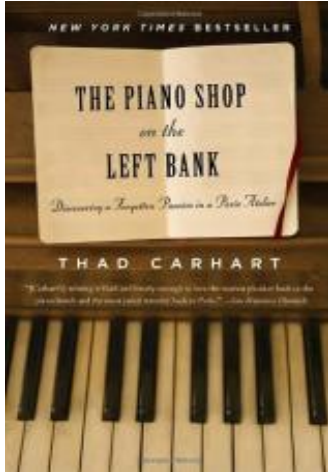


The Piano Shop on the Left Bank: Discovering a Forgotten Passion in a Paris Atelier

by Thad Carhart



About the Book

Thad Carhart never realized there was a gap in his life until he happened upon Desforges Pianos, a demure little shopfront in his Paris neighborhood that seemed to want to hide rather than advertise its wares. Like Alice in Wonderland, he found his attempts to gain entry rebuffed at every turn. An accidental introduction finally opened the door to the quartier's oddest hangout, where locals — from university professors to pipefitters — gather on Friday evenings to discuss music, love, and life over a glass of wine.

Luc, the atelier's master, proves an excellent guide to the history of this most gloriously impractical of instruments. A bewildering variety passes through his restorer's hands: delicate ancient pianofortes, one perhaps the onetime possession of Beethoven. Great hulking beasts of thunderous voice. And the modest piano "with the heart of a lion" that was to become Thad's own.

What emerges is a warm and intuitive portrait of the secret Paris — one closed to all but a knowing few. **The Piano Shop on the Left Bank** is the perfect book for music lovers, or for anyone who longs to recapture a lost passion.

Discussion Guide

1. As much as it is a history of the piano, **The Piano Shop on the Left Bank** also offers a warm account of the author's friendship with Luc, the atelier's master. When Carhart first meets Luc, he offers Carhart his right forearm to shake, since his hands were wet. Carhart observes that this is a particularly French custom. What other customs does Carhart encounter that might surprise or startle an American observer? What might be an explanation for the French way of doing things?
2. Carhart admits that, with Luc as a guide, he begins to feel as though he's looking at pianos for the first time. How

would you describe Luc's attitude towards the piano? What characteristics does Luc find attractive in the pianos that pass through his restorer's hands?

3. In the chapter entitled "Miss Pemberton," Carhart recalls a piano teacher of his who once remarked, "Music isn't music unless we share it with others." Would you agree with this statement? Why, or why not? Do you agree with Carhart's description of a piano recital as a "confidence game"?

4. What, according to Luc, contributes to a piano's personal character? In what ways do modern production techniques sometimes diminish this character?

5. In describing his evolving friendship with Luc, Carhart writes, "Beyond our conversations about the pianos in the shop, certain things were tacitly understood. Luc and I virtually never asked about each other's personal lives, although details occasionally came out as we talked." How does this picture of a friendship compare with how most Americans understand the idea of friendship? Indeed, would you label his relationship with Luc a friendship, or something else?

6. After buying a Stingl baby grand piano for his tiny Paris apartment, Carhart decided to embark on a series of piano lessons (something he hasn't had since childhood.) How is Carhart's attitude towards lessons different from when he was a child? What, according to the story, are some of the pleasures that re-discovering childhood passions can offer?

Author Bio

Thad Carhart has lived in France for much of his life. He was educated at Yale and Stanford and has worked as an events coordinator in the music industry and as communications head of Apple Computer's European division. A freelance writer and consultant, he lives in Paris with his wife, Simo, and their two children.

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