

**Selected and annotated by Melissa Albarran  
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This bibliography features biographies of notable musicians and artists in a variety of musical genres, creators of a completely new musical style, and stories about the joy music brings to the soul. Titles here are best suited for readers age four through grade nine.

For your listening pleasure, check out the accompanying playlist [here](#).

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**Andrews, Troy.** *Trombone Shorty*; illus. by Bryan Collier. Abrams, 2015. 40p. 4-8 yrs. Growing up in the Tremé neighborhood of New Orleans, young Troy Andrews admired the parading players that filled the streets with infectious jazz music. Determined to create his own sound, the aspiring musician found a broken trombone, joined the parade, and was dubbed “Trombone Shorty” because the instrument was double his size. His enthusiasm and unique sound caught the attention of Bo Diddley at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. Now with his own band, Trombone Shorty supports gifted young musicians and works to preserve New Orleans’ musical history.

**Capaldi, Gina, ad.** *Red Bird Sings: The Story of Zitkala-Sa, Native American Author, Musician, and Activist*; ad. by Gina Capaldi and Q. L. Pearce; illus. by Gina Capaldi. Carolrhoda, 2011. 32p. Gr. 3-5.

Gertrud Simmons, later known as Zitkala-Sa, willingly left her family and their Sioux reservation for a boarding school; she lost her enthusiasm when she realized the well-meaning missionaries were stripping the students of their American Indian culture. Finding solace through music, Zitkala-Sa used her musical and literary gifts to educate Anglo society about her culture, advocate for American Indian rights, and create a bridge between cultures.

**Christensen, Bonnie.** *Elvis: The Story of the Rock and Roll King*; written and illus. by Bonnie Christensen. Ottaviano/Holt, 2015. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

Before becoming the King of Rock and Roll, Elvis Presley was a shy boy from Mississippi who loved to sing and taught himself how to play the guitar. Elvis blended different genres of music together: blues, country, gospel, and jazz, to create a sound all his own that eventually gained him the title “King.” With simultaneously lyrical and conversational narration, this story brings readers up close to Elvis’ early life.

**Cline-Ransome, Lesa.** *Before There Was Mozart: The Story of Joseph Boulogne, Chevalier de Saint-George*; illus. by Games E. Ransome. Schartz & Wade, 2011. 36p. 6-9 yrs.

Born in the West Indies to a black slave and a white plantation owner, Joseph loved accompanying his mother into town and listening to the music of the bustling port. After moving to Paris, Joseph was recognized as a talented violinist, with skills that rivaled even his instructors’ abilities, but he was rebuked because of his skin color. Determined to succeed, Joseph devoted his life to music and rose to be first violin and timekeeper, one of an orchestra’s most important positions, and eventually played for Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in the palace of Versailles.

**Cline-Ransome, Lesa.** *Benny Goodman & Teddy Wilson: Taking the Stage as the First Black-and-White Band in History*; illus. by James E. Ransom. Holiday House, 2014. 32p. 7-10 yrs. Alternating between the two very different lives and musical backgrounds of Benny Goodman, from Chicago, and Teddy Wilson, from Tuskegee, this picture book follows the two musicians until they finally come together. Starting with their segregated performances and then their late night integrated jam sessions together, this tale culminates in their ground-breaking performance as a racially mixed jazz band, the Benny Goodman Trio.

**Engle, Margarita.** *Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl's Courage Changes Music*; illus. by Rafael López. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015. 42p. 4-8 yrs. Decades ago, girls and women in Cuba were not permitted to play the drums. This did not stop the drum dream girl, surrounded by the islands' pounding drums and the rhythms that percolated in her imagination, from practicing the rolling beats that flowed from her fingertips. Forbidden by her father to play in her sisters' all-girl dance band but later permitted to learn to from an instructor, the unnamed drum dream girl's persistence gained her the concession to play the drums in public, paving the way for the many young girls that followed her.

**Greenberg, Jan.** *Ballet for Martha: Making Appalachian Spring*; written and illus. by Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan; illus. by Brian Floca. Porter/Flash Point/Roaring Press, 2010. 48p. Gr. 3-5.

This picture book chronicles the creation of *Appalachian Spring*, a collaboration of Martha Graham, twentieth-century dancer and choreographer, Aaron Copeland, American composer, and Isamu Noguchi, sculptor and craftsman. The ballet's story of pioneer families that traveled west through America takes a back seat here to the creative process, highlighting the cooperation, frustration, and revision that went into the final production.

**Hill, Laban Carrick.** *When the Beat Was Born: DJ Kool Herc and the Creation of Hip Hop*; illus. by Theodore Taylor III. Roaring Brook, 2013. 32p. 6-10 yrs.

