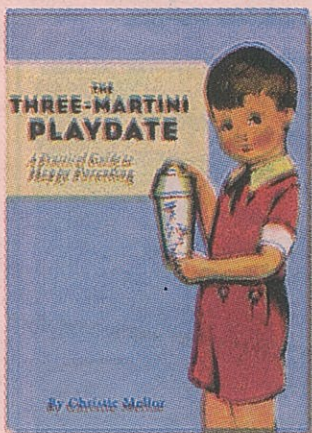


SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE | 3.18.07 | **KID STUFF** | MARK WAHLBERG | CHRIS ROCK

# ROCKIN' WITH KIDS

BY ERIKA MILVY



**THE CHILDREN'S HOUR AND THE COCKTAIL HOUR NEED NOT BE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE. AROUND THE BAY AREA, NIGHTCLUBS ARE HOPPING BEFORE BEDTIME.**

The value of mixing booze and babies was memorably extolled by San Francisco native Christie Mellor, who coined the term “The Three-Martini Playdate.” Her 2004 book mocks uber-moms and micromanaged childhoods and extols the virtues of hands-off, absentee parenting.

In Bay Area parlance, Mellor’s message is, essentially: Put down the homemade play dough and the sugar-free millet birthday cake and pick up a stiff drink. In chapters with titles such as “Children’s Birthday Parties: Not Just for Children!” and “Children’s Music: Why?,” Mellor’s snarky musings suggest that there must be a better way.

But the children’s hour and the cocktail hour need not be mutually exclusive. Around the country and around the Bay Area, nightclubs are hopping before bedtime to accommodate tykes and tipplers. Hip Mamas and Alternadads — with AC/DC onesies on their kids and “Confessions of a Slacker Mom” paperbacks in their Petunia Pickle Bottom diaper bags — are taking back the night.

The combination of cool, urban adults venturing into parenthood at later and later ages, the rise of children as a cottage industry and the emergence of an entirely palatable genre of family music (a.k.a. kiddie rock or alt kid music), has created a supply and a demand for adult-friendly kid activities, safe but not uncool spaces where young and old are free to be either young or old.

Somewhat big name (in the kids’ music scene) Ralph Colvert (a.k.a. Ralph’s World) recently played a gig at 10:30 in



MICHAEL MACOR / THE CHRONICLE

Heather Phillips, 13, right with bass, and her mother, Brenda, after her performance at 12 Galaxies “School of Rock” program, with two enthralled boys (left) waiting for the next act.

# COVER STORY

the morning at the Fillmore, as part of his nationwide tour of House of Blues clubs. Why the Fillmore? Do toddlers appreciate the chandeliers? Or the club's rich rock history? Not so much. Parents were willing to fork over \$18.50 a ticket to recapture those heady days of youthful childlessness — and to reassure themselves they haven't become one of those people — a Stepford mom.

The 16-city tour reflects a major shift in children's music tolerance. Children's music: Why? Why, because we like it, a certain demographic of parents will readily (or sheepishly) admit.

With Dan Zanes leading the pack of hipster rockers whom parents enjoy as much as, if not more than, their kids do, record labels, concert promoters and even the cafe around the corner are sensing profits in the Pampers crowd. As iTunes takes off, album sales across the board are down about 2 percent. But children's music sales (for hissy-fit-free car trips) are up nearly 60 percent. Colvert's tour (he's now on the Disney Sound label) is sponsored by Rice Krispies. Last summer's Jamarama kids' music festival was sponsored by Noggin. And Grammy winner Zanes, who recently sold out the house at Carnegie Hall, is talking TV with Disney.

Locally, restaurant family nights, baby happy hours, kid-friendly club venues and adult-friendly kid concerts are helping parents get out of the house and avoid seeing "My Little Pony Live: The World's Biggest Tea Party."

Whether at 12 Galaxies, family music night at Dolores Park cafe or baby happy hours (Wine and Whiners, Tots and Tonic, Strollerbar), city parents are enjoying "age-desegregated music" (as Zanes calls it) in age-desegregated watering holes.

