



BOOKFILTER'S JULY PICK OF THE MONTH

MICHAEL GILTZ | JULY 29, 2019

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Every month, BookFilter picks the best new theater book, exclusively for Broadway Direct readers.

THE BLUE DOOR SERIES

By Pamela Brown

\$12.95 each in paperback, Pushkin Children's Books

The *Blue Door* theater books for kids are beloved in the U.K. and virtually unknown in the U.S. But every decade or so, some wise soul reissues them in hardcover or paperback in North-America. This time we can thank Pushkin's Children Books for re-releasing them in paperback and even e-book.

Beloved, you say? Don't listen to us — listen to Eileen Atkins. "An enchanting book," the legendary actress once said about the series that launched in 1941 and contains five novels in all. "A must for any child who wants to become an actor."

If that's not enough, how about a nod from the Dowager Countess of Grantham? Yes, Dame Maggie Smith is also a fan. "I wanted to act before I read this book," Smith once said about the first in the series. "And afterwards, there was no stopping me."

The books by Pamela Brown (just 16 years old when the first one was published) revolve around a group of friends in a small town. While amusing themselves one fine day, the kids stumble across an abandoned space. After a Mickey-and-Judy "Let's put on a show!" burst of inspiration, they clean the place out, paint the door blue (obviously), and write and perform their own evening of entertainment.

It's a disarming mix of fantasy (who stumbles across an empty theatre space just waiting to be claimed?) and reality. While each teen is more talented than the next, the real pleasure of the series is in the detailed and believable depictions of the hard work, grit, disappointment, and joy of a life in the theater.

The Swish of the Curtain (No. 1) captures community theater in all its ragged glory, from the recycling of costumes in show after show to the day-after doldrums when a run is over. *Maddy Alone* (No. 2) dips into film work. *Golden Pavements* (No. 3) covers both life at an arts academy in London, à la the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and summer rep work. *Blue Door Venture* (No. 4) covers more life at school, con artists, radio, and teaching and mentoring others in the arts. *Maddy Again* (No. 5) dives into the nascent world of live TV in the 1950s, one in which the author spent most of her career.

Realistic heartbreak and triumph are both explored here. When one of our favorites loses out on a role at an audition, they get murmurs of comfort from other students ... but they also quietly note a few eyes lighting up and satisfied smiles. (Yes, if you don't get the role, why shouldn't you be pleased a rival lost out too?) The novels are filled with such detail.

The *Blue Door* books are indeed a treat to share with young people yearning for a life in the theater. Adults can savor them too, with a smile about what might have been. But they're dangerous! As Smith said, once she read them, there was no stopping her from becoming an actress. You can find the books in various editions right now, while the handsome new Pushkin reissues will be complete after the final book, *Maddy Again*, comes out August 20.

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