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How Jelly Roll Morton Invented Jazz

Aylea Stephens

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Book Review

Title: How Jelly Roll Morton Invented Jazz

Author: Jonah Winter

Illustrator: Keith Mallett

Reviewer: Aylea Stephens

Publisher: Roaring Brook Press

Publication Year: 2015

ISBN: 9781596439634

Number of Pages: 32

Interest Level: Primary

Rating: Dependable



Review

This book tells the poetic story of Jelly Roll Morton in a creative way. When he was a baby, his godmother, a voodoo queen, put a spell on him and then got arrested with him when he was just a baby. Music is the only thing that can stop him from crying in jail, and later in life he learns to play the piano so well that he's playing with the grown-ups in bars. He is thrown out of his house because his great-grandmother doesn't want a lowlife musician in her home, but he goes back to the one thing that can make his crying stop: music. He invents jazz with a recipe for something sweet, spicy, smooth, bluesy, and something special. And even if he didn't invent it, he spells it throughout all the towns.

This book is full of bright, colorful pictures with a lot of oranges, purples, and blues to capture the spirit of jazz and New Orleans. The book is written in a poetic form, talking to the reader as "you," but telling the story of Jelly Roll Morton, although some of the facts are unclear. It presents the story as a possible folk tale origin story. The back of the book contains some facts about Morton and whether he truly invented jazz or not. Although the plot can be confusing because of its half folk-tale, half-historical nature, the illustrations' ability to capture the spirit of jazz will please fans of that style of music.