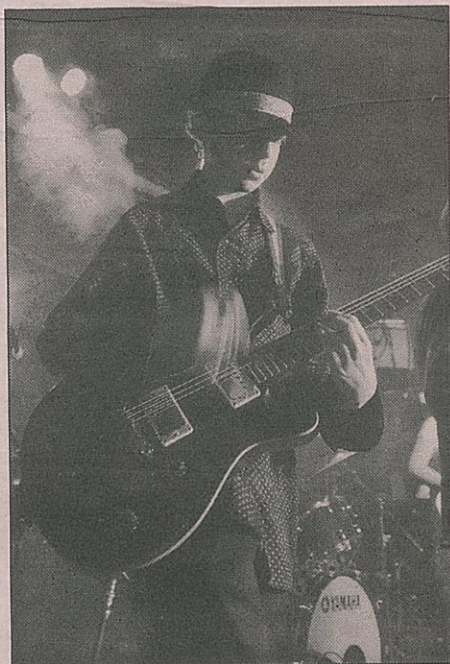
The rise in middle-aged parenting, 35- to 40-year-olds just now becoming parents, may have contributed to this trend. Older parents are more set in their ways and maybe less willing to drop their former lifestyle to stay home and listen to lousy music.

The funky, late-night Mission Street dive 12 Galaxies hosts daytime kids' shows catering to lapsed hipsters from the neighborhood. In *après* nap floor shows, bands like Ralph's World and locals like Charity and the Jam Band make pure pop for tomorrow's moshers.

"I think the sight of families rocking out together in traditionally adult venues is a blast," said Justin Roberts, who will play 12 Galaxies on April 12 — although, he added, "It's very surreal to see a 4-year-old sitting at a bar drinking a juice box while his or her dad and mom are enjoying a beer."

The last time he played 12 Galaxies, the mosh pit made its way up onto the stage as zealous moppets crowded out the band. But sometimes, Roberts said, "the parents can be louder than the kids."

Roberts, whose music is as catchy as a preschool full of sneezers, sings of the joys of sidewalk chalk and the pride of going training wheel-less. And, using the newly winning formula of parent-winking lyrics, his title track "Meltdown" borrows from '80s New Wavers Modern English with the line, "I'll stop the world and melt down with



**RECORD LABELS, CONCERT PROMOTERS AND EVEN THE CAFE AROUND THE CORNER ARE SENSING PROFITS IN THE PAMPERS CROWD.**



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL MACOR / THE CHRONICLE

**Jonah Schacter plays lead guitar, top, and, above, Angela Baltor, 11 (left), Jayne Colorado, 13 (center), and Noam Baruch sing a song together, all part of "School of Rock" held at 12 Galaxies on Mission Street in San Francisco.**

you." Indeed, parent-winking and inside jokes (see "Shrek" and "The Simpsons") — and rock 'n' roll beats — keep grown-ups from feeling lobotomized.

Adam Bergeron, one of the owners of 12 Galaxies, implemented kids' shows at the club after observing that there was a new wave of local and touring bands who "make great music that kids love and that appeals to adults as well." Artists like Zanes (who's had Natalie Merchant, Nick Cave and Suzanne Vega sing on his CDs) and Roberts, and locals like the Sippy Cups and Charity Kahn, are creating, said Bergeron, "straightforward rock 'n' roll that is innocent, fun and educational." Bergeron, whose girlfriend has two kids (who have 10 friends who told 10 friends . . .), found a ready audience for music with a crossover appeal that was a far cry from Barney-esque treacle.

"I think it's safe to say that today's parents are generally a pretty darned hip bunch,

and the thought of taking the kids out to a place where they can have a beer while the kids have a juice box and rock out to some great music is very appealing," said Bergeron. "Everybody wins."

