



The Weight of a Piano

Chris Cander

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For fans of Ann Patchett's *Bel Canto*, Amanda Coplin's *The Orchardist*, and Annie Proulx's *Accordion Crimes*. A tour-de-force about two women and the piano that inexorably ties their lives together through time and across continents, for better and for worse.

In 1962, in the Soviet Union, eight-year-old Katya is bequeathed what will become the love of her life: a Blüthner piano, built at the turn of the century in Germany, on which she discovers everything that she herself can do with music and what music, in turn, does for her. Yet after marrying, she emigrates with her young family from Russia to America, at her husband's frantic insistence, and her piano is lost in the shuffle.

In 2012, in Bakersfield, California, twenty-six-year-old Clara Lundy loses another boyfriend and again has to find a new apartment, which is complicated by the gift her father had given her for her twelfth birthday, shortly before he and her mother died in a fire that burned their house down: a Blüthner upright she has never learned to play. Ophaned, she was raised by her aunt and uncle, who in his car-repair shop trained her to become a first-rate mechanic, much to the surprise of her subsequent customers. But this work, her true mainstay in a scattered life, is put on hold when her hand gets broken while the piano's being moved--and in sudden frustration she chooses to sell it. And what becomes crucial is who the most interested party turns out to be. . .

The Weight of a Piano Details

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Author : Chris Cander

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From Reader Review The Weight of a Piano for online ebook

Shana says

I have a total "book hangover!"

The story is poignant, but more importantly to me is how the people are so real! This author clearly understands human emotion on another level, and pulls the reader right into each character's world so completely that you truly forget they are words on a page and not flesh and blood!

The research that must have gone into this novel in order to include the level of detail it does, is staggering.

The PASSIONS are palpable! I laughed, I cried, and I even exclaimed "Oh, shit!" out loud while reading.

The author takes you on a journey with each character, and gives you their stories without insulting the reader's intelligence by handholding along the way.

For those (like me) who need a comparison novel... I would say my last relationship to characters this strong was when I read "All the Light You Cannot See." The novel overall also had a perfect blend of past and present that reminded me of when I read "History of Love: A Novel." Without the WWII (which personally I need a break from every once and a while).

This book was full of real relationship with raw emotions of need, anger, desire, pain, loss and control! Stories and sentiments that any reader will be able to relate to, and will come away wishing they had more intensity in their own lives.

I did not want it to end, and will definitely be reading this book again!

Jen Coombes says

This book was provided to me for free from Net Galley in exchange for a fair review.

Chris Cander starts out this book with a mind blowingly good first chapter. The problem with introducing a book with such a beautifully written first chapter is that you lead the readers to believe that every chapter after that is going to be of that same tone and quality. Unfortunately the remainder of the book just did not take me there again.

With that said, this book had its moments and was technically written well with two stories playing out side by side. The first story is that of a young pianist in Russia who falls into a relationship with an abusive husband. This part of the story is particularly tragic. It is also problematic. When we first meet Katya she is an independent woman who is making her way and knows what she wants. This somehow dissipates as she becomes involved with the man who becomes her husband. Though this happens in real life all the time, it was hard to buy into her total acceptance of her plight when she had a strong family to support her, good friends and had up to this point been pretty self sufficient. Her fall into a life of depression and solitude with only her music to bring her solace could have been better if we had experienced some of her internal conflicts more. By the time her husband does the unthinkable and separates her from her only friend, her

piano, readers are clearly left wondering what the benefits are to staying with such a person and what has happened to Katya's common sense. The motivations in this story needed more attention.

The other story that is interwoven throughout is Clara's, the owner of a piano given to her by her father before his death. Her story is fairly typical. What is not typical is her connection throughout the story to Katya's experience. Though the inner workings of Clara's psychological problems and issues feel telegraphed and transparent, the descriptive details of her trip to follow her piano on a journey through Death Valley is beautifully written and leaves you wishing for deeper connections within the story.

The ending to this book was also problematic for a variety of reasons. A personified reflection from the piano's point of view was out of place and odd since the object this story is based on is not personified prior to this chapter. The amount of time it takes for Clara to come to the story's final conclusion is frustrating as the reader can already guess where things are going.

So, while the story is an interesting one and the writing is at times quite beautifully, the structures and revelations of Cander's story about how a piano touches several lives and thus becomes a living container of history and emotions is a bit predictable. The story needed deeper connections to the humans of the story. I wanted to know more about the characters that were mere reflections in the story and just did not get it. Clara's point of view was the dominant story story and sadly also the least interesting.

Joshua says

Fast paced and a joy to read! Interesting storyline with rich details and fascinating characters. Loved it!

