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## Voodoo Daddy works swing shift

Dirk Shumaker takes time out from his main gig to record a children's CD

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Dirk Shumaker, strumming a guitar in his back yard while singing about frogs, doesn't seem big or bad. But as he sits cross-legged on the grass, crooning to daughter Eva, 4, and son Joseph, 15 months, there's no mistaking he's a daddy.

Shumaker, best known as the bass player for popular hometown neo-swing band Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, is also a devoted dad -- and a singer-songwriter who's just released a children's album, "Everybody's Gotta Have a Place," with 12 original songs.



Courtesy Photo

Shumaker -- seen here cuttin' loose with Big Bad Voodoo Daddy -- thinks his new kids' CD will appeal to the band's fans. "Our niche is that we're a swing band, but we're also very family-oriented," he said.

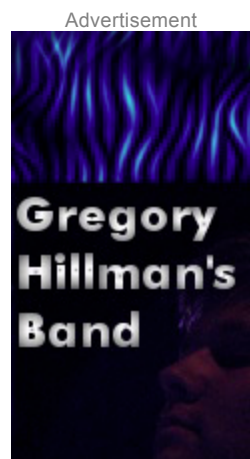


Karen Quincy Loberg / Star staff

Big Bad Voodoo Daddy bassist Dirk Shumaker sings a song off his new children's CD as his 4-year-old daughter, Eva, curls up by his feet in the back yard of their Ventura home. "Being playful and lighthearted makes things easier," Shumaker says.

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During a photo shoot at the family's Ventura home, Shumaker's kids, along with his wife, Eco, tear up the dance floor (i.e., the lawn) as they jump around and twirl to the sounds of Dad's "The Little Green Frog" and "Monkey Business."

Their moves -- and

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the obvious fun they're having -- rival the swing-dancing scene at any BBVD concert or The Derby club in Los Angeles, where the band made a name for itself in the 1990s.

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Shumaker, who's been with the band for 10 years, wants to make a name for himself as a children's singer, although BBVD is still his No. 1 job priority.

He began composing and recording children's songs in 2001 during his off time from the band, which isn't often because BBVD is "on" most of the year touring around the country.

The album, said Shumaker, "revolves around the idea in the title song that everyone has a right to be here. Whether you're a person or animal, you have a place on this Earth." Each song packages a story about an animal with an earnest but whimsical lesson. Some of the messages are straightforward, like the importance of keeping a safe distance from wild critters ("Please Don't Feed the Bears" and "Diamondback Rattlesnakes").

The more subtle and serious "Life Will Go On" is about the extinction of whales: "Life will go on, when we're gone/but you know all along when we are gone/we are gone for good!"

Other tunes are just plain goofy, such as "Bugs" or "Monkey Business," which includes a line perhaps directed more at adults than kids: "Monkey business is the way it oughta be/Working 9 to 5 is really not for me."

Shumaker, 39, dressed in cuffed jeans and a plaid shirt, is not at all the 9-to-5 type and at times comes across like a big kid himself.

"Being playful and lighthearted makes things easier," he said. "As an adult I sometimes take things too seriously, like if the toys are not picked up by the time I go to bed. But it's good to play."

Shumaker is serious about music, however, even though he doesn't have any formal training.

Raised in Santa Barbara, he began his musical career as a trombone player in fourth grade. He switched to guitar and electric bass in high school.

After graduating he considered music a "serious hobby and second job," taking whatever gigs he was offered.

One of those gigs was in Ventura with BBVD lead vocalist Scotty Morris and drummer Kurt Sodergren. The trio clicked, added a horn section and soared in popularity, especially after the group was featured in the 1996 movie "Swingers." The band's most recent album, "Save My Soul," was released in July.

Several BBVD musicians play on "Everybody's Gotta Have a Place," including pianist Joshua Levy, trumpeter Glen Marhevka and

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saxophonists Karl Hunter and Andy Rowley. Among the other musicians on the album are a bluegrass band from Florida and locals including Camarillo percussionist Al Velasquez and Port Hueneme guitarist Mike Fishell.

The quality of the music is what makes the Shumaker CD stand out from other kids' albums. Instead of one sing-song vocalist with a guitar, you get an impressive lineup of instrumentalists playing an eclectic mix of western, bluegrass, Dixieland, rock 'n' roll and calypso tunes.

"I noticed that some children's albums are very simple, with instrumentation and song choices that are all very similar," Shumaker said.

He'll play some of the album's songs during a performance with Sodergren at Borders Books and Music in Oxnard on Saturday -- his first appearance to promote the CD.

Shumaker, who doesn't even mention his BBVD affiliation on the album, said he thinks the CD will appeal to the band's fans, who include all ages, from "toddlers to grandmas and grandpas.

"Our niche is that we're a swing band but we're also very family-oriented," he said, adding that most of the band's members are married with children.

The CD's swingin' title song, which Shumaker said is his favorite, is the most BBVD-like tune on the album.

"It's supposed to make you smile and want to dance around," Shumaker said.

At the photo shoot, Eva and Joe, after taking a break for goldfish crackers and to chase a grasshopper, smile as Dad begins to sing.

They're ready to dance.



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