MUSIC CRITIC (THE OCEAN'S OPINION): A Poem and a Writing Exercise

MUSIC CRITIC (The Ocean's Opinion) by April Halprin Wayland

This guy drags his drum set onto the sand so that I have a front row seat takes off his jeans jacket snaps his wide red suspenders and lets loose:

he is in his space sun is on his face gulls in the air clouds in his hair

Go man, go! I clap against the shore, rise up and give him a standing ovation More!

First published in Cricket Magazine

Winner of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators Magazine Merit Award for Poetry

About writing this poem:

My young son and I were walking along Redondo Beach in California when we saw a man setting up a full drum set (the kind used in rock bands) on the edge of the ocean. Once he'd set up, he began to rip, playing his heart out, facing out to sea. We watched awhile, fascinated.

The image of him playing to the ocean stayed with me. I so admire his absolute "me"ness. He was living that hour in his own way, without regard to what looked right, without regard to where one should practice, without regard to who the audience should be. Not one "should" here. Just passion. This drummer, whoever he is, is one of my heroes.

I decided to write a poem from the point of view of this guy's audience--the ocean. I wanted to write with a sense of a drumbeat, a rhythm and some rhyme, but also with freedom-freedom from rigid structure, as he was free from one.

When I submitted it to my editor at Cricket Magazine, I submitted a version with the second stanza repeated twice--to emphasize the beat. My editor thought the poem worked best without the repeat. I reluctantly agreed to remove it (not completely convinced.) This poem was subsequently awarded the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators 1999 Magazine Merit Award for Poetry. (You're right, John D. Allen! I take it all back!)

I was thrilled that the artist chosen by Cricket for this poem was Eric von Schmidt. I've always adored his work. His illustration is absolutely delicious.

A Poetry Writing Exercise Based Music Critic (The Ocean's Opinion):

name:_____date:_____

LANGUAGE THAT SINGS

WRITING A PUTTING-ON-A-MASK POEM-A P.O.A.M. POEM --a language arts activity by April Halprin Wayland

- Go to a music or drama or dance performance.
- Take lots of notes.
- Now, describe it from the point of view of an animal or an object in the audience or onstage (A flute? A Spotlight? A music stand? An ant?)
- Try to incorporate some of the rhythm or music of the performance into your poem--with rhyme or repetition or words to make your reader dance.
- Rewrite your poem. Let it sit for a day or longer. Come back to it. Rewrite it again.
- Read the poem aloud as you rewrite. Poetry is word music. Do you like the sound of it?
- Do not hide your light under a bushel. Your poem is a gift to be shared. Share it.

