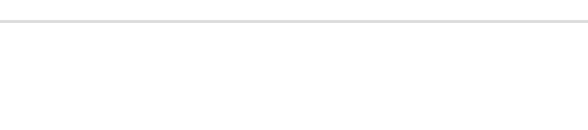


BOOKS

Daniel Handler, Author of the A Series Of Unfortunate Events Books, Reveals Why His New Book Is So Different

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Daniel Handler—aka Lemony Snicket, author of the blockbuster A Series Of Unfortunate Events books—returns with Poison for Breakfast (August 31, Liveright), a stand-alone adventure filled with mystery, musings on life and an apparent culinary crime.

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You're known for picture books, young adult novels, literary fiction and especially the Gothic thrills of A Series of Unfortunate Events. What prompted this change of pace?

When my son was younger, he was most interested in reading nonfiction. Which was quite expected in some ways, since he's the child of someone who makes a lot of picture books [mom Lisa Brown] and someone who writes novels for young people.

Poison for Breakfast is a mystery of sorts, where the mystery is almost beside the point. You must have had a mystery phase as a kid. Sherlock Holmes? The Hardy Boys?

It was definitely Agatha Christie. What I really liked when I was maybe 11 or 12, when I was starting to read them, was the list of characters in the front. I thought that was just fantastic.

What's your own reading routine?

I'm usually reading five or six books at a time in different rooms: a novel, a book of poetry, someone's letters or diary and a book for whatever it is that I'm researching.

If you had to choose: library or a bookstore?

One of the delights of my life is that I really don't have to choose. But I like a library because you can really take anything off the shelves and look at it.

You've talked about arranging a club to read Proust together in dive bars. Has that happened yet?

No, but during the pandemic, I did have a two-person Reading Out Loud Epic Poetry Whilst Drinking Whiskey on Zoom Club.

What I like about poetry is that booksellers can't decide if it's fiction or nonfiction. Poetry is just ... poetry.

Well, it's interesting that you would say that, because when my son was interested in reading nonfiction, he would ask all the time, "Is this nonfiction or fiction?"

You've said that the first book you bought was The Blue Asp by Edward Gorey, which is set in the world of the opera. Were you already singing when you bought that?

Yes, I was. In fact, I bought that book on a break from an opera rehearsal.

Were you good enough a singer to say, "Should I become a castrato?"

My parents used to joke that they considered castration to extend my career. But in the long run I'm grateful for my secondary sex characteristics.

You said you bought the Edward Gorey, a major influence of yours, with your own money. But you were only 8 years old! Where did the money come from?

That's more like a family joke. We would get an allowance and then we would say, "Hey, I'm buying this with my own money."

What are you reading now?

I'm reading Dead Souls by Sam Riviere; Dorothea Lasky's book Animal, which is about writing a little bit; and Hilary Leichter's Temporary.

What is Lemony Snicket reading right now?

What is Mr. Snicket reading? Well, I'm working on another Snicket project [for the stage, although it's not a theatrical adaptation of A Series Of Unfortunate Events], and for that I'm using this chap book by Magdalena Zurawski, which is called Being Human Is an Occult Practice.

What books are you recommending right now?

The Kids of Cattywampus Street [Anne Schwartz Books, by Lisa Jahn-Clough, following the mischievous adventures of kids who live on the same street].

Jackpot [Ember, by Nic Stone, in which a high school senior juggles school, work and caring for her younger brother].

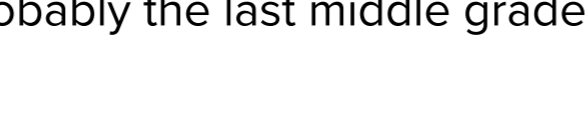
A Swim in a Pond in the Rain [Random House, a collection of essays and Russian short stories by George Saunders].

You share your passion for everything from the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop to the children's book The Long Secret by Louise Fitzhugh. Have you always loved recommending things to others?

It can be tricky. When I lived in New York, I used to go to a record store; I think it was House of Records on the way to Film Forum.

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