

Biography

James McBride is an award-winning author, musician, and screenwriter. His landmark memoir, *The Color of Water*, published in 1996, has sold millions of copies and spent more than two years on the New York Times bestseller list. Considered an American classic, it is read in schools and universities across the United States.

His debut novel, *Miracle at St. Anna*, was turned into a 2008 film by Oscar-winning writer and director Spike Lee, with a script written by McBride. His 2013 novel, *The Good Lord Bird*, about American abolitionist John Brown, won the National Book Award for Fiction and will be a Showtime limited series in fall 2020 starring Ethan Hawke.

McBride has been a staff writer for *The Boston Globe*, *People Magazine*, and *The Washington Post*, and his work has appeared in *Essence*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The New York Times*. His 2007 National Geographic story “Hip Hop Planet” is considered an important examination of African American music and culture.

A noted musician and composer, McBride has toured as a saxophonist sideman with jazz legend Jimmy Scott, among other musicians. He has written songs for Anita Baker, Grover Washington Jr., Pura Fé, Gary Burton, and even for the PBS television character “Barney.” (He did not write the “I Love You” song for Barney, but he wishes he did.) He received the Stephen Sondheim Award and the Richard Rodgers Foundation Horizon Award for his musical *Bobos*, co-written with playwright Ed Shockley. His 2003 *Riffin’ and Pontificatin’* musical tour was filmed for a nationally televised Comcast

documentary. He has been featured on national radio and television in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. He often does his public readings accompanied by a band.

In addition to being an author and a musician, McBride has other attributes. He admits to being the worst dancer in the history of African Americana, bar none (he claims he should be legally barred from dancing at any event he attends). And when he takes off his hat, fleas fly out. Little things, little talents.

A native New Yorker and a graduate of New York City public schools, McBride studied composition at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Ohio and received his master's degree at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University. In 2015, he was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Obama "for humanizing the complexities of discussing race in America." He holds several honorary doctorates and is currently a Distinguished Writer in Residence at New York University.