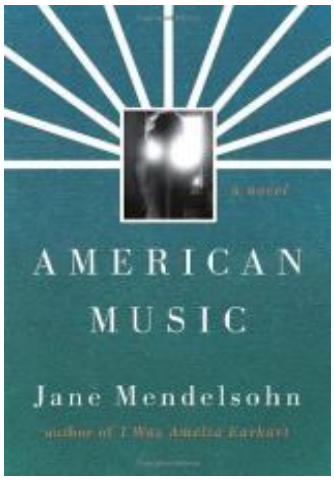
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American Music

by Jane Mendelsohn



About the Book

From the author of **I Was Amelia Earhart**, a luminous love story that winds through several generations --- told in Jane Mendelsohn?s distinctive mesmerizing style.

At its center are Milo, a severely wounded veteran of the Iraq War confined to a rehabilitation hospital, and Honor, his physical therapist, a former dancer. When Honor touches Milo?s destroyed back, mysterious images from the past appear to each of them, puzzling her and shaking him to the core.

As Milo?s treatment progresses, the images begin to weave together into an intricate, mysterious tapestry of stories. There are Joe and Pearl, a husband and wife in the 1930s whose marriage is tested by Pearl?s bewitching artistic cousin, Vivian. There is the heartrending story of a woman photographer in the 1960s and the shocking theft of her life?s work. The picaresque life of a woman who has a child too young and finds herself always on the move from job to job and man to man. And the story of a man and a woman in seventeenth-century Turkey --- a eunuch and a sultan?s concubine --- whose forbidden love is captured in music. The stories converge in a symphonic crescendo that reveals the far-flung origins of America?s endlessly romantic soul and exposes the source of Honor and Milo?s own love.

A beautiful mystery and a meditation on love --- its power and its limitations --- **American Music** is a brilliantly original novel.

Discussion Guide

1. American Music is preceded by two epigraphs, one from Shakespeare: ?O boys, this story / The world may read in me: my body?s mark?d / With Roman swords?; and one from Billie Holiday: ?If you expect happy days, look out.? In what ways do these quotes introduce major themes of the novel? Why would Mendelsohn choose such disparate figures as Shakespeare and Billie Holiday?

2. Why has Mendelsohn chosen **American Music** for her title? In what ways is music important in the novel?

3. Milo at first resists Honor?s attempts to help him. What is the turning point that allows him to open up to her?

4. American Music is centered around the idea that stories reside in the body and can be released through touch. Is this simply a metaphor, or does it represent a process that can happen outside the pages of a novel

5. In what ways are Milo and Honor like readers within the novel? Why do they feel driven to understand the stories that are emerging from Milo?

6. When a taciturn Vivian is being interviewed before her show at the Museum of Modern Art, one of the museum?s benefactors says: ?I can see why you never married. You don?t want to reveal anything? (p. 63). What parts of her life does Vivian want to keep secret? In what ways is **American Music** as a whole about the process of keeping and revealing secrets? What are the novel?s most surprising revelations

7. Why does Iris steal Vivian?s photographs? Is she justified in doing so?

8. What effects does Mendelsohn achieve by layering her novel with the stories of so many characters from such different time periods?

9. Late in the novel, when Honor kisses Milo, ?she felt a peace in not having to imagine anymore. Trouble starts, she thought, when we take the symbol for reality?She didn?t have to do that anymore?? (p. 211). Why would Honor feel peace at ?not having to imagine anymore?? In what ways has she taken the symbol for the reality?

10. Mendelsohn's prose style might be described as lyrical or impressionistic. What are the most distinctive features of her writing? How does it differ from more straightforwardly realistic narrative prose?

11. Is **American Music** primarily a love story? How are the love relationships between Joe and Vivian, Hyacinth and Parvin, and Milo and Honor connected?

12. What does **American Music** reveal about the trauma of war? How has Milo been affected by nearly being killed in Iraq and by being pinned under the body of a dead fellow soldier?

13. Honor tells Milo: ?Your body is like a haunted house?And it seems as though I live there? (p. 185). In what ways is this true?

14. American Music is a novel of many disparate threads --- different time frames, different characters and relationships, different generations in the same family. How does Mendelsohn bring these together at the end? What larger connections exist between all the stories in the novel?

Author Bio

Jane Mendelsohn is an American author. Her first novel was the critically acclaimed international bestseller I WAS AMELIA EARHART. Born and raised in New York City, she attended the Horace Mann School and Yale, where she was a Connecticut Student Poet and graduated summa cum laude. After attending Yale Law School for one year, she left to pursue writing. She began publishing literary reviews in the *Village Voice* in 1990. Since then, her reviews have appeared in *The Guardian*, the *New York Times Book Review*, *The New Republic*, *The Yale Review* and the *London Review of Books.*

Her first novel, I WAS AMELIA EARHART, was published by Knopf in 1996 and became a *New York Times* bestseller. It was translated into many languages and short-listed for the Orange Prize. Her second novel, *Innocence*, was published in 2000. It is being developed as a feature film by Killer Films. Her most recent book is AMERICAN MUSIC, published by Knopf to wide acclaim in the summer of 2010 and now out in paperback from Vintage.

She lives in New York City with her husband and daughters.

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