

Music and Children's Literature



From *Moon River*. Illustration © 2019 Tim Hopgood. Published by Oxford University Press. Book based on the song by Johnny Mercer and Henry Mancini.

Editorial

Music surrounds us. Whether it is something we have chosen for ourselves from our own personal playlist or the music – or should that be muzak – that bombards us when we shop. We can enjoy music as part of an audience or we can make music ourselves, perhaps playing an instrument or even more personally using our own voice; you do not have to be a diva, singing is something that comes naturally.

How does music translate onto the page – not as a score with the coded symbols to be unlocked by musicians – but as words? How do authors and illustrators rise to this challenge? How important is it for music to be present in the written text? These are some of the themes touched on in this latest *IBBYLink* as our contributors explore an often personal response to music and writing.

Janelle Mathis opens proceedings in an article that looks at the way literature and music – each a language – are linked contextually, aesthetically and through the recognition that both are processed through the same cognitive skills and abilities. They are interconnected in so many ways that are not immediately recognised but both are universal and intercultural. Words are sounds and sounds lead to music – as Janelle Mathis points out ‘Literature is a well-matched vehicle to encourage the intercultural role of music for young literacy learners.’

And not just interculturally around the world but across the ages as Kevin Crossley-Holland shows in his novel *Gatty’s Tale*. Here he reflects on how much music, so important to him personally, has pervaded the narrative just as it would have pervaded life in the Middle Ages – not recorded music but the music that

comes from the voice as an instrument, music that uses words.

Music is not just of the past but is very much of today, and is as important to the young as it is to older audiences. In her young adult novel *Love Song*, Sophia Bennett explores the world of the boyband: the relationships, passions and commitment are all forged through music and music making, and affecting not just those making the music but also the fans who listen.

It is perhaps not too difficult to make the link between music and words, the musician and the author. How does an illustrator bring music into the picture? Synaesthesia is a known condition and in his picture book *Here Comes Frankie!* Tim Hopgood explores this visually, allowing his readers to see the sounds. This is not the only picture book he has created linking music and song to illustration. In *Singing in the Rain* (his readers will be humming as they open the book, so famous are the lyrics), he again brings sounds to life and provides us with a glimpse of how he approached the challenge.

Linking music and text intimately is *The Phoenix of Persia* from Tiny Owl. In this vibrantly illustrated retelling of an Iranian tale – the colours really do sing off the page – the storyteller Sally Pomme Clayton has joined forces with Iranian musicians playing traditional instruments to bring the text to life musically, together with the words. Here there is a very real juxtaposition of the two art forms creating a different experience but showing, as do all the contributors, how closely music and literature work together.

Ferelith Hordon

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Giving Voice to the Global Community through Storied Experiences

Janelle Mathis is a professor of literacy and children's literature at the University of North Texas. Her research focuses on international children's literature, multimodality and critical literacy. She is a co-editor with Holly Johnson and Kathy G. Short of *Critical Content Analysis of Children's and Young Adult Literature: Reframing Perspective* (Routledge, 2016) and recently *Critical Content Analysis of Visual Images in Books for Young People* (Routledge, 2019). Currently she co-edits with Petros Panaou, *Bookbird: An International Journal of Children's Literature*.

Music is a living, vital aspect of how we learn about ourselves, share our stories, understand the cultures and stories of others, and use multimodal means to comprehend the world around us. Music is acknowledged as a traditional cultural form, assuming roles of great importance in many societies. For some it is the heart of life with social and religious roles. More primitive societies used music to mark their place in time and space as well as aiding in medicine or giving advice about life. The Aboriginals of Australia encoded layers of information about socialisation while the Navajos in the USA created and valued songs for curing ailments. However, while greatly regarding these traditional roles, those planning programmes in contemporary schools frequently do not place music in a significant position, as seen by so many music programmes and budgets being cut from the curriculum along with other fine arts classes. Despite the revival of multimodality in literacy learning over past recent decades, it seems that only the visual has received more focus as a result, and understandably so with the visual being a primary mode of technology's role in both professional and social resources. The notion of music as language, as has been recognised by musicians over eras, is not as easy to define since musical phrases and chords normally do not have conventional meanings as do language and visual images. At a time when intercultural understanding is a goal of schooling, however, music can be a resource at all grade levels, especially when children are young.

With a keen and concerned interest, I contemplated the music connections to literacy learning by examining findings in both the music and literacy academic literature. The field of music held most of the applicable resources in their considerations of music as language. Then I naturally turned to children's literature where I always find support for the most challenging of topics. And, I was not disappointed! I found, and continue to find, stories about music that share meaningful experiences and insights as they speak to music's importance. The stories in picture and chapter books do not take the place of actual music as an intercultural resource, but the titles that stood out reflect examples of how literature supports music's role in life and in communicating within the world around us. The examples I share here are limited to a Western perspective by virtue of their publication source (books available in English) although the contexts are inclusive of other global areas. The insights revealed within these titles reflect the potential of literature across global communities. And attention to the significance of music as a communicative form elevates the potential of literature so focused, to nurture intercultural communication and understanding.

In considering music as an intercultural resource through children's literature, I found three themes that helped to explain music's role shared within the global society.

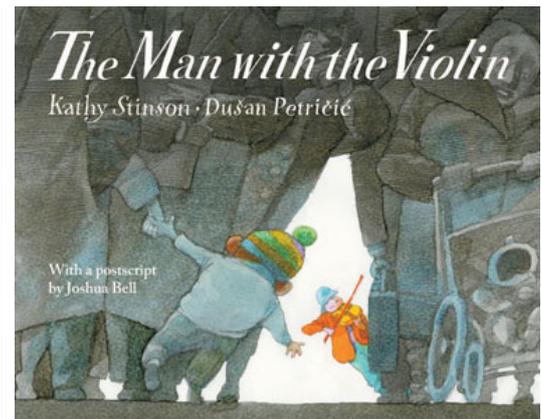
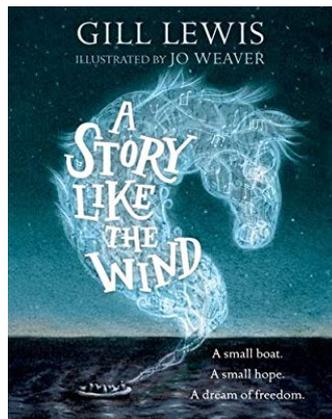
- Shared aesthetic appeal and universal appreciation
- Insights to social, cultural and historical contexts
- Shared understandings about relationships between language and music.

Each of these themes are described briefly in the following sections with a sampling of children's literature that gives insights to music, culture and communication. Both picture and chapter books reveal these themes but for space limitations here, picture books are the focus as they most readily appeal to younger readers.

Shared aesthetic appeal, personal relationships and universal appreciation

Across cultural groups there is a universally shared appreciation of sound. Research has shown that music strengthens social bonds as evidenced in oxytocin found in the brain (Suttie, 2015).

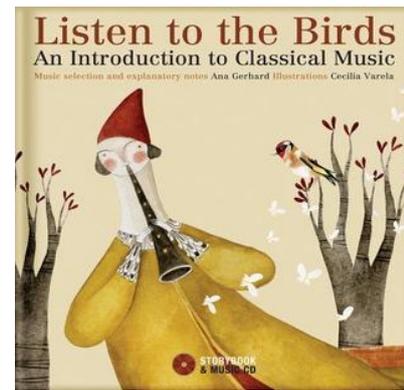
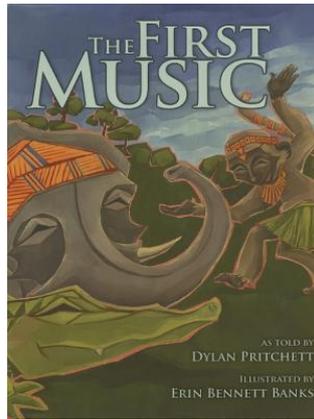
Studies have reported greater instances of cooperation, empathy and community building when listening to music together. One of the most powerful books recently that points to music as building community is created around an immigration story. *A Story Like the Wind* (Lewis, 2018) tells of refugees escaping in a small boat with the barest of essentials. One boy brings as his only possession a guitar and with the guitar plays music that reminds each of the people on the boat of some story from their life. There is also a story the boy is telling with his music - a story that tells of hope.



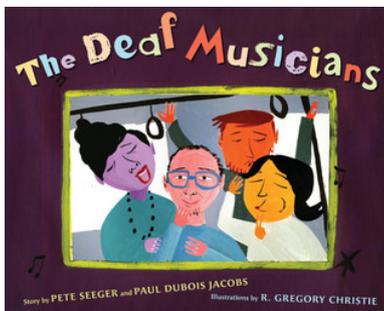
The Man with the Violin (Stinson, 2013) speaks to the appreciation of a young child who happened to hear music in a subway station. Drawn to the music, the boy wants to stop and listen, while his mother hurries him on. Later we find that this was based on a true story where a concert violinist experimented to see who might stop and listen to his playing as he performed among hurrying people. The child is seen as more observant and appreciative than the adult, which can also provide rationale for engaging children in the music around them and developing an early appreciation.



