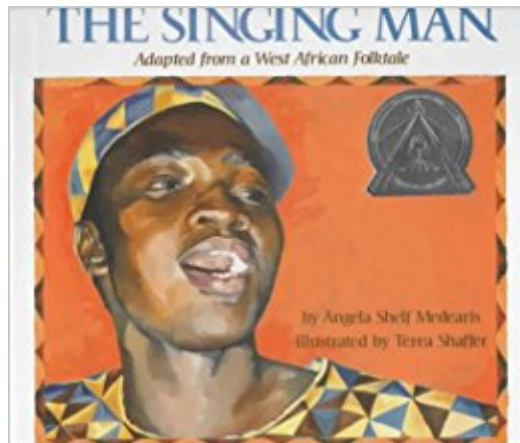




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The Singing Man: Adapted From A West African Folktale



Synopsis

A couple's youngest son is forced to leave his West African village because he chooses music over the more practical occupations of his brothers, but years later he returns to show the wisdom of his choice.

Book Information

Hardcover: 1 pages

Publisher: Holiday House; 1st edition (September 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0823411036

ISBN-13: 978-0823411030

Product Dimensions: 10.3 x 9.3 x 0.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.9 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,836,125 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #73 in [Books > Children's Books > Fairy Tales, Folk Tales & Myths > African](#) #1347 in [Books > Children's Books > Arts, Music & Photography > Music](#) #53803 in [Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction](#)

Age Range: 4 and up

Grade Level: Preschool and up

Customer Reviews

Medearis (*Dancing with the Indians*) comes to full maturity as a storyteller with this engaging folktale from the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria. When a family's three sons reach manhood, each selects a profession. Swanga chooses farming, Taki chooses blacksmithing, but when Banzar announces that he wants to be a musician, the elders banish him from the village for his impracticality. He soon befriends the praise singer Sholo who, in his music, preserves centuries of African history. Traveling and performing with Sholo, Banzar learns the ancient songs; after Sholo dies, Banzar becomes the king's musician. He is reunited with his famine-struck family, sharing his riches with them and the true worth of his trade: "Yams fill the belly and trade fills the pockets, but music fills the heart."

Shaffer's (illustrator of Medearis's *Come This Far to Freedom*) textile-inspired, color-drenched oil paintings offer further testament to the value of the arts as they honor the multifarious beauty of Nigerian culture. Ages 3-8. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Kindergarten-Grade 4-This story, adapted from a Yoruba folktale, tells of three brothers who, having

completed their manhood ceremonies, must decide on their life's work. The first two make acceptable decisions, but the third boy, Banzar, wants only to be a musician. When the village elders rule that his choice is unacceptable, he leaves. He meets an old, blind praise singer (or griot), and the two spend years traveling while Sholo teaches the young man how to make a living as a musician. When the Singing Man dies, Banzar goes on to become the personal musician of the king of Lagos. One day, he sees his brothers in the marketplace and arranges for a happy reunion. This story imparts the subtle bits of wisdom found in traditional African folklore. Medearis's retelling is well developed and presents a fuller text than found in her *Dancing with the Indians* (Holiday, 1991) and *Our People* (Atheneum, 1994). Shaffer's rich oil paintings and decorative borders are lively and capture the mood of the text. Expressive renderings convey the anxiety of approaching manhood, the ambivalence of having to choose between family tradition and one's heart's desire, the shame of failure, and the pride in success. Banzar's humility enables him to return to his family and offer them love and financial assistance. Barbara Osborne Williams, Queens Borough Public Library, Jamaica, NY Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I am a storyteller and drummer, so this story is very appealing to me. It combines both. The illustrations are beautiful. This Nigerian tale is simple. It also invokes hope, that there can be a place for the artists in the world. The story is visual and can be "heard," as well, which is perfect considering it is the story of a musician. A person reading this to children could have great fun with it. It almost has the air of a Biblical story. Enjoy it! I currently have a borrowed copy. I am ordering my own for my personal collection!

In a small village near the town of Lagos there were a man and a woman who had three sons. One became a farmer, the other became a blacksmith and they both were honored. The third son, Banzar, wanted to be a musician and got cast out of the family. Banzar met a blind musician named Sholo who taught him how to play an omele drum and to be a praise singer. The king of Lagos recognized Banzar's talents. So, Banzar became the king's personal musician and was richly rewarded. Banzar was happily reunited with his family at the end. The book is fun to read. The paintings in the book are colorful and beautiful. I recommend it to anyone who enjoys music and loves reading folktales.

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