



Sylvie and the Songman

Tim Binding

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A compelling story full of magic and music.

Sylvie Bartram lives alone with Mr. Jackson the dog and her eccentric composer father, who invents strange and wonderful musical instruments. One day she returns from school to find a message left in toothpaste on the bathroom mirror: her father has been kidnapped. Later that night, the house is visited by a terrifying apparition—a half-man, half-creature who is searching for something and will not rest until he has found it. . .

Sylvie uncovers an underground world of magic and evil, and with help from her friends, she must hold off a power that threatens the lives of all beings in the world. The Songman is at large, and is determined to steal music and use it for his own evil ends. . . .

Sylvie and the Songman Details

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From Reader Review *Sylvie and the Songman* for online ebook

Katie says

3.5--The Songman is definitely creepy! I enjoyed this book though--especially Angela Barrett's illustrations!

Nicole says

As a musician I fully expected to love this book. While I did enjoy it, I also spent a fair amount of time being confused or even bored.

Sylvie: Sylvie was an okay character. She's kind, stubborn and brave. But she's also mulish, selfish and hotheaded. She dragged her friend George into her adventure, and while I was grateful to have George along, he didn't give much of a choice in the matter. During the period in the book when she was listening to her song, I hated her for her selfishness.

George: George is a unique character. He's chubby and out of shape. Most characters with this kind of appearance end up either being child geniuses, or selfish, greedy brats, but George only has a talent with kites and a strong potential for kindness. He was Sylvie's friend throughout the entire book, and, even if he didn't have much of a choice in the matter, he did choose to come with Sylvie, and he chose not to complain too much about it, and to do everything he could to help Sylvie, not just so that he could go back home, but also because he cared about her. During the times I was hating Sylvie, George kept me reading.

Mr. Jackson: What can I say about Mr. Jackson that isn't obvious. He's a dog, a sweetheart, a loyal friend. I loved him even more than I loved George. It was worth reading this book just for sweet little Mr. Jackson. (view spoiler)

Sylvie's father was not in the story very much, but he was interesting. I like his sense of adventure, and I really liked his musical instrument creations. It was nice to have a classical musician for a character.

The Songman: The Songman was not a very interesting villain. He wanted his music to be heard all over the world, but he didn't want to do the work of trying to get it heard without hurting people. He had a soft spot for Sylvie, but was still more than willing to hurt her and those she cared about in order to get what he wanted. His identity wasn't much of a surprise.

The Woodpecker man was a weird character. He was the crony who carried out the main-villains desires. He was much more interesting than The Songman, but I don't remember him really having any actual motivations. He had a lot of potential, with his magic coming from music (the triangle can make music through rhythm, even if it is an unpitched instrument,) but without motivation, what was the point of having a unique villain, instead of a paper cutout like Crabbe or Goyle?

Sylvie's mother: Okay, I'm confused, was Sylvie's mother a selkie? Do selkies get sick if they stay on land too long? What was the purpose of having Sylvie's mother be alive, but barely in the story, and certainly not in the ending? Or what was the point of Sylvie thinking her mother was dead? If she'd known her mom was alive, but that she couldn't be with them because she'd get sick, wouldn't that have been a more interesting take on this common tale? I don't know if the author was trying to make Sylvie's mother being alive a twist,

but I was not at all surprised by that so-called twist.

The story was decent, but if the author had addressed some of the plot-holes, unsurprising twists and character problems, the book could have been amazing.

Grace says

~2.5 stars~

I am so torn about this book because the story was kind of interesting and there were a lot of really good parts to it and I really wanted to like it and even throughout it I wanted to read it but overall it just wasn't a great book.

~SOME THOUGHTS~

- There were some *GORGEOUS* poetic phrases that I just wanted to wrap up in a cosy little blanket and put on a wall and some of the prose was so so great
- This story had a great premise and a great idea it was just the execution of these ideas that I had problems with.
- A lot of this book was just not believable and the characters made really poor decisions. SO much of this book was in no way plausible and I kind of just had to put the book down and sigh and take a walk.
- I can see how this book was difficult to write because of like animal languages and things but the way it was written also made it really difficult to read.

I understand this book and why a lot of people enjoyed it but it really just didn't grow on me. I really liked the beginning of it and was super excited but then it was kind of off and on. Honestly if you were to ask me whether or not I liked it I really don't know how to answer that.

