

Palo Alto Weekly

Arts & Entertainment - Friday, May 16, 2008

The art of 'noize'

Kids' musicians Doctor Noize and Andy Z play the Bus Barn

by [Rebecca Wallace](#)

Some people get nervous being interviewed by a reporter, but Doctor Noize and Andy Z are having way too much fun.

Toting their guitars, the two children's musicians clamber onto a picnic table outside the Bus Barn Theatre in Los Altos, and then up into an overhanging tree. They sing, harmonize, forget the words, remember them again, and laugh at each other.

"Should we pose like rock stars?" Andy Z asks.

"Can you play the guitar with your teeth?" a reporter responds.

Doctor Noize looks fiendish. "Can you play the guitar with your mind?" He screws up his face in concentration.

If this is any indication of how much fun the guys have on stage, their May 24 concerts should be a blast. Doctor Noize, a.k.a. Cory Cullinan, and Andy Z (who some people know as Andreas Zamenes) are playing two double-bill gigs at the Bus Barn, at the kid-friendly hours of 10 a.m. and noon.

This is a homecoming for Cullinan, 38, who lives in Colorado with his wife and two young daughters but grew up in Los Altos. He has a music degree from Stanford University and also previously taught music and coached soccer at Pinewood School in Los Altos. Zamenes, 40, is a Redwood City resident who studied music at San Francisco State University. He left the high-tech world a few years back and now frequently performs around the Bay Area.

"I love being around young people," Zamenes says.

Cullinan concurs, watching a caterpillar crawl across his finger. "It's nice to hang out with people of your maturity level."

Both musicians play in a variety of styles and have popular recordings. Andy Z, who plays guitar and sings with his Andyland Band, recorded "Pockets," an assortment of original and traditional tunes for toddlers. Then there are "Welcome to Andyland" and "Return to Andyland," which both take place in a fictitious world where, he says, "the sun talks, dinosaurs wear party hats, and anything is possible!"

"Scarecrow," which encourages kids to dance like a scarecrow coming to life.

On a recent flight from Colorado, Cullinan's 3-year-old daughter paid Andy Z's songs the ultimate compliment: She scorned the Hannah Montana movie being shown, instead preferring to listen to her Andyland music.

Andy Z was also an inspiration for Cullinan getting into children's music. About four years ago, Zamenes was playing at a Los Altos Easter egg hunt when Cullinan and his daughter came to listen.

"I liked Andy's music. It was fun and musically sound, and I saw Andy having a great time," Cullinan said. After teaching at Pinewood from 1998 to 2003, he had been working on various musical projects. He had recorded a solo album in 1996, "My Oyster," but now started writing songs for kids, too.

As Doctor Noize, Cullinan wrote a book, "The Ballad of Phineas McBoof," and created a CD around it. It's the story of a monkey musician who becomes so popular that he runs away to escape his groupies. On his journey, he meets other musicians — including drummer Backbone the Octopus and Riley the Robot, who has an electronic sound on "keyboards and toys" — and forms a new band, The International Band of Misunderstood Geniuses.

The book has lively rhymes and snazzy illustrations by Cullinan's childhood friend Christian Lowe, and the CD features a host of guest voices portraying the animals, such as opera singer Nathan Gunn. A second "Phineas" recording is almost finished.

In concert, Cullinan takes a cue from Riley the Robot. He plays a multitude of instruments, including a laptop that he uses to create songs live on stage, layering vocal and instrumental parts and enlisting the young audience to help improvise.

"The energy that Cory generates is right on the edge of manic," said Vicki Reeder, president of the Bus Barn board of directors.

When Cullinan and Zamenes played the Bus Barn last fall, the theater was packed, she said. "Kids wanted to be on stage, and we had to pull them back."

On May 24, the two plan to perform their own shows, then play a few numbers jointly. As they sing together in the Los Altos tree, their voices blend well, and Cullinan says they don't need that many rehearsals together.

"Neither of us can sing on pitch, so we always sound like we're harmonizing," he jokes.

Both musicians work to make their art accessible to all ages. They avoid talking down to kids, and they use references that adults will get and kids will enjoy even if they don't know the originals.

Zamenes, for instance, likes to write parodies, such as "Barber Ant," a take-off on a particular song by the Beach Boys. And Cullinan plans to give youngsters a taste of opera on his second CD by having three classically trained singers, including Nathan Gunn, sing an operatic version of his song "Banana."

"I'd love to see the two of them perform together," says Reeder. "Andy and Cory are both

After all, if your 4-year-old loves a musician, chances are you're going to be hearing a lot of him.

What: Doctor Noize and Andy Z perform family concerts

Where: Bus Barn Theatre, 97 Hillview Ave., Los Altos

When: Two shows: 10 a.m. and noon on Saturday, May 24

Cost: Tickets are \$10.

Info: To buy tickets, go to busbarn.tix.com; call the theater at 650-941-0551. For more about the musicians, go to www.doctornoize.com or www.andyz.com.

© 2008 Palo Alto Online All rights reserved.