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# *To Love a Stranger*

## Information Kit

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# *To Love a Stranger* Description

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Sam and Jeannette have two things in common: a passion for music and a need to escape from themselves. In the fall of 1986, when President Reagan is in his second term, Elton John plays on the radio, and Spike Lee is conquering the box office, Sam and Jeannette meet in Virginia. Both of them have landed their first job with the Richmond Symphonic Artists, a small orchestra that's fighting to survive.

Jeannette, fragile and shadowed by demons from her past, quickly falls in love with the charismatic and brilliant Sam. She thinks he will bring her stability and redemption. But she doesn't know that he has secrets of his own, especially that the mystery disease AIDS, the so-called "gay plague" that fills the news and terrifies the American public, could touch his life.

As Sam and Jeannette struggle to save their orchestra, they look for deliverance in each other. But their past secrets—especially Sam's—threaten to destroy the future they're trying to build.

A beautiful debut novel filled with human emotion and an undeniable passion for music, *To Love a Stranger* explores a story of love and personal redemption that is impossible to forget.

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# *To Love a Stranger* Excerpts

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## **Power of Music**

“He dared to dream about a job that would let him stand up on a stage in front of a crowd and make the kind of music that would change the world. Music could do that, if you held the threads of it in your hands and gave it your soul to take into itself.”

“When you rehearsed, you treated phrases and even individual notes like pearls. You buffed them one at a time, strung them together with careful attention. There was no such thing as spending too much time on any one moment. All of them were essential.

“In performance, you forgot all of that.

“The notes were not pearls anymore. They were rubies and emeralds, amethysts and sapphires, or they were pieces of coloured tile in a mosaic, or they were drops of paint in the largest mural you ever saw. They flowed past and poured around you. You stood in a living stream of colour.

“When Sam stood in front of the orchestra with the white light on him and the audience behind, he could not imagine anyone not wanting to give up their whole self, down to the last drop, to this.”

““You might tell me, we know the notes, we’ve got the words. What does it matter if it’s not perfect?”

“He answered the question the way Gil had. ‘It matters because this music will only live through us. What becomes of it is our responsibility.’”

## Struggles of Being Gay

“Other people made different choices. Other people like Sam decided to be who they were, live openly with the partners they loved, and to hell with what anyone else thought. Sam knew that perfectly well. Gil himself had done it, living his life and washing his hands of the older brother who couldn’t stand the ‘shame’ Gil had dumped on their family. Sam had never had so much courage. He had never been able to forgive himself for destroying the home life he had loved, and more importantly, hurting Ma so badly.”

“‘You’ve always hated me! Let me give you something to hate!’ He had heard his own voice, and it had been too late to stop, there in the kitchen with Dad’s cold eyes on him and Ma standing silent with her hands twisted together. He had thrown the word ‘queer’ down in front of them, and the raw ugliness of his own voice stabbed him all the deeper as he clung to the image of Gil’s face in his mind. ‘Go ahead, Dad, tell me how fucked-up I am! Tell me how much you hate me now!’

*“It could not be true. Dad could not hate him, not really. Sam’s words rang in the silent room, and he held his breath and prayed with every nerve for something, something he couldn’t say in words, but if God would listen just once to someone so messed up, maybe He would understand. Sam knew He probably wouldn’t. All those Masses and Sunday school sessions had made it too clear that God hated people like him, but in this moment he couldn’t help pleading for help anyway. Maybe God would hear him. Maybe.”*

“Then his father’s mouth opened. Quiet words dropped out. ‘Get out of this house.’”

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# Praise for *To Love a Stranger*

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“Sam Kraychek is the Maestro, in total command of the small city orchestra he conducts. But the rest of Sam’s life refuses to give in to his control, and throughout this gentle, moving book, Sam struggles to get along with his father; he struggles with his religion; he struggles to come to grips with the impending death of his gay lover; and he struggles to keep secret the deepest parts of himself, especially from his soon-to-be-pregnant new wife. More than anything, Sam struggles to accept himself. *To Love A Stranger* is a novel filled with decent, loving people all seeking acceptance, of and from others, and from themselves most of all.”

