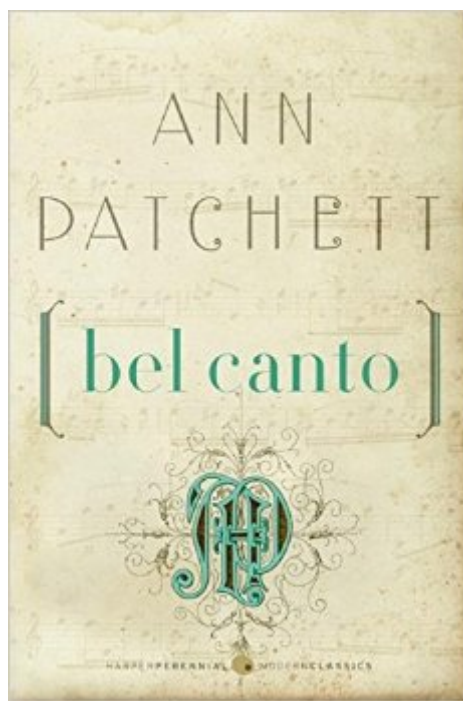


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Bel Canto (P.S.)



Synopsis

“Blissfully Romantic”. A strange, terrific, spellcasting story. “San Francisco Chronicle” Bel Canto “should be on the list of every literate music lover. The story is riveting, the participants breathe and feel and are alive, and throughout this elegantly-told novel, music pours forth so splendidly that the reader hears it and is overwhelmed by its beauty.” Lloyd Moss, WXQR “Glorious.” The New Yorker Ann Patchett’s award winning, New York Times bestselling Bel Canto balances themes of love and crisis as disparate characters learn that music is their only common language. As in Patchett’s other novels, including Truth & Beauty and The Magician’s Assistant, the author’s lyrical prose and lucid imagination make Bel Canto a captivating story of strength and frailty, love and imprisonment, and an inspiring tale of transcendent romance.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Bel Canto" is a beautifully written story of unlikely love and secret desires. Do not be put off by the barebones plot--a group of people at a party taken hostage by South American terrorists. And do not think you are in for a routine "put a bunch of strangers in a room and then learn their life stories" sort of saga. Patchett gathers together a group that spans nationalities, professions and class and reveals the hidden depths, sometimes in a few short pages, through their interactions with each other. Take the Russian minister of commerce--portrayed as something of a buffoon who has fallen in love with Roxane, the opera singer. He screws up his courage to declare himself--which must be

done through Gen, the translator. What he says to her is completely unexpected--a wonderful story of his childhood and an art book. He declares himself a man who appreciates beauty and therefore worthy to love her, and asks nothing in return. Meanwhile we see into the heart of Gen the translator, as he awkwardly acts as intermediary he realizes he has never told anyone that he loves them, not a woman, not family, not his mother--he feels as if his life has been to act as a conduit for the thoughts and feelings of others, that he has never experienced a real life of his own. Then there is the relationship of Mr. Hosokawa and Roxane, who do not share a common language. Is it possible to love a person to whom you cannot speak? I loved the transformation of the characters that occurs--the Vice President of the country dreams of adopting one of the young terrorists and becoming a gardener, another terrorist uncovers his great gift as a singer, a buttoned up Japanese businessman becomes Roxane's accompanist, the young priest becomes a gifted and courageous spiritual counselor. The Generals become human too, worrying about their young soldiers as a close relative might worry about a child, and regretting recruiting them for this operation that has gone terribly wrong. Like the hostages themselves, we get lulled by the harmony and unreality of life within the compound, yet as time passes Patchett delicately conveys a sense of impending doom through the Swiss Red Cross mediator, who himself longs to become a hostage after seeing the community that has been created within the walls of the Vice President's house. Patchett tells us at the beginning of the story what the end will be, and yet creates an aura of suspense as we realize that dreams of the future will never be fulfilled. There is a surprise ending here that I wasn't sure rang true, but the book stands without it--a wonderful novel!

In this PEN/Faulker award winning novel, Ann Patchett has created an intriguing and poetic tale based (loosely) on a real hostage taking episode that occurred in Peru in April 1997. **Bel Canto** succeeds in revealing the common humanity that persists behind the oppositional roles and stances shaped by social and political structures beyond our individual control. In these times of wars on terrorism and terrorist wars, this story emphasizes that even the most superficially frightening political fanatics ultimately are human beings with personalities, hopes, dreams, and reasons why, and for that reason alone the novel is well worth reading. In terms of style and texture, Patchett has endeavored to compose a work that is lyrical and "magical," and she largely succeeds in creating an ethereal, dreamlike mood throughout. As such, however, the degree to which readers ultimately will embrace the novel depends upon their willingness to engage in a "willing suspension of disbelief." Those possessed of any significant degree of skepticism regarding the actual nature of political struggle, small group social psychology, and human behavior generally will find much about which

to be dubious, beginning with the notion that ALL of the guerrillas would be mesmerized by Roxanne Coss' operatic singing. They also will look askance at the romantic interludes portrayed here, including the prospect of romance between a superstar American singer and a staid Japanese businessman. Furthermore, the lack of substantive political content is striking and to me, disappointing. It would seem that a lengthy confrontation between desperate rural guerrillas and cosmopolitan luminaries would reveal more insights regarding the social and economic bases for radical grassroots rebellion (and ruling class repression) than Patchett offers here. I must also join the chorus of voices rising in protest against the tacked-on ending, which is just plain horrible. Despite these flaws, this book is a well-crafted and thoughtful work that once started is hard to put down.

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