



Little Melba and Her Big Trombone by Katheryn Russell-Brown,
illustrated by Frank Morrison

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ISBN: 9781600608988 (Hardcover)

*Age Range: 6–10 (Suggested by Publisher)

Grade Range: 2–5 (Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

BOOK SYNOPSIS

A biography of African American jazz virtuoso Melba Doretta Liston, a pioneering twentieth-century trombone player, composer, and music arranger at a time when few women, of any race, played brass instruments and were part of the jazz scene.

Melba Doretta Liston loved the sounds of music from as far back as she could remember. As a child, she daydreamed about beats and lyrics and hummed along with the music from her family's Majestic radio.

At age seven, Melba fell in love with a big, shiny trombone, and soon taught herself to play the instrument. By the time she was a teenager, Melba's extraordinary gift for music led her to the world of jazz. She joined a band led by trumpet player Gerald Wilson and toured the country. Overcoming obstacles of race and gender, Melba went on to become a famed trombone player and arranger, spinning rhythms, harmonies, and melodies into gorgeous songs for all the jazz greats of the twentieth century: Randy Weston, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Billie Holiday, and Quincy Jones, to name just a few.

Brimming with ebullience and the joy of making music, *Little Melba and Her Big Trombone* is a fitting tribute to a trailblazing musician and a great unsung hero of jazz.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ "Russell-Brown's debut text has an innate musicality, mixing judicious use of onomatopoeia with often sonorous prose. Morrison's sinuous, exaggerated lines are the perfect match for Melba's story. . . Readers will agree that 'Melba Doretta Liston was something special.'" — [Kirkus Reviews](#), **starred review**

★ "Staccato rhythms pepper the fluid prose . . . Morrison's oil paintings practically sway with a jazz beat, though somber moments crop up, too: the shadows on Liston's face signify the trials of life on the road. A final image showing long-limbed Liston in profile as she plays under the glow of stage lights is exquisite." — [Publishers Weekly](#), **starred review**

★ "An excellent match of breezy text and dynamic illustrations tells an exhilarating story. . . A celebration of the talent and success of a little-known African American female musician, this title will enrich library collections." — [School Library Journal](#), **starred review**

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“In a smoothly passed narrative, this picture-book biography surveys the full life arc of a relatively unknown and unique jazz master. Brimming with inherent and inescapable enthusiasm, the oil-painting illustrations are the cat’s pajamas, with brassy colors and jazzy perspectives that slide across the long pages, like Melba’s own instrument.” —[Booklist](#)

“Russell-Brown’s account of her subject’s early life is as smooth and stimulating as a Liston trombone solo, and will leave readers wanting to know more about the woman and her music. Morrison’s oil paintings, in his trademark elongated, angular style, perfectly convey the jazz scene and, of course, Melba’s amazing horn.” —[The Horn Book](#)

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- ALA Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor (American Library Association)
- ALSC Notable Children’s Book (American Library Association)
- NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work nominee
- Amelia Bloomer Book List (Feminist Task Force and the Social Responsibilities Round Table of ALA)
- Notable Book for a Global Society Book List (International Literacy Association)
- Orbis Pictus Award, Recommended (National Council of Teachers of English)
- *Kirkus Reviews* Best Books
- *School Library Journal* Best Books of the Year
- Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) Choices
- Bank Street College of Education Best Children’s Books of the Year
- Center for the Study of Multicultural Children’s Literature Best Books
- Chicago Public Library Best of the Best Book
- Eureka! Nonfiction Children’s Book Award Honor (California Reading Association)
- Black-Eyed Susan Award Nominee (Maryland Association of School Librarians)
- Louisiana Young Readers’ Choice, Grades 3-5 (State Library of Louisiana)
- Delaware Diamonds Award Grade 3-5 (Diamond State Reading Association)
- Georgia Children’s Book Award Picturebook Grades K-4 finalist (University of Georgia)

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Teacher’s Guide](#)
- [Lee & Low’s The Open Book Blog: Interview with Katheryn Russell-Brown](#)
- [Lee & Low’s The Open Book Blog: Illustration Process with Frank Morrison](#)
- [Lee & Low’s The Open Book Blog: Frank Morrison’s Jazz Primer Playlist](#)
- [Anti-Defamation League’s Book of the Month reading guide and learning activities](#)
- [Reading is Fundamental’s Multicultural Book Collections lesson plan and activities](#)
- [TeachingBooks’ Meet-the-Author with Katheryn Russell-Brown](#)
- [TeachingBooks’ Meet-the-Illustrator with Frank Morrison](#)
- [The Brown Bookshelf: The Back Story with Katheryn Russell-Brown](#)

*A NOTE ON AGE RANGES

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book’s intended use.

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