



A Song for Bijou

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Life for Alex Schrader has never involved girls. He goes to an all-boys prep school and spends most of his time goofing around with his friends. But all that changes the first time he meets Bijou Doucet, a Haitian girl recently relocated to Brooklyn after the earthquake-and he is determined to win her heart. For Bijou, change is the only constant, and she's surprised every day by how different life is in America, especially when a boy asks her out. Alex quickly learns that there are rules when it comes to girls-both in Haitian culture and with his own friends. And Bijou soon learns that she doesn't have to let go of her roots to find joy in her new life.

Told in alternating viewpoints against the vibrant backdrop of Haitian-American culture, Alex and Bijou take their first tender steps toward love in this heartwarming story.

A Song for Bijou Details

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Author : Josh Farrar

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From Reader Review A Song for Bijou for online ebook

Jessie says

I love this book! I hardly ever find books with a mix of Caribbean and American culture.

I connected immediately with this book. I remember when I first arrived in NYC from a Caribbean country, thinking "the American movies is nothing like real life". Lol. Like Bijou, I had a hard time fitting in school. Unlike her, when I came to this country I had just started 10th grade and let me tell you, high school kids are mean. The American culture and custom were different. But thanks to amazing friends (some Americans) that took the time to know me, I'd say I was lucky.

Josh Farrar has done an exceptional job portraying the struggle and hardship of Caribbean kids making America their new home.

Katherine says

"I feel different, as in like the person I was before but bigger and better. I feel like, and I don't mean this to sound strange, but I feel like I was meant to know you, that somehow you were going to be a part of my life. Don't ask me how, but I knew it."

A sweet, utterly charming tale of first love and learning to find your way in two very different worlds.

Review coming soon!!!

Flip says

This was a cute little story.

Ms. Yingling says

Alex goes to an all boys' school in New York City, so he is intrigued by girls and yet utterly clueless about them. When he sees a new girl who is attending the neighborhood sister school, he is inexplicably smitten with Bijou Doucet and uses his network of friends to find out about her. Bijou has moved to NY from Haiti to live with an aunt, uncle, and older brother. She finds the girls and the school confusing enough-- she doesn't really want anything at all to do with Alex, especially since her uncle is very strict about such interactions. Alex, however, is fairly intense in his pursuit of her-- he talks to her friends, hangs out in her neighborhood, even befriends her brother and starts playing Haitian drums in an effort to connect with the object of his affection. He's not gross and insulting like some of the boys in his school-- he's truly smitten and just wants to be with Bijou. For her part, Bijou finds Alex truly likeable, even if the situation is difficult for her. Also adding to her problems adjusting to American culture is Bijou's past experiences in Haiti, which are not fully explained until the end. Any romance is difficult, and Alex and Bijou are trying to figure out

romance while they are still trying to figure out themselves.

Strengths: This is a romance book FOR BOYS!! While chapters are told from both Bijou and Alex's viewpoints, the story really does center on Alex. Hooray! How many books like this are there out there? The description of Haitian culture in New York was really interesting, and I liked how Bijou's background does have an impact on her relationship with Alex but is not the entire focus of the book. I also appreciated that she was from a fairly well-to-do family in Haiti, and how a few characters from the Dominican Republic are also included. Very well balanced.

Weaknesses: Will boys pick this up? The cover is really cute, and not overly girly-- it's perfect for the story, really-- just wondering about the appeal.

Nana says

Completely and totally adorable, realistic...I could just go on. I did notice that the way these kids acted was more at a high school level if you ask me, but nevertheless, I've found a new favourite book :)

Michael says

Alex Shrader is in the seventh grade, not on the quest to look for love. The odds are against him, he goes to an all boys school, nagging mother and annoying sister who teases him about every little thing. Alex is your typical teenager that has friends around him that he questions if he is in the right crowd, while they are trying to fit in with the popular crowd, he has grown accustomed to living an ordinary and boring life. Girls are not even even his priority, that is until he meets Bijou a girl that can possibly change his outlook on romance and culture itself.

