

Boisjoly both celebrate and poke fun at the rituals of everyday urban life. Francis and his father always “make a game of tossing their orphan socks onto the caribou antlers mounted above the window,” then go for frozen yogurt while the clothes churn. Francis’s Laundromat adversary is the owner’s human granddaughter, Lily Rain Boots, who pulls a prank on Francis that scares away Mouse, the Laundromat cat; Francis and Lily are thrown together as they figure out how to bring Mouse back. The ethereal plot is almost beside the point. It’s the team’s quirky human-animal universe, gentle humor, and close observation that provide the book’s ample pleasures—and a big grin of a punch line. Ages 4–8. (Sept.)

Don’t Spill the Milk!

Stephen Davies, illus. by Christopher Corr. Andersen Press USA (Lerner, dist.), \$16.95 (32p) ISBN 978-1-4677-2028-1

The creators of *The Goggle-Eyed Goats* set this warm story in West Africa, where Davies is a missionary. The rhythmic text and gouache folk art capture the vibrancy of life on the banks of the Niger River, which a girl named Penda crosses on her way to deliver a bowl of milk to her father, a herder watching over sheep in the grasslands. Corr’s pictures burst with electric colors as the girl crosses golden sand dunes, past “a caravan of camels and a flock of desert jinns,” and sees a ritual mask dance whose participants look like “a million dancing beasts.” Penda concentrates on carrying the bowl of milk on her head, ignoring the distractions, while the colloquial narrative cheers her on: “Don’t shiver, don’t quiver,/ don’t fall in the river, girl./ Keep it on your head,/ girl, milk don’t float.” When a mango falls from a tree, splashing milk from the bowl, Penda’s father reassures her—and readers—that her mission was a success. “This bowl was full of love, girl, and it still is.” Ages 4–9. (Sept.)

The Man with the Violin

Kathy Stinson, illus. by Dusan Petricic. Annick (Firefly, dist.), \$19.95 (36p) ISBN 978-1-55451-565-3

“In January of 2007, over a thousand people *heard* me play my violin in the L’Enfant Plaza Metro Station in Washington, D.C. But very few actually *listened*,”

writes musician Joshua Bell in a post-script to a picture book based on that event. According to Bell, a few children tried to stay and listen, but were hustled along by their parents—which is exactly what happens to a (fictional) boy in this story. “Dylan was someone who noticed things,” writes Stinson (*Red Is Best*). Petricic (*Mr. Zinger’s Hat*) provides a wonderful visual representation of Dylan’s attentiveness as boy and mother dash through the dull, gray metro station. White contrails streak behind them, and Dylan’s highlights colorful objects and people that have caught his eye (his mother’s contrail, meanwhile is blank). Swirls of colors show how Bell’s music enchants Dylan, and at times the boy is literally born aloft by the music he hears and remembers. In a world of sounds that aren’t always as pleasant as a Stradivarius, Stinson and Petricic remind readers

young (and especially old) to stop and listen to the arpeggios. Ages 5–8. (Sept.)

Fiction

Frightfully Friendly Ghosties

Daren King, illus. by David Roberts. Quercus (Random, dist.), \$12.95 (128p) ISBN 978-1-62365-026-1

Well-meaning but clueless “ghosties” take on “still-alives” in this helter-skelter comedy, the first book in a trilogy by the creators of *Sensible Hare* and *the Case of Carrots*. The eccentric spirits, each of whom has a different ghostly ability, are distressed that the “mean” human residents of the house go shrieking off whenever the ghosties try—ever so politely—to interact with them. Though variations on that scenario grow repetitive, the banter and bickering among the ghosties and

★ Frog Trouble... And Eleven Other Pretty Serious Songs

Sandra Boynton. Workman, \$16.95 (70p) ISBN 978-0-7611-7176-8

Boynton (*Philadelphia Chickens*) returns with a fifth vibrant CD-and-illustrated-songbook collaboration. This time, she embraces country music, inspired (as a note explains) by the soundtrack of her childhood, growing up in the 1950s, singing folk songs at school and watching westerns on TV at home. With long-time songwriting and producing partner Mike Ford and top-notch musicians, including Alison Krauss, Ryan Adams, Dwight Yoakam, and Fountains of Wayne, Boynton presents 12 tunes with some familiar country themes (trucks, dogs, heartache) as seen through a child’s or parent’s eyes.

In the book’s “Look While You Listen” section, select lyrics appear with Boynton’s signature animal characters. Spot illustrations dot the “Sing and Play Along” pages, which include full lyrics and musical notation. The eponymous “Frog Trouble” is a simultaneously ominous and hilarious send-up of spaghetti western soundtracks, while Brad Paisley’s band mimics his lyrics in “Copycat,” resulting in some funny musical moments: “Stop it. (Stop it!) No, seriously. (No, seriously).” In the humorously mournful “Heartache Song,” Kacey Musgraves channels Patsy Cline as she croons, “Don’t they remember—/ all the heartache so deep/ when somebody tells you/ it’s time now for sleep.” And Ben Folds is pure honky-tonk as he insists, “Some might say the piano is broken,/ but it seems to play for me.”

Boynton’s spot-on humor and the performers’ talents ensure an entertaining family outing, while demonstrating just how diverse country can be. Brief profiles of the performers, humorous interstitials about good pet names and how to talk like a cowboy, and a frog-puppet craft round out the fun. Ages 2–up. (Sept.)