This book seems older than it is too. Apparently it was written in 2008 but the writing style is really old-fashioned which I actually didn't mind I guess. Also it takes place in England and was never really translated from British English like the American versions of books usually are which was cool. IT'S CONFUSING THOUGH because like half of it is in British English with British spellings and the other half is American spellings so that was weird like PICK A DIALECT PLEASE.

I started reading this book because I figured it wouldn't take too long. It's fairly short but it took me SO DAMN LONG to read. Yes, I was busy. But also, I just didn't want to pick it up very often because I wasn't particularly enjoying it all the time.

Overall I just think that this book was intended for a younger audience (ALTHOUGH IT WAS ACTUALLY MUCH DARKER THAN I EXPECTED HOLY KAZOO PEOPLE AND ANIMALS WERE DYING I JUST WOW). It just read more like a middle grade book and I think that's what it was.

So I appreciate this story and I think that a lot of people will enjoy it and that this book deserves to be enjoyed, but it will not be making the list of books I really liked.

Betsy says

One Sentence Review: A strange and lyrical book, though one that does feel as if it was written by an adult author who was trying to figure out the children's book genre.

Ryan says

The illustrations are pencil drawings, with lots of shadow and light, a few clear images but mostly suggestions. That's probably the best description of the book too. Sylvie has lost her mother and then her father disappears. She has to search for him and then rescue him from the Songman, who is determined to steal the songs of all creatures so he can control the world. It's an interesting idea, with many of the elements of good YA. And an overall enjoyable book. But I'd have enjoyed a hint of color in the shadows and light.

Phoebe says

Sylvie's musician/inventor father doesn't come home one night, and this is the start of Sylvie's surreal adventures as she tries to find him and defeat the very bad guys. All of her father's musical instruments have vanished, and Sylvie, except for the help of her friend George, realizes that she is on her own. Why don't the birds sing anymore, and why does Sylvie's dog, Mr. Jackson, also seem to have lost his voice? Who is the scary Woodpecker Man and why is he chasing them? This often frightening book reminded me strongly of *The Dark is Rising*, but was less apocalyptic. The detail of Sylvie's missing mother seemed a bit tossed in, and appeared to serve only one purpose near the end of the story. Otherwise, the plot was pretty interesting and the soft yet precise art lovely. 5th grade and up.

Pam says

Loved the premise, kooky, kind, likable father invents musical instruments that capture the sounds of animals, birds and even humans not found on conventional musical instruments. When these instruments strike a powerful, loud chord, the adventure begins. Sylvie's mother had drowned at sea a year earlier, then her lovable father mysteriously disappears after he hits this chord, setting in motion an adventure for Sylvie, thirteen, her friend George, and her dog, Mr. Jackson, who mysteriously lost his bark. They go on the search for her father after being chased by a man who resembles a woodpecker and can control the actions of other woodpeckers, leading them into an underground world of animals, where Sylvie, after being bitten by a fox who had always watched her on the train, gains the ability to hear the thoughts of all the animals around her. The children slowly discover the madman, aka The Songman, behind animals, one by one, losing their songs or voices, the reason for her dad's disappearance, the relentless pursuit of the woodpecker man, and why the animals so badly want Sylvie and George to stop the Songman in his evil plot to silence all the animals, birds and humans for his control.

I loved the idea behind this adventure story, the resiliency of the children, and the evil plot, however, the plot becomes a bit convoluted at times, as you can tell even from a plot summary. I felt as though Binding tries to do too much and tie up too many details, when I wished he would have spent a little more time on relationships between the characters and the characters and animals. I hope Binding continues writing for children, brilliant imagination!

Kurt says

J Binding T

Sylvie Bartram faces several mysteries in this book. Where has her father, a musician and inventor, disappeared to? Why are so many animals losing their voices? Why are mysterious and upsetting characters searching her house? She sets off with friends, human and animal, to find the answers and bring her missing father home.

What attracted me to this book initially was a startling cover. The book is well illustrated and it prompted me to take a look at the inner flap. It revealed an imaginative and unusual plot so I had to take it home and learn more. The author brings to life the many animals Sylvie meets on her journey through their inner voices, expressed through a kind of semi-nonsensical poetry which is different for each species. I think the author brings to the young reader an appreciation for the diversity of the animal kingdom as well as an appreciation for the freedom of expression, in this case through the sounds we hear in nature.

