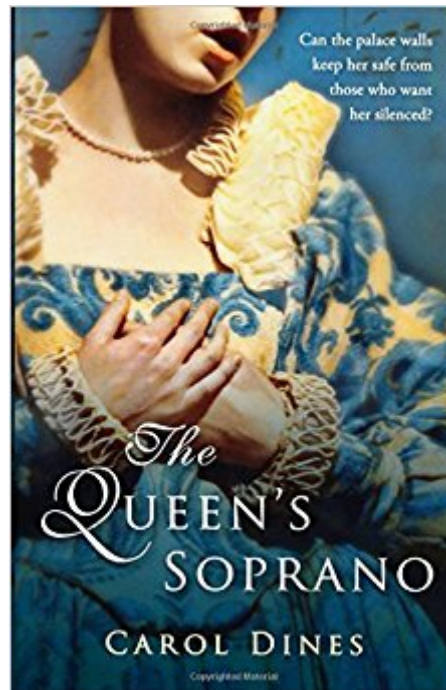




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The Queen's Soprano



Synopsis

Seventeen-year-old Angelica Voglia loves to sing. But she lives in a seventeenth-century Rome, and the pope has forbidden women to sing in public. To make matters worse, her controlling mother is determined to marry her off to a wealthy nobleman, even though Angelica is in love with a poor French artist. Angelica's only hope to sing before an audience--and escape a forced marriage--is to flee to Queen Christina's court, where she will become the queen's soprano. But she soon discovers that the palace walls are not completely secure . . . and her freedom will require an even greater sacrifice than she imagined.

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Customer Reviews

Grade 9 Up This novel, inspired by the life of a real court singer in late-17th-century Rome, re-creates a time under Pope Innocent XI when women were not allowed to sing in public. Angelica was born into a modest tradesman's home with a magnificent gift a beautiful voice that she can only exercise in the privacy of her home or a convent. Admirers from artisans to cardinals line up outside her house to listen to her practice. Her mother intends to use the girl's gift to secure her a wealthy husband and raise the family's status. Romance blossoms as a young French artist falls in love with the teen and the two begin an innocent exchange of drawings and notes through a servant girl. Angelica's voice grows with passion as she sings to Theodon through closed shutters. To avoid her mother's entrapping marriage plans, Angelica runs away to join the court of Queen Christina, a Swedish queen who converted to Catholicism and rules a quarter of Rome, where she defies the pope by allowing women to perform. As long as the Queen lives, her ladies are safe, but when her

death is imminent, each one must plot her way to safety from the pope's guards. A slice of courtly life tinged with sexual misconduct by clerics, betrayal by Angelica's mother, and heartbreaking sorrow, this tale will appeal to female readers, who will admire the young woman's steadfast devotion against tremendous odds. Kathy Lehman, Thomas Dale High School Library, Chester, VA
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Gr. 9-12. Like Louise Hawes' *The Vanishing Point* (2004), inspired by Renaissance painter Lavinia Fontana, Dines' first historical novel features another female artist straining against cultural expectations of a bygone Italy. Angelica Voglia, a real figure whose historical milieu and scant biography are addressed in a foreword and endnote, has a "miracle voice"--or is it the "devil's breath"? Her gift for singing exposes her to numerous threats: a manipulative, social-climbing mother; noblemen who see her public displays as an invitation to take liberties (and worse); and an austere papacy that persecutes women who sing in public. Eventually Angelica seeks refuge in the bohemian court of an expatriate Swedish regent, a path that Dines portrays not as an idealized salvation but one fraught with pitfalls. Angelica's personal story (especially her romance with a lowborn sculptor) is frequently eclipsed by details about her charismatic protectress and baroque-era Roman politics. But persistent readers, inspired by Angelica's determination to "look into [her] heart and speak the truths [she finds] there," should find sufficient motivation to sift through the overzealous historical context. Jennifer Mattson
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I bought this for my daughter and was surprised how quickly I received the book and was in very good condition.

If you are looking for a lovely historical fiction book for a teenager, especially one from a new author, *The Queen's Soprano* is definitely for you! As a fan of historical fiction, and a person interested in studying history in general, it is a disappointment that there aren't more books available in this genre for young adults. This book was refreshing in subject matter, as Rome in the seventeenth century isn't something one learns about in school. I myself had never heard of virtually all the primary figures described in the novel, and am now glad that I have. It provides a sort of snapshot of a young girl's life, and is full of detailed descriptions as vivid and lovely as the dress on the cover. However, although the information included is interesting, the story is much more centered around

the main character, Angelica Voglia, than it is historical facts. Don't read that the wrong way, everything is, to my knowledge, completely accurate. However, this book is first and foremost, written for the character and her story, and serves more to inspire further research on the topic rather than give all the historical information to the reader. All in all, the book is a snapshot of Angelica's life. There are advantages and disadvantages to this. The story and storytelling are highlighted more so than they would be if the book was written from the perspective of say, Queen Christine, who is an important figure in the novel, which would have probably shown more of a change over time of policies and rules. However, choosing to write the story from the perspective of Angelica allows a deeper look into the everyday culture of the time period, and makes the book seem more like a story of a struggling protagonist, with whom the readers can possibly relate to, that just happens to be occurring in a culture different from their own. The pacing of the novel, I felt, was well done. As far as content goes, parents should know that there are several suggestive parts, and one section that is intense and could be especially upsetting (it is intentionally upsetting to any reader) to more sensitive readers, but nothing is explicit. In conclusion, I would recommend *The Queen's Soprano* to lovers of historical fiction in at least 7th grade, especially fans of Susanne Dunlap, who are looking for a sparkling story that delves deeper into the personal side of a more obscure bit of history.

