

Raffi Cavoukian

For nearly four decades, children's troubadour and independent-label pioneer Raffi has been the world's best-selling and most influential children's entertainer, delighting successive generations of kids—and their parents—with his playful, exuberant personality and his irresistibly infectious songs. In addition to delivering numerous gold and platinum albums and performing countless sold-out concerts, Raffi has also emerged as a respected advocate on behalf of children, lending his voice, insight and experience to a number of crucial issues.

Love Bug, Raffi's first album of children's songs in twelve years, marks a welcome return for the artist. The effortlessly engaging 16-song collection embodies all of the qualities that have already established Raffi as a beloved and trusted icon for young listeners.

"I see this album as a celebration of the real world, in response to the digital overreach that now touches every aspect of our lives," Raffi says. "I think that these songs are rich in themes and styles and rhythms, but the main thing is that it's filled with joy. Essentially, this is an album about love in the real world. When I hear this album, I hear myself strong and smiling."

Raffi recorded much of *Love Bug* in his own living room, accompanied by an extended family of musicians whose talent and sensitivity on a wide range of instruments lends added warmth and uplift to the artist's new songs of love ("Love Bug," "Seeing the Heart"), nature ("In the Real World," "Blue White Planet"), play ("Free to Play," "To the Park"), chores ("Mama Loves It"), teamwork ("On Hockey Days"), social responsibility ("Magic Wand") and the need to slow down and catch one's breath amidst the accelerated pace of modern life ("Cool Down Reggae").

Other album highlights include Raffi's tributes to a pair of recently-departed heroes: folk-music iconoclast and children's-music pioneer Pete Seeger, whose spirit animates the upbeat instrumental "Pete's Banjo," and human-rights icon Nelson Mandela, whose achievements are celebrated on the poignant "Turn This World Around." Elsewhere on *Love Bug*, Raffi delivers a rollicking reading of the Woody Guthrie classic "This Land Is Your Land," *Love Bug*'s only non-original composition.

"I had a lot of fun putting the album together," Raffi notes, "and I put a lot of thought into assembling and sequencing this group of songs. It had been a while since I'd made an album, but once I felt that inner spark telling me that it was time for a new CD, I'm amazed at how smoothly it went."

Although *Love Bug* is his first children's album since 2002's *Let's Play*, Raffi has been remarkably active and productive over the past several years. He has devoted much of his time and energy to his vision of Child Honouring, an original holistic philosophy for creating a humane and sustainable world by addressing the universal needs of children and a unifying ethic for restoring human and natural communities. The philosophy's principles were outlined in the 2006 book *Child Honouring: How to Turn*

This World Around, a groundbreaking anthology which Raffi co-edited. *A Covenant for Honouring Children* has been widely circulated in child development, education, ecological economics and environmental health circles, and Raffi has given talks on the subject in settings as diverse as the New York Academy of Medicine, Parliament Hill in Ottawa, the World Bank, and Harvard University.

In 2013, after learning about the online extortion that led to the suicide of Vancouver teenager Amanda Todd, Raffi was inspired to write his widely acclaimed book *Lightweb/Darkweb: Three Reasons To Reform Social Media Before it Re-Forms Us*. The book addresses the myriad concerns posed by the internet in relation to young children's developmental needs.

"For me, to be a children's advocate in this day and age, and *not* comment on social media, I wouldn't be doing my job properly," Raffi states, adding, "I'm a tech enthusiast myself, and I've kept up with the times, in terms of how I record and the freedom that the online and digital worlds give me. But with all tech events, the challenge is to keep your humanity in the forefront.

"InfoTech is changing childhood and changing parenting, and parents are now raising children in two different worlds, the real world and the virtual world. Many parents don't understand that this tech isn't good for children in their early years. We adults are custodians of a real world that children growing up today may not know or remember. Zero to six is a formative time for children. What's forming is how it feels to be human, and we need to give those kids the chance for real-world textures and rhythms to be imprinted in their growing brains. So I think that the best thing I can do, coming out with a new CD at this time, is to add a fresh voice to that dialogue."

