

## Playing by Heart wins Catholic Arts and Letters Award

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[August 20, 2018] The historical novel *Playing by Heart* by Carmela A. Martino has won the 2018 Catholic Arts and Letters Award (CALA) for children's/young adult fiction. The CALA, also known as the "Lily," is presented every two years by the Catholic Writers Guild (CWG) to honor "outstanding achievement in Catholic literature." Before announcing the winner at the Guild's annual conference, CWG president Joseph Wetterling commented that, because of the high caliber of entries in the children's/young adult category, the judges designated four finalists this year instead of the usual three. The other finalists were *Bane's Eyes* by Corinna Turner, *The King's Prey* by Susan Peek, and *Seven Riddles to Nowhere* by A.J. Cattapan. In another first, all four of the finalists are featured at [www.CatholicTeenBooks.com](http://www.CatholicTeenBooks.com), a website that provides teens, parents, teachers, catechists, youth ministers, and others links to well-crafted novels that reflect the fullness of the Catholic faith.

*Playing by Heart* was inspired by the lives of two gifted eighteenth-century sisters—mathematician Maria Gaetana Agnesi and composer Maria Teresa Agnesi. Professor Roxanne F. Owens, Chair of Teacher Education at DePaul University in Chicago praised the novel when it was first released last fall, saying, "Authentic, strong character voice, rich and detailed historical setting, and an intriguing plot all come together to create a can't-put-it-down book. The story provides a look into the fascinating world of 18th-century Italy in a way that no history book ever could. The fact that *Playing by Heart* is based on the lives of extraordinary real women who were quite ahead of their time makes it a must-read addition for school libraries everywhere." Classroom teachers and homeschooling parents can download a free Teacher's Guide containing book-related student activities and discussion questions for *Playing by Heart* on the author's website, [www.carmelamartino.com](http://www.carmelamartino.com).

*Playing by Heart* has received several other awards, including Third Place in the Teens & Young Adults Category of the 2018 Catholic Press Association (CPA) Book Awards. The CPA award announcement noted that topics covered in *Playing by Heart* include "family ties, vocation, and feminism." Martino says, "My goal was to entertain readers while also introducing them to what life was like for young women in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. Modern teens often have difficulty understanding the limited options available to girls in the past, even upper-class girls. Those limitations are integral to my novel, which tells the story of two sisters who struggle to follow their true calling, even when it conflicts with their father's selfish goals." The novel has proven popular with historical fiction fans of all ages, teens through adults.

*Playing by Heart* is Martino's first young-adult novel. Her middle-grade novel, *Rosa, Sola*, which is set in 1960s Chicago, received an Honorable Mention in the Children's Books Category of the 2017 Catholic Press Association Book Awards. *Rosa, Sola* was also a *Booklist* "Top Ten First Novel for Youth." Both of Martino's novels have received the Catholic Writers Guild Seal of Approval.

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