

# Modern-day minstrels

Kindermusik co-owners bring new melodies, rhythms to tiny ears

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**E**nergetic and caring, Holly Lesnick has found her niche in helping tots learn through music.

At Kindermusik with Grow and Sing Studios, which Lesnick owns with her best friend, Rachael Joachim, they teach children from infancy through kindergarten through melody, rhythm and singing.

It's the opposite of where she began. Lesnick's college major of music therapy originally manifested in the geriatric arena, when she worked at a retirement center, and also in a psychiatric hospital.

For her patients, music was reactive therapy, reaching out to damaged souls, attempting to heal broken psyches.

She organized music trivia games and lyric writing activities. She asked them to write poems about how they were feeling, poems that were the basis for the cathartic outpouring that would become song lyrics.

"It did get to the point where I needed a break. You're in this depressing place where psychiatrists are talking to you, sitting around watching TV," she said.

Though she clutched tightly onto her natural cheerfulness, working in the drug rehabilitation unit of the hospital dimmed her bright outlook.

"It was draining. Every day you never knew what you were going to get," she said. "I was always positive, hoping they wouldn't come back. But I would repeatedly see people I thought I'd never see again, people who swore they were finished [doing drugs]. It really woke me up."

When her children were born, Lesnick decided to



Top: Jake Melvin, wearing stripes, and other infants practice their rhythm accompanied by egg shakers. Below: Bradley Drohan plays the resonator bar with his mother, Cheryl.

PHOTOS BY KRISTIN MIZO

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HOLLY LESNICK

Kindermusik with Grow and Sing Studios

dedicate herself to their care. When she and her first, Anna, now 5, were attending Kindermusik classes, she was recruited by the former program director to work there. When she was about eight months pregnant with her second, Aidan, now almost 2, she lost her job when the owner packed up and moved to Pennsylvania.

When Aidan was 6 weeks old, she was ready to start up again.

"Rachael got recruited by her too," she said. "We just missed it, you know?"

The duo started with two classes. A year and a half later, they're up to 11 classes at two locations —

University Unitarian Universalist Society on McCulloch Road, and LifeSong Church on South Alafaya Trail. They've even hired a new teacher, Elizabeth Gerrity.

Her knowledge of the effect of musical therapy on human psychology, though hard-earned, has enabled Lesnick to be ideally suited to caring for special-needs children.

"For students with attention disorders and autism, I work with them and their parents and come up with really good plans for them, making Kindermusik work for them," she said.

One mother began attending classes with her adopted daughter, who is Russian and would not attempt to communicate with her.

"She wouldn't speak," said Lesnick. "But over the course of a 15-week session — by week 11 — that little girl was singing every song, totally communicating with her mom."

"Her mom came up to us and said, 'You don't know the effect you've had on her and on us and on our family. Rachael couldn't stop crying.'"

At their Kindermusik franchise, Lesnick and Joachim are strict about keeping classes small and intimate, with no more than 12 children (and their parents). There are always two teachers with the preschool class, in which the parents are not with their children for 30 minutes. And they always have two teachers with their family class, which draws 15 or 16 because most people bring more than one child.

"It's a little chaotic," she said. "Rachael and I tend to bop in on each other's classes, always making sure the quality's high. We try to make more one-on-one time."

Though Lesnick and Joachim aren't related, they could be twins — they're both stay-at-home moms who don't really stay at home. They are like medieval minstrels, traveling and entertaining with the music they create — in addition to the classes, they provide entertainment at birthday parties.

Kindermusik came naturally to Joachim, who was a voice major in college. Prior to the births of her children, 3-year-old Amy and 3-month-old Seth, she was teaching elementary school music for Orange County Public Schools.

The co-owners met in 1991, in music theory class at Florida State University's School of Music. The classically trained singers — both sopranos — harmonize with one another, and serenade their students. They also play the guitar.

They also keep on their toes with their musical endeavors in the community — Joachim used to sing in the Orlando Opera, and Lesnick sang this season in the choir at Walt Disney World.

They both married men they met at FSU, and their husbands are now business owners who devote con-



siderable time to helping their wives with their business.

Paul Joachim created and maintains their Web site at [www.growandsing.com](http://www.growandsing.com), and Will Lesnick, who operates his own video production company, In-Focus Media, out of the couple's home, handles all their video needs.

Kindermusik with Grow and Sing Studios offers classes Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and once a month on Saturdays.

There's a class for infants where participants dance together in a circle, using different props such as colorful scarves, egg shakers, bells, bubbles and a parachute. A five-week sign language workshop for babies is also offered.

The toddler class is more energetic, encouraging independence — enormous drums, a glockenspiel and a triangle are added, while group singing and dancing continue.

The preschool class takes it to the next level. Teachers and students work together for the first half-hour, while parents and siblings observe. The work is on musical concepts, getting the children ready to learn a musical instrument. The final 15 minutes is for sharing time, when parents and siblings come back together, which is when the class becomes "pure chaos."

"I've never been so happy with a job as this one," said Lesnick. "It's not a job; it's definitely what I was meant to do."

To preview a class, e-mail [info@growandsing.com](mailto:info@growandsing.com) or call 407-970-2774.

Right: Nicolas Jimenez crawls through a hoop tunnel. Below: Licensed Kindermusik educator Rachael Joachim plays guitar with Anna Daleiden.

PHOTOS BY BETH VALENTINE

