

# Meet, PLAY, Love

Once again, Rock the Cradle opens the world of music and art to kids and their grown-ups by Luke Taylor

It was a profound, almost rhetorical question. Walking through the Minneapolis Institute of Arts from one activity to another during last year's Rock the Cradle, a five-year-old boy gazing at Renaissance paintings paused to ask his mother, "Is this ART??"

Ali Lozoff, marketing manager at 89.3 The Current, saw the scene unfold. "It was this delightful awakening for this little kid," Lozoff recalls. "I think the biggest thing I've taken away from Rock the Cradle is the opening up of children's minds and excitement levels about playing an instrument or viewing art for the first time."

More such epiphanies are set to take place on Sunday,

Rock the Cradle happens Sunday, Feb. 20, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Children's Theatre Company and Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2400 Third Avenue South in Minneapolis. Plan your visit and find more information at [TheCurrent.org](http://TheCurrent.org).



photos by (top to bottom) Stacy Schwartz, Stacy Schwartz, John Nicholson, Tyler Boland, John Nicholson, Stacy Schwartz

Feb. 20, when Rock the Cradle unleashes itself once again at the Children's Theatre Company (CTC) and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA).

Barb Abney, daytime host on The Current, is busy booking the bands. Koo Koo Kanga Roo, the kid-friendly hip hop duo, have already committed. Other kid-friendly acts coming to Rock the Cradle are bluegrass duo The Okee Dokee Brothers and power-pop rockers The Bazillions (see sidebar). Additional bands will be announced closer to the event.

As programmer of the child-focused Wonderground Radio service and as a parent herself, Abney has a discerning ear for good kids' music. "I really made a concerted effort to keep my daughter away from Hannah Montana," Abney laughs. "It failed, but I tried. But to at least show kids there's something other than that is worth it, because the musicians are just so amazing."

Rock the Cradle mainstay activities like the Kids' Disco, Instrument Petting Zoo and DJ Story Time will naturally be on the agenda. "We don't change the programming dramatically from year to year," Lozoff explains. "We want kids to know and recognize and be excited about the activities and programs."

The past few years of Rock the Cradle have seen attendance remain steady in the 10,000 to 13,000 range, but Lozoff credits the partnership with the CTC and MIA for making the event run smoothly. Tom Rohde, a house manager at the CTC, says he and his colleagues have learned a lot about making the space hospitable to a large gathering. "It's been great working with folks who are used to staging rock shows at so many venues," Rohde says, "because it helps you tap into all the potential a space has and how it can be used."

And Rohde says Rock the Cradle aligns well with the CTC. "Our mission revolves around three words: educate, challenge and inspire," he says. "Kids should be encouraged to explore all aspects of art, music and theatre, because the appreciation of as well as the creation of art can enrich so many aspects of our lives."

The Current's Lozoff calls Rock the Cradle and Rock the Garden "signature bookend events" on the year. "One's aimed at a beer-drinking crowd and the other at a baby-bottle-drinking crowd," she says, "but the result is the same: Both of them are about bringing the community together and celebrating music and celebrating joy in an artistic setting."

## Schooled in Rock

Minneapolis band The Bazillions ready to Rock the Cradle



photo by Scott Cohen

The parents at Kenny Elementary School in south Minneapolis kept asking teacher Adam Marshall where they could find the songs he was singing with the kids. "They didn't know I had written the songs," Marshall recalls, "so finally I figured I had to record them."

Marshall's band The Bazillions released their debut album *Rock 'n' Roll Recess* last June. Imagine The Hopefuls or Fountains of Wayne singing kids' songs — with the vital addition of a female voice — and you have The Bazillions.

The band got noticed by 89.3 The Current's Barb Abney, who invited The Bazillions to play Rock the Cradle on February 20. "There's a lot of great music on their CD," Abney raves. "I'm excited to have them out there."

A Bazillions show is structured with kids in mind: Children and parents join in refrains; occasional videos are projected behind the band; coloring pages and buckets of crayons are distributed among the audience. Marshall promises the same approach at Rock the Cradle.

Zoogobble.com hails The Bazillions as "another important part of the increasingly strong Minnesota family music scene" that includes such acts as Bunny Clogs, Koo Koo Kanga Roo and The Okee Dokee Brothers. "We're focused on expanding the world of The Bazillions in Minneapolis and beyond," Marshall says. "We are really psyched about doing that."