

Beautiful Music for Ugly Children

Kirstin Cronn-Mills

Flux, October 8, 2012

Reviews

- [Booklist Reviews](#), November 15, 2012: Gabe has a secret. He is really Liz. Born a female, he is cautiously beginning his transition to male. Only his parents and his lifelong best friend, Paige, know. But when a girl at school, where he is callously called "that lesbo chick," discovers the truth and outs Gabe, things become difficult, if not downright dangerous. In the meantime, Gabe is a part-time DJ on the local community radio station, where his show, "Beautiful Music for Ugly Children," is fast becoming an underground hit. Will his fans reject him when they, too, discover the truth? What, as Gabe thinks in difficult circumstances, would Elvis do? Obviously, there are nuggets of humor in an otherwise serious story. Cronn-Mills' thoughtful book joins a small but growing body of literature that gives faces to this traditionally invisible minority. Despite a few incidents that require a willing suspension of disbelief, the story is a model of integrity, and Gabe is an always appealing character. Copyright 2012 Booklist Reviews.
- [Kirkus Reviews](#), September 15, 2012: Readers first meet Gabe as he DJs his first community-radio show, Beautiful Music for Ugly Children. It is only after hearing Gabe's friend and neighbor John, a fellow music lover who worked as a DJ for forty years, use Gabe's birth name that readers learn that Gabe is transgender. Being trans, Gabe opines, is like being a 45 record with an A side and a B side. When the story opens, only a few people know about Gabe's B side; the rest see him as a girl. When Gabe's radio show becomes an underground hit, generating a difficult-to-believe-but-pleasing-to-imagine cadre of fans calling themselves the Ugly Children Brigade, Gabe's B side is pushed further into public view. While Gabe's coming-out process figures heavily into the story, it is, refreshingly, only one aspect of his experience. The show-stealer here is John, a unique, well-conceived, funny and loving figure whose enthusiasm for music and endless support for Gabe provides solidity and warmth amid the many changes Gabe experiences. A kind and satisfyingly executed portrait of a music-loving teen coming out as transgender. (Fiction. 12 & up) Copyright Kirkus 2012 Kirkus/BPI Communications. All rights reserved.
- Library Media Connection, 2012: This title adds to the growing body of literature featuring transgendered teens. Elizabeth's parents withdraw when she tells them that she is a man trapped in a female body. They pressure her to earn money for college, but Elizabeth, now called Gabe, desperately wants to be a DJ. With his mentor's support, Gabe finds the strength to "come out." Struggling with sexual feelings toward his longtime best friend, Gabe fears that coming out may jeopardize the friendship. Readers will enjoy the references to song titles, lyrics, and artists. More important is the raw angst of teens coming to terms with their sexual identity. Librarians and educators should be aware of the frank sexual content and language. Tena Natale Litherland, Central Library Director, Webb School of Knoxville, and Adjunct Lecturer, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. ADDITIONAL SELECTION

- [Publishers Weekly Reviews](#): Gabe Wilson has a lot going on. He's about to graduate from high school, he's just started hosting a radio show, and he's got a crush on his best friend Paige. Overshadowing it all: everyone knows him as Elizabeth. Cronn-Miller, whose *The Sky Always Hears Me and the Hills Don't Mind* featured a teenage girl grappling with her sexuality, has clearly done her research. Gabe's difficulties—from dealing with freaked-out parents and bigoted classmates to navigating love, sex, and whether to use the men's or women's room—are well documented. So much so, in fact, that the book sometimes feels like a PSA exposing the challenges a trans teen faces. Cronn-Miller never minimizes those challenges (Gabe faces some terrifying abuse), avoiding a too-happy ending, but Gabe and Paige's supportive friendship and Gabe's love of music shine through. It's impossible not to root for Gabe as he finds the courage to live the life he wants. Ages 12–up. Agent: Amy Tipton, Signature Literary Agency. (Oct.) Copyright 2012 PWxyz LLC
- [School Library Journal](#), January 1, 2013: Reviews Gr 8 Up—Elizabeth Williams knows he has always been a guy, and if he can only get through graduation in a few weeks, he can begin his new life as Gabe. He is transitioning, but his family refuses to acknowledge him, and his classmates bully him. The only person who supports him is his BFF, Paige, and, predictably, he has a crush on her but can't take a chance on ruining their friendship. Gabe is a music geek, and his ultra-cool, grandfatherly neighbor John, a former DJ, lands him a community radio show, *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children*. Gabe DJs as himself, and after working up the courage to tell John, who is fine with him being a "triangle," they put together a show about A sides and B sides, which becomes popular with the Ugly Children Brigade fan club and a running theme in the book. But when Gabe has a date with one of his fans, and she recognizes him as Liz, word spreads and some fans drop out of the Facebook club, while others get violent. When John is critically hurt defending Gabe at an Ugly Children event, the offenders are arrested, John's long-lost daughter shows up, Gabe's parents have a change of heart, and Paige and Gabe may have a chance together. While this transgender coming-of-age tale wraps up a bit too quickly, the quirky relationship between Gabe and John and their shared music obsession elevates this story above the average problem novel.—Betty S. Evans, Missouri State University, Springfield [Page 104]. (c) Copyright 2012. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.
- [Voice of Youth Advocates Reviews](#): As if high school is not hard enough for a loner and die-hard music geek, Gabe is a guy trapped in the body of a girl. In the spring of senior year, he has come out as a transsexual to his family and Paige, his only friend at school, where he is known as Elizabeth, or "that lesbo chick." After telling his neighbor John—a radio DJ and mentor in the radio business—Gabe plans to lie low until graduation, when he can move to the Twin Cities to begin life as a man. But his parents still call him "Elizabeth," his brother ignores him, and he blurts out his name as Gabe on his first late-night community radio show. When "*Beautiful Music for Ugly Children*" attracts a following at Elizabeth's school, Gabe is forced to decide whether to be Gabe to everyone or keep his true self hidden. This moving story of senior-year insecurity and bravery is told by Gabe who does not shy away from frank references to male and female genitalia, sexuality, slurs related to sexual orientation, combined with an overwhelming amount of music trivia.—Laurie Cavanaugh 4Q 3P A/YA Copyright 2011 Voya Reviews.

