

## *Earth Mama turns lesson into song*

# Rouse successfully mixes musical skills, environmental concerns

BY SERENITY GERBMAN  
Staff Writer

Joyce Rouse is one rockin' Earth Mama, using all of her many talents and a heart full of compassion to teach kids about the riches of our planet.

Rouse is a musician and public speaker who happened into the unique field of children's environmental music just two years ago and has been exploring it ever since.

Her first album, "Earth Mama", has been nominated for a Nashville Music Award in the children's category. She will appear at the NEA extravaganza as an artist in the family music category.

And her date book is packed with appointments at schools, museums, conventions and other forums where people want to learn about environmental education and the best way to teach it to children.

It's obvious that Rouse, an enthusiastic woman who radiates good energy, is thrilled with the success of her music—and her message.

"For me, this is just a way to help kids and adults and everyone get in touch with how connected we are to the earth through everything we do," Rouse says. "It's easy to forget that everything we wear and eat and possess comes in some form from our environment, from the earth, and all of those resources provide our lifestyles.

"The more understanding we have for that, and appreciation, the better we respect our environment."

That's a big philosophical statement to get across to a tough room: kindergarten.

But Rouse has her ways of making learning fun and memorable.



Joyce Rouse — *Earth Mama*

When the Cumberland Science Museum asked her to appear at an event, she composed an "Energy Tango" just for the occasion.

She has a ready stockpile of environmental riddles (What tree stays the warmest in the winter? The fir tree, of course.).

She does magic tricks. She even laughs that she recently executed her first handstand, all in the name of environmental learning.

"I am willing to make a total and complete fool of myself in the interest of broadening people's awareness of the environment," she jokes. "The good news is that people are becoming much more aware and they are responding to this."

For a weighty topic like the preservation of the planet, Rouse can find lots of good news to share. That may be a big part of her success. While deeply concerned about the countless ways we're harming the environment, Rouse is no gloomy naysayer.

She's cheerful. And she sees a lot to be cheerful about.

"It was not that long ago that anybody who claimed to be an environmental activist was considered to be a tree hugger or thought to live in the woods on nuts and berries," she points out. "Today the field of environmental activism is considered a very respectable and professional one."

After years of being an advocate for the environment and a musician separately, it was a teacher at Lipscomb Elementary who invited Rouse as a kindergarten parent to address the class.

Pretty soon she was speaking to other classes, and then at other schools.

"Earth Mama" seemed like a natural step.

"A friend who's done lots of albums encouraged me to put this together for friends and family and kids and make it available," she says. "It's really a combination of my passion for the environment and for music, and I'm having a ball."

"Earth Mama" is Rouse's name for Mother Earth, and it's starting to stick to her with young people she visits.

She says she tries to tailor her message to the age and interests of the group she's addressing. High school students already know about recycling, she explains, so she talks to them on more advanced topics.

"One of the great things about working with kids is they have already established much better habits than we have," she observes. "I know kids who have been recycling their whole lives. Their families have been, and it's just second nature to them."

Rouse believes the biggest reason for higher awareness today is teachers.

"I am convinced that 90 percent of recycling in this country is a result of kids coming home and saying 'My teacher says we need to do this so I want to get it started,'" Rouse declares. "I just think teachers to a wonderful job."

She hopes "Earth Mama" and her follow-up album "Every Day Is Earth Day" achieve results. Drawing on the entire globe for her musical influences, Rouse composes songs that she hopes will be fun and teach children without making them feel like they're learning another boring lesson.

"Part of my goal, too, is to point out that caring for the environment is truly a global concern," she explains. "It makes no difference what color you are or what money you make or where you live; ultimately we all breathe the same air and drink the same water."