

THE BEST OF 2006

SPIN

STARRING

The Raconteurs / Beck / Lady Sovereign
 Ghostface / The Roots / The Black Keys
 The New York City Dolls / T.I.
 The Roots / Romance

Indie Kid Rock

Why your favorite bands are getting
 child-friendly BY DAVID SPRAGUE

Cooke isn't the first indie rocker to aim at the knee-high set. Over the past several years, first-generation alternative artists like Dan Zanes (who fronted the rootsy Del Fuegos in the '80s), Farmer Jason (né Jason Ringenberg of alt-country pioneers Jason and the Scorchers), and They Might Be Giants have segued into second careers as purveyors of kid rock. But lately, a slew of newer acts have begun moonlighting in the Baby Belt. Last spring, Sufjan Stevens and Hot Chip contributed to *See You on the Moon: Songs for Kids of All Ages*. In October, San Francisco spazz-rockers Deerhoof composed music for a ballet performed by students at the North Haven Community School in Maine. Members of the Donnas, the Dwarves, and Alkaline Trio appear on the new Ramones-for-kids disc, *Brats on the Beat*. Conor Oberst, Metric, and M.I.A. are

"Children do not want to be patronized."

MICK COOKE, BELLE AND SEBASTIAN

among the guests on the latest DVD from *Pancake Mountain*, a public-access TV show aimed at grammar school students. And labels are following their lead: L.A.'s Baby Rock Records recently issued a series of cover albums devoted to instrumental, "lullaby" versions of songs by Radiohead and Queens of the Stone Age (among others), and V2, home of the White Stripes, will soon launch Little Monster, a label devoted entirely to kids' music.

Of course, the Chuck E. Cheeseing of America isn't merely an underground phenomenon. For the past



Jenny Lewis (center) gets help from some pint-size fans on the set of *Pancake Mountain*.

year, the upper reaches of CD sales charts have been dominated by rugged records, from the triple-platinum *High School Musical* to the late-fall ascent of the *Hannah Montana* soundtrack, which went gold in just three weeks and placed a record six singles simultaneously in the Hot 100. Those figures offer many indie rockers a financial incentive they can't ignore.

Andy Hurwitz, who started the

Saturday afternoon concert series *Baby Loves Disco* at clubs in a dozen cities, admits that his event was inspired in part by such profits. "It gives clubs a chance to make some money at a time when they'd normally be closed," he explains, noting that *Baby Loves Disco* will soon branch out to Dallas, Milwaukee, and Atlanta. "We do well, although we try to keep the price lower than, say, going to a movie and buying popcorn."

The makers of *Pancake Mountain*, who draw indie icons to a cramped Washington, D.C. soundstage to perform their "hits" in front of schoolkids, add that the younger demo also provides livelier audiences. "We wanted to do something low-budget with music," says Scott Stuckey,

the show's creator, "but we found that teenagers are just too cool to shake their groove things. Kids between five and 12 have no problem with it."

Some artists don't feel the generation gap so readily. Stephin Merritt, the crotchety man behind the Magnetic Fields and the 6ths, didn't change his sarcastic tone for his Gothic Archies project, *The Tragic Treasury: Songs From A Series of Unfortunate Events*, a soundtrack he composed with Daniel Handler, author of the Lemony Snicket books. While Merritt acknowledges a debt to the Brothers Grimm, he bristles at the kid-rock tag. "I didn't put that much effort into making it child-friendly—other than the fact that there aren't as many swear words," he says. "Otherwise, the songs aren't much different from what I'd usually write."

Kristin Hersh of Throwing Muses, who released the kids' record *Murder, Misery and Then Goodnight* in 1998 and will soon issue another, initially resisted playing dark folk tunes for her own offspring. "I thought the music was too intense—I didn't want them to have nightmares," she says. "But then my son Ryder said, 'They're just songs.' Music aimed at kids offends [my children]. If kids' movies have music, they just roll their eyes and mute it. They like things more along the lines of Vic Chesnutt or the Ramones."

The average five-year-old, however, wouldn't stumble upon a copy of *Rocket to Russia* in his or her everyday life. So is this musical guidance simply furthering a hipster agenda—the trucker-hat version of gathering the family for an evening with Andy Williams? "That's one of the dirty little secrets of parties like ours," says Baby Loves Disco's Hurwitz, laughing. "It's really all about the parents."

