



Raffi Cavoukian

Singer, songwriter, music producer, performer, ecology advocate, entrepreneur, author, founder of Child Honouring.

Millions know Raffi for his work as a children's entertainer whose string of gold and platinum-selling recordings in North America includes his classic "Baby Beluga" song with its beloved melody and lyrics. But a very interesting piece of Raffi's story is not as well known: Raffi's pioneering commitment to honouring his young fans changed the way we came to view music made for children.

Founding his own record label, Troubadour, then folk musician Raffi set out on a path that rescued children's recordings from bargain bin pricing and sub-par production values. In 1976, with help from Ken Whiteley and Daniel Lanois, Raffi spent the time and money it took to ensure that his recordings met the highest standards. Raffi convinced retailers that parents would pay regular price for quality music for their children, and he was right.

Teachers, parents and kids took an immediate liking to the kind of songwriting Raffi offered, perhaps because of the respect that was obvious in his material and the playful delivery which always clicked with the kids. Soon, the media were knocking at Raffi's door.

Because of his belief that children should not be exposed to too much television viewing and that they should not be directly marketed to, during his thirty-year career as a superstar of kid's music Raffi refused all offers for commercial television shows and commercial endorsements. Even recently, when approached by a Hollywood production company to do a film based on "Baby Beluga," he declined when told that the film's marketing would include direct advertising to children. This is only one of a series of lucrative deals Raffi and Troubadour have declined over the years.

The accidental career

But how all of this came to be is another interesting story. Raffi Cavoukian became a children's entertainer quite by accident. As a working folk musician in the mid '70s, Raffi was asked to participate in the Mariposa Folk Fest sponsored "Mariposa in the Schools" program. He found himself in a schoolroom setting, singing songs for children. Around the same time, Raffi's mother-in-law invited him to sing at her nursery school. She recognized his ability to connect with the kids in an authentic way and she suggested he do a recording for young children, because she felt there was a lack of quality music available for their age group. His debut album, *Singable Songs for the Very Young*, was irresistible. Within a few months, Raffi went from performing in front of small audiences to selling out theatre venues.

The ensuing string of Raffi albums and DVDs has sold over 15 million copies in Canada and the US, including more than 3 million "songs to read" books.

Changing stride

In 1988, Raffi attended a presentation at the Ontario Science Centre, which outlined the alarming decline in the beluga whale population in the St. Lawrence River. "I was stunned," writes Raffi in his autobiography. "The estimated 5,000 whales at the time of World War II were now down to 450... Autopsies of dead belugas washed ashore showed that the creatures had died painful deaths from cancer and other internal failures... their bodies were riddled with toxins and declared hazardous waste sites."

This was a pivotal revelation and a calling to Raffi. He shifted focus dramatically and began attending ecology summits, advocating for ecology initiatives and writing and performing call-to-action ecology-themed music throughout the 90's into the new millennium. Raffi's 1990 ecology album, [Evergreen Everblue](#), has earned praise from the United Nations and is a valued resource in environmental education.

After his parents passed away within hours of each other in 1995, Raffi wrote an honest and thoughtful [autobiography](#) that explored both his own childhood and his reflections on what all children need in order to thrive.



Full Circle

In 1997, Raffi was inspired to develop a holistic philosophy called [Child Honouring](#). The heart of this vision was expressed two years later in [A Covenant for Honouring Children](#) (Raffi's poetic declaration of our duty to the young), along with its nine principles. The Covenant and Principles are now circulated widely in public health and education circles.

The philosophy is outlined in the book [Child Honouring: How To Turn This World Around](#) (edited by Raffi Cavoukian & Sharna Olfman, 2006). With a foreword by the Dalai Lama, this anthology is a groundbreaking work which provides the reader with an exciting, positive vision of how to “turn this world around, for the children”, as Nelson Mandela has said. The book has also been published in Portuguese in Brazil. A paperback edition will be released in October, 2010.

To express Child Honouring themes musically, Raffi wrote and produced two CDs for adults: *Resisto Dancing* (2006) and *Communion* (2009). His anthemic songs “Turn This World Around” and “No Wall Too Tall” have found their way into the keynote presentations of progressive thinkers.

After years of networking and reflecting on what it might take to create a world fit for children, in 2010, Raffi founded the Centre for Child Honouring on Salt Spring Island. The Centre advocates for an ecological worldview, a whole systems shift in the way we think and make decisions – decisions that affect our children's world today and the world they will inherit. Raffi is outspoken in his call for a “compassion revolution” so the world's children might receive the respect and support they deserve.

Recognition

Once called “the most popular children's singer in the English-speaking world” (Washington Post) and “Canada's all time children's champion” (Toronto Star), Raffi is a recipient of the Order of Canada and the United Nations' Earth Achievement Award. He has received two honorary degrees: Dr. of Music from the University of Victoria, and Dr. of Letters from the University of British Columbia. He is associated with many NGOs, including the Council of Human Development, the Darwin Project Council, the Center for Partnership Studies, the Center for Children's Health and the Environment, and the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. He is a member of the Club of Budapest.

Developing diverse Child Honouring resources and doing international outreach to further the vision make up Raffi's current work. He is also a unique conference lecturer, presenting Child Honouring in word and in song. An estimated 10 million kids who grew up with Baby Beluga now sing it to their own kids. These [Beluga Grads](#) are inspired by Child Honouring, and their enthusiasm further inspires Raffi's legacy work.

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