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Award-Winning Illustrator Rafael López Shares Art From His Heart

By A.K. Carroll



Image provided

work.

"I wanted to become a little more personal and a little less annual reportish," López says. That personal touch is what got him noticed by Theresa Howe and launched his career as an award-winning children's book illustrator. López's work as an illustrator, along with his heart for community-building, is what brings him to Lafayette Public Library on Friday, June 19, as a part of this summer's reading program, Read to the Rhythm.

"He's going to bring original artwork, do a drawing demonstration, and bring slides showing various parts of the work," says youth services librarian Ginny Golden, who describes López's illustrations as "bright and beautiful."

Golden discovered López through his recent work on "Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl's Courage Changed Music," a picture-book based on a true story about a young girl in Cuba who wants to play the drums despite gender stereotypes that forbid her from doing so. The book has been selected as a featured read for the Read to the Rhythm program.

"This is a program we do every summer to encourage children and the whole family to continue learning," says Golden. "We really want summer to be a time when they read for their own enjoyment. It's important for the county and really the whole country."

In an effort to promote the program and draw in readers, the library has put together a wide variety of activities, including an event with Drum Dream Girl author Margarita Engle in August, and the upcoming evening with Rafael López.

López's presentation is slated to begin at 6:30 p.m. in the Community Hall of the Lafayette library, with the Azucar Quartet playing Latin jazz and salsa starting at 5:30 p.m. The quartet is all-female, just like the band of sisters featured in Drum Dream Girl.

The true storyline of the book is one of the things that initially drew López to the project. "It was sort of related to my own mom's struggle as an architect from a traditional family in the '30s and '40s," he says. "Once I connected it to my mom's story everything started to evolve."

One of López's favorite scenes in the book comes just after a moment of conflict. "The girl's father asks, 'What are you doing? I told you no.' Then she's invited by her sisters to join them. In the next scene she's back in the jungle dreaming and drumming along - that's my favorite scene

"I grew up in Mexico City, and there was this huge flea market. My dad would take me every Sunday and he would walk away with 15-20 new books," award-winning artist and illustrator Rafael López says of his early encounters with literature. "He was a lover of books, especially old books. As a child we had this wall in our living room packed with old books. I'd read about everything." In a time when there was no Internet for personal distraction, López immersed himself in pages, especially in art books. "I loved seeing images."

López's love for imagery, nurtured by his architect parents, dominated his formative years—from those spent studying under Felipe Ehrenberg in Exeter, England, to those invested in earning a BFA in illustration in Los Angeles. Twelve years out of college, López made a shift toward conceptual illustration, introducing Latin elements into his

because she isn't being prevented from becoming what she really wants to be. It's a story about women who are very determined to make their dreams come true."

As a part of his presentation, López plans to talk about women who have faced challenges - mountain climbers, race car drivers, a female president in Argentina, etc. "There are some traditions that are meant to be broken," he says.

López will also ask his audience to think about creation and collaboration and the ways that they can build something together. He ends his presentation with an interactive demonstration, working with the audience to connect emotions, people and illustrations.

López says he had no idea what he was getting into when he first started illustrating children's books. "Ignorance was bliss," he recalls. His efforts in the field now make up half of his work and add to depth and perspective to his perceptions of his own illustrations. "Getting involved with kids allowed me to get more creative with explaining what I do and why I do it. I just jumped in headfirst, bringing something very personal to the style and the story."

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