For all that there is very little information on Angelica Voglia outside of what Queen Christina wrote, Dines has done a great job of fleshing out and embellishing her life into something believable. Never did something make me stop and go, "No, come on, that would not have happened". Everything was realistic and Dines has obviously done her research well, despite the fact that there are very few accounts of common life in 1600s Italy. I think what I liked the best out of this story was the numerous women characters and their relationships with each other. It occurred to me about half way through that the amount of women characters vastly outnumbered the male characters, and none of the women characters were set up as villains to Angelica. In fact, while there are jealousies and competition in the book, they're not spent a lot of time with, and Angelica's friendships with other women outnumber the ones who try to harm her. Angelica even stands up for a few who, if you went with modern YA story lines, she should be jealous of and hate. In fact, most often in the storyline, Angelica depends on other women to help her through tough times, and her escape into Queen Christina's court is aided by another woman. It's sad to think how rare this is in most books, especially YA, but it's wonderful to see it in at least one book. The relationships that were written the best, in my opinion, were the ones between Angelica and the Queen, and Angelica and her family's

maid, Lucia. Angelica and Lucia were really good friends who could depend on each other no matter what, and they were willing to do anything for each other. Even though at times I do think Lucia was bad for Angelica, in the end I really admired their friendship. Queen Christina and Angelica had a very sweet, mother-daughter relationship. You can tell that Angelica truly does respect and love the Queen, even when she starts to doubt that Queen Christina will keep her around all that long. The way Angelica can easily decipher what mood the Queen is in just by how she holds her hands, for example, is a great way of showing how close the two have become. There's definitely a lot of respect and admiration between the two, and it was nice to find a mother figure who could love Angelica in a way her mother didn't. I do wish that maybe Angelica's relationship with her sister, Bianca, had been given more focus, but considering how much Dines packs into a 320 page book, I can understand why it wasn't. What we're given is good, though, as the two sisters are very different in their ambitions in life, and Bianca feels betrayed that Angelica has started to confide more in Lucia than her. In the end their rift is too wide to really do anything about, and they grow too far apart. Another good point was how the villains weren't stereotypical villains, and while they did things that greatly disadvantages the protagonists, they're never seen as wholly evil and misguided. In fact, the main reason Angelica's life is so hard, Pope Innocent XI, is probably the most surprising character in that he and Queen Christina have a strange sort of respect for each other, and while they disagree heavily, they remain kind. The writing, also, was very nice. Most of the important characters are fleshed out and given motives and flaws and strengths, and Angelica's voice in particular comes through quite strong. The pacing is slow, encompassing about two or three years of Angelica's life and the major events that happened within those years, but I never felt bored with it. There were some things that I didn't really like, namely the romance between Angelica and a French artist named Theodon. Personally I was far more interested in Angelica's journey to the castle to pay much attention to her growing romance with Theodon. I never really thought they would work out; I mean, they don't even talk to each other face to face until maybe more than a hundred pages away from the end. Their relationship must be kept secret in case Angelica's mother finds out, so they send notes to each other, and Theodon stands outside her window to hear her sing. It's great if that's the kind of romance you're into, but it never really worked for me, sadly. The Queen's Soprano is a great book that needs more attention. It has a strong cast of characters, good writing, and while there were a few problems here and there, all in all it's a wonderful book that I'll likely read again in the future.

This book is about a real-life woman named Angelica Voglia living in Rome in the seventeenth

century. She has what is called a "miracle voice" several times in the book, but just how her voice is a miracle is never described in full. She has to live with her critical younger sister, a mother who is using her to further her own place in society, two brothers, and a father who is not really her blood-father. The Italian in this book is well used and the only thing that made me feel like the setting was actually in Italy. Angelica's time at Queen Christina's court is fraught with emotions, including her loyalty to the queen, frustration with the insipid talks of her peers about the goings-on at Court, and the love she feels for "the Frenchman" Jean Theodon, whose love she ends up rejecting. This novel is based on a real woman named Angelica Voglia who lived as Queen Christina's soprano during seventeenth century Italy. Although a good (and fast) read, this novel could have been flushed out a lot more and been made into an engrossing novel. Overall, a good book for anyone wishing to hear the story of a woman who refused to have her life dictated for her. 4 stars.

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