Partita by Barbara Kingsolver

Book Club Questions

1. The book begins with an epigraph from a Toni Morrison interview. Why do you think Kingsolver chose this quote?
2. A partita is a piece of music that consists of a series of dances with different paces and moods. How is that idea of the partita playing out in the novel for you? Why do you think the parts of the novel are named after different dances, and what impact did that have on your reading experience?
3. While celebrating her performance with the Knoxville Symphony, Livia 'held on to the fire, let go of the sticky strings of guilt.' Fire is so often associated with passion, but also with the idea of destruction and renewal. What does that motif of fire represent for you in this novel?
4. Livia's hands were crucial to her expression of talent and securing financial freedom. How do hands, work, the idea of physicality both as a pianist, but also as a farmer land in the novel? Does it have a political relationship for you? If so, what is it?
5. Kingsolver draws an interesting parallel between Sigurd and Livia's views on class consciousness. How does their conflict, and their trajectories, help us understand the political themes at the heart of the novel?
6. Livia insists: 'Reach into that bottomless music box and pull out whatever medicine your day is wanting.' How does music function as medicine in the novel?
7. How does Kingsolver meditate on female bodies particularly in this novel for you? How much control did you feel Livia had and to what extent did you read that politically?
8. How does Livia's relationship with her music evolve throughout the book? Did her story impact your view on the importance of art?
9. When Livia finds the letters her maternal grandmother wrote, her perspective on her mother's parenting changes. How did that alter your view of both characters?
10. Several of Livia's students challenge her selection of classical music pieces over their preferences. Livia argues that it is her job to expose them to the best music people have made 'not just last week but in our history'. Do you agree with this? What do you think the novel suggests about who decides what society values artistically?
11. What role do Percussion and Bassoon play in how Livia comes to understand love and partnership?
12. The story ends with the recital, before Livia's conversations with Sigurd, Charlie and Mickie. Why do you think the author chose to end the story here? Did you find this ending satisfying?



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