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A novel approach to classic kids' tunes

By **BRYAN BORZYKOWSKI**

Special to The CJN

TORONTO - When a group of veteran musicians get together the last thing on their minds is probably children. But for Hamilton resident Candace Alper, music and kids go hand in hand.

Alper runs Name Your Tune, a company that creates CDs loaded with personalized kids' songs. More than 1,600 names can be inserted into classic tracks including Old MacDonald, Wheels On The Bus and Head and Shoulders.

"As a parent I wanted to make something different, that people can interact with," she says on the phone from her home. "Most of the other CDs like this are original songs and American."

Instead of crafting originals, Alper "went with the classics." She chose 14 familiar tracks so parents and grandparents could sing along, and, she says, these are songs kids are learning in school.

Alper started Name Your Tune in 2003 after she gave birth to her first child, Hannah. She was working retail at the time, but hoped she'd land a job as a high school teacher. The job never came, though, because Alper decided working from home would suit her and her daughter best. She came up with the idea of making a customized kids' CD after singing songs to her daughter and inserting her name into the lyrics. She knew right away she had a good idea.

But turning her brainstorm into an actual product was a monumental task. She had to find willing musicians, money to rent a recording studio, and the patience to record hundreds of different names. Luckily, Alper has a lot of musical friends. Her husband is a publicist for Koch records, an international record label, so she had a stable of musicians she could approach.

"The first thing I did was talk to friends of ours that are performers. They all jumped at the opportunity. For the most part this was something they had never done before."

Alper settled on Paul Humphrey, former singer in popular Toronto new wave band Blue Peter, Barbara Vermeulen, a trained opera singer, and Lenny Graf, the only professional kids' musician of the bunch. "Lenny thought it would be a riot. It really takes a certain kind of person to be a kids' performer and they all had a really good time doing it."

Alper and her trio of musicians started recording in 2003, with a list of about 700 names. She culled the list from websites of popular baby names and now she takes requests. "There are a lot of interesting names that have multiple pronunciations," she says, adding that she records every variation of a name. "Rowan can be pronounced different ways, and people are making up names too. You put together Bradley and Logan and you have Brogan."

Adding each name into a song isn't a matter of cutting and pasting. The band has to sing and re-sing most of each track so the name fits properly. "It's a little like getting the caramel into the Caramilk Bar," she says. "They don't just sing the name and try and work it in. They sing enough of the song to make it work. It's incredibly time consuming."

Fortunately, all the hours in the studio are paying off. Alper just opened a Vancouver office in order to facilitate her orders out west and she says she's "selling a lot." While most of her customers are your average parents and gift buyers, she does have a few unusual clients.

"(Actors) Erik McCormack, Debra Messing, (CNN anchorman) Soledad O'Brien," says Alper rattling off her celebrity clientele. This former JCC camp counselor makes it a point to send her CDs to celebs who've recently given birth. Thanks to CNN anchor O'Brien, one record made its way to Brad Pitt.

"A few weeks after I sent a CD to Soledad, she ordered a dozen more for her friends. She said she was interviewing Brad Pitt and if I could Fedex her a copy. She emailed me after, from her BlackBerry and said she put a CD into his hands."

Matt Damon, Adam Sandler, and Lauralee Bell, who plays Cricket on *Young and the Restless*, all have copies too. "Lauralee wrote back a lovely email. She said my son, who's not much of a dancer has been rocking out for two days to this."



Candace Alper and her daughter Hannah

With her CDs selling well, Alper's offering other kid related products on her website, www.nameyourtune.com.

com, such as customized baby blankets, personalized jewelry and other kids' albums of original tunes. But her baby is definitely the Name Your Tune CDs.

"The impact of music for children is undeniable," she says. "When children hear their name in a song it captures both their attention and their imagination since each song is all about them. Each song was chosen for what it can bring to a child - interaction, activity, learning, relaxing - they are all qualities that are important to me."

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