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Kirkus Review

THE ELEPHANT AND THE PIANO

Author: Colette Hiller

Illustrator: Nabila Adani

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Publisher: *Sourcebooks eXplore*

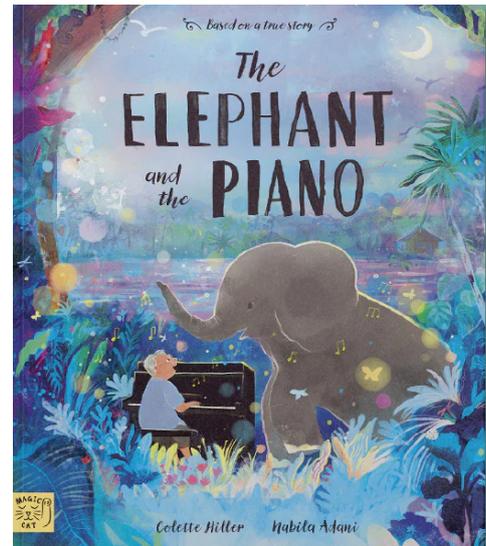
Pages: 40

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Section: Children's



In this story based on actual events, a pianist discovers an extraordinary way to connect with a troubled elephant at a Thai sanctuary along the River Kwai.

Bonti is isolated and angry; his fellow pachyderms and humans avoid him. But when Paul, a pale-skinned, white-haired Englishman, brings his piano to play Beethoven by the riverbank, something remarkable unfolds. Bonti listens, rapt. Adani's illustrations, rendered in gouache, watercolor, oil pastel, and digital media, shimmer with emotion. The art glows with golden yellows and warm greens during daytime scenes, then shifts to deep blues punctuated by glowing orbs of light as more elephants gather to listen one night. Adani's compositions skillfully convey Bonti's transformation. Early spreads show him dwarfing the landscape in solitary vastness, while later scenes depict him surrounded by his herd, all swaying and "plink[ing]" and "plonk[ing]" on the piano that Paul has specially built for elephants. The mixed-media approach creates rich, textured layers that give depth to both the lush Thai landscape and the animals' expressive faces. Hiller's text strikes an ideal balance, providing enough detail to ground the story while maintaining a gentle, accessible pace for young readers. The backmatter enriches the narrative with information about the real Paul Barton, whose ongoing work playing piano for rescue elephants continues today. This inspiring account demonstrates how one person's compassion and creativity can profoundly impact even the most angst-ridden soul.

A heartwarming testament to music's healing power and the difference one caring individual can make. (Picture book. 4-8)