Tory says

The start was GORGEOUS. The piano-maker roaming the Romanian forests to find a perfect tree; the craftsmen carefully creating each instrument by hand. But then: for as sweeping a story as it was, the language was seriously lacking, imho. I wanted perfectly-wrought, elegant sentences that made me sit up and take notice -- and I didn't get them. Somewhat predictable storyline and Greg got really creepy, really fast.

Claude Bouchard says

OMG, can this book be any more irritating?

Every major character in this book is either depressed, behaves badly, or keeps making bad decisions. It's essentially the story of a young Russian girl named Katya to whom is bequeathed a beautiful and expensive Blüthner piano, which eventually falls into the hands of an American girl named Carla, and how their stories intersect. Katya's story is interesting, and I wanted to read more about her. Carla's story, whose chapters alternated with Katya's, was much less interesting by comparison, and I couldn't wait for those chapters to be over. I'm not sure how anybody could refer to this as a "tour de force." This type of story is not new...it's been done before: please refer to the 1998 movie "The Red Violin."

Add to the mix a couple of needless sex scenes that truly added nothing to the story; I'm far from being a prude, but sex scenes for the sake of sex scenes don't mean much. They weren't obscenely graphic, thankfully, just not really relevant to the story or that damn piano. Also, Katya often spoke in Russian and the author sometimes wrote out her words in Cyrillic with no translation, including sentences during a couple of important moments. As a non-Russian speaker this really detracted from the story and made me feel like I was missing an important point. And why write out AN ENTIRE LETTER in Cyrillic?! What's the point? There was a translation for that one, fortunately, but it was unnecessary.

So, is there anything positive about the book? Yeah, there is: the story wasn't completely horrible, and it was a quick read.

Stephanie Crowe says

The Weight Of a Piano by Chris Cander

I knew that Cander was writing this book and it's title always intrigued me. Now it's finished and what a book it is!! The piano has always been a part of my life so it is appealing to me that the Bluthner piano is the main character of this story. It's presence becomes significant to every person who owned it. Cander weaves a mesmerizing tale of the human connections beginning with Julius Bluthner who created the piano in Germany, to Katya in Russia and finally to Clara in California. The piano truly did weigh on the lives of these characters and it was a thrill to see this unfold. Once I began I couldn't put this book down and finished it one sitting. A must read!!!!

Marjorie says

In 1962, 8-year-old Russian Katya receives a piano, which is bequeathed to her by her elderly neighbor, who recognizes the music in Katya. The piano is a German Bluthner. Katya becomes a gifted pianist and she brings the best out of the piano. But her piano is lost to her when her husband decides to leave Russia with high hopes of starting a new life in America with Katya and their son.

In 2012, Clara is torn about whether she should sell her Bluthner piano, which was given to her by her beloved father as an early 12th birthday present. She never learned to play it and has had to have it moved every time one of her relationships ends. But the piano is special to her since her father gave it to her shortly before he and her mother died in a fire. When she impulsively decides the piano must go, the buyer brings a connection with the piano that completely takes Clara off guard and brings her on a unique road trip through Death Valley.

I loved how this book begins with the building of this particular piano. The details in this chapter are fascinating, from the slow choosing of the right tree to the long drying out of the wood to the final building of the exquisite piano in a factory in Leipzig. It made the piano come alive in my mind and immediately built a connection with it. In alternating chapters, the author introduces the two women who have such a love for this piano – Katya and Clara – and carefully weaves their stories together. Their stories are beautifully told, with a slow and careful intent towards the brilliant ending.

Recommended.

This book was given to me by the publisher in return for an honest review.

Michelle Lancaster says

LITERARY FICTION

Chris Cander

The Weight of a Piano: A Novel

Alfred A. Knopf

Hardcover, 978-0-5256-5467-4 (also available as an e-book), 336 pgs., \$26.95

January 22, 2019

Julius Blüthner, a German piano maker in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was a legend in his time. He would take the train from Leipzig to the mountains of Romania to personally choose the spruce trees which would become, after a process involving many steps and many years, a piano. One of the Blüthner factory's rare instruments, which would "open up and gather into itself a unique history," is a main character in Chris Cander's latest novel, *The Weight of a Piano*.

The story begins with the birth of the piano and then leaps across time and space, first to Bakersfield, California, in 2012, where auto mechanic Clara Lundy is a twenty-six-year-old orphan, trying not to want anything because life has taught her that if she wants it too badly, she cannot keep it; then to Zagorsk, USSR, in 1962, where eight-year-old Ekaterina "Katya" Dmitrievna is kept awake at night by a piano-playing neighbor, an old German man who'd been blinded "by either shrapnel or guilt."