Novelist shows a reading level of grades 4-6 for this book. It has a relatively benign theme but there are deaths and some violence in this that would make me hesitate to recommend it to younger, sensitive readers that read above their grade level.

Elizabeth says

I bought this book in a pound shop ages ago, but have only just read it. I quite enjoyed the story, but it feels like it's not sure of its audience. I assume that it's aimed at the group just before young adult (9-13?), but some of the language is complex enough that it would alienate some of that group, and it's also a bit harrowing in a couple of places.

Outside of struggling to understand the target audience, there's an awful lot of talking between Sylvie and George at times when they are supposed to be stealthily hiding!

Jennifer says

So the premise of this book, is that Sylvie's Dad is kidnapped, because he's always inventing new musical instruments, and with all his instruments combined he creates this one monster note.

There's a bad-guy, who has figured out how to sing other creature's songs, and once he's sung their song, he's stolen their voice, and - this part is unclear, some of them do his bidding. Some don't.

This book has a vague-ness about it's writing that I thought took away from the storyline. Also, a lot of what the characters do, that propels the story, is all for naught, except propelling the story. They spend a lot of time running from, simply to run too. There's a lot of holes in the warp and weft of the story - for instance

(view spoiler) sorry - all my for instances were spoilers. But there's a pretty long list of things that don't seem entirely clear. And this book is perhaps a wee bit longer than it needs to be. I believe I was %30 into it, before there was any actual momentum into the plot. It dragged, giving way to many details in some things, and clearly not enough in others.

The part I liked about the book, was the funny way the animals spoke (the fox always calling Mr. Jackson "Fartdog" as a term of...domesticity). But that was the only thing that really stood out to me.

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Theresa L. Stowell for TeensReadToo.com

Thirteen-year-old Sylvie Bartram's father is not just any musician in *SYLVIE AND THE SONGMAN* by Tim Binding. Daniel Bartram is an inventor and composer whose search for that one perfect note leads to more trouble than anyone could have imagined.

One night, father and daughter experiment with his homemade instruments and hit an unusual note. The next day, Sylvie comes home from school to find that her father is missing and a mysterious message is on the bathroom mirror. The novel traces Sylvie's and her best friend George's adventures as they set off on a quest to find him.

Daniel's note seems to have drawn the attention of the Songman, a mysterious figure who has been stealing the voices of animals. As Sylvie and George search for her father, they must elude The Drummers, a strange old couple who are able to control behavior through the rhythmic beats they create, and the Woodpecker Man. The Woodpecker Man travels in a hot air balloon pulled by swans and accompanied by myriads of green and red birds.

Sylvie is aided by Mr. Jackson, her much-loved dog who has lost his voice, and a friendly fox who gives her the ability to understand the language of animals. Sylvie discovers that animals communicate in ways that are much different than humans, and their understanding of the world can help her to see the things around her differently, as well.

The adventure undertaken by these two children opens their hearts to realizations that though the adults around them are motivated by a variety of actions which the children do not always see, their parents' love for them is never out of reach. The novel is a lovely story of friendship, love, and belonging.

Alongside Binding's captivating text, Angela Barrett's beautiful illustrations bring the characters and story to life.

Books Kids Like says

Sylvie's father is a musician extraordinaire who has devoted his career to building various instruments that play the "songs" of nature. He's searching for the perfect note. Little does he know that the Songman plans to use his instruments for his own diabolical plan. One day, Sylvie returns home to find her father and his instruments missing. When their house is ransacked, Sylvie realizes that someone is looking for the written

notes her father made about the sequence of events that lead to the explosive note. For the time being, these notes are safe in her school backpack. With the help of her best friend, George, and an unusual fox, Sylvie sets out to rescue her father. Their search ends at a remote lighthouse where they finds the Songman gearing up for a concert in which he plans to steal all of the world's "songs." After this, only he will have a voice, and he will have supreme control over all of the animals and humans. It's up to Sylvie and George to foil his plot. The compelling action kept me reading even though I felt a certain vagueness surrounding the Songman and his plans for world domination. For instance, the purpose of his cohorts- the drummers and the woodpecker man- weren't particularly well-developed. Also, the book is rated for ages 9-12, but I would only recommend it to people 12 and older. I felt that the ways in which a dog and a main character are killed were too graphic and potentially disturbing to most children. There's also a sequence in which the Songman tries to control Sylvie with her own song. Sylvie craves the song above food, rest, her father, her friends. It made me think of a person's decline into drug addiction.

