

Song Bird: Matters of the Heart

Christine M. Knight

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An Australian music star must balance fame with family in this story filled with lush descriptions of the country.

In Australian author Christine M. Knight's *Song Bird: Matters of the Heart*, the plucky singer introduced in *Life Song* again takes center stage as an international music star.

Despite her fame, Mavis Mills still struggles with the issues that rendered *Life Song* so relatable and complex. She grapples with whether to be referred to by her given name or her stage name, Nikki. Although people close to her still call her by the name on her birth certificate, she associates that name with the insecure teenager she once was. To that end, most people refer to her as Nikki, a name that symbolizes the confident woman she has become. Her son, Dan, now ten, has identity problems of his own. He wants to know the name and story of his biological father, and he dislikes sharing his mother with the hordes of fans that now surround them. Mavis also tries to juggle fame with the need to keep her family intact. Even though she has a supportive, loving network of friends and family, she still yearns for a romantic love of her own.

This book touches on the themes of love, identity, and conflict in ways specific to the characters, but universal enough to draw the audience in. The protagonist's social supports are her parents, Marg and Trevor; her friends, Kate, Gary, and Susie; and her son, Dan; all are well-developed characters, including young Dan, who merits lots of direct dialogue as well as his own internal conflicts. A handy list of characters precludes confusion about how people connect to each other.

The book benefits from Knight's evocative turns of phrase, e.g., "[The men in Nikki's band] all wore a patina of stubble." The poetic prose, replete with lush descriptions of Australian terrain, makes those who have never been to the country feel at home. A glossary at the back of the book explains common Australian abbreviations and slang.

Although Mavis desires romance, she continues to remain her authoritative self, even as men attempt to woo her: "I'm here to work ... not to be seduced." It is refreshing indeed to find a female character willing to speak her mind even during potentially awkward moments. Although Mavis is a superstar, her dilemmas and her dialogue keep her grounded and easy to relate to. She forges ahead due to the support of men, not because of them. If Knight continues the protagonist's development on its current trajectory, this series definitely has the potential to go platinum.

JILL ALLEN (January 23, 2015)

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