



Last Song Before Night

Ilana C. Myer

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Long ago, poets were Seers with access to powerful magic. Following a cataclysmic battle, the enchantments of Eivar were lost—now a song is only words and music, and no more. But when a dark power threatens the land, poets who thought only to gain fame for their songs face a task much greater: to restore the lost enchantments to the world. And the road to the Otherworld, where the enchantments reside, will imperil their lives and test the deepest desires of their hearts.

Last Song Before Night Details

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From Reader Review Last Song Before Night for online ebook

Aidan says

On the surface, Ilana C. Myer's debut fantasy, *Last Song Before Night*, sounds familiar. It's about a group of young men and women, from various casts of life—from wide eyed and naive, to ambitious and dangerous—who are manipulated by the great poet, Valanir Ocune, and his rival, Nickon Gerrard. Magic, once thought lost, is returning to Eivar, for good or ill, and the fate of the world is at stake. It's all been done before, but, rooted in compelling characters, and a deep-seated sense of respect for their emotional journeys, *Last Song Before Night* is so much more than an over-tread quest for lost magic.

On her website, Myer cites Guy Gavriel Kay and Robin Hobb as a major touchstones in her development as a reader and novelist. Their fingerprints are all over this novel. There's attention paid to the delicate, intertwining relationships that grow between the various characters—some of whom have past histories, others who form bonds of friendship or animosity over the course of the novel—and greater weight given to their goals and motivations, individually and as a group, over building out a deep fantasy world with a millennium-long history or complex, rules-based magic systems.

Last Song Before Night caught me completely by surprise. It's not often that a debut novel forms such an immediate relationship with some of its genre's grandmasters, but *Last Song Before Night* will please fans of Robin Hobb, Guy Gavriel Kay, and Lois McMaster Bujold, and leave them desperate for more stories set in the fabulous fantasy world of Eivar. Be ready to laugh and cry, gasp in horror, and vent steam through your ears, because *Last Song Before Night* will toy with your emotions from its first page to its last, and you'll love every minute of it.

Read an expanded review [here](#).

Robyn says

3.5 stars - not sure if I should round up or not. A compelling world and characters, but the plot and pacing of this went awry. I'd still like to read the sequel, if there is one (?)!

Seth Dickinson says

Reading *Last Song Before Night* was like chasing a mirage.

I came into the story and I thought I saw the shape of it: a heroic young poet-man named Darien fighting to win his love Rianna away from her cold arranged marriage to nebbish Ned. A young woman named Lin who wants to be a poet, even though her world says that's a job for men. And a wise old wizard who'd bring them together to fight an ancient evil. There was a jealous friend, a manipulative worldly woman, and a scheming Court Poet archvillain. The cast was assembled!

I thought the shape of *Last Song Before Night* was a classic quest fantasy.

Last Song is not that story. That story is a trick, an assumption you're invited to make. Last Song is a story about acknowledging truth, and stories about truth start with a lie.

Everyone in Last Song is lying to themselves and to the people around them. The fundamental myths of the world are built on lies — and not lies of malice, but very fragile, human lies of self-protection, self-deceit, and shame.

Last Song is about art: poetry is magic, the villain is a censor. It has to be! Art is how we tell stories about who we are and who we should be. But Last Song wants us to know that art can be powerfully, powerfully damaging. In the wrong hands, it can scar us.

The real quest here is a quest for personal truth. The story lives in the character work, and man, the characters are deeply surprising people. I think Last Song's best trick is its origami: showing us a flat, familiar character, then folding her, creasing him, looking from many perspectives, making us double back on our own conceits and doubt what we know. Marilla is a vampiric, toxic parasite who drags down the men in her life; Marilla is a woman who's made necessary choices about how to live in a patriarchy; Marilla is a survivor who refuses to live on anyone else's terms. Rayen Amaristoth is an absolute sadist; Rayen Amaristoth is a noble man trying his best to redeem himself for what he did as part of an awful family heritage. Lin is a defiant, independent woman who refuses to be kept down; Lin is a psychologically injured person who can't separate helping others from hurting herself.

