



All The Right Moves Selling song therapy

WHEN TESSA GRIGG and Brian Ringrose sing their bean song kids become wobbly jellybeans, leaping jumping beans, broad beans stretching out wide, and baked beans lying on a plate. With a clever meld of catchy lyrics and compelling rhythm this talented Christchurch duo has sold more than 200,000 tapes, CDs and DVDs since teaming up in 1991.

And behind all the fun there's a serious goal. Many of their songs, targeted at newborns to seven-year-olds, teach crucial co-ordination skills important for brain development and learning.

On top of regular live performances in preschools and kindergartens, the pair regularly turn out to early childhood conferences in New Zealand, Australia and the United States and run concerts and workshops as part of the active movement programme of Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC).

Grigg, a former preschool and primary teacher, sees a certain irony in the fact she got a C for music at teachers' college. "They didn't think I was going to amount to much."

Grigg says 70 per cent of their songs are designed to get children moving. That focus is driven by her work with Gymbaroo, a sensory perceptual motor programme that improves children's co-ordination through music and movement. She ran a Christchurch Gymbaroo franchise for nine years and also has a private clinic teaching brain gym to youngsters with learning difficulties.

With children spending so much time in car seats, strollers, backpacks and in front of televisions and PlayStations, many do not learn basic co-ordination skills such as skipping, Grigg says.

The ability to do physical movements that cross the mid-line of the body (such as touching the left hand to the right knee, or moving eyes from left to right) is important for learning to read and write.

"If children can't cross their mid-line they find writing hard, and they find reading hard. They find it hard to do games and sport and to join in with stuff in the playground which means they are ostracized and then have difficulty

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Her move into music came as a result of an experience while working for a nanny school. Her students complained they couldn't find suitable children's music tapes to sing along to with their young charges. Grigg saw a gap in the market, decided to try song-writing and went in search of a musician to work with.

Ringrose came highly recommended. He'd started playing guitar with Ray Columbus and The Invaders while still at high school, and during 15 years as a session musician with TVNZ he did backing for everything from *Opportunity Knocks* to *Play School*.

Tessarose Productions has since produced 600 original songs, all recorded in Ringrose's home recording studio. He also burns the company's CDs and DVDs, while wife Lyn assists with distribution and marketing.

Ringrose, who still writes radio jingles and plays 60s, 70s and 80s music at corporate gigs and house parties, is "chuffed" with Tessarose's success. "We've sold the equivalent of two platinum records a year for 10 years and that's pretty cool."

Grigg puts their success down to the fact many action songs are unsuitable for children because they're pitched too low for kids' voices. Often the beat is too fast so they can't keep up with the movements and quickly lose interest. "When you're three it takes quite a long time to get your hands from your head to your shoulders, to your knees, to your toes, so we've slowed our songs down a lot."

making friends. There's quite a big flow on effect for children who can't move well."

Son Harry, seven, has proved a handy in-house critic. "I watched how he learned things and with our skipping song he learned to skip in a few days. He used to make me skip in the supermarket and I'd be trying to do 'polite' skipping down the supermarket aisle and he'd be going, 'Higher, Mummy, higher!'"

Grigg and Ringrose also write songs on contract for organisations such as the YMCA. Their 600th song (celebrated with a weekend at Blanket Bay Lodge with their spouses) was for Australia-based Gymbaroo and features a famous singing dingo Grigg saw in action on a trip to Alice Springs. "He stamps around on the piano and howls. In the song I do the dingo impersonation."

Mostly, though, the lyrics are distinctly New Zealand, with songs about a cabbage tree in the backyard and a calf escaping at the Kirwee Show. For the latter, Christchurch A&P Show announcer Sam Rutherford recorded a show-day commentary that plays in the song.

That keen Kiwi flavour certainly hasn't hindered exports. "The CDs have gone all over the world with people wanting a little slice of New Zealand," Grigg enthuses. A Dubai preschool ordered 30 CDs after being introduced to them by a New Zealand staff member, and tackling the UK market comes next when Grigg, builder husband Drew and Harry spend 2008 in Europe.

AMANDA CROPP ■