- Mark Farrington, author of *Manion in Darkness*

“*To Love A Stranger* by Kris Faatz is a novel full of all kinds of love—big, messy, secret. It is a novel full of music and juicy orchestra drama rivalling *Mozart In The Jungle*. It is a novel full of both sweetness and sadness. Readers are safe in this author’s thoughtful hands, amidst these gorgeous words, in this world rich with the heady sounds of darkness, honesty, forgiveness. *To Love A Stranger* is written with the harmony of humanity in mind. *To Love A Stranger* is a song.”

- Leesa Cross-Smith, author of *Every Kiss A War*

“How well do we know the people we love? This question is at the heart of Kris Faatz’s beautifully written first novel. With Sam and Jeannette, Faatz has created two sympathetic, deeply flawed characters, driven by loneliness and a desire to belong. Set in the 1980s, at the height of the AIDS epidemic, their story unfolds with tragic inevitability. Compassionate and emotionally engaging, *To Love A Stranger* is a page-turner, a story that will resonate with the reader for a long time to come.”

- Geeta Kothari, author of *I Brake For Moose and Other Stories*

*“To Love A Stranger* captures your attention and heart immediately. I had to finish it in one sitting. Ms. Faatz writes with such vividness and her characters are so genuine that you are swept into their world, and you can’t wait to read what happens next.”

- Cecelia Prinkey, pianist

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# Kris Faatz Biography

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Kris Faatz (rhymes with skates) is a pianist, writer, and teacher. Before finding its home with Blue Moon Publishers, her debut novel *To Love a Stranger* was a finalist for the 2016 Schaffner Press Music in Literature Award. Kris's short fiction has appeared in a number of journals, including *Kenyon Review*, *Potomac Review*, *Reed*, and *Glassworks*.

Kris holds Bachelor's degrees in music and engineering from Swarthmore College and a Master of Music from the Peabody Conservatory. She has also been a contributor at the Kenyon Review Writers Workshops and the Sewanee Writers' Conference.

When not at work, Kris can often be found cooking or baking one-handedly so she can also hold up a book to read. Favourite writers include Barbara Kingsolver, Terry Pratchett, Jane Austen, Richard Adams, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and John Steinbeck. Kris also loves hiking and exploring the outdoors. She lives in Maryland with her husband Paul and cats Alafair and Templeton, who, like cats everywhere, know who's really in charge.



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# Kris Faatz Photo

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# Marketing Plan for *To Love a Stranger*

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- Book Launch Event(s)
- Local Author Tour
- Book Signings
- Reading and Performing Appearances
- Online Publicity Campaign
- Social Media Campaign including Goodreads, Facebook, and Twitter

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# Press Release for *To Love a Stranger*

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## For Immediate Release

Summary: Debut Maryland author Kris Faatz prepares to launch new literary novel

(TORONTO, ON) November 2016 - Multi-talented Kris Faatz is a pianist, studio teacher, lecturer, and performer, and is now preparing to add “published novelist” to that list with the release of her first literary fiction title, *To Love a Stranger*. This beautiful debut is filled with human emotion and an undeniable passion for music, while exploring a story of love and personal redemption amidst the fear of AIDS in 1980s America.

*To Love a Stranger* tells the story of Sam and Jeannette, who have two things in common: a deep passion for music and a driving need to escape from themselves. They meet in the fall of 1986, when they both arrive in Virginia to work with the Richmond Symphonic Artists, an orchestra fighting for its survival. Each of them sees the other as a lifeline. But as they struggle to save their orchestra and look for redemption in each other, their past secrets—especially Sam’s—threaten to destroy the future they’re trying to build.

*To Love a Stranger* was inspired by Kris’s work as a professional musician. When she was studying for her Master’s degree at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, she immersed herself in classical music, especially the backstage world of the professional symphony. The excitement, energy, and kaleidoscope of personalities in the symphony’s orbit fired her imagination and provided the seed for *To Love a Stranger*.

Kris states, “When I started writing *Stranger*, all I had was a character I desperately wanted to put on the page. As I worked on the book over the years, it took on a life of its own, dealing with larger issues of prejudice and social justice, and also getting out a message about classical music.

Classical performers across the United States are having a tougher and tougher time getting audiences. This music can thrill, empower, soothe, cheer, transform: we can't sit back and let it fade into obscurity. With *Stranger*, if one reader gets interested in this particular musical world, if one person buys a concert ticket or listens to a recording they've never heard before, I'll feel I've done my job."

When asked about writers who have inspired and influenced her, Kris says, "I admire Barbara Kingsolver tremendously. I love how she combines clear, taut storytelling with the ability to inform readers about larger issues, especially relating to social justice. Other favorites include F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Steinbeck. I'm also a huge fan of fantasy; Terry Pratchett is one of my great heroes."