Of course, just as there was a backlash to high-fructose parenting, with its endless rounds of "If you're happy and you know it . . ." there's a growing backlash to the Barney backlash perpetrated by mod moms and dads. "Can we please get over the hipster parent moment?" asked David Brooks in the *New York Times* recently.

Of Vino Rosso, the Bernal wine bar that hosts the Wine and Whiners Wednesdays, one yelper yapped, "I am boycotting this local establishment based on the number of times I've passed by and seen strollers parked outside or inside. Stop encouraging them! For the cost of a nice glass of wine, you can get a babysitter for two hours."

Speaking of the same phenomenon in New York (hip dives in Brooklyn and the

## EVENTS AND VENUES

**PIPSQUEAK A-GO-GO:** 1-4:30 p.m. March 31. \$8 (babies younger than 1 free). Rickshaw Stop, 1555 Fell St., San Francisco. (415) 861-2011. [www.rickshawstop.com](http://www.rickshawstop.com). [www.virtuous.com](http://www.virtuous.com).

**DAYTIME KIDS' SHOWS:** Jump Around. Dance party for kids and their parents featuring special guests. 2-5 p.m. March 25; Justin Roberts, 11 a.m. April 15; Hanna Banana, 3 p.m. April 21. 12 Galaxies, 2565 Mission St., San Francisco. (415) 970-9777. [www.12galaxies.com](http://www.12galaxies.com).

**OCCASIONAL FRIDAY FAMILY NIGHTS:** Dolores Park Cafe, 501 Dolores St., San Francisco. (415) 621-2936. [www.doloresparkcafe.org](http://www.doloresparkcafe.org).

**BABY LOVES DISCO:** (All parties 2-5 p.m.) April 21 and May 12, Ruby Skye, 420 Mason St., San Francisco; March 31, April 28 and May 26, Aura Nightclub, 4825 Hopyard, Pleasanton; May 19, Avalon Nightclub, 777 Lawrence Expressway, Santa Clara. Admission is \$15 for all walking humans (infants free). (800) 594-8499. [www.babylovesdisco.com](http://www.babylovesdisco.com).

**HOPDOGS:** A kid-friendly dance venue. 5 p.m. Last Saturday of every month. ODC Dance Commons, 351 Shotwell St., San Francisco. [www.hopdogsdance.com](http://www.hopdogsdance.com).

**VINO ROSSO'S WINE AND WHINERS:** 3-7 p.m. Wednesdays. 629 Cortland Ave., San Francisco. (415) 647-1268.

**CHENERY PARK'S FAMILY TUESDAYS:** Tuesday nights. 683 Chenery St., San Francisco. (415) 337-8537.

**SIPPY CUPS:** Dugout concert. Noon April 7 (before Giants-Dodgers baseball game). AT&T Park, San Francisco. The Green Apple Music & Arts Festival. 1 and 4 p.m. April 22. Bimbos 365 Club, 1025 Columbus Ave., San Francisco. [www.greenapplefestival.com](http://www.greenapplefestival.com). [www.thesippy cups.com](http://www.thesippy cups.com)

**SMOOSH, A T'WEEN POP DUO:** 4:30 p.m. April 22. Cafe Du Nord, 2170 Market St., San Francisco. (415) 861-5016.

Lower East Side are now great places to catch the best in music for minors), Nicholas Kulish wrote (also in the Times last month), "I blame the law of unintended consequences — in this case, the no-smoking movement. Sure, cigarettes are a public health problem. But the smoky bar filled with unhealthy grown-ups at least felt like a bar. Now, the local gin joints look more like jungle gyms."

While she can see the advantage of not paying for a babysitter, Mellor told *The Chronicle*, "Honestly, has it become so much about the children that we have to give over our Friday and Saturday nights to them too?" Next month, Chronicle Books will publish her follow-up handbook, "Three-Martini Family Vacation: A Field Guide to Intrepid Parenting," which offers tips on steering clear of Chuck E. Cheeses.

