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# Catching little ones' ear is easy

AndyZ of Redwood City strikes just the right chord

By Charlene Prince

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

It's difficult for performer Andy Zamenes to resist requests from his groupies, especially because they are loyal fans who sing and dance to his music and laugh at his jokes. But then again, how could he say no to a flock of children asking to hear his song "I Went to a Party with Dinosaurs"?

Zamenes, 37, or AndyZ as he's known to his fans, writes and performs children's music, solo and with his Andyland Band. The Redwood City native has enchanted young children along the Peninsula for the past three years with his mix of music, storytelling and general goofiness.

He always sports a backward baseball cap and plays an acoustic guitar boosted by a wireless amplifier so he can easily roam, jump and dance around. The mo-

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ment he appears, children are eager for him to start his tunes. Once he strikes a chord on his guitar, it's as if the bashfulness typical of young children in public is released and is replaced with smiling, singing, dancing and just plain grooving kids. For the parents, having a camera at the ready is essential. And for everyone else in the radius of this performance, it's nearly impossible not to be entertained by Zamenes, the kids and the parents watching their offspring with pride.

Perhaps Zamenes has this effect because his life is rooted in music. While singing has been in his repertoire since he

was a child, Zamenes started playing the piano when he was 3 years old, and at the age of 12 he picked up the guitar, which became his passion. He went on to receive a bachelor of arts degree in music from San Francisco State University, and worked as a computer technician while playing music as a hobby. But after being laid off during the dot-com bust, Zamenes decided to take a leap of faith and pursue a musical career. He began with solo performances along the Peninsula at farmers' markets and city festivals.

"I scraped by for a few years, then I discovered playing for kids, and I realized that it was a really cool thing for me," he said.

So "AndyZ" was born, and he pulled

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# Music that gets kids smiling

## ► ANDYZ

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together the Andyland Band. Zamenes can tell how his early musical experiences helped his studies, and how they tie in to his current endeavors.

"I can remember my mom vacuuming the house, and I was sitting between the speakers listening to the records . . . the same song over and over. I'd listen to one instrument, then listen back for another instrument. When I got into school, that's what you do to train your ear. I learned how to write music, orchestration. It was a pretty stressful major for me but I'm sure it contributed to what I do know because I can draw from all styles."

Zamenes' most recent album, "Welcome to Andyland," earned the Parents' Choice Foundation's Parents' Choice "Recommended" award last summer. The dinosaur party anthem appears on this album and combines a mid-tempo rock 'n' roll rhythm with lyrics that are quirky and educational in their own way: "I went to a party with dinosaurs. I went to a party with dinosaurs. The herbivores and carnivores were waitin' outside my door. You ask me, 'What's a carnivore?' Well, they eat other dinosaurs. And herbivores eat plants and leaves on the ground and in the trees. . ."

Zamenes is working on a new CD, "Return to Andyland," scheduled for release on June 1. With the follow-up album, he hopes to reach upper-grade school kids in

**Andy Zamenes**, above, plays to a packed house at Pottery Barn Kids at Stoneridge Mall in Pleasanton. One-year-old Carley Kern, right, of San Ramon is pleased by a Zamenes song.

addition to his younger fan base — traditionally toddlers to 9-year-olds.

