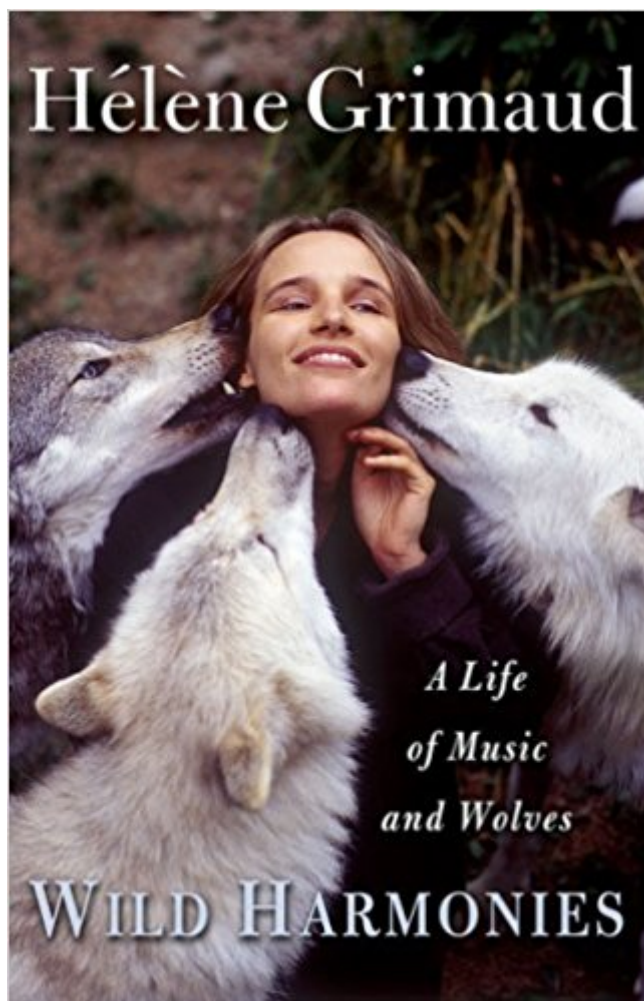


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Wild Harmonies: A Life Of Music And Wolves



Synopsis

A celebrated French pianist's poignant story of her journey from her early days as a student in Paris to her life as the founder of a wolf conservation center in upstate New York. A gifted pianist from a young age, Hélène Grimaud made her first recording at the age of fifteen and won the French equivalent of a Grammy at sixteen. She is a classical music star whose concerts continue to draw sellout crowds all over Europe and North America. But it wasn't until she met her first wolf that she discovered there was something missing in her life. Late one night in 1991, Grimaud encountered a wolf-dog hybrid in Florida and felt an immediate, instinctual connection to the animal-one that the wolf also seemed to share. Determined to do what she could to protect this threatened species, she committed her time and resources to becoming certified to found her own wolf preserve on the grounds of her home in New York State. Today, the master pianist acts as a tireless advocate for wolves, a species she believes has been unfairly demonized throughout history. In turn, the animals have given her a sense of freedom that she has never before experienced, even as an artist. In a beautifully rendered personal story that weaves the tale of a musical prodigy's rise to stardom with one of an animal lover learning to communicate on a level as primal as music, Hélène Grimaud touches, astonishes, and delights with her remarkable insight and passion.

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Customer Reviews

A renowned classical pianist, Helene Grimaud explores life with passion, stating, "I have never had the feeling of a paradise lost, but of a paradise to be found." Her islands of bliss are classical music

and the sanctuary she created for wolves. Growing up in France, her talent for the piano was evident early on, and at 13 she became the youngest student at the National Conservatory of Music. A determined prodigy who shouldered responsibility for her path even when she stumbled, she shaped her musical gift in her own way. She met her first wolf in Florida, and the intense recognition seemed to be mutual. Grimaud's deep friendship with the wolf and her owner, Dennis, inspired her to establish a wolf sanctuary in upstate New York and to become a wolf advocate. As Grimaud celebrates both the transcendental power of music and the beauty, spirit, and significance of wolves, her eloquent and inspiring reflections embody her love for and total involvement in her work and nature. Pamela Crossland Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Born in Aix-en-Provence, Hélène Grimaud was accepted into the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris at the age of thirteen. Her international concert career began in 1987, and she performs regularly worldwide. She lives with her husband and four wolves.

