

# Do Re Mi: If You Can Read Music, Thank Guido d'Arezzo

By Susan L. Roth in association with Angelo Mafucci • Houghton Mifflin, 2007



Reviewed by  
Kate Williamson

**H**ave you ever tried to explain to your students where the music staff came from or why we read music at all? How did it all begin? Who is the “Father of Music?”

This book takes this piece of music history and brings it alive for both children and adults through artful storytelling based upon historical facts and events. Susan L. Roth’s *Do Re Mi: If You Can Read Music Thank Guido d’Arezzo* tells the real life story of Guido d’Arezzo, the “Father of Music.” Her passion for this subject is evident in this book from the very start. In the forward, Roth describes written notation stating that by “...enabling music to live beyond the moment, Guido d’Arezzo immortalized it.”

The artwork in this book helps tell the story as well. It is infused with torn-paper illustrations that incorporate sections of real music manuscript throughout the scenes. The varying layers of paper give a sense of texture and depth to the illustrations; collage images of monks appear three-dimensional. A creative addition is a music staff cleverly woven into each page.

The book traces the roots of written notation back a thousand years to a small town in Tuscany, home of Guido d’Arezzo. It begins with young Guido singing in a children’s choir learning to sing by rote and dreaming of writing down the sounds of a song. We learn that, although children were singing a thousand years ago, all music had to be memorized and learned by rote. Guido believed that there could be a better way to learn music.

As Guido grows into adulthood, he begins to act upon his idea and to experiment with various ideas to put music to paper. The reader is drawn into his passion and frustration of trying to transfer sounds to ink and parchment. Although he is tempted to give up, Guido tries and tries again. It is the simplest idea that finally gives Guido the breakthrough he needs. Utilizing his fingers as the five lines and the spaces between to create the staff, as we

know it today, Guido developed a written notation system of music. What a brilliant concept that is easy for children to see as they examine their own fingers and spaces of their hand.

By bringing the life of Guido d’Arezzo into the classroom, this book takes a very complex idea of written music and makes it easy for children to comprehend. After learning of his inspiration children learn that literally, music is in the palm of their hands.

