

Contra Costa Times

Sunday, December 31, 2000



Lawyer changes his tune

When technology/entertainment lawyer Bob Roden decided to write children's music, he turned to the authorities -- kids.

The Richmond resident and former counsel for George Lucas has released his first children's CD, "Mammals Eat Coconuts." The album covers stock favorites like "Polly Wolly Doodle," and originals such as the title track. He crafted the song like a Mad Libs riddle, and had

his daughter's schoolmates fill in missing nouns, adjectives and verbs. The 49-year-old one-man recording label wrote, performed and produced the final product in his home studio/office.

Children's music is a bit of a digression from entertainment law: How did you get the idea to record a children's CD?

"I hadn't intended to put it out to the world. When my daughter was in first grade, I went to her class to show them how to write a song. When I asked what we should write a song about, one kid shouted mammals (they just happen to be studying mammals), someone else yelled coconuts, and the whole thing just wrote itself from there. It was a wonderfully spontaneous thing that you couldn't just sit down and write."

How long have you been playing music?

"I've played music since I was young. I played professionally for 10 to 12 years in rock 'n' roll bands and traveled with a band called Sidro's Armada. We were well-known in the Nevada area. The majority of our gigs consisted of casino shows. We did a lot of playing in situations where the band communicated a lot with the audience."

How would you describe "Mammals" music?

"There's a fair amount of country. The music's a combination of real music -- I play the guitar, trombone and a plastic ukulele I had since I was 8 -- with samples and synthesized stuff. It's kind of zany, but I make it accessible to people of all ages. They (parents) can go right along with it. That's the key; I do kids music, but I don't dumb it down."

What's the response been by children?

"It's doing surprising well. I'm very gratified by how the whole thing is being received. Since most children's music is produced independently, it's primarily a word-of-mouth kind of thing. That's the beauty of it. It can really only succeed by its merits. And grown-ups don't mind hearing it over and over again, either. That

was conscious. I try to treat the songs seriously, try to make them interesting."

And your daughter?

"She loves it. She's very proud of the whole thing. She's very musical herself. I made a CD of her singing for her mom last Christmas. She's got an instinct for it. She wrote her first song when she was 6."

Any plans to go on tour?

"It's hard to say. I haven't performed other than at my daughter's school. That (planning) has to just show itself. My wish is that the music gets out there so kids can enjoy it. It's really a labor of love. I'm not interested in becoming famous. I can be a recording artist simply because I want to."

Any tips for others wanting to venture into the kiddy music arena?

"The key is to define your own success. The world tends to define success in its own ways. Do the things you love and let that be your success -- the creation itself. Also, make your living doing something else. If you make it the centerpiece of your life, that limits you as a creative artist."

-- Cassandra Braun