

## CULTURE SHLOCK

# Break on through to the author side

It's pretty clear that, in most ways, kids today have it better than previous generations, what with advances like the Internet, cell phones, DVD players in the car, and the frequent discovery of new body parts to pierce.

Another advantage kids today enjoy is the abundance of books written specifically for early readers. Not too long ago the options were more limited, consisting mostly of the widely read "Dick and Jane" books, which included riveting passages like:

*See Dick run. See Jane run. See Spot run. Run, Dick, run. Run, Jane, run. Run, Spot, run.*

These books were mostly remarkable for managing to come across as deathly boring even to children who could easily spend 20 minutes exploring the contents of a single nostril.

But today the children's book options are nearly limitless, even for the youngest kids. Quantity does not necessarily mean quality, however. In fact, thumbing through many children's books on the market today, you may be struck by the notion that writing one of these books is easy, that anyone could do it, even you.

Well, you might think that, but you know what the truth is? The truth is that you're right — writing a children's book is easy. How do I know? Because so many celebrities have done it. It turns out that authoring children's books is the preferred outlet for famous people who aren't that busy but are too old to release a sex tape. Today the ranks of celebrity children's book authors include actors (Whoopi Goldberg, Billy Crystal, Brooke Shields), singers (Madonna, Tim McGraw), athletes (Peyton Manning, Tiki Barber), and other random famous people (Sarah Ferguson, Kathie Lee Gifford). At this rate, it's only a matter of time before we hear of a new children's book written by the cast of "Jersey Shore" (possible titles: "Make Way For Drinking"; "Good Fight, Moon"; "Where The Wild Thongs Are").

This kind of writing is also easy because readers have been trained not to expect children's stories to make any sense. Take, for example, "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." Remember how the story begins with Mama, Papa and Baby Bear going for a walk while their bowls of hot porridge cool off? But when Goldilocks arrives, Papa Bear's porridge is still too hot, Mama Bear's is too cold and Baby Bear's has been turned into green eggs and ham. Wait, that's a different story. No, Baby Bear's porridge is, in fact, "just right." Three different bowls of porridge cooling at three different rates. Apparently the laws of thermodynamics aren't enforced so strictly in the Bear family kitchen.

Then there's the story of Cinderella. At the 12th stroke of midnight, the fairy godmother's magic wears off, and Cinderella's horses go back to being mice, the coach becomes a pumpkin again and her magnificent gown is transformed back into rags. But lo and behold, the glass slipper somehow remains intact! How did that happen? It's never made clear, but apparently it doesn't serve the story well to have Prince Charming tromping all over the countryside with a pungent, hole-riddled flat.

Adding to the confusion, many children's book authors write stories featuring animals who are otherwise just like people in that they talk, wear clothes, hold down jobs, complain about the government, etc. So, for example, you might read a children's story about a mail carrier named Mr. Fox (note: animals in children's stories are almost always named for the kind of animal they are. That's another thing that makes writing children's books so easy). Stopping along his route, Mr. Fox might stop at Mr. Duck's house, deliver the mail and wave hello. Whereas a real fox mail carrier would viciously attack Mr. Duck and tear him to shreds, regardless of the disciplinary consequences he might face back at the main post office.

But the children's books with the most confusing animal occupation would have to be Richard Scarry's "Busytown" series, which on more than one occasion depicts an apron-wearing pig working as — why not? — a butcher, who is at times even shown busily chopping up bacon and sausages. I mean, I know it's a tough employment market out there, Mr. Pig, but there must be *some* other job out there for you.

So there you have it, the perfect recipe for a children's book — a bunch of animals acting strangely and a plot that doesn't make much sense. But to guarantee interest from a publisher, you should probably get a celebrity to co-author — maybe Snooki from "Jersey Shore."

Readers may e-mail additional tips for children's book authors to Malcolm at [Malcolm@CultureShlock.com](mailto:Malcolm@CultureShlock.com).

BY PAUL FREEMAN  
For The Daily News

Jayne Stone journeyed to Africa to find the roots of his instrument — the banjo. His music is without creative or geographic boundaries.

