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School Library Journal[®]

JULY 2005

For Children's, Young Adult and School Librarians

Charming The Next Generation

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ter. Background music transitions the beginning and end of each story. Young readers will enjoy this popular series with believable characters who have incredible opportunities to solve mysteries on their own with adults who help when needed but don't interfere in their adventures.—Teresa Wittmann, Westgate Elementary School, Edmonds, WA

Agnes Parker...Girl in Progress (unabr.). 3 cassettes. 4 hrs. Prod. by Listening Library. Dist. by Listening Library/Books on Tape. 2005. ISBN 0-307-20704-8. \$30.

Gr 4-6—Sixth grader Agnes Parker learns the true meaning of friendship in Kathleen O'Dell's wonderful novel. Throughout the story, Agnes deals with typical teen problems: Neidermeyer, the class bully, getting glasses, and fights with her best friend. After realizing that her new neighbor is also the new student in her class, Agnes quickly becomes friends with Joe, who is part Native American, and together they both deal with the loss of his mother and his father's subsequent depression. O'Dell accurately portrays sixth graders, from Neidermeyer's teasing to Agnes's relationship with Prejean, her best friend. We are shown each character's weaknesses and strengths as the story progresses, making readers like them all. Cassandra Campbell does an excellent job of reading the story, giving each character an individual, believable voice. An excellent choice for younger listeners and readers looking for a heroine who could be the girl sitting next to them in class.—Lisa D. Williams, Chocowinity Middle School, NC

Around the World in 80 Days (unabr.). 5 cassettes or 7 CDs. 7:55 hrs. Prod. by Listening Library. Dist. by Listening Library/Books on Tape. 2005. cassette, ISBN 0-307-20628-9. \$40; CD, ISBN 0-307-20682-3. \$50.

Gr 5 Up—Jules Verne's travel adventure written in the 1870s is read here by actor Jim Dale. In the story, Phileas Fogg makes a wager that leads him and his French valet, Passepartout, to attempt to go around the world in 80 days. They travel over three continents and two oceans; ride on trains, boats, a sled, and even an elephant; and encounter numerous people throughout their many adventures. Dale's reading makes Phileas Fogg come to life. Listeners will be entranced with the story and route for Phileas to win his wager. Passepartout will become a favorite character, too, and Dale's rendition of his French accent is excellent. Dale gives all the characters an individual voice. Each chapter starts with music related to the region they are in or to the mode of transportation they are on. While it might be difficult to get used to the music at first, it does add to the story. Most students will have fun listening to this tale and will get a history and geography

lesson as well. Dale's superb reading makes this a really fun adventure.—Azita Lawson, Otsego High School, MI

Bollywood Babes (unabr.) 3 cassettes. 4:56 hrs. Prod. by Listening Library. Dist. by Listening Library/Books on Tape. 2005. ISBN 1-4000-9938-2. \$30.

Gr 5-7—British teens Geena, Amber, and Jazz are back in this sequel (Delacorte, 2005) to *Bendi Babes* (Delacorte, 2004). This time the girls hatch a scheme to invite a faded Indian actress to appear at a school fundraiser. Molly Mahal was once the darling of the Bollywood film world (India's version of Hollywood), but she has fallen on hard times. Geena discovers her living nearby and impulsively invites Molly to live with them until she can get back on her feet. Regret for the hasty invitation quickly sets in as Molly manages to put the house in an uproar. She treats the girls and Auntie as her servants, wears Auntie's clothes and, worst of all, flirts with every man that enters the house. Events come to a climax the night of the Bollywood party: will Molly show up or is she as shallow as the girls fear? Narrator Nina Wadia's voice rings true with her British/Indian accent. Unfortunately, it's not enough to save this fluffy piece of chick lit. The sisters are indistinguishable from one another and the plot is stretched so thin that few teens will care enough to listen through to the end.—Tricia Melgaard, Centennial Middle School, Broken Arrow, OK

Casey at the Bat (*Stories in Music Series*). 1 CD. 34:34 min. with lyrics, teacher's guide. Magic Maestro Music. 2004. ISBN 1-932684-03-4. \$16.98.

Gr 1-5—The second release in the *Stories in Music* series is a winner. In the tradition of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, this production features the classic 1888 poem by Ernest Lawrence Thayer with music composed and conducted by Stephen Simon. "Yadu the Famous Narrator" (a.k.a. Dr. Konrad Czyski) gives a dramatic reading of the text. The London Symphony Orchestra supplies not only music, but also the sounds of the crowds and the crack of the bat, completing the listener's transport to Mudville and the day of misery. The rest of the recording extends the story and appreciation for the music: producer Bonnie Ward Simon relays background information about the poem, The Michigan State University Band performs the rousing "Casey March," the Rhonda Cole Studio Suzuki students play a simplified version of the music theme, and a combo band finishes with "The Casey Tango." Additionally, the Young Singers of St. Patrick's Day School perform another story song, "In a Cabin in the Wood." Stephen Simon then describes the action in this second song and breaks the music down to a very basic level,

providing prompts about what to listen for when the music repeats. The accompanying teacher's guide includes lyrics, music, games, and activities. A fun family experience as well as an excellent tool to use in music appreciation training.—Stephanie Bange, Wilmington-Stroop Branch, Dayton Metro Library, OH

Classic Fairy Tales, Vol. 2 (unabr.). 1 CD. 50 min. Bolinda Audio. 2004. ISBN 1-74093-569-1. \$18.

PreS-Gr 3—Australian children's entertainer Peter Combe marvelously breathes new life into four classic fairy tales: "Cinderella," "The Billy Goats Gruff," "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," and "Rumpelstiltskin." Each story begins with a brief musical introduction, and then the tale is read by Combe. While his Australian accent may be a bit unfamiliar to listeners, it adds to the magical allure of the fairy tales and is always easy to understand. Occasional sound effects, such as the music played by the Pied Piper, complement the stories and infuse them with a richness that entices listeners. Each tale, with the exception of "Rumpelstiltskin," is followed by an original song written by Peter Combe. "Rumpelstiltskin" is sung at the beginning. These well-produced songs retell shortened versions of the stories and are fun to listen to and sing along with. This truly delightful production would find a welcome home in any collection.—Veronica Schwartz, Des Plaines Public Library, IL

Cold Iron (unabr.). 5 CDs. 5:50 hrs. Bolinda Audio. 2004. ISBN 1-74093-559-4. \$40.

Gr 6-9—Sophie Masson has woven together a fascinating tale (published in the U.S. as *Malkin*, St. Mary's Press), part historical, part fantasy. Set in Elizabethan times, with a visit to London and a cameo appearance by Shakespeare, the historical elements are convincing and smoothly integrated into the fantasy, including elements of the early Cinderella story and the fairie other-world of old England. By the end of the story, alert listeners will be sure to see aspects of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as well. Read by Esther Van Doornum, the tale is related from the point of view of Malkin, a servant girl and the only friend of the poor Tattercoats who is held almost a prisoner by her unfeeling grandfather. Pug the Gooseherd helps the girls to escape at a crucial moment, starting them on the adventure. Van Doornum has a beautiful voice, but her Australian accent occasionally has cadences and phrasing that might be somewhat disconcerting. She does a good job of providing auditory cues to the other speakers when necessary. Following the end of the story, there is a fascinating discussion about the material Masson used from folk and other traditions to develop her story and a retelling of the Tattercoats tale in its more

