

## **PUTTING TOGETHER YOUR OWN CHILDREN'S RADIO SHOW**

**by Susan Salidor**

About a year and a half ago I was given the opportunity to co-host a one-hour children's music radio show out of Loyola University here in Chicago. WLWU 88.7 FM is a commercial-free, independent radio station with an eclectic mix of music and talk radio. It is owned by National Public Radio and can be streamed via the Internet. All of the radio hosts are volunteers, and we have regular pledge drives to help keep the station alive.

Because of its independent status, I am allowed to create my own playlist each week without directives from anyone. This allows me to choose themes that are sometimes seasonal, sometimes musical, sometimes political, and sometimes educational. My co-host and I receive music from all over the country, and we listen to each CD that comes in, often splitting the reviewing process between us and making recommendations to each other. I have very eclectic tastes in children's music, and because of my own work as a singer/songwriter for kids, I believe I have high standards as well. Although I am allowed to prerecord a show, I have only done on-air, live hosting.

When I first started as a radio host, I was surprised at the amount of original music being produced for children nowadays. Not all are radio-worthy, in my opinion. I look for good production values (the nature of radio demands it), able songwriting, interesting arrangements, and strong singing, not necessarily in that order. If a song is amazing and the singer is not, it just may make it onto my show. On the other hand, if the singer is amazing and the material is not, it won't be heard on my show.

I have outlined some start-up tips for putting together a radio show. I know there are CMN members who have been doing this a lot longer than I have, but I am hoping that my radio adventures and recommendations will be helpful to other novices.

### **1) Tips on start-up materials (minidisk, CD binder, headphones, organizing shows, researching artists)**

I was trained by my co-host Sheila Donlan at WLWU in Chicago, Illinois. She was really helpful in getting me set up to begin my DJ-ing duties. Here's what I had to buy:

a) A large CD binder with four slots on each page. I place a CD in one slot with its booklet right next to it so I can easily identify songs. I store the plastic cases in my office at home. My binder also has a place in front with CD slots. After I plan my show, I take the CDs I'm planning to use and put them in order in these front slots, rubber band together the CD booklets, print out my show and stick it in the binder, and I'm ready to go to the studio.

b) A minidisk recorder so that I can prerecord kids, interviews with musicians who cannot make it into the studio, or put together whole shows if I'm not able to be in studio and can get someone to engineer for me. The minidisk player came with computer software that allows me to edit on my computer. I can also edit directly on my minidisk player if I choose.

c) Good headphones with an adapter for the studio. Wish I could afford great ones, but that will have to wait until I go national(!). Check to see if your station has these to spare—mine doesn't. My Sony headphones cost about \$20 at Best Buy.

d) A box of recordable CDs so that I can record and critique my shows. I can also do this with a minidisk as there are two minidisk players/recorders at my station.

## 2) Tips on theme-related programs

I have found using a theme or themes to be helpful in planning my one-hour radio show for children and their families. Sometimes I choose a theme and, in trying to find just the right songs, I find a group of songs I love that are related to a completely different theme and change my show. Or I keep a list of those songs (and the new theme) for future reference. A theme is only useful if it *helps* you organize your thoughts and music for your show. In other words, a theme should not be too constrictive. I tend to choose a theme and then be creative about how the songs will relate to it.

**Example:** Martin Luther King Show, Kids Play Radio, WLWV 88.7 FM Chicago  
Saturday, January 15, 2005

For the Martin Luther King holiday weekend, I wrote down *all* the words I associate with the man and the holiday: freedom, civil rights, civil disobedience, Rosa Parks, hero, African-American, church, preacher, march, human rights, antiwar, peace, moral, religious, civil rights movement, Pete Seeger, Bernice Johnson Reagan, folk music, political folk music, holiday. (Keep in mind these are just my words; I'm sure you would come up with a different set.)