Bijou was raised in a very traditional and strict home. Chaperoned whatever she goes, it is difficult for her to find freedom in places she adores. Although she respects her family core values, she wishes that they can restrain from being so haughty to other people that are not the same. Raised in a Haitian culture, she was taught the meaning of respect and to set boundaries to the the opposite sex. However things are about to change for the better when she meets Alex, whose race and appearance is existing and nerve wrecking at the same time. Exchanging notes through a mediator, Alex and Bijou learn more about each other language and lifestyle. Additionally they are determined to overcome the odds that are against him and make sure that their commitment towards each other remains.

An edited leaked video on youtube causes Bijou to question everything she thought she knew about Alex. Proving his innocence to her is going to take time and effort, but Alex will stop at nothing trying to explain to Bijou that he is the same guy that she fall for. Tensions collide in this very sweet romance between two different people that fall for each other from different worlds.

Normally I don't care much for beautiful covers but this was one hard to resist. Ah come on how romantic was the book cover? Okay maybe I am a hopeless masculine guy but honestly the book cover pulled me in initially. As far as the content of the story, it was very cute and subtle with romance parts, it reminded me a lot of high school. Alex and Bijou were people I knew in life, huge plus that the author added the cultural aspect to their relationship.

Looking forward to reading more novels by Farrar, talented writer.

G says

Really great MG book

When I began reading this book, I didn't know what to expect but from the first paragraph, the writer has made me smirk and giggle like a schoolgirl watching the scene unfold before me. I'm just hooked in the world of the main character and love the fact that NYC is portrayed as the melting pot that it is because representation matters.

With that being said, I purposefully read fiction that has a cast of main characters who are multicultural and with varying ethnicities. This book was recommended to me by a person I admire and hasn't steered me wrong yet. I knew I had to give it a shot when the main love interest is revealed as Haitian, as I am Haitian as well. It's actually very rare for me to see other characters who are Haitian in romance novels whether it's MG, YA, or IR.

I must admit that I doubted the author would be able to accurately portray the life of a Haitian girl. Bijou is from my hometown and describes in detail exactly how it is for a young girl growing up in Haiti. Most families are super strict, not allowing their daughters anywhere without family member serving as a chaperone. I loved the smattering of French in their initial meeting and throughout the book. I was slightly disappointed that there weren't more Kreyol words used besides Tonton. I loved the use of rara and showing our music and voodoo in a respectful light.

The only cons that I feel this book had was that I don't feel that the villains of the book actually got what they deserved. None of them really had any repercussions for their actions even though Alex had the key to make them pay for the turmoil they caused his friends and him. I also felt like the book ended incredibly abruptly. There's so much more the author could have delved in with regards to the discord between Jenna and Bijou, especially considering the fact that Jenna is from the Dominican Republic.

I loved the fact that Bijou was bourgeois. I do wish that she were more of an extrovert and put people in their place with all the ignorant comments they made but I kept telling myself that it wasn't her place to teach people her culture. There's a thing called Google if they really wanted to learn.

I really love this book because it's great to see someone who could be me or my female relative in book form. I wish the author would write a sequel to this book as I want to know what the characters have been up to. I still have to so many questions left unanswered! But a good book will do that to you. I would highly recommend this to others to read.

Jenna Friebe says

Note: ARC received from NetGalley

This tween romance between Alex and Bijou was adorable. Alex is your average American boy, and he goes to an all-boys prep school. Bijou is from Haiti but moved to the States after the earthquake to live with her

aunt and uncle. She is a new student at an all-girls school that is the sister school to Alex's. The first time Alex sees Bijou, he knows he wants to get to know her. Throughout the book he has to work around her strict uncle and learn about Haitian culture to win Bijou's heart. The book is told in alternating narratives of Alex and Bijou.

I really liked both Alex and Bijou. They were thoughtful and sweet, and they seemed realistic to me. However, many of the side characters weren't as well fleshed out and felt flat and cliché (particularly the bullies). Mostly, I was able to look over that since I liked the two main characters so much. Also, I loved the character of Alex's older brother, Jou Jou. I wish there was a book for an older audience all about him!

My favorite thing about this book is that it is an interracial, cross-cultural romance... for tweens! I rarely see interracial romances in books for any age, and I think having one for this age range is wonderful. Also, the Haitian culture throughout the book is really interesting, especially the drumming. Overall, a really fun, sweet read.