Hélène Grimaud, 45, was born on November 7, 1969 in Aix-en-Provence, France, a city-commune about 19 miles north of Marseilles. A world-famous classical pianist, Ms. Grimaud has written in *Wild Harmonies: A Life of Music and Wolves*, 2006 (the English translation from the French of *Variations sauvages* / "Wild Variations," 2003) an intelligent and heart-warming memoir. Hélène confesses to being an "Un" child--Uncontrollable, Unmanageable, Unsatisfied, Undisciplined, Unadaptable, Unpredictable--restless and subject to sudden passions. Her parents enrolled her in martial arts (judo), tennis, dance. She was Unfit at all. And school bored her to tears. "[There was] something in me," she writes, "that wanted to get out, to express itself, to escape." One day her father formed an hypothesis, "Perhaps it's an excess of mental rather than physical energy. What if we were to enroll Hélène in a music class?" She was indeed enrolled in a music class at the age of 7, and on the first day of classes she encountered the piano and the kind of her music that would change her life. Hélène writes of that occasion: "She [Francoise Tarit, her music teacher] sat down at the piano and played a little piece by Schumann. And like the genie that emerged from Aladdin's lamp, a magical atmosphere filled that music salon. As if in a dream, distant feelings stirred in me--or rather they were born in my very depths, my furthest interior. I remember it as if it were yesterday, the enchantment I felt, as though I had been seized by the idea that music evokes. I had the physical sensation of an opening, the impression that a path opened in the wall and a luminous, straight path led from it toward a harmonious revelation. I remember breathing deeper, more expansively." The rest, as they say, is history: Ms. Grimaud went on to win

international fame, playing concerts in the major cities of Europe and the United States."The Romantic repertoire," she writes, "has always enchanted me"--the music of Brahms, Beethoven, Rachmaninoff, Chopin, Schumann, Debussy, and Liszt. Other favorite composers include Bach, Mozart, Ravel, Strauss, Gershwin, Bartok, Berg, and Shostakovich. Many of her performances can be enjoyed at YouTube.com. I especially recommend her renditions of these piano concertos: Brahms First, Rachmaninoff's Second, and Beethoven's Fifth. Nietzsche once wrote: "For believe me! -- the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is: to live dangerously! Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas!" There is something of the Nietzschean spirit in Helene Grimaud. In her life and in her music she is not afraid to take chances and make mistakes. Not to worry! Her daring and adventurous approach to playing the piano creates the music afresh. Her wild, barely domesticated play is tempered by hard work, a restless seeking for quality, and a stunning creativity through which her volcanic individuality shines. And then Ms. Grimaud experienced a second epiphany, when Alawa, a she-wolf with glowing eyes, crossed her path on a road in Florida. With this barely domesticated animal she immediately bonded. Thus began the second great passion of her life, a love that led her to found the Wolf Conservation Center in South Salem, New York. This memoir is the engaging story of a stunningly talented young woman whose soul is inhabited by the spirit of the wolves. A wild vitality, a ferocious passion, animates her life and music. What a remarkable human being is Hélène Grimaud!

I like the format of the book; the way Grimaud alternates between the myth, legend and folklore of wolves with her own individualistic musical biography and how the two come together at the end when she meets her first wolf in the flesh. "I have found my equilibrium... located between the wolves, the wildest form of nature, and the most refined music between heaven and earth." I admire her desire to do things her own way; learning English by watching hundreds of subtitled movies, dropping out of formalistic conservatory training against the advice of nearly everyone in favor of self-teaching through master classes, armed with a freedom and fierce individuality that female performers as Fanny Mendelssohn and Nannerl Mozart were never allowed. One of my favorite moments in the book is when told by teachers, "Don't come back to class unless you can play the required program," Grimaud disappears from school to teach herself Chopin's Second Piano Concerto, only to be chastised for doing so. "Oh, so I had taken the statement... (too) literally?" The book is excellently translated by Ellen Hinley, so it is a pleasure to read and savor the words as well as the story.

Love her style - loved her story!

talented lady

Great

Horowitz once said that a great musician must first of all be well read and liberally educated. Hélène Grimaud not only satisfies those requirements but even writes her own books! Although she was a prodigy she is not of the machine-like version. Her aesthetic philosophy springs from personal experience and development which informs and enriches her music immeasurably! She weaves her interest in animals (she has a wolf preserve in upstate NY), culture and music into a single fabric. She could be a beauty who loves wolves and plays well but she is not a packaged gimmick. Her words take us from the nature of animals to the nature of man and how these are all relate to music as a cultural expression. Her music takes us on mythical forays in search of the mystery of what music is and what it does to us. (Elle "nous laisse devant l'absolu.") Do yourself a favor, get her book and spend the entire night reading her and then have a long breakfast sipping on tea and listening to her.

Helene Grimaud is a wonderful pianist. I enjoy her music and when I saw this book, I tried it, read it, and liked it. At this price it is a great bargain, I think. This is autobiography, and tells how she got out of a frenetic childhood through music, how she met her first wild wolf, and a bit about the sanctuary she made for wolves on her New York farm. Though you learn something about her parents and friends other than the wolves, she is very devoted to them. The book is translated from "Variations sauvages," a best seller in France; it is sometimes mentioned as "Something Wild," instead of "Wild Harmonies," the title in the U.S. Another book of hers that has sold extraordinarily well in France apparently has yet to be translated. She writes with great passion, about her life, her music, her education, her move to the United States, and the wolves. These days about 20,000 youngsters visit her sanctuary every year; and she is helping the federal government with plans to possibly reintroduce wolves in important places they once lived in. What a great thing to do with celebrity, with her determination. Her musicianship is superb also.

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