

CHILD'S PLAY

Local musicians cater to all ages with 'kindie' rock

Singer Alastair Mook's live show is half Appalachian hootenanny, half honky-tonk jam session. It's also totally kid-friendly.

Mook's trio blazed through guitar solos, banjo breakdowns and songs about the ABCs at a Saturday morning show at the Regent Theatre in Arlington. But unlike such insipid mainstream mainstays as Barney and the Wiggles, Mook's music has an indie sensibility hip parents dig.



Jed GOTTLIB

Call it kindie rock. "You get so sick of this xylophone-y, twinkle-twinkle crap," said Jeremy Breslau, a father of two, at Mook's show. "When real musicians make kids' music, it shows through to the parents. We can hear it."

Mook is just one of several local musicians moonlighting as a kids' performer. He came up playing local coffee houses and rock clubs. Listen to his "Death Don't Have No Mercy," with its squalling electric guitars and ragged vocals, and it's hard to imagine he wrote a song called "Ladybugs' Picnic."

"I meet parents all the time who say the No. 1 band they play for their kids is the Beatles," said Mook, who began writing kids songs when his daughters were born five years ago. "They are on the lookout for music like that, which doesn't distinguish between kids and adults."

Other local artists also are delivering. Pete Montgomery's the Bugs follows the template of his power pop band the Irresponsibles. Singer-songwriter Joe Pleiman of Summer Villains brings a Weezer-meets-the-Kinks vibe to his songs for PBS' "Fizzy's Lunch Lab." Folk pop musician Michael J. Epstein's Space Balloons is for parents more into alternative rock heroes Neutral Milk Hotel than the Jonas Brothers.

"I've tested a few of our songs at 21-plus venues, and they've worked," Epstein said. "I figure if a song can



OUT OF THIS WORLD: Joe Kowan, Sophia Cacciola and Michael J. Epstein of Space Balloons.

capture the imagination of hipster rock people in Boston, it can capture kids' imaginations."

Kindie rock godfather Dan Zanes, formerly of '80s Boston indie rock band the Del Fuegos, said his family music — he won't call it kids' music — has the same depth and complexity as his old stuff.

"Songs about old girlfriends and getting hampered don't fly, but neither do songs about learning how

to tie your shoes," Zanes said. "I try and find the middle ground between the two, like friendship."

He also said his audiences have never been more receptive — both Zanes and Mook have found their second careers more successful.

"You don't have to light your hair on fire to entertain kids," he said. "My shows are like little Grateful Dead shows. People never sit still."

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CLAP YOUR HANDS: Fayerweather Street School of Cambridge students, top, dance and sing while on stage with Alastair Mook at the Regent Theatre in Arlington. John Halloran of Cambridge, above, and his 3-year-old daughter Niamh Roberts Halloran applaud during the show.

STAFF PHOTOS BY PATRICK WHITTEMORE/PHOTO BY JOHN KOWAN, LEFT