*To Love a Stranger* is being published by Blue Moon Publishers and is being marketed by DigiWriting, both firms based in Toronto, Canada. It is scheduled to be released in May of 2017. For more information about *To Love a Stranger*, please visit [BlueMoonPublishers.com](http://BlueMoonPublishers.com) or contact [Talia at talia@digiwriting.com](mailto:Talia@digiwriting.com). To find out more about Kris, visit her website at [krisfaatz.com](http://krisfaatz.com).

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# Contact Information

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# Q&A with Kris Faatz

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**Q. Have you always wanted to be a writer?**

**A.** Not quite, but almost! I started telling stories when I was about three. Back then, I remember I had a long ongoing story about a character - named Allergic; I didn't know what it meant but I liked the sound - who was always going across the ocean (I don't know why; maybe to get to the other side). In first grade I wrote and illustrated my first original "book." It was called "The River," and it was about an evil king who dammed the river that was his subjects' only water source. I don't remember what his subjects did about it, but they won in the end, as they should. The dream of being a real published author came along in about fourth grade. By then I had a few author heroes, including Albert Payson Terhune and J.R.R. Tolkien. I loved to imagine doing the kind of work they did, and fantasized about holding a real book with my name on the cover.

**Q. What inspired you to begin writing your novel? Did you draw from personal experiences?**

**A.** *To Love a Stranger* got its start during a tough period in my professional life, when I was between jobs and feeling at a loss. I had gotten away from writing for a number of years, while I was training as a musician, and had kind of lost track of that ambition. In the winter of 2007, I got back into it while I was trying to figure out what to do with myself. I had an idea for a character - no story or plot, just a character - who was based on a gifted and charismatic musician I had worked with for a number of years. That character, who quickly developed a personality and a life of his own, took hold of my imagination. I still wasn't sure what his story was, but I had a gut feeling that it was important. I had to figure it out and tell it.

**Q. Which aspects of the writing process come most naturally to you?**

**A.** I love to brainstorm. Often I like to start with a character and get to know that person while I do other things: cook, drive, hike, play the piano, listen to music. I'll think of scenes and sketches involving that character, often scenes that will never be part of any written story, but they always tell me something about the person and help me see him or her more clearly. I like to flesh out my characters as fully as I can, because when I feel like I'm writing about someone I know, the words and the story come much more readily. I don't have to wonder how my character will react in a given situation. What I know about the character leads me forward.

**Q. Which aspects of the writing process present more of a challenge? How do you overcome them?**

**A.** Honestly, sometimes the toughest part is sitting down in the chair and actually working! My biggest hangup is that I'll have an idea, but when I sit down to work - as much as I tell myself that's exactly what I'm craving to do - I'll freeze up, terrified that either my idea isn't any good, or I can't possibly bring it to life on paper, or nobody will ever want to read it anyway, or... (etc., etc.). I spend a lot of time staring at blank Word documents and blinking cursors. Often I just have to kickstart myself. "Write one sentence." "Try for a page." Sometimes it helps to have one specific moment or scene that I'm looking forward to writing: "In this chapter, you know that Jeannette will tell Sam how she feels about him. That's going to be fun. Now get there." If I stare at the screen long enough, and tell myself firmly enough to write a sentence (and then not delete it), I can usually get into the groove and find the energy to forge ahead. Sometimes that doesn't happen, though, and in that case I have to get up and do something else, and let my brain work on the story while I keep my hands busy.

**Q. Do you have a writing routine, and if so, what does it look like?**

**A.** Routine? I'm not an organized person as a rule. ;) I've learned I'm a kind of feast-or-famine writer: when I'm in a project, it's all I want to do, and I'll spend as many hours a day on it as humanly possible. When I'm not actively working on something, for instance if I've just finished a big project and am hunting around for the next idea, often I don't write at all. During those times I try to get on top of the rest of life, for when the next "feast" period hits. (During the "famine" times I also often get cranky; without a project, at least something to brainstorm and chew on, I feel kind of unmoored.) When I'm actively working, though, I like to write first thing in the morning. I'll have breakfast and then sit down and try to put in a solid couple of hours, or work until I run out of ideas or energy, whatever comes first. It usually helps to take a break and go for a walk in there somewhere. Often I want to keep working past the point when I have energy and/or time, and in that case I'll try to come back to the project later in the day. Sometimes I can hook into it again, but sometimes I can't, and have to step back and let my brain recharge for the next day. When I'm in a project, though, and the energy is flowing, and I'm hanging out with the characters in my imagination, there's no greater joy.