Music Everywhere (Ajmera, 2014) is a photographic essay with brilliant colourful images of children and a variety of traditional instruments from around the world. Often in traditional dress, the children share their joy in performing, dancing and creating a variety of noises and emotions in many different venues. The ending even has directions for making instruments and a glossary of words specific to the types of music shown.



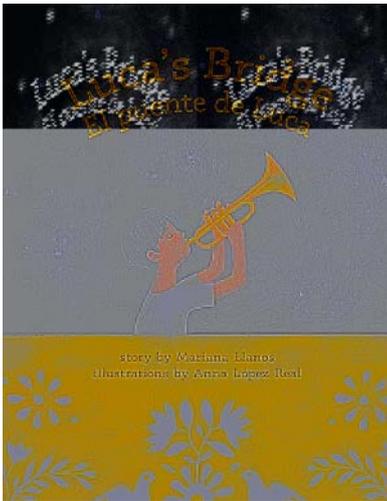
Some books tell of shared understandings of the natural sources of sound influencing music. *The First Music* (Pritchett, 2006), a tale set in the West African forest, begins with each animal discovering his own sound that eventually leads to the first music as they all contribute to an engaging rhythm. The frogs initially think they cannot make a sound but discover a most unique contribution to this first music with the eventual theme that all have music inside. *Listen to the Birds* (Gerhard, 2013) provides examples of how birds inspired the creativity of composers by sharing information about each composer in the text and excerpts from 20 works by renowned symphony orchestras on a CD. The use of different instruments points to the impression that nature's singers made on creators of music.



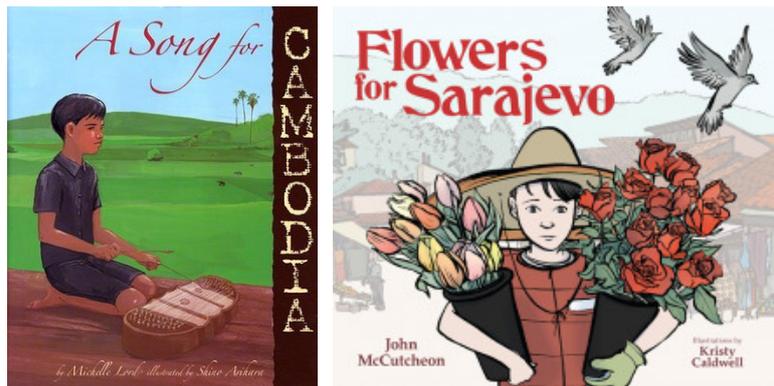
The Deaf Musicians (Seeger and Jacobs, 2006) reveals the love of music for one jazz musician who loses his hearing. As he learns sign language, he also makes friends with other musicians who are deaf and together they form a band and entertain despite not hearing. The power of music in this story speaks to shared appreciation and building relationships.

Insights to social, cultural and historical contexts

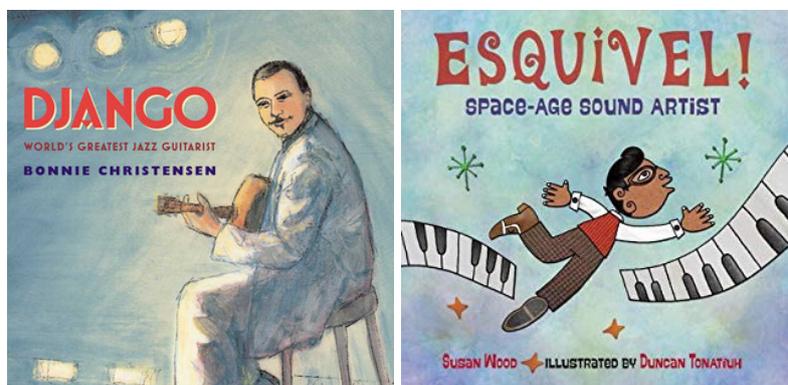
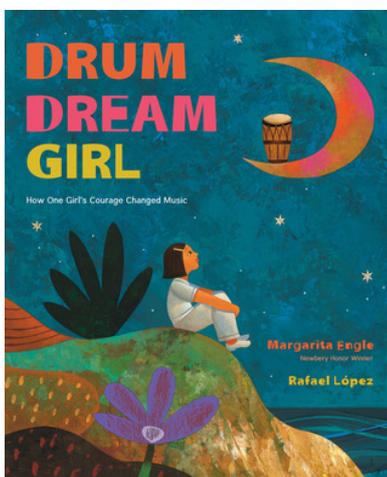
Music is a pathway into history as it has served to comfort, strengthen and maintain identity in challenging times as well as those of celebration. Stories that focus on social issues, both past and more contemporary, reveal music's importance as people strive to survive physically and emotionally. Already mentioned is *A Story Like the Wind* (Lewis, 2018) that reveals the importance of music in the plight of immigrants.



With a related social issue in mind, Luca's *Bridge/El Puente de Luca* (Llanos, 2019) tells of Luca whose family is returning to Mexico from the USA due to immigration laws. Luca is sad because he must leave his friends even though he was born in the USA. The music he makes with his trumpet becomes the connection between his home and Mexico. In a dream the music forms a bridge that takes him back to his friends. This brings him so much joy that he fills his grandmother's home in Mexico where they now live with music and laughter for all his family.

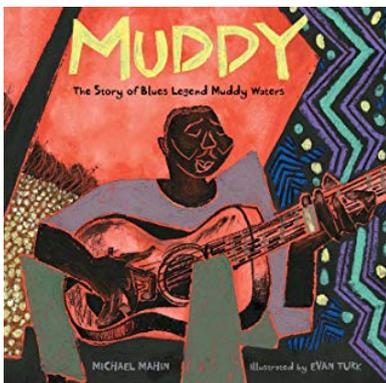


Another story that speaks to the role of music for one child during conflict is *A Song for Cambodia* (Lord, 2008). Based on a true story, Arn survived the Khmer Rouge 'killing fields' in 1970 Cambodia because of his ability to play an instrument and entertain as well as his personal strength to endure. And, in another part of the world, two decades later during the Balkan War, 22 people were killed waiting for a bakery to open. In honour of these people, a cellist in the Sarajevo Orchestra played every day for 22 days at the same time of the attack in the town square. *Flowers for Sarajevo* (McCutcheon, 2017) presents a child's perspective on this historical event.



Besides social issues for which music became a critical source of resiliency, young readers learn about the lives of musicians all over the world in stories that speak to

music's universal and historical significance. *Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl's Courage Changed Music* (Engle, 2015) was inspired by the life of Millo Castro Zaldarriaga, a Chinese African Cuban girl whose determination overcame the notion of her time that girls could not be drummers. *Django* (Christiansen, 2009) shares the life of a gypsy guitar player who suffered extreme burns on his hands, and as a result of his determination to play again, he developed an internationally recognised technique of playing. *Esquivel, Space-Age Sound Artist* (Wood, 2016), brings to life the story of a colourful Mexican artist who combined all the sounds around him into a unique form of lounge music. *Muddy* (Mahin, 2017) tells the story of Muddy Waters, an internationally known and respected blues singer. It is said that even the Beatles sought Muddy when they first came to the USA in the 1960s.



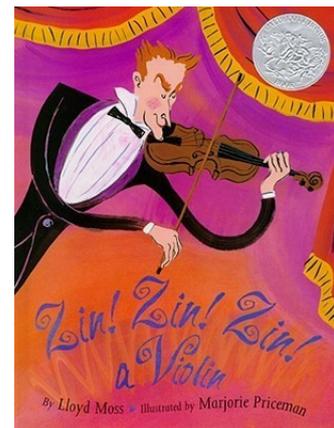
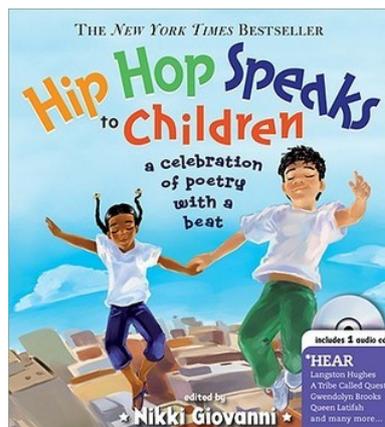
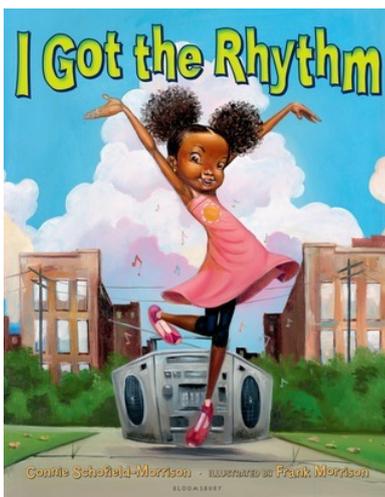
And, speaking of the blues, many books from USA publishers share the history and cultural significance of the blues (including its related form, jazz) for young readers. These titles include: *Blues Journey* (Myers, 2003), *Jazz* (Myers, 2008), *Ruby Sings the Blues* (Daly, 2005), *My Hands Sing the Blues: Romare Bearden's Childhood Journey* (Harvey, 2011), *The Sound that Jazz Makes* (Weatherford, 1996), and *Daddy Played the Blues* (Garland, 2017).

