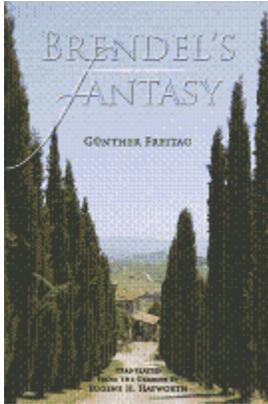


Book Club Discussion Guide

***Brendel's Fantasy* by Günther Freitag**



Without any explanation to his family, the German manufacturer Höller has decided to sell the family business and use the proceeds to pursue his new found dreams. While his wife is in the middle of defending the most important client of her career, (a shady politician accused of funneling money from the government coffers), Höller slips away to Castelnuovo, a sleepy village in the hills of Tuscany. Here he intends to build the perfect concert hall, a place to stage the ultimate performance of Schubert's "Wanderer Fantasy". While waiting for a letter from Alfred Brendel, Höller wanders through the Italian countryside, making friends with a retired professor, the landlady at his *pension*, a dwarf employed by the mysterious *Sindaico*, and an entourage of village misfits who stand in the way of his success. Höller is plagued with fears of his impending death and the hallucinations that accompany his growing illness. Will Brendel agree to perform the 'Fantasy'? Will the villagers let him build the concert hall? A compelling, illuminating portrait of mortality and desire.

In Günther Freitag's recent book, music plays an important role. Mr. Freitag himself started playing piano at the age of 8 and continues to play today. Schubert, together with Mahler and Schönberg, are his favourite composers. In his opinion, Alfred Brendel, the Austrian pianist who stopped giving concerts in 2008, is one of the best interpreters of Schubert's music in the world today.

Discussion Questions

How does the protagonist in *Brendel's Fantasy* use the the music of Schubert to find meaning in his prognosis?

The main character in Günther Freitag's novel *Bienenkrieg (War of Bees)* is a music critic who lost suddenly loses hic capacity to hear. After this illness, he also loses his job in the cultural department of the newspaper and had to re-arrange his life. These extreme situations color Freitag's work. In addition to the protagonist's illness in *Brendel's Fantasy*, what other extreme conditions occur that move the story forward?

The major part of the novel is situated in a small Tuscan village. According to Mr. Freitag, this village is a micro-system in a metaphoric sense, playing the role of the Italian State and society of today, especially under the government of the Prime Minister Berlusconi. What parallels can you draw between the village and the contemporary Italian state?

Although it is never specifically named, the flashbacks in *Brendel's Fantasy* all occur in Vienna. How does this knowledge change your overall understanding of the story?