

And After the Fire: A Novel

By Lauren Belfer

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National Jewish Book Award Winner!

The *New York Times*-bestselling author of *A Fierce Radiance* and *City of Light* returns with a new powerful and passionate novel—inspired by historical events—about two women, one European and one American, and the mysterious choral masterpiece by Johann Sebastian Bach that changes both their lives.

In the ruins of Germany in 1945, at the end of World War II, American soldier Henry Sachs takes a souvenir, an old music manuscript, from a seemingly deserted mansion and mistakenly kills the girl who tries to stop him.

In America in 2010, Henry's niece, Susanna Kessler, struggles to rebuild her life after she experiences a devastating act of violence on the streets of New York City. When Henry dies soon after, she uncovers the long-hidden music manuscript. She becomes determined to discover what it is and to return it to its rightful owner, a journey that will challenge her preconceptions about herself and her family's history—and also offer her an opportunity to finally make peace with the past.

In Berlin, Germany, in 1783, amid the city's glittering salons where aristocrats and commoners, Christians and Jews, mingle freely despite simmering anti-Semitism, Sara Itzig Levy, a renowned musician, conceals the manuscript of an anti-Jewish cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach, an unsettling gift to her from Bach's son, her teacher. This work and its disturbing message will haunt Sara and her family for generations to come.

Interweaving the stories of Susanna and Sara, and their families, *And After the Fire* traverses over two hundred years of history, from the eighteenth century through the Holocaust and into today, seamlessly melding past and present, real and imagined. Lauren Belfer's deeply researched, evocative, and compelling narrative resonates with emotion and immediacy.

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And After the Fire: A Novel By Lauren Belfer Bibliography

- Rank: #350354 in Books
- Brand: Belfer Lauren
- Published on: 2016-05-03
- Released on: 2016-05-03
- Format: Deckle Edge
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.41" w x 6.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 464 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
In Belfer's compelling third novel, an American soldier in 1945 Germany unknowingly purloins a controversial unpublished cantata by the great Johann Sebastian Bach, and it ends up in the hands of the soldier's niece, Susanna Kessler, upon his death. The journey of this manuscript, with lyrics based on one of Martin Luther's anti-Jewish screeds, from Sara Itzig Levyâ€"a Jewish student of Bach's eldest son and the real-life budding doyenne of Berlin's upper echelonsâ€"to America is interspersed with Susanna's own inner trajectory to finding normalcy and love in her life after being raped. The author's strengths lie in the historical passages, starting with the 1780s when Sara receives the cantata as a young woman, and continuing through her rise in society, her subsequent marriage, and her confidential gift of the manuscript to her beloved niece's daughter, Fanny (sister to Felix Mendelssohn). Fanny leaves it in a piano bench, where it's discovered by Susanna's uncle. Belfer's (A Fierce Radiance) comprehensive research brings depth and veracity to the novel, intertwining real-life figures and events from the past with the modern-day story and detailing the strong currents of anti-Semitism that have existed in Germany for centuries. The people in Susanna's life, as well as the contemporary situations Belfer portrays, are not as strongly drawn, and the passages about romance and sexual attraction in both the modern and historic realms never quite work. Nevertheless, this is an immersive, page-turning story emboldened by historical fact and a rich imagination. (May)

Review
“[Belfer’s] virtuoso novel…epitomizes Faulkner’s epigram that the past is never dead—or even past. Susanna and Sara’s storylines inevitably merge, across centuries and continents and gathering suspense. The novel swells with life’s great themes—love and death, family and faith —and the insistent, dark music of loss.” (*USA Today*, ****)

“In Belfer’s hands, fictitious characters blend uncannily with historical ones.” (*The New Yorker*)

“Finely written historical fiction layered with richly detailed characters and moral complexity.” (Jane Ciabattari, BBC.com)

“[A] compelling blend of fact and fiction.… Based on impressive research, this remarkable novel spans centuries and continents, touching finally on the Holocaust and serving as a paean to Bach’s music.” (*Booklist* (starred review))

