

From the Editor

By Lyn Miller-Lachmann



At the American Library Association meeting in Washington, D.C. in June, my friend Christine McDonald and I took a break from the exhibits, sessions, and meetings to see the Manu Chao concert in Columbia, Maryland, about an hour away. I had first seen Manu Chao at the Red Hot + Riot concert, which honored the work of Nigerian musician Fela Anikulapo Kuti (1938–1997) and raised money to combat AIDS in Africa. Several months earlier, I had learned about Chao's music on a global Internet music-networking site, one of several that link music and fans across borders.

Such sites are absolutely essential, as radio play and the distribution of music in the United States has for a long time been controlled by a few large corporations. In recent years, the Latin music category has expanded, but the artists that the music industry promotes in the United States aren't necessarily the ones popular in Spain and Latin America. One of those is Manu Chao, born in France of Spanish parents, refugees from Francisco Franco's fascist regime. In the late 1980s, Chao, his brother Antoine, and musicians he recruited in large part from the ranks of street and subway performers in Paris formed the band Mano Negra. Influenced by the likes of punk, ska, and reggae, the band became popular in Europe and Latin America until its breakup in the mid-1990s. Performing with a new band, Chao released *Clandestino* in 1998. The title cut, considered one of the best political songs of the past 50 years, comments on illegal immigration and the forces that drive people to make the perilous journey from their countries into foreign and unwelcoming lands. In his most recent concert tour, Chao and his band sang beneath a banner that read, "Immigrants are not criminals."

Despite the difficulty of finding Manu Chao's music in stores and on the radio, both the Washington, D.C. concert that I attended and another one I saw with my husband in Prospect Park in Brooklyn the following week were sold out. So were almost all his performances in the United States in this, his first major U.S. tour. I don't know the various avenues by which the multiethnic (and mostly young) audience found out about this remarkable songwriter and performer—only my own—but what is important is that they did.

Those of us who care about the rest of the world—what people read, what they listen to, what they think—need to go beyond what is readily available to us. Too often, the music and books that get hyped in the marketplace are what entertain without making us think, what tell what we want to believe or what those in power want us to believe. Manu Chao's successful tour this past summer belies the conventional wisdom that people don't want to hear political music, or music in languages other than English, or music that crosses genres. In an industry that has gone stale—the recording industry claims that illegal music downloading has led to the precipitous decline in their sales, but it is far from the only cause—people are looking for fresh sounds and new messages, and they are looking beyond the borders of the United States.

In her years teaching at an American school in West Africa, Zanna Denis McKay attempted to raise her well-to-do students' awareness of the African people who lived in the surrounding villages. Even though many Africans worked at the school, they were invisible to the students, or the students saw them in their narrow roles—as bus driver, janitor, or cook—and not the respected place they had in their communities. The students struggled to learn one language besides English, while the African villagers often spoke three or four languages fluently. In the lead article of this issue, "Seeing and Being Seen: Pedagogy for Students of Privilege," McKay describes the challenges she faced and the innovative curriculum she developed to teach her middle-school students to "see" the people around them, in all their dimensions, and in turn to "be seen"—to make a difference in the lives of others.

The importance of "seeing," of learning about other peoples whose history and contributions have been hidden, informs other articles in this issue. Danilo H. Figueredo's "Not a Narrow Citizenship: Anglophone Caribbean Literature" goes beyond the 1960s hit movie

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To *Sir with Love* to reveal a long history of literature from the English-speaking Caribbean as well as significant writers, works, and genres that have not been published in the United States or have long gone out of print. Like author/musician Linton Kwesi Johnson's dub poetry (published in 2006 by Ausable Press in the collection *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*) or the classic novels of Rosa Guy (re-released by Coffee House Press), many key works have been published for the first time or brought back into print by independent presses.

The success of independent presses and the alternative perspectives that they present depends on their getting the word out. This is where awards programs can be of the greatest help. For nearly 15 years, *Skipping Stones* magazine has published writing by children and adults around the world, and has sponsored the *Skipping Stones* Honor Awards to recognize outstanding multicultural, international, bilingual, and environmental children's books as well as teaching resources. In contrast to many other children's awards, where the works of mainstream presses dominate, the *Skipping Stones* Honor Awards recognize publishers large and small. Founding editor Arun Toké and assistant editor Nicole Degli Esposti describe the genesis and mission of the awards, the selection process, and some recent winners and why they were chosen in their article "*Skipping Stones* Magazine's Annual Book Honor Awards Celebrate Diversity."

Vladimir F. Wertsman, the author of two previous articles on postage stamps around the world depicting librarians and libraries and archives, returns with a comprehensive piece on stamps that portray books, periodicals, publishing, and printing. It is a revealing commentary on the place of books and reading in the United States that this country lags behind its American neighbors Chile and Uruguay and is tied with two others, Ecuador and Mexico. Various nations in Europe and Asia, including Russia, Germany, Israel, and India, far exceed the U.S. output. Stamp collectors and people who see these official releases as windows into a country's culture and values will appreciate Wertsman's exhaustive research.

This issue also contains the semiannual roundup of urban fiction, authored by Hattie and LaSaundra Vines. This roundup contains a larger share of books by male authors, as well as a formerly self-published thriller by Dominican-American author Jeff Rivera. Rivera's persistence in the face of multiple rejections allowed him to build an audience on his own terms, and this spring, that once-spurned first novel was republished by Warner Books (now renamed Grand Central Books after its acquisition by the French publishing conglomerate Hachette Books).

As usual, our reviews and Editor's Shelf highlight other recent books and media that go beyond formulas, that break the boundaries of genre, that show us ourselves and the world. When you read this issue, I hope you have some interesting music playing in the background too. 🎧



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