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Body and Soul

By Frank Conroy



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In the dim light of a basement apartment, six-year-old Claude Rawlings sits at an old white piano, picking out the sounds he has heard on the radio and shutting out the reality of his lonely world.

The setting is 1940s New York, a city that is "long gone, replaced by another city of the same name." Against a backdrop that pulses with sound and rhythm, *Body & Soul* brilliantly evokes the life of a child prodigy whose musical genius pulls him out of squalor and into the drawing rooms of the rich and a guilt-edged marriage.

But the same talent that transforms him also hurtles Claude into a lonely world of obsession and relentless ambition. From Carnegie Hall to the smoky jazz clubs of London, *Body & Soul* burns with passion and truth--at once a riveting, compulsive read and a breathtaking glimpse into a boy's heart and an artist's soul.



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Body and Soul By Frank Conroy Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

When the author of *Stop-Time* and *Midair* produces a new work, it is an event to celebrate. And although Conroy's bildungsroman of a boy finding his identity in his musical genius has some flaws, it is by and large an engrossing novel, written in a supple and elegant prose and displaying remarkable insight into the mind of a prodigy. Conroy's protagonist is Claude Rawlings, who grows up in the 1940s in the shadow of New York's Third Avenue El. Claude's education in some ways is similar to Billy Bathgate's: neglected by his emotionally unstable, alcoholic, cab-driver mother, he shines shoes, lifts coins from sewers and learns to steal. He is introduced to another world when Aaron Weisfeld, a music store owner and WW II refugee, recognizes his musical gifts and transports him to the Park Avenue apartment of a maestro whose Bechstein piano Claude uses and eventually inherits. Even more in the Dickensian mode, Claude falls in love with a cold, arrogant young woman from a patrician New York family, a character who is eerily similar to Estella in *Great Expectations*. Conroy's depiction of a young boy's discovery of music, the awakening of his sensibility and the flowering of his genius is brilliant. Lucid explanations of musical theory ranging from basic harmonics to the 12-tone scale, from Bach to Charlie Parker to Schoenberg, provide a continuum of insights and discoveries for Claude and for the reader. The first half of the book sweeps Claude along a path strewn with almost miraculous lucky breaks: he has inspired teachers and generous and appreciative patrons; his concerts are unalloyed triumphs--and only the cynical will wish for a disaster to increase the tension. (Readers of *Stop Time* will also recognize in Claude's childhood an alternative version of Conroy's miserable youth.) The second half is less successful. Claude's immersion in music, an obsession that makes him fascinating as a youth, renders him hollow as a man, and while Conroy obviously intends to demonstrate that Claude's emotional life is sterile in several ways, as a protagonist for a time he becomes a muted and shadowy figure. Claude's unquestioning relationship with the kindly Weisfeld, his first and abiding teacher, is less credible once he matures. The revelation of Claude's patrimony is poignantly rendered, however, and provides another look at the nature of creativity. And the book as a whole is harmoniously orchestrated and beautifully observed. 125,000 first printing; film rights to Spring Creek Productions; major ad/promo; author tour.

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From Kirkus Reviews

From rags to riches--by way of musical genius--in this alluringly atmospheric first novel by Conroy of *Stop-Time* (1967) fame. In a squalid basement apartment on New York's Third Avenue toward WW II's end, a fatherless little kid named Claude Rawlings spends his days alone while his mother--obese, left-wing, prone to booze and to bouts of instability--drives a cab for a living. The days are long, and to while them away Claude bangs around on a small white piano (his mother was once a singer) half buried in the back of the apartment--and the rest, you could say, is history. Claude's awakening to music is splendidly, rivetingly, described, and the Horatio Alger-esque clichés and coincidences are readily forgiven as the boy tears through his beginning-level lessons, becomes the student of nearby music-store proprietor (and ,migr., having fled from the Nazis) Aaron Weisfeld, stumbles into a full scholarship at a ritzy private high school, has his big break performing the Mozart double concerto with the world's greatest pianist, marries a pretty girl with a five-million-dollar trust fund, gets divorced five years later when it's discovered that.... In other words, once Claude is grown and launched, Conroy fills out his novel with more and more soap-opera turns, among them the death of Aaron Weisfeld (after the long-postponed revelation of his past), Claude's resultant and extended breakdown (connected also with his own medical secret), his sudden recovery and meteoric rise to new fame as the composer of a prize-winning concerto to be premiered in London, where, in case you're wondering what ever became of Claude's long-ago first teen heartthrob, or why he still hasn't ever found out who his

father was.... Still, especially for the first two-thirds: a masterful coming-of-ager set in a now-vanished New York, with great music, and the life of great music, galore. (First printing of 75,000; film rights to Spring Creek Productions) -- *Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Review

“Beautifully written, and hypnotically readable...the best story I know of in a long, long time.”

--*Vanity Fair*

“Full of enchantment...a precise conjuring of an exceptional child’s perceptions and feelings.”

--*Entertainment Weekly*

“A big, old-fashioned book as satisfying as a fine evening at the symphony.”

--*Dallas Morning News*

“A literary event...a grand saga...**Body & Soul** was written under the spell of Dickens, not to mention Stendhal, Tolstoy and the other 19th century titans...Conroy bedazzles readers!

--*Chicago Tribune*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Patricia French:

The book Body and Soul give you a sense of feeling enjoy for your spare time. You need to use to make your capable a lot more increase. Book can to get your best friend when you getting tension or having big problem along with your subject. If you can make studying a book Body and Soul for being your habit, you can get a lot more advantages, like add your capable, increase your knowledge about some or all subjects. You are able to know everything if you like start and read a book Body and Soul. Kinds of book are several. It means that, science e-book or encyclopedia or others. So , how do you think about this book?

Kenneth Harrell:

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Donald Sigman:

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Melody Herrera:

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