

## Reader's Guide

### NOCTURNE - A Novel with a Soundtrack:

#### A Conversation with author Harrison Gradwell Slater

Q. What was your inspiration to write a novel based on Chopin, and to include a piano CD of his music?

A. As a pianist, the music of Chopin captured my interest from a very early age. When I decided to write *Nocturne*, a novel about rediscovered diaries related to Chopin, the piano music played role from the very beginning of the research and writing. Perhaps the idea came from a review written in *The Boston Globe* about my first novel, *Night Music*. Richard Dyer wrote something like, "Slater gets as close as anyone can to reproducing in prose the sound and effect of Mozart's music, which provides a soundtrack to the action." The "soundtrack" concept had been important to my descriptions of Mozart's music for *Night Music* (which was optioned for a film) but the CD I recorded of Mozart's music was not actually tied in with the narrative. For *Nocturne*, I decided to integrate the music into the text ... to make it an indispensable part of the novel.

Q. How were you able to incorporate Chopin's music into a contemporary novel?

A. Initially, the use of music in *Nocturne* was to help the reader. Whenever a piano work by Chopin was mentioned in the diaries, or in the contemporary narrative, I added a CD TRACK marker, so that the reader could hear the work immediately without having to look up recordings and order many different CDs.

Q. The concept changed?

A. Yes, you could say that it evolved in a very short time. When I started book readings for *Nocturne*, I played CD tracks (not necessarily mentioned in the text) that evoked the character of the narrative. Certain works of Chopin enhanced the moods and textures dramatically, and I realized that Chopin's music could provide a virtual soundtrack for the novel. The audience reaction was overwhelming.

Q. Did you go back and edit *Nocturne* to accommodate the changes in the concept?

A. No, the way the novel was written and edited was already fairly radical and I didn't want to confuse the reader, who was dealing with a new approach to reading novels. It's already a historical new concept: A novel with a soundtrack, performed by the author. *Nocturne* works well with the present CD TRACK markers, and presently the reader has the option of listening to the entire CD while reading, or to play it only when the particularly piano work is mentioned. Or, not to listen at all while reading, which is what many readers are accustomed to. After testing it out for several years, I was reassured that, even without an explanation about how to use the accompanying CD, readers found it easy to use. There was never a single problem.

Q. How are you going to take *Nocturne* to the level of a novel with a virtual soundtrack?

A. Before the final printing, there was the possibility of adding (in color) a small CD TRACK marker at each point in the novel best suited for a soundtrack. For example, the entire last scene in the novel (Chapter Forty-Two) calls for CD TRACK 22, almost from the beginning, even before the piano work is mentioned in the text.

Q. You decided not to change the CD markers of where the music enters?

A. I chose to keep the music closely tied in with where each particular work of Chopin is introduced in the text. However, this will change with Books on Tape. The novel will be read aloud with the music fading in and out wherever it is best suited for effect, not just when it is relevant to the text, literally like a soundtrack for a film.

Q. Where else in Nocturne could the reader play the piano CD as a soundtrack?

A. The moments that call out most for a soundtrack are, for example, the last scene in Chapter Six, with Clifton looking out over Montmartre, which is being slowly enveloped by dark storm clouds. Chopin's Prelude in E Flat Minor (CD TRACK 20) conveys his disturbed state of mind, and the direction the narrative is taking. It also provides a leitmotif for the character of Clifton.

Q. A leitmotif?

A. For example, the Nocturne in D Flat Major (CD TRACK 1) provides a leitmotif – a theme representing a character, situation or idea – for Artemisia, and of Matthew's vision of her. It should accompany her entrance in Chapter Five, and her appearances throughout Nocturne.

Q. Other places where the reader could play the CD as a soundtrack?

A. For the opening of the novel, the Nocturne in C Sharp Minor (CD TRACK 2) should be played immediately. It represents the main theme of the novel, and the love story between Matthew and Artemisia. Later, the love scene between Matthew and Artemisia, which forms the arch of the novel, is intimately tied in with the Nocturne in E Minor (CD TRACK 15) with its undercurrent of foreboding, interrupted by an Italian vocal duet that Chopin wrote in between the turbulent waves of sound. This nocturne can begin at the opening of Chapter Twenty-Two. And the preludes of Chopin on the CD, with their wild and dramatic changes of mood, can be used freely throughout the reading of Nocturne.

Q. How do you see the future of novels with a soundtrack?

A. It's a concept that's going to take off, particularly in this age of multimedia, interactive media and new forms of communication, all which will be expected by readers in the future. Nocturne is just at the beginning of a new era of experimental trends in the publishing industry.