

# Bay Area Living

sanmateocountytimes.com

Monday  
May 19, 2003

## BIOGRAPHIC

# From rock 'n' roll to day care

By Elizabeth Jardina

STAFF WRITER

**A**NDY Zamenes wasn't looking for a pint-sized musical audience, but the kids found him anyway.

A year ago, the 35-year-old Redwood City native was an aspiring rock 'n' roller playing at coffee houses and farmers markets.

"It dawned on me one day that the kids were the ones who were stopping — and were stopping their parents — to listen," he says. "Kids were really the ones who were responding to my music."

He started adding kids' favorites to his set lists and eventually recorded "Pockets," an album of songs for children.

"Apparently I've replaced Raffi in some car stereos," he says dryly, referring to the musical superstar for the under-5 set.

Zamenes started playing music when he was a child himself. "I banged on the piano when I was a little kid and started playing by ear, copying songs off the radio."

At age 11, Zamenes discovered the Beatles' "White Album" and practically

wore the grooves off the record. The next year he persuaded his parents to buy him a \$50 used guitar.

When he graduated to an electric guitar, a Fender Bullet, he wrote songs and played with his high school band, Vex, later renamed D.P.S. — Dudes Playing Songs. "We were kinda '80s rock 'n' roll, kinda heavy, kinda 'dude' rock," he says.

After acquiring a degree in music from San Francisco State University, Zamenes' music became his moonlighting gig. To pay the bills, he worked 9-to-5 fixing computers.

He formed a band called Tinman and recorded a solo acoustic album while working in tech support for eight years.

Then his safety net broke. "I got laid off a couple of years ago," he says. "After that I decided that I was going to be a musician full time, no matter what, no matter how much I had to scrape."

Shortly after that, Zamenes discovered his rapport with young people.

"I'm a big kid," he says. "That's why I understand kids. I got reacquainted with my inner child when I started



**REDWOOD CITY** native Andy Zamenes' dreams of being a rock 'n' roll star have taken a back seat to his new profession, children's entertainer.

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# Zamenes teaches, performs at schools

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playing for kids, because that's where my creative fire comes from."

After brushing up on "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," Zamenes filled in when the music teacher at a San Francisco day care called in sick. He was a big hit, and now he teaches and performs regularly at schools and day care centers around the Peninsula.

Although most people who work in early childhood education are women, Zamenes loves working with young people.

"I think there should be more male role models for kids," he says. "When I'm playing for kids, the boys see a role model that says it's OK to sing and play and dance and be at least a little bit sensitive.

"It's really refreshing to see a male teacher in preschools and day care centers because it's just a different energy," he says. "Guys interact with kids differ-

ently than women do. We play differently with kids. I think it's good for kids at a very young age to be exposed to both of those energies — female and male."

The title track on Zamenes' album, "Pockets," was inspired by a child at one of his schools.

"He put his hands in his pockets and said, 'I have pockets,' and he had a big smile on his face and his hands in his pockets," he says. "And I thought, 'Pockets are pretty cool. We adults take these things for granted.'"

Writing, he says, is one of the best parts of his job. "It's fun. You can write about silly things and actually be educational."

For example, "The Boo-Boo Song," an audience favorite from "Pockets," ends with the practical advice: "If you have boo-boos anywhere/keep them clean and take good care/and soon they'll disappear."

Zamenes predicts that the big hit from his upcoming

album will be "I Went to a Party With Dinosaurs."

"When I was a kid I loved dinosaurs," he says, "and that hasn't changed. Kids still love dinosaurs. Adults too. Animal songs are popular. Dinosaur songs are very popular."

While being a children's singer-songwriter isn't quite as lucrative as being a computer tech, it has more important benefits. "I'm doing what I love," Zamenes says. "What more could you ask for?"

► *Andy Zamenes plays from 11 a.m. to noon Saturday at Talbot's Toyland, 445 S. B St., San Mateo. The Andy Z Three performs at 11:30 a.m., 1 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. June 7 at Art in the Park in Washington Park in Burlingame. Zamenes' album, "Pockets," is available through his Web site, [www.andy4kids.com](http://www.andy4kids.com). Call (650) 298-9530.*

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