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Music: Pied Piper Oran Etkin wakes up instruments and audiences

By JONATHAN TAKIFF Philadelphia Daily News



"The kids are mesmerized in his presence. Parents, too," says Mona Kayhan, co-producer of the "Putumayo Kids" album series, of the born-in-Israel, raised- and trained-in-the-U.S. Oran Etkin (above).

Could there be a better representative of the Putumayo World Music label experience (and ethos) than **Oran Etkin**, featured artist at two performances Sunday for the finale of the 18th annual **Please Touch Museum Junior Jazz Festival**?

"Our [kids] shows start with bringing the instruments to life," explained the musician and educator, a cultural globe-trotter born in [Israel](#), raised and trained in the U.S., and also well-connected to the sounds and talents of [West Africa](#).

"First I 'wake up' my clarinet and she starts to talk - 'Ma Ma, I want Ma Ma' " shared the multi-instrumentalist Etkin. "Then Big Mama Tuba comes out of the audience with a 'roar,' and we sing and dance.

"Then my clarinet is feeling hungry. So we sing and play [the [Dizzy Gillespie](#) and [Kenny Clarke](#) classic] 'Salt Peanuts.' Then we take a trip around the world - all the way from Duke's [Ellington] place down to Africa, from France to [New Orleans](#).

"The kids are usually right there with us from the first moment when they see and hear this instrument talking. And that's what music should do. It should speak to you."

"Oran is a pied piper. The kids are mesmerized in his presence. Parents, too," enthused Mona Kayhan, co-producer of the "Putumayo Kids" album series that's celebrating its latest (like, 20th) release, "Jazz Playground," with this show.

Etkin's contribution to the compilation is a bopped and bluesy version (with singer Charenee Wade) of a familiar children's song, "Little Lamb Jam." It's an apt example of the Putumayo label's whole-earth approach to musical celebration, combining elements familiar with those that are not. All to broaden developing minds - those young and young at heart. Themed on a globally embracing style (jazz, reggae, folk), a culture (New Orleans, French, Brazilian) or a kid-centric theme (picnicking, playground, dreamland), "about 80 percent" of Putumayo's compilation CDs "sing" in one or several foreign languages. "And we sell them all around the world," noted Kayhan, an ethnomusicologist by training.

"So, the first and foremost element we focus on is the music," Kayhan said. "It's got to be good and accessible. That's the entry point for the child, the parent, the grandparent and the teacher. Thing is, kids are like sponges when they're young. When exposed to one of these discs, they instinctively come to see there are different ways to say, sing or play something.

"That broadens their understanding of their own and other cultures, makes them realize there are different ways to communicate. It makes them more tolerant and global citizens as they grow."

Putumayo World Music doesn't share sales figures on either its children's or grownup music packages. But clearly the label is doing things right by doing things differently. The operation mostly licenses tracks rather than producing them; it brands all sets with similarly crafty, colorful, folk-art designs; and it sells the offerings in dedicated displays and listening stations at "alternative" outlets, such as gift, clothing and toy stores and Whole Foods supermarkets.

"So, while dedicated record shops are closing, the number of stores carrying Putumayo discs has actually expanded," Kayhan shared. "Merchants enjoy playing the albums in the store. They say the music lends an appealing atmosphere."

The children's segment of the music business has proven more resilient to downturns in album sales "as parents look for better alternatives to the [Britney Spears](#) of the world," said the label exec. "There's now a lot of stuff out there for kids, but nothing else quite like ours." Some artists, like [Dan Zanes](#), who used to make grownup music, too, have gone totally family-friendly. Oran Etkin aims to maintain his split identity, thankfully.

Do your ears a favor and check out his adult-oriented album and group, "Kelenia," on the Motema label, offering a very fresh fusion of American jazz and Malian (Africa) talents, with a tad of old world klezmer. The set recently earned the Independent Music Award for best world-beat CD of the past year.

An equal priority for Etkin is working his own building-block methodology to imbue children (as young as 2) with the joys of music "so they learn to understand and make music as instinctively as they learn to speak and control their bodies."

He is active in New York City offering classes in community centers and living rooms. He also dreams of getting his own TV show and is prepping a jazz recording for children, "Wake Up, Clarinet!" from whence that "Little Lamb Jam" cometh.

Junior Jazz Festival, Please Touch Museum, Memorial Hall (4231 Avenue of the Republic), Fairmount Park , 1 and 3 p.m. Sunday, free with museum admission of \$15, underage 1 free, 215-581-3181, www.pleasetouchmuseum.org.

Music

Dee-saster relief

The Deedle Deedle Dees celebrate a new album that benefits Haiti earthquake victims. By **Eileen Clarke**

As founder of the indie rock group the Deedle Deedle Dees, Lloyd Miller is well-known for paying respect to the under-celebrated of U.S. history—from Satchel Paige to Nellie Bly. But this month, the Brooklynite expands his usual repertoire to embrace more global themes.

After a summer hiatus from their monthly variety show at the Knitting Factory, Miller and his band resume the series with a party for *Many Hands: Family Music for Haiti* (Spare the Rock Records, \$14). The compilation disc, conceived by musician Dean Jones (Dog on Fleas), benefits the Haitian People's Support Project, a not-



Young Dees fans get to be part of the show.

for-profit formed in 1990 that's currently helping victims of the January 2010 earthquake. When Jones approached Miller with the idea of combining the album shindig with the Dees' scheduled September show, he jumped at the chance, in particular because of the event's date—9/11. "We're doing something positive," Miller says, "which I always try to do with my family on September 11."

The CD features tracks from the likes of Recess Monkey, They Might Be Giants—and, of course, the Dees, who contributed an ode to author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. Joining them onstage are Dog on Fleas, performing "Sing About the Sun," and Gustafer Yellowgold, singing "Penguin Day."

As usual, kids will play a pivotal role in the program:

Both the MC and a pair of interviewers who'll chat with musical guests are middle-schoolers, and two of the Dees' students will show off their skills on the mandolin and trumpet. After all, Miller's raison d'être is to let the young (and unsung) shine.

The Deedle Deedle Dees Family Variety Show resumes Sept 11 at the Knitting Factory. See *Calendar* for details.

Timbaloo-who?

Jazz and world-music artist Oran Etkin may not be on your radar... yet. But the acclaimed clarinetist has gathered a local following with his Timbalooloo kids' music classes, named after an imaginary instrument dreamed up by one of his students. This fall, Etkin kicks off another semester of courses and releases his children's-music debut, *Wake Up Clarinet!* (Oran Etkin's Timbalooloo, \$15).

Some of the buzz surrounding Etkin comes courtesy of his celebrity clientele, which includes city parents Liev Schreiber, Edie Falco and Harvey Keitel. Carter Burwell, a Tribeca dad and composer (he scored 2009's



Where the Wild Things Are and *The Blind Side*) enrolled his two sons as preschoolers. "His teaching methods are beautiful," Burwell says. "He anthropomorphizes everything. The instruments have names and personalities, and he presents lessons in terms of stories."

Wake Up is similarly playful. On the title track, Etkin rouses his drowsy clarinet; as the instrument stirs, it produces some funky warbles—possibly not unlike those of your child at the crack of dawn.—Blair Tidwell

Oran Etkin plays the *Highline Ballroom* Sept 25. See *Calendar* for details.