Betsy says

Now let us discuss the middle school book. It is, arguably, the most forgotten book of its kind on a library and/or bookstore shelf. The book written for your average everyday denizen of junior high has no place in this world. It is too old for the children's section, seething as it is with budding romance and a general distrust of authority of every stripe. It is also, by the same token, too young for the teen section, feeling far too young for a place where you can encounter sex, drugs, and in general very splattery violence. Yes, the middle school book is an unloved object, doomed to drift between two very different worlds, acting as a bridge with no home. And yet, one has to understand that the middle school book is a necessary creation. It is in middle school that we lose whole swaths of readers. Where the children that are more than happy to plunk down with a book at the end of the day find themselves in the throes of a hormonal change without a literature to serve them in their hour of need. So it is with mixed feelings that I approach *A Song for Bijou* by Josh Farrar. At once familiar and unexpected, Farrar's pseudo-Romeo and Juliet styled romance set in contemporary Flatbush and Ditmas Park may have some difficulty locating its audience at first, but those that go in for the ride will find themselves rewarded a hundred times over. What a great little book.

Cue the soundtrack, the stars, the explosions, and the confetti. When Alex Shrader lays eyes on Bijou Doucet, it couldn't be called anything but love at first sight. A kid who normally just bumbles his way through his day, Alex is suddenly thrilled with the prospect of finding out more about his sudden crush, and with a bit of research he has some answers. Bijou Doucet: Relatively new transfer from Haiti to St. Cat's (the sister school to his own St. Chris) and mystery woman. Alex doesn't know anything about her family (or her culture for that matter) but he is determined to learn more. Bijou, meanwhile, at first wants nothing to do with the strange but sweet boy that looks at her like she's the sun, the moon, and the stars. In her family boys and girls don't date or even hang out, but there's something about this guy's dogged persistence she begins to take to. Told in alternating points of view, Farrar dives into first crush situation where success seems utterly impossible, but maybe worth fighting for just the same.

I've been sitting here, writing this review, wracking my brain to come up with other examples of middle school literature where a boy dedicates himself to a crush as thoroughly as Alex does in this particular book. I know that they're out there. I accept that they exist. Yet more often than not, a book containing a storyline where a boy crushes on a girl usually makes that fact secondary to the overall plot. It's not usually in the

forefront of the action itself. Alex, however, is the kind of guy you believe in. In fact, Farrar has his character down cold. It takes a little more effort on his part to render Bijou as warmly, particularly since the beginning of the book is marked pointedly with her indifference. Fortunately you come around to her, just as you come around to their core group of friends.

Now there's a lot of talk these days about the Common Core standards by which our kids will soon be taught. As a result, I'm always on a lookout for books that not only work in details from a variety of different cultures, but have the depth and research to pull it all off. In this particular novel, Farrar sets much of his action in Flatbush, a diverse area of Brooklyn where a large and thriving Haitian community exists. It's not a part of the world where we see many books for kids set. In his Author's Note, Farrar explains that after watching the 2007 documentary *The Other Side of the Water: The Journey of a Haitian Rara Band in Brooklyn*, he was inspired years later (and after the Haitian earthquake) to take a devastating event far away and ground it in a place already near and dear to his heart. A white author, Farrar says that while writing Alex's part came relatively easily, to ground Bijou's story in something better than mere guesswork he spoke at length with Haitian and Haitian American women, attended second language classes for Haitian students, and learned some hand-drumming techniques with musicians in Prospect Park. Every book written for children by authors about kids from another culture is subjected to a certain level of scrutiny on the part of reviewers like myself. Name whatever standards you like, though, and you'll find that Mr. Farrar's book passes the litmus test for great writing with flying colors.

I was also pleased that the book gave a certain level of depth and weight to the decisions and personality of Bijou's Tonton Pierre. It would have been the easiest thing in the world to render Bijou's hard-nosed rule-obsessed and ultimately (perhaps secretly) frightened uncle a parody of himself. However, he wears his heart on his sleeve, and while most child readers won't spend more than a second of thought on him beyond the page, Bijou's brother Jou Jou may allow a couple of them the chance to appreciate that this guy has a heart somewhere. It just happens to be buried in the thick of his misplaced intentions. Tonton Pierre is a real guy to the reader. That's more than can necessarily be said for the bullies in Alex's school. They occasionally show hints of interesting meanness, but generally speaking they're just your standard brainless baddies. Foils for the action, if you will. And after Tonton Pierre you expect more.

