

quaint, with a strong flavour of Blyton writing for the tinies (a car goes "Vrrrooomm!", a plane "Whoo!"). Characters are inconsistent: Will, "the adventure-lover" (20) cries and screams at the first sign of danger. Given Claxton's credentials, we must conclude the weaknesses are the author's. Frequent sketches add interest and convey most of the tension.

Against her mother's wishes, Matas's Roz wears an heirloom locket to school where it is promptly stolen by the school bully, leaving Roz to figure out how to retrieve it before she gets into trouble at home. Language is competently used and dialogue is believable. Interesting new words (conundrum, ogle, flabbergasted) are blended in. The story moves forward crisply. Family dynamics are well drawn; readers will easily identify with Roz's resentment of her parents' indulgence of her younger brother, her distress at having to follow through with the karate lessons she begged for but now dreads, and her efforts to conceal her disobedience in order to avoid punishment. Less believable is the ultimate confrontation at which Roz suddenly masters her elusive karate skills and vanquishes the bully.

Siamon revisits Northern Ontario's Pickle Lake for a humorous tale about excavations at a fur-trade fort, a perilous canoe trip, bumbling horse thieves, and a galumphing red setter. Josie Moon and Kiff Kokatow are back, still bickering but pulling together in trouble. They come across as real kids readers will wish they knew. This is good adventure fare for younger readers, with swift pacing and lots of excitement. Inconsistencies mar an otherwise recommended effort: an illustration shows Kiff with shirt on while the text says it's off; "Smoke" is a mare who raises "his" head and stamps "his" hoof. There is a useful afterword about the trading forts used by the voyageurs.

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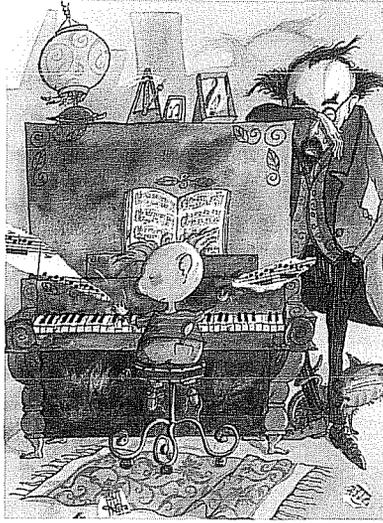
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### **Having Fun with Pushy Parents and Their Little Geniuses**

*The Fabulous Song.* Don Gillmor. Illus. Marie-Louise Gay. Stoddart Publishing, 1996. Unpag. \$17.95 laminated boards. ISBN 0-7737-28600.

It's no surprise that this stunning book was nominated for the Governor General's Award. Although its nomination was in the "text" category, the pictures are as vibrant as the text is witty. The text is an unusual pleasure to read out loud. Nothing twists up your tongue or runs you short of breath. But you do have to stop to laugh at some of the jokes. The illustrations, by the way, do what illustrations should: they extend and amplify the humour in the text. Each page has its own internal rhythm, and as soon as you finish reading it, you don't reach to turn the page — you stop to look more at the illustrations because it takes a long time to find all the inventiveness in them.

The story is about one young Frederic Pipkin, whose music-loving family names him Frederic for "Frederic Chopin," hoping he will live up to his name. When people tell his mom he's a "beautiful baby," his mother chimes back, "and musical, too." Gillmor tells us, "Actually, Frederic wasn't a beautiful baby. He



looked like a turnip left too long on the windowsill. He was wrinkled and pale, with a tuft of carrot-coloured hair. He gurgled and made noises when he ate. To Sarah it sounded like air leaking out of a balloon, but to Mr. and Mrs. Pipkin it sounded like a symphony." Every child who has ever taken music lessons will start smirking, guiltily, as Frederic's parents push him to achieve. His piano playing is a disaster, so they buy him a clarinet. That he leaves on the bus. "The next day, Frederic and his mother drove to a warehouse that was full of all the things people leave on buses. There were sixteen clarinets, nine oboes, six saxophones, eleven cellos, twenty-nine recorders and more than a hundred violins." And "Frederic saw lots of other mothers with children searching for lost instruments. Mrs. Pipkin picked out Frederic's clarinet and they went home." Poor Frederic is forced to try every instrument in the orchestra. "The oboe sounded like a sick dog whining. The violin sounded like two cats fighting ... When he blew into the trumpet, it sounded like a frog trying to spit ... The cello sounded like an argument between four snakes." Musically literate children are really giggling by this point. Such disaster would be fun, except for the fact that everyone else in the Pipkin family loves music, and little Frederic is the odd-man-out. You begin to feel sorry for him. Then, suddenly, Gillmor provides a happy closure. Frederic makes magical and mysterious music, and feels creative and powerful and happy. What more could one ask of a book? It teaches a little musical history; it makes everyone laugh, but at no one's expense; and it takes music out of the category of "dreary practice" and turns it into family fun and personal empowerment.

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