Wait, though! It's not all internal action! Epic fantasy is the genre of making big ideas literally real.

There IS a quest in Last Song. The villain is an embodiment of personal and social deceit, a man who wants to abuse systematic mistruth about history to become immortal. The fight takes our characters from the warm, joyful streets of their home city into cold winter woods and ancient dreams. (The environment writing is really great — I felt like I could smell the air in cosmopolitan Tamryllin, a wine-soaked Mediterranean city that feels just as nice as the lovely cover looks.) But as the stakes get bigger, they get smaller and more precise too — not just 'can we win' but 'who are we going to be when it's done?' The quest drives the changing angles between the cast. And the only possibility of salvation is that they'll figure out the lies they're telling about themselves and each other.

There's a moment, late in the story, when every thread and choice collides. Everyone gathers at a winter place in the deep woods, about as far from the singing city as they can get, and they all reckon their choices with each other. They all face each other down and say 'This is what I think the truth about you must be.' And man, this book doesn't flinch. The truth isn't always kind.

Reading Last Song is like growing as a person. You start in a simple, mythic place, where you care about winning a contest and the person you love. You go somewhere complicated and painful. You lose people, and you find people. Some of what you learn is redemptive. Some of it's cruel as hell.

But the core action of the story is about defeating the lies that guard truth. That's what art should do.

Kelly says

I didn't finish more than half of this, but from what I saw, this is poor man's Kay, mostly. Same beats, similar characters and interests, same fascinations, some stylistic influences... just not as good. It's just close enough

for everything to ring false. I might finish it later, but putting it aside for now.

Sara says

I went back and forth with this book, my first experience with a genuinely bad audio book, and I can't help but wish I'd read it if only because every now and then there is just barely great potential in this very, very, very, very long and for the most part very, very, very very boring "high fantasy" epic.

We open in the city of Tamryllin in the kingdom of Eivar where the people are gathering for a huge festival. The high point is to be an epic contest between poets each of whom hopes to win the fabled Silver Branch. Poets in Eivar are trained at the "Academy" where they learn music and the ancient art of song writing. Hundreds of years in their past poets once commanded great magical power through their songs but the power has since been lost though rumors persist that it can be accessed again through something called "the path" and that some poets may be seeking it now. As the people gather it becomes apparent that the current "Court Poet" who has the ear of the king and a great deal of power may be up to no good.

This all sounds pretty great. I straight up love the idea of poetry and music being used to wield magic. I also love any fantasy with a rich mythology like Tolkien's epic Middle Earth history or the awesome world building of writers like Guy Gavriel Kay or (Mallorean era) David Eddings. So there was immediately tons of potential for epic adventure, magic battles, and tragic romance. All things I adore in really great fantasy tales.

There's nothing quite like an epic quest where innocent knowledge seekers go on a great journey to discover the truth of their heritage or reveal some long hidden secret event that changed the course of their world. There's so much room for an author to reveal their characters slowly as they join forces or betray alliances or discover hidden powers in themselves in something of this kind of scope. So much can happen creatively too, especially when you present something like music and song as the cornerstone of your stories world.

Sadly, there's no music, poetry or magic here.

There are no songs and no poetry in an epic fantasy based entirely on songs and poetry. I can't even begin to understand that or adequately explain how frustrated this makes me. How can you write a 400+ page fantasy epic with poetry and music as the basis for your magical world and then not write any poetry or music? Its like setting your novel in an underwater world and then having the whole story unfold on land. To make things super frustrating we occasionally get scenes where poets are performing or (at the very, very end) working magic and we get as far as them opening their mouths and then...nothing. Wind blows, and no one can see clearly, darkness, light, pain blah blah blah and then cut scene and on to the next thing.