Understandings the relationships between language and music

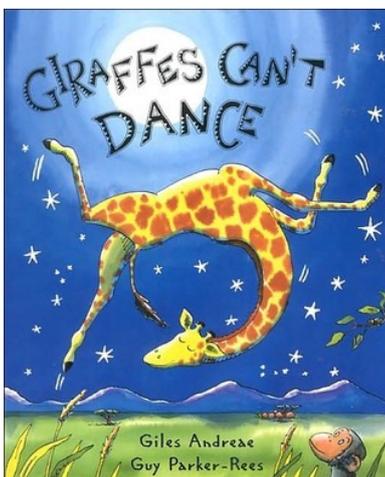
When we think of the connection between literacy and music, we often focus on the obvious qualities, such as rhythm, tone and, depending on the type of music, the words or vocabulary being used. These are important parallels to literacy learning, and research supports this significance, especially in light of technological advances revealing that music and literacy require many of the same cognitive skills and abilities to process (Edwards, 2013). Music incorporates all three domains of learning: cognitive, affective and psychomotor, and recent innovations in technology have revealed insights regarding music's domains (Brewer, 2018). One study claiming a 'theory of mind' suggests the brain doesn't just process sound when we hear music but it tries to understand the intent of the musician and what is being communicated. Research at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine reports that the brain uses the

syntactic areas to process communication in general, whether through language or through music (Limb, 2014). Both music and language share grammar features that are aligned – ones that order language elements and musical elements (Asano and Boeckx, 2015). They are similarly distinct elements in hierarchical sequence. Educators have also reported that music strengthens listening and attention skills, improves phonological awareness, enriches print awareness, requires auditory discrimination that is critical for reading, and builds vocabulary. Stephens (2018) writes,

Singing, rhyming, and storytelling are part of every culture. By singing and rhyming to children, parents and caregivers are not only keeping traditions alive, they are teaching children to articulate words, practice the pitch, volume and rhythm of their native language, and develop the listening and concentration skills essential for brain development and memory.



Identifying books that share music's connections to language, such as articulation, rhythm and rhyme, is not a difficult task. Many of these texts invite readers to join in with 'snap, snap', 'shake, shake', 'tip tap' and 'beat bop' as found in *I Got the Rhythm* (Schofield-Morrison, 2014).



A variety of rhythms and vernacular language makes *Hip Hop Speaks to Children* (Giovanni, 2008) a celebration of spirited sound. This book brings messages of identity and hope from lively artists and illustrators. *Zin, Zin, Zin! A Violin* (Moss, 1995) uses rhyme in wavy lines to share the sounds of instruments. An older book, it reflects the qualities that are shared by language and music. Of course *Giraffes Can't Dance* (Andreae, 2001), is a favourite rhyming tale that invites swaying and moving to the sound of music, capturing the rhythms around the animals in the jungle. The giraffe realises that the music

heard by each animal is different and he must dance to his own music. Of course, there are a plethora of other rhyming and rhythmic books that invite readers to play with alliteration, onomatopoeia and other word forms – language structures that align with that of musical understanding.

Concluding thoughts

Van Leeuwen (1999) in writing about sound and music quotes Ong (1982) stating that sound “‘comes to us from all sides. It envelops us and places us in the centre of a world, and it establishes us at a kind of core of sensation and existence’ (p. 196). Van Leeuwen then continues his discussion drawing from Eco who said that at the centre of sounds, there are no privileged points of view and ‘all available perspectives are equally valid and rich in potential’” (quoted in Chana, 1994, p.269) (p.196).

Literature, like music, can place us in the centre of a world and can value the potential of all points of view. Literature is a well-matched vehicle to encourage the intercultural role of music for young literacy learners.

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A Sort of Song of Everything: *Gatty's Tale* and Music

Kevin Crossley-Holland is a poet, writer for children, translator and librettist, keenly interested in the traditional tales of north-west Europe. His cycle of poems, *Seahenge: A Journey*, with remarkable images by Andrew Rafferty, has just been published by Kailpot Press (May 2019), and his next books for children, both to be published by Walker, will be *Across the Rainbow Bridge: Five Norse Tales*, illustrated by Jeffrey Alan Love, and *The Always King*, a retelling of Arthurian legends illustrated by Chris Riddell.

Our language is an instrument, and many but not all of our better writers have been able to play it to great good effect, so that the music of their words is part of their meaning.

While it's no guarantee of success, it can scarcely hurt to become aware of pulse and sound and some of the subtleties of language at an early age. This was true in my own case. My witty mother often read me light verse, and my father, a composer and musicologist, 'said and sang' stories to my sister and me as we lay in the half-light on our bunk beds, accompanying himself on his Welsh harp.

Throughout my childhood, too, I attempted to play the piano and viola and to sing, in general without the least distinction. Nevertheless, my musical background must have sharpened my ear, although I'm no great linguist and learn languages other than my own only with difficulty.

Perhaps there's a compensatory element in the way that much of my writing has involved working with composers (including Bliss and Mathias and Chilcott and LeFanu), or expressly reflecting an interest in music. I don't know, but it's certainly true that I've regularly written carols, cantatas and even libretti for opera over a number of decades, and no less true that music matters very greatly to some of the characters central to my fiction.

In this short piece, I want to concentrate on my own favourite character, Gatty, and the way in which her book approaches sound and music along different spokes. But first let me just waltz through a few earlier items.

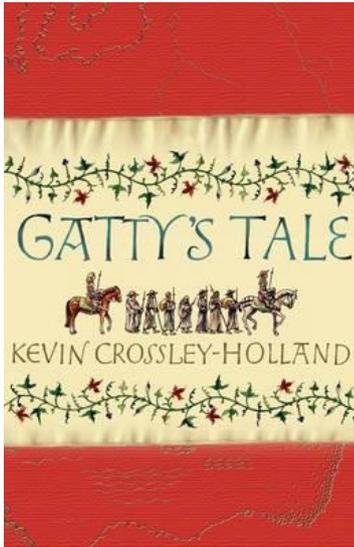
In *Wordhoard* (1969), co-authored with Jill Paton Walsh, I wrote about the tone-deaf cowherd, Cædmon, and his vision – and throughout my twenties I translated verses from Anglo-Saxon, an oral tradition in which the poet accompanied himself on his lyre. My little trilogy, brought together as *Wulf* (1988), is full of the music of the monastic offices. For BBC radio, I assembled programmes of work songs and initiation songs. And collaborating with the composer Nicola Lefanu on our two operas, *The Green Children* (1990) and *The Wildman* (1995), I began to learn some of the skills of writing libretti.

And so on! Traditional song goes hand in hand with folktale; many kinds of music animate my Arthur trilogy; and halfway-to-heaven songs are instrumental to the discovery of the Waterslain angels! And then there is *Heartsong* (2015), set in the Ospedale Pieta in Venice, where Vivaldi taught the violin and brought together his renowned orphan choir and orchestra. Jane Ray's and my central character, Laura, is fulfilled despite her inability to speak by her divine playing of the oboe. This story hints at the power of music in prenatal memory – and turns on the gentle rocking tune that Laura almost thinks she almost knows, and that Vivaldi subsequently used in his *Gloria*.

I'm not sure that there is much point in pitching one art form against another, but will say that unlike almost every writer I know, music matters more greatly to me than the word. My sense of the world around me is as much a matter of sound as of sight, and the 'organised' sound of classical music, ancient and modern, puts me more deeply in touch with my own head and heart, and offers me more ecstasy and consolation than any other art form.

But now Gatty! In preparation for writing this short piece, I've reread my novel – the first time I've ever revisited a book of mine except to quote from it during some talk – and have been quite startled by just how much musical reference there is in it.

Music was very much part of medieval life, sacred and secular. Most people, illiterate, were nonetheless able to join in chanted responses at church services; incantations were used by medicine women as a way of healing or protecting people, though by no means everyone believed in them: ('God in heaven,' exclaimed Sir John. 'Armed men keep people safe – not singing.'). There was



community singing at festivals such as Easter and Harvest Supper and Christmas. And of course song also formed part of the language of love, chaste and erotic.

Gatty has a rather disarming way of crooning or humming to herself as she works, and then putting words to her tune. At Caldicot, where she is growing up, the priest Oliver often hears her singing (her voice is a lovely, red-gold contralto) and he tells Sir John that she has the voice of 'an apprentice angel'. Sir John rubs his nose thoughtfully. 'I wouldn't know,' he says.

It's not surprising, then, that when Gatty reaches Ewloe before setting off on her momentous pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the choirmaster Everard (who is joining the pilgrimage) starts to teach her to sing.

'Me and my voice are friends,' Gatty tells Everard. 'It keeps me company.' And then she confides in him that her father didn't like her to sing, because it reminded him of his dead wife.

'Sing me a scale.'

'A what?'

Everard plucked one string of the psaltery and, making an open purse of his lips, sang 'Uuuuu-t. . .' Then, waving his delicate white hands, he signalled to Gatty to join in.

'Uuuuu-t,' sang Gatty, a whole octave lower than Everard.

Everard plucked the next string and half-opened his mouth. 'Re,' he sang.

'Re,' sang Gatty.

