

In the Spotlight

Rock

Your Dirty Socks Off



By Teresa Tobat

It's a Sunday afternoon in late February, and the Jewish Museum's auditorium is packed with kids and their accompanying adults. Performer Annie Elmer (aka the Raven Rocker), decked out in hot pink tights, a flashy white dress and silver glitter go-go boots, takes the stage. "Are you ready to *rock*? Are you ready to *dance*?" she asks, eliciting cheers and shouts from the audience. After all, this is a Dirty Sock Funtime Band concert, where listeners can't help but become part of the show.

"There's so much fun energy between the band and the kids and the parents," says guitarist Stephen Jacobs. "During the whole set, the kids are not just listening, but doing something. They're interacting with the music."

Incorporating creative characters and theatrical elements into their performances (one song features a swashbuckling pirate wielding a microphone in place of a sword), The Dirty Socks inspire dancing in the aisles—by children and parents alike.

Each of the band's eight members has his or her own individual character that helps close the gap between the performers and the audience. The

Socks include the aforementioned Annie Elmer; guitarist Adam Jacobs (aka Mr. Clown), who sports a pink afro and says silly things; lead singer Mike Messer; guitarist Stephen Jacobs (brother to Adam); guitarist Bill Phillips; sax player Ken Thomson; drummer Sean Dixon and bass player Jasper Leak.

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The band's origins can be traced back to Kids Creative, a non-profit founded by the Jacobs brothers that operates arts-based, peace-themed, educational after-school programs and camps across the city. They started creating CDs for the kids in the program, and then began fielding requests from parents to play live shows.

Things really took off after the band received coverage in "Time Out New York" and the "New York Post." They were soon tapped to play in a video for "Jack's Big Music Show" on the children's TV channel Noggin (now Nick Jr.). "The education that we got from linking up with Nickelodeon was a complete and utter turning point," Messer says. Just two months after its founding, the band had gone national.

Despite their success, The Dirty Socks strive to stay true to their roots. Even today, their musical intentions

stem from Kids Creative, their parent organization. "We run the band as a community, building friendships through creativity and a shared love of insane things," Stephen Jacobs says.

When composing songs, the band members stick to the same philosophy they teach their students: All ideas are good. The members weave their thoughts together until they create one cohesive song. They also try to include advanced vocabulary words in order to inspire children to strengthen their language skills. "Kids' songs don't have to be dumbed down," says Phillips (also known as "Billy Z").

Parents love The Dirty Socks because their music is intelligent and can be enjoyed by both kids and adults. Mom Dana Breitman compares one of the Socks' albums to Queen. "These guys do not fool around," Breitman says. "They play great music that's easy to learn and dance to. They work so hard, and their music is fun."

In addition to releasing a new album, "Sock-a-delic," The Socks recently teamed up with Snapfilms, the company that filmed them for "Jack's Big Music Show," and are releasing test pilots for their own PBS series. "The show's a little bit 'Seinfeld,' a little bit 'Monkees,' a little bit 'The Muppet Show' and a little bit 'The Young Ones,'" says Adam Jacobs.

While each individual band mate gets a kick out of performing, The Dirty Socks say their concerts are ultimately for the fans.

"The show is for them," Stephen Jacobs says. "We want them to feel like rock stars." 🎸

For more info, visit dirtysockfuntimeband.com.

Wanna rock out with the Dirty Sock Funtime Band? Catch them on Sunday, April 11 at 2 p.m. at Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts! Tickets are \$6. Walt Whitman Theatre at Brooklyn College, 2900 Campus Road, Brooklyn, 718-951-4500, brooklyncenteronline.org.