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In Business

It's not in the game
EA's bad quarter persists,
but stock beats predictions.
Inside

Kids at heart put wildlife in art



JAY SOLMONSON — Staff

Danville couple entertain, teach youth with music

By Lea Blevins
STAFF WRITER

DANVILLE — When Stephen Morgan and Sandi Hunt agreed to write and record some songs about bugs, they never expected to think about it again — let alone have it spiral into a career.

Morgan, better known as "Stevie," was making a living as a computer consultant for various companies all over the world while recording his own pop and rock songs on the side. A friend working with a new company asked him to make an album about insects, and he joined with his significant other, Hunt, to create it.

Hunt, originally from Vallejo, was working a federal job at the time but had experience performing with R&B, gospel and pop groups.

Once people heard the album, they began to ask "Sandi and Stevie" if they had a show to perform with it. The answer was "no," but the pair soon realized the song lyrics already created many visual images that could be worked into a fun and educational show.

Sandi and Stevie performed their first "Insect Songs" show in 2001 at Crow Canyon Gardens in San Ramon.

"We realized that people loved the shows," said Morgan, whose

Welsh accent often adds to children's fascination with the characters he portrays.

The Danville couple did almost 40 shows the first year at schools, libraries, zoos, birthday parties and public events. They now do between 180 to 200 shows a year throughout the greater Bay Area.

"Our shows are intelligently silly, and that's why I think they're popular," said Morgan, who typically wears a green wig or green spray paint on his hair for the "Green Grasshopper" song.

Hunt wears a headband of butterflies and flowers and presents the show's educational aspect while Morgan runs out in various costumes throughout the performance.

"When you have something for them to look at, then they see that you really want to play with them," Hunt said.

Interaction with the children is essential for the performances, and teachers often appreciate this because it helps the children practice various motor skills, they said.

By the time the show ends, kids are waving goodbye or running up to give Sandi and Stevie hugs.

"That's so rewarding for us," Hunt said.

Sandi and Stevie recommend their show for children ages 2 to 8, with ages 4 to 6 being the optimal group.

On the heels of the "Insect Songs" CD and of their performances, Sandi and Stevie recorded "Sealife Songs" in 2004. Both albums were produced at DKS Productions in Hayward with the help of Don Turney and his wife, Sharon, who did the album artwork. They now have a show to take on the road for either of the two albums.

Both Morgan and Hunt said they are glad this project has become their full-time gig. They would like to see it go even further, with the idea of putting together a children's television program or putting animation to the songs.

Outside of officially being "Sandi and Stevie," Morgan is a stamp collector and freelances graphic and Web designs. Hunt loves to spend time in her backyard herb garden, which is also the inspiration for her side project, "Oh Taste & See," that involves teaching workshops.

They are contemplating a third children's album, which might focus on birds, rain forest animals, jungle animals or endangered species.

Teaching children to respect the environment and various species is part of the educational message behind the CDs and performances.

At the end of each "Insect Songs" show, children chant, "Take them outside, and let them go free."

Sandi and Stevie will perform at the Livermore Farmers' Market at 6 and 7 p.m. today at Carnegie Park along Fourth Street between J and K streets in Livermore.

The CDs are available in some local toy stores and Whole Foods markets, as well as online. For more information, visit www.sandilandstevie.com or call (925) 743-9838.