This isn't my only problem with this book though its certainly the most glaringly obvious. Myer's characters are a strange mix of stereotypical and so bizarre as to be unbelievable. I'd like to say this strange combo results in at least interesting people populating an astoundingly boring narrative but alas I cannot. We're treated to a cast of the usual players in stories like this; damsel in distress, awkward not quite a hero guy, smarmy kind of bad guy with a heart of gold, sexy dark lady with a magic devil vagina who was beaten as a child and that's why she's mean, quippy devil may care hero, pointless Gandalf knock off who's here because you need old sages in epic fantasy novels, and not conventionally pretty woman with hidden depths who saves the day because she's "chosen."

This obviously suggests there's a plot, and there is, but it's so vague as to be almost nonexistent. The poets are wandering around trying to free "the enchantments" (their ancient lost power) but we never even find out what these enchantments are! Are they spells? power they no longer have access to? How did they lose the powers? What are they planning to do once they have them back? What the heck is this "path" everyone keeps referring to? It's like in naming things "the enchantments" and "the path" Myer seems to think she's done enough to explain what's going on. I was pulling my hair out when a climax involving poets "joining together" was happening and the most description or explanation for what that even means was a bunch of guys holding hands and "singing" something we never hear....

So what does happen in 400+ pages you ask? A whole lot of personal monologuing about feelings and endless, endless, endless descriptions of people walking around and just observing shit. I so wish I was kidding. That's the only part of "epic quest" Myer seems to have taken to heart, making sure there's a lot of walking around.

I just didn't get this. I stuck it out in the hopes that what amounts to a lot of "pretty" writing would somehow come together in the zero hour and provide at least some explanations for what everyone was looking for, but we don't even get that. The answers, what few there are, are so utterly mundane and boring if you're like me you will be hard pressed to work out what in the world you were hanging around for.

Because I'm quite certain the narration did play a role in my intense dislike of this book I do need to talk about it. Alison McKenna has a very pretty voice but that's all I can say for this. Gandalf knockoff sounds like a wheezy old man with a high reedy voice perpetually trying to catch his breath before he passes out. Cocky hero's every sentence is punctuated by a slight uptilt to his sentences just so we know he's being snarky. Bad guys are distinguished ENTIRELY by soft, breathy voices and sounding what I can only describe as "extra Irish" since that appears to be Ms. McKenna's native accent. It's like the degree to which they sound more Irish than she's making the other characters sound indicates their level of evil? I don't know.

From a purely technical level this sounds like it was recorded in a few very long takes by a woman who read the book maybe once based on the different ways the same characters' names are said and complete blowing of sentences (putting commas where there are obviously periods, blatant mispronunciations, and occasionally forgetting which character is actually talking or thinking). Honestly the only thing keeping me from giving up on the audio and switching to the book was the fact that I would have had to special order it from another library and I could not be bothered.

You cannot label something "high fantasy" because it has moderately pretty language and keeps referencing things like "being noble" and "destiny." You have to show me that destiny and explain why being noble is important! Give me some stakes to invest in that aren't just repeating "time is running out" and "you are the key!" over and over and over again.

If you are a fan of epic fantasy please don't waste time on this. There is other, far better stuff, out there. This was a huge waste of time despite a promising premise and was deeply disappointing on absolutely every level.

Sharon says

Exciting, daring, and thoughtful. I read this book on my weekday commute, at the beach, and in bed at the

end of the day, and it was perfectly suited for all three. The writing is rich and beautiful without being precious and while the plot moves quickly, the action/adventure serves character development rather than the other way around. I especially loved how the love stories are handled - without giving any spoilers, this book skips the usual predictability of True Love with blinder focus, and instead reflects the real world in which true love happens on a spectrum, sometimes landing on more than one object, sometimes disguising itself, sometimes connecting a good heart with a bad one.

Looking forward to the sequel!

