

Operatic

Kyo Maclear

Byron Eggenschwiler, Illustrator

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Opera isn't at the top of most teens' playlists, but Kyo Maclear and Byron Eggenschwiler relate the form, and in particular the life of soprano Maria Callas, to adolescent travails in the graphic novel *Operatic*.

The book focuses on Charlie, a girl who's pushed into the world of music through Mr. K, her teacher. Mr. K shows genuine interest in his students' top song choices even as he exposes them to other musical genres. When Mr. K introduces opera to the class with Maria Callas's "Una voce poco fa," most of the kids hate it, but Charlie has a different experience. "Today a song snakes inside me," she muses, and she's inspired to learn more about Callas. Although the parallels aren't obvious at first, Charlie finds inspiration in Callas's life and in the singer's examples of hard work and determination over a modest background and low initial expectations.

Though the sections on Callas provide a wonderful mini-biography, they are more valuable in underlining the book's extremes of adolescent turmoil. *Operatic* portrays a wide range of teen drama as seen through Charlie's eyes, including the tentative steps of two boys who are just beginning to explore their feelings for each other. The book's art depicts these ups and downs subtly and realistically, from Charlie's generally guarded demeanor at school to the bliss she feels when hearing Callas's music.

Operatic works as a middle school tale, and though its primary purpose may not be to win converts to opera, it might inspire teenagers to investigate the form—or, at least, Maria Callas.

PETER DABBENE (May/June 2019)

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