



## Thank You for the Music

By Jane McCafferty  
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### Introduction

In 14 original stories, award-winning author Jane McCafferty illuminates life, weaving her love of music throughout the lives and stories of her characters. From two middle-aged strangers who meet in an empty baseball stadium during a rainstorm to a 25-year-old man who brings his 60-year-old wife home to meet his parents to a young couple who live next door to an unemployed clown and his wife, these stories are at once unexpected and enthralling. Whether the music is loud or soft, a song on the radio or clarinet lessons, music infiltrates these perfectly orchestrated tales.

### Discussion Questions

1. "Family on Ice" -- "I have the kind of loneliness that makes me sit too close, on purpose, to strange men on buses," says the narrator at the start of the story. At her friend's Christmas party where her loneliness intensifies, she connects with the "family bum," sharing a strange, profound night of silence with him. How does she change by the end of the story? What does she learn from the family bum?
2. "The Pastor's Brother" -- Tim, the pastor's brother, after a lifetime of squelched jealousy and emotion, finally breaks down. What causes Tim to break? Is it a good thing? If Tim had not broken down, would he have become more like his messed-up daughter or would he have been able to go back to his repressed but safe life in upstate New York?
3. "Guiding Light" -- Grace loves her neighbor Anne for her refinement and neatness, qualities her mother lacks. When she finds out that Anne is a lesbian, Grace drops Anne. Why? Describe Grace's relationship with her mother and how it changes. Is this typical?
4. "Berna's Place" -- How does Berna and Griffin's relationship help Patricia and Jules reach an understanding and acceptance of their imperfect life. What do you imagine their life would have been like if Berna had not come along?
5. "Light of Lucy" -- Does Lucy leave the man hopeful -- "Oh, I always leave 'em laughing?" Is Lucy real? Does it matter?
6. "Brother to Brother" -- Why does the man call his brother who lives in another town when he finds the rat? In the same moment the man recalls the brother fighting to defend him, he also remembers his brother's philosophy of life -- Neil Young's "Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere." He says, "The essence of this day runs in my veins." What does he mean by this? Is the rat genuine or is the man hallucinating?
7. "You Could Never Love the Clown I Love" -- Is the clown's wife right when she says, "You don't got the heart [to love the clown I love]?" Why do they invite the clown and his wife in? Are you surprised when the clown has the audacity to complain about the young lovers' conversation when he is constantly dropping pins above their heads?
8. "The Dog Who Saved Her" -- Discuss Julie the child's understanding of her mother -- the mother who kicked a cat but who also took her pet mouse to the vet. What are her feelings about her mother when she comes to Europe? What was she hoping for? Why does she defend her mother and in the next moment hate her?
9. "Dear Mister Springsteen" -- Do you share the feelings the narrator has about the album, "The Rising?" What does the narrator's middle-of-the-night visitor Desmond teach her -- "He was profound enough, just being a kid alive in the world?" Discuss the narrator's statement, "I remember my black friends after 9-11 said it was sort of a relief not to be seen as the enemy for awhile, that for a while it was the Muslims who people had their eyes on."
10. "So Long, Marianne" -- Why does Marianne resist telling Ben her stories? What kind of listener leaves you feeling empty? Could Marianne have had control over that? When Marianne tells Ben her stories, will it be different from the other two men? Why?
11. "Elizabeth Tines" -- Why does having knowledge of the life she never led make Elizabeth happy? Why doesn't she complete the story she tells Bennet about Joe Beehan and her parents' discovery of her diary? Why does she decide to go to Bennet's family's house for Christmas? How are Elizabeth and Bennet connected in the end?
12. "Stadium Hearts" -- How does the man change after he anonymously disrobes with the woman in the baseball stadium?
13. "Embraced" -- What kind of mother and grandmother are Belle and Roseen to Aileen? Will Aileen become like Belle and Roseen? The faces of the women in her brother Blaise's pornography stay with Aileen a long time -- why? Why is Aileen irritated at her friend Marie at the magic show?
14. "Thank You for the Music" -- Have you experienced music in the way Francine does? How does this story make you feel about Francine? Leonarda?
15. All the stories reference music in one way or another. Think about Grace and her piano lessons in "Guiding Light." The old man singing "All the lilies" in "Berna's Place." The letter to Bruce Springsteen about his album, "The Rising." How does music tie the stories together? What other themes bind these stories together?

### About the Author

Jane McCafferty is the author of *One Heart*, for which she was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. Her stories have

appeared in *Glimmer Train*, *Story*, *Witness*, six volumes of *Best American Short Stories*, and other publications. Her short story collection, *Director of the World*, was awarded the Drue Heinz Literature Prize. She has also won the Pushcart Prize for fiction. She teaches at Carnegie Mellon University and lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.