



Moey and her groupies

Positioned on a platform between a sandbox and a jungle gym in Central Park, Melissa Levis watches as her fans trickle in. Her pink princess hat sparkles in the sunlight as her audience—standing about two feet tall and wielding pom-poms and maracas—gathers in front of her. Looking out over the rows of strollers parallel-parked along the playground’s perimeter, Levis smiles and begins to strum her glittered guitar. Moey’s Music Party has begun.

Levis, known to scores of pint-sized Manhattanites as Moey (her childhood nickname), is an award-winning songwriter turned “mommy rocker.” She began her career writing custom tunes for high-end birthday parties and other celebrations, then went on to write for an Off-Broadway production.

But the birth of her son, Monty, prompted Levis to take a break from the NYC performing arts scene. In fact, when Monty was a year old, Levis took a break from New York altogether, heading to her hometown of Manchester, Vermont for the summer. She volunteered to teach music for the local daycare, and while there, wrote a collection of songs for kids. Before long, she had gained small-town fame. Her local popularity won her a children’s program spot on the public access TV channel, where she first showcased her songs under the title “Moey’s Music Party.”

But transferring her newfound celebrity status to the Big Apple was not so easy. Upon returning to the city, Levis began teaching preschool music at places like Congregation Habonim, Gymtime Rhythm & Glues and York Avenue Preschool, where she taught 300 children per week. Today, she teaches at P.S. 158 and Imagine Early Learning Centers, channeling her students’ creativity through music. “I work in a lot of rhyme, drama, and movement to encourage self-express-

Moey TOWN

Part Auntie Mame, Part Mary Poppins And Part Maria Von Trapp, Melissa Levis (AKA “Moey”) Inspires Learning And Creativity Through Music

By Amanda Sakuma

sion,” she says. “My songs are like a coloring book—the structure and the form are there, and the children color them in.”

Levis also teaches mommy-and-me classes at fun venues. While most recently held at Big Daddy’s Diner, this fall the party moves to Gymboree Play & Music. Each week’s party is based on a different theme. At a recent “Pirate Party,” for example, tiny buccaneers toddled in a circle, clad in pirate hats, shaking silver and gold poms poms and singing songs like “Three Bottles of Juice on the Wall” and “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.” One-third of each party’s songs are tried-and-true “kiddie classics,” one-third are Levis’ original songs, and one-third are kid-friendly renditions of adult favorites—for the moms, of course. Levis also incorporates props into every party and performance.

Kids’ concerts are the other component of what has become a fulfilling, if unexpected, career for the “Pied Piper in Pink,” as Levis calls herself, referring to her trademark pink costumes complete with sequins, fringe and feathers. “I went from singing in the playgrounds of the rich and famous to just singing in the playgrounds,” she jokes.

This summer, she performed 17 free concerts in parks throughout the city, singing for over 4,000 kids. “I have two-year-old deadheads that come to every concert!” she laughs.

Levis now plans to market her music and her curriculum, called “Preschool Pop,” to early education centers in the city and beyond. “We’ve figured out the recipe for the special sauce, so now other people can do Moey’s Music Party—it doesn’t have to have Moey,” she says. She also hopes to one day start her own national television program.

For now, Levis has more than enough to keep her busy right here in the city she loves. After a concert-packed summer, Levis is fielding more performance requests than ever from daycare centers, schools and parents—Moey’s Music Party was even nominated for “Best Birthday Party” by GoCityKids.com. And despite how crazy her schedule becomes, Levis considers her work “an honor,” noting that children’s music has the power to define a generation of kids. “I feel like I’m more than entertaining them,” she says. “I’m helping to shape them in a really positive way.” ✨

For more info, visit moeymusicparty.com.