The fact of the matter, and this is not giving anything away, is that there are no easy answers to Alex's predicament. I say "Alex" specifically because I get the sense in this book that while Bijou is vaguely interested in this sweet gawky guy, his particular feelings are the crux of the novel itself. As such, I was mighty relieved that while his solution at the end of this story may bring him (and perhaps even Bijou) a certain level of inner peace, it's not really going to change much of anything. It makes for a great capper on the story, but since we're dealing with middle schoolers here, neither kid is going to suddenly go crazy and break the rules of family and society.

I call this book "middle school" but aside from the first crush storyline and the oblique reference to "getting some" (its innocent speaker is referring to kissing alone, so that's pretty indicative right there) there's nothing here that couldn't be found in any middle grade novel. Ultimately I decided the children's section was the best place to put *A Song for Bijou*, a decision I've not regretted one iota. Presenting a story that's been told in different versions before, but never with this particular setting, Farrar ends up making something ultimately pretty original in spite of its traditional background. A fine, fair little novel that will hopefully find its audience someday.

For ages 10 and up.

The FountainPenDiva, Old school geek chick and lover of teddy bears says

This looks soooo AWESOME!!!

NO, this book was AWESOME! It hit all The Fountain Pen Diva's happy buttons. I realize this is middle grade, but it's not dumbed-down in the least. Not to mention a New York that is realistically diverse.

One of the surest ways to end up in The Fountain Pen Diva's crosshairs? Write about a cosmopolitan city like New York and whitewash the entire cast.

Once again I have to thank the awesome Libertad for knowing just what The Fountain Pen Diva needed after so much recent and depressing IR fail. Firstly, this book was all kinds of sweet and cute. Alex, Bijou and their diverse friends are people I wish I'd known back in junior high school. And yes, while Alex is total jailbait lol, he's become another of my favourite fictional boyfriends. I loved how adork-able he was; trying to be smooth and sometimes making a mess of it. I adored how he saw Bijou and that was all they wrote. No hand-wringing, no angst (save how to get to know the object of his affections better).

I've been to Haiti. A long time ago when it was still on the cruise ship itinerary. Yes, there were poor people (name me somewhere on this planet that doesn't have poverty of some sort). There were also beautiful homes, and everyone I met was gracious. The island was stunning and the ocean a blue that seemed endless.

I enjoyed how the earthquake was not front and center, but a part of Bijou's life. She wasn't this tragic young girl heroine, but just a girl struggling to understand what it is to be fully American. To honor tradition but to also make one's own way in a new land. Wow, I never realized just how scarily strict some Haitian families are. I felt bad for Bijou just wanting to hang out with friends of the same gender; no wonder Alex's attentions just turned everything upside down.

And Bijou had BRAIDS with BEADS. After a slew of "long, silky locks" it was rather nice to read about a heroine with a natural style.

I hated that this book came to an end. I loved the vivid descriptions of a New York seldom seen. I want to find my own Rara Grand Bwa and learn to play drums. Even the food descriptions made my mouth water.

Brandy Painter says

Originally posted at Random Musings of aBibliophile.

I found A Song for Bijou by Josh Farrar one day on NetGalley and was immediately intrigued. I had not heard about it prior to that and after reading the synopsis I knew I had to read it. A contemporary book about a Brooklyn boy who falls for a newly arrived Haitian immigrant? We don't get many of those and I am happy to say that it is a good one.

There are so many books that focus on boy-crazy girls. We don't get nearly enough that focus on girl-crazy boys. And those boys are out there. Oh believe me are they ever. Alex sounds like a few of the boys I taught. I loved that. I loved the genuineness of his voice and the interactions with his friends. He is a nice guy but a painfully shy one and the way he deals with this is fun to read. Bijou's character felt slightly more forced, but

only slightly. She is more mature in her thinking. She has been through a lot so that is understandable. I found her struggle to maintain who she has always been and at the same time fit into her new world a heart-wrenching one. The rules in her family will seem crazy insane to modern American readers, and she chafes under them as well. Through Bijou and her family we get a picture of the modern immigration struggle of one small community and it is fascinating. The story switches back and forth between Alex and Bijou's points of view. I liked that their names weren't tacked on the beginning of their chapters. They didn't need to be. I knew after only a few words whose point of view it was. Their voices are that distinctive.

