

TIME

Yo Gabba Gabba!

*By Carolyn Sayre
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PARTYBOYS. It was never easy for Scott Schultz, 36, to get his 4-year-old to eat vegetables. That is, until he started singing "There's a party in your tummy, and the green beans want to go," as he made the vegetables on the plate dance.

Parents know those experiences well--which is why it was such a stroke of inspiration for Schultz and co-creator Christian Jacobs, 36, to

use them as the basis for Yo Gabba Gabba!, their popular and quirky show on Nick Jr. that teaches preschoolers life's important lessons. Schultz and Jacobs, who's also a father, figured a show like this was overdue. "[Kids' shows] needed a new generation of hip parents," Jacobs says, "not a bunch of executives doing research." So six years ago, they set about tackling the job themselves.

The show's recipe is familiar: Take one wacky host and put him on camera with a handful of cuddly, brightly colored monsters. Cue some funky animation and catchy songs, and kids not only brush their teeth but dance while doing it.

Still, it was hardly a straight path to the top. After struggling to get a response from several networks, the show first got traction on the Internet, where Nickelodeon execs noticed the secret ingredient that makes Yo Gabba Gabba! work: funk--lots of it. The songs are set to contagious hip-hop beats, and the animation is so retro it looks like a rave party for kids. "We have all the traditional elements, but they are repackaged in a contemporary way," says Jacobs.

And it works. Reminiscent of Pee-wee's Playhouse, the Emmy-nominated show draws an audience of more than 700,000 viewers per week. And its absurd sense of humor and witty guest appearances by rockers like the Shins and artists like Devo's Mark Mothersbaugh make it fun for parents too. "So many shows are based on research. Well, I'm not an expert--I'm just a parent," Jacobs says. Of course, if there's a better kind of expert than that, it's hard to think of one.