

Singing with Your Spouse

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by Beth and Scott Bierko

BETH AND SCOTT BIERKO are a husband-and-wife team of singer/songwriters and arts-in-education specialists. Since 1993, they have been performing for children and families at concerts in schools, libraries and theaters. Their first DVD, "Beth & Scott: Live in Concert", was recently released and is available on their website, www.bethandscott.net. The Bierkos live in Yorktown Heights with their daughters, Helen, 12, and Stephanie, 8. They talked to WESTCHESTER PARENT about ...



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One of the questions we hear after a concert is, "How could you two possibly spend so much time together?" Apparently, it is inconceivable to many people that we have been living and working as a couple 24/7 for 14 years. And while it is true that most children's entertainers work alone, we prefer each other's company for several reasons.

First, we are best friends, so we usually want to spend more time together, not less. Second, being a duo all day, every day helps us fine-tune our relationship. Third, at the end of the day or week, we know all of the details of each other's lives because we were there to experience it, too. Finally, we have learned that working together requires the willingness to sort things out when we disagree. After a few angry or silent car rides during our early years, we figured out how to talk things over and make compromises or adjustments.

Though we work full-time, we have created a lifestyle that allows us to be present in our daughters' lives. More often than not, we make them breakfast and take them to their bus stop on our way to a performance or workshop. And after almost every show, we are home for play dates and activities. Instead of pursuing a national touring career, we opted to create a business that keeps us closer to the girls. This is a decision that we have never regretted, even when it meant slower progress in our quest for fame and fortune.

Of course, there are days when it feels like we are walking a tightrope between our work schedule and our family's needs. As hard as we try, we cannot be at home every moment, so we rely on the help of neighbors, grandparents and babysitters. These loving people — our "net" under the tightrope — are essential to our personal and professional success.

New technologies help things run more efficiently, too. GPS helps us move in the right direction and cellphones keep us connected when the traffic slows us down. Of course, we also spend a lot of time at the computer. While the kids are playing upstairs with friends, we are often downstairs writing our e-newsletter, mixing a podcast, or designing a flier. It gets hectic and our eyes often get blurry, but we have learned to thrive amidst the chaos of children and phones ringing off the hook. Luckily, we can distinguish between our children crying out for a little attention (which usually requires them to be patient), or really crying out for help (which requires us to put down the mouse and pick up the pieces of a broken lamp or friendship).

Best of all, our clients, most of them moms, sympathize with the demands of working with children at home. We have booked many gigs in-between temper tantrums on both ends of the phone. The unplanned benefit of some of this drama at home is this: Attending to our off-stage relationships have definitely improved our work on-stage. How else could we confidently write, sing and teach children about tolerance, conflict resolution and communication skills if we were not living these lessons in our own home? We write songs about the challenges of family life because we live it every day. It is all "grist for the mill", as they say.

So, when people remark on the astonishing fact that we spend so much time together as a couple, we try to take it as a compliment, an acknowledgment that we are getting what we want out of life on our own terms. And it of course begs the question of other couples: "How could you two possibly spend so much time apart?"