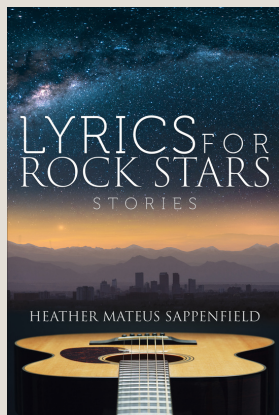


PRESS RELEASE

LYRICS FOR ROCK STARS: stories

Colorado's women, landscapes and history come alive in re-release of multi-award-winning story collection



A widow's daring bear encounter brings healing, two bicycling women from vastly different eras share one destiny, a ski instructor careens out of control, a 15-year-old girl lusts after a real cowboy, a mother bolts from her fantasy life to find wild horses, and a 109-year-old soldier finally discovers grace on the moon. This prize-winning collection traces the contours of Colorado's history and geography, while mining the secrets of its people's hearts.

"Welcome to the beautiful state of Colorado. Meet its inhabitants. Visit all the most spectacular sites, and a few dark and scary ones too. In *Lyrics for Rock Stars*, Heather Mateus Sappenfield has drawn a map of the Colorado mountains and written a legend that describes the inner workings of its people's hearts."

—Camille T. Dungy, author *Guidebook to Relative Strangers*, National Book Critics Circle Awards Finalist
& Guggenheim Fellowship Recipient

"Wow! *Lyrics for Rock Stars* is a rousing literary adventure set in a brilliant Colorado landscape. The western men and women in these stories ski, bicycle, race with donkeys, work on ranches, taunt bears, and run away in search of wild horses or a kind word. Sappenfield's courageous children will bring you to tears as they work their way through the messes adults make for them. These vivid, muscular stories make me feel glad to be human."

—Bonnie Jo Campbell, author *The Waters*, National Book Awards
& National Book Critics Circle Awards Finalist

IN AN INTERVIEW Heather Mateus Sappenfield can discuss:

- Why Colorado, its landscape and its history play such unique and important roles in her storytelling
- Her techniques for writing characters throughout history
- How—in a life filled with adventure—writing is her bravest pursuit
- How and why her literary career defies boundaries
- Why she's taking lessons from Taylor Swift with her books

HEATHER MATEUS SAPPENFIELD writes fiction and essays. Her works have earned a Reading the West Award, a Nautilus Award, a Moonbeam Award, the Danahy Fiction Prize, seven Pushcart Prize nominations, finalist for the Flannery O'Connor Award, and finalist for a Colorado Book Award. The audiobook, narrated by Michael Crouch, won an AudioFile Magazine Earphones Award, a SOVAS Award, and was a finalist for Audies. Heather lives with her husband in the heart of Colorado's Rocky Mountains. Learn more about her at heathermateussappenfield.com.

LYRICS FOR ROCK STARS: stories

Heather Mateus Sappenfield

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www.twilight-empire.com
alpineheather@comcast.net

An Interview with Heather Mateus Sappenfield

1. Where did the idea for this collection come from?

All of these stories have roots in my life, yet each one sprouts into fiction. The first story I wrote was “Coloring Beyond the Lines,” after leaving my high school teaching position to stay home with my daughter, taking my first wobbling steps toward becoming a serious writer as she took hers. After several near misses with editors at magazines, I headed to Pacific University’s MFA in Writing program to hone my craft. Seven of the collection’s stories originated from there. Just before graduating, “Empty Feast” was runner up for an award, then “Indian Prayer” won the Danahy Fiction Prize, and I thought, Well, I’m a real author now. But being an author isn’t about writing to the end of a story, or awards. Like raising a child, it’s about patiently beckoning and allowing a story to unfold into its greatest potential. Post-MFA, I continued writing short stories, eventually entering the collection in some contests, where it was a finalist over and over. Finally, around my daughter’s twentieth birthday, their overarching themes—the way they spoke beyond themselves—finally became clear to me. Surprising me, honestly, and allowing me to fully understand and shape that body of work. And then it won!

2. Your stories trace through historical time periods as well as modern day settings.

What connections do you see between the past and the present?

We are creatures woven into legacies—familial, cultural, historical—and, whether we realize it or not, acknowledge it or not, our actions are guided by these threads. I believe life’s greatest adventures, the ones that require the most courage, lie in recognizing how these histories affect us, and then in having the fortitude to accept or reject them according to our personal truths, which often leads to conflict with society, others, ourselves. Where and when we live makes all the difference. For this reason the Colorado settings of my stories usually have as much influence as any character.

3. Why was it important to you to weave hopeful themes throughout this collection?

I don’t write for catharsis, or to create art, rather to forge a bond with a reader. Foundational to this connection is an implicit agreement that is present in each story’s first words, in how its characters and settings are brought to life, in how their conflicts play out. This relationship invites a reader to lift, from how I arrange mere letters on a page, an emotional investment. All of these stories have origins in my life experiences, especially the ones involving kids. There’s no denying my childhood was rough. But it also made me the author I am today. “Hope” literally means to want something to happen or be true. I believe most of us hope that at least an inkling of grace waits at the far side of struggle. So where it fit the story arc, I provided that, no matter how ragged that hope might be.

4. Michael Crouch gave an incredible performance as the narrator for the audiobook.

What was it like working with him? Were you surprised to see the audiobook receive the highest recognitions?

When I suggested Michael Crouch as one of my favorite narrators, the book’s first publisher, V Press LC, contacted him about doing the narration. When I learned that he’d said yes, I was stunned. In a Zoom meeting during the height of the pandemic, he asked me why I wanted a male for the narration. Of the seventeen stories in *Lyrics for Rock Stars*, only three have male protagonists, and they range from ten years old to one hundred and nine. The rest of the female narrators range from eight years old to fifty. Having a male narrate a

collection predominately about women throughout history seemed to create a balance. Still, though I'd heard Michael's range, I knew even he'd be stretched. I'll never forget first hearing his rendition of "The Oldest Living Man in America." His voice was so exactly as I'd imagined it that I cried. Michael and I clarified the pronunciations of names and the pathos of several stories, but beyond that, I felt it was better to step back and let him create. Afterward, listening to the other stories was magical. I laughed and cried for characters I'd revised and edited hundreds of times. As for the big awards, I'm truly thankful yet not surprised that his remarkable performance garnered such attention. The SOVAS and Audie Awards are the equivalent of the Golden Globes and Academy Awards of voice acting, so *Lyrics* was like a screenplay from which an actor was nominated for or wins an Oscar. It was surreal, and I'm so happy for his success. Michael is not only a stunning talent, but a genuinely kind person, and I'm honored to know him.

5. What can readers expect to see from you in the future? Do you have any other projects in the works?

Most definitely. I'm in a phase not unlike Taylor Swift, where I've bought back the rights to three of my books. It feels so good. I plan to re-release one of my YA novels in the future. Additionally, I have a new book—an amazing humorous speculative fiction novel—that required oodles of research and took forever to write! It's a funny book about society, aging, death, oppression of women—not funny topics at all, right? But I've found that often the best way to explore difficult subjects is with a light heart. It's a book that spans all of time, with gods, and profound world-altering conflicts, and romance. I just love it. I will most likely bring that novel into the world with Twilight Empire Books as well.