

# IL SEGRETO DEL CANTO DI MARIA CALLAS

## OGGI

ANNO XIV - N. 12 settimanale di politica, attualità e cultura

Direttore: EMILIO RADIUS - Editore: RIZZOLI - Milano (P)

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## Iconic Callas

*With captivating images, illustrated by quotes of the prima donna herself, 'Maria by Callas' published by Assouline is the definitive, unique product of countless hours of research by Tom Volf. He passionately uncovered rare archives, also soon to be released as a film, that offer a new perspective on the life and legend of Maria Callas.*

“Everything I have to say is in the music. It is all there in my records,” Maria Callas once said. Whilst the music may, in fact, be the ideal source for understanding the renowned soprano, the book ‘Maria by Callas’ as well as a forthcoming full-length film and exhibition also offer insight into her life and times, told through her own words.

These words are part of an assemblage of lost archives, which were retrieved by director and photographer Tom Volf. He began the project by travelling the world to gather direct testimonials of over thirty of Callas's closest friends and colleagues, in view of making a documentary. “Because it was a personal kind of meeting, they all opened up some cupboards, old box or album and gave me access to their personal archives.” Once he reviewed the gathered material, the project shifted: “Seeing the number of interviews and recorded conversations where Callas expresses herself, it suddenly struck me that it would be much more interesting to have a whole film of Callas in her own words.” When he asked those interviewed what they thought of the idea, they unanimously replied: “This is what should be done and this is what she would have wanted.”

From her Greek origins to her upbringing in New York City, from her early years of struggle to her breakthrough role in ‘I Puritani’ by Bellini in Venice – which opened up a series of *bel canto* roles in which she veritably flourished – her experience comes through with a vivid, contemporary strength of voice. The character of

the lady and the legend are enveloping, even for those who know her only by name or only by her most celebrated role as Norma in the eponymous opera by Bellini. “She made this role widely known and approachable and, of course, she marked it so strongly that it is hard for any singer to sing Norma without being compared to Callas,” says Volf. “She is second to none.”

Indeed, during Volf's research, he corresponded with one man passionate about the work of Callas, who described her by two terms that Volf found to be definitive: ‘second to none’ and ‘out of this world’. “These two expressions, which seem almost trite, took another meaning for me. Callas would call composers ‘ethereal’, which relates to this sense of ‘out of this world’. It's not only singing. There is a kind of soul when you listen to her; it's like she is singing from her soul and she is speaking to her soul.”

Volf sees himself as only a messenger, by whom Maria Callas can be known to today's audiences. “It is important to preserve testimonials of people who are 85 years of age,” he reflects. “But I realised it was, moreover, important to gather all the elements related to her, spread around the world and across decades, and to put them together to give her her voice back somehow.”

Maria By Callas, Published by Assouline, 2017  
By Tom Volf, Introduction by Nadia Stancioff, Foreword by Georges Prêtre