Ville Kokko says

Last Song Before Night by Ilana C. Myer is a masterful fantasy story. The plot revolves around bringing lost magic back into the world to counter a supernatural threat — but even more around the fates of the characters, who are so achingly real that the reader has every reason to care about them.

Even before the main conflict is introduced, the story weaves a situation rich in conflict and potential just by introducing the setting and characters. The story starts in the city of Tamryllin in the days before the Midsummer Fair, in which Poets — musicians — compete for the Silver Branch in front of the king and everyone else. But of course there's a twist. Events take an entirely new turn before even the supposedly pivotal contest. At a ball where the Poets are performing in front of distinguished guests up to the king himself, a surprise performer whose very name causes ripples shows that, magic or no, music can still have a great deal of power, and changes the lives of those present and upsets the political situation with one song.

The beginning of the story is a captivating page-turner of winding threads, set in a fictional city that has its own tangible twilight atmosphere. The pace is steady and eventful, introducing one twist after another, never lagging. However, this is nothing compared to reading the middle for the first time — written with blood from a quickly beating heart, it left me no choice but to read on and on to find out what happened to the characters I already cared so much about, poised on a knife-edge the whole time, not only physically in danger but in spiritual and moral peril as well, with truly everything at stake. This goes on almost to the end and the satisfying conclusion.

The characters are obviously a strength of the story. As another reviewer pointed out, they are also more than they appear to be — or, at least in one case, appear to be more than they are, which is just as interesting done in moderation. More than anything, they are women and men trying to find their place in a world that opposes them at every step.

A central theme in this story is music, or rather, art on the whole, represented by music, largely from the artist's point of view. The book itself is a good example of what art can be and do. In my mind, it ranks just below the very best I have ever read.

A longer and more in-depth version of this review can be found at <https://thoughtsonx.wordpress.com/201...>

Jessica says

Gorgeous, finely-wrought fantasy that reminded me of Kay's *A SONG FOR ARBONNE*.

If you know me, you know that's high praise indeed! Luminous writing, well-developed characters, strong world-building, all come together to create a wonderful debut- in fact, I was stunned to realize that this was a debut novel! I loved the way that music, magic, and religion were all intertwined, and I have to say that I also loved, LOVED the discovery that it was a standalone novel! As much as I enjoyed the book, it was almost a relief to find out that I wouldn't have to wait years to find out what happened to the characters next. Though the ending was a touch rushed, I thought that otherwise it moved very smoothly and was an excellent example of how fantasy authors really can get their story done in one volume!

Lindsay says

A country that sacrificed the enchantments that went with its music and poetry now faces a threat that can only be fought by that which was lost.

The players in this tense little tale are set early and defined well, with quite a lot ahead of them. Lin, the forbidden female poet running from an horrific past, Darien and Marlen, a duo of poets with huge potential, the lady Rianna, rich daughter of a merchant whose hand is courted by her childhood friend Ned and Darien the poet. There's a sinister force in the country of Eivar where they live that is using the forbidden blood divination which requires murder and causes plague. And the only way to fight blood divination is via the magic of the poets, accessed via the Path which has been lost for centuries.

The first part of this story is excellent, where each of the parties dance around each other in Tamryllin, but once the various players split off bit by bit the story becomes really disjointed. Disjointed in terms of character interactions, spacial separation and some really clumsy sections where one group of characters encounters a second group before the second groups story is told. The constant dream sequences don't help either. It does all come together, but the middle third of the book is such a mess that it really detracts from the rest of it.

Where the book shines is the character growth, particularly with Darien, Marlen and Rianna. These characters could easily have been defined by their tropes, Darien as the light-hearted adventuring hero, Marlen as the mustache-twirling villain and Rianna as the spoiled heiress, but they all go far beyond those things. Lin has an interesting arc as well, but it's a little dis-satisfying in that she is largely defined as a victim and her eventual part in the climax doesn't really pull her far from that role. Her future role on the other hand ...

