

## SOUTHEAST OAKLAND

# Royal Oak musician writes songs for tweens

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Too old for Raffi and too young for radio, a growing number of tweens are discovering a singer/songwriter who understands the challenges and humor of the awkward ages of 8-12.

Tom Seley of Royal Oak strikes a chord with this audience at sing-a-longs at Covington School in Birmingham, where he teaches the third- and fourth-graders who have given him inspiration and rave reviews for his new CD "Eat Your Books (And Read Your Vegetables)."

The title song was inspired by a student asking "Mr. Seley" what he was doing for the weekend.

"I said I was going to eat Transformers and watch pizza," Seley, 29, said. "Those

## FYI

Tom Seley's CD will be available at the concert and on iTunes. For more information, visit <http://mrseley.com/>.

reversals were really funny to the class."

Seley went home and in an hour wrote the lead track:

"They say a good book will rot your brains. Wait a minute.

Oh yeah, I forgot, that's television and video games.

They say ice cream and cake will make me grow up so big and strong. Wait a minute.

Oh yeah I should eat fruits and vegetables all day long.

I am so clearly confused ..."

Seley said he began writing music aimed at tweens after the school district canceled vocal music for the grades he teaches. He started an optional

sing-a-long once a week and had trouble finding age-appropriate music.

"I went through a ton of songs," said Seley, who plays guitar. "They were too babyish or had too much boyfriend/girlfriend stuff. I was listening to everything by Hillary Duff and Hannah Montana just to find one or two songs."

Seley said he discovered a void of "developmentally nutritional" music for tweens and he thinks he is on to something with his songs, which the public is invited to hear during a free concert at 2 p.m. Sunday at the Baldwin Library, 300 W. Merrill, Birmingham.

Seley will entertain the crowd following the city's 75th anniversary parade. He will perform his songs, such as "Why is the Grass so Green,"

in which he cleverly avoids having to rhyme anything with photosynthesis, and "You're So Wonderful, You Should Live in a Castle" — an ode to helpful kids who do their own thing.

It goes: "You're so wonderful you should live in a castle / but I'm sure that the taxes would be a great hassle / So you'd move to a small house to be a bit more comfortable / But no matter where you lay your head I still think you're wonderful."

Seley said Covington students have been a good sounding board for his topics and tunes. One of their favorites, "My Fish Ran Away," was written after Seley's beta fish, Rufus, disappeared. He isn't sure if his finned friend hopped out of the bowl and bit the dust or met tragedy with the aquarium equipment.

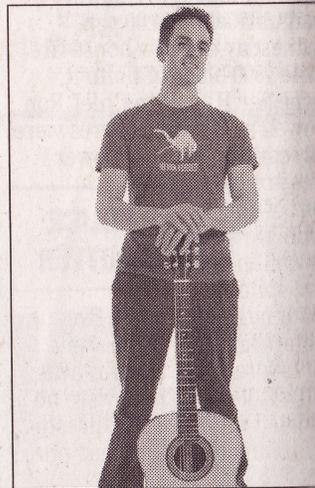
Regardless, Seley said he and his students like to think of Rufus as a pet fish that got away.

"I joked with them that Rufus probably ran away and they thought that was hilarious," Seley said.

"Now they love to joke about Rufus. One student went for sushi over the weekend and he said he thinks he had Rufus for dinner."

Songs about a fish's yearning to be free, the struggle to put down the video game and pick up a book, and rewarding good behavior with a castle seem to resonate with tweens, according to Seley.

"They can deal with jokes and tongue-in-cheek comments," he said. "They need music that respects their intellect and that's what I'm trying to do."



Tom Seley of Royal Oak teaches third- and fourth-graders at Covington School in Birmingham and plays music aimed at children ages 8-12. He has a new CD titled "Eat Your Books (And Read Your Vegetables)."