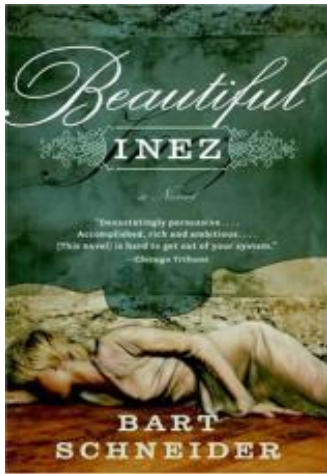


Beautiful Inez: A Novel

by Bart Schneider



About the Book

From critically acclaimed novelist Bart Schneider comes a captivating tale of romantic love and sexual adventure, social change and family upheavals, set against the vibrant backdrop of San Francisco in the 1960s.

Inez Roseman has a brilliant career as a violinist with the San Francisco Symphony, a successful husband, and two bright and talented children. But despite her seemingly perfect life, Inez is obsessed with thoughts of suicide.

Sylvia Bran also has an obsession. Enraptured with the beautiful violinist, she pretends to be a reporter and arranges to interview Inez. At once seductive and solicitous, she awakens Inez from the suffocating grip of her career, the demands of motherhood, and the tensions caused by her husband's many affairs. The two women become lovers, embarking on a dance of passion and betrayal that soon spins out of control.

Like Arthur Golden's **Memoirs of a Geisha** and Michael Cunningham's **The Hours**, **Beautiful Inez** is an unexpected journey into the lives of masterfully drawn, unforgettable women, by one of the literary world's leading writers.

Discussion Guide

1. On page 5, we're told that "Sylvia Bran's career as a voyant is about to begin." What did you imagine that meant when you read it? What do you think it means now? Who turns out to be the more successful voyant, Sylvia or Inez?
2. What part does language and etymology play in the story? How does Sylvia use language as a barrier? Or a weapon?

3. Throughout the novel, questions of role and identity are raised: Sylvia pretends to be a reporter to meet Inez; Jake wears Bermuda shorts to court as a sort of costume; Christine dresses like a hooker for her final rendezvous with Jake. What role does Inez assume? Is she convincing?
4. On page 141, Inez admits to herself that "she doesn't care who Sylvia is. Let her be whoever she wants." Why is Inez willing to continue the affair after such a grave deception? How does their relationship change as a result?
5. How does the Cuban Missile Crisis impact the various characters? Do you think they might have behaved differently if it weren't for the specter of imminent death?
6. Do you believe in Hy's concept of a "mind lasso"? Which characters wield it best? Do they know they're doing it?
7. Music is woven throughout the novel: Inez plays Paganini for Sylvia on their first meeting, then plays with the symphony; Jake whistles jazz everywhere he goes; Sylvia plays piano in the showroom, and for Bibi in the mental hospital. What does each character's relationship to music tell us about him or her?
8. On page 221, Inez thinks, "A woman like her isn't brave enough to walk away from her family, her children, and go on living. She cannot make so sharp a left turn in her life, nor can she sit idle." Why do you think Inez feels this way and continues to contemplate suicide, even while she seems so happy?
9. Food has a different significance for each character, seen, for example, in Inez's fluctuating appetite or Jake's gourmet assignations with Christine. How does Sylvia's simple, sensual attitude compare? What does Isaac's disdain for "goyish" mashed potatoes reveal?
10. Was it wrong for Jake to bring Isaac home to live with them? Did he have any other options?
11. How does Bibi's benediction alter the relationship between Inez and Sylvia?
12. How does the fact that Sylvia's mother committed suicide influence her response to Inez's initial confession? How does it influence her response when Inez announces her "irreversible decision"?
13. What role does religious belief play in the story? Is it a help, or a liability?
14. Consider the theme of betrayal in the novel. Christine has a speech on page 223 in which she says: "Who's betraying whom. Isn't that the question we're always at the point of asking our spouse? Or have we already decided? It's them." Who is betraying whom?
15. What do the chapter titles signify? Why do you think the author chose to use chapter titles?
16. Did the ending surprise you? How might it have been different if the story took place in our era, or in a different era?

Author Bio

Bart Schneider is the author of the novels **Blue Bossa**, a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, and **Secret Love**,

a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year. He was the founding editor of the *Hungry Mind Review* (later *Ruminator Review*) and now edits *Speakeasy* magazine.

Critical Praise

"**Beautiful Inez** takes us into the heart's uncharted territories, where two unlikely lovers come together in San Francisco in the early 1960s --- the beautiful Inez, a concert violinist and unfulfilled wife, and the impetuous, passionate bohemian, Sylvia, who sees in Inez her own salvation. A memorable, risk-taking novel that gets the people, the time, and the place just right."

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Publication Date: March 7, 2006

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Three Rivers Press

ISBN-10: 1400054435

ISBN-13: 9781400054435