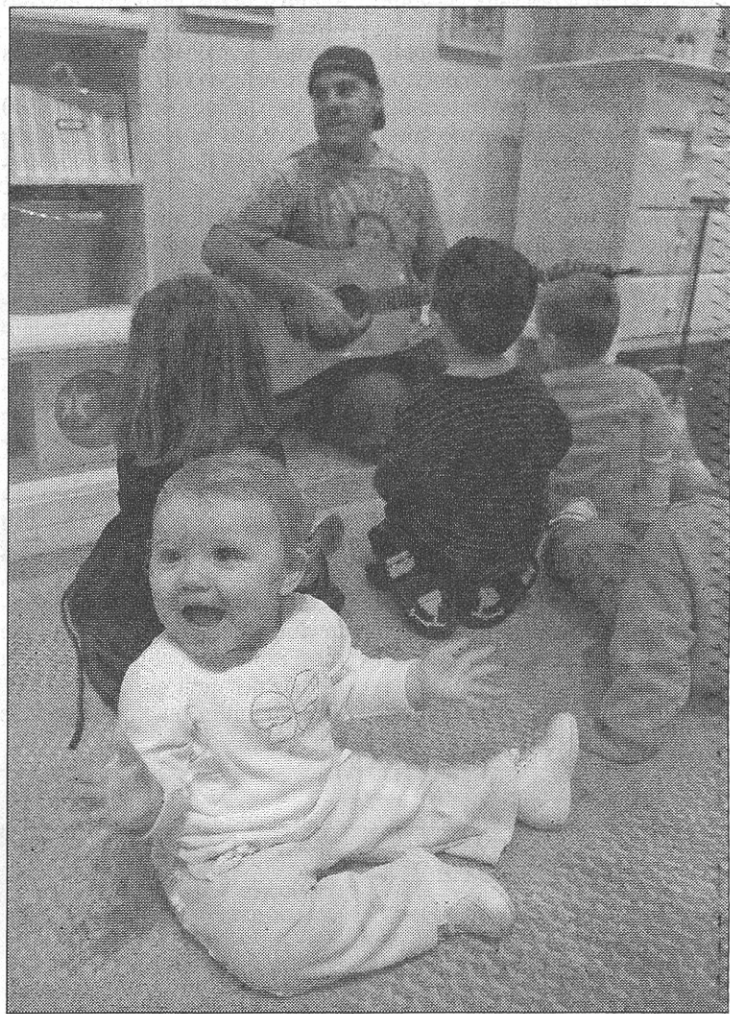
As his popularity increases, so does the radius of his fan base. His shows are no longer limited to the Peninsula — he's popular in Livermore, Pleasanton and Sacramento. And after a successful concert last year at the Coyote Point Museum in San Mateo with another Bay Area children's band, Daffy Dave and the Treefort Gang, the two will be featured as a double-bill at summer events in Redwood City and at the San Jose Discovery Museum. Zamenes has also been asked to play at the City of Campbell's summer concert series.

Zamenes hopes to transform his AndyZ musical endeavors into children's books and even a television show. He also aspires to record a more adult-oriented album.

"I put all those songs on a tape recorder so I don't forget them. I would like to get them out there and get them on a CD. But I can't rush that either," he said.

So Zamenes continues to focus on AndyZ and the Andyland Band, and it's proving to be a winning strategy. At the Coyote Point event, Zamenes and his band easily enthralled an audience of 320, parents included. Anyone who's ever thrown a children's birthday party knows this is quite a feat.

"I've played in a lot of bands, and sometimes when you perform you are in a sea of boredom, whereas with kids, if they enjoy it they are laughing and smiling and hopping around. It's a lot of fun," said Ed Bauman, who plays keyboard and sings background vo-



Photos by MICHAEL MACOR / The Chronicle

cal in the Andyland Band. Bauman, who lives in Brentwood, has known Zamenes since 1980 and has performed in several bands with him for nearly as long.

With three boys 10 years old and younger, Bauman is an expert at translating what draws children to the Zamenes' music and performances:

"His music talks to the heart, and it's at their level. They can understand what he's singing about, and it's fun.

"And Andy's a goofball," Bauman said with a laugh. "We are all goofballs . . . in a good way."

But ask Zamenes why he and his music appeals to kids, and he is more contemplative.

"They can see the truth and feel the vibe. They know if you are sincere. They can see it in your eyes. They know if you want to play for them. They know what's real and what's not on a deeper level that we sometimes forget. They go by how they feel. If someone is putting out positive energy, they are drawn to it."

E-mail comments to [penfriday@sfchronicle.com](mailto:penfriday@sfchronicle.com).

## Get groovin'

For information on Andy Zamenes' performances, visit [www.andyz.com](http://www.andyz.com).