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Appassionata

by Eva Hoffman



About the Book

A novel of moral passion and fierce lyricism.

Isabel Merton is a renowned concert pianist, whose performances are marked by a rare responsiveness to the complexities of her art, and its intensities of feeling. At the height of her career, she feels increasingly torn between the compelling musical realm she deeply inhabits, and her fragmented itinerant artist?s life, with its frequent flights, anonymous hotels, and brief, arbitrary encounters. Away from her New York home on a European tour, Isabel meets a political exile from a war-torn country, a man driven by a rankling sense of injustice and a powerful desire to vindicate his cause and avenge his people. As their paths cross in several cities, they are drawn to each other both by their differences, and their seemingly parallel passions --- until a menacing incident throws her into a creative crisis, and forces her to re-evaluate his actions, and her own motives. In this story of contemporary love and conflict, Hoffman illuminates the currents and undercurrents of our time, as she explores the luminous and dark faces of romanticism, and those perennial human yearnings, frustrations and moral choices that can lead to destructiveness, or richest art.

Discussion Guide

1. Does Isabel feel her life of ?bourgeois heroism? (Page 5) and global travel to be somehow lacking? What do you think her malaise is about?

2. Ernest Wolfe is from an old world while Jane is from a new one. How do they contrast? How does music bridge their very different views of life? (Pages 103, 108, 150)

3. Compare Isabel and her husband Peter. How does Isabel think of him? Why does she leave him?

4. Anzor?s rage at the unjust treatment of the people of Chechnya has no bounds. How does he manifest his rage? Do his

feelings and some of his observations seem justified? At times Isabel agrees with him but she later begins to lose respect for him. Is Isabel naïve? Is Anzor?

5. The bombing, what Isabel calls ?anti-music? (Page 298) throws her into a sea of doubts about art and meaning. How is she able to reawaken from this state of despair?

6. Ernest Wolfe says in his memoir, ?I have also studied death. I come after?.I was the child who ate death for breakfast. Only that ground is true, all the rest is ornament. Whatever sounds of pity and praise I find must rise up, however improbably, out of that. (Pages 87-88) Compare this with Anzor?s reaction to injustice and death.

7. In an interview Isabel is asked if it is arrogant to believe that European classical music expresses timeless and universal values. Isabel responds that it must not be since people all over the world want to listen to it. How does **Appassionata** illuminate the universality of music?

8. What does Anzor?s story about his father?s killing of his dog say about his conflicts between hate and love? What does it say about forgiveness?

9. Anzor shows a tremendous sensitivity about honor and respect and equates his rage with self-respect. Does his portrayal help you understand how this could turn into extreme violence? Can you imagine different ways to react to the indignities that he feels his people have suffered?

10. When Anzor says he loved his dog Isabel realizes she has never heard him use the word love except for his country. He had emphasized his feelings for his country over any individuals, including his family and friends. How does his nationalism affect his capacity for love?

11. When Isabel reflects on her relationship with Anzor, she realizes that ?part of her has been poured into him, and part of him is now within her? (Page 183). How do parts of Azor show themselves in Isabel after the bombing?

Author Bio

Eva Hoffman was born in Krakow, Poland, and emigrated to America in her teens. She is the author of **Lost in Translation**, **Exit Into History**, **Shtetl**, **The Secret** and **After Such Knowledge**, and the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Whiting Award, and an award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. She lives in London.

Critical Praise

"Hoffman?s prose is reliably gorgeous?what?s memorable is the way Hoffman maps the intersection of art, history and man's striving for meaning."

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