



A Classic Turns 25

As That Girl, she was one of TV's first feminist funny ladies. But it was as the creative force behind the multimedia sensation *Free to Be...You and Me* that Marlo Thomas leapt beyond the laugh track to jump-start an entire generation of kids with fun-filled lessons about life. "I went to the record company [Arista], and I said I wanted to do a record for my niece Dionne and that other children might like it too," says Thomas.

They certainly did. Following the 1972 release of the collection of songs and sketches, *Free to Be* evolved into a virtual cottage industry of kid empowerment. The record went gold (500,000 sold), the companion book was a best-seller, and the 1974 ABC special won an Emmy. Now, 25 years since the book's publication—and more than 10 years since its follow-up, *Free to Be...a Family*—a special edition of the books (Running Press, \$14.95) and CDs is set for release this month.

With simple but infectious songs and silly comic sketches and stories, the ma-

At 25, Free to Be still shows that demolishing stereotypes can be as engaging as child's play

terial on *Free* tackled gender preconceptions, encouraged acceptance and challenged kids to be, well, free. "I think the reason it hit such a chord is that we were rewriting our own childhoods and trying to say these are the things *we* needed to be told," says Thomas, who rallied the support of Diana Ross, Mel Brooks and Alan Alda for the original project.

The material also struck a chord with that girl for whom the project was launched, Dionne Kirschner. "All my friends brought it in to show-and-tell," says Kirschner, 28, now a television producer. "I'm sure when I have kids, I'll share it with them."

Thomas may even have a new installment to share with them. "The one cooking in my head now would deal with ethics—because I don't think we're getting that anywhere else."

—Stef McDonala

Marlo and logo: That Girl became that award-winning creator.