Jamaican native Clive Campbell, grew up admiring DJs and their influence on a party's atmosphere. Equipped with his father's sound system that he had rigged to shake the speakers with sound, Clive rented a rec room for his sisters birthday and transformed into DJ Kool Herc. With two turntables, shout-outs, ad libbed raps, breakdancing, and MC battles, the new DJ created a new musical style that later became known as Hip Hop.

**Krull, Kathleen.** *The Beatles Were Fab (And They Were Funny)*; written and illus. by Kathleen Krull and Paul Brewer; illus. by Stacy Innerst. Harcourt, 2013. 34p. Gr. 3-5.

Three guitar players and a drummer, all from Liverpool, relied on their humor to see them through shows and tours that were financially exhausting and had yet to land them a record deal. Beatlemania gained steam with the radio release of "Love Me Do," John, Paul, George and Ringo skyrocketed to fame, and their songs continued to reach the top of the charts. In this picture book group biography, the Fab Four's collective sardonic sense of humor is the defining characteristic that keeps the Beatles separate from other British bands.

**Neri, G.** *Hello, I'm Johnny Cash*; illus. by A. G. Ford. Candlewick, 2014. 40p. Gr. 4-6.

In this picture book biography, Johnny Cash's childhood and rise to fame is chronicled through lyrical verses of text. Each double page spread serves as a chapter in the legendary country

musician's life, including his upbringing during the Great Depression, the death of his older brother and the songs he wrote to cope, his gig as Elvis Presley's opening act, and how his simple introduction, "Hello, I'm Johnny Cash," became his familiar concert preface.

**Orgill, Roxane.** *Skit-Scat Raggedy Cat: Ella Fitzgerald*; illus. by Sean Qualls. Candlewick, 2010. 44p. Gr. 3-6.

Growing up dancing and singing with her mother and sisters, Ella Boswell earned enough money as a street performer in 1930's Yonkers, New York to make her way up to Harlem, where new dance moves evolved daily. After the death of her mother, Ella bounced from home to a school for orphans to living on the streets. Singing at Amateur Nights, she caught the attention of bandleader Chick Webb, and in rags-to-riches fashion, Ella soon had a hit song on the radio.

**Ray, Mary Lyn.** *A Violin for Elva*; illus. by Tricia Tusa. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015. 32p. 6-8 yrs.

After hearing a violin for the first time, Elva asks her parents for one of her very own. They refuse, but she creates her own, practicing with a badminton racquet and a stick for a bow, rehearsing while she brushes her teeth. As Elva grows up, she also outgrows her badminton violin. As an adult, she remembers her dream but insists to herself she is much too busy, until one day she buys a violin and soon after plays at her first recital.

**Rockwell, Anne.** *Hey, Charleston!: The True Story of the Jenkins Orphanage Band*; illus. by Colin Bootman. Carolrhoda, 2013. 34p. Gr. 6-9.

Reverend Daniel Joseph Jenkins needed a way to support the growing number of young African-American boys that sought shelter in his orphanage in Charleston, South Carolina. Seeking donations from community members, he gathered discarded band instruments and arranged for instructors to teach the boys to play and read music. Eventually, the Jenkins Orphanage Band caught the attention of President Theodore Roosevelt, growing in fame to perform throughout Europe and earn enough money to support themselves and the orphanage, which still exists today.

**Rubin, Susan Goldman.** *Music Was It: Young Leonard Bernstein*. Charlesbridge, 2011. 178p. Gr. 5-9.

Lenny grew up knowing his life would revolve around music. His father feared he would end up penniless, because classical music was no place for an American Jew. Each chapter of this biography follows Leonard Bernstein's musical studies and development, both formal and informal, ending with Bernstein's conducting debut with the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall.

**Weatherford, Carole Boston.** *Leontyne Price: Voice of a Century*; illus. by Raul Colón. Knopf, 2014. 34p. 5-8 yrs.

Leontyne Price grew up surrounded by church hymns and admired Marian Anderson, the legendary opera singer that faced closed doors because of her race. Leontyne's singing talent led others to encourage her to pursue an education in voice and a career in opera, which led to performances in which she gained recognition and challenged the barriers black performers faced.

**Winter, Jonah.** *How Jelly Roll Morton Invented Jazz*; illus. by Keith Mallett. Porter/Roaring Brook, 2015. 32p. 6-9 yrs.

This picture book biography tracks the childhood of Jelly Roll Morton, born as Ferdinand Joseph La Menthe, and explores his claim to have invented jazz. Though the musician cannot be given all the credit, he did play a significant role in the development of the musical style and was the first musician to publish a jazz composition.