

Dream Songs Night Songs: From Mali to Louisiana

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Sylvie Bourbonniere, Illustrator

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“Pleasant dreams / as I beat my drum to the sound of your heart / to the rhythm of Mother Earth.” These are the lyrics of “Sadraskwiio,” of the Huron-Wendake tribe of Canada, one of fourteen lullabies included in this enchanting storybook with accompanying CD.

Geared towards very young children, this bedtime story is a lullaby itself. Its few reassuring sentences talk about the wonderful things that tomorrow’s voyage will bring. The story’s fourteen fragments, written in English, Spanish, and French, thematically anchor each accompanying two-page illustration. Each illustration is also sequentially associated with a lullaby on the CD. The lullabies are sung in their original language in a lush recording that employs a worldwide assortment of instruments. The line, “New friends will come along,” for example, is illustrated by a mother hen trailed by three chicks in little rubber boots, and is paired with “*Los Pollitos Dicen*” (“The Chicks Say”), a lullaby from Costa Rica.

The book is well served by the story’s simplicity, as the illustrations and songs are rich and textured. The illustrator has won numerous awards, including finalist in the 2003 LUX Quebec children’s book category. Her illustrations here are dreamlike and saturated with color, and depict scenes from around the world, such as a mother feeding her child soup in Mali, or magical creations like a winged horse. The warmth and whimsy of Bourbonnière’s art will win over any viewer.

Also included on the CD are PDF files of posters of the illustrations, with the song lyrics translated into the three languages. As in many lullabies, the actual words can sometimes be a little scary, as in the Japanese lullaby “*Owaiyare*,” in which a child is warned to go back to bed or a rat will take him away. However, the song is so spellbinding that only a cynical adult fluent in Japanese would bat an eye.

Dream Songs is the second volume in a series; the award-winning Volume One, by the same author, featured lullabies “from China to Senegal.” This volume was first published in Canada under the title *Dodo La Planète Do* (“*dodo*” means “night-night” in French). That edition won the Parents’ Choice Foundation’s 2004 Gold Award and was nominated for the 2004 Juno Awards for Children’s Album of the Year. The PDF files might be a little tricky to find for less computer-savvy readers, but this book is a luscious example of excellent children’s literature.

A true multi-cultural and multi-disciplinary work, it is as educational as it is enjoyable. The only catch is that little ones, and any adults within earshot, might not be able to resist sleep long enough to reach the end. If so, the remaining songs make for wonderful dreams.

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