

Danville songwriters bring insect world to children through music

BY CATHERINE NEEDHAM
CORRESPONDENT

Do cockroaches make you cringe? Spiders make you squirm? Fleas make you furious? Bugs of all kinds send many adults sprinting for the repellent, but not so for Sandi Hunt and Stevie Morgan.

Instead of obliterating the little critters, the married couple finds them inspiring. So much so that the Danville duo was able to harness that stimulus and combine it with their talent for songwriting, singing and performing.

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What was the result? "Insect Songs" — their first compact disc about insects for children. It is geared for the 2- to 8-year-old set.

Not everyone aspires to sing about small arthropods or for youngsters, including Morgan and Hunt. However, when a friend suggested they write songs about insects for children, the couple agreed to the idea. That was two years ago.

"So far, it's been our most popular work," says Morgan. "Whoever listens to it thinks it's cute."

Indeed it is. Beginning with the first song, "Five Little Insect Friends," and on through "The Greedy Wasp", "Marching Ants" and "Battling Beetles," children and adults immediately begin to move to the beat and melody.

The words make the listener feel he or she has entered the bug's world — and it's a fun place. All the songs are chirpy, catchy and a welcome addition to traditional children's songs.

Hunt and Morgan have been songwriters for 15 and 30+ years respectively. Besides being singers and writers, they are record producers.

"Insect Songs" has been a labor of love for the two. The couple researched the insects they wanted to write about, wrote the words and music and performed the songs.

Morgan co-produced the CD with "the great" noted producer and arranger Don Turney at DKS Productions in Hayward. Sharon Turney lent her hand with the illustrations and graphic design on the CD jacket. Morgan's mother, Evelyn, did the photography.

How does one generate songs about bugs? "Once we decided to do this, we had to seriously think about which insects to write about. What do they really do after all? We researched each insect subject to be sure our information was correct," says Hunt.

Part of their research occurred in the lovely garden that surrounds the couple's home. It's easy to see how the many flowers, plants, scents and the view invite humans and insects to visit a while and perhaps interact.

The couple also had to put themselves in a child's shoes. They have no children of their own, but Hunt has spent much time with her nieces and nephews.

"Also, we deliberately avoided listening to any other children's music before we started writing," says Hunt. "We wanted our songs to be as original as possible."

"Each song is about a specific insect only," says Morgan. "All the songs are informational, insect-friendly, amusing and tell something of a story."

Helping the couple with the singing on the CD were six neighbor children — all non-professionals.

"I didn't want to use trained singers," says Hunt. "We preferred a truer sound, one that other children, who when listening, might feel more inclined to join in."

The CD took about four months to compose and record. Hunt worked with the children. She taught them the words and melody and rehearsed with them.

"Performing with the kids was easy," she recalls. "They recorded eight songs in one day — they were great!"

What was the best part of creating this CD? For Hunt it was the children.

"Connecting with the kids, seeing their innocence and watching their eyes grow wide with wonder gave me a lot of pleasure. Their response to our project was the fuel that helped me continue with the CD and not find excuses to put it off."

The high point of the project for Morgan involves the entire process of writing the songs. "The joy ends for me when the CD is completed," he says.



MIKE RUSSELL/STAFF

While putting words to music may come easy to the two, getting the word out to the public is another thing. To date, the couple has been selling the CD on their Web site, www.insectsongs.com. It also can be purchased locally at Tower Records.

But as the couple has discovered, marketing themselves and distributing a CD involves much time and work. To date, they perform at children's birthday parties and local events, do the scheduling for those performances, among other myriad tasks.

"We are songwriters; that is what we do best. We are not marketers," says Morgan. To help with the success of Insect Songs, the couple is looking for a marketer and a children's music publisher.

They also have other musical interests. Morgan, originally from Wales, released two soft rock CDs for adults prior to "Insect Songs." His strongest influence was Barry Gibb of the Bee Gees.

"I was able to meet my idol when Barry presented me with a guitar while on stage in Mi-

ami in 1996. (Morgan had sung before the Bee Gees' performance.) I had written a biography about him.

"Not everyone is fortunate to meet the people who inspire him or her the most," he notes. "But music should move you and music always makes a lovely gift to give people."

So, the next time you come across a creepy crawly, take a second look and give yourself an attitude check. You may find a bug's world has something to offer. As Morgan and Hunt write in the last verse of the last song, "Insect Carnival":

"So please come and join in the games if you may
The insects are waiting for you
The bumblebee's ready to show you the way
And tell you just what you should do
Come play in the sun
The fun's just begun At the insect carnival (and you're invited too)."

For additional information, 925-743-9838.