



## Billy Jonas and his band bring ‘neo-tribal hootenanny’ to CL

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“It’s easy for people to be part of the music and to feel like the song has been part of their lives even if they’ve never heard it,” he said.

At a performance of Jonas and the Billy Jonas Band, the audience is invited to participate as Jonas combines conventional instruments of guitar, bass and marimba with homemade creations, such as buckets and barrels, keys and cans, bells and body percussion.

His three goals: to have fun, to make it easy and to sound good.

“Adults and kids are equally entertained,” Jonas said. “We look for the balance between asking them to be part of it and asking them to go along for the ride.”

Jonas performs throughout the country and Canada. His CD, “What Kind of Cat are You?!” has received multiple awards, including a First Place/Gold from the American Federation of Independent Musicians and Parent’s Choice Gold.

Growing up in Chicago, Jonas learned instruments, such as piano, guitar and trombone, at a young age.

But, he said, “The most joy I had was when I was with my friends playing rhythms in the kitchen on pots and pans.”

He and his friends would bang on the pans with chopsticks. In college, they turned the act into a band called “The Oberlin Big Bang Theory.” After college, Jonas began writing songs and playing them at coffeehouses.

He’d present them “raw,” using only a water bottle drum and his voice. He thought if they worked that way, he’d develop them into full-blown songs. But the response was so strong, he kept them that way.

Influenced by artists such as Joni Mitchell, Harry Partch, Jimi Hendrix, Igor Stravinsky and Pete Seeger, he developed his show over time.

He found joy in involving the audience as much as possible, giving audience members simple parts to perform.

Other performers, such as Dan Zanes, similarly cater to families, but none do so quite like Jonas.

“We’re the only ones that have this particular way of crafting an audience of spontaneous community in song, having them become part of it,” he said.

His “What Kind of Cat are You?!” song, for instance, asks the audience a series of questions that get harder as they go.

“What kind of cat hangs out in a house? A house cat.”

“What kind of cat lives in an alley? An alley cat.”

“What kind of cat throws stuff over the wall of a castle? A catapult.”

Taking the stage with a trio of performers – Ashley Jo Farmer on vocals and re-percussion; Sherman Hoover on vocals, bass, marimba and re-percussion; and Juan Holladay on vocals and re-percussion – Jonas stresses harmony above all else.

The show is described as having a big-tent festival quality, accessible to people of all ages.

“We encourage people to come with their minds and hearts wide open,” he said.

“If they don’t come that way, then we hope they’ll leave that way and also a little more connected to themselves, to their neighbors and to the world at large and to the universe. At least that’s our plan. That’s our agenda.”

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