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Sylvie and the Songman

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

The idea of music, and in particular song, as a metaphysical force underpinning and uniting the physical and organic worlds, provides the basis for this fantasy thriller. Sylvie's widowed father is a composer and inventor of musical instruments, whose creative explorations suddenly become dangerous as the creatures around the family home begin to lose their voices. One day he is kidnapped, and Sophie finds herself the target of a nightmarish band of conspirators who want to steal and control the world's resources of music and silence. With the family dog and her best friend George, a tone-deaf and kite-obsessed eccentric, she flees into the intensely imagined countryside around her home. The fugitives are pursued by a woodpecker-man in a balloon propelled by enslaved swans, and are assisted by a fox who initiates Sylvie into communion with the animal world.

The book is as densely packed with ideas and episodes as this synopsis suggests. The children encounter bottled barks and birdsong, deliciously visceral animal speech and over-the-top poetic rhapsodies, all bound together by an underlying vision of threatened natural harmonies. There are echoes of Ted Hughes and Alan Garner here, as well as of Olivier Messiaen and Percy Grainger; the synthesis is, however, highly original and distinctive, if a little over-embellished at times. The transition from a naturalistic prelude to a supernaturalist climax is very exciting, and it's wonderful to find an adventure book that provides perspectives on the organic and musical worlds that many readers may find intriguing and enlightening.

Running Order:

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