

# Singing for children

**D**escribed by Parents Magazine as "the best voice in children's music," Red Grammer is one of the premier children's entertainers in America.

As a featured artist on the 2005 Grammy-winning Best Musical Album for Children, "cEllabration: A Tribute to Ella Jenkins," now Red is back with "BeBop Your Best! ... Music to Build Character By," his new Grammy nominated collection of songs for Kids of All Ages.

His children's recordings are also a treasured resource for teachers who use them to communicate the themes of caring, excellence, oneness and diversity in a language kids instantly understand and eagerly embrace.

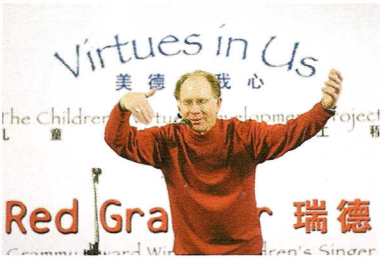
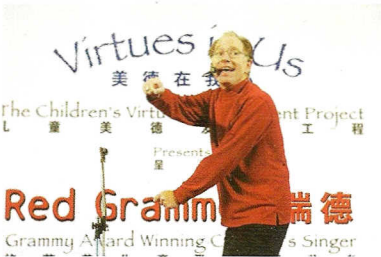
"Truthfulness," "Integrity," "Responsibility," "Citizenship" and many others have never sounded so good and fun as at his joyful concert in Beijing recently.

"There is nothing more exciting to me than seeing children connect with the best part of themselves," Grammer told LittleStar after the concert.

**Q:**How did you get into children's music? Is it more difficult than writing songs or performing for adults?

**Red:** My wife, Kathy, and I were songwriters in California when we started our family. Being songwriters, we naturally made up songs around the house for our sons, David and Andy. At some point Kathy said, "Maybe other families would enjoy these songs. Why don't we make a little recording and see what happens?" People really liked the songs, and we soon discovered we had a real gift for creating fun songs for children and families that nurtured their hearts.

The real challenge in writing a good children's song is to find the right balance between keeping a song simple and honoring the natural intelligence of children. Sometimes adults write



songs for children that don't respect how smart and aware they are. Many adults are afraid to perform for children because they know that children are very honest in their response to what they hear. That honesty can be hard for some adults to face. On the other hand, if you respect the intelligence of children and your performance meets their needs to play then they are the very best audience in the world. Their eyes shine like stars, their smiles and laughter are more encouraging than any adult applause.

**Q:**Where do you get your inspirations? Any new inspirations from this trip to China, too?

**Red:** Some of our inspirations come from the children themselves. When our children were little they would constantly give us ideas for new songs. In fact, when our son, David, figured out that we were making a point of writing songs for children he would make suggestions... like the time he said, "Write a song about our house." So we did. It's on our first album, "Can You Sound Just Like Me?" It is like a walking tour through our house from the front door to the kitchen, to the bedroom, to the bathroom, etc.

Having little ones around always helps. I am eager to see what new inspirations will come from this wonderful trip to China!

**Q:**What are you thinking about when you write a song for children? Or what messages do you want to communicate to them?

**Red:** We are always looking for new, interesting and playful ways to speak to the best in children. It's clear that music delights children. So why not nurture their hearts and souls even as they are being entertained? We are looking for a combination of playfulness and truth in each new song we create.

**Q:** "Music to build character" or "Music and Virtues", how do you see it?

**Red:** Music has a unique ability to open up the heart, to make it receptive. When you combine music and "higher" truth a bright light shines in the hearts of the hearers.

**Q:** How important do you think music education is to a child? What is the best way to introduce music into classrooms?

**Red:** There are many university studies that show that musical training increases one's mathematical abilities. But even more important to me is music's ability to open up a child's ability to learn about the world of their heart. I remember clearly as a child how my musical experiences put me in touch with places of great beauty within me. Certainly giving children lessons in musical instruments is important and learning to sing in groups is a wonderful beginning.

**Q:** You mentioned music workshops for teachers, what are your suggestions for them?

**Red:** Some teachers feel that since they are not talented musically they are reluctant to use music in their classrooms. Young children are more interested in the joy and the sense of community that comes from making music together than the quality of it. So I try to reassure teachers that if they love to sing that is what the children will learn from them. I also talk about how when we use the arts (music, movement, art) as part of our learning environments we are engaging the emotions and the hearts of the children even as they are learning. Research shows that when emotions are engaged while studying academic subjects the memory is much deeper.

**Q:** What do you think about the area of children's music these days? And in China especially?

**Red:** In America, many children (even the little ones) are immersed in popular music that was not created for



children. This is not a good thing because so much of American popular music right now reflects a rather low, material, physical vision of what a human being is. The true greatness of life, of course, is found in our spirit, character and high aspirations.

There are a number of singers in America, like myself, who have made it our life work to create music that speaks to the best in children and to encourage them to become everything they were destined to be. But right now this kind of music is not what most children are listening to in the West. I don't know much about Chinese children's music, but I can say that the children here sing with great joy and sweetness. I have been so privileged to be working with the Children's Virtue Development Project here in China. China has a real chance to emerge onto the world stage with a balance of physical prosperity and virtue unmatched anywhere in the world.

**Q:** As a children's musician, what do you enjoy most? What is the most important or valuable award you have ever got?

**Red:** I love performing for (and with) the children. Their freshness, their joy, their playfulness is so life affirming. If I wake up tired, as soon as I get in front of a group of children with their shining eyes I remember who I am and what I am on this planet to do!

It was a great honor to be one of the artists on a Grammy winning recording for children and to have my last recording for children, "Bebop Your Best -- Music to Build Character By" nominated for another Grammy. My album, "Teaching Peace" has been named one of the top

five children's recordings of all time by the media review publication-The All Music Guide. But truly the most important honor is that the children love our music and take it into their hearts and minds.

**Q:** How to "be a child" always? :-)

**Red:** Hang around children!

They do remind us how to stay in the moment and find joy in love, community and service. I tell the teachers children are learning much more than math, reading and science from you. They are looking to see what an 'adult' human being is like. If you have no joy or passion in what you are doing they will think that is what it means to be an adult. So I always encourage teachers to find ways to share the things they are passionate about so that children can see that it is possible to be excited and deeply connected with oneself as an adult. Trying to do that on a daily basis helps a lot in keeping us childlike.

### See Me Beautiful

By Red and Kathy Grammer in 1986  
Smilin' Atcha Music, Inc.

See me beautiful, look for the best in me

It's what I really am and all I want to be

It may take some time, it may be hard to find

But see me beautiful

See me beautiful each and everyday

Could you take a chance, could you find a way

To see me shining through in everything I do

And see me beautiful