“A different species of suspense tale…. Evocative, deeply researched…. Manage[s] to dazzle while delving into dark places.” (Maureen Corrigan, NPR’s *Fresh Air*)

“An intellectual thriller and a beautiful love story. What if you came into possession of an historical artifact with the power to alter history and change the world? Sure to establish Belfer as a fearless, provocative writer. Impossible to put down.” (Sara Gruen, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *At the Water’s Edge* and *Water for Elephants*)

“A bold and hugely ambitious novel with the transfixing appeal of a best-seller…by a native daughter of the city whose talent is now even beyond the admiration of those of us so impressed by *City of Light*.…Extraordinary.” (*Buffalo News*)

“A remarkably suspenseful story, a literary thriller in the tradition of A.S. Byatt’s *Possession*.” (*Kirkus Reviews*)

“Compelling…. An immersive, page-turning story emboldened by historical fact and a rich imagination.” (*Publishers Weekly*)

“Highly readable…. Will delight readers of historical fiction, especially if they are music aficionados who like a good love story thrown into the works…. Belfer proves herself to be that skilled weaver of tales in this intellectual thriller.” (*New York Journal of Books*)

“Music pulses through this rich tale of love, morality, and a lost cantata…. Filled with history, gorgeous descriptions of music, and people both real and imagined.” (*Washington Independent Review of Books*)

“This latest novel from Belfer…is her most compelling yet…. Told with lyrical beauty (in a tender love scene, the past exists with the present), the novel is like the lost cantata itself, revealing our capacity for darkness, redeemed by the power of unconditional love. A dazzling, transformative novel. Highly recommended.” (*Historical Novel Review*)

“Belfer is adept at revealing the complex politics and sentiments, including the religious biases, of 18th-century Europe. The important questions Belfer poses regarding the ethical complexities of art are engrossing.” (*BookPage*)

“A fascinating historical novel and poignant love story that will open the eyes and ears of music lovers and please those who enjoy a graceful, spellbinding tale pondering important questions.” (*Library Journal* (starred review))

“Blending the gorgeousness of Bach and the horror of anti-Semitism over several centuries should make for unsettling contemplation, and readers of Belfer’s…know that the author will be meticulous with both fact and fiction.” (*Library Journal*, “Editors’ Spring Picks”)

“Brilliant and mesmerizing…. Since reading *And After the Fire*, I’ve been trumpeting it as the best novel I’ve had the pleasure of reading in years.” (Elinor Lipman, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Then She Found Me*)

“One of the four best novels published to date in 2016.… The research and writing are… splendidly accomplished…. Brilliant.” (*AEQAI*)

“Marvelous…. Meticulously structured…. Eloquently and elegantly written. The themes are important and engaging. It is not a novel one will put down easily or forget at its conclusion.” (Jewish Book Council)

“On as grand a scale as any Bach masterpiece, Belfer’s novel explores the composer’s religious music and its effect on two women living 300 years apart…. Powerfully and emotionally written…. A fascinating, compelling read.” (*RT Reviews*)

“An outstanding historical novel…. Compelling.” (BookLoons.com)

“An ingenious first novel. . . . Alive with historical figures who mingle seamlessly with the fictional characters. . . . A huge, sprawling portrait of the United States at the turn of the last century.” (New York Times Book Review, in praise of City of Light)

“Belfer’s prose is heartbreaking, as are her twin themes of love and betrayal, both romantic and familial. . . . She also has a gift for rejuvenating spirit of place—turn-of-the-20th-century Buffalo in City of Light and wartime New York here.” (USA Today)

“. . . Belfer is adept at writing historical fiction that sizzles. Sex, spies, murder, big money, family betrayals, doomed romance and exotic travel are smoothly braided into her main narrative about the wartime race to make large quantities of penicillin.” (Washington Post Book World)

Lauren Belfer’s panoramic new novel is a love story wrapped around a spy story with a pivotal medical breakthrough at its center.” (O, the Oprah Magazine)

“A FIERCE RADIANCE shines with fascinating detail about a moment in American history we have mostly forgotten, when penicillin was new, miraculous, and in short supply. Belfer’s powerful portrayal of how people are changed in pursuit of a miracle makes this book an especially compelling read.” (Nancy Horan, author of Loving Frank)

From the Back Cover

This spellbinding new novel from Lauren Belfer, the *New York Times* bestselling author of *A Fierce Radiance* and *City of Light*, spans centuries and continents to reveal the secret history of a long-lost musical masterpiece—and the two women bound together by its troubled past.

