

Music to their ears

A stockingful of songs and stories for young listeners

By **STEPHEN A. IDE**

Marshfield's Jay O'Callahan is world renowned for his abilities to weave charismatic stories about people and creatures of all types. Time magazine calls him "a genius among storytellers." Some of his latest will amuse older kids and adults.

O'Callahan's "The Island" CD, with music by David Gay, is an enchanting and mysterious tale about creatures who maneuver to rule on an island. O'Callahan is at his vocal best, his voice rising and falling with emotions and characters.

Also check out O'Callahan's "Three Pill Hill Stories" on DVD. The master storyteller, standing on a dark, sparsely decorated stage at the Studio Arena Theater in Buffalo, N.Y., relates three tales from his childhood neighborhood, Brookline, which he dubs Pill Hill because of all the doctors who lived there.

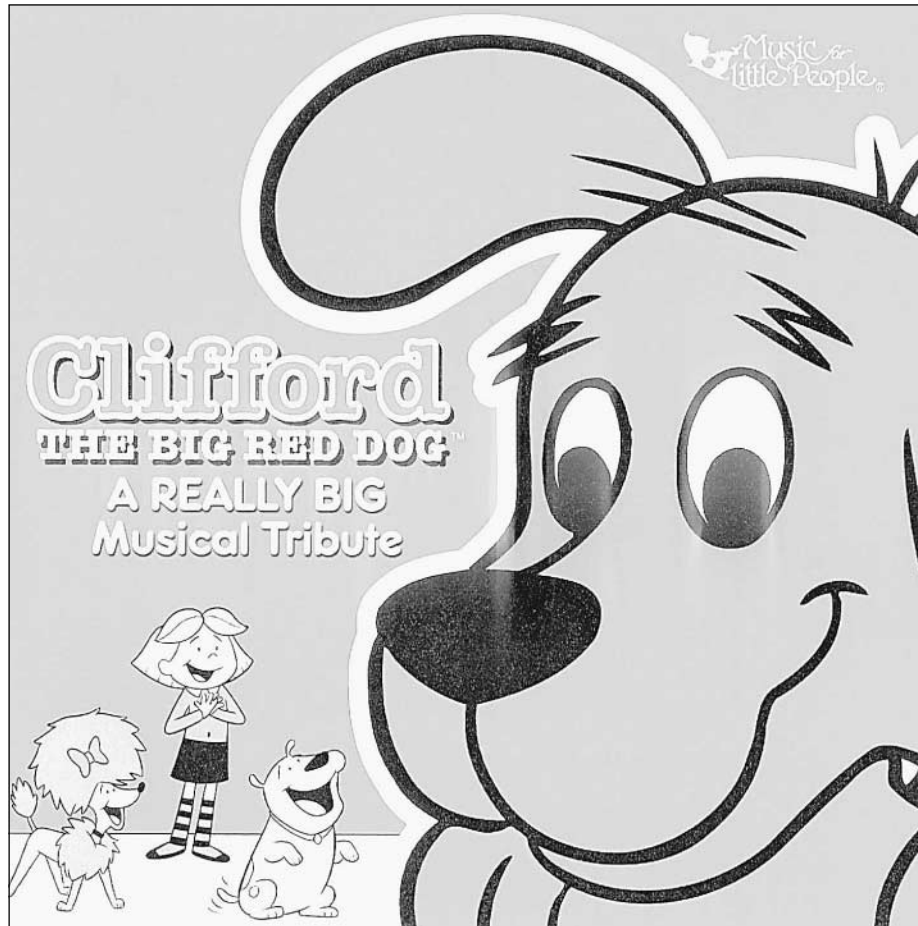
One story is called "Electra," about a woman who provides culture to area children through her invitations to "cookies and Dickens." The storyteller explains humorously that as a youth he thought "Dickens" was ice cream. O'Callahan captivates as he relates his tales, wondrous descriptive narrative weaving each story. For older teens and adults (www.ocallahan.com).

Shaking it up

Milkshake, the Maryland duo of Lisa Matthews and Mikel Gehl, has a second release for kids and parents called "Bottle of Sunshine," a collection of upbeat, cleanly produced songs.

Matthews and Gehl, both parents, have been performing together since the '80s. They turned their focus to children's music in 2002 with their first release, "Happy Songs."

