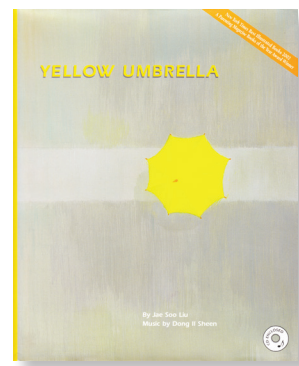


The Yellow Umbrella

By Jae Soo Liu

Music by Dong Il Sheen

Kane/Miller Book Publishers, 2002



The cover is as somber as a grey rainy day—with the exception of the bright yellow umbrella floating across the page. It is this yellow umbrella that beckons you, like a yellow caution light, to stop and take a closer look at this picture book.

At first, you may think that this is just another rainy day story, but as soon as you begin to turn the pages, you realize this one is quite different. Immediately apparent is the absence of any text. A picture book in the most pure form, a visual rainbow begins to appear as the rain falls and a parade of umbrellas begins.

The lack of text is a freeing experience for the perceptive teacher. As the pages unfold, the ideas begin to splash in one's mind like the first unexpected drops of rain. The illustrations are painted from an aerial view. One cannot see the children in their various shapes and sizes, whether they are boys or girls, or any of the multitudes of variations the human package presents. Instead, it is the canopies of the umbrellas that harmonize the movement and illuminate the journey in which they are participating.

The umbrellas trickle in one by one, starting with a lone yellow umbrella. Then, a friend comes along, adding a blue, then another, with a canopy of red. With each page turn, more umbrellas begin to trickle in to join the parade. Visually this is not unlike building a melody, slowly increasing the pitch set until a larger scale appears. Oh, but wait, perhaps it is not melody that the iconic pictures represent, but the timbres of unpitched percussion adding a new tone color with the hue of each umbrella. Of course, the imagination cannot stop at this point. The rainstorm of ideas begins pouring in. What about the opportunities for movement? Immediately, the vivid circles of color that the umbrellas create arouse the eye. A solo umbrella moves to a duet, which increases additively until the whole ensemble is present. Beyond the splashes of color lie pathways of the street curbs, the gentle arch of the bridge, and the step-like patterns of the brick cobbles. The possibilities seem endless.

As you explore this book, you'll undoubtedly note the accompanying CD affixed inside the back cover. The

CD contains short piano compositions as well as the song "Underneath the Sky." The author worked with musician Dong Il Sheen to provide a musical setting to expand the possibilities within the story. The piano vignettes are a freely formed theme and variations. In the front of the book the author denotes specific directions on how they can be played while sharing the book with students. In contrast, the melody and text for "Underneath the Sky," is notated clearly in the back of the book, but its use within the story is left to the reader's discretion. Although CD material may be helpful to some, the opportunities for students to create their own musical settings and compositions are the real pearls of this book.

"Rain, rain, go away." Not as long as this book is in your library! Whether the ideas trickle in slowly, like the first drops of rain, or come like the torrent of a summer storm, your students will love to play with the possibilities of this wonderful picture book gem. ■

Sharon Mazion teaches lower and middle school music at Breck School in Minneapolis, Minnesota.



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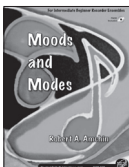
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