

**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!**

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**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.

