Kindergarten rock

Southeast Portland is the new home base for New Jersey’s cult radio show for kids and their parents, “Greasy Kid Stuff.”

“Greasy Kid Stuff” is a national phenomenon by playing grown-up music they think kids would like instead.

What that means for those who happen to tune in to the show, which is broadcast Saturday mornings by WFMU, a free-form, independent radio station in the New Jersey-New York area (and which also is streamed live over the Internet to everyone else), is an eclectic sonic stew that has at times encompassed Lou Reed, Blue Oyster Cult, Yo La Tengo, the Moldy Peaches, LL Cool J and Mel Torme — all selected with little ears in mind. (No swearing. Please see ‘KID STUFF,’ Page D2)

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Belinda Miller, “Greasy Kid Stuff” co-host
‘Kid Stuff’: DJ Waah Waah also gets some time on the air

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Nothing too titillating. Sufficienctly sweet and silly.)

“We just felt like so much of the stuff that was being offered to kids was really bad,” Hova says. Condensing. Anesthetizing.

As Bellinda puts it, “We wanted to do this service for the parents of America,” to give them something “they can share with their kids,” a fairly radical notion at a time when “we seem to be niche marketing everything,” keeping kids’ and parents’ music separate, creating an atmosphere of “us against them.”

“I like to think that’s where we’re stepping in,” she says.

Hawthorne HQ

The current headquarters of Greasy Kid Stuff is a rambling gray

house just off Hawthorne Boulevard, where Bellinda and Hova and their 2-year-old daughter Georgia, also known as DJ Waah Waah, moved nine months ago from New York so that they could be closer to Bellinda’s family.

The couple, who have been married for 15 years, broadcast out of a studio on the home’s second floor. There, shelves of CDs and several boxes of LPs line the walls, painted portraits of the Modern Lovers and Elvis provide the decoration, and a red 1950s dining table holds equipment, including an official-looking box that allows them to hook up remotely with WFUM back in New Jersey via the telephone line. A framed copy of a New York Times article about Greasy Kid Stuff hangs over the turntables.

On this particular morning, Hova, who is 42, and Bellinda, 38, were returning to the air after a two-week vacation and were to be joined by a good friend from WFUM named Amanda Barrett (known on the air as Miss Amanda) who had come to visit — as soon as Barrett emerged from the shower downstairs. In the next room, DJ Waah Waah slept.

As Bellinda made a few last-minute checks to ensure the hookup to New Jersey was working, headphones around her neck, Hova checked the computer in the next room for listener requests.

“We have a request for the Black Lodge Singers’ ‘Flintstones Pow-Wow Song,’” he called out.

“OK,” said Bellinda, as she organized a stack of CDs she had piled on the dinette.

By 7 a.m., they were ready to start. Bellinda, dressed in a black WFUM T-shirt, eased the arm of the turntable onto an LP, and the sound of the Village Stompers, a Diaseld band from the 1960s, filled the room. She and Hova had recently picked up “a whole pile of old records” at a garage sale and were excited to air some of their best finds on the show that day.

After playing a few more songs, including “Nasty Dan,” by Johnny Cash, Bellinda and Hova finally came on the air, in their signature fashion. “Hey there, Hova!” cried Bellinda. “Hey there, Hova!” cried Hova. Then they let listeners know that Greasy Kid Stuff had recently celebrated its 10th birthday.

Free-form radio

When Bellinda and Hova started DJing “Greasy Kid Stuff” in 1995, they had no children themselves. They had worked as au pairs for a couple of years, but that was about the extent of their experience with kids. “I had no experience with kids at all,” Hova says.

But both he and Bellinda were passionate about music — Hova

had always had a huge record collection, and they had both been volunteering at WFUM for a few years. And they had seen how positively their young charges had reacted when they happened to play some of the more kid-friendly selections from Hova’s collection. “He was the one with the really good taste,” says Bellinda, and I had the kid-filter.”

When WFUM asked if they would like to DJ their own show, doing something for kids just made sense, Hova says. There was nothing like that on the station, and “it was around the time a lot of the folks raised on punk rock were starting to have kids, too,” Hova says.

Since then, “Greasy Kid Stuff’s” influence has spread far beyond the New York area via the Internet, becoming an underground hit among parents looking for alternative kids’ music. It also has spawned two CDs of collected music from the show.
Belinda likes to say that "Greasy Kid Stuff" is a land of its own, and if so, quirky lo-fi cult figure Jonathan Richmond is clearly its patron saint. Songs about peanut butter sandwiches and earthworms are popular here. And if kids music is played at all, it tends to be vintage cool or it is actually made by kids themselves, such as the surreal punk rock stylings of Eyeball Skeleton or the songs of the Kids of Whidney High, a group of special education students from Los Angeles.

Back to work

During the Saturday taping, just as Man or Astro-man? was finishing up "Cattle Drive," DJ Waah Waah began to wail from her bedroom. As Belinda cued up the next song, Hova went to fetch her. She entered the studio in his arms, blinking, sucking on a pacifier and wearing a pink T-shirt that said "I ♥ Mekons," celebrating the famous British punk band.

"Uppy mommy," she murmured.

"Just a second, Georgia" said Belinda, as she cued up the next CD.

"Who is this?" called Hova, who had run to the other room where the computer was, to try and update the playlist.

"It's the Aquabats' "The Ballad of Mr. Bonkers," Belinda said. "It's a whole rock opera!"

Georgia, now seated on a chair stacked with records, rocked back and forth to the beat.

Often, Belinda and Hova let Georgia speak into the microphone, and include her in their on-air conversations. It's an interesting touch, allowing listeners this glimpse into their family, and at times, as you watch Belinda let Georgia punch the button for a segue, or as Belinda sings along to the Blue Oyster Cult while changing a diaper, it feels less like you are listening to a radio show and more like you are simply eavesdropping on two hip, indie parents as they let their kid rifle through their record collection.

"Little Bunny Foo-Foo," by the Moldy Peaches elicited a particularly positive response from Georgia, who was munching on a doughnut.

"You're partial to the punk rock, aren't you?" said Belinda, as Georgia enthusiastically waved her doughnut to the lyrics.

After a few more minutes, though, Georgia started to get a little restless and tried to climb the record collection. There was still a good chunk of show left, and like any parent stuck in the middle of something that had to be done right now, Belinda searched for a distraction.

"We can turn on the TV and you can watch Pee-see Herman," she tried.

Then she and Hova laughed, realizing how that sounded. "This is not the kind of parenting we normally condone," Belinda apologized.

"TV, doughnuts and punk rock..." Miss Amanda said.

"Oh no," said Belinda, as she readied the next song. "We condone the punk rock."

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