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## From SteveSongs To Mr. Steve

By Roger Catlin

After he graduated from Wesleyan University 15 years ago, Steve Roslonek traveled the country as a business consultant.

Any thoughts the Wethersfield resident had about becoming a performer died with the end of his days as part of the campus a cappella group the Wesleyan Spirits, or the group he got together during summers on Martha's Vineyard, the Vineyard Sounds.

It wasn't until his brother, a first-grade teacher in Boston, asked him to write some tunes for his class that he thought children's music might be a field for him.

"I had a blast connecting with my inner child," Roslonek says. Guided by an abiding love for the "Schoolhouse Rock," he wrote a number of simple, educational songs. And, he says, "on a whim, I played a couple of preschools and had an awesome experience doing that, too."

Now, after five albums, several national awards and thousands of shows, the performer known as **SteveSongs** advances to a higher platform as one of three on-air hosts for the new season of PBS Kids preschool shows starting this morning.

As befitting a schoolroom setting, alongside the returning Miss Lori and another new teacher, Miss Rosa, Roslonek will also have a slightly more formal name: Mr. Steve.

The connection with PBS "was an excellent timing kind of thing," Roslonek, 36, says from his Wethersfield home.

He was making new music videos for a home release being issued in August, he says.

"My agent was shopping those around about the same time PBS was looking to add teachers to their morning-block segment," he says.

At PBS headquarters, some people were familiar with his **SteveSongs** shows, having seen him in concert.

So he was hired to appear with the other teachers (and an animated guinea pig named Hooper) amid the two-hour morning block, seen locally from 8 to 10 a.m. on Connecticut Public Television, introducing segments and singing songs between showings of the shows "Curious George," "Super Why!" "Dragon Tales" and "Clifford the Big Red Dog."

In his brief segments, titled "Music Time with **SteveSongs** ," Roslonek doesn't exactly have time to do long versions of songs such as "Rhythm Safari" or "Stop, Look, Listen."

"Don't blink," he advises of his 90-second segments.

He has been enlisted to write one-minute songs that tie into the day's theme, from counting or rhyming to space or pets.

"For the recycling theme, I play a recycled instrument, the canjo," Roslonek says.

After years of playing to packed audiences, which he continues to do (playing a Middletown matinee this Saturday), it is a little odd to be playing to an even bigger audience through an empty studio, he says.

"When I do performances for 1,000 people, it helps to know how to connect with people in small group," he says. "Doing these segments for PBS is like thinking of the camera as one more kid, while representing maybe 100,000 kids at same time."

It's probably much more than that. The four shows he helps introduce have continuously ranked among the Top 10 shows for kids ages 2 to 5.

The goal is not to play for a complacent audience, he says.

"What we're trying to do with the music segment is to be really interactive," Roslonek says. "We're trying to motivate and inspire kids at home. The challenge is to write interesting songs that weren't too simple, that were interesting musically but simple enough so that the interaction easily followed."

Roslonek became a popular children's performer without the benefit of having kids of his own.

"When people asked if I had kids, I used to say, I had thousands of kids," he says.

But now that he and his wife, Lori, have a son, Josh, he has an audience for trying out songs.

Josh is only 6 months old, but "definitely likes music. He seems to like hearing me sing - unless he's humoring me," Roslonek says. "The thing he's not a fan of is hearing me practice or rewriting a song, which is the same thing over and over.

"He'll actually cover his ears."

PBS KIDS preschool block begins its third season today, locally on CPTV, Channel 24 at 8 a.m. **STEVESONGS** performs a benefit for the Green Street Arts scholarship fund Saturday at 3 p.m. at Wesleyan University's Crowl Concert Hall in Middletown. Information: 860-685-3355 or [www.wesleyan.edu/boxoffice](http://www.wesleyan.edu/boxoffice).