Now Everard covered his upper teeth with his top lip, like a horse. 'Mi,' he sang.

'Mi,' sang Gatty.

'Good,' sang Everard. 'Very good. Very rich,' he sang. 'All on the same note. Keep it steady.' And then, plucking the next strings. 'Fa. . . Sol. . . La. . .'.

'La-a-a-a-a.' sang Gatty.

'Go on,' sang Everard, 'and on and on and on and on.'

'a-a-a-a-a.'

'On!'

Gatty coughed. 'Can't' she said. Her eyes were bright with excitement. 'I haven't got no more breath.' (p.50)

Gatty responds to this first lesson by telling Everard to close his eyes, and then singing him the sound of the wind kissing the horn-windows, and the soft cu-ic, cu-ic of the nightjar, and the p'weet, p'weet of a lapwing; and then, right behind him, the sound of a mare, loudly neighing!

That's to say, Gatty is a girl who hears and sings the music of the green world – a girl who translates what she hears and learns into song. And more besides, as we shall see.

There's a point when, talking to a Muslim astronomer aboard a boat heading from Venice to Jaffa, Gatty says that her eyes and ears get mixed up, and her nose as well:

**I can touch what I smell
And smell what I hear
And hear what I see.
Mongrel-and-jumbled-and-scrambled-and tangled.
That's me! (p.204)**

So Gatty has a kind of synæsthesia, I suppose – and it enables her, *inter alia*, to believe she can actually hear the sound of sunlight, and of the wind, and of the stars.

When you or I hear a solo singing voice of great beauty, more especially an upper voice, it can cut us to the quick, and induce hot tears. Why? What is its power? I think it has something to do with innocence. And with memory, perhaps.

When Gatty is stranded in Cyprus, she sings in the half-built monastery of Bellapais in a refectory packed with monks.

'I don't know no song about Mary Magdalen,' she called out, 'but I know that one about all the saints, flourishing like the lilies, hidden in the clouds.

'Alleluia,' Gatty began to sing. 'Alleluia. Alleluia.'
In the refectory, there was a great stillness. Gatty's voice was like a scalpel, cutting away the monks' sins, and it was a balm, healing their wounds.

Time passed outside the door.

Gatty looked around her. She could tell the monks all wanted her to sing more.

'Audi filia,' she sang, as Everard had taught her. 'Listen, my daughter, look.'

The holy men listened, and they looked. One remembered his mother and one fingered his rosary; one thought of the girl he had kissed from top to toe

under an olive tree, and one tried to think about God. The abbot rose to his feet. 'You have given us fine gifts,' he said. 'In your voice, Gatty, we hear the grace of God. Never have I heard a voice as beautiful as yours. I only wish you could stay here. It's a pity you're not a boy!' (p.265)

So Gatty loves melody and she loves song; and in writing her tale, I afforded myself the most wonderful opportunity to show off my own love of language!

The wordplay in the first 11 words of the book point the way, and from there on I did all I could to make the lexicon, and the pulse, and the silences, and the speech rhythms, and the varying tones of the book musical.

At times I went clean over the top, I know! When Gatty reaches the Holy City, for instance, she hears it and sees it not only from A to Z but from Z to A!

Absolving and blessing, caterwauling, dancing, elbowing, fiddling, gawping, haggling, insisting, jeering, kissing, limping, mourning, neighing, ogling, pick-pocketing, questioning, rosary-telling, sweating, taunting, ululating, vowing, wailing, exclaiming, yelling, zither-plucking; zit-picking, yawning, explaining, whistling, vandalising, uttering, tale-telling, showing, rabbiting, quaffing, pleading, oat-eating, nagging, money-changing, laughing, kneeling, jostling, hugging, gossiping, flagellating, entreating, doddering, chanting, breast-beating and arguing. (p.298)

Well, why not? What I was trying to do was to capture not only the energy and excitement of the scene, but the way Gatty engaged with it.

I've been describing how Gatty translates what she hears and sees into song. But there is a moment when Gatty becomes more than an interpreter. She becomes a maker.

For a long night, she is alone in the heart of the church of Holy Sepulchre – a little Saracen boy has let her stay there against all the rules – and Gatty knows she is blessed.

'I don't deserve this. I done nothing in my life. I'll make it different because of this, all my life, each day of it.'

During the night, Gatty sings. As she tells her solitary companion, Snout the cook, when they are reunited the next day, 'I sang psalms and that, and songs without words. And a new song . . . I can't explain. A sort of song of everything'.

'I mean, I made rock solid and gritty.'

'Rock is!' said Snout.

'I know, but it might not be, if I hadn't sung it so.'

Snout frowned.

'I made steps climb and passages twist, I made darkness blind, and candles waxen. I made light shine. In my song, I created them.'

Snout shook his head.

'With my head and heart, my flesh and blood, I made air breathe. I made air sing.'

'You and your notions,' Snout said fondly. 'You are a one.' (pp.315-316)

So there it is. Gatty sings to pitch her world. And I write words to tune mine.

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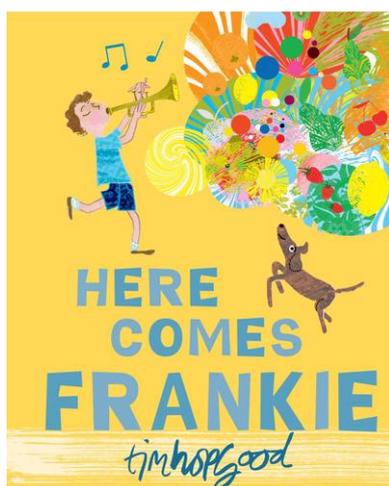
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Creating Picture Books Around Music

Tim Hopgood is an award-winning picture-book creator. His first book, *Our Big Blue Sofa* (2006) won the Read It Again! Award in 2007. In 2008, he won the Booktrust Early Years Award for Best Emerging Illustrator for *Here Comes Frankie!* (2008). Since then his books have been translated into over 20 different languages and he has been nominated for the Kate Greenaway Medal six times. To find out more visit www.timhopgood.com.



It's hard to believe that ten years have passed since Frankie first marched down Ellington Avenue playing his trumpet and turned a grey, quiet street into a noisy, colourful carnival scene. *Here Comes Frankie!* (2008) is a book that's taken me out of my studio and into schools, working with children of all ages. Through it I discovered the world of synaesthesia. More recently, when the book was selected by CLPE to be part of their Power of Pictures project, I've seen the power of expression and character development through drawing, and its positive impact on literacy in schools.

I had no intention of writing a picture book about synaesthesia, in fact I'm not sure I even knew what synaesthesia was. My starting point was simply to create a book to encourage young children to learn to play a musical instrument or at least give it a try. Giving it a try is more in line with my own experience, having been in the recorder club at primary school and then the proud owner of a 1970s Hohner Melodica (its bold green and cream colour combination was the big draw for me) and the offer of 12 weeks of violin lessons seemed like a must. Unfortunately the violin and I didn't bond. I desperately wanted to: I loved carrying the case, I loved playing with the bow and I loved the smell of my violin, but when bow, violin and I got it together it was clear we weren't made for each other. I had high hopes of moving on to the clarinet or the oboe, but my parents weren't so enthusiastic and declared me 'non-musical' and that was that.

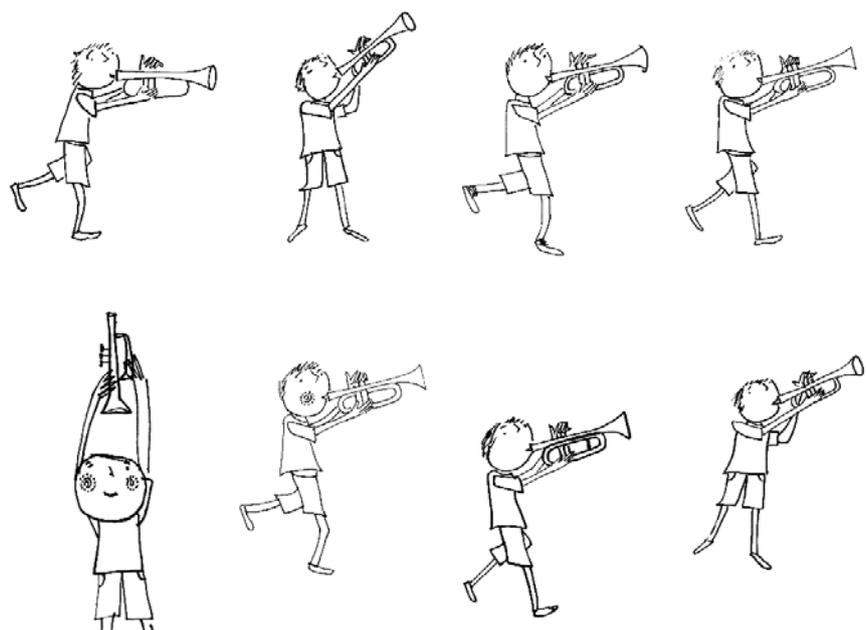
Having encouraged my own children to play musical instruments, I wanted to write a book about not giving up, about persevering and the joy that music can bring to our lives. I've always been fascinated by how music can

change your mood or the atmosphere in a room. But how do you show music in a picture book?

