

Tony's Wife

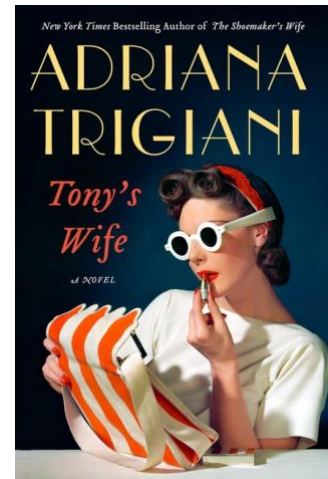
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By Adriana Trigiani

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Introduction

Set in the lush Big Band era of the 1940s and World War II, this spellbinding saga from beloved *New York Times* bestselling author Adriana Trigiani tells the story of two talented working class kids who marry and become a successful singing act, until time, temptation, and the responsibilities of home and family derail their dreams.



Shortly before World War II, Chi Chi Donatelli and Saverio Armandonada meet one summer on the Jersey shore and fall in love. Both are talented and ambitious, and both share the dream of becoming singers for the legendary orchestras of the time: Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman. They're soon married, and it isn't long before Chiara and Tony find that their careers are on the way up as they navigate the glamorous worlds of night clubs, radio, and television. All goes well until it becomes clear that they must make a choice: Which of them will put their ambitions aside to raise a family and which will pursue a career? And how will they cope with the impact that decision has on their lives and their marriage?

From the Jersey shore to Las Vegas to Hollywood, and all the dance halls in between, this multi-layered story is vivid with historical color and steeped in the popular music that serves as its score. *Tony's Wife* is a magnificent epic of life in a traditional Italian family undergoing seismic change in a fast paced, modern world. Filled with vivid, funny, and unforgettable characters, this richly human story showcases Adriana Trigiani's gifts as a storyteller and her deep understanding of family, love, and the pursuit of the American dream.

Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways are the historic time and place of the novel important to the story?
2. How are Saverio and his father different? Why is Leone so disappointed in his son? How does this affect Saverio later in life?
3. Leone argues that, "Life is not what you want to do. It's what you have to do." To what extent is this true or not? How does each character balance necessity and desire?
4. How might Saverio's heartbreaking experience with choir mate Cheryl Dombroski affect him in his future romantic relationships? What does it take to recover from such disappointment and have healthier relationships?

5. For Saverio—and millions of people—music is “a respite.” Why is this? How does listening to music work to make people feel better? What does playing or performing music possibly add to the experience?
6. What is special about Chi Chi Donatelli? In what ways is she different from her sisters, Barbara and Lucille? Why does Chi Chi feel particularly close to their father?
7. Mariano Donatelli tells his daughters that, “It’s good to have big dreams.” How does this affect each of them? How does a philosophy so different from Leone Armandonada’s change the way Mariano lives? To what extent is Barbara’s claim that dreams should be backed up “with a weekly paycheck” important or discouraging?
8. Discussing the idea of marriage with Saverio, Chi Chi claims that, “there’s not much in it for the girl.” What does she mean? Why, despite this modern idea, does she eventually agree to marry Saverio? What’s the best way to make a marriage equitable?
9. Why can’t Saverio stay faithful, even to Chi Chi, the true love of his life? To what extent is it culturally allowed for men? What *is* love? Why do people mistreat people they supposedly love?
10. What’s the significance of Saverio agreeing to change his name to Tony Arma? What’s important about a name? In what ways is Chi Chi naming their son after Tony’s father against his wishes justified or not?
11. What is important about food and home-cooked meals throughout the novel?
12. What is Chi Chi’s relationship to music, as a writer as well as a performer? How does she protect this relationship or not throughout her career? What does it mean that listening to Sy Oliver’s band play *Uptown Blues* in a small club was for Chi Chi “like church”?
13. What makes Chi Chi a good songwriter? What does she understand about people that allows her to write successful popular songs?
14. Mariano instructs Chi Chi to have the courage to stay committed to “the unspoken pact” to do “the thing you were born to do.” How does a person decide or discover this? Why did Chi Chi have “to leave home to become the person she was meant to be”? What kinds of things prevent people from pursuing their purpose?
15. How does music serve people experiencing great hardship like the Great Depression or WWII? What is the message about music that will come from “some kid from a slum who has seen it all”?
16. What social and institutional forces make it difficult for Chi Chi to be financially independent and responsible? How does she develop and protect her earnings throughout her career? Why is Tony so financially inept?
17. What is important to Chi Chi and Tony about family? How did each experience support or not from theirs? How does this affect how each of them behave as they create their own family? What should a person do if his or her family is unsupportive?

18. What important parts of her life or purpose does Chi Chi sacrifice once she's married to Saverio? How does this happen? What might it take for a woman to maintain her professional or artistic pursuits while having children?
19. Why doesn't Chi Chi ever remarry? Is this a healthy avoidance of an institution that "didn't seem like a good deal," or a sacrifice of her own additional happiness?
20. Mariano wisely instructed Chi Chi to identify and pursue what was sacred to her. What does this mean? What is sacred to you?