Said Mellor, "There used to be a little mystery about growing up. Children would hear the adults in the next room having adult conversations and listening to their music, perhaps Mom having a glass of wine with Dad after a long day at work. There was a magical world of grown-up activities, to which children were allowed a glimpse, but not a standing invitation."

But today's too-cool-for-preschool set are not just privy to adults' magic moments, but they're witness to adults' less admirable moments too. Enzo Garcia, a roots and folk musician who has helped caffeinate countless moms while stimulating their young with his musical saw, washboard and Jew's harp, has sworn off mixing babies and booze. In addition to his popular "Breakfast With Enzo" morning shows (first at Progressive Grounds coffeehouse in Bernal Heights, now at the Bernal Heights Neighborhood Center), Enzo used to play Stroller Bar, a monthly happy hour at the Argus bar in the Mission, which featured free juice and goldfish and \$3 Cosmos.

Prompted by a brawl that broke out, Garcia concluded that he doesn't love the vibe of the kids' concerts in the bars. "The music tends to be an accessory to the adults drinking, and there are times when drunk, unruly folks (not parents — other people not there for the show) have had to be asked to leave," he said.

Garcia prefers his gigs at the Park Chalet, the laid-back restaurant across from Ocean Beach where dogs and toddlers have the run of the lawn, and parents who can't grab a coveted Adirondack chair spread blankets on the grass. It has pear and rosemary martinis for parents (they're overpriced, but, then again, someone serves them to you) and crayons and chicken nuggets for kids. There seems to be an unspoken acceptance of someone else's kids purloining your pizza.

Unlike many homeowner backyards, the Chalet offers space to run and trees to climb. Other attempts at kid-friendly adult spaces are more cramped.

Chenery Park offers a kids' menu and tolerates tykes on Family Tuesdays. But it's family friendly in name only; there's little room for ants-in-pants wiggling and no communal toy chest. (Even Noe Valley stores have that.)

Likewise, Vino Rosso is "nice in theory,"



KATY RADDATZ / THE CHRONICLE

### At Vino Rosso's Wine and Whiners Wednesday, Andrea Beach gives her 7-month-old son a bottle.

said a Bernal mom (who asked not be identified because she likes the owners, who are also part of the small Bernal parent world). But the wine bar is too cramped for her avid ambulator and offers little to eat for her 5-year-old. "Granted, she's picky," said the mom, "but stinky cheese didn't cut it for dinner."

At the Dolores Park cafe, there are cheese toasties and hot cocoa — and lattes, beer and salad — plus a bit of room for tiny dancers. Owner Rachel Herbert's semi-monthly family music nights are often followed by a post-bedtime show. Recent months have showcased Abby and the Pip-squeaks and Amy Meyers, whose February gig included puppets, chicken hats and a headbanger's rendition of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star."

And new venues are popping up faster than you can say goo. Pip Squeak A-Go-Go is a new '60s go-go dance party at the Rickshaw Stop bar, with DJs, dance lessons, live music from the Time Outs (an all dad-band) and diaper-changing areas. HopDogs, a kid-friendly dance class/groove out, held monthly at ODC in the Mission, instructs happy feet — little and big — how to Lindy Hop, Shim Sham Shimmy and cakewalk, with free string cheese.

Also intended to appeal to parents who refuse to suburbanize, Baby Loves Disco is a monthly extravaganza held in childproof discos from New York to Los Angeles. These Saturday Afternoon Fever fetes promise a Barney-free zone with Trader Joe's hummus and broccoli, bubble downpours, hula hoops and DJ-spun hits from the heyday of disco. Held in Pleasanton, Santa Clara and Ruby Skye on Mason Street (a bridge-and-tunnel-crowd haunt), the grooviness factor is somewhat wanting. Baby Loves Disco is a 17-city franchise with national sponsorship and oodles of merchandising. The gestalt may be too corporate for the anarchy-in-the-pre-K crowd. But, then again, it sells out every month. ■

Erika Milvy is a freelance writer.