



Cue

# Best bets for your music-lovin' kids

KIDS, from 11

ates the sweetness of children."

**Richard Perlmutter**

*Beethoven's Wig 2*  
Rounds Kid  
Age 6 and up

Richard Perlmutter hadn't heard of Spike Mulligan, the British comedian who specialized in amusing lyrics to well-known songs and classical works, but he has channeled him anyway.

And Perlmutter goes several steps better, employing his expertise as a music producer and studio specialist, and using the best-known symphonies in the classical lexicon to create a unique, hilarious homage to Western culture's great music.

Perlmutter has a somewhat flat, thin vocal style, which, juxtaposed with the well-trained baritone and soprano singing behind him, not to mention the symphonic work, makes for another stunning element to the disc. He proves you don't have to be an opera singer to sing "Sing with Brahms."

Pick any song and you'll find something to make you smile. Along the way, you'll also learn something of musical forms and the history of what used to be called "song-hood music."

To the tune of the famous "Blue Danube Waltz": "Please do not tease (please do not tease) / The sweet Viennese (the Viennese) / They love melodies (those melodies) / Conducted in three (always in three)."

Perlmutter's first experiment, 2002's "Beethoven's Wig," was a surprise hit and won him a ton of awards. He knew he'd hit pay dirt when he was riding a crowded elevator with his 4-year-old daughter one day and the Mozart version of Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" came on.

"My daddy wrote this song!" she blurted out.

With "Beethoven's Wig 2," Perlmutter's taking his act on the road, performing the music with symphonies across the country.

"I just love this music so much. ... It moves me so deeply; I hope people are hearing that I'm having fun with the music. I'm not making fun of it," he said.

**Various artists**

*off/Aladdin*  
Suffocation Folkways Recordings  
Age 2 to 6

This is a charming tribute to Chicago-area children's singer-songwriter Ella Jenkins, who celebrated her 80th birthday in August and her 50th year making music for

use an expansive variety of cultural styles and languages, from African and Caribbean rhythms to Latin mariachi-style harmonies.

"Children love challenges. They love adventures," she said. "I always felt that those of us who serve children should do all we can to contribute to their growth, emotionally and spiritually."

**London Symphony Orchestra**

*Mike Simon and His Great Sound: A New Way to Listen to Symphony Concerts*  
Simon & Simon  
Age 10 and up

This is the "Peter and the Wolf" for today's generation.

Produced by Bonnie Ward Simon, who has more than 20 years' experience producing live symphony concerts, with original music by her husband Stephen, former music director of the Washington Chamber Symphony, this is a mesmerizing trip through the orchestral universe.

Using the beloved Virginia-Lee Burton story as a map, the Simons take us through the process of storytelling through music. The CD grew out of the Simons' experience putting on family concerts in Washington.

"This is the product of — what? — 15 years of experience," she said. "We know what works and what doesn't work. We saw how people reacted."

The CD includes a helpful booklet, complete with games, plus additional tracks that explain the instruments and a karaoke version of Stephen Simon's "Mike Mulligan Song."

Bonnie Simon thinks that kids as young as 6 might appreciate the CD, but older children seem to get the most out of it.

"We've lost a generation, possibly two generations because music is being cut out of the schools," she said. "I really felt we were in danger of losing the classical form entirely."

The Simons are working on producing another in the "Stories in Music" collection. Next up: "Casey at the Bat."

**Ben Rudnick and Friends**

*Shut Off*  
Sensationalist Records  
Age 4 to 8

Here's a more traditional folk-style children's album but with quality storytelling and a tight sound.

Rudnick's songs are clever and appealing, making the most of kids' imaginations. There are songs about playing with balloons with aliens, dancing with Martians and dancing with dads. The collec-



Jessica Harper starred in "My Favorite Year."

# Children led to new career

Jessica Harper admits that when she tells people she writes children's music, "their eyes kind of glass over."

The veteran actress, who starred in "My Favorite Year" (1982) with Peter O'Toole and in "Stardust Memories" (1980) with Woody Allen, understands that look.

People too often believe children's music has to be made up of syrupy, headache-inducing earworms, sung by a horde of tuneless voices to the accompaniment of an electronic keyboard — sounds best dismissed for the sake of sanity.

Harper believed this, too. But something happened.

"What happened was I had children," she said.

She got married in her 30s and had her first child at 35, the second a year and a half later.

Music had always meant a lot to Harper. Even as she pursued acting, she had kept up her interest in music, singing in bands and performing in musical theater.

With her performing background, Harper was already a discerning music consumer by the time she became a mother. She was discouraged by what she found in the children's CD racks.

"I went looking for music for them, and I didn't like a lot of it," she said. "It was condescending. It was poor quality. My feeling was, if I like how the music sounds, then my children will probably like it, too."

Since her first album, "A Wonderful Life," Harper has consistently pleased critics, parents and children with her complex, layered songwriting and intelligent lyrics. Her style leans heavily to smooth jazz or light swing, but the songs pass the stop-able test — significant for any family

