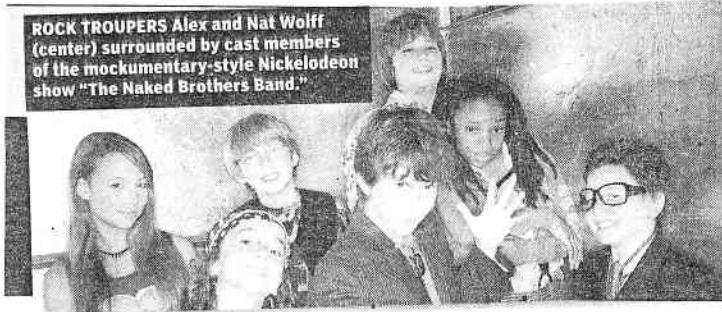


ROCK TROUPERS Alex and Nat Wolff (center) surrounded by cast members of the mockumentary-style Nickelodeon show "The Naked Brothers Band."



# TINY TUNES HIT BIG

The new music on kids' shows is snappy, not sappy BY MICHAEL GILTZ

**B**arney is dead. Or at least, the sappy, simplistic, mind-numbing sing-alongs that the purple dinosaur popularized are dead. With the cool music airing on kids TV shows all over the dial, "This Old Man" just won't cut it anymore.

On "The Naked Brothers Band," debuting Jan. 27 at 8 p.m. on Nickelodeon, Nat and Alex Wolff play preteen rock stars in a mockumentary show with the improv feel of a Christopher Guest film.

In real life, Nat has been writing songs since he was 5 (he's all of 12 now), and he and Alex just spent a few days in the studio recording nine of his tunes.

Meanwhile, on "Jack's Big Music Show," airing Saturdays at noon on Noggin, puppets interact with people in a mashup of every musical style imaginable, from doo-wop to pop to rock with guests ranging from Lisa Loeb to members of the Flaming Lips. Even Jon Stewart stops by this season.

And on "Johnny and the Sprites" (Saturdays at 10 a.m. on the Disney Channel), John Tartaglia works on his music while playing with his friends the Sprites and singing songs by Broadway talent like Stephen Schwartz ("Wicked") and the gang behind "Avenue Q."

The "Naked Brothers" show is a family affair: Nat Wolff co-stars with his brother, sister, friends and dad (jazz musician Michael Wolff), and it's a great example of kids delivering "adult"-style music.

"I've been getting into a little Joni Mitchell," says Nat, who was inspired by her classic album "Blue" to consider a concept album built around Hawaii. The result? His song "Banana Smoothie."

Meanwhile, adults like Laurie Berkner go the other way: She's a regular on "Jack's Big Music Show" and a kids' music superstar who's already sold out two shows at Town Hall in March. Berkner

says the current state of kids music is even better than when "Sesame Street" and "Schoolhouse Rock" were cool.

"There's so much more of it and so many people who have gained the respect of the music industry and their fans," says Berkner. "There is so much crossover in every direction."

Indeed, her songs have been heard on "Sex and the City" and plugged by Starbucks, and bands like They Might Be Giants and artists like Stephen Merritt of Magnetic Fields think nothing of alternating "adult" albums with music geared toward kids. And music is integral to shows like "SpongeBob SquarePants" (which has spawned soundtracks) and Noggin's "The Wonder Pets," which draws on Gilbert & Sullivan-type music for its sound.

"I love feeling like I'm reaching people my own age as well as the kids," says Berkner, who began in the adult music world and doesn't see much difference between them anymore. "I'd probably be a better adult songwriter than I used to be because of my writing for kids."

For Nat, playing a rock star in a TV show with his pals is as cool as it gets—even if going to school means he has to put off going on tour. His dream now is to follow in the path of Drake Bell, another Nick alum who played a song-writing kid on "Drake & Josh," and just released his major-label debut on Motown.

"We have Drake's album 'It's Only Time,' it's awesome," says Nat. "My brother listens to it almost every hour of the day. I don't even think he sleeps." ♦

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AVENUE CUTE Broadway vet John Tartaglia with his pals on Disney's "Johnny and the Sprites" Photo by Larry Riley



TOT'S ENTERTAINMENT Laurie Berkner of "Jack's Big Music Show" started in adult music. Photo by David Handschuh/Daily News