That's what I asked myself when I came to illustrate *Here Comes Frankie!* (2015). As a starting point I looked at the paintings of Wassily Kandinsky; I remembered from school that Kandinsky had created a series of paintings in response to music. I noticed that some of his mark making looked like musical notes, some of it mathematical and other elements looked very much like hands playing abstract instruments. The arrangement of these elements was dynamic and joyful.

And then quite by accident I came across an article online about how Kandinsky thought he heard his paintbox hiss. I read with great excitement how he was convinced the colours in his paintbox made different noises and that he was most likely a synaesthete. And suddenly a whole world of different possibilities opened up for Frankie and me. Imagine his surprise when Frankie first blows his trumpet only to discover that he can not only hear the sound, but see and smell it too!

I had already decided that Frankie would learn to play the trumpet (not the violin!) and that the book would reference the jazz era around the 1950s and 60s. Why? Well, because it's an era that really fascinates me: a time when ideas in art and music seemed particularly fluid, groundbreaking and exciting and I wanted to capture this excitement in my book.



From *Here Comes Frankie!*. Copyright © 2015 Tim Hopgood.
Published by Macmillan Children's Books.

I also looked at the experimental work of Jackson Pollock. The raw energy of his splatter paintings seemed to me like a good place to start when it came to illustrating sounds. I decided to show Frankie's first attempts at playing the trumpet in rough scribbles and cut-up collage shapes that were awkward and rough, a direct visualisation of the noises he was making.

To slow the whole process down, I didn't want him to be a musical maestro overnight, there had to be a moment when things weren't going well, so I divided the pages up into separate panels. I call these 'pack-horse' spreads because they are pages that carry a lot of information. Having a series of pack-horse spreads enabled me to then have a run of high impact pages towards the end of the book that are bursting with colour and movement and very little text.



From *Here Comes Frankie!*. Copyright © 2015 Tim Hopgood. Published by Macmillan Children's Books.

As the book progresses, the pages gradually become more colourful and the shapes that Frankie creates become more fluid and appealing to reflect the development of his musical skills. Eventually we come to a double-page spread that is bursting with colour and this is the moment that Frankie fills his house with wonderful patterns of sound before heading outside and filling Ellington Avenue with the sound of sunshine.



From *Here Comes Frankie!*. Copyright © 2015 Tim Hopgood. Published by Macmillan Children's Books.

Years later I was able to combine my love of music and art again when my editor at OUP Children's Books asked if I had ever considered illustrating a classic. I don't think he was considering it to be a classic song, but I seized the moment and showed him a pencil rough I had created of *What a Wonderful World* written by Bob Thiele and George David Weiss (2015). Following the success of *What a Wonderful World* I've since illustrated three more classic songs: *Walking in a Winter Wonderland* (2016), *Moon River* (2018) and *Singing in the Rain* (2017). I like the idea that in my own way I'm keeping these songs alive and introducing them to a new, younger audience.

People are generally surprised when I tell them that 'Singing in the Rain' was written in 1929. Any song that's been around that long is special. It means people connect to it. The song was a hit long before the film was ever made. In fact, the film was used as a vehicle to make the song a hit all over again! But I guess the reason we love the song so much is that iconic dance scene by Gene Kelly.

A hit song that already has strong visual associations is possibly dangerous ground for a picture-book project. When I told friends which song I was doing next I was surprised by their response, 'Oh brilliant, I love that song, and will you be drawing Gene Kelly dancing in the rain?'. They were surprised to hear that no, I would not be doing

that, although in truth, there is a nod to Kelly right at the start of the book, because I want people to make the connection. I very much hope that parents and teachers will share that classic dance scene and the wonders and skill of Kelly with the little ones in their life.



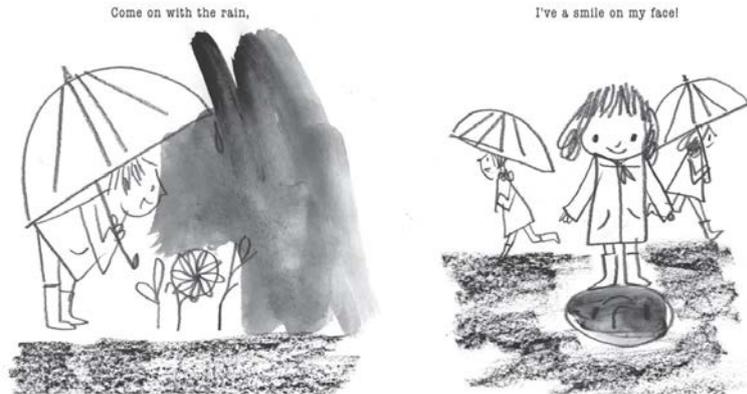
Singing in the Rain. Layout for pp.4–5. Illustration © 2017 Tim Hopgood. Published by Oxford University Press.



Singing in the Rain. Final illustration for pp.4–5. Illustration © 2017 Tim Hopgood. Published by Oxford University Press.

Can the words from a song make a good picture book? I think they can. To me ‘Singing in the Rain’ is about life. It’s about how rain is a powerful life source. It’s about how rain connects us: after all, moisture created in the rainforest falls in our cities. In the book this is all seen through the eyes of a child. It’s children who tend to notice the cracks in the pavement; when did you last stop and really look into a puddle? I’m guessing you can’t remember because as adults we just don’t have the time! And actually rain is a huge inconvenience. If I announce that it’s raining I doubt that many of you would jump up with sheer delight, you’re more likely to groan and check the travel news. Rain means delays. But to a child, rain means dressing up in bright, funny clothing. Rain means

wellies. Rain means puddles. Puddles mean splashing! And splashing is fun. So now you're aged four again, you're in your rainy day gear, you've got your wellies on and you've just been handed an umbrella. It's a bit windy, perfect, because you feel like flying. One, two, three and you're off. So now you're flying high above the city heading for where? The rainforest of course!



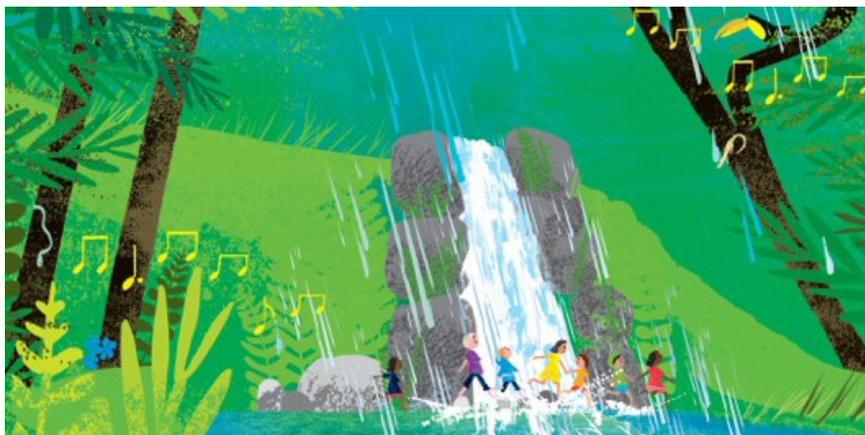
Singing in the Rain. Layout for a double spread. Illustration © 2017 Tim Hopgood. Published by Oxford University Press.



Singing in the Rain. Final illustration for a double spread. Illustration © 2017 Tim Hopgood. Published by Oxford University Press.

And as you drop through the clouds you feel the warm, damp air and suddenly your head is filled with the sound of amazing tropical birds. And having grown up in the city, you've never seen anywhere so green and lush. You can hear a roar, but it's not the roar of a tiger, it's continuous and powerful and you can't help but be drawn towards it.

Now the noise is deafening . . . and what's the source of the noise? A wonderful, powerful waterfall. It's time to head back now, time to leave the rainforest behind, time to return to the other side of the rainbow, back to the city, back to reality, back down to earth.



Singing in the Rain. Illustration © 2017 Tim Hopgood. Published by Oxford University Press.

At first glance, what might appear to be ‘just the words from a song’ can in fact, as I’ve come to discover, be a terrific springboard for some spectacular visual storytelling.

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On Music – The Making of *Love Song*

Sophia Bennett is the author of *Threads* (2015), *The Look* (2016), *Love Song* (2016) and several other books for teens. *The Times* has called her ‘the queen of teen dreams’. Her latest book, *The Bigger Picture: Women Who Changed the Art World* (2019) is an illustrated guide to great women artists, old and new, with works in the Tate’s collection. Sophia teaches Writing for Children at City University.

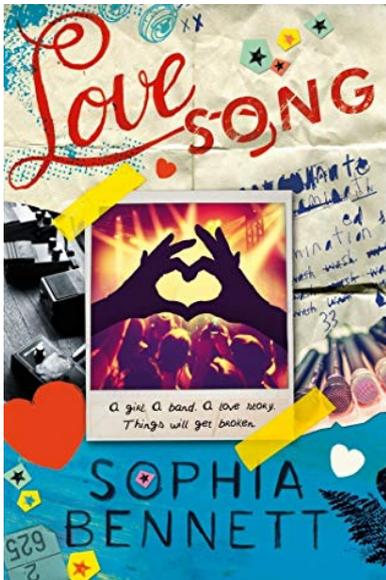
I am listening to Led Zeppelin with my seven-year-old son. Thanks to an earlier book about a girl band, I have taken up bass guitar and am trying to find new songs for my playlist. In the way of these things, one track to another, and we go down a musical rabbit hole until, in the gathering darkness of the early evening a stand-out guitar riff pulls us both in . . . and we look at each other and know we’ll always have this moment.

