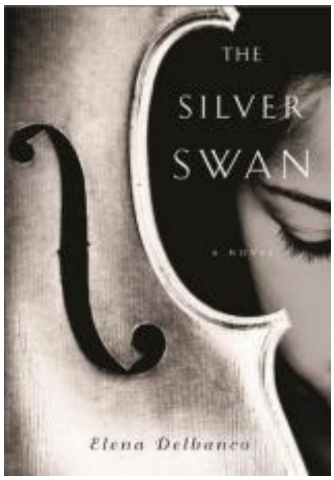
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The Silver Swan

by Elena Delbanco



About the Book

A debut novel about a daughter grappling with the legacy of her famous and imposing cellist father, the secrets he has hidden from her and the fate of his Stradivarius.

Alexander Feldmann is a revered and sought-after performer whose prodigious talent, striking good looks and worldly charm prove irresistible to all who hear and encounter him. After years of searching, he acquires a glorious cello, the Silver Swan, a rare Stradivarius masterpiece long lost to the world of music.

Mariana is Alexander?s only child and the maestro has large ambitions for her. By the age of 19 she emerges as a star cellist in her own right, and is seen as the inheritor of her father?s genius. There are whispers that her career might well outpace his. Mariana believes the Silver Swan will one day be hers, until a stunning secret from her father?s past entwines her fate and that of the Silver Swan in ways she could never have imagined.

Discussion Guide

1. Describe the influence Alexander Feldmann holds over Mariana?s life. How is it similar to his influence over Claude?s life? How is it different?

2. What does Mariana inherit from her father? What does she end up doing with this inheritance? What does she inherit from her mother, if anything?

3. What kind of childhood did Mariana have? How is it different than the one Claude had?

4. How does Mariana?s understanding of her parents? marriage influence the decisions she makes when she learns Claude may be marrying another woman?

5. On page 176 Pilar accuses Mariana of ?flirting with [her] father,? and thwarting their marriage. Why do you think Pilar accuses her daughter of this? How does her mother?s jealousy affect the relationships Mariana has with men?

6. The Stradivarius was Alexander?s most prized possession. What is the significance of Mariana inflicting such extensive damage on it? How is the place the instrument held in Alexander and Mariana?s relationship similar to the place it holds in Claude and Mariana?s relationship?

7. When Claude performs for Mariana she tells him to ?Make the dog howl? (p 218), just as her father had told his own students. What is the difference between Mariana?s and Alexander?s approach to teaching? Do you think the novel supports one approach over another?

8. When Mariana played for Claude she ?reach[ed] into the depths of the meditative, prayerful line, drawing out each phrase until she reached the final, whispered note? (p 219). What place does music ultimately hold in Mariana?s life?

9. For most of her life Mariana is known as ?the maestro?s daughter? (p 163). How is she finally able to escape from the legacy of her father?s work and genius? Had her father not died, would she have been able to find the kind of stability and success she achieves at the end of the novel?

10. Mariana describes herself as being ?transported by [music] to a place of beauty and solace? (p 228). What is your experience of music? How does it compare to your experience of reading and literature?

Author Bio

Elena Delbanco has recently retired after teaching for 27 years at the University of Michigan?s Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. Before moving to Ann Arbor, she worked at Bennington College in Vermont, where she and her husband, the writer Nicholas Delbanco, together with the late John Gardner, founded the Bennington Writing Workshops. Delbanco has long been engaged in the world of classical music. Her father was the renowned cellist Bernard Greenhouse (of the Beaux Arts Trio), who owned the Countess of Stainlein ex-Paganini Stradivarius violoncello of 1707. The imagined fate of that instrument, upon her father?s death, inspired THE SILVER SWAN, her first novel.

Critical Praise

?THE SILVER SWAN?is an enthralling tale about music and the passions it inspires?[Elena Delbanco?s] fast-paced plot is handled with virtuosic flair, and the characters are intriguing onstage, backstage and offstage. Told with respect, humor and affection, THE SILVER SWAN offers insights into those who maintain and sell precious stringed instruments and those who live to play and own one.?

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