**Q. Do you have any quirky writing habits, such as a favourite snack or music playlist?**

**A.** Favourite snack: pea crisps. Also tea, especially lavender-chamomile. I always like to have a cup of tea on my desk while I'm working, though a lot of times it goes cold before it gets consumed. During a writing period, sometimes I need to give my brain a few minutes' break, and in that case I'll pull up one song on YouTube. Lately it's often been Elle King's "Exes and Ohs," or Sheppard's "Geronimo." Playing the piano is also really helpful; if I'm totally stuck, I'll practise for a while instead of writing. Pieces by J.S. Bach and Domenico Scarlatti, in particular, let my brain start working again. I

think their precision and cleanness, and the way my fingers have to work to play them, give my creativity a jump.

**Q. From where do you draw your inspiration for your vivid characters?**

A. Often, a character will grow out of a person I know, whether someone I know well or someone I've only met once or twice but who has struck me for some reason (maybe the force of their personality, or my sense of some internal conflict or challenge). My image of the real person creates a picture in my head. Then the character will start to take on a life of his or her own. It's very important to me, especially if I'm working with a character based on someone I know well, to make deliberate changes to that person. I never want to feel that I'm trying to put a real person on paper; in addition to how that person might feel about it, being restricted by biographical knowledge can block creativity. If I make some changes, in appearance or personality or some other way, the character becomes a new individual, and the story can develop however it wants.

**Q. Can you describe your revision and/or editorial process?**

A. Editing has been tough for me for a long time. I'm finally learning how important it is to put a piece aside for a while before I try to work with it; I've tended to be so anxious to "get it right" that I'll jump in with a piece that's just too fresh, so that I can't see what needs to happen to it. With *To Love a Stranger*, that process was especially difficult. I had such a strong image of what I wanted the book to be, and was at the same time so scared that I couldn't make it happen, that I kept trying to mess with it and change it when I couldn't detach from it enough to see what it really was. It's hard to fix something when you don't know how it's broken! What finally worked there was to put the book aside for more than a year and work on other things. I've gotten better, in general, at putting projects aside for a while, and coming back to them with fresher and clearer eyes. When I do read them again, I tend to read them very quickly, and the revision process itself is quite intense and quite fast. I'll spend a week or two of very focused time re-reading and making changes, meanwhile putting everything else on hold. I find it helps to work quickly so that I can keep the whole project in my head. I actually love revision, when I can step back enough to enjoy it. It's like putting a puzzle together. You find the pieces that fit, and you change the ones that don't, and it's very satisfying when you put everything where it needs to be.

**Q. Have you had anything published in the past? Are you working on writing anything currently?**

A. I've never published a book before. I do have some short stories out, in various online and print journals. Right now I'm between projects and am playing with a couple of different ideas. The one that seems to have the most energy, and the strongest grip on my imagination, is a new novel that's inspired by some family history. I like a story to have a big picture, in addition to the characters' day-to-day lives and interactions, and in this case I'm looking at the women's lib movement in the United



States. My main character is in the vanguard of liberated women, though she isn't in that position because she chose to be. She ends up there when her life takes unexpected turns. I've only done a few very preliminary sketches for the project, so I'm not sure how it's going to go, but I'm having fun playing with it.

**Q. What have you learned through your writing?**

**A.** This is really a terrific question, because when I look back at the time when I started *To Love a Stranger*, coming up on ten years ago, I see what a different person and different writer I was then. I hadn't planned on writing becoming such a driving passion, much less my major professional aspiration. When I started the book, I thought I would have a draft in a couple of months. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. The process of learning to write, and learning to write this book in particular, has taught me so much about how to be patient in learning, and especially how to listen and absorb feedback. In order to learn - which was hard - I've needed to let go of a lot of pride and a LOT of insecurity. I wanted to think I was better than I was. I wanted to be right; but eventually I understood that the work was much more important, and that I had to ask what the work needed and be willing to make mistakes, because that was how I could get better. I've also learned about committing to a project for the long haul. It's like growing a tree: it won't happen quickly, but the end result is more than worth the time.