

Jazz Vocalist Teaches Scat Style

**By Mark Anderson
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NEW BUFFALO, Mich. -- Jenna Mammina, the well-known jazz vocalist who's been captivating listeners from coast to coast and is a rising star in jazz circles, also likes to teach.

So the southwestern Michigan native who performs 250 dates a year has added a new program for children and teens to her schedule. Known as Scat for CatsSM, the program was created by Jenna within the last year to teach scat singing to kids.

With the help of Liz Andrews of the Berrien County Intermediate School District (BCISD), Jenna brought the program to southwest Michigan schools, including a session with young pupils on Dec. 5, 2001, in the New Buffalo Performing Arts Center in the new middle-high school.

During the same week, she also visited elementary, middle and high school students in the same region at the River Valley Public Schools, a Montessori school in Benton Harbor, Hull Elementary, McCord Renaissance Center in the Benton Harbor public school system, and at a Stevensville parochial school. The program is popular with kids across the nation. With Jenna having made stops in Jenna's home state of California, as well as Ohio, Oregon, New York, Illinois, and elsewhere to teach Scat for CatsSM.

In New Buffalo and at the other nearby schools, she conducted nine sessions in three days, and the kids enjoyed the sessions, during which her faithful guitarist Andre Bush added his fluid style to support the instruction.

Her brother, Mitch, who heads Mamma Grace Records -- the label that publishes the vocalist's popular CDs -- observed that Scat for CatsSM helps cure stage fright, or what some may call "mic fright."

"A lot of these children have never had a mike in their hand before," he observed, adding that through Jenna's encouragement, the kids soon lose their fear and become eager to grab the mic and sing.

The idea behind Scat for CatsSM, according to Jenna, is to show students that their voices and body movements are the only instruments they need. Using her warm and engaging personality, Jenna, a former teacher, uses a blend of call and response techniques to help kids get familiar with their own unique voices. Whether imitating a horn, clarinet or snare drum, snapping their fingers or stomping their feet, kids learn to use their whole bodies to make music.

"It's a way to be creative on a lot of different levels," Jenna said in a recent interview with the Harbor Country News.

Jenna combines Scat for CatsSM instruction with her performances. While in New Buffalo, she performed with Bush and noted bassist Michael Arnopol, and brother Tony Mammina in a Dec. 8 concert in the Performing Arts Center. The concert, a benefit for the Coast Cares for Kids Endowment created by the Berrien Community Foundation in St. Joseph, Mich., was well-received. The concert hall was packed and many enjoyed a festive afterglow at Timothy's restaurant in Union Pier's Gordon Beach Inn.

Hugh Davis of the BCISD filmed Scat for CatsSM sessions in southwest Michigan, as well as the New Buffalo concert. He'll provide Scat for CatsSM footage for a new website, ScatforCats.com, which will promote and explain the program, which Jenna sees as a long-term project. Those who log on to the website and request information will receive a brief video clip, in CD form, with which to view the teacher and her pupils in action.

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