

Words and Music: It's a great season for giving

Written by Terry Mathews

Saturday, 17 December 2011 12:18



If some of the people on your Christmas list love to read and listen to good music, here are a few suggestions to make their holidays just a little bit brighter.

The 11 books in the Mary Russell series by Laurie R. King are captivating, enchanting, educational and thoroughly entertaining.

“The Beekeeper’s Apprentice,” published in 1994, introduces readers to Mary Russell, a 14-year-old who is sent to live with her aunt in Sussex, England, after her wealthy parents and younger brother are killed in an automobile accident on the coast of Northern California.

Recovering from physical and emotional wounds, the fiercely independent, incredibly intelligent young girl wanders the English countryside. During one of her long meanderings, she encounters a curious beekeeper who turns out to be Sherlock Holmes, one of England’s most famous detectives, who becomes her mentor.

King’s books are full of mysteries, social history and just enough whimsy to keep readers coming back for more. While some stories are a bit overloaded with information, most of the books are worth every minute.

The series does need to be read in order, especially the first few, as King unfolds the personal side of this odd couple.

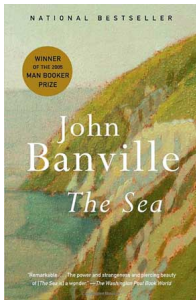
Many thanks to Pat and Trice Lawrence for recommending the books and lending their collection without a due date for return.

Watch upcoming editions of your *News-Telegram* for an interview with King and a book giveaway.

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The best book I've read this year – and possibly ever – is “The Sea,” by Irish author John Banville.

The 2005 Man Booker Award-winning novel begins with this singularly stunning sentence – “They departed, the gods, on the day of the strange tide,” and proceeds to tell the story of Max Morden, a middle-aged Irish intellectual who is reeling from the recent loss of his wife, desperately trying to find a way to carry on.

To cope with his grief, Morden returns to the seaside resort where his family once lived. He takes a room in a boarding house once owned by a family who impacted his life one fateful summer.

Banville crafts such beautiful prose that sometimes it's hard to read more than a few sentences at a time.

“On occasion ... I had felt myself break through the membrane of mere consciousness into another state ... where time moved differently ... where I was neither alive nor the other thing, and yet more vividly present than ever I could be in what we call the real world. ... Perhaps all of life is no more than a long preparation for the leaving of it.”

Although the paperback edition runs a mere 195 pages, it took me three weeks to finish it the first time and two weeks for the second pass – not because the reading is difficult, but because the beauty of the language took my breath away.

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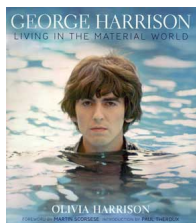
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It's hard to rave about anything coming out of Nashville these days, with the exception of "This One's For Him: A Tribute to Guy Clark," a celebration of Clark's 70th birthday. The 33 artists who collaborated on this 2 CD collection brought their A-games to the recording studio, and the result is one of the most enjoyable catalogs of work to come down the pike in a long time.

Artists include famous names like Lyle Lovett, Emmylou Harris, Kris Kristofferson, Willie Nelson, Vince Gill and Jerry Jeff Walker, and lesser known journeyman musicians like Rosie Flores, Kevin Welch, James McMurty, Terry Allen and Terri Hendrix.

Clark is the dean of Texas music, and the songs on this CD cover his brilliant 50-year career. I've had the CDs since early September and they just get better with every pass. In a perfect world, all music would be this good.

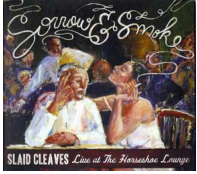


If someone on your gift list is a Beatles' fan, the lovely coffee table book, "George Harrison: Living in the Material World," will not disappoint. It's a beautifully laid out tribute to "the shy Beatle," complete with reminiscences by Eric Clapton, Paul McCartney and Ringo Star, along with 200 beautiful photographs.

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For the live music lovers on your list, try “Sorrow & Smoke” by Slaid Cleaves. The shy singer/songwriter gets to strut his stuff here, much to the delight of the crowd at Austin’s legendary Horseshoe Lounge and anyone who takes time to listen to Cleaves’ straight-from-the-heart stories.

Here's a list of Laurie R. King's series:

The Beekeeper's Apprentice (1994)
A Monstrous Regiment of Women (1995)
A Letter of Mary (1996)
The Moor (1998)
O Jerusalem (1999)
Justice Hall (2002)
The Game (2004)
Locked Rooms (2005)
The Language of Bees (2009)
The God of the Hive (2010)
Pirate King (2011)