The track is ‘Kashmir’. I know its iconic da-da-dah, da-da-dah opening chord sequence by osmosis, but could not have named the song. This evening, in the dying light, my son and I get lost in its poetic sense of mystery; the ethereal wail of Robert Plant suggests infinite adventures in far-off lands. We are bonded by this strange experience of music from a time when I was little, decades before he was born.

Later, I’ll write the moment in *Love Song*. Same track, same sense of discovery. But not for a mother and son this time: for a girl and a bad boy rock star. Of course, I amped it up to 11. There is a storm outside. They are almost alone in a huge, crumbling house in Northumberland. He is one of the most famous musicians on the planet. In honour of Public Image Ltd, the title of the book was originally going to be *This Is Not a Love Song* – and it isn’t a proper love story, really. The boy and girl may well not end up together. But it’s a true love letter to music, and what it can do to you.

In around 2014 I set out to write a book about the dying days of the pop boy band One Direction. Much of my readership was obsessed, and when it came to Harry Styles I could perfectly understand why. But I watched

those boys on tour after tour and thought how very exhausted they must be; how they must long to step out of the limelight for a while; how the joy of seeing new cities must have palled. *That* was the band I wanted to explore – the one the fans never get to see.



Researching *Love Song* was a series of pinch-me moments. The idea came from a boy band, but the more I researched the more I was inspired by the groups from my early days who were experiencing the madness for the first time in history: the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and later, Duran Duran.

I devoured Hunter Davies's account of the Beatles' rocket-speed ascent to fame, when they let him travel along like a fifth member of the band (1968). I could legitimately and tax-deductably lie on the sofa reading John Taylor's entertaining autobiography *In the Pleasure Groove* (2013), about being a worldwide sex symbol in the 1980s. The crowd at Madison Square Garden in *Love Song* – like pixels on a massive screen – is based entirely on Taylor's account. So is one of the characters, and if you know him you probably won't find it too hard to guess who.

My father was, and is, a Rolling Stones fan. One of the high points of his life was getting to hang out with the band after a concert in Berlin. I devoured Keith Richards' autobiography *Life* (2010), which is just as geeky about reel-to-reel recording and open-chord tuning as it is about how and where to find high quality heroin on the road. (He approached it with the care and precision of a professional chemist, and that is possibly why he's still alive.)

For many years the Rolling Stones used a recording bus they'd had built for them, which they could park outside whichever mansion they happened to be writing songs in. Known as Rolling Stones Mobile Studio, it looked like a Portakabin on wheels, but inside it was magic. *Sticky Fingers* (1971) was largely mixed here and it was later used by bands from Led Zeppelin to Queen and Patti Smith. It's immortalised in Deep Purple's 'Smoke on the Water' (1972) – the song with perhaps the most iconic guitar riff of all time – because they were using it to record their album *Machine Head* (1972) in Switzerland, and it was rescued just in time from a nearby fire.

In real life, the bus lives in retirement in Canada, but in fiction it came back for one last hurrah in *Love Song*, and was parked outside Heatherwick Hall for the benefit of The Point. I like to think that Windy, the band's eccentric manager, would have had it flown over at reckless rock expense for the boys.

The Hall is inspired partly by Headley Grange in Hampshire, where Led Zeppelin recorded 'Kashmir'. Knowing I was writing the book, Barry Cunningham, my publisher (who has a 1970s rock history of his own) gave me *Hammer of the Gods* (1985), the unauthorised biography by Stephen Davis. The madness of their tours in the US was fascinating. A couple of lines about The Point's early days, driving through snowstorms to make gigs where five people showed up, pay homage to their beginnings. But just as beguiling is the account of their friendly, laid-back recording days, living like hippie country gents in the English countryside (apart from John Bonham, the drummer, who spent much of the time in an alcoholic stupor) and creating songs that would become the soundtrack to a generation.

Love Song is infused with music. There's a playlist at the back, with a QR code that links to Spotify, so readers can listen as they go along. It references the Beatles, the Cure, Blondie, Muddy Waters, Jimi Hendrix, David Bowie, Mark Ronson and many more. There was a worry that a teenage audience wouldn't identify with 'old' music - but teenage audiences today are the most music-literate we've ever had. Thanks to internet streaming they have access to most of the music in the world, and teenagers are *curious*. They click on links and make connections. They discover a vintage riff they love and sample it and share. They make no music hierarchy; they know it's personal. This makes writing about life-changing music for them a joy.

However, when you write about music you quickly learn that though you can quote from books in satisfying chunks, you cannot safely quote from a song, however much you long to share what its lyrics mean to you. Not unless you want to pay a fortune. Instead, I had to write my own. It's a totally different mental process from writing a story, or even pure poetry. I became fascinated by songwriters from Paul McCartney to David Bowie and Leonard Cohen talking about jotting down iconic lyrics on

a napkin, or an envelope. That's all it takes: inspiration and a handy pen.

Then comes the chemical experiment by the band to create a mood and sound and a hook. All those rock biographies captured the joy in the early days of jointly creating something iconic, followed by the fallings out, the rivalries and recriminations. If you want to write young adult literature all the highs and lows are there. Just add some misplaced desire and wait for fireworks to happen.

It was that chemistry that caught me in the end. Being in a band is ultimately about enduring creative friendship – one that often starts in early adolescence and has to survive whatever comes next. No wonder it goes wrong so often. But I can't think of anything more fascinating and wonderful while it lasts. And sexy. It wasn't sleekly styled boys staring out at the cameras I wanted to see, it was young men fresh from sleep, stuck in a crummy room together, using each other's ideas and some old-fashioned technology to make something that filled them with wonder and joy. From silence and frustration, those opening chords that build to a song that will become the soundtrack to a million lives.

In my book, my girl and her boys break up, make up, listen to some of the greatest pop and rock of the late twentieth century, and go on to create their own. I was astonished when – as a young adult novel – *Love Song* won the Romantic Novel of the Year in 2017. I'm pretty sure it was the music scenes that did it.

Oh, and my husband plays and makes guitars. Not sure that's obvious from the way I write about music and love, and the boys in the band. But possibly.

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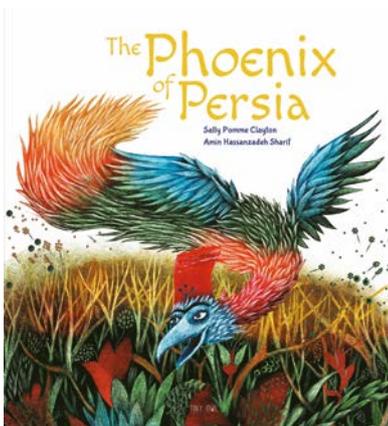
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The Phoenix of Persia Revives an Ancient Story as a Multimedia Picture Book

Phyllida Jacobs is a Publisher's Assistant at Tiny Owl.



If you travelled back a thousand years, to a coffee shop in ancient Persia, you would almost certainly encounter a rapt audience all gathered around, listening to a storyteller. Amid the scents of coffee, ripe mulberries and walnuts, you might hear him recount tales from the epic *Shahnameh*, illustrated by an intricately painted *pardeh* wall hanging. You might experience the story of Prince Zal, the ancient Persian hero abandoned by his father only to be saved by the mythical bird Simorgh. Tiny Owl's new picture book *The Phoenix of Persia* (2019) aims to recreate this rich storytelling experience for the new generation to enjoy. A retelling of the story of Zal and the phoenix Simorgh, this unique picture book is accompanied by an original musical composition and a recorded narration.

The project was initiated by Professor Laudan Nooshin of City University of London, who has been researching and writing about Iranian classical and popular music for more than 30 years. She had the idea of turning the story into a children's book after working on a similar project with the Community and Education Department at the London Philharmonic Orchestra. After Professor Nooshin partnered with independent children's book publisher Tiny Owl, author Sally Pomme Clayton reinterpreted the story in her own words. A professional storyteller with a long-standing fascination with ancient myths and fables, she co-founded the groundbreaking Company of Storytellers. Tapping into the ancient, global tradition of

oral storytelling, her rich and poetic language breathes new life into old stories.

Tiny Owl was first started because its co-founder and publisher Delaram Ghanimifard, who is originally from Iran, couldn't find books that reflected her sons' heritage. *The Phoenix of Persia* has huge personal significance for her, as it's based on an episode from Iran's national epic the *Shahnameh*, or *Book of Kings*. Written by the tenth-century poet Ferdowsi, it tells the story of the Persian Empire from the beginning of the world to the Arab conquest of Iran in the seventh century. In this part of the story, King Sam awaits the birth of his son, but when the child is born with white hair, he is banished to the forest. Luckily for the baby Prince Zal, he is found by the mythical firebird Simorgh and raised in her nest. When the King and his son are reunited, they both learn a powerful lesson about forgiveness and acceptance. Although the story is mainly unknown to non-Iranian children, it carries echoes of Snow White and firebird folklore - including, of course, the phoenix Fawkes of Harry Potter fame - that will instantly feel familiar. The story is updated for contemporary readers but keeps the original poem's sense of magic and mystery.