Then I went through each of these words and jotted down a few songs from my own repertoire: "Rosa Parks" (Dee Werner), "I Have a Dream" (Chris Inserra), "Peace Before Us" (Native American), "Oh Freedom," "Rosa Parks Got on the Bus" (Uncle Ruthie), "Peace In My Fingers" (S. Salidor), "Paz y Libertad" (Jose Luis Orozco), "Woke Up This Morning," "If I Had a Hammer" (Hays/Seeger), "Ruby B." (S. Salidor), "This Little Light of Mine," "We Shall Not Be Moved," "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho," "Oh Freedom" (S. African).

Then I consulted my CD collection and tried to find these songs and any new songs, and also all the songs I forgot that relate to my theme. I try to use a combination of new songs, old songs, upbeat and slow songs, some easy sing-along songs, a dance song or two, etc.

The final playlist included most of the songs above, along with two excerpts from MLK's speeches, including "I Have a Dream" and one about Rosa Parks; and these other songs: "Peace Train" (Cat Stevens), "What Can One Little Person Do?" (Sally Rogers), "Under One Sky" (Ruth Pelham, sung by Sol Y Canto), "Teaching Peace" (Red Grammer), "You've Got To Be Taught" (Rodgers & Hammerstein), "Courage" (Bob Blue), and "We Shall Overcome" (Peter, Paul & Mary).

*Special Note: I always consult my music bible, Rise Up Singing, for song ideas and song histories and authorship. If you don't already know about this amazing volume of music, visit Sing Out! online and order a copy A.S.A.P.*

## 3) Benefits of recording kids in advance

I love recording kids on my minidisk player and find it easy to do. I use the kids I teach every Wednesday, so they know me and feel comfortable with me. I sit the kids around a table (so there's less fidgeting) or on a rug and turn on my minidisk and start asking questions. My four- and five-year-olds are never at a loss for words, and I record everything and edit it later for use in the studio. I have also

brought older kids (ten to twelve years) into the studio for a live show and let them comment on songs and help create the playlist on air.

I use bits and pieces of kids material on my show to break up the monotony of song after song after song. Also, kids like to hear kids. I usually don't play more than one or two minutes of talking at one time.

#### **4) Benefits of minidisk production**

I'm still learning about my minidisk recorder, but it allows you to record, erase, and edit all on one machine. They are small and easy to use, but make sure your station has a MD player before you purchase a recorder. (At my radio station, we have two minidisk players and you can even sign out a recorder should you need one in the field.) I bought mine online for about \$250 along with a good microphone (another \$60). Make sure you buy a minidisk player *with a microphone input* as they don't all have one. As I mentioned above, my minidisk recorder came with computer software to allow me to edit via computer.

#### **4) Benefits of overpreparing and being flexible on air**

As I've become more experienced, I've become a better judge of time, but I still overprepare. Each one-hour show takes me at least two hours to plan. I sit at my computer and listen to new CDs and check out old ones as I type up my playlist. An actual playlist looks like this:

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**Kids Play Radio Playlist**  
Saturday, January 08, 2005

1. "On the Day You Were Born" (Track #4) (2:42) from *Hello World*, Artist: Red Grammer
2. "Shake Your Brain" (Track #11) (1:56) from *Teaching Peace*, Artist: Red Grammer
3. "All Aboard" (Track #12) (4:08) from *Putumayo Kids: Caribbean Playground*, Artist: Atlantik from Trinidad

CHAT: Intro songs, show ID, themes: One World, winter weather

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Because I pull each CD and booklet for each show, I have the booklet in hand should I need more information. I always announce the title, performer, songwriter, and CD title for each song played.

I plan approximately fifty-five minutes of music per one hour show, allowing ten minutes for announcements of kids' activities around the city (which I get off the Internet), station ID, intros and chatting about songs. With each show I become more confident and can stray from my playlist if something occurs to me on air. We have a request line, too, but I don't usually announce the number because I worry that I don't have the CD they want. As my CD collection builds, I'm sure I'll be more open to taking requests.

I hope this information is helpful to all who have been given the opportunity to be a radio host. Please feel free to ask questions at [ssalidor@aol.com](mailto:ssalidor@aol.com) or to send comments to me or the CMN office ([office@cmnonline.org](mailto:office@cmnonline.org)).