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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ JUVENILE FICTION

We Are Music Stars

Shanda Ramnarine
Otis Lauritz Gibbs
Matthew Joseph, photographer
Author House (Apr 9, 2013)
Softcover $24.99 (56pp)
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A creative use of photographs and an emotionally engaging narrative will inspire children to pick up an instrument.

We Are Music Stars by Shanda Ramnarine and Otis Lauritz Gibbs, with photography by Matthew Joseph, is a fictionalized story following eight-year-old twins, Zack and Epi, and their father, Khadijo, which is a stage name adopted when he became a musician. Khadijo wants to pass on his love of music to his children.

Geared for elementary-school-age children and told solely from the twins' perspectives, *We Are Music Stars* conveys how Khadijo explained his emotional connection to music to his children and how he uses it to express himself.

As Khadijo reflects on his childhood in St. Croix, when he learned to play piano and sing in local choirs, his tone is enthusiastic and warm, and Zack and Epi share his excitement—so much so that they want to learn to play instruments themselves.

The first half of the story is told from Zack's point of view, and Epi picks up the narration in the second half. Young readers will likely relate to the eight-year-olds' experiences. However, there are no transitions to introduce the new narrator, which makes the shift from Zack to Epi feel abrupt and the story line becomes jumbled. There is also a large jump in time from when the twins learn to play instruments to when they perform in a concert, and that gap makes the narrative feel rushed and incomplete. Many grammatical errors throughout the book create additional distractions.

Although Khadijo addresses the emotional aspects of music, the focus of the story is on the children's eagerness to become "music stars." This contrasts with the father's message about the personal joy he feels when playing music, and it detracts from the heartfelt tone established early on.

A highlight of the book is Joseph's high-quality photography. The vivid color photos help illustrate the story and provide a captivating alternative to the typical cartoon-style graphics and other illustration styles commonly found in children's storybooks. At times, though, Joseph's photos don't match the content of the narrative, causing confusion when, for example, new characters are introduced in photos without accompanying text.

On the back cover, the authors cite research that points to the importance of music in children's development, particularly in stimulating the brain and increasing creativity, but this idea is not integrated into the story. If it were more prominent, it would reinforce Khadijo's heartwarming message about why he has such a passion for music, and the story would have greater appeal for both parents and children.

MARIA SIANO (October 8, 2013)

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