Conan Tigard says

Sylvie and the Songman is a evenly-paced book that follows Sylvie, George, and Mr. Jackson through the English countryside as they search for Sylvie's missing father. With the Songman's two evil henchmen, Rabbit-Teeth and Mildred, after the kids on the ground and the Woodpecker Man in the hot air balloon, they make their way toward the lighthouse with the help of the fox and his friends.

Tim Binding has created a wonderful story about a young girl in search of her missing father. He has created a perfectly ruthless villain in the Woodpecker Man. We never really get a back-story on him, so we are left wondering how he came into being. He never talks so all we witness are his actions. Plus, he is kind of gross, with bugs coming out of his sleeves and worms in his hair, so it left me wondering how he came into being. To top it off, he controls a descent of woodpeckers that are quite a terror to witness as they try to get at the kids.

As for the Songman, his goal is to rule over a quiet world where he has stolen away everyone's voices. People and animals will do whatever he wants them to just for a chance of hearing their songs, which he sings beautifully. He can control everyone, like a puppet master, except for one breed of animal that seems to be able to resist his magical voice.

I really liked the two main character of Sylvie and George. I think young readers will instantly bond with both of them and will be cheering for them as they make their way through the many dangers in this book. I didn't really like the convoluted way that animals think as Sylvie began to understand them. I do realize that animals probably don't think the way humans do, but after a while I gave up trying to understand what they were saying and just skipped over that part. I also didn't like the way Sylvie and George escaped from the island. I found it a little too far of a reach for me to believe.

The artwork by Angela Barrett is quite wonderful and really compliments the storytelling style of Tim Binding. I always looked forward to seeing what new picture out pop up next, and I was never disappointed.

Overall, Sylvie and the Songman is great story that I looked forward to sitting down with every night and reading. Sure, there were a few things I didn't particularly like about the book, but I could overlook those for the intriguing story and the well-written characters. I recommend this book to any reader looking for a story that is a little different from the norm. I look forward to reading more book by Tim Binding and hopes that

he writes soon.

I rated this book an 8½ out of 10.

Sierra Abrams says

All is not well in London, England. Sylvie has noticed that the birds refuse to whistle, and her own dog, Mr. Jackson, apparently has lost his bark. The fox she always sees from the train isn't on his platform, watching her pass. Her father, Daniel, a creative musician who builds and plays his own instruments, has just discovered an entirely new note. Shortly afterward, he disappears, leaving only an eye drawn on the bathroom mirror with toothpaste to give Sylvie a clue to work with. Sylvie and her friend George must find Daniel and figure out why the world has stopped singing – and all the while running from the evil Woodpecker Man and his master.

Buying this book was a gamble: I hadn't heard anything about it, but it looked too good to pass up. (I don't normally just buy books because nowadays, unless I've read them from the library and just have to have them on my shelf.) Sylvie and the Songman definitely could have gone either way, but I was willing to take the chance.

It was amazing. I read it once last December, and I just finished it for the second time. What a ride! It's full of mystery, interesting (and sometimes scary) characters, and a fascinating battle between good and evil. The Songman is a psychological and puzzling man, worthy of note. His helper (one of those wicked characters who, even though he works for someone, isn't actually bound to that person) is the Woodpecker Man, a frightful character who flies in a balloon pulled by swans, surrounded by green woodpeckers. Then there's Rabbit-tooth and the Knitting woman. Daniel and Sylvie and George themselves are masterpieces. Daniel is still saddened by the loss of his wife, but loves Sylvie and wants her to be happy. Sylvie and George make quite a duo: Sylvie is quiet and curious, while George is proud and ambitious. They work well together and emit a wonderful sense of loyalty throughout the book.

Tim Binding is a very talented writer. His style forms this story into what it is – a beautiful piece of prose, a wonderful work of the English language. And I can tell you now... You'll never see woodpeckers the same again.

Maggie G. says

I loved the animals' songs and the way they were expressed in a way that was vaguely human. Beautifully imagined.