[Lambda Literary](#), April 24, 2013: A trans teen’s local southern Minnesota radio show inspires an unlikely cult following in Kirstin Cronn-Mills’ quiet coming-of-age novel *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children* (Flux). Seventeen-year-old Gabe knows he’s a boy—he’s known that for a long time. And while his new job as a DJ for a local radio station allows him to be himself as he is, at home his parents struggle to come to terms with losing their daughter Elizabeth. It’s John—Gabe’s neighbor and mentor, “the oldest DJ in the universe”—who becomes Gabe’s saving grace. A 70-year-old chain-smoker with a southern drawl, John’s influence on Gabe is refreshing and inspiring. He quickly takes on the role of Gabe’s parent (or “uniparent” as Gabe might describe him). It’s not long before the issue of Gabe’s identity comes to a head as he faces the challenges of the average American teenager—falling in love, hating your parents, and embracing self-acceptance—as well as the painstaking struggles of coming out as trans in a suburban high school environment. Cronn-Mills delivers a believable first-person narrative in Gabe, yet the novel isn’t without flaws. Gabe’s narrative voice is often inviting if not charming—especially as the narrative arc begins to settle. Early on he quips, “If testosterone shots turn me into an asshole I’m going to be pissed.” Nonetheless, similar to Cris Beam’s inspiring *I Am J*, Cronn-Mills has written a necessary novel about a character who will be undoubtedly embraced by trans questioning young readers and LGBTQ literary advocates. Lastly, Lisa Novak’s stunning cover design should not go unnoticed. This is easily one of the best YA book covers of the year. Author: Antonio Gonzalez Cerna

Crowdsourced Reviews

[Goodreads](#)

Awards/Lists

- [Stonewall Book Awards - Mike Morgan & Larry Romans Children’s & Young Adult Literature Award, 2014](#)
- [YALSA’s Best Fiction for Young Adults, 2013](#)
- [YALSA Top 10 Popular Paperbacks, 2014](#)
- [Finalist, Lambda Literary Award for Children’s and Young Adult Literature, 2013](#)

Accolades for *Beautiful Music for Ugly Children*

Year ↕	Accolade ↕	Result ↕	Ref. ↕
2015	Green Mountain Book Award	Nominee	[7]
2014	Stonewall Book Award	Winner	[8][9]
	Independent Publisher Book Awards for LGBT+ Fiction	Silver Medal	[10]
	Young Adult Library Service Association’s Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults	Top Ten	[11][12]
2013	American Library Association Rainbow List	Top Ten	[13]
	American Library Association’s Best Fiction for Young Adults	Selection	[14]
2012	Lambda Literary Award for Children’s and Young Adult Literature	Finalist	[1]

Response to challenges

None found

References

- Beautiful music for ugly children*. (n.d.). Goodreads. Retrieved July 8, 2022, from <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13221769-beautiful-music-for-ugly-children>
- Beautiful music for ugly children*. (2012, September 15). Kirkus. Retrieved July 8, 2022, from <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/kirstin-cronn-mills/beautiful-music-ugly-children/>
- Beautiful music for ugly children*. (2012, September 24). Publishers Weekly. Retrieved July 8, 2022, from <https://www.publishersweekly.com/9780738732510>
- Beautiful music for ugly children*. (2012, November 15). Booklist. Retrieved July 8, 2022, from <https://www.booklistonline.com/Beautiful-Music-for-Ugly-Children/pid=5543972>
- Cavanaugh, L. (2011). *Beautiful music for ugly children*. Voice of Youth Advocates.
- Evans, B. S. (2013, January 1). *Beautiful music for ugly children*. School Library Journal. Retrieved July 8, 2022, from <https://www.slj.com/review/beautiful-music-for-ugly-children>
- Gonzalez Cerna, A. (2013, April 24). *Beautiful music for ugly children*. Lambda Literary. Retrieved July 8, 2022, from <https://lambdaliterary.org/2013/04/beautiful-music-for-ugly-children-by-kirstin-cronn-mills/>
- Litherland, T. N. (2012). *Beautiful music for ugly children*. *Library Media Connection*.