

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TO REQUEST A REVIEW COPY OR TO INTERVIEW THE AUTHOR, CONTACT:

Sue Havlish, 812-327-5494, sue.havlish@bigsisterproductions.com



## As “Pre-K for All” Gains Public Support, Educator-Musician Leah Wells Offers Tips to Make Preschool Arts Curricula More Rewarding

*Preschool Music Specialist Also Shares the Joys and Challenges of Teaching at Head Start in Her New Memoir*

(NEW YORK CITY) When President Obama proposed “Pre-K for All” in his 2016 State of the Union speech, he received a standing ovation — recognition that preschool education is high on the public’s agenda. But will school systems be ready? Will there be enough qualified teachers?

Preschool educators are too often thought of as glorified babysitters, with an abundance of workers ready to fill any job openings. But as any dedicated, effective teacher can tell you, that’s not the case, especially at Head Start. “Many people assume that teaching children is easy and joyful,” reflects musician and educator Leah Wells, “but while it includes such moments, teaching is generally quite challenging.”

Wells’ memoir of her first year in the Head Start trenches as a visiting music teacher, **ON ANOTHER NOTE: Making Music at Head Start**, was just published (January 26, 2016) by Heliotrope Books. Her account of working with very young learners, their teachers, and the administrators and staff of our nation’s signature program in the War on Poverty is eye-opening and instructive. Wells spins a compelling tale of her own journey and growth from the middle-class familiarity of her Greenwich Village home to the very different world of Head Start classrooms in the heart of the Bronx. A stranger in a strange land—with no teaching certification—she challenged herself to create the best music and movement program that she could for her preschoolers.

Wells said her hope was to enter the Head Start world with a light spirit, to win the trust of children, and gain the cooperation of the staff. But, like a child thrown into a pool and expected to teach herself to swim, she was thrown into her Head Start classes without preparation or training—and without knowing, in many instances, what was expected of her. Yet through trials and errors (both hers and the system’s), Wells managed to craft music programs which were not only fun and engaging, but which helped prepare the children for entry into elementary school, one of Head Start’s main goals.

The position of “visiting specialist” (a contract employee without job security or benefits) came with a price to Wells, both personally and professionally. She writes about how she coped with the pressure, eager to share a “behind the scenes” story of a music specialist who appears in the classroom only once a week—struggling to form bonds with children who need stability and security, and to share with them her delight with music. Many more visiting specialists and other newly-recruited teachers will be needed if/when Universal Pre-K becomes a reality.

Wells dedicates her memoir “to children growing up above 125th Street and below the poverty line, and to the hard workers who tend to preschoolers every day.” Having entered this world, she knows its challenges and offers these **tips to make preschool arts curricula more rewarding for students, teachers, and supervisors:**

- Goals of enrichment programs should be clearly expressed and understood by all tiers of faculty.
- Arts curricula should reflect vetted structures, but allow for spontaneity and innovation.
- Classroom teachers should actively support enrichment sessions rather than absenting themselves on breaks, or chatting with each other. At least two adults should supervise preschool classes at all times.

*On Another Note* also features classroom exercises Wells developed to focus group energy, instill basic motor coordination, encourage playful movement to simple music, introduce lyrics, rhyme, and elements of drama. Musical notation and instructions are included in these exercises, which supplement her narrative.

*“Leah Wells improvised her classes, adapted to structured classroom schedules, and overcame myriad administrative obstacles in order to create fulfilling hours of music and movement for her students. ... Readers will find a deeply moving, humane, compassionate narrator whose wit, insights, details, ear for language, and love for the arts enrich the book’s pages.”*

—M.J. Moore, **NewWorld Review**

# # #

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Leah Wells**, a veteran children’s music educator and performing musician (vocals, guitar, piano, mandolin, and more), is the author of the How Do You Do Music™ children’s book series published by HelioTot, an imprint of Heliotrope Books (the first two books, *A Song for the Birds* and *The Rainbow Remembers the Music*, were published in the past year, and six more are planned). She is also the co-author of *Games That Sing: 25 Activities to Keep Children on Their Toes* (2011, Heritage Music Press), the winner of Honorable Mention in the 1999 John Lennon Songwriting Contest, and a 2005 nominee for an Editorial Award of Excellence by the Parenting Publications of America (PPA). Wells was invited by *Women’s Memoirs* ([www.WomensMemoirs.com](http://www.WomensMemoirs.com)) to write a two-part article on how she came to write and publish *On Another Note*. They will appear in February and March.

---

BOOK INFO:

## **ON ANOTHER NOTE: Making Music at Head Start**

*A Memoir with Classroom Exercises*

**By Leah Wells**

Foreword by Gabe Turow, Ed.D.

ISBN 978-1-942762-10-2 paperback; 230 pages; 6 x 9 inches. List Price \$17.00

**Published January 26, 2016 by Heliotrope Books**

[www.HeliotropeBooks.com](http://www.HeliotropeBooks.com)

[www.BigSisterProductions.com/Leah\\_Wells](http://www.BigSisterProductions.com/Leah_Wells)