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by Vivien Santana Hughes

## Scott Schultz and Christian Jacobs: They Put a Party on Your TV!

“Cooler than SNL!” proclaims Rachel Dratch of *Saturday Night Live* fame. The *Root*’s Ahmir Thompson says, “We’re all big fans.” During a recent concert, indie rockers The Flaming Lips did a dance tribute. The latest hot thing? Not a new late-night show. It’s preschool cool *Yo Gabba Gabba!*

I knew something was up when I caught my two college-student sons watching Nick Jr. with their little sister nowhere in sight. Skateboard legend Tony Hawk was on *YGG* – skating his dancey dance – and rapper Biz Markie followed with the beat of the day.

“We wanted to do something for our children that was awesome; with not just one style of music, but different flavors from everything,” says Scott Schultz, *YGG* co-creator with his cousin Christian Jacobs. The self-proclaimed Orange County skater-surf dudes, both musicians, each have four children from toddler to tween-age. “We started watching TV shows with our kids and it was disappointing,” says Schultz. “Everything took the safe route, musically,” recalls Jacobs, lead singer of rock band The Aquabats. “Then it just kind of clicked. We said, ‘Dude, we need to make our own kids’ show!’”

But the road to Nickelodeon wasn’t as smooth as DJ Lance’s dance moves.

“We were naive enough to do it, but experienced enough to know that our show idea was ‘unpitchable.’ We needed to shoot a pilot,” says Schultz. After talking about it since 2002,

the two quit their day jobs in 2005 to focus on their dream. “Scott and I mortgaged our houses, we were living on loans, we had kids, our wives were biting their nails ... but we had a lot of support at home,” says Jacobs. That and Schultz’ cousin, John Barrett, who helped cobble together the \$150,000 in capital.

We met at their office – a space stuffed with retro toys and complete with skateboard half-pipe and black-light bathroom (an experience!) – which reflects the positive vibe and playful nature the two emit.

### How did you come up with the characters?

**Schultz:** We wanted something memorable like on *Sesame Street*, *H.R. Pufnstuf*, *Lidsville* and *The Bugaloos*.

**Jacobs:** Muno was our first character. I started drawing him back in high school. I’m actually legally blind in my left eye. One day, I was doodling and drew a cyclops and thought, ‘Hey, I can relate to that guy!’ [Scarier versions of] Muno and Brobee were made for The Aquabats shows. So we had our Laurel and Hardy, added the two girls [Foofa and Toodee] and the robot, Plex – the paternal educator/older brother. We built the boom box, the costumes, and figured out how DJ Lance would act.

### Tell us more about the musical inspiration for YGG.

**J:** Everything out there [before] was really left over from the ‘60’s and ‘70s: not hip-hop or rap or techno or indie. But really it’s just the lyrics that are a problem. That music is very primal. It’s just ‘kick, snare, kick, kick, snare.’ Anyone can respond to that, anyone can dance to it. So why not appropriate it for kids?

**S:** It was less of an abstract idea because we all of a sudden ‘got it’ by watching our own kids. Like when they would be really excited about a Ramones song.

**J:** It’s the nucleus of the show, it’s really first and foremost about music and putting together all these fun sounds. You will notice with *Gabba* that a lot of the songs are electronic sounding and random noises. It wasn’t

**Yo Gabba Gabba! co-creators Scott Schultz (left) and Christian Jacobs chill on the set with the YGG gang. Says Jacobs, “The show is first and foremost about music and putting together all these fun sounds.”**



like, turn up the amp and BAAAAA! hit that scary guitar chord, it's was more like bee bee boo bee....

### **What does the name "Yo Gabba Gabba" mean?**

**J:** We wanted to come up with a magical word that was repetitive enough that a toddler could say it. 'Abra cadabra' was a little tricky. So we came up with our own unique name...

**S:** ...that would be the magic word that brings the toys to life. Something like, 'goo-goo, ga-ga.' Easy for kids to remember.

**J:** 'Yo Gabba Gabba' was the name that really stood out from the rest.

### **What kind of response did the pilot get?**

**J:** We were really excited about the episode. We sent it around to the networks thinking that they would say, 'You guys are great, this is awesome!' But we couldn't even get a response. After that, we moved to plan B and decided to market it ourselves.

**S:** We ended up renting out a theater and [designer] Paul Frank helped us put together this awesome premier. We invited a lot of the networks. To promote it, we posted a minute-long trailer online. It had a life of its own! It spread to blogs and review sites and went viral.

**J:** Soon enough, all of the networks had seen it. We ended up meeting with Brown Johnson from Nickelodeon. She 'got' the show right away.

### **The show debuted in 2007. What was it like to see it all become a reality?**

**S:** It was a magical moment.

**J:** We still pinch ourselves when we see the giant, life-sized toy table and huge characters come to life [on the set]. It's very surreal and humbling at the same time. We are incredibly grateful.

### **What's in store for season four? More cool guests?**

**J:** We're just excited to set up a new season of the show each year. There are so many things to explore.

**S:** We're getting contacted all the time now by people who want to be on the show. It's fun to be able to be selective!

**J:** We want someone who is actually there for the kids, not just there to promote a new single. Someone who just wants to do something good ... and jump through the hoops for us! [Laughs.]

**S:** Some of the first guests, like The Shins and The Killers, were actually really hip to come on the show just because their kids liked it. (All they had to go off of was the pilot episode.) Their excitement and energy were great because they were there for their kids, you could see it in their eyes.

### **YGG performed at Coachella and now your live show is on a 60-city tour. What can we expect?**

**J:** We wanted to have something that parents could watch and not just roll their eyes and wonder, 'When is this going to be over?!'

**S:** This really is our show with the actual DJ Lance and the 'super music' group. This is like your kid's first rock or pop concert. We've noticed that more dads are taking their children to our shows. It's, 'Honey, I'll take the kids to this one, it looks like fun!'

**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. She lives with her patient husband in La Cañada Flintridge.**