

Music

Child's Play

by [Jeremy Schwartz](#), February 26, 2007

Good bye, porkpie hat and hello, Keds.

For one day in March, the High Meadow School's newly constructed performing arts center in Stone Ridge will morph into a junior-league Village Vanguard, as New York saxophonist Hayes Greenfield brings Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz, his interactive children's jazz education workshop, to town.

Greenfield, who has performed with the likes of Rashied Ali, Paul Bley, and Ritchie Havens, invites kids of all ages to scat-sing, dance, and generally pitch a wang-dang doodle while learning the call-and-response language of jazz. The workshop started in 1998 and grew out of *For the Children*, a short film that Greenfield produced.

The Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz touring trio includes Sonny Jane on drums and Adam Roberts on bass.



Hayes Greenfield brings his Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz program to High Meadow School in Stone Ridge March 24.

—Jeremy Schwartz

JS: Jazz is often perceived as a complex musical form played by virtuoso musicians. How do you introduce children to jazz?

Greenfield: What I'm trying to do with Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz is to use it as a vehicle to inspire people to get involved with the creative process. We're not looking at it as a complex form; it's more about focusing on the human spirit and how it uses improv as a way of expression. Jazz is an intricate and highly developed language, but something that bothers me is that often people think that they are not up to it intellectually. The essence of jazz is that if it swings and the groove is nice and warm and fat, it's very inviting and you don't have to feel afraid of it.



JS: What are the mechanics of the workshop?

Greenfield: We start out with a technique called negative discovery, where everyone [in the trio] is playing a different tune and no one is listening to each other. I stop the band and give the audience a chance to ask, "What is this?" Inevitably, someone says, "Everybody's offbeat" or "You're not playing the same tune," and I say, "Exactly!" Then I get them to help me count in the next tune and I play something they are familiar with and they are right there with me! They have been engaged, and from then on they aren't afraid.

JS: Do children intuitively understand the concept of improvisation better than the average nonmusician adult?

Greenfield: Adults get fixated on something in their mind and they are ready to blow it off if they don't like it. Kids, they think about something. But if you do it with a sense of humor, they're more open to changing their minds. They may come in with preconceived notions, but we do scatting and call and response and engage them, ask them what they think. This is the essence of music, the conversation that goes on between musicians. It's all about active listening.

We get the audience to vocalize the instruments. I may divide them into two parts, where one side sounds like a walking bass and other is the hi-hat. There's a subliminal education process going on. I'm teaching them and they don't even know they are being taught.

JS: How do you use dance in the show?

Greenfield: It's a blast. I do that to get them to dance to a jazz beat. A lot of children think that if it's not a funk beat, then they can't dance to it. In America, the beautiful thing is that we have diversity. We can add a calypso or swing beat and that's when sparks really start to fly! The other day, we played a school in Queens where 30 different languages were spoken. It was amazing. We were able to communicate through music.

Hayes Greenfield's Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz comes to High Meadow School's High Meadow Performing Arts Center in Stone Ridge on March 24. The event is the middle performance in the school's family concert series, which includes Peter Schickele on March 3 and Elizabeth Mitchell with Dog on Fleas on April 15. All shows in the series begin at 2pm. (845) 334-2414; www.highmeadowschool.org.