Raffi's commitment to treating his young fans with respect is an enduring thread that runs through his long and storied career. Born in Cairo, Egypt into an artistically inclined family of Armenian descent, Raffi Cavoukian moved with his family to Canada at the age of ten. By the mid-'70s, he was a young singer-songwriter performing in the folk clubs and coffeehouses of his adopted hometown of Toronto, when he was invited to sing for children in a classroom setting. Raffi's uncanny ability to connect with young listeners led to him launching his own label, Troubadour, and recording his first children's album, *Singable Songs For The Very Young*, in 1976 with borrowed funds and in Daniel Lanois' small basement recording studio.

Picked up for distribution by A&M, the album struck a responsive chord with children, parents and educators, setting in motion a career that would soon set records and break down boundaries, rescuing children's music from bargain-bin pricing and sub-par production values. Within a few months, Raffi was selling out theater-sized venues and winning widespread acclaim as a new kind of children's performer. A series of best-selling albums and concert DVDs—including such popular Gold and Platinum-selling titles as *Baby Beluga*, *Rise and Shine*, *Raffi's Christmas Album*, *One Light One Sun*, *Everything Grows*, *Bananaphone*, *Raffi Radio* and the all-star *Country Goes Raffi*, which found such noted country acts as Alison Krauss, Marty Stuart and Asleep At The Wheel

performing Raffi songs—followed, selling over 15 million copies in the U.S. and Canada. Meanwhile, his beautifully illustrated *Songs to Read* book series has sold more than three million copies.

As a longstanding advocate for a child's right to live free of commercial exploitation, Raffi has refused all commercial endorsement offers, and he has never directly advertised or marketed his music to children. He turned down a proposal to make a film based on his beloved classic "Baby Beluga" because the film and various related products would be marketed directly to children.

"I learned early on to have respect for the child as a whole person, and the word 'respect' has been the guiding core value throughout my entire career," he explains. "When you respect your audience, you don't exploit them, and that makes it easy to say no to commercial ventures that would not be respectful of the child. If you're clear about what your values are, then it doesn't take time to say no or yes."

In the 1980s, Raffi's growing awareness of pressing ecological issues influenced him to become an active and passionate advocate for environmental causes, and he has continued to address those concerns in numerous songs, most notably on his landmark 1990 album *Evergreen Everblue*, which earned praise from the United Nations and has been widely recognized as a valuable resource in environmental education for children.

In 1999, Raffi published *The Life of A Children's Troubadour*, a startlingly forthright autobiography that encompassed the artist's personal and professional experiences as well as the development of his philosophy. While remaining a passionate advocate for children, he expanded his creative horizons with a pair of adult-oriented albums: *Resisto* | *Dancing* in 2006 and *Communion* in 2009. In 2010, after many years of reflection and advocacy, Raffi founded the Centre for Child Honouring on Salt Spring Island in British Columbia.

A recipient of the Order of Canada and the United Nations' Earth Achievement Award, Raffi also holds four honorary degrees including Doctor of Music, from the University of Victoria, and Doctor of Letters, from the University of British Columbia. He is associated | with many NGOs, including the Center for Partnership Studies, the Darwin Project Council, and the Children's Environmental Health Center in New York.

Now, as millions of former kids who grew up with his songs—whom the artist has dubbed "Beluga grads"—sing those songs to their own children, Raffi is enjoying his current return to recording and live performance, with a series of eagerly awaited concerts throughout North America. And he promises that it won't be another twelve years before his next children's album.

"I'm having as much fun making music now as I ever have, and I want to record an album a year now, forever," he enthuses. "I'm feeling unrestrained and I'm really feeling the joy of it, and that's a nice feeling. The five-year-old in me is alive and well, and the class clown in me is having a great time."