

## InTheArts

# Kids get Rockin'—

## Dirty Socks and All

By Elias Stimac

It looks like a pep rally for pre-schoolers — kids and adults dancing around, wearing funny costumes, playing and swaying and singing about heroes, glue sticks, and bananas. Actually, it's just the latest interactive concert from Kids Creative, a troupe of actors-musicians who have discovered a great way to help children pre-K through grade 5 in the New York area make their own theater, and strengthen their confidence and self-esteem in the process.

Through their musical group "The Dirty Sock Funtime Band", these enterprising educators strive to empower students by reminding them how amazing they are. The company's motto is: "We show kids that they rock." And judging from the beaming faces of recent participants, the message is reaching the young-

sters loud and clear.

The program offers two types of experiences: Create-A-Play Camps, afterschool workshops where the kids become the performers and the playwrights, developing original shows through music, theater, art, and multimedia; and The Dirty Sock Funtime Band, professional musicians who develop the children's ideas and bring them to life for live performances.

Kids Creative was founded in 1998 as a series of Create-A-Play afterschool programs, by artistic director Stephen Jacobs, a classically trained musician. His brother Adam Jacobs, who serves as executive director, has also worked extensively in the field of education, teaching music and arts to children around the world. Together with associate artistic director Mike Messer and a growing roster of musicians and counselors, the group plans to expand their reach. They have just

released a new CD, *Mr. Clown and the Day the Sun Got Wet*.

Stephen Jacobs points out that the workshops bring children together in a unique way. "Our programs are really great for both outgoing kids and shy kids. If they want a big role in the play, they can have a big role; if they want a small role, they get one. We really encourage the kids to believe in themselves, and we have a lot of confidence-building techniques."

The artistic and personal benefits for the children are obvious, but equally important are the social benefits that Kids Creative helps foster. Working on group projects not only allows the staff to include kids who may normally feel left out, but also helps the children resolve any problems or issues they may be confused about by exploring them in a creative atmosphere.

Stephen continues: "We have developed ways to promote conflict resolution. In each story, we create a conflict between the characters, and then we brainstorm with the kids to figure out how the characters can get out of each situation in the play peacefully. We talk to the students about how they can do that for themselves in real life. We also help them to bring up whatever emotions they are having, and talk about them to get through them. It creates an incredibly peaceful atmosphere, and we need that kind of community in order to do what we do. In our five-week camp, they have to memorize and perform a 90-minute play. We couldn't possibly write and produce a 10-song musical in such a short period of time otherwise."

Adam Jacobs adds that the students are getting exposure to professional music as well. "In every program, the participants receive free copies of our albums. But in the summer, they

actually get to record their own, and then we give them a copy of their performance on the CD."

Upcoming goals for the company include obtaining their own space, expanding their educational outreach nationwide, and adding new forms of expression, including filmmaking and animation. Stephen also hints at a possible television project currently in the works, "kind of like 'The Monkees'. We really want adults to love the music as well."

"We have a scholarship fund that we started last year," Adam adds. "A parent had lost her brother, and she had been looking for something to start in his name. One day, her daughter came home from camp and said, 'I like Create-a-Play so much because it makes me exercise my mind.' When the mother heard that, she realized that was something her brother might say, and started the fund in his name. We were able to offer two full scholarships and a few partial scholarships."

The Dirty Sock Funtime Band held a benefit concert in January and donated \$1000 to Save the Children/Tsunami Disaster Victims. The band has upcoming concerts at the Madison Square Park Conservancy and the Children's Museum of Manhattan. Registration has begun for Create-A-Play/Rock 'N Roll Theatre Summer Camp at P.S. 87. Call Jessica Bashline, (212) 586-2330 or email [jessica@wingspanarts.org](mailto:jessica@wingspanarts.org).

You can also contact the group at [www.kidscreative.org](http://www.kidscreative.org). And if you are an educator or musician, call (212) 591-2253 and find out ways you can get involved. As Kids Creative and The Dirty Sock Funtime Band, [www.dirtysockfuntimeband.com](http://www.dirtysockfuntimeband.com), both prove, you're never too old to get in on the act. ♦



Actor/musician/educators of the enthusiastic Dirty Sock Funtime Band.

Photo: Mike Messer