Clarion Review

Juvenile Fiction

Martimus at Midnight
Alina B. Klein
Joy Allen, illustrator
978-1-4259-5528-1
Four Stars (out of Five)

Martimus at Midnight is set in the Children's Museum of Indianapolis. It is the fourth in a series created to promote a literacy program. Martimus is a nine-foot tall stuffed polar bear who kicks off a raucous dance party when the human staff are home sleeping. A French-speaking mastodon named Briella is only too happy to take a few turns including what looks like a Lindy hop. Pretty soon all the static exhibits are joyously animated denying the common dig that museums are lifeless.

As Martimus shimmies
Briella pliés
They jitterbug-boogie among the displays.
Exhibits start whooping and waving their hands
Inside their glass cases and velvet-roped stands.

Klein's rhyming verse shifts meter often enough to stay fresh. The language choices vary from fairly formal to terminal-g dropping casual speech blending pretty successfully. The fully realized pictures are all about motion. The illustrator best shows the transition to freedom when the carousel creatures lunge off their platform into the air. There is only one clunk in the catchy phrasing: "The party *gets jiggy*…" Although few kids will notice this mildly pejorative term the world is still awaiting hippop-opportunist Will Smith's apology for popularizing it.

This is Alina B. Klein's debut as a children's book writer. Joy Allen has won considerable accolades illustrating forty-some books since 1997 working previously in graphic design.

Martimus at Midnight is confirmation to every kid who ever suspected that stuffed animals have a fuller life when no one is watching. Its target audience is primarily four to seven year olds.