

Tuning in ▲

Kids' CDs combine musical entertainment, life lessons

By **STEPHEN IDE**

Fans of Trout Fishing in America

know that the dynamic award-winning duo of Ezra Idlet and Keith Grimwood always has a trick up the sleeve. Their new album, "It's A Puzzle" (Trout Records, 888-439-8342, or on the Web at www.troutmusic.com), has everything their fans – children and adults – have come to expect, and more. This is another mix worth reeling in.

They sing a tongue-twister ("Isn't it a puzzle that an is'll be a was?") with its built-in lesson amid the blather: "It's excuses and saying it's no use ... That keeps us from getting anywhere."

They sing of disgusting people, an imaginary world and then pull out the "Alien in My Nose," which will delight anyone who's ever even thought about being a nose-picker.

(You know who you are.)

Anything is fair game for this Arkansas pair, including gross school lunchrooms ("Why I Pack My Lunch") with their mystery food: "Cream of tea bags, wombat pelt ... lizard lips, What's that? Smelt?"

Parents of teens will appreciate "It's Like," which is, like, what it's like talking to your, like, children. Well, you, like, totally get the idea.

Whatever tune they play, TFIA is a blast to listen to, with styles ranging from rock to blues to cajun to pop and folk. The intelligently crafted melodies and lyrics don't talk down to kids or adults. Joining Idlet and Grimwood are eight other musicians, including Grammy-winning fiddler Vassar Clements and Fred Bogert, who handles everything from guitar and keyboards to cornet, banjolin and vocals. A must-buy.

● **If you and your children** are star-gazers, you'll enjoy "Hey, Mr. Spacemen" (Music for Little People, 800-346-4445, www.mflp.com), a compilation of mostly rock 'n' roll tunes with space themes.

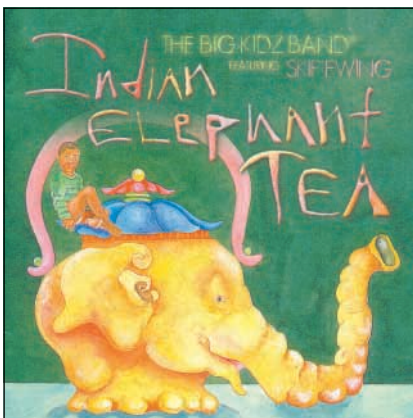
In most cases, like the title track from The Byrds and Jimmy Durante's "We're Going UFO'ing," space travel means entering a time warp: MFLP culled decades of archives looking for space-related ditties, some with special audio effects. Faves include the classic Sheb Wooley "Purple People Eater," Ella Fitzgerald's "Two Little Men in a Flying Saucer" and the B52's cosmic "Planet Claire." Otherworldly, and likely to appeal to adults more than children.

● **For Bill Harley**, the world is one big jungle gym, the twists and turns of life that he captures in stories and songs. The award-winning performer, who lives in Seekonk, is at his prime in his latest: "The Town Around the Bend: Bedtime Stories and Songs by Bill Harley" (Round River Music, 800-682-9522, www.billharley.com).

Harley blends in lullabies and tells stories about everything familiar, and some things not so familiar



STEPHEN IDE photo



Above, Keith Grimwood, left, and Ezra Idlet, of Trout Fishing in America, perform their trademark mix of comical music at the Towne Crier Cafe in Pawling, N.Y., in July 2003; At left, the new CD, "Indian Elephant Tea," features fresh arrangements of perennial kids' favorites.

that just sound like they are.

In his fictitious Town Around the Bend, a place he'd "like to live in," Harley reveals the importance of bellybuttons and how they got there. He tells of brother and sister "Bucket of Beans" and Clarisse and what happens when they don't listen to their parents.

His repertoire appeals to adults, who often recognize familiar themes from their own lives, as well as children, who crane to hear what he'll come out with next. Highly recommended.

● **Nashville singer-songwriter** Skip Ewing and a group of musicians dubbed The Big Kidz Band tackle traditional and well-worn kids' songs on "Indian Elephant Tea" (Rounder Kids, www.rounder.com). The CD combines rock, blues, folk and bluegrass in covers of "Old McDonald," "If You're Happy and You Know It," "Oh Susannah," "Old Joe Clark," "Bingo" and "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star."

Though I enjoyed the tightly performed, fresh arrangements of these well-known melodies, aimed at children 3 and older, it's hard to say whether they would hold the attention of youngsters.

The final tracks are a departure from the rest of the CD. "Fare Thee Well Fondly," written by Ewing and his daughter, Rebecca, is a penny-whistle Celtic tune with a rousing children's chorus. The piano-led title track, set to a poem by Ewing's grandmother Martha Hector, is a touching look at growing older.

● **If your child** is enthralled by fairies, try "A Flower Fairy Alphabet" (Music for Little People, 800-346-4445, www.mflp.com), which combines Renaissance and Celtic melodies with lyrics from renowned author Cicely Mary Barker (1895-1973). The third release in this series, with titles arranged A to Z offers tender, delicate, mystical melodies set to classical instruments and sung by a host of children. Ages 5 to adult.

Stephen Ide is an editor at The Patriot Ledger