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## When a child star grows up

By Nancy Dunham  
Special to The Washington Post  
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For those of a certain age, it's almost inconceivable that Susan Cowsill is planning a 16th birthday party for her daughter.

It sounds so corny, but wasn't it just yesterday that Cowsill was the young girl we all wanted as our BFF? As the one daughter in the Cowsills -- the real-life musical family of the 1960s that inspired "The Partridge Family" television series -- she was sunny and happy and funny and adorable, and we all loved her. Of course, now that we're all older and hopefully wiser, we realize that life probably wasn't quite as easy as Susan and her brothers (Barry, Bill, Bob, Paul and John plus mom Barbara) made it appear in fan magazine interviews and during television appearances when they sang such hits as "Hair" and "Indian Lake."

"We really have a great love for each other," Cowsill said of her relationship with her surviving brothers, who still perform with her as the Cowsills. "It's a fluke that we are so well-adjusted. You either have a good survival technique or you don't. No disrespect to my parents, but they really didn't know what they were doing" in the music business.

The same arguably can't be said for Susan. The youngest Cowsill, 50, has carved out a solid niche for herself not just in her adopted home of New Orleans, but in the blues-tinged American rock scene.

Despite her rich background in music that included 10 years as a member of the rock band the Continental Drifters, Susan didn't fully plunge into solo work until the 2005 release of "Just Believe It," which won critical and popular success. Many critics were especially awed by Susan's rich, gutsy voice, which blends Bonnie Raitt's grittiness with Sandy Denny's passion.

The album was so popular that Cowsill has had it remixed and released a new version.

"This version is very fun, very different, very cool," Cowsill said from her home.



Susan Cowsill started her career in the musical family that inspired "The Partridge Family." (Carlton Mickle)

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"Anybody who has the original one will definitely tell the difference."

Cowsill's sense of humor and light, easy style bubble as much as ever despite the sorrows she has endured the past few years. When Hurricane Katrina hit, it killed her brother Barry and destroyed her home and its contents, including priceless Cowsills memorabilia.

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In a way, Cowsill almost immediately contributed to the city's healing. Her song "Crescent City Snow," which she had written about a rare Christmas snowfall in New Orleans, became the anthem for Katrina survivors.

The storm also destroyed the hopes of many musicians in the area who struggled to rebuild their careers. Now with funding from New Orleans-based group the Threadheads, Cowsill has recorded her second album.

The organization, which also underwrote other albums by New Orleans musicians, began as a group of jazz-fest buddies who would hold private playing parties for local artists, Cowsill said.

The label formed when members of the Threadheads nudged area musicians to make records and were continually told that no money was available.

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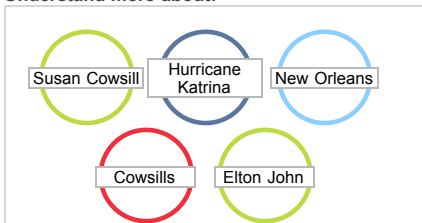


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