Amir Eslami (ney), Saeid Kord Mafi (santur), Nilufar Habibian (qanun), Sally Pomme Clayton (storyteller), Arash Moradi (tanbur). Copyright © 2019 Tiny Owl.

A huge part of what makes this book so special is the free music and narration that accompanies it. On opening the book, you'll find a QR code that can be opened with any smartphone, no special app required. Simply point your camera at it and tap the link that appears to open Soundcloud and stream the music. Right away you'll be struck by the unique sounds of the Iranian instruments featured, quite different from the sounds of a Western orchestra. Like Prokofiev's classic composition *Peter and the Wolf*, each instrument represents a character in the story. The various sounds reflect the nature of the character. Our protagonist Zal is represented by the qanun, a type of Iranian zither played by plucking. The majestic firebird Simorgh is represented by the ney, a traditional reed flute. The music also features the sounds of the Iranian instruments tanbur, santur and daff (a type of lute, dulcimer and frame drum respectively). Hearing Sally Pomme Clayton's narration alongside the music recreates the experience of listening to a storyteller, and provides many different ways to enjoy the story. Children might listen to the narration on its own or alongside the book to support their reading. They can even use the music track without narration as an accompaniment to their own telling of the story.

Professor Nooshin and Soosan Loloovar, a PhD student at City University, worked as Project Leader and Creative Producer to create the musical track. The musicians also acted as composers, improvising much of their parts as is common in traditional Iranian music. The music was mixed, mastered and edited by Julius Johansson and other students at City University.

The audio element of the book is complemented by its beautiful illustrations. The artwork illustrating the tale of Zal was created by Iranian artist Amin Hassanzadeh Sharif. He used a technique called 'sgraffito', in which an initial layer of bright colour is covered by a layer of black paint, which is then scratched away to reveal what lies beneath and create a pattern or image. The resulting illustrations mirror the beauty and intricacy of Persian miniature paintings or the elaborate backdrops used in traditional storytelling in Iran. They're full of jewel-like tones that perfectly capture the sense of an ancient, mythical world filled with enchantment.

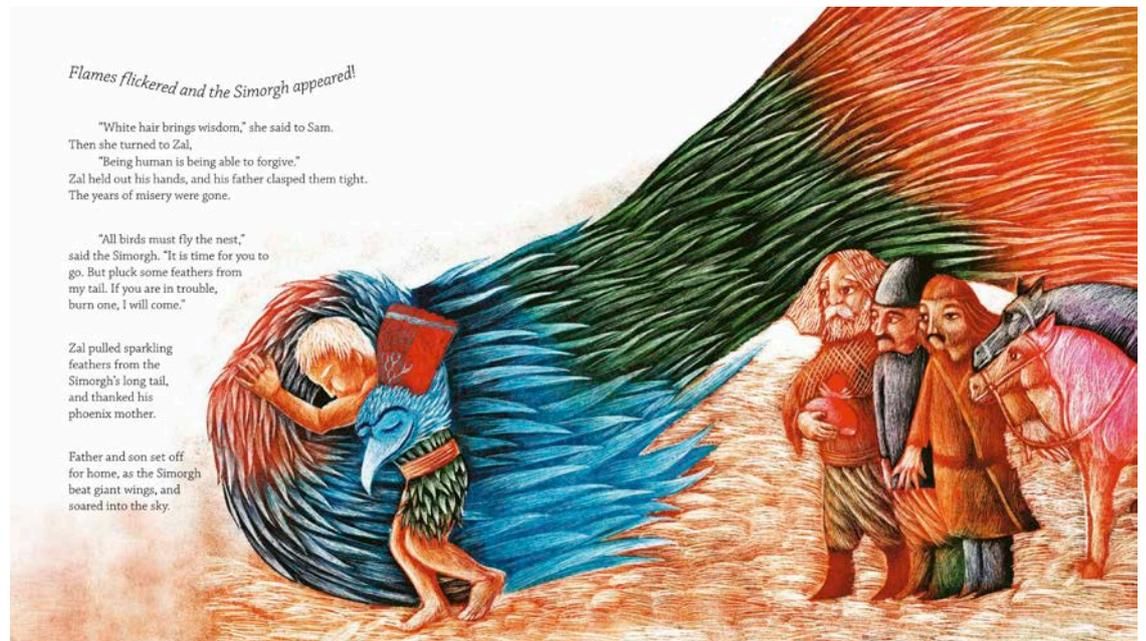


Illustration © Amin Hassanzadeh Sharif 2019, published by Tiny Owl Publishing © 2019.

As part of this hugely ambitious project, Tiny Owl partnered with Tower Hamlets School Libraries Service to create the Shahnameh Box, a free resource for schools to borrow. The box is packed with exciting materials to help enrich students' understanding of Persian culture. It contains a copy of *The Phoenix of Persia*, the non-fiction book *I is for Iran*, and the Persian love story *Bijan and Manije*, another picture book from Tiny Owl. There are materials to help teachers create a beautiful display, including Iranian fabric and coins, patterned tiles, 'phoenix' feathers, dried rose petals, musical instruments, contemporary Persian miniatures and a matching game for students to play. Also included is a booklet of cross-curricular teacher resources to help schools plan lessons around the book. These comprehensive resources cover English, art, history, geography and more. Not only that, but *The Phoenix of Persia* was also brought to schools and venues all over the country through the annual Pop Up Festival. Children got to hear Sally Pomme Clayton's spellbinding performance of the book, and enjoy artist workshops with Amin Hassanzadeh Sharif.

The Phoenix of Persia is the second book in Tiny Owl's series One Story, Many Voices, which promotes cross-cultural understanding by sharing stories from around the world. When the world feels more divided than ever before, it is essential that we learn to appreciate and understand cultures different from our own. Middle Eastern countries, especially Iran, are presented in an

overwhelmingly negative light in Western media, leading to stereotyping of people from these countries. *The Phoenix of Persia* shows children the beautiful culture and history of Iran, hopefully creating a more positive nuanced view of the country and its people. Traditional Iranian dramatic storytelling has been included in UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. This book helps to revitalise this vibrant tradition and allow children from all backgrounds and cultures to experience its magic.

Creating *The Phoenix of Persia* has been a long journey for everyone at Tiny Owl. For co-founders Delaram Ghanimifard and Karim Arghandehpour it began in their childhoods when their parents and grandparents told them stories from the *Shahnameh*. When Professor Nooshin brought them the idea for *The Phoenix of Persia* two years ago, they were electrified by the idea of bringing these beloved stories to life. But they were also worried – would children find the sounds of Iranian music too unfamiliar?

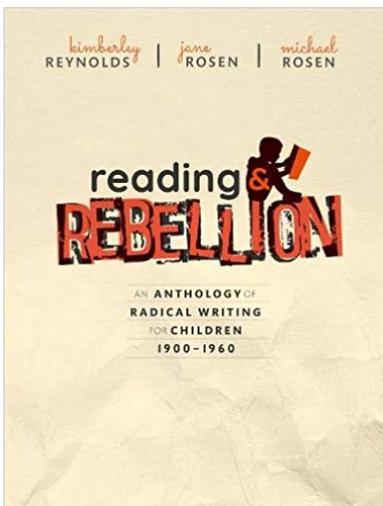
Luckily, the children loved it! It has been wonderful to see children all over the UK enjoying the music that's so integral to the Iranian storytelling tradition. We hope that *The Phoenix of Persia* will continue to fly to new readers, and open their minds to other cultures.

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Review

Reading & Rebellion: An Anthology of Radical Writing for Children 1900-1960



BBYLink recently included my review of Kim Reynold's fascinating book *Left Out: The Forgotten Tradition of Radical Publishing for Children in Britain 1910-1949* (OUP, 2016), and to complement that she has now co-edited *Reading & Rebellion*, which is, as it claims, an anthology of some of those works she highlighted. With her are two lifelong readers (and current author or preserver) of radical literature for young people, all of whom bring their academic and personal knowledge of the subject to curate their findings. Their combined experience offers us an Introduction which outlines the reasons behind their interest, as does Polly Toynbee in her Preface. We then have ten sections, each with around half a dozen excerpts from material published in the 60 years from the beginning of the twentieth century. The sections are separately introduced to place the works within the social, political and publishing history of those years, and the individual excerpts are then further put into context with more detailed additional information concerning that specific work. It would have been helpful to know which of the three editors contributed which section and which individual introduction. From odd phrases, e.g. 'as Michael Rosen can testify' (p.260), we can guess they are largely Reynolds' work but there is no specific attribution.

