

Do Not Say We Have Nothing

Madeleine Thien

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Angela Lin's narration of this beautifully written novel makes this a listening experience worth savoring.

Madeleine Thien's *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* is a multigenerational saga depicting the lives of three classical musicians during the Chinese Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. Gripping, rhapsodic and heartbreaking, this is a novel replete with vivid characters and prescient themes. Narrator Angela Lin infuses the story with authenticity and vocal inflections that honor Thien's delicate, complex narrative.

Lin's voice provides a calming juxtaposition to the mournful opening of Thien's novel, and her empathy is evident in her subdued narration. The story begins with young Li-ling, also called by the anglicized version of her name, Marie, recalling the sorrow of her father's suicide amidst the backdrop of the Tiananmen Square massacre. Another young girl, Ai-ming, soon enters the novel, which threads together their personal histories and their country's history. Ai-ming's own stories reveal a deeply emotional relationship that developed between her father, Sparrow, Li-ling's father, Kai, and Sparrow's cousin, Zhuli, while they all attended the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

Lin deftly portrays each character with accuracy and range. Her intonation between exposition and dialogue is immediate and distinct. With a voice actor's ear for inflection, Lin also ably handles the modulation demanded by the English text, the Chinese words, the language of classical music, and Li-ling's mathematical language. The age of each character, from Li-ling's mother's English-as-a-second language staccato accent to Zhuli's exuberance and higher, youthful register, is made clear.

Do Not Say We Have Nothing is beautifully written novel about the brutality of political oppression and the eradication of art. Angela Lin's gifts as the narrator of Thien's moving tale make this a listening experience worth savoring.

MONICA CARTER (Audio 2017)

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