

VOICES



EDITED BY ERIC FISHER
efisher@metro-philly.com

MY VIEW

BY SCOTT PRUDEN
letters@metro-philly.com

Putting a little soul in baby's little soul

All parents want to do the little things they hope will make their kids smarter. The hip thing recently was playing Mozart for your tyke, hoping that a little of the kid-genius mojo would rub off on junior. I never bought that, but I always agreed that a little music, particularly by someone generally regarded as a genius, couldn't hurt.

That's why, in addition to my wife and I playing Bach, Beethoven and Mozart for our infant son, Andrew, I threw in my own personal wild card: James Brown.

Lots of folks looked at me funny when I started saying that I'd lay some J.B. on the boy before he was even born. But there was logic there, and when I related my plans to several former co-workers who seemed to question my logic, another piped in with the perfect summation: "He wants the kid to be smart *and* funky."

That was it in a nutshell. If a little Wolfgang Amadeus could potentially help little Andrew do better in higher math, then I figured a little Godfather of Soul would make certain he'd at least be able to get down.

Fortunately, Andrew showed early signs of aptitude. At a Paul Green School of Rock Music show at the Trocadero

three days before he was born, he was already jamming in utero. The music — ranging from AC/DC to David Bowie and the Beatles — would start, and he would shake his little unborn booty. When the music stopped, so did he. I took that as a good sign that I might be on to something.

Despite the stereotype (thank you "Frasier" and "Friends"), not all white folks are rhythm-challenged, uptight Michael Bolton-listening B101 devotees. I'm not trying to breed my own little Andre 3000, but the kid's got to have the basis to decide that Aretha beats Britney and Christina every time and that Otis Redding and Marvin Gaye sound better from the grave than an entire raft-load of today's R&B singers and rappers have during any moment of their earthly existence.

It's not limited to James Brown, of course. I'm trying to give Andrew a full taste of the diversity that could build his musical taste. After all, I cut my teeth on my dad's old Four Seasons records, and (Lord help me) ABBA, The Carpenters and John Denver before a friend handed me a Beatles record and said, "That's OK, but listen to this."

But even those artists, as unhip as they were, positively affected my taste by teaching me about layered harmonies, lush production and rootsy twang. Even though a music hipster would look down his nose at my musical foundation, it gave me an initial interest in music and ample room for my taste to grow.

My son, I know, will develop his own taste that might clash with mine. As such, I will refuse to crush any progress he might make in the direction of whatever I find objectionable 16 years from now.

I will, however, be there to get him off on the good foot, as it were — to gently guide, to suggest, to pull the obsolete disc of vinyl or the dusty CD from the shelf, hand it to him and say, "That's OK, but listen to this."

I'm not trying to breed my own little Andre 3000, but the kid's got to have the basis to decide that Aretha beats Britney and Christina every time.



SCOTT PRUDEN is a freelance writer and columnist.