Ilana says on her web site that there will be a sequel, which I will definitely read. Ultimately I think there was much more good than bad, and a lot of what's wrong here could be put down to first book problems.

Brian Staveley says

I had the great good fortune to read this book in bound manuscript form. It's not a short novel, but I tore through it. My blurb, (which I've included below) mentions THE NAME OF THE WIND, but I've just finished Guy Gavriel Kay's TIGANA, and I think perhaps that latter novel might be the more apt comparison. I'm struck by the ability of both Myer and Kay to marry beauty and brutality. Neither author shies away from difficult scenes, but both insist on the fundamental beauty of the world. I'm itching to see what other people make of this one -- I loved it.

THE BLURB:

Not since *The Name of the Wind* have I read a novel so filled with music. In this pitch-perfect debut, Myer has created a world of knife-wielding poets, bloody bards, and songs so important, so dangerous, that women and men are willing to die to sing them or hear them silenced. Myer writes with a music that lingers, even after you close the book for the night.

Thomas Wagner says

2.5 stars

Last Song Before Night comes so close to being a brilliant debut it nearly brings me to tears. Ilana Myer lures you into her extravagantly mounted epic with the promise of a tale of a rebellion inspired by poetry and led by musicians. But what emerges is just another tropey quest novel, with stock heroes and villains, and a curious lack of conviction supporting its feminist subtext.

Our heroine is Kimbralin — or just Lin — Amaristoth, daughter of an aristocratic household, who has fled her family's abuses and come to the marbled and pillared city of Tamryllin. Here, despite strict Academic rules limiting the vocations of music and poetry to men, Lin pursues her musical ambitions. Ages past, music was a powerful form of spellcasting, but after blood magic corrupted the practice and spread a fearsome plague, the Red Death, music was stripped of its magical essence and poets were required to have all their songs approved by the king's closest advisor, the Court Poet.

The story begins as Lin and her performing partner prepare to enter a song contest to be held at (continued...)

K. Lincoln says

This one took me a long time to read. I went into it based on a friend's recommendation, not really thinking the cover drew me in....and found out its an emotionally lush, richly woven world and story in the vein of Guy Gavriel Kay, Patrick Rothfuss or Melina Marchetta. So I had to slow down and appreciate not only the descriptive and evocative writing of the locations, but also to fully appreciate the emotional ramification of what was happening to each of the main characters.

And I was surprised. Which is unusual in fantasy, I've read a lot and I know the tropes. But here Myer surprised me in a totally true-to-character way by several of her main POV characters choosing difficult paths that caused lots of juicy angst. People don't end up necessarily being who you think they'll be, or loving those they start out with. Delicious.

This is an ensemble cast novel, begun with a pair of Poets (kind of like wandering Bards in this world) who are traveling to a city for a contest to be named greatest Poet in the land by the very powerful King's Poet, Nickon Gerrard. Both are handsome, talented, hero material: but in disposition they are the moon and the sun. You can kind of guess what's going to happen there, can't you?

And there's also a girl heading towards the same contest...except there are no female poets. And there is the daughter of a rich merchant being courted by a nobleman.

All the characters will be thrust from their usual lives and assumed futures as the contest ends exile, bloodshed, and danger to the entire kingdom because someone is using blood divination magic.

This is lovely, lyrical, darkening alternate world fantasy. And I readily fell in love with the characters. The ending of the book felt rushed, I won't lie. I might have been tempted to only give 4.5 stars because it gets mighty confusing due to the author's penchant for switching POV without telling you who's the voice at the start of the chapter as well as whether this is happening real time or in Poet magic time and where it is happening in the timeline of the story.

In the end, I didn't actually care enough to change my stars. It's so rare (like not since discovering Melina Marchetta, actually) that a fantasy novel has sung to me like this. Beautiful. Luckily, it looks like the author has another book coming out next year set in the same world. Awesome.

Justine says

3.5 stars rounded down.

