

ACTIVEfamily

MAGAZINE

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Susan Reed, Making Spirits Soar

Every once in a great while the fates present you with a gift, a joyful sweet gift, and something inside you shifts. It's a delicate shift, but there nonetheless, and your life is altered and made happier for it.

A while back I was visiting the Chorus of Westerly's website and found an announcement for a June 7th Music on the Hill performance. It featured Susan Reed - storyteller, composer, singer and performer, joined by "Children and Adult Voices from the Chorus of Westerly", and George Kent, Conductor. Curious, I called the Chorus of Westerly. They kindly explained that Susan Reed is George Kent's daughter and she could be reached through her website www.susanreed.com.

I opened Susan's website to her sunny "Hello! Hello! How'd you do? How'd you do?" How nice! I played every recording and then zipped back to Chorus of Westerly's site to buy tickets. I was hooked! Later, I played Susan's music for my daughter: she sang along to "Rain", snuggled close while I teared up to "Home", and whisked me into a dance for "Listen to Your Dreams".

Trained in classical violin since she was 12, Susan grew up in a musical family. Her dad is George Kent, Music Director of the Chorus of Westerly; Susan and her four siblings all sang in the chorus, "It's just what we did. It was part of the fabric of our lives, like brushing your teeth." Susan's dad is also a trumpet player. She recalled how as kids, they'd be out playing with their friends and when it was time for dinner, "We were the only kids on the block who got a bugle call!"

Susan graduated with a Bachelor and Master of Music Degree in violin performance from the Cleveland Institute of Music. From 1989 to 1999, she was Director of Suzuki Studies and on the Violin Faculty at the New England Conservatory of Music. She founded and is co-director of the Ogontz Suzuki Institute in Lyman NH, an award winning family music camp. Susan is also a freelance violinist in the Boston area and she teaches and performs at Suzuki workshops and institutes throughout the country.

When she started having babies, Susan found practicing violin and attending 8 pm concerts hard, so she began playing violin for her kids instead and picked up a love for dulcimer, guitar and banjo along the way. She also started writing stories and songs for her kids, inspired by funny everyday goings-on and special events in their lives as well as lessons from when she was a kid.

In 2005, Susan launched her debut album *Shoes* followed by *Skipping Round the Moon*, her musical tribute to math facts; both CDs received 2005 National Parenting Publications Awards (NAPPA). *Earth Songs* won a 2006 Parents Choice Recommended Award and NAPPA Honor's Award.

Her latest CD, *Gather*, won the distinguished 2008 Parents' Choice Approved Award. Through song and stories, *Gather* shares ideas about growing up, taking charge, and finding your place in this world, as well as love and wonder for our earth. The song "Rain" delivers a



Susan Reed, a joyful, award winning children's song and story teller.

Photo: Susan Wilson

fun lesson about how all the world shares the rain cycle. Like Susan's other earth songs, "Rain's" science and nature lesson is much more memorable than dry text prose. "Home" is a poignant ballad written for Susan's son as he journeyed to boarding school for the first time; it speaks of challenges ahead while assuring him of the ever present love and support of his family. Susan often sings "Home" for kids graduating into middle school. "Listen to Your Dreams" encourages kids to stay true to themselves, to find a life that makes "your spirits soar".

Susan is contemplating a new CD that teaches the art of maintaining friendships as kids grow older. Susan's kids are older now too. Allison is 10 and plays violin. Kate, 11, plays cello and Jon, 13 loves being sound crew for school productions. The

kids and her husband Ken sing backup on Susan's albums. The girls also sang with the chorus in the June 7th Music on the Hill performance, marking the first time three generations of Kent's performed at one event!

Susan performs at family orchestra concerts throughout the country; the June 7th Music on the Hill performance was her first with this company. Invited by Music on the Hill Artistic Director (and childhood friend) John Mark Pellegrino, Susan hosted the one-hour performance with sparkling energy. She delighted the audience with funny stories of Johann Sebastian Bach getting ready for a big concert and gave exuberant

life to four Aesop's Fables set to music, à la *Peter and the Wolf*. Susan sang her jubilant "Up Up Up" and mesmerized in the telling of "Cranes", her original story of peace and love. It was a performance brimming with fun and fantastic music.

Through family concerts and customized school programs Susan makes classical music fun and accessible to "inspire young people to pick up an instrument, write a story, write a song, to live a life filled with art." And she champions the important role music plays in helping kids learn, "it's amazing the impact music can have...I see it all the time."

Susan's music expresses how she teaches her own kids and her warm-hearted take on everyday life lessons as they grow and experience life. Her songs and stories strengthen kids' belief in their innate goodness and their appreciation for those around us. They stir kids' desire to respect and care for the wonders of our natural world, and affirm their ability to create positive change in our world. Susan honors kids' unique place in the world, so they can too.

To learn more, visit www.susanreed.com, www.chorusofwesterly.org and www.musiconthehillri.com.