

# **Healing Songs Take Flight Figuratively and Literally**

## **By Cynthia Lescalleet**

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Songs by children being treated for cancer and blood disorders are taking flight – figuratively and literally – through a new project called Purple Songs Can Fly.

Children can choose to write a song and record it in the newly completed studio on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor of Texas Children’s Cancer Center. Purple CDs of their tunes, meanwhile, travel the world with pilots, passengers and other program supporters, who log their flight information along the way.

“Having them fly is a symbol of hope,” said songwriter, recording artist and pianist Anita Kruse. She founded the nonprofit project in March as a music outlet for the clinic’s children to express their feelings and thoughts – or to escape them.

So far, the children’s songs have touched on “things meaningful to them,” Kruse said. Among the topics: wearing a red hat, hating shots, riding a Harley-Davidson, break-dancing puppies or flying above the obstacles of illness.

Depending upon the mood of the lyrics – and the child – Kruse and fellow singer/songwriter Sandy Stewart add instrumentation and percussion to infuse each song with musical style, be it rap or rock and roll or ballad or rhythm and blues or gospel.

Sometimes the child has a tune in mind, Kruse said. Sometimes the lyrics lend themselves to a melody. Either way, the effort to compose and record a song takes about an hour. Kruse discovered this quick turnaround was possible while working with one of her music students. She decided to bring the concept to the TCH Cancer Center, where she has been a visiting artist with its Arts in Medicine program.

Working with these children is “inspiring,” Kruse said. “I feel blessed to be able to share my musical gift and to have them find something within themselves.”

One of the more powerful songs recorded so far was penned by Stephen Eno Makia II, 13. Before heading into a round of chemotherapy last spring to treat his Hodgkins lymphoma, he composed “I Can Make It,” based on a favorite prayer of his mother, Refolia Eddie. After completing his treatment that day, Stephen recorded his song.

The moving results have become a family anthem played daily, his mother said. “It’s like a medicine. It strengthened me to know he was prepared to go through a journey he was about to go through.”

Stephen said recording a Purple Song is “a good chance to express your feelings about what you’re going through.” Now he’s on the debate team at Albright Middle School in Alief, where he is trying out for the basketball team.

Not all children want to participate or feel well enough to make a Purple Song, Kruse said. They might watch another child do so, however. And, sometimes, siblings will write something for an ailing brother or sister.

Kruse believes creativity can help heal the body and the spirit and that the collaboration between music teacher and student can resonate, much as instruments do when they're blending their sounds.

"Part of the power of it (Purple Songs) is that in the moment of writing the song, everyone forgets they are sick and escapes the reality of illness," she said. "And, in the moment of that creativity, that's the healing tapping the other, deeper energy of the body."

Studies and anecdotal evidence suggest creativity can promote healing, which is one reason TCH's Cancer Center has an extensive Arts in Medicine program, said Carol Herron, program director.

Kruse's personal style and "calming demeanor" works well with the youths, Herron said. "There's no pressure" to produce a Purple Song. "It's a neat process to watch. It's loose but it comes together. Creativity flows."

Each CD "freezes a moment in time" for a family, she said, and creates something positive out of what they are experiencing.

"We just want to give them a chance to be kids," she said.

For information about the nonprofit organization, contact [www.purplesongscanfly.org](http://www.purplesongscanfly.org).

### **The name game and high-flying CDs**

When songwriter Anita Kruse founded Purple Songs Can Fly earlier this year, any dilemma over what to name the music outreach project was quickly settled, she said.

Kruse's personal recording studio is purple, so citing the color linked to creativity was an obvious choice.

And since the nonprofit organization gives a voice to children undergoing medical treatments, the imagery needed something suggesting "flight of the spirit if not in reality," she said.

Kruse realized she was onto something when her Internet research on the concept of songs in flight pulled up her own composition, "If We Can Fly to the Moon."

A Sept. 11 tribute, the song in CD form traveled on the Endeavor Shuttle Mission with astronaut John Herrington and logged more than 5 million miles.

"That was my 'purple song' that flew," she said.

Now, CDs recorded by Texas Children's Cancer Center outpatients can fly as well.

Since the start of the Purple Song project in March, more than 30 purple CDs have been toted by volunteers in their travels to places like Rome, the Kyrgyz Republic, New Delhi, Mongolia, Turkey and Aruba.

If you'd like to help a Purple Song take flight, visit [www.purplesongscanfly.org](http://www.purplesongscanfly.org).