

## Children get involved in Cookies' monster show of music and fun

By BELINDA M. PASCHAL  
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From a foundation as a child entertainer in Europe, Nels Lund has built a career in America as a children's entertainer. Born in Denmark, the singer-songwriter moved with his family to Salt Lake City as a child, then returned to his homeland at age 9 and enjoyed small-scale stardom singing American standards that went over quite well with the audiences there.

"I guess you could say I was a little bit of a child star back in the late '50s. I had a duo with my brother, who's six years older.

"I wore a little cowboy outfit, played a ukulele and old-style Western songs, Stephen Foster songs, calypso music," he said, chuckling at the memory.

Known to most on a first-name basis, Nels and his backup players, the Peanut Butter Cookies Band, will liven up the Palmdale Playhouse this weekend with a big batch of "up-tempo happy music, kind of folk-based leaning toward a bluegrass feel."

Nels was a club-performing folk singer before breaking into children's music — a career move sparked by the birth of his daughter 17 years ago.

"Since I was a singer-songwriter, it became natural to write songs about my life," he said.

"When you have a baby, you tend to get associated with a lot of other parents with small children. I started singing for those groups and eventually the local preschools.

"Performing for children was something I never thought of until I had my own. But your perspective on life changes; it becomes kind of a whole new world. The affinity I had for my baby was very, very strong and that parent-child bond is something I celebrate in my music."

Nels has been a children's artist exclusively for the last 13 years; besides uniting two things he loves — music and kids — he doesn't have



**CAUGHT IN THE ACT** — Nels and The Peanut Butter Cookies Band will perform its brand of children's music Sunday at the Palmdale Playhouse.

to deal with the stress of playing nightclub after nightclub, where most of the gigs are, well, at night.

"With children's music, the shows are all during the day," he noted. "After doing lounges and clubs a lot, it kind of wears on you, especially when you're trying to build a relationship."

His musical skills are mostly self-taught, though he does have nine years of vocal instruction under his belt, not to mention valuable theatrical training.

Besides allowing him to hang out with kids and play music, being a children's entertainer also affords

Nels the chance to educate youngsters, undoubtedly a priority for this former schoolteacher.

Typically, he will do a school residency in the towns he plays. "I usually do a songwriting class. I take one class of kids and talk about how songs are written and by the time we're done, the kids have written their own class song," he said.

As part of his appearance here, Nels will work with Tumbleweed Elementary School youngsters, who'll perform their class song at Sunday's show.

"It's really festive and it gives the kids a chance to get some focus on them," Nels said.

Artist-audience interaction is *de rigueur* at a Nels concert. "There's a lot of interaction on pretty much every song. That's the trick for holding the attention of children. Rather than just sitting and listening, they can respond to things so they stay connected," he said.

Attention span is a key difference between adult and child audiences, Nels noted. "With adults, they basically sit and watch. You don't always know during a performance whether they really like your show or not. Usually, they wait patiently until after the show.

"But children are very immediate, you'll know *instantly* if they don't like what you're doing. They'll start fidgeting, you'll lose their attention. You have to work hard to hold children in the palm of your hand all the time."

Nels and The Peanut Butter Cookies Band are "always working on new material," the singer said. They've released four albums, the most recent of which is last year's *Time for Christmas*.

Themes range from kids' games to parents to food, all issues that are relevant in a child's world

"I like using material that children can really see as part of their world, things that are not foreign to them," Nels explained. "At the same time, I try to throw in some educational focus."

For example, "Let's Make a Band" spotlights various instruments, allowing kids to "see what the instrument looks like, what it's called, what it sounds like," so they can understand how separate instruments make up one ensemble.

"They're simple, silly child themes, and parents love them, too," Nels said. ■

### Nels and the Peanut Butter Cookies Band

Shiny, happy music for the little people.

**WHERE:** Palmdale Playhouse, 38334 10th St. East.

**WHEN:** 2 p.m. Sunday.

**TICKETS:** \$10 general; \$8 seniors, students, military; \$6 youth. (267-5685)

