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# Hum (Ala Notable Books For Adults)



## Synopsis

In May's debut collection, poems buzz and purr like a well-oiled chassis. Grit, trial, and song thrum through tight syntax and deft prosody. From the resilient pulse of an abandoned machine to the sinuous lament of origami animals, here is the ever-changing hum that vibrates through us all, connecting one mind to the next."The elegant and laconic intelligence in these poems, their skepticism and bent humor and deliberately anti-Romantic stance toward experience are completely refreshing. After so much contemporary writing that seems all flash, no mind and no heart, these poems show how close observation of the world and a gift for plain-spoken, but eloquent speech, can give to poetry both dignity and largeness of purpose, and do it in an idiom that is pitch perfect to emotional nuance and fine intellectual distinctions. Hard-headed and tough-minded, Hum is the epitome of what Frost meant by 'a fresh look and a fresh listen.'" --Tom Sleigh

"Jamaal May's debut collection, Hum, is concerned with what's beneath the surfaces of things--the unseen that eats away at us or does the work of sustaining us. Reading these poems, I was reminded of Ellison's 'lower frequencies,' a voice speaking for us all. May has a fine ear, acutely attuned to the sonic textures of everyday experience. And Hum--a meditation on the machinery of living, an extended ode to sound and silence--is a compelling debut." --Natasha Trethewey

"In his percussive debut collection Hum, Jamaal May offers a salve for our phobias and restores the sublime to the urban landscape. Whether you need a friend to confide in, a healer to go to, or a tour guide to take you there, look no further. That low hum you hear are these poems, emanating both wisdom and swagger." --A. Van Jordan

From "Mechanophobia: Fear of Machines": There is no work left for the husks. Automated welders like us, your line replacements, can't expect sympathy after our bright arms of cable rust over. So come collect us for scrap, grind us up in the mouth of one of us. Let your hand pry at the access panel with the edge of a knife, silencing the motor and thrum.

Jamaal May is a poet and editor from Detroit, MI where he taught poetry in public schools and worked as a freelance audio engineer and touring performer. His first full-length collection is Hum (Alice James Books, 2013). Individual poems have been awarded the 2013 Indiana Review Prize and appear in journals such as The New Republic, Poetry, Ploughshares, and the Believer. Jamaal has earned an MFA from Warren Wilson and fellowships from Cave Canem and Bucknell University. He is founding editor of the Organic Weapon Arts Chapbook Press and a visiting faculty member in the Vermont College of Fine Arts MFA program.

## Book Information

Series: Ala Notable Books for Adults

Paperback: 80 pages  
Publisher: Alice James Books (November 19, 2013)  
Language: English  
ISBN-10: 1938584023  
ISBN-13: 978-1938584022  
Product Dimensions: 0.5 x 6 x 8.8 inches  
Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)  
Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 14 customer reviews  
Best Sellers Rank: #57,302 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #9 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Themes & Styles > Places #18 in Books > Travel > United States > Midwest #48 in Books > Literature & Fiction > African American > Poetry

Customer Reviews

May's first book of poems delves deeply, employs clever wordplay, and digs into the resonant hollow of empty space--a play on white noise that gets to the center of a universal rhythm: "or it could just as easily be a shaft of wood crumpling a man struck between spaulder and helm. / But now, with the rain making a noisy erasure / of this town, it is the flash that arrives / and leaves at nearly the same moment." Mostly told in free verse, Hum takes on big themes: the destruction of the body and an exploration of love and forgiveness, power and fear, drugs and death. May is a storyteller, and his imagery is often easily decipherable. What's more, he pays attention to sound: "Yes, the needle / of Mother's scream, as the thumb was machined / clean off, brought icicles down. The boy listened for the sea. / Gripped his shovel. Gripped his oar. Now, in a waiting / room, he bows to the florescent hum and begs." A gripping first collection. --Mark Eleveld

"Linguistically acrobatic [and] beautifully crafted. . . [Jamaal May's] poems, exquisitely balanced by a sharp intelligence mixed with earnestness, makes his debut a marvel."--Publishers Weekly  
"Hum" delves deeply, employs clever wordplay, and digs into the resonant hollow of empty space--a play on white noise that gets to the center of a universal rhythm. . . --Booklist  
"The melancholic hum of May's tone lends gravity and heart to this debut collection... May's work is skillful and nuanced in its surprising approach to the nature (and nurture) of identity."--Los Angeles Review of Books  
"...in Hum, machinery isn't a predictable

representation of modern despair. Instead, it embodies a spiritual force, presenting a potential for energy, for both violence and renewal." --HTMLGIANT

Jamaal May is one of the finest poets in his generation. This debut collection is one that makes a mark, that crackles with energy and skill... Strongly recommended." --C. Dale Young

This collection of poetry is near perfect. It's accessible, unique, masterfully written, and brilliantly executed. These are poems by a man obsessed with sound (as evidenced by his experiences as a performer and an audio engineer). This voice takes you on an incredible journey through a life in a city rife with urban decay and its inhabitants' struggles with addiction, death, joy, laughter, and more. Mr. May is an amazing poetic voice (who is rarely in better form than the -phobia poems which are interspersed throughout the book). It would be a great injustice to not mention the book design as well. The cover art is incredible and the pages periodically invert to be black pages with white writing, and the various gray stages in between, evoking a day/night cycle in the text as well as a level of inversion. A must for fans of contemporary American poetry!

It's pretty audacious to dedicate a book to an entire city, especially a dying one. But in Jamaal May's collection, *Hum*, readers are drawn into the bodyshops, bedrooms, and back alleys of Detroit. This book of poems is as much memoir as it is poetry (as it is philosophy). And as an African American coming from one of the poorest cities in the country, May opens the readers' eyes to a world that is foreign and heartbreaking to many readers of American poetry. If there is a torch burning somewhere for Etheridge Knight, I vote Jamaal May be the next to bear it.

The poems are very intense, very powerful. They resonate within you and make you wonder how anyone could have missed the connections but also how anybody could have thought to immortalize their thoughts on paper with this sort of phrasing. Recommended for all poetry enthusiasts as well as aspiring poets who are looking for new sources of inspiration and new voices to hear. Book arrived within the week and in great condition.

Fell in love with May's work after hearing "Hum for the Bolt." His poetry is beautiful and powerful and I highly recommend this book to any poetry lover (or anyone just beginning to love poetry). We all need more poetry in our lives.

Love this work - will look for future books from this poet.

Shockingly good.

I love it.

i saw this book on a writer friend's table. i opened at random, read a couple of poems and ordered my own copy when i got home. a strong voice. a strong voice saying something quietly.

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