.com.

Mirna Martinez Santiago is an attorney and writer. She is the mother of one and works in Westchester County.