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Raffi wants kids to have a better world, launches book, CD

LORRAYNE ANTHONY

TORONTO (CP) Raffi's not just for kids anymore.

During an interview in a downtown hotel room he offers a taste of his new adult-oriented approach.

"Impossible samba, improbable rumba ... dancing in your junglehood," he raps while breaking into slow, syncopated hip-hop moves to a surprised audience of one. "All grown up and on the go, tune into the global radio."

Raffi, who now goes by Raffi Cavoukian, says he's having a "renaissance." His message is about children but is aimed at adults. No longer is he performing at children's concerts - in fact he hasn't performed for children in four years. He's giving speeches at universities and writing for op-ed pages in newspapers. And it's all about saving the planet by saving children.

He was in Toronto last week to promote a book, *Child Honouring: How to Turn This World Around*, and his new CD, *Resisto Dancing: Songs of Compassionate Revolution*. Both are aimed at adults, in fact the CD is for "Beluga grads" - the kids who listened to Raffi's *Baby Beluga* albums in the '80s and are now adults.

"I blended my love of children with my love of the Earth," said Cavoukian of the book and CD, in that comforting voice so familiar to countless young listeners. "I've been an ecology advocate - a passionate one - it's in some of my songs. So in a way it's a natural evolution."

Child Honouring, which Cavoukian co-edited with Sharna Olfman, is an anthology of essays that he says "connects the dots between the personal, cultural and planetary domains" when it comes to making the world a better place for children.

It contains writings by child development author Penelope Leach; former foreign minister Lloyd Axworthy; Joel Bakan, writer of the book and film *The Corporation*; and novelist Barbara Kingsolver among others. The foreword is written by the Dalai Lama.

Cavoukian has no trouble speaking of large ideals.

"The goal is to transform society. The goal is for a world fit for children so your little ones have a viable future," he said, pointing to problems ranging from urban smog and the increasing number of children with asthma to all the kids who live in poverty during a time of economic boom.

"Something is profoundly out of whack."

Transforming the world can start, he said, by something as simple as keeping children under the age of two away from the television. And then, when they're a little older, they can watch a few videos or DVDs - but in moderation, to prevent the corporate world from getting its hooks into them, he said.

"I'm sympathetic to parents," said Cavoukian, who has no kids of his own. "If they don't have the resources, if they don't have the extended family, if they don't have sufficient childcare, of course they might be tempted to buy themselves a half-hour of quiet by putting the child in front of the TV."

Instead, Cavoukian feels it is more important for children to spend time in the natural world - looking at grass, flowers and trees with people who love them.

He says parents should pressure their elected officials to increase the minimum wage to reflect the reality of raising a family on one income. They should also write to corporations demanding benign products for kids, and campaign to keep corporate funding out of schools.

"And no one should hit children, period," he said, explaining that he knows first hand how the scars of corporal punishment remain in the psyche long after the child has grown. He didn't elaborate on his own childhood other than to say he knew his parents loved him, but that he never felt a respect that all children should feel.