

ForeWord Reviews

Clarion Review

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Platforms

Tyler Spence

FriesenPress

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Five Stars (out of Five)

With clear and eloquent writing, *Platforms* is as laid back as its characters in this music-filled coming-of-age story.

Platforms, by Tyler Spence, tells the story of Tyler, a teenage musician in the mid 1970s. His outrageous fashion sense, natural athleticism, and conga drum skills serve him well as front man for his band, Dance Machine. He and his bandmates head out to a gig in a small mountain town just a few hours away and end up with more of an adventure than they had bargained for. Sex, drugs, and funk music fill their journey as they go from one problem to another, counting on the kindness of the people they meet to help them through.

Ty is on the cutting edge of cool. A successful athlete in football and track, he surprised his friends and family with his decision to drop sports to pursue his passion for music. His band plays funk and they are fairly successful on a regional level, playing gigs every weekend and traveling around entertaining school dances and late-night bar crowds. A gig in the small town of Omak takes them out of their comfort zone and further away from their home than they usually travel. When their car breaks down, they find themselves stranded for the weekend. Their teenage antics keep them right on the edge of serious trouble and the kindness, understanding, and consideration they are shown by the townspeople teach them all a valuable lesson.

The plot of *Platforms* meanders along with the band, taking several twists and turns as the band struggles with personal issues, car problems, old grudges, and bad weather. The story is as laid back as the characters in it, and although there are times when the pace seems slow, Spence makes up for it with clear writing and eloquent descriptions: “Way off on the western horizon, the faint silhouette of the Chelan Mountains emerged like distant camel humps, rising above the plains into the cloudless blue sky.”

Spence writes that this story is autobiographical. The authenticity of the dialogue and the

descriptions of music and fashion attest to the author's firsthand experience, making the book educational as well as entertaining. For example, he describes the funk music his band played: "Masterful creations like Donny Hathaway's 'The Ghetto' and The Isley Brothers' 'Fight The Power,' expressed meaningful messages of the day, wrapped in fresh, powerful, soulful grooves that drew multiracial listeners with their danceable beats."

Ultimately *Platforms* is a coming-of-age story. Ty and his bandmates are ill prepared and make poor decisions throughout their road trip. Each time they make a bad decision, someone from the small town steps up and helps them out. By the end of their long weekend they recognize the decency they have been shown and head for home, more mature than when they left.

Though the circumstances and events of the book are unique to the time period Spence is writing about, the lesson is universal. The process of learning decency and acceptable behavior is one that all young people go through and so most young adults will find something to relate to in this enjoyable story.

Catherine Thureson