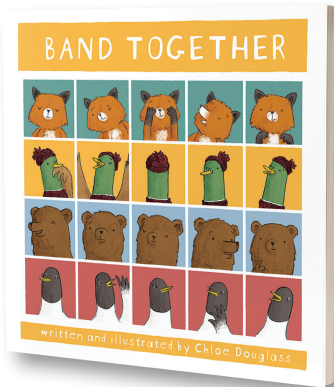




Band Together: Interview with Chloe Douglass



Magination Press's new book, *Band Together*, tells the story of a musical, but loner duck, and a traveling band in need of some back-up. It explores friendship and the process and rewards of stepping out of one's comfort zone. Magination Press interviewed *Band Together*'s author and illustrator about creating the book.

Magination Press: What inspired you to write *Band Together*?

Chloe Douglass: I think what inspired me to write the book is how music can be a universal communicator to bring us all together. Music has had a big influence in my life so naturally, I think I fell to this idea early on in my story writing process: this was how my main character was going to tackle his problem.

MP: What is *Band Together* about?

CD: *Band Together* is about Duck, who has lived on his own for so long, he has forgotten how and gotten a little bit scared to make new friends. It's all a bit overwhelming. One day a band: Bear, Fox, and Seagull, break down on the beach where he lives and he ends up being roped into helping them before he can think of saying no. They end up having a jam with their instruments and have a great time. Duck thinks about asking them if they would play with him the next day but he puts himself down, overthinks it and can't go through with it. Seagull gets sick and throws the concert into jeopardy, but Bear knows just who to ask to fill in. It's up to Duck to drum up the courage and help out his new potential friends.

MP: This was the first book you both wrote and illustrated. What was that like? How was it different from illustrating another author's work?

CD: Writing and illustrating your own book is different in a way as you're much more attached to the text and the story. Working with an editor, changing and tweaking bits, was a new experience and one that I loved, as it makes the finished story the best it can be.

The book also goes through a lot of different versions before it gets help with an editor. I have lost count of how many versions of the story there have been!

When working on the final stage it felt easier to get roughs drawn fairly quickly and onto the finals, because I have had the story and characters in my mind's eye for so long. Whereas illustrating for an author, you have to spend time getting to know the character/s, doing lots of sketches and roughs to get them right, and working on lots of different layouts before settling on the right one to help tell the story.

MP: What was unexpected about creating this book?

CD: I think the biggest unexpected thing was having to change the title once it had gone to print. The book title was originally a lyric from a favorite band of mine, but without us knowing, a book had come out using the title and the lyrics from the song. The team at Magination Press and I brainstormed a new one and I actually think it now works better!

MP: Why did you choose animals instead of people for the characters in *Band Together*?

CD: Bear and Duck have been characters that have been popping up in my sketchbook for years. I would write or draw scenarios or story starters for them. Duck's been a knight and a detective before now!

I think I started drawing Duck living on the beach in a hut because my best friend lives near the sea and the beaches are so quiet and calm. I could just picture Duck living in a cute little hut by himself, which probably led to how the story started to come together.

MP: Do you have a favorite part of *Band Together* or was there a section that was especially challenging to write?

CD: I LOVE a good pun, so putting the endpapers of the animal band/artist album covers together made me chuckle to myself so much! I put a couple puns in Duck's hut that I'm quite proud of!

There were a lot of versions of this story before it settled into the one it is now. It was quite tricky to get the core message across without Bear shaming Duck into action, but making it Duck's choice of wanting to change and get out of his rut. He needed to see the opportunity for himself and, that if he didn't take it, he might never change. It can be hard to try and get this message over in a few words. I hope that the spread of Duck making the decision creates a nice place to pause to discuss these thoughts and feelings as you're reading.

MP: In *Band Together*, you explore the experience of making new friends and how it feels to put yourself "out there." That's a very vulnerable feeling. What do you hope kids and families get from reading about Duck's experience?

CD: I hope that anyone who feels the same as Duck might take some reassurance from it. You might not be pursuing opportunities due to fear of the unknown or worrying about the worst-case scenario. There's a Chinese proverb that sums this up neatly: "He who deliberates fully before taking a step will spend his entire life on one leg."

By grasping an opportunity or taking a chance you might change things for the better, and that one act of courage can be built upon time and time again. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, as they say.

MP: What do you do when you aren't writing?

CD: When I'm not writing I might be drawing in my sketchbook or creating something for my portfolio. If I'm lucky I might be working on a commission. When not doing work-related things I am usually pottering in the garden or playing on my games console! Before the COVID-19 lockdown, I'd spend time with all my friends. I didn't realize how much it meant to me, and I have been hugely missing hanging out and laughing with chums. I also really like watching documentaries about how Disney films are made (I'm a huge Disney fan!), and then watching the film to see how it all comes together. It's a bit like the process of making a book, because you see what works and what doesn't and what makes the story work harder and so on.

MP: Do you have any fun facts readers might not know that you'd like to share?

CD: I guess being able to loop your arms around your body like a skipping rope might count as a fun fact?!

MP: What was your favorite children's book when you were growing up?

CD: Oh it's so hard to choose just one! *My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes* by Eve Sutton and Lynley Dodd comes straight to mind, because you end up shouting it out loud by the end of the book. The illustrations and stories in Hilda Boswell's *Treasury of Stories, Nursery Rhymes and Verse* have stayed with me my whole life. A nostalgic, inspiring beautiful book.