Katya inherits an antique, shining ebony Blüthner upright piano from her neighbor; Clara's father, he of the loud silences ("Hush, they said. I'm busy or Maybe later or I forgot."), gifts her a Blüthner for her twelfth birthday. Katya's piano is lost in the complicated immigration to America; Clara's piano is a "paperweight, keeping what was left of her childhood memories from floating away." Having never learned to play, and breaking her hand maneuvering the 564-pound paperweight up a flight of stairs during her latest move, Clara posts the Blüthner for sale. Needled by second and third thoughts, Clara tries to remove the sale notice but too late: a photographer in New York has bought it.

The Weight of a Piano is Chris Cander's third novel. A work of literary fiction that spans decades and continents, Cander's latest offering is an original, creative tackling of the essentially solitary human condition; the effort required of women to claim full personhood (I love you now change); and the frightening vulnerability necessary to connect with another, defiant in the face of the transitory nature of all things.

The story is told in three third-person accounts: that of Clara, Katya, and the piano. "I want to say that there's a reason this piano exists in the world. This specific piano. That there's something important about it, to the people who made it, to the people who played it and lost and found it and lost it again."

Cander's women are each quite different from one another. While I appreciated the younger Katya, bemused and curious to see what she'd do next, I grew impatient with Clara's (altogether understandable) pre-emptive strikes ("self-sufficient and self-contained, reliable instead of reliant") and skittishness, shying like a wild thing from perceived threats to her jealously guarded independence. The two women's paths cross in myriad ways, diverging in apposition; as Katya ages, she seems to diminish; as Clara ages she becomes bolder, more

decisive.

There are a handful of slips in *The Weight of a Piano*. “His eyes glazed with animal desire” is unworthy of Cander. Granted, sex is hard to write well and it’s where the clichés reliably appear—not surprising but a touch disappointing. And why print an entire letter in Cyrillic?

Imagery such as this makes up for the slips: “This amplified tension between [Clara’s] parents so dense and sticky, always came and went, and now it was there again, like a spider web that had been spun in the night.” The stark extremity of Death Valley serves as inspired metaphor, providing a backdrop supremely indifferent to the human dramas playing out — all sorts of things are dying out there.

The piano tries to please — it has abandonment issues, too. “Oh, how hard it had tried to produce the right sounds, grateful as it was to finally have been asked to once again.” The denouement unexpectedly features the Blüthner’s point of view — compelling and, oddly, more affecting than the people. “It felt as though it were twice its actual size, a burden to itself and others … 564 pounds plus the invisible emotional and musical heft.” The piano is burdened by the hopes, dreams, disappointments, and griefs of its humans. “That’s not music. Let me go.”

Cander’s *The Weight of a Piano* showcases her development as a powerful storyteller, reminding me of *Accordion Crimes* (Scribner, 1997) by the great Annie Proulx. Steadily, warily, the two halves of this story move toward each other, and what follows is a tale of the paradoxical power of art — the duality that transfigures, enslaving some and setting others free.

Originally published by Lone Star Literary Life.

Esme says

I received *The Weight of a Piano* through NetGalley in exchange for a review. Thanks to Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group for allowing me a copy!

Two women over nearly 50 years are united by their attachment to an extraordinary piano and a secret that causes a domino effect of tragedy. Katya is growing up in the Soviet Union during the 1960s when a neighbour gifts her with a Bluthner piano; Clara has just ended another hopeless relationship in 2012 and is moving the same piano from her ex-boyfriend’s house to a new flat. The story of how the instrument went from one woman’s hands to the next unfolds when Clara allows the piano to be used by an enigmatic photographer for a special project, in a history as mournful and heart-wrenching as the music it played in its previous life.

Why should this piano be special? Each one was special, with its own soul and distinct personality. This one was substantial but unassuming, mysterious but sincere.

Gosh. This book is sad. It’s also beautifully poignant and written with gorgeous prose. The piano may be the centre of the story, but the characters are Cander’s masterpiece; each one is melancholy and self-destructive, a portrait of how one decision can cause a ripple effect over several lives.

The two standouts are the leading ladies, Katya and Clara, very different people, but both clinging onto the piano as a reminder of their former lives. For Katya, she relies on it for happiness she can't find in her marriage and new experiences in America having fled the Soviet Union under her husband's demand. She is desperately lonely, diagnosed with depression, but a masterful pianist who is never more alive than when she is sat at the keys.

She lifted her hands gently and paused before setting upon the keys with a strikingly fast and tempestuous piece that sent her hands flying up and down until it seemed she could strike sparks on them.

Clara, meanwhile, received the piano as a birthday gift soon before her parents died in a fire that also took all her belongings and home – the piano is literally the only thing she has left of her childhood, and although it wasn't necessarily a happy or caring one, her perspective has warped to consider it vital as a physical memory that she refuses to part with despite the perils of moving it from home to home and the fact she is unable to play.

