



Leeny and Steve

The Making of Be Nice



When Leeny's nephew Zak was born, she broke out her old Sesame Street and Beatles songbooks and played Zak the songs she loved when she was growing up. Zak was digging it. So, Leeny wrote a few little ditties to entertain and educate him about the important things in life – fruit, clouds, and stinky diapers. Then Zak said, "Leeny, can you write me more songs?" To which Leeny replied, "Uhhhh... sure, buddy!"

Leeny called her longtime friend, Steve. They had met in 1990 at Berklee College of Music in Boston, MA, but in all the years they had known each other, they had never collaborated. Steve had recently released a solo EP that he independently produced. Leeny was impressed with how he had grown as a songwriter and musician, and with the production quality he was able to achieve at his home studio. She also remembered Steve's fondness for Schoolhouse Rock and the Muppets.

Leeny was living in the Bay Area at the time and flew to Steve's place in Houston for five days to write and record five songs. "We talked about the music we loved when we were kids and why we still loved it: The songs were well-crafted with catchy hooks and featured outstanding musicianship. The lyrics were clever, funny, sweet, and educational... often simultaneously. The music was written for and directed specifically to kids without ever talking down to them, while also appealing to adults. Good songs are good songs, no matter the musical genre or lyrical content."

"We just tried to write the best music we could with kid-oriented subject matter. Lyrics that could help you learn something without realizing that you're learning something – Kids' music that's funducational! We wanted kids to have songs for dancing and for quiet time, and parents really wanted songs about good behavior."

"The process was so much fun and just happened so quickly. We sent the first five songs around to family and friends with and without children and the positive response was overwhelming. We got together two more times for five days each to write and record another 11 tracks for the album. We enjoy so many different styles of music – rock, country, R&B, reggae, opera – we wanted to leave ourselves open to whatever style felt right for each song."

All the songs on the album were written, produced, and performed by Leeny and Steve, including Steve's super spoon solo on "What CAN I Do?!" Steve recorded and mixed the album at his home studio. Kirk Wheeler did the mastering. And Leeny called her old buddy, video animator Steve Gumm (a different Steve), to design and create the adorable illustrations for the CD.

Leeny (Ilene Altman):

"Writing kids' music is more fun than any other music I've written, and it just feels so much more worthwhile and fulfilling. Plus I'm getting to relearn everything I've forgotten from my youth!" Leeny's "adult" musical influences include Ben Folds, Sheryl Crow, Bonnie Raitt, and anything from the 80's. Leeny grew up in Clark, NJ and currently resides in Gloucester, MA with her husband Nick. She enjoys playing Frisbee, eating strawberries, and reciting the states alphabetically in 19 seconds.



Steve (Steve Equi):

"I thought that writing music for kids would be interesting because I could essentially perform the same music I was writing for myself, but gear the lyric content toward children." Steve's musical influences include Frank Zappa, Otis Redding, Nick Drake, and James Brown. Steve grew up in South Deerfield, MA and currently resides in Houston, TX with three dogs, two cats, and one wife, Stacia. He enjoys furniture refinishing and home remodeling, and is studying to become a winemaker.

