

The enchanted world of Happy Gabby's musical adventures

Hong Kong author Jo Anne discusses her classical music book series with Shweta Soni

How did the idea of writing the Happy Gabby series come about?

Our son is our inspiration and every character in the book is somebody he knows or something that's very dear to him. The eureka moment came when he was humming Vivaldi's Four Seasons and Saint-Saëns' Fossils even before he spoke, having been exposed to classical music from a young age. I decided to publish a music book for young readers up to seven years of age. Kids love looking at vivid images, listening to music, being read to by their parents, and pressing buttons, and as such I decided to combine all of that in one book.

Why did you choose 'animal' theme for the two new books?

There are many reasons why we decided to choose this theme. First of all, Fossils by Saint-Saens and Flight of the Bumblebee by Rimsky-Korsakov are two of our little readers' favourite pieces in our first book. Kids are naturally fascinated by animals, even if some of them are a little scared. And every single piece of music by Saint-Saens in his suite The Carnival of Animals is just so beautiful and fun.

Do you have a personal favourite book in the series?

Every 'book baby' is different in its own way and comes with special memories. The church in Till Eulenspiegel Plays Merry Pranks was added when we had just come back from our summer in Geneva, and our son, Gabby told us that each village should have a church.

How can little ones get the most out of the books?

Begin by reading the title and composer names and text on each page to them. Point to the images, have a conversation with your child. Be silly. Use a funny voice. Ask them to look for Happy Gabby on each page and tell them what instrument he is playing. If they like a particular piece of music, find it



on spotify or youtube and have them listen to the whole piece of music. The kids can keep themselves entertained with the books when parents are busy.

What plans do you have for the series?

We have created a music-based board game called *I Speak Fluent Music* to teach kids simple music signs and instruments. We are also working on a Happy Gabby animation which we will premiere at the Happy Gabby Plays Classical Music with the Hong Kong Philharmonic when the world opens up again.

When you're not writing, how do you like to spend your time?

This has been an unprecedented year for

everyone. Our son has attended school for a total of 49 days this year. So when I am not writing or working, I spend a lot of time homeschooling and playing with him and truly treasure every moment of it. There is so much to be thankful for, despite this being a challenging year.

