

UPBEAT

Teddy Bear Band Rocks for Kids

Richard Erickson, Local 30-73 (St. Paul-Minneapolis, MN), didn't know that holding a one-time concert to benefit early childhood development would turn into a lifetime gig, but it did more than 17 years ago. Erickson founded the Teddy Bear Band and has been entertaining children and parents at a variety of venues ever since.

The band incorporates guitars, keyboards, saxophones, and drums to perform an assortment of original songs the whole family can enjoy. With a core group of four members jumping around the stage while kids sing and dance with teddy bears, the band has become quite popular in the Minneapolis area. "We've been all over the continental US," says Erickson. "Our travels have taken us to Atlanta; Washington, DC; Toronto; Anaheim; Dallas; and Cleveland."

Erickson, a full-time professional musician, was approached to play for a concert that protested the proposed cutting of funding to early childhood development programs. "It was supposed to be a one-time only benefit concert," laughs Erickson. The band really clicked with kids. "We named it the Teddy Bear Band because a teddy bear was something that everyone could afford to have, whether it was a rag doll or a designer bear," he says. "We use the bears as an object of interaction, the whole thing is really about involving kids. When kids are comfortable participating, it does things for them mentally and psychologically that set them up for success."

The musicians recognize the positive effects music has on a child. "We all got started in music because of our basic love for music and how it makes us feel personally," says Erickson. "That's what motivates you and keeps you going as a musician. With the Teddy Bear Band, I have discovered that music can be used as a catalyst for a lot of wonderful purposes. Among them is encouraging children to par-

"Our music is palpable for adults," says Erickson. "There's something in our concerts for everyone and they like participating in our shows. All of us in the band are men and that makes it easier for dads to get involved. They see us grown men jumping around and having a good time and it makes them more apt to join their children in a fun day of singing and dancing."

Besides their performances at civic



The Teddy Bear Band performs for an enthusiastic audience.

ticipate. It's great that we use the child development knowledge we have to accomplish the desired result."

But the Teddy Bear Band isn't just about the kids throwing their bears in the air while dancing to the original tunes the band pumps out. Erickson says the beauty of the band is that the whole family can, and does, enjoy it.

events, fairs, and malls, the band travels to early childhood development conferences where they are keynote speakers. The band is also collaborating with the National Head Start Program and recently met with the National Institute of Media and the Family about possibly touring and doing conferences.