"The banjo came from West Africa on slave ships in the 1700s and 1800s," Stone said. "Minstrel-style banjo was the first white adaptation of African-American styles that came from Africa and were immediately watered down to some degree and blended with music from the British Isles and Ireland, fiddle tunes and all that.

"It was very interesting hybrid stuff. But I'd put on an African record, and there'd be so much more going on than the strings that you hear in old-time bluegrass music and that kind of thing. So I was really curious to try and play with African musicians on their own turf."

Stone and Yacouba Sissoko will present a free concert on Sunday as part of Redwood City's monthly Cultural Performances series. Sissoko plays the Malian kora, a 21-string, West African form of harp.

In describing the kora, Stone said, "There's this ringing resonance that's really beautiful. It's played with four fingers and two, three or four melodies are sometimes played on it at the same time. So it's almost like a tiny orchestra. And the music is polyrhythmic. So it's a complex instrument."

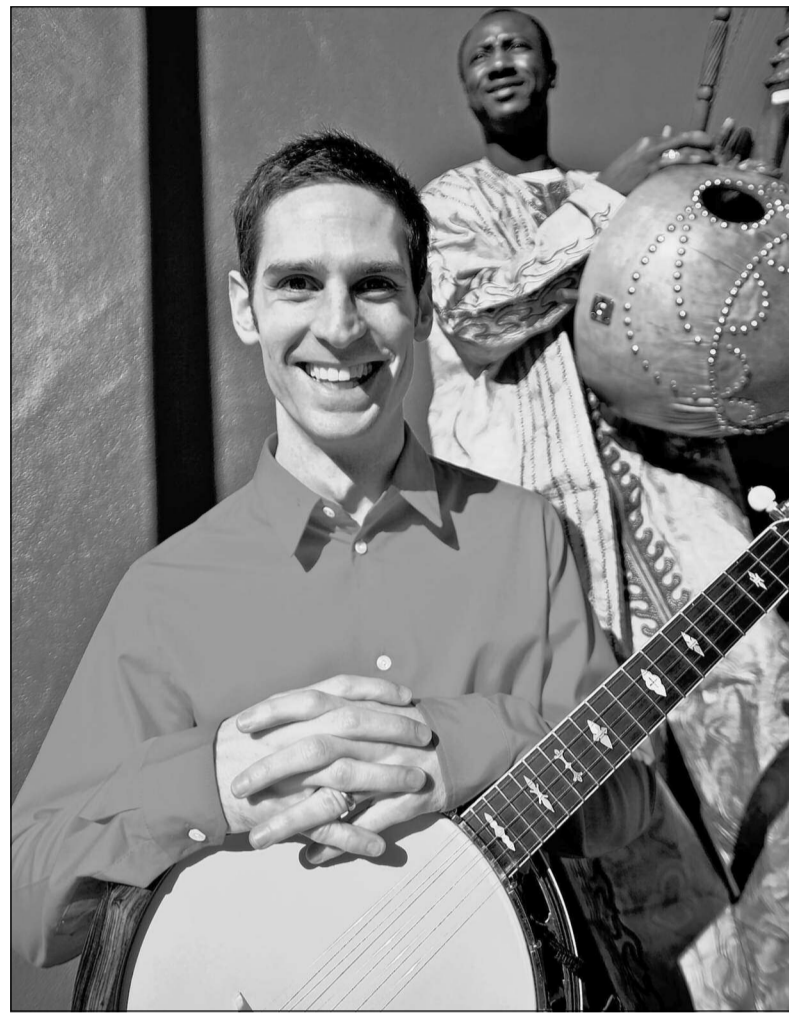
Joining Stone and Sissoko will be bassist Brandi Disterheft and percussionist Jim Santi Owen. The quartet will perform the unique and fascinating material from Stone's latest album, "Africa To Appalachia." It won Canada's 2009 Juno Award for World Music Album of the Year.

For Stone, who had fallen in love with African music years before, venturing to that continent was a huge learning experience. Visiting Mali was particularly significant.

"It seemed like whenever there was some African music that really bowled me over, it was always from Mali. I didn't know why, but that was the particular musical tradition that really spoke to me.

