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Foreword Review GENERAL FICTION

Songs by Honeybird

Peter McDade
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Peter McDade's original, quirky novel *Songs by Honeybird* riffs on the 1960s Southern rock scene.

In Atlanta, Ben and Nina's relationship falls apart, even as they move in together. She claims that her dog, Sid, is a reincarnated being and can talk; it's an assertion whose wildness Ben cannot accept. Alternating between Ben and Nina's perspectives, the book begins in the epic squalor that follows their breakup, then traces their late-night texts, innermost thoughts, and deepest fears. Their conversations ring with verisimilitude, whether conducted via text, social media, or in real-life exchanges.

In the midst of their relationship changes, Nina also seeks the truth about her father's death, while Ben is busy with his dissertation. His subject is the South's first integrated rock band, Honeybird; the band met a tragic fate, and he sifts through interviews and archival materials to learn more. That research is a grounding force that balances the book's weighty symbolism and charged, incisive social critiques.

The prose is resonant, holding reverence for music that is evinced in its procession of knowing allusions and inspired depictions of a rock band in action. Though it toggles between the contemporary era and the past, it captures both with convincing details. The sins of history haunt the present; the implications of the past are teased out to maintain intrigue, as when Ben discovers that Harlan Honeybird's father was a segregationist politician and realizes he found his dissertation's direction. After some unexpected twists, the narrative reaches a satisfying conclusion in which Ben and Nina both gain needed perspective and look toward their futures with promise.

Compelling, stylish, and profound, *Songs by Honeybird* is a novel about relationships, the South, anger over past wrongs, and new beginnings.

JOSEPH S. PETE (March / April 2022)

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