

### Music for a Shrinking World

For more than 25 years, Robbi K's concerts have been joyous and exhilarating, with a focus on amusing and edifying the entire family, from parents to grandparents, toddlers to teens. Everybody participates with voices, hands, feet and hearts.

Robbi K's powerful lyric soprano has graced TV commercials for the likes of Coca Cola, Lincoln Mercury, and GE, while onstage and in studios it has served her well in establishing an active career as a back-up singer for such superstars as Chaka Khan, Aretha Franklin, Jewel, Diana Ross, Rod Stewart, Daniel Rodriguez, Mary J. Blige, and Harry Belafonte. With these stars, Robbi has appeared on Oprah, 60 Minutes, Rosie, Live with Regis & Kathy Lee, The View, VH1 Storytellers, The Today Show, and The Late Show with David Letterman.

Robbi is married to Grammy-winning bassist Bakithi Kumalo, whose longstanding association with Paul Simon is a story unto itself. And together, Robbi and Bakithi move easily among the jazz, pop, blues and world music genres for young audiences either as a duo or with their world-class ensemble of musicians.

Robbi K presents a variety of lively, interactive musical and storytelling concerts for families including "Keep the Beat," which has been performed most recently at NYC's Symphony Space, The Philadelphia International Children's Festival; The Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall in Sarasota, Florida; The State Theatre in New Brunswick, New Jersey; and The Berks Jazz Festival. Robbi's most requested show, which plays in venues nationwide, is inspired by Paul Simon's Grammy winning *Graceland*. As a storyteller, "Turtle's Shell," derived from her Parents' Choice Award winning CD *Keep the Beat!* incorporates music and spoken word in an outstanding and unique manner. These days, she's performing a new live show based on her recent album, *Music Makes Me Happy*, with an emphasis on jazz, pop, and world music for children and their families.

A trained Lincoln Center for Aesthetic Education Teaching Artist, Robbi K has created a new kind of artistic presentation, which successfully combines music, theater, and culture with a worldview that makes a dramatic break from the Eurocentric norm. For years, she has been a major force in bringing a sense of the world community to children's musical theater. Robbi sings and speaks English, Spanish, French, German, and Italian. In addition she has developed a host of characters that incorporate a variety of accents, dialects and Zulu idioms in into her shows. Her award winning CDs for children attest to the fact that all children relate to great music and storytelling and that cultural differences are opportunities for sharing and celebration. Robbi K has released three children's CDs: *Set It Free*, *Keep the Beat!* (honored with a Parents' Choice Award), and most recently, *Music Makes Me Happy*, recipient of a 2007 Parents' Choice Silver Award.

Born in New York City, Robbi Hall Kumalo, grew up funny, dramatic, and completely stage-struck. Her family nickname was "Sarah" (as in Bernhardt), and responding to the eclectic mix of musical styles (from R&B to Chopin) played in her home, she wrote her first song, "A 'U' Monkey Face" – a tribute to her brother's funny face – at the age of three. Robbi's early years were filled with dance and piano lessons, singing in her church choir, and appearing in local musical productions.

When Robbi K's daughters were smaller, she began looking for outstanding children's music to share with them. What became evident was that, aside from the legendary Ella Jenkins, she couldn't find many other performers of color doing live, diverse and well-rounded children's music. Where were the role models for her girls and for millions of other kids? She says, "My desire is to offer music kids and their caregivers can really get involved with. Our children are a lot hipper and smarter than we give them credit for. Their music doesn't have to be pabulum or speak down to them. It can spark their minds as well as their hands and feet."

### 2008 References:

#### **State Theatre** New Brunswick, NJ

Lian Farrer, Vice President for Education (732)247-7200 lfarrer@statetheatrenj.org

#### **Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall** Sarasota, FL

Leslie Lacktman (941) 955-7676 leslie.Lacktman@sarasotagov.com

#### **Long Island Children's Museum** Garden City, NY

Jim Packard, Theatre Dir. (516) 224-5845 JPackard@licm.org

#### **Marlboro Twp. Public School District** Marlboro, NJ

Victoria Andalucia, Curriculum Supervisor/World Language (732)972-2000, x 2034

VAndalucia@marlboro.k12.nj.us

#### **Pequenakonck Elementary School** North Salem, NY

Mary Rubini, PTA Contact (845) 669-3037 mmrubini@comcast.net

#### **Oakwood Elementary School**, Orange, NJ

Annmarie D. Guenther, Educator (973)677-4000, x 3604 guenthan@mail.orange.k12.nj.us

#### **Westford Public Schools**, Westford, MA

Wendy Brown, Arts in Ed. contact 978-392-1407 wendycbrown@comcast.net

#### **Symphony Space/Celebrate Brooklyn**, NYC, NY

Darren Critz, Producer of Performing Arts Programs 212.864.1414, ext 247 darren.critz@symphonyspace.org