

UNPLUGGING KIDS' MUSIC

Parents burned out on The Wiggles tune children into alternatives.

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Amy Davis's home is a Wiggles-free zone these days.

"You can only take so much of them," said the mother of two from Bowling Green.

She's talking about the hugely popular children's group The Wiggles, four upbeat men in bright shirts who sing and dance to the delight of many youngsters — but not always their parents.

Not to pick on The Wiggles. Lots of parents cringe when they think of mass-marketed children's songs and listening to them over and over.

But it doesn't have to be that way. It turns out there's a lot of interesting, different kids' music out there that adults can really dig.

Call it "alternakids" music. Or "kindie rock." Mrs. Davis, who listened to more than 100 kids albums last year for her blog on children's music, just calls it good.

"This is so much more fun and enjoyable to listen to with your kids than a lot of the mass marketed stuff, like The Wiggles or other things," she said. "I think if they knew this was out here, it would be so much more enjoyable and people would spend a lot more time listening to music, which to me is a great thing to do with your kids."

Her blog is called "The Lovely Mrs. Davis Tells You What To Think" (thelovelymrsdavis.blogspot.com), and there is plenty happening in the area for her to weigh in on.

Kids' music is big business these days. At one point last year, the Billboard album chart had kids' records in the top three slots: the High School Musical soundtrack, Kidz Bop 9, and the Curious George movie soundtrack by Jack Johnson.

AUDIO

Hear songs from Tom Jackson's kids' album, 'Wilson Lake and the Rock Bass':

['Welcome to my Cabin'](#)

['Walking in the Woods'](#)



Tom Jackson with children Harry, 5, and Sophia, 7. Mr. Jackson plays 'alternakids' music for his family. (THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT)

Other notable "adult" artists have gotten in on the action, like They Might Be Giants and Dan Zanes, who has found success in children's music following a stint in the '80s with the rock band The Del Fuegos.

Some musicians aren't as high-profile, but they're just as good, like Frances England. The San-Francisco mom created her "Fascinating Creatures"

album as a fund-raiser for her son's preschool. It came in fourth place in the 2006 Fids and Kamily Poll, a music award that used critics, radio programmers, and others involved in the music industry as judges and which Mrs. Davis helped coordinate.

Mrs. Davis, a nonprofit consultant and grant writer with kids ages 6 and nearly 2, said the music genre seems to be exploding.

"A lot of it has to do with our generation of parents being more interested in kind of preserving our kind of identities," she said.

They're hesitant to give up their own tastes and interests in favor of their kids' favorites. Instead, they're looking for music that all of them can enjoy.

"I love listening to music with my kids, and I love music that we can both enjoy, not where one of us is tolerating the other person's music but music that we can really all enjoy together," Mrs. Davis said.

P.J. Swift, a California teacher who is Web master for The Children's Music Web (www.childrensmusic.org), said there are many children's artists who deserve attention, but people just don't know where to look for it.

"The general public only knows what's available on shelves in chain stores," said Ms. Swift, whose site highlights independent children's music and has its own awards.

Some children's artists have their own Web sites; others can be found on sites like Amazon.com or CDBaby.com.

Parents may be surprised by the variety of what's out there.

"It's not all guitar and folk singing-type music," Ms. Swift said. "There's quite a range: reggae to ska to rock and roll for kids. To me, the only difference between quality music for adults and quality music for kids [is] the lyrics."

So, instead of singing about love or breaking up or partying, the lyrics are about tricycles and blueberry pancakes.

Appropriate lyrics are important elements of children's music, according to Joyce Gromko, a professor of music education at Bowling Green State University who studies how children learn music.

"The songs should be appropriate for children, about topics that interest them," she said.

And it should be easy for the children to hear and understand the words so that they can sing along. Singing — whether it be to The Lion King movie soundtrack or Barney the purple dinosaur — is the ultimate goal.

"When a parent sings with a child, the child becomes a singer," Ms. Gromko said. "It makes for the ability to make music wherever you are."

She recommends artists like Jill Trinka and the vocal quartet Max Q.

Or you could be like Tom Jackson, a local teacher who recorded his own children's album. He didn't mean to; it just happened.

2006 'FIDS AND KAMILY' AWARDS

Children's music blogger and Bowling Green resident Amy Davis helped coordinate and judge these awards for kids and family music. Here are the top 10 albums, in order, that made the list.

1. "Meltdown!" Justin Roberts
2. (tie) "You Are My Little Bird" Elizabeth Mitchell
2. (tie) "Catch That Train!" Dan Zanes
4. "Fascinating Creatures" Frances England
5. "Animal Crackers" Wee Hairy Beasties
6. "Electric Storyland" The Sippy Cups
7. "Hey You Kids!" The Jellydots
8. "Rock Your Socks Off" Charity and the JAMband
9. (tie) "The Great Adventures of Mr. David" Mr. David
9. (tie) "Celebrate the Difference" Terri Hendrix

His kids, Harry, 5 and Sophia, 7, certainly dig it.



Amy Davis has a children's music blog, 'The Lovely Mrs. Davis Tells You What To Think.' (THE BLADE/LORI KING)

The Lake Township man plays bass in the rock band, Dave Carpenter and the Jaegers, and often takes his guitar up to his family's Hillsdale County cottage. He started scribbling some lyrics one time and before long he had enough material for an album.

The result, with help from his father-in-law on drums and a former neighbor singing back-up, is "Wilson Lake and the Rock Bass," an acoustic, folk-rock fusion. The upbeat songs are about kid-friendly topics and have names like "Walkin in the Woods" and "Hey Toad."

"I think kids, they like energy. They like rock and roll," said Mr. Jackson, who teaches English and coaches wrestling at Lake High School and who has performed kids' music at local libraries.

“They were my critics. I’d try stuff out on them,” he said. “They like it. They go around singing it.”

Some parents don’t worry too much about kids’ music. They keep playing the modern, adult music they like — and find that their kids like it too.

Shawn Leitch makes special CDs for his 5-year-old son Cameron, full of songs by groups like Green Day and My Chemical Romance. (Any bad words are edited out using a computer.)

“He’ll have it as loud as most teenagers do,” said Cameron’s mom, Toni.

Mr. Leitch, who grew up with his parents’ music — entertainers like Dolly Parton and Elvis Presley — used to have long hair that hung past his shoulders and played bands like Metallica. These days, he has short hair and a tie. But he still likes to rock, and he seems to have passed that trait down to his kids.

“We all play a mean air guitar,” said Mr. Leitch, 35, of West Toledo, who also has a 2½-year-old, Connor.

When the loud, hyper song “I’m Not Okay (I Promise)” by My Chemical Romance booms from the family’s speakers, Cameron starts singing into his mic and hopping on the couch. At other times, he straps on a little guitar.

“When he gets done, he’s out of breath,” his father said. “I think they’re both gonna be music fans.”

And that, after all, is the whole point.

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Cameron Leitch, 5, rocks out while listening to the same music his parents like. (THE BLADE/HERRAL LONG)

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