



Hal Silverman Studios

Entertainer Red Grammer

## Why they love Grammer lessons

### Musician sings for Music for Minors on Sunday

BY PAUL FREEMAN  
*For The Daily News*

Why does Red Grammer record and perform children's music? He explained, during a recent interview:

"The daily confirmation that children are drawn to joy, happiness, love and truth. The sheer delight of getting to 'play' most every day with children and their families through music. Hearing from thousands and thousands of families that our music has touched their hearts and helped them survive the gantlet of modern life. Watching their eyes light up and shine."

The award-winning singer-songwriter performs at Redwood City's Sequoia High School on Sunday, in a benefit for Music For Minors, a nonprofit agency dedicated to nurturing children's love of music.

Grammer believes it is vital to make music an integral part of children's lives. "The thought that every child in America does not have access

to a rich musical experience in school hurts my heart.

I am so grateful to Music For Minors for the work they have done all these years in bridging this gap. Bravo!"

Grammer, who earned a Grammy nomination for his latest album, "Bebop Your Best," discovered the importance of music early in life. In his New Jersey elementary school, he began playing drums and singing in the chorus.

"My musical gifts were laying latent in me, waiting for these opportunities in 4th grade to set the wheels in motion. Of course, not every child will grow up to be a musician. But music programs in schools give children a chance to physically participate in tangible beauty. I'm afraid that real beauty is currently underrated in our society."

Grammer fronted local rock bands, but folk music gradually captured his focus. "I became enthralled with Peter, Paul and Mary. Their incredible musicality and harmonies and the spirit of their work set my

internal tuning fork to vibrating. Later, while in college in the Midwest, I got to see Pete Seeger in concert at the Navy Pier in Chicago. His ability to create, in minutes, a community built on our oneness was a revelation. I have aspired to that ever since.”

In 1981, Grammer replaced Glenn Yarbrough as lead tenor of The Limelites. “Lou (Gottlieb) and Alex (Hassilev) were so generous with their experience and advice. Even though the type of music I would end up doing as a solo artist differed considerably from the Limelites repertoire, their commitment to musical excellence and their finely honed sense of show were invaluable. Also, they were like extra grandparents to my two boys who were little guys at the time.”

Grammer’s musical path led toward children’s music. “Looking back, I can see now that it was inevitable that I would do something for children. As I’m the youngest in my family, my brother and sister had their children when I was at the end of high school and in college. Whenever we got together with my nephews and nieces, I would play them Pete Seeger’s version of ‘Froggy Went A Courtin’,’ called ‘Ding Dang Dong Go the Wedding Bells,’ and other songs that I would write for them.

“Later, when Kathy and I began our own family it really took root. Kathy and I had started writing songs together in L.A. in the late ’70s. When our son David was born, we started making up little songs around the house. One day Kathy said, ‘You know, these songs are pretty good. If we write a few more we could record them and make an album for parents and kids who are driving around L.A. all day in the cars.’ In 1983 we released the album that is now called ‘Can You Sound Just Like Me?’”

The children’s music industry hadn’t been established. “Raffi hadn’t yet come down from Canada, and the only family music available were the first Sesame Street recordings and old Burl Ives and Danny Kaye LPs.”

Certain concepts recur in Grammer’s albums. “We’ve always tried to find playful ways to write songs that help to grow souls. Some of the themes are, the oneness of the human family, the excitement of discovering our differences —

in food, language, music, dance, etc. — being awake to the best in ourselves and others, the importance of family time.”

Songwriting ideas come from varied sources. “When the boys were little they were walking inspirations. Then we got into writing songs about big ideas that had never been presented in kid-friendly ways before.”

Often, he said, his Baha’i faith provides a spark. “There is a Baha’i quote that says, ‘Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.’ That resulted in the song, ‘Diggin’ For Diamonds.’

“Sometimes a request from teachers and parents to write about something will get the wheels turning. But I love it when the good old, unexpected, wacky idea floats in from nowhere and ends up in a song like ‘The Barnyard Boogie.’”

Audience participation plays a huge part in Grammer’s live performances. “The audience is my band. I can’t imagine just playing ‘at’ an audience. We do the concert together.”

Parents and teachers enjoy the shows as much as kids do. “We have always prided ourselves at how many parents and teachers have thanked us for writing children’s songs that are not only tolerable but that actually inspire and uplift them so much that they listen to our music in the car when they are alone on their way to work.”

Grammer, 57, makes Ojai, Calif., his home base. He’s busy with numerous new projects, including an album of songs dealing with grief, penned in recent months following the passing of his beloved wife Kathy. He’s also developing a TV show for children in China.

Prior to his Redwood City show, Grammer performed extensively in China. This summer, he journeys to Africa. He revels in global interaction. “In the interplay of music and words there is an incredible opportunity for hearts to be knit together,” he said.

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