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## Concerts can keep you in tune with your kids

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My husband, Vince, and I love listening to music and have exposed our children to our favorite genres from a young age. Because of this, their musical interests are quite varied. In fact, it would not be unusual for us to listen to a gospel CD, a cassette tape of hip-hop pop music, and a classical or jazz music radio station on the same day. Our willingness to support our children's growing appreciation for such a significant part of American culture is one of the reasons we recently did something that only the bravest of parents would consider doing: We took them to their first concert.

Headlining the concert was my girls' favorite recording group, The Cheetah Girls. My husband bought four tickets online the moment they went on sale as a birthday present for our oldest daughter. She and her sister are huge fans of this multiplatinum recording group, which consists of Adrienne Bailon, Sabrina Bryan and Keily Williams. Three of the four actresses have starred in two popular Disney Channel original movies featuring four teenage girls and their attempt to become singing superstars.

The Cheetah Girls sang about 14 songs during the sold-out concert at Allstate Arena in Rosemont, and my girls attempted to sing and dance along with them on each one. The two-hour show included an opening set by Miley Cyrus, the star of Disney's "Hannah Montana" television series and another one of my kids' favorite entertainers. After the show, we met with my sister and my niece, who were sitting in another section of the arena, and headed over to the adjacent building to attend the post-concert meet-and-greet. It was there we had the opportunity to speak with and take photos of Bailon, Bryan, Williams and Cyrus.

Experts believe that when moms and dads stay engaged, they'll be more aware of what or who is entertaining their kids. According to Dr. Stephen Maynard Caliendo, who teaches a course on the politics of music at North Central College in Naperville, parents should be "intimately connected with their kids' music."

Caliendo, the father of a 7-year-old daughter who also likes The Cheetah Girls, says, "My dad hated most of my music, and that was just fine with me, but as a result, he wasn't engaged in it, and therefore didn't really know or understand what I was listening to. When he did like a band I liked, though, I thought that was cool of him, and we had a place to talk." He continued, "It's important to remember that (music) is powerful to affect their attitudes, and the only way to be involved in mitigating or perpetuating that potential effect is to be involved."

Fortunately, it's easy for me to get involved in The Cheetah Girls' music. Their songs have infectious melodies and are extremely fun to dance, or exercise, to. More important, their songs express sentiments appropriate for young girls' ears. Many of them could even be labeled as empowering. For example, it's not uncommon for fans to hear such refrains as "we can do anything" or such encouraging phrases as "reach any dream" in their favorite Cheetah Girl tunes.

In addition, during the phone interview I recently had with Bailon and Bryan, it became apparent to me that these friendly and personable young stars seem to have given a considerable amount of thought to the question of why they're so popular with girls of all ages. Bailon said it's because their movies address typical friendship issues and their songs have "positive" and "real" messages that girls can relate to and be inspired by.

Yes, our first concert with our girls was a hit. My husband and I hope our daughters' desire to hang out with us is something that will never grow old and trust that this concert was simply the first of many musical events we'll enjoy with them.

*Shelley Kimmons Bacote lives in Glen Ellyn with her husband and two daughters. She can be reached c/o The Sun, 1500 W. Ogden Ave., Naperville, IL 60540.*

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