The plot focuses on the budding relationship between Alex and Bijou as he tries (sometimes disastrously) to get to know her and she slowly lets him. Everything about the two of them is spot on middle school crush. It's perfect. As a result of this Alex, and with him the reader, get a fascinating window onto Haitian-American culture. The setting is so well rendered I felt like I was actually there. I was a little disappointed in some of the plot developments toward the end and felt that the drama there was unnecessary and detracted from what is otherwise a wonderfully written and engaging story. I'm pretty sure the target audience will love it though, and that's what matters. This is a book that will appeal to many students in grades 5-8.

I read a copy of *A Song for Bijou* from the publisher via NetGalley. It will be available for purchase on February 12.

Heidi says

I enjoyed a lot of things about this book. The characters are interesting and unique. The plot was different than I've read before in a lot of ways. But there were a couple of things that irritated me as well. I'll start with the good stuff.

Strengths: Alex and Bijou are great characters. Alex is shy but fascinated by girls and when he sees Bijou he falls in like immediately. The rest of the book follows Alex and Bijou as a relationship begins to form and Alex tries to convince Bijou to be his friend (girlfriend). Both characters come across as believable and likable. The secondary characters are great too, Alex's friends, Ira and Nomuro, Bijou's friends, brother and aunt and uncle, all come across as real people.

The plot is an interesting one as Alex and Bijou have more than the normal boy/girl stuff to contend with. Bijou has recently come from Haiti where she lived through the massive earthquake of 2010 and it has left it's mark on her. In addition, Haitian culture is very different than American culture when it comes to boy/girl relationships and Bijou is not supposed to have anything to do with boys, so both she and Alex lie to further their friendship. I appreciated that this came back to bite both of them in the end. The boy/girl and friend interactions felt quite real and authentic. I really enjoyed the taste of Haitian culture and the inclusion of Haitian music and dance in the story, it added real flavor. It was great to see a cross-cultural relationship develop along with the tensions involved.

Weaknesses: Is the profanity really necessary? I know a lot of people speak that way, but I prefer not to read it and a lot of the kids I work with do to. In addition, am I the only one who finds twelve too young for kissing? Maybe I'm just weird that way. Sigh. I also got really irritated that the bullies who sabotage Alex and Bijou's relationship get away with it and Alex and Ira use 'blackmail' to get the boys to back off. I think this is just a personal pet peeve though.

Overall, an enjoyable and informative read full of life and culture and fun. I ended up really liking both Alex and Bijou, despite their sometimes poor choices.

Rea K says

Alex hasn't really ever cared about girls. Up until now. He sees a girl and the "slow-motion thing" happens and he has a crush on Bijou Doucet, a Haitian girl. Bijou doesn't want a boyfriend and anything to do with boys- in her own mind and her family forbids her to. When Alex tries to get Bijou's attention, the perfect moment comes- one of the few dances that involve both schools. Alex touches Bijou's heart, but he doesn't know what Bijou has been through. When he breaks her heart, can she forgive him...?

I liked this book. I think it's a good book, but it's not completely my style. I recommend this book to anyone who likes shorter story line with a lot jumps and stories that do the opposite of what you think might happen. This is a middle school love story involving secret movie-visits and planning. If this was part of a series, I wouldn't want to read the rest because I don't think that this is my style of series. I think the strengths in this book are that Farrar is good at describing what Alex or Bijou is thinking, from the point of view of a boy or girl and that the description of their surroundings are very detailed. I think that this needs some work on describing what the characters do, feel and act to one another at certain moments. Overall, I think this is a good book.

Alicia says

Bummer...I had high hopes for this one, especially since I saw it was being read for Capital Choices. This book was really boring and slow and the characters were flat with little personality. I can't see alot of kids enjoying this book, almost seems like it was written with adults in mind, even though it's a kids book.

Licha says

I am still a kid at heart and like to read all kinds of books, but I think this one is really intended for a very young audience, as in pre-teen. I liked that the story was really clean and about innocent puppy love. The story is told from the two protagonists' point of view and the author did a good job in making their voices believable for their age. My original review for some reason got deleted. Suffice to say, I think I was too old for this book to truly appreciate it.
