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Grandma's Records



Synopsis

Every summer, Eric goes to live with his grandmother in El Barrio (Spanish Harlem) while his parents work. Through the long hot days, Grandma fills her apartment with the blaring horns and conga drums of Bomba y Plena, salsa, and merengue-the music she grew up with in Puerto Rico-sharing her memories and passions with Eric. But Eric sees Grandma in a new light when she gets them tickets to hear their favorite band in concert. The music sounds so different than it does at home on their scratchy records. And then the lead singer serenades Grandma right in front of the whole audience! Join Eric Velasquez on a magical journey through time and across cultures, as a young boy's passion for music and art is forged by a powerful bond between generations.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (9 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 5 - 8 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 3

Customer Reviews

When your eyes feast upon the frontispiece illustrations-before the story has even begun-you know you're into something good. Eric Velasquez serves up a sometimes dazzling, sometimes quiet, evocation of the magic of album covers, salsa music, and warm family love in this autobiographical reminiscence of his childhood in Spanish Harlem. The pictures can be eye-popping dazzling; many times they are more serene one-panel set pieces. At all times, they accurately and richly convey emotion and setting. Here, the settings range from Grandma's house in El Barrio, to a brightly lit

nightclub (both inside and out) in the Bronx, and even to young Eric's imagination. The plot revolves around Eric and his grandmother, who met many of the best salsa players while growing up in Puerto Rico. The furnishings and her love of a few material objects suggest her relatively modest means: her record player and records. Without a trace of melodrama or contrivance, author/illustrator Velasquez shows music's importance to "Grandma": "Sometimes," Grandma said, "a song can say everything that is in your heart as if it was written just for you." She says this, covering her heart, and at the side, we see a picture of her and her husband long ago in Puerto Rico. There is joy as well. Listening to a meringue from the Dominican Republic, Grandma sways her hips, moves her arms, and generally loses herself in the rhythms. There's one shockingly good picture showing a somewhat older Eric drawing sketches based on album covers: "As I drew, I could see the record covers coming to life and the bands performing right there in Grandma's living room." Bright, angular, Picasso-like suggestions of musicians playing their instruments fill the page.

Eric Velasquez gives us an autobiographical narrative of emotional connections to music, family, and the homeland. The book introduces us to Eric by his retelling of how every summer he went to his grandma's apartment in El Barrio while his parents worked. From the first day, she wrapped him around her music, her dances, her special song, and her stories about growing up in Puerto Rico. Eric, due to the insistence of his grandmother, carefully selected records to play for both of them. Selecting and playing records became a ritual during which he became fascinated with the album covers and his grandma's love for Puerto Rican music. These music-filled summers are delightfully represented through each carefully crafted illustration and each story. We can see how their joy for music is portrayed through images that are playful but veer into photo-realism, while their emotions are carefully captured through the text. Velasquez was able to pay tribute to his grandma's connection to and love for music and Puerto Rico, the same love that cemented a strong connection for Eric to his grandmother. This book has a wonderful moment I must highlight as an example of bringing historical context to a memoir to convey the power of music in our daily lives: One day Grandma's nephew, Sammy Ayala, paid them a visit. Sammy was a musician and came from Puerto Rico because his musical group was going to perform for the first time in New York. Sammy gave his loving grandmother a copy of their brand-new record and two tickets to see his band: the now legendary Cortijo y su Combo with lead singer Ismael Rivera. This concert became for Eric and his grandmother a very personal and magical moment that captured their ongoing love for music and their 1950s summers in El Barrio.

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