There were things about this I liked a lot and for most of the things I didn't I'm willing to give this debut author the benefit of the doubt and attribute them to first book difficulties. The story and characters were interesting enough that I might read the sequel that is apparently planned. However, it didn't leave a real impression on me.

Which is kind of a problem. I'm usually pretty impressionable.

Bradley says

This was one hell of a pleasant surprise!

I expected an interesting fantasy, having thought the premise looked promising, but I hadn't realized I was stepping into a wonderfully pure story. Every character was crystal clear and everyone changed naturally, proving to be much more than any single trope, growing into wonderfully *likeable* people. Even the antagonists were exquisitely balanced.

I fell into this novel as if it was always meant for me, and I never once had to use any of my willpower to plow through either plot, circumstance, or reversal. This was pure candy, leaving out everything except the elements absolutely necessary for the protagonists, the over-story, and the magic.

Best of all, Poetry is Magic, and poets are powerful in the realm. How cool is that? Sure, they're bards, and a few of them rule from behind the throne, but most glorious of all, words have power again.

No fireballs, no uber-powerful assassins, no young girls overthrowing kingdoms... oh wait... that last one is true, but how it happens is simply and truly delightful.

The old ideas are made fresh. The people want to bring magic and enchantment back to the world. To do that, the poem must be found to open the door to the Otherworld. Of course, magic always comes with a

price, and the old Poet who had gone there and come back was not willing or able to pay it. It's fresh because it is written so damn well. I feel the draw of the magic, the efforts of our heroes, their pains and their hopes, and, eventually, their tragedies.

Everyone shines and the pacing and characterizations are divine.

It is one of the easiest reads I've had this year, but don't assume it's not smart. It's very adult and it's very modern classic, focusing on better writing, evocative events, and practically no exposition. It has got to be the most organic and natural fantasies I've read in a long time.

Even the ones I swore by over the past few years seem rather contrived with stylistic tomfoolery compared to this novel.

There's only a few places where the time of events is reversed, but it doesn't feel bad or seem like a mistake. It just propels the plot forward and keeps the overall pace perfect.

Myer is going to be an author I'm going to follow with great anticipation from now on. Something this deeply enjoyable and spot-on is rare and just plain lovely.

I will say one last thing: I was frankly amazed and in awe of the fact that women weren't raped willy-nilly through the tale. Men were actually behaving with honor, and I am even including the bad guys.

I kept expecting coercions of one type or another, and indeed, they do happen fairly regularly, but it's an open question as to who is coercing whom. Lin is the exception. Her brother was a real bastard to her.

But in the end, I never thought that any character was without agency. They were all heroes to their own stories. I liked Lin, Darien, Rianna, and Marlen. They all start out as archetypes but they definitely grow into their own and I never once had a problem with believability.

What I did bring out of this novel was not a throwback to old fantasy themes, but a purifying of them.

Shel says

First, the disclaimer, in the name of full disclosure: the author is a friend who I've known for many years. Of course I want her to be successful, but as a dedicated reader who is always looking for the HONEST review, I can only give an honest review myself. Please believe me when I say I'd give this five stars no matter who had written it!

Here's the part where I wish I were a writer so I could do justice to this book. Alas, my reviews tend to read like student book reports (this is what I liked. this is what I didn't like. etc). So instead I'll just tell you who should read *Last Song Before Night*:

If you like high fantasy, read this book.

If you like well-drawn characters with complex, believable motivations behind their actions, read this book.

If you enjoy Guy Gavriel Kay's lyrical writing and masterfully bittersweet plots, read this book.

If you like Patricia McKillip's dreamy prose, read this book.

If you are tired of drawn-out series and just want to read an epic that stands alone, read this book.

If you are tired of the usual fantasy tropes and are looking for an original story, read this book.

If you are an artist or have a love for the arts, in any form, read this book.

And if you want to know more, read the other reviews already posted. The other reviewers have done a much more thorough job than I. I may not be a writer, but I'm a very experienced reader and I know good work when I see it!
