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Norm Jones: Cool Drummings

There's music that only a kid could love. You know it. You've listened to it. Over and over.... (Sorry Chipettes, but I prefer Beyoncé's "Single Lady" to your "Squeakquel" cover.) Then there's music from Rhythm Child that can make you feel, well, cool. Even while holding a sticky juice box.

At a recent, outdoor concert at Pasadena's Levitt Pavilion, Norm Jones and Rhythm Child had the kids groovin' and the parents appreciating a respite from another bland round of "Wheels on the Bus." Oh, they played that ubiquitous ditty, but with a reggae-ska beat that made you actually hope for another verse. And with good reason.

"I've been in the 'band life' since college," says Jones. He toured for 10 years with his reggae-ska band, Crucial DBC. Following a stint with a '90s revival of rock-band General Public, Norm returned to his roots: "I wanted to get back to my music, which is funky-soul." And then came inspiration: Jones and wife, Heather, had their first child and were trying to find music to play with him. "There really wasn't anything that had the rhythmic style I was looking for," he recalls. Soon thereafter, in 2003, Rhythm Child was born. "If it weren't for our kids, I'd probably still be playing in bars!" laughs the singer/drummer whose two sons, Bailey, 9, and Andre, 4, perform with him.

We caught up with Norm right before the show.

How did Rhythm Child Network get started?

My band played a lot of farmers' markets and family shows. Because there were kids there, in the middle of a song I would break into nursery rhymes. Then, I recorded a drum and vocal CD with my buddy [guitarist/producer] Duane' [Neillson], *Drum Circle Sing-A-Long*. We put it out and I found people were listening to it! Some told us they listened to it every day. So I remixed it, remastered it, to make it sound more professional. What I realized is that kids' music lasts a long time. When one group grows up, the next one is right there in line. Kids' music doesn't go away! We start-

ed getting recognition. Soon, we had requests to come into the schools and do classes. We became part of the kids' community in L.A.

You now work with thousands of pre-K and elementary school children. Tell us about the drum circles.

I've developed a routine of how I feel it works best: slowly introducing. I used to just pull out all these drums and it was chaos! Now it's really based on them trusting that I'm going to give them a fun experience. I sprinkle in little lessons along the way about sound waves and vibrations, the construction of the drums, the different countries they come from. This is as we're really building up to the ultimate just letting loose on the drums.

Why is drumming important for children?

It's not about teaching rhythm, it's more about giving kids the opportunity to express themselves through drums. If they can feel free and confident to fully unleash and express themselves in a controlled-but-creative way, then when music comes into their lives later on, they can feel that same passion that they felt with drums. Whether they take piano lessons or guitar or whatever instrument, they can use that same inspiration.

What do you learn from the kids?

To be real. To be honest and passionate. They guide me to stay true to myself. They give me the opportunity to share my passion.

What's your favorite age to work with?

Three, 4, 5. They're just like sponges. And they give so much back. The energy, the smiles, the reactions, the unbridled joy!

See Rhythm Child live Aug. 1, 15 and 19 at MacArthur Park, Skirball Center and The Grove. Find out more about, performances and workshops at www.rhythmchild.net. ♦

Chat Room columnist Vivien Santana Hughes is a former *L.A. Parent* editor and the mother of three – two sons in college and (surprise!) a 5-year-old daughter. All three play drums. Two play well, so far.



Rhythm Child Network front man and co-founder Norm Jones offers kids – and parents – music with a funky, positive beat.