Sara Itzig Levy, the daughter of Frederick the Great’s banker, counts herself among the élite of late-eighteenth-century Berlin. A gifted harpsichordist, she hones her musical talents under Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, a son of Johann Sebastian Bach. Kindred spirits, the elderly maestro and his protégée enjoy a close friendship, but their time together is running out. Friedemann’s final gift to his dearest Sara is the original score of one of his father’s cantatas—yet, as she reads its libretto, her gratitude turns to horror. . . .

In present-day New York City, Susanna Kessler enjoys a seemingly charmed life with a loving husband and a terrific job. Then a random, devastating act of violence tears it apart. Just as she’s beginning to recover, her beloved Uncle Henry kills himself. He leaves behind a cryptic note alluding to his haunting World War II experiences as an Allied soldier in Germany, and to an artifact he took from the war-ravaged country before returning home.

Framed by Susanna’s urgent search for the truth about the disturbing musical score her uncle bequeaths to her, Sara’s richly atmospheric narrative—studded with vibrant, real-life musical figures from Wilhelm Friedemann Bach to Beethoven to Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn—reveals the passions and politics of Enlightenment- and Romantic-era Berlin.

Wealth might buy Jews an entrée into German society but, as Sara discovers, a dark anti-Semitism simmers all around her. And as Susanna attempts to fight her demons by plunging deeper and deeper into Sara’s world, harrowing questions about her own family’s past begin to surface.

Advance Praise for *And After the Fire*

“It’s a remarkably suspenseful story, a literary thriller in the tradition of A. S. Byatt’s Possession.”—*Kirkus* reviews

“A ‘what if’ novel that begins in the glittering salons of Enlightenment Berlin where, beneath the surface, are sentiments too sinister to be named and culminates in New York present day, And After the Fire is an intellectual thriller and a beautiful love story. What if you came into possession of a historical artifact with

the power to alter history and change the world? Sure to establish Belfer as a fearless, provocative writer. Impossible to put down."—Sara Gruen, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *At the Water's Edge* and *Water for Elephants*

"Brilliant and mesmerizing. . . . Since reading And After the Fire, I've been trumpeting it as the best novel I've had the pleasure of reading in years."—Elinor Lipman, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Then She Found Me*

Praise for Lauren Belfer's previous novels

"Enthralling. . . . Belfer's powerful portrayal of how people are changed in pursuit of a miracle makes this book an especially compelling read."—Nancy Horan, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Loving Frank,* on *A Fierce Radiance*

"A love story and murder mystery rolled into a panoramic family saga and industrial-espionage thriller. . . . Belfer's prose is heartbreaking, as are her twin themes of love and betrayal."—*USA Today* on *A Fierce Radiance*

"Impressive. . . . A stereopticon of a novel, sepia-tinged at the edges yet bursting with color at its center. . . . A powerfully atmospheric book."—*New York Times* on *City of Light*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lydia Sanders:

The book And After the Fire: A Novel make one feel enjoy for your spare time. You need to use to make your capable considerably more increase. Book can to be your best friend when you getting pressure or having big problem along with your subject. If you can make studying a book And After the Fire: A Novel for being your habit, you can get much more advantages, like add your current capable, increase your knowledge about several or all subjects. You can know everything if you like start and read a e-book And After the Fire: A Novel. Kinds of book are a lot of. It means that, science publication or encyclopedia or others. So , how do you think about this publication?

James Shipp:

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Anita Cannon:

Is it you actually who having spare time after that spend it whole day through watching television programs or just laying on the bed? Do you need something new? This And After the Fire: A Novel can be the solution, oh how comes? A book you know. You are therefore out of date, spending your extra time by reading in this fresh era is common not a nerd activity. So what these publications have than the others?

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