"There's so much amazing music in Africa, and West Africa particularly. With the Malian stuff, there's a melodic sensibility that I gravitated towards. The music is kept through family tradition. You have people that come from, literally, 70 generations sometimes, of playing the same instrument or singing. So you have people who, from the time they emerge into the world, know that they're going to be musicians and storytellers. An amazing training ground. The culture values passing it along."

Stone hails from Toronto. He played guitar as a youth, but switched to banjo at 16, after hearing the adventurous styles of Bela Fleck and Tony Trishka. "They were my heroes, starting out. There may still be, in the popular consciousness, people who associate the banjo solely with hillbilly music. But it had been



Banjo player Jayme Stone traveled to West Africa to get the goods on his chosen instrument. He performs in Redwood City on Sunday.

Photo by Amanda Kowalski

## MUSIC PREVIEW

**WHAT:** Jayme Stone and Yacouba Sissoko  
**WHERE:** Courthouse Square, 2200 Broadway, Redwood City  
**WHEN:** 6 p.m., Sunday  
**Admission:** Free  
**INFORMATION:** 650-780-7340 or [www.redwoodcity.org/events](http://www.redwoodcity.org/events)

proven to me, before I even picked up the banjo, that you could play any kind of music on it, and that it's an incredibly flexible and creative instrument. So my approach with the banjo has always been that anything is possible. And you can be as musical as you're able to be, as a musician.

"The banjo really resonated with me when I heard it, just something about the way melody gets made on it. And it's kind of a quirky thing. It just struck me like a bolt of lightning, right at the time I was having a musical awakening. I realized I could do anything I ever wanted to do musically on the banjo. So I put all my energy into that."

Stone didn't begin his banjo playing with

simple numbers. He tried to emulate music he had heard at a concert of traditional compositions from India. Then he transcribed music from an Egyptian oud player. A few years later, he discovered guitar players from Mali and tried to transpose it to banjo. All the while, he was learning old-time bluegrass tunes and more modern material, as well.

"For me, there was no linear progression that I ought to start with," Stone said. "It just all happened simultaneously."

Now a resident of Boulder, Colo., Stone, 32, is in the middle of producing an album of Bela Bartok compositions and is completing an album of his own based on folk dances from around the world.

"I'm always interested in pushing my own boundaries and pushing my conception of how to play the banjo. I just find it really satisfying, being musically engaged in a lot of different ways and getting to play with so many different, incredible musicians.

"I'm learning from them all the time. That, to me, is exciting. I don't like standing still."

E-mail Paul Freeman at [paul@popcultureclassics.com](mailto:paul@popcultureclassics.com).

## Things to do

### ART

**Watercolors by Andy Muonio.** Community School of Music and Arts, Mohr Gallery, Finn Center, 230 San Antonio Circle, Mountain View. Through Sept. 20. Reception 6 p.m. Friday. Free. 650-917-6800, ext. 306, or [www.arts4all.org](http://www.arts4all.org)

**Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University.** Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas; through Jan. 2, 2011. William Trost Richards — True to Nature: Drawings, Watercolors, and Oil Sketches; through Sept. 26. 650-723-4177 or <http://museum.stanford.edu>

**"Color • Delight: Acrylic & Watercolor."** Works by Vickie W. Chiang and Peggy Kang. Foster City Art Gallery, 650 Shell Blvd., Foster City. Monday-Saturday, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Closes Sunday. 650-286-3380.

**Sculpture:** Leon Kortenkamp and Ellen Lowenstein exhibition in the Rotunda Gallery. Through Oct. 31. Free. 555 County Center, Redwood City. 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Mondays-Fridays. 650-594-1577.

**The San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art.** "Exposed: Today's Photography/Yesterday's Technology — 15 photographic artists using centuries-old technology." "Captured: Photography's Early Adopter — original professional and personal photos dated from 1839-1911." "Reconstructing Memories — unrelated images are digitally manipulated to create

unlikely combinations within photographs." Through Sept. 17. Open seven days. Free. 560 S. First St., San Jose. 408-283-8155.

### BOOKS

**Deborah Grabien.** "London Calling." 2 p.m. Saturday. "M" is For Mystery, 86 E. 3rd Ave., San Mateo. 650-401-8077 or [www.mformystery.com](http://www.mformystery.com).

