

When *Pancake Mountain* launched on Nov. 15, via a promotional pilot webcast, superannuated punk kids—and their offspring—tuned in to watch MacKaye perform the infectious “Vowel Movement,” in which he extols the virtues of the letters that “make the sounds that make up words.”

“It was only up for a few hours, and we had like 1,200 hits or something,” says Stuckey.

In between the musical performances are segments designed to appeal to kids and parents alike. The 11-minute preview includes a cartoon about a little boy with a fondness for blueberries written and voiced by local animator J.R. Soldano; “Hey Joey,” a sketch in which an employee of Glover Park’s Italian eatery Mama Maria’s and Enzo’s gives wise-guy answers to kids’ queries about subjects such as math; a science segment hosted by St. Patrick’s Episcopal Day School teacher “Tommy Boy”; and, of course, plenty of antics from Captain Perfect.

Segments in the works include a series of fake-commercial sketches to teach kids a lesson or two about materialism, typically extolling things that are old-school but better than their newfangled counterparts. Several involve a bright-red vintage Emencee jukebox—part of a subversive plan to teach the kiddies about the superiority of good old vinyl over tapes, CDs, and, horror of horrors, iPods.

“Do you misplace CDs? No more, with these big, black discs,” reads writer/creator George Seder from the storyboards at one weekly meeting.

“It has music on both sides!” adds Stuckey. “It’s adult programming masquerading as children’s programming,” says Bill Crandall, another of the show’s creators. “And maybe on some subliminal level, we’re nurturing hip little children.”

On the basis of the teaser alone, *Pancake Mountain* appears to be building a fan base, at least among viewers who are old enough to use e-mail. Responses have included general kudos (“WAAAAAAAAAAAAAY COOOOOOOOOOOOOL!” offered one viewer), offers from record labels volunteering their bands’ services for upcoming episodes, and dazed and confused responses from people who loved the show but found it somewhat off the wall.



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“I like the little bit I was able to see,” wrote one such fan. “But, hell, it’s so weird.”

**“D**oes that look like a stomach?” Stuckey asks Kevin O’Neill, another of *Pancake Mountain*’s creators, during an editing session one recent afternoon. He is adding a clip of animation to the title sequence, which features his wife, Kristina Stuckey, and Cauty playing two sleepy parents. Among the lines they lip-synch is “It’s Saturday morning, and me and my stomach are watching cartoons and waiting for breakfast,” so naturally, this is the perfect place to add in an animated stomach.

Stuckey has decided, per the lyrics, to tuck in a quick cut of a little girl and her stomach sitting on a couch, and is faced with an editing dilemma that the folks over at *Sesame Street* have probably never grappled with: How long does a gastric bag have to appear on screen for viewers to be able to discern what it is?

“Oh, is that a stomach?” O’Neill says. “Oh, yeah—I can make it out now.”

The logistics of putting together a children’s show have been more difficult than Stuckey initially imagined. In addition to the task of realistically rendering internal organs, there is the constant need for new material—and, of course, the legendary unpredictability of corralling children.

Most of the kids who have appeared on *Pancake Mountain* to date are residents of the Glover Park neighborhood, where Monkey Boy’s offices are housed, or children of Stuckey’s co-workers and their friends.

Some of the children involved love their five minutes of fame. The video shoot for “Vowel Movement,” in which kids hop around in black leotards with letters on their chests, proved to be a particular winner.

“We put on a costume with letters and went on a green screen,” says James Howard, 8, of McLean, Va. “It was easy—we just went up and back...it was cool.”

But there are times when the kids give up nothing useful or are puzzled as to why something that seems so effortless on TV is so hard to produce. As proof, Stuckey shows up footage of one child who quickly grew bored of being prodded for cute or silly: “Disney Channel is much more better,” the boy tells an off-camera Stuckey. “They’re better at acting—you guys ask too many questions!”

One more obstacle appeared in the form of the DIY-er’s old bugaboo: credentials. The show’s creators originally wanted to create *Sesame Street*-like educational TV, but *Pancake Mountain* failed to stand up to strict regulations governing such shows. “We decided we can’t be an educational pro-

gram,” O’Neill says. “People want to know who your educational consultants are, and none of us have degrees in child psychology or education.”

**E**ven without the advantage that the educational label would confer—stations are required to devote three hours a week to educational children’s programming—Stuckey hopes *Pancake Mountain* will be picked up by a local channel, moving off the Internet and onto area TV sets.

So far, the show’s creators have approached the Washington-area NBC and CBS affiliates; they eventually hope to ink some sort of deal wherein they are given a budget to work with—eliminating the need to use a ping-pong table as a sound baffle. What network money wouldn’t change, however, is the network of people involved in the show.

“Making TV and movies, it’s about being resourceful,” Stuckey says. “It’s about getting the most for your money, and even with a big budget, I would still pick these people.”

In the meantime, the team behind the show keeps taping more segments, anticipating a time when they will find a deal and may have to piece together several episodes at once. In preparation, Stuckey & Co. have gone from working on the project two days a month to two days a week.

In case they don’t get a bite from a major network, they are also toying with the idea of finding a sole corporate underwriter to foot the bill, or putting the show on public access—although, Stuckey notes regretfully, a run on a cable station would limit the number of people able to tune in.

Stuckey has even looked into buying airtime and running the show commercial-free, to avoid the litany of ads for violent toys and sugary cereals that would threaten to detract from *Pancake Mountain*’s aesthetic.

“We want to buy time so we own it and it’s ours,” Stuckey says. “So we don’t have to subject kids to commercials. I’ve been reading trade mags that say kids watch four hours of TV a day—and one hour of commercials. So, by the time you’re 40, you’ve spent, like, three years of your life watching commercials.”

“But who knows—we could give in and be sponsored by M&M candy or something,” he jokes. “*Pancake Mountain*! Brought to you by M&Ms!”