The sections themselves range widely over many subjects: 'Stories for Young Socialists', 'The War against War', 'Writing and Revolution', 'Of Russia with Love' (I wonder what was the inspiration for that title . . .), 'Examples from Life', 'Performing Leftness', 'Fighting Fascism', 'Science and Social Transformation', 'Sex for Beginners' (all from the 1920s and 30s, and more down to earth and accurate than many succeeding attempts), and 'Visions of the Future'. These sections are interspersed

with occasional excerpts from the ‘Adventures of Micky Mongrel the Class Conscious Dog’, a series which ran in the *Daily Worker* from 1930. There is a great deal of variety in what the editors have included: fiction, instruction, songs (hooray – with their music – so frequently omitted in writing about songs!), which shows twenty-first-century readers just how wide-ranging radical writing for young people was in the first half and a bit of the previous century. The book is comprehensively illustrated, but only in monochrome, a pity as the colour palette of many of the originals tells us much about their underlying philosophy as it does about the limitations and development of printing during these 60 years.

Altogether, this book is ‘a good thing’ as Sellar and Yeatman would say. The book itself, with its list of works cited and textual acknowledgements, together with the reasonably comprehensive indexing, should provide extremely useful resources for students both of children’s literature and left-wing politics. It’s far more than the ‘snapshot’ Reynolds claims in her Introduction, as much of the material sampled is very hard to come by in hard copy or virtual format. Coupled with Reynolds’ more overtly academic and excellent *Left Out*, it opens a window on a previously neglected genre, and one hugely relevant to our present times.

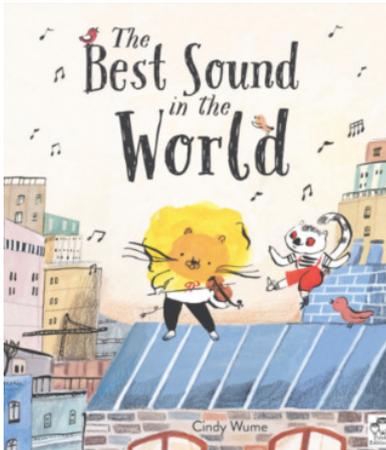
Work cited

Reynolds, Kimberley, Jane Rosen and Michael Rosen (2018) *Reading & Rebellion: An Anthology of Radical Writing for Children 1900–1960*. Oxford University Press, hb. 978 0 1988 0618 9, £25, illus., xxiv + 463pp. [Age range: 16+. Keywords: academic; student; general reader; left-wing politics; radical writing; publishing history 1900–1960.]

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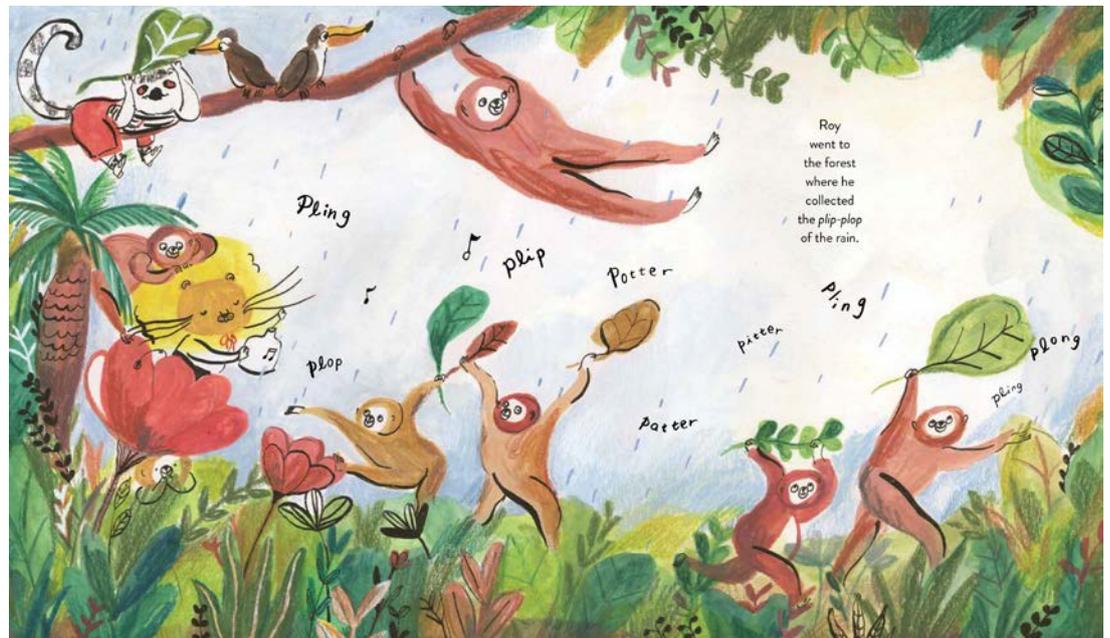
Review

The Best Sound in the World



Small city-dwelling lion Roy has a big dream: to become a Great Musician. And he certainly doesn't need help from his annoyingly enthusiastic neighbour and friend, Jemmy the lemur, no matter if Jemmy is as passionate about music as Roy himself.

Roy decides to capture the very best sounds in little glass bottles but none of them sounds right when he tries to play them on his violin. So Roy decides to travel the world to find the most beautiful sound of all. He collects the 'plip-plop rain' in the forest and the 'twitter-tweet' of birds in the highest mountains and visits the souk, the beach and the desert - but just becomes more and more confused. Which is the most beautiful sound of all? How can you tell? Everyone gives him a different answer. Discouraged and lonely, Roy goes home. Jemmy, ever loyal, appreciates Roy's music and Roy starts to see that it is the best, because his friend loves it. They go sound hunting together and enjoy music together, too.



Illustrations © Cindy Wume 2018, *The Best Sound in the World*, Published by First Editions.

The concept of being able to capture sounds in little glass bottles is playful, imaginative and original, and works in

perfect balance with the prose in this story. Wume's language has a fresh, sweet and simple feel with scattered 'sound words' working particularly well alongside the main narrative: for instance, in the rain-forest scene, raindrops 'pling, plip, plop, patter and pitter'. Roy captures the 'woooooo' of the wind, the 'splish-splash' of the tide and the 'chitter-chatter' of the market, making this a fun story to read aloud.

Wume's illustrations are as delightful as the text, with warm rich tones and a charmingly vintage feel that also manages to be perfectly contemporary. The pages are sprinkled with music notes adding a dynamic feel and plenty for little fingers to discover.

The intertwining of musical notes with 'floating words' and short paragraphs of text is not only a pleasing creative choice, it also supports that way that music can help children develop language and reading skills. Babies 'respond to the rhythm and melody of language before they understand what the words mean' (1) and experience with aspects of music, such as keeping a beat, helps children become reading-ready.

The passage of time is subtly presented in *The Best Sound in the World* with the changing seasons. Little birds adorn almost every spread – a charming device that amplifies the focus on music as a key theme. The illustrations also capture and portray the emotional depth of the story, particularly in the two train-travel spreads, where little Roy stands out with great poignancy as a bright yellow but very small and lonely lion.

The idea of catching sounds in bottles is charming, but it's the message about friendship that really makes this picture book sing. Handled with a light touch, Roy's journey is not only a physical one but also one of personal development. He shows true perseverance and must overcome disappointment, disheartenment and injured pride as he bravely travels alone on his mission, collecting sounds and puzzling over the difficult and deeply philosophical question of what 'best' really means. Ultimately, he discovers the importance of teamwork, compromise and, most of all, the beauty to be found in true friendship. The meditative, reflective quality of this story is cleverly balanced with its vibrant visual appeal, rich detail and powerful, minimalist storytelling.

It could be argued that making either Roy or Jemmy (or both) female would have further enhanced the work since ‘male characters continue to dominate the most popular picture books’ (3) and research conducted in 2018 found that, in picture books featuring animals, whenever an author revealed a creature’s sex, it was 73 per cent more likely to be male than female (2). Against this backdrop, it would be unfair to single out *The Best Sound in the World* in this regard, but is certainly an aspect worth considering for future works.

The editing could be a little tighter – e.g. on the back cover, it’s suggested that a ‘new friend’ may be able to help Roy in his quest, but Jemmy is quite clearly a longstanding buddy.

But as a debut, *The Best Sound in the World* is a wonderful achievement and Wume, who is based in Taiwan, is an exciting new talent.

Work reviewed

Wume, Cindy (2018) *The Best Sound in the World*. London: Lincoln Children’s First Editions, pb. 978 1 7860 3169 3 £11.99, 32pp. [Age range: 5+. Keywords: music; sounds; sound words; friendship; travelling the world; lemurs; changing seasons.]

Works cited

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2. Ferguson, Donna (2018) Must monsters always be male? Huge gender bias revealed in children’s books. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jan/21/childrens-books-sexism-monster-in-your-kids-book-is-male>. Accessed 14 June 2019.
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Kate Lee



The UK section of the International Board on Books for Young People

The next issue of *IBBYLink* is *IBBYLink* 56, Autumn 2019 and will be on the theme A Sense of Place: Scotland.

Articles on other subjects are also welcomed. Contributions to Ferelith Hordon: fhordon@aol.com.

If you are interested in becoming a reviewer for *IBBYLink*, contact Lina Iordanaki: linaioranaki@gmail.com. New reviewers are always welcome.

Titles for Review

Publishers and others with books to be reviewed in *IBBYLink* should send them to Lina Iordanaki at Campus London, (Code First Girls), 4-5 Bonhill Street, Shoreditch EC2A 4BX, London; linaioranaki@gmail.com.

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