**Kepler's Books.** Mary Roach, "Packing for Mars: The Curious Science of Life in the Void," 7 p.m. Monday. "Mockingjay" release party with pizza, 6:30 p.m. Tuesday (author Suzanne Collins to appear at Kepler's on Nov. 3). Brad Herzog, "Turn Left at the Trojan Horse: A Would-Be Hero's American Odyssey," 7 p.m. Aug. 30. Kepler's Books, 1010 El Camino Real, Menlo Park. 650-324-4321 or [www.keplers.com](http://www.keplers.com)

### DANCE

**Ballet Audition for Underprivileged Children.** Western Ballet. Girls 6-10 years old and boys 6-12 years old are invited to audition for the Nina Novak Ballet Scholarships for underprivileged children. Scholarship recipients will enter Western Ballet's outstanding children's and pre-professional programs. Attire: Shorts to mid-thigh and tank top. Scholarship requirements: proof of family income and a signed parental commitment to bring the child to classes. Aug. 28, 1 p.m. Western Ballet Company and School, 914 N. Rengstorff Ave., Unit A, Mountain View. Free. 650-

968-4455. [www.westernballet.org/youthprogram/novak\\_scholarships.html](http://www.westernballet.org/youthprogram/novak_scholarships.html)

### MUSIC

Organist Steve Cram. Classical program. Cram will be playing a 1918 Wicks pipe organ, with many additions, restored and maintained by Gary Brandenburg. 7:30 p.m. Friday. Congregational Church of Belmont, 751 Alameda de las Pulgas, Belmont. \$10. 650-593-4547 or [www.ucclbmont.org](http://www.ucclbmont.org).

**Stan Erhart Band, including Michael Warren, Nancy Wright, Damon Hope and Richard Palmer.** 8 p.m. Friday. Nick's Restaurant, 100 Rockaway Beach Ave., Pacifica. [www.nicksrestaurant.net](http://www.nicksrestaurant.net)

**John Blues Boyd and Friends.** 5:30 p.m. Saturday. British Bankers Club, 1090 El Camino Real, Menlo Park. No cover. 650-327-8769.

**Jayne Stone & Yacouba Sissoko — African to Appalachia.** Cultural Performance Series. 6 p.m. Sunday. Courthouse Square 2200 Broadway, Redwood City. Free. 650-780-7340 or [www.redwoodcity.org/events/cultural\\_performances.html](http://www.redwoodcity.org/events/cultural_performances.html)

**Orquesta d'Soul and Chelle & Friends.** Hidden Villa End of Summer Concert. 5:30 p.m. Aug. 29. Bring a picnic and lawn chair/blanket. Parking at Foothill College; \$10 per car; shuttle bus service to Hidden Villa begins at 4 p.m. Advanced registration required: 650-949-9704 or [www.hiddenvilla.org](http://www.hiddenvilla.org). Hidden Villa, 26870 Moody

Road, Los Altos Hills.

### THEATER

**TheatreWorks 2010 New Works Festival.** Through Sunday. Readings of musicals — "Red Clay," book and lyrics by Jeff Hughes, music by Scott Ethier, directed by Daniella Topol; 7 p.m. Sunday. Readings of plays — "Variations On a Theme," by Anna Ziegler, directed by Meredith McDonough; 8 p.m. today, 2 p.m. Saturday. Developmental production of a musical — "Fly by Night," conceived by Kim Rosenstock, written by Will Connolly, Michael Mitnick, and Kim Rosenstock; 8 p.m. Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday. Extras — Festival: Unplugged, Songs in the Key of New, 8 p.m. Friday cabaret concert featuring festival composers, performers, and special guests share a wealth of new songs and treasured favorites (Not included as part of the Festival All-Pass). TheatreWorks at Lucie Stern Theatre, 1355 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto. \$15-\$75. 650-463-1960 or [www.theatreworks.org](http://www.theatreworks.org).

**"Menopause The Musical."** Through Sunday, California Theatre, 345 S. First St., San Jose. \$29.50-\$49. 408-792-4111 or [www.sjtx.com](http://www.sjtx.com). Also, Wednesday-Aug. 27, Herbst Theatre, 401 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco. \$29.50-\$49. 415-392-4400 or [www.CityBoxOffice.com](http://www.CityBoxOffice.com)

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