

Instead, he harbored dreams of underground success, drawing inspiration from the punk scene that thrived in D.C. in the 1980s. These groups did everything from the recordings to the concert posters themselves and carved careers outside the mainstream entertainment machine.

Stuckey sharpened his chops in the late 1980s and early 1990s in music production, working with artists including Vic Chestnut and R.E.M. In 1997, he launched his own postproduction company, Monkey Boy, which still pays the bills. And as he watched MTV over the past decade turn away from music videos and toward sitcoms and reality shows, he thought the time was right to create a fun, freewheeling echo of the early days of musical variety on TV. Targeting kids 10 and younger gave him the most creative leeway to send up the hyper-commercialized music television he was seeing.

Stuckey launched *Pancake Mountain* with \$500. His friend Ian MacKaye, guitarist of alt-rock band Fugazi, helped finagle shoots during sound checks at D.C. haunts like the 9:30 Club. Inspired by childhood faves like *Hee Haw* and *Laugh-In*, Stuckey went for a neo-vaudeville vibe with dumb jokes, zooming close-ups, and a Goldie Hawn-esque hostess. To his delight, the bands understood his humor—and shared his frustration with commercial music television. “They were looking for something different from Letterman or Leno,” Stuckey says.

Though the bands do get exposure from those appearances, the appeal of *Pancake Mountain* largely seems to be simple fun. When British rock duo the Subways showed up, Stuckey talked singer Billy Lunn into donning a cape and impersonating the show’s cross-eyed superhero, Captain Perfect. The Scissor Sisters fielded questions from *Pancake Mountain*’s erstwhile puppet host, Rufus Leaking. For Sisters’ singer Ana Matronic, Rufus was a vast improvement on the “sullen, half-interested journalists” the band is accustomed to. “It speaks volumes that some of the best questions ever asked us were from a puppet,” she says. “At this point, if you’re not a puppet or don’t have your hand in one, I’m not really interested in answering your questions.”

When *Pancake Mountain* puts out an audience call on its website to attend a concert shoot, it often fills up within 20 minutes. How often, after all, can someone see a private show by Arcade Fire? Still, artists can be leery of playing for tots. “I was worried I’d end up hitting one with the bass and we would have to turn monitors down so as to not hurt their ears,” says Charlotte Cooper of the Subways.

Stuckey jokes that, unlike kiddie hit machines like, say, the Wiggles, he never had much of a business model. “We’re kind of a startup company that hasn’t started up yet,” he says. He has managed to keep costs remarkably low—the *Pancake* crew consists of 14 people, and an average episode costs only \$500 to