



Monkey Monkey Music

Meredith LeVande is a children’s performer with a deep commitment to putting “the child” back into children’s music. Beyond and because of this, her music is pure fun. Just as on her debut children’s album, *Monkey Monkey Music with Meredith LeVande*, listeners can detect a playful and heartfelt connection to children in her new album, *What Are the Odds?*

Meredith’s performing career actually began as a successful singer/songwriter on the college circuit, where her shows often featured introspective songs about childhood struggles and finding one’s true self. One day, during a performance before a crowd of families, she was inspired to improvise a presentation of traditional children’s songs. It was mutual love right from the start, with a palpable connection between the performer and her audience. Meredith’s identity as a children’s musician was born that day — an identity that would evolve into the project now known as **Monkey Monkey Music**.

There is an emotional depth to the art of Meredith LeVande’s performances for children that belongs to who she is. In the mode of Charles Dickens, her history is a tale of survival and triumph. Shortly after Meredith was born in New Jersey, her mother became incapacitated by mental illness. Since her father was absent, Meredith was raised solely by her elderly maternal grandmother, who died when Meredith was 15. At a time when most teenagers can count on a family support system, she had to grapple with the responsibility of *being* the family support system for herself and her ailing mother. The one ally in her struggle to survive was singing.



For Meredith, performing for kids is a liberating, exhilarating experience, which comes through loud and clear on her recordings. *Monkey Monkey Music with Meredith LeVande* became an instant hit with families nationwide, was a *Parenting* magazine “Pick,” and was in rotation for several years on Sirius Satellite Radio, earning a grassroots reputation as a classic children’s record. *What Are the Odds?*, filled with catchy, clever, upbeat songs, will be released on August 31.

Meredith LeVande is happily married and lives with her husband on New York City’s Lower East Side.



With Meredith LeVande



Q & A

When did you discover a talent for singing?

I had an unusually difficult childhood for someone who grew up in a middle-class suburb. The one thing that offered me a sense of identity and safety was singing. Having to take care of a sick mother, I discovered that one of the ways that I could communicate with her was through singing. Hearing someone play guitar and sing was transformative for me, especially when I heard female voices. If I can offer or encourage that for young ones, then I feel like I'm doing part of my life's work.

Which brings us to Monkey Monkey Music! What exactly is Monkey Monkey Music?

Monkey Monkey Music is the umbrella title I use for all my children's music activities, including live performances, CDs, and DVDs. When I first began performing music for children, I was still playing singer/songwriter gigs on college campuses, and I was also lecturing in the area of gender studies (which I continue to do). I wanted to set my children's music apart from those activities.

You have a disparate and broad educational range. Could you tell us about that?

Teenagers who grow up under adverse conditions often don't make it to college. I had to start off at junior college and work my way into a four-year university. I'm a firm believer that the most important way to empower oneself is through education. Learning is a way of life for me, which is why I pursued my master's degree in music while I was performing professionally with children. It was during law school that I started songwriting. I absolutely love studying music and music theory.

Your first children's CD came out in 2004. Why did you wait so long to produce another children's album, and why don't you put yourself out there more?

My children's music career has evolved very naturally. I'd like to continue that evolution at the same natural pace, growing from my experiences making music for and with children. I don't want to create CDs just for the sake of having "kindie hits." Every song should originate from a wonderful connection with a child, and I want my repertoire to grow organically, rather than as a manufactured experience in a recording studio.

What are some of your thoughts regarding mass media and consumerism for children?

I find it fascinating and somewhat disturbing that many parents are so conscious of their kids' nutritional diets, but pay very little attention to their children's media intake. I think there's a definite corporate movement to force kids to grow up quicker in order to turn them into earlier consumers.

What is your biggest accomplishment as a children's musician?

My biggest accomplishment is and always will be the happy faces of kids who are jumping and dancing in unison with me. There's really nothing like it!



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