

On music

By [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [July 28, 2009](#) issue

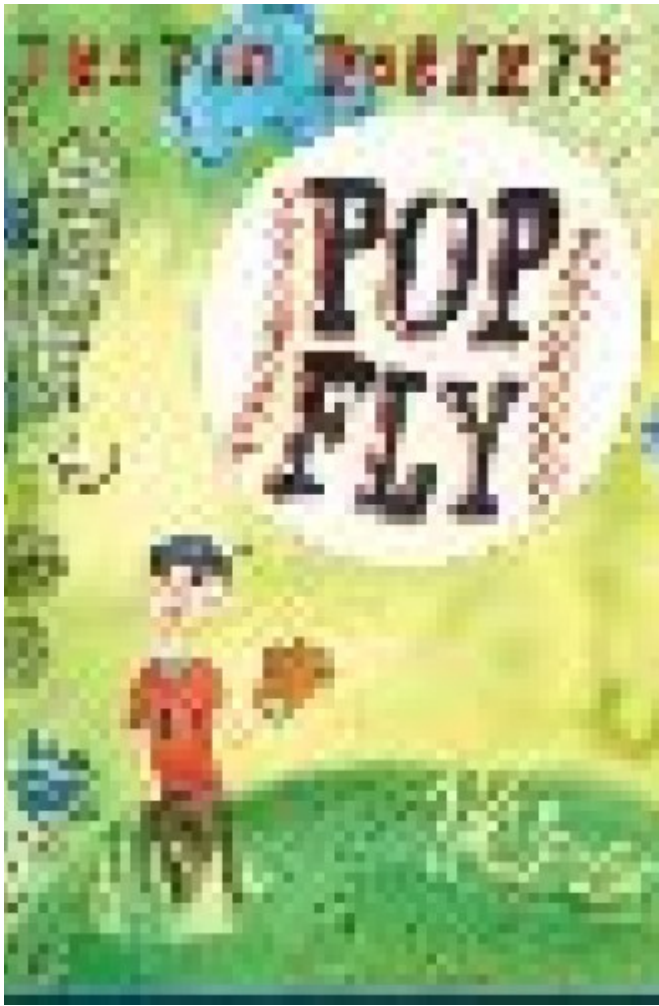
In Review



You Are My Little Bird

Elizabeth Mitchell

Smithsonian Folkways



Pop Fly

Justin Roberts
Carpet Square



Mellow Fever

Gustafers Yellowgold

Apple-Eye



Corazón Alegre-Happy Heart

Tricia Sebastian
self-released



Emphatical Piratical

Captain Bogg and Salty
Scabbydisc



Soulville

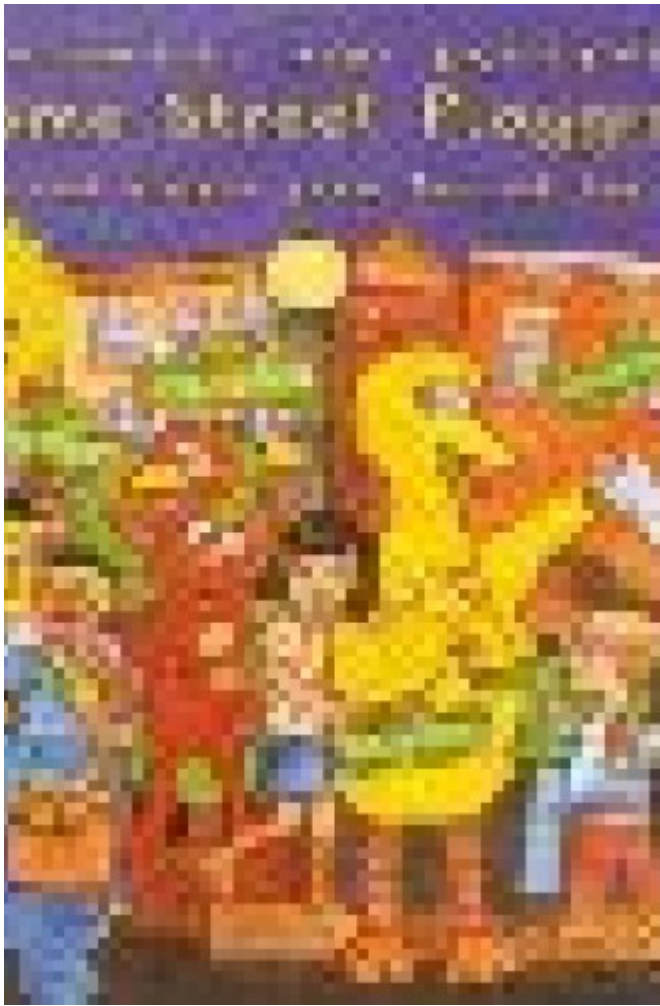
Little Monsters

Mri Associated



Dog Train: A Wild Ride on the Rock-and-Roll Side

Sandra Boynton
Workman



Sesame Street Playground

various artists

Putumayo



Big Round World

Trout Fishing in America

Trout



A Frog Named Sam

Ben Rudnick and Friends
Bartlett Ave.

Back before pop diva Lisa Loeb became a household name, she and Elizabeth Mitchell performed together at Brown University. While Mitchell didn't achieve Loeb's fame, she possesses no less talent—and on her album for children, *You Are My Little Bird* (Smithsonian Folk ways), she demonstrates how the simplest music-making can be the most moving.

On "Little Liza Jane," backed just by hand-clapping, Mitchell lifts up her soft voice in a way that will charm the crabbiest tot. Grown-up lovers of folk music will find Mitchell hard to resist too. "Who's My Pretty Baby" splashes just the right amount of slapback electric guitar atop Mitchell's gossamer vocal. Part of the Smithsonian Folkways project, *Bird* honors American roots music without seeming like a dusty,

academic exercise.

More of my favorite albums for children:

Roberts rules the children's-rock roost like a cheeky John Lennon. The infectious title track, which mixes ska horns and dreamy interludes, tells of a kid afraid to catch a baseball that comes his way.

Gustafer's fans include hip bands Wilco and the Polyphonic Spree; his acoustic songs recall the 1970s soft-rock group Bread. Created by illustrator and musician Morgan Taylor, Gustafer is a pointy-headed yellow character who comes from the sun.

Chicagoan Sebastian honed her chops in folk styles—including huapango, bolero, ranchera and polka—while traveling and playing in Mexico and Spain. Her bilingual canciones will transport you to places where the weather's always warm and inviting.

You can't beat pirates as a kids theme, and Captain Bogg's mates pull out all the silly sea-shanty stops. The title tune steals the famed French cancan melody and adds heavy-metal guitars—a goofy mix that puts the jolly in Jolly Roger.

These faithful covers of funk, soul and R&B hits such as "Lean on Me," "ABC" and "Mustang Sally" include singing kids—which will get your kids singing, too.

The woman behind those lovably goofy animal greeting cards somehow landed both Alison Krauss and British invasion hero Billy J. Kramer for this album—and persuaded actress Kate Winslet to duet with Weird Al Yankovic.

Big Bird and friends get the world-music treatment from performers in the Netherlands, South Africa and India. The result sounds exotic in style but familiar in content.

Before kids' music was trendy, Ezra Idlet and Keith Grimwood paved the way with this mix of nutty and serious acoustic songs. "Curse of the Spinach" tries to redeem a reviled vegetable, while "I Don't Care" celebrates a kid's joys in straight-up bluegrass style.

Like the best pop music, the songs on *Frog* hop along, short and sweet. The music brandishes tight harmonies and rustic instruments.