Like Katya, it at first seems that she doesn't fit in with her surroundings; she is the only female mechanic at a family run garage, she doesn't want to marry her comfortable live-in boyfriend and she grew up under the care of her aunt and uncle who had no children of their own and limited parenting skills. However, it becomes clear throughout the novel that unlike Katya who cannot escape her situation, Clara has actually set up a life that she could be content in and the only thing standing in the way of her happiness is herself. She is the one falling in and out of unhealthy relationships, while denying herself her true affection for her co-worker Peter; she is the one desperately clinging onto the piano that is no use to her despite the fact that letting go might help her exhume the trauma of losing her parents.

You can read the rest of my review on my blog here: <https://esmooglereads.home.blog/2019/...>

Maxine says

I read an advance copy of this novel and absolutely love it. Highly recommend!!

Tammy says

Pianos are difficult to move. Ponderous and unwieldly, a piano cannot be moved by oneself. Help is required. This particular piano carries with it not only its heft but emotional attachments that are equally as heavy. Auto mechanic, Clara, drags the piano around from apartment to apartment and relationship to relationship until she meets a photographer with his own baggage associated with the instrument. And what of the music or its absence? There is a great deal of history associated with this piano and we travel from the Soviet Union to Bakersfield, California as the story unfolds. For a romance, this is surprisingly well written and I learned a bit about auto mechanics, photography and how pianos are constructed, maintained and tuned.

Janelle • She Reads with Cats says

Thank you so very much Knopf for my free copy of THE WEIGHT OF A PIANO -

This is an emotional, poignant novel with elegant prose that will pull you in so much you won't want to let go.

In 1962, eight-year-old Katya Dmitrievna receives a piano from her neighbor who sees something special in her. It's a beautiful Blüthner piano and Katya grows up to become a gifted pianist. Years later, she's married with a son and her husband decides it's time to leave Russia to start a new life in America, but her piano is lost.

In 2012, Clara Lundy has been moving her piano with her for years, ever since her father gave it to her for her twelfth birthday just before her parents died in a fire. After her last relationship ended, she impulsively decides to sell her piano. Even though it's special to her, she's never learned to play it. Come to find out, the buyer has an unexpected attachment to the piano that catches Clara off-guard.

We follow three storylines that run parallel of each other: the piano maker (Julius Blüthner), Katya, and Clara. Cander's writing is exquisite and her characters are so real you can reach out and touch them. The details of the piano, how it's created, and the central role it plays are magical. The piano carries a heavy weight on each of their lives, from Blüthner, to Katya in Russia, to Clara in California, and it made quite the impression on me as well. Cander weaves the stories together perfectly, but be prepared to feel every emotion when reading this book. THE WEIGHT OF A PIANO is a brilliantly unique exploration of loss, along with the power of beautiful music.

Jonathan says

I couldn't decide whether to give this book a 3/ 3.5/ or a 4 and After debating I decided on a 4 because it genuinely was a good novel. It had some predictable moments however, the alternating stories of the past and present kept me interested not really lagging anywhere throughout. Of all the "twists" there was only really one that I didn't see coming and I enjoyed that. This books synopsis is already written out so I will just say that it was a heartfelt book about wrestling with either holding on too tight to the past or trying so hard to let it go and actually being scared of both. The Piano in this book linked two families, and the two main characters, but it can be used as a metaphor for any object in anyone's life that keeps them clinging to the past, and all you can do is choose whether it's something you wish to keep doing or finally just let it all go, and stop bearing the "weight of a piano"

Aditi says

Thanks to FTR and publishers for an ARC of the book.

I thought this would be a 'weighty' book, pun intended. Having recently finished a russian cold war era book I had similar expectations of this one. But this is, at the heart of it, a love story and a woman called Clara trying to understand her past, to come to terms with her present. So read it as a romance and you wont be

dissapointed.

This book starts well, with descriptions of Piano making. Its an easy read with varying emotions and some cliffhangers. I liked the story of Katya more than Clara, which had more passion. Clara's decision to follow men across the state renting her Piano seemed impractical to me, but literary license right? I didnt love this book, but read it in one sitting so it is definitely gripping enough. One piano tied these two families across generations and the closure seemed befitting to me. An epilogue about Clara would have been even better ending to the book.

rating- 3 stars.

Cindy Burnett says

Chris Cander's new book, The Weight of a Piano is simply stunning. Her story follows the life of a Bluthner piano as it travels from owner to owner. In addition to the piano, there are two women who play central roles in the tale. In 1962 when she is 8 years old, Katya is gifted the piano by a neighbor in her apartment building in Russia. She eventually emigrates from Russia to the United States losing her piano in the process. In 2012, Clara, who was gifted the piano by her father, decides to sell it to help make ends meet. As the book progresses, their stories unfold and begin to intertwine. Cander's prose is lyrical and beautiful, and her tale unfolds at just the right pace. As I was close to finishing the book, I began to worry that the ending was going to frustrate me, but instead the book ends perfectly. I highly recommend this one.
