

# dan zanes

## biography

**Here are two things you should know right off about Dan Zanes**, two things that set him apart from the huge and festive field of people who have in the past few years begun making music for families and people of all ages in a way that is, frankly, changing the face of America, or the sound of it, at least. First, he is making homemade family music and encouraging similar behaviors in friends and neighbors. Second, he is the guy who is always interested in singing along with people, people everywhere. Which brings us to his mission, if you can call it a mission: Dan is introducing his musical friends to his neighborhood friends and then showing everybody not just that they, yes, can play together but that they can also feel pretty good while doing so. In this sense, Dan is a Twenty-first Century version of the guy who in the old days used conduct the town band from the gazebo, though in lieu of a gazebo he's playing places like Carnegie Hall and The Melbourne International Arts Festival, where no matter how you say it good music is good. He is a ringmaster, introducing new songs and reconnecting people to songs that have always been there, and still are—it's just that people forgot about them.

Take, for example, Dan Zanes and Friends' "**Catch That Train!**" the 2007 Grammy Award winner for Best Musical Album for Children (co-released with Starbucks/Hear Music). It is the one CD in America today that brings together the Kronos Quartet, the Blind Boys of Alabama, Father Goose, Dan's mother-in-law, and the children of South Africa's Agape Orphanage to sing Zulu folk songs, an old labor organizing tune, a song about the joys of farming the English countryside, and of course a few train songs—all in an instrumental mix that highlights cuatros and lap steels and does not in any way discourage the use of trombone.

Dan's latest recording project is "**¡Nueva York!**" or what he is often heard calling his "pro-immigration CD." While the debate about who is eligible to live in the United States rages on, Dan has been having a rocking time with new musical friends from the Latino world, celebrating some of the vibrant culture that comes with immigration. The result: a collection of songs from Puerto Rico, Mexico, Colombia, the Dominican Republic and other parts of the Spanish-speaking Americas which will be released in Spring 2008.

Keeping things all in the family, Dan also spent some time in 2007 with bandmate Father Goose (aka Wayne Rhoden) and longtime recording ally Rob Friedman co-producing "**It's a Bam Bam Diddly!**"—a musical memoir of sorts, sounding very much like the most incredible block party stretching from Jamaica to Brooklyn and spilling out into neighborhoods around the globe, filled with Caribbean flavors and a cavalcade of great guests including Sister Carol, Sheryl Crow, Wayne Smith, Ansel Meditation, and Dan himself.

Lately, Dan has been spending his spare time with Spanish Dictionaries listening to salsa or merengue or norteño or anything along those lines; writing songs for films (and even making a cameo appearance here and there), developing on a children's musical television show for Playhouse Disney (Disney Channel), and brushing up on Broadway tunes as his next recording project takes shape.

For the record, Dan Zanes was born in Exeter, New Hampshire in 1961. He was a member of the Del Fuegos from the beginning to the end of the eighties, and with them made "**The Longest Day**" (1984), "**Boston, Mass**" (1985), "**Stand Up**" (1987), "**Smoking in the Fields**" (1989), and the hit single, "**Don't Run Wild**." In 1994, he released a solo CD, "**Cool Down Time**," shortly after which he moved to Brooklyn, N.Y. with his wife and daughter, where he then released "**Rocket Ship Beach**" (2000), an immediate hit with families around America, as well as with the *New York Times Magazine*, which said, "Zanes kids music works because it is not kids music; it's just music—music that's unsanitized, unpasteurized, that's organic even." His next CD, "**Family Dance**" (2001) was comprised of songs that are difficult not to dance to, and feature Loudon Wainwright III and Roseanne Cash and a lot of dancing that you can't actually see but you can imagine. Next in the Festival Five family series came "**Night**

**Time!** (2002)—featuring collaborations with Aimee Mann and Lou Reed—followed by the Grammy nominated **“House Party”** (2003), a rambunctious twenty-song collection that includes Deborah Harry, Bob Weir, and Philip Glass, as well as the Rubi Theater Company and Rankin Don (a.k.a Father Goose). **“Sea Music,”** a collection of maritime songs that was the first CD in the Festival Five Folk Series, and was cited in *Rolling Stone’s* Hot Issue in the category of Hot Maritime Sounds. The next CD in the Folk Series—**“Parades and Panoramas: 25 Songs Collected by Carl Sandburg for The American Songbag”**—is the disk on which Dan’s scruffy troupe of musicians dragged the poet’s 1927 collection of songs kicking and screaming into this century, with traditional instruments, with tuba-driven electric guitars, with whatever it takes. And, while no one was looking Dan co-authored two picture book collaborations with the artist Donald Saaf **Jump Up!** and **Hello Hello** (Little, Brown and Company Books), and appeared in the Dan Zanes and Friends concert DVD, entitled **“All Around the Kitchen!”** (2005) recorded at the Knitting Factory, in New York City.