The songs on this CD will get kids up and dancing,



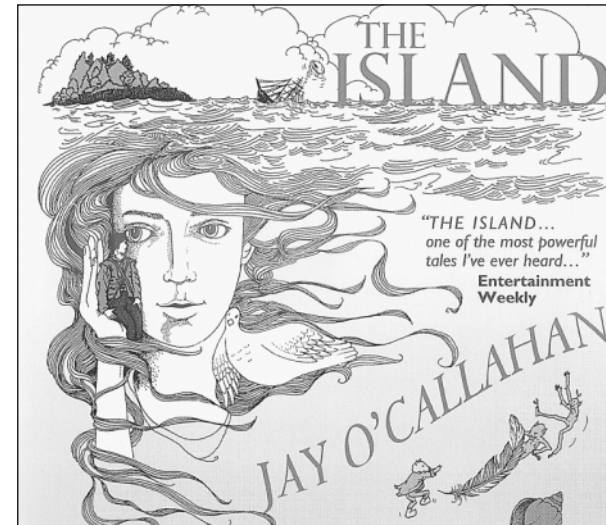
especially the bouncy namesake song, "Milkshake," with its kids' chorus. They sing about the fun of going to school, the joys of nature, their own alphabet tune, "ABC of Me," and a doo-wop-like tune about being a mermaid.

And parents can listen to Milkshake without cringing. Ages 3-10 (www.milkshakemusic.com).

Celebrity sing-along

Kids enjoy fun-loving, silly songs and need to have music that is upbeat and positive. "A World of Happiness" (Hylo/Buena Vista Records) is a compilation of songs and poems of joy presented by some of today's celebrities, from Lou Rawls to Magic Johnson.

Johnson performs a recitation called "Little Me," with playground voices behind him, as he tells the story of a ball game and says "the real heroes are sitting on the bench today." Illeana Douglas and Gary Oldman sing with a children's chorus in a song about proper manners called



"Clifford the Big Red Dog" and Jay O'Callahan's "The Island" are among this year's albums for young people of various ages.

"Just Ask."

Deborah Harry (Blondie) sings to a buoyant, horn-led, island melody about the value of gaining knowledge in "Don'tcha Wanna Know." Samuel Jackson performs a (yes, curse-free) recitation over a jazz melody in "Knowa the Cat." Rosanna Arquette sings "The Possibilities," a positive tune about friendship and togetherness. George Wendt ("Cheers") and the Velvet Snazzletones render a harmony-rich, banjo-piano-horn song about choosing words carefully.

The CD, produced by Tor Hyams and Vincenzo LoRusso, includes more than a dozen musicians, along with a gospel choir and a bunch of kids voices. Ages: 3+.

Disney deja-vu

Everytime you turn around, Disney manages to repackage and sell its vast inventory, and there are a slew of new releases from Disney Records this season.

Another Princess set, "The Ultimate Song Collection," includes songs by animated divas in various films, from "Just Around the Riverbend" of "Pocahontas" fame to "Some Day My Prince Will Come" from "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs."

Disney has also reissued a special edition soundtrack to "Aladdin," which includes all 21 original tracks from the film plus demos of two deleted songs from Oscar-winning songwriters Alan Menken and Howard Ashman.

Tied to the soundtrack release are "Disney's Aladdin Read-Along," which contains film dialog, music from the

film and a 24-page book for kids to follow along, and an "Aladdin" addition to Disney's karaoke series.

Non-stop pop

Music For Little People has released "Top Pop 2," the second in its teen pop music series, featuring a young crop of singers and musicians performing chart-topping tunes.

The teens on this CD sound very close to the original artists, performing hits by Avril Lavigne, Counting Crows, Christina Aguilera, Justin Timberlake and many more.

The advantage to buying this CD for your kids is that the lyrics are kid-friendly, without the graphic images presented in much of today's pop.

I was impressed by the performances of Chelsea Romans in Norah Jones' "Don't Know Why," and I found myself singing along with Britten Newbill, who performed the Uncle Kracker rendition of "Drift Away," which was a chart topper for Dobie Gray in the '70s.

Ages 8 and up (www.mflp.com).

Big red recording

Music For Little People has collaborated with Scholastic Entertainment for "Clifford the Big Red Dog: A Really Big Musical Tribute."

Based on the PBS television program, the CD includes a new version of the theme song and an upbeat mix of songs celebrating Clifford's animated life in songs from Mike Himelstein ("Shrek," "102 Dalmatians"), Jody Gray ("Clifford's Really Big Movie") and award winner Dennis Scott ("Sesame Street").

Expect plenty of kids' voices, a few well-placed barks and songs about friendship and canine life on Birdwell Island. Ages 3 and up.

And the rest...

Other new releases include:

On Music For Little People: "The Peanut Man," by Maria Del Ray. Children's songs and stories from Latin America.

On Hollywood Records: "Hillary Duff," the second CD from the TV pop star.

On Disney: "Lizzie McGuire Total Party," songs and karaoke; "Brother Bear" from Disney's karaoke series.

Other Disney film and TV show soundtrack releases include "Princess Diaries 2 Royal Engagement," "Around the World in 80 Days," "Mickey, Donald, Goofy: The Three Musketeers," "Sleepover," "Pixel Perfect," "Zenon Z3," "Teacher's Pet" and "Stuck in the Suburbs."

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