



## Devil's Trill

*Gerald Elias*

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*From concert violinist Gerald Elias comes this debut set in the classical music world about the theft of a priceless violin.*

Daniel Jacobus is a blind, reclusive, crotchety violin teacher living in self-imposed exile in rural New England. He spends his time chain-smoking, listening to old LPs, and occasionally taking on new students, whom he berates in the hope that they will flee.

Jacobus is drawn back into the world he left behind when he decides to attend The Grimsley Competition at Carnegie Hall. The young winner of this competition is granted the honor of playing the Piccolino Stradivarius, a uniquely dazzling three-quarter-size violin that has brought misfortune to all who possessed it over the centuries. But the violin is stolen before the winner of the competition has a chance to play it, and Jacobus is the primary suspect.

With the help of his friend and former musical partner, Nathaniel Williams, his new student, Yumi Shinagawa, and several quirky sidekicks, Jacobus sets out to prove his innocence and find the stolen Piccolino Strad. Will he be successful? The quest takes him through the halls of wealth and culture, across continents to Japan, and leads him to a...murder.

*Devil's Trill gives the reader a peek into the world of classical music, with its backstabbing teachers and performers, venal patrons, and shady violin dealers. It is the remarkable beginning of a wonderful new series.*

## Devil's Trill Details

Date : Published August 18th 2009 by Minotaur Books (first published August 12th 2009)

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Author : Gerald Elias

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## From Reader Review Devil's Trill for online ebook

### Rebecca McKinnon says

This is very different from things I've been reading lately but I loved it. A mystery set in the world of classical music. And it's done well. I would expect no less from this author, who once was a chamber music teacher of mine.

I loved seeing the different types of people who truly exist in this much-misunderstood world. A lot of people have a hard time believing music has the kind of underworld portrayed here: greed, abuse, backstabbing, etc.--but it's very, very common. (Not the murders, although there would be a bunch if people thought they could get away with it!) These were portrayed very well.

It reminded me of some of the reasons I stepped away from this world!

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### X says

A cynical though likely not altogether inaccurate view of the classical music world and competitions. I enjoyed all the music references.

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### Elderberrywine says

Alas, this book fell into the, for me, *Moby Dick* vortex. You know, when you're zipping along and Mr. Dick is frolicking about, and Cap'n A is chewing the scenery left and right, and suddenly the author feels compelled to Tell You About A Thing. In Melville's case, whale blubber. In this author's case, violin bows. Admittedly more palatable, and yet the same grinding halt.

All right, this is a first novel from a professional violinist and music professor, so one can admit to a certain tolerance to certain enthusiasms. And I must also admit to a quarter century of being a violist in orchestras good, mediocre, and incredibly bad, so there is a certain bias here. (Admittedly we may well be the scorned stepchild of the string section, but those after-beats aren't going to play themselves - yes, *Sleigh Ride*, I AM giving you the hairy eyeball.)

So points for the main character - a blind crotchety violin teacher/semi-detective. And also points for hating on high-stakes youth music competitions. But the writing could have used some tightening up.

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### Lourdes Venard says

At the Grimsley Competition for young violinists at Carnegie Hall, a rare and valuable Stradivarius violin is stolen, even though it had been in a locked room and guarded by two security guards. Daniel Jacobus, a blind, reclusive and crotchety former violinist who now teaches, is a suspect -- he dislikes the competition and the group that hosts it, the Musical Arts Project Group. As he tries to help solve the theft -- with Nathaniel Williams, the investigator for the company that had insured the violin, and Yumi Shinagawa, a 19-year-old student fresh from Japan -- a MAP member is murdered, and Jacobus is a suspect in the murder, as

well. The story is written by someone who has been a violinist, composer, conductor and teacher -- so there's much insight into the world of music, and the fierce competition that is sometimes seen. And Jacobus, for unlikable as he can be, is a compelling protagonist. For a debut novel, Devil's Trill is good. But there are still some annoying quirks. For example, the author tries to be too cutesy with puns. It's not just one character who loves musical puns -- but just about every character. After awhile, it grates, and actually lowers the enjoyment of what otherwise is a good mystery.

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### **Jeana says**

This book starts off very strong with the backstory of the Stradivarius violin around which the entire story is going to revolve. And to be honest, I actually kind of liked the rough and unlikeable protagonist. I liked the way he looked at music and the music world, even though he doesn't want to be liked. I liked his dour attitude and the way he shocked people, just because he really didn't care.

The plotline is a little complex and there was a little bit too much expository for my taste. I think our murderer at the end admitted a little more than was necessary and than what a murderer would admit. I guess I've never understood why murderers or criminals admit things in the TV shows and movies and books that incriminate them, but I guess that's just this murder-mystery genre that I really don't read that often.

I picked this book up because my daughter and I go to the Utah Symphony often, and we saw this book for sale at the symphony store. I was intrigued I liked learning about the classical music world. I was also interested about the author's opinion on forcing kids to do too much too soon. It seems like everyone's in such a rush all the time.

A pretty good read.

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### **Jolene Mercadante says**

I find this book very difficult to review for one reason. Mr. Elias clearly seems to have a negative bias toward the American Pit Bull Terrier. I know one might find this unusual in a book that has to do with classical music and murder/mystery, and I certainly find it unusual as well. This is the first book in the trilogy about Daniel Jacobus, a blind violin teacher who seems to keep finding trouble. I so looked forward to this trilogy since its setting is in Massachusetts and I love reading books that follow the same characters throughout. It is very well written and I was very sad to stop reading the series with the second book (Danse Macabre) but my heart could not take any more negative references towards pit bulls. As someone involved in animal advocacy and specifically in the advocacy of pit bulls, I could not continue reading Mr. Elias, who seems to use every chance to perpetuate unjust stereotypes toward this sweet, beautiful breed. Knowing and witnessing what happens to these loving, living creatures every day who desperately need our help out of their tortuous, abusive situations, I cannot, in all conscientiousness, keep reading. What a waste of great talent! As a librarian and avid reader, I find too many good books out there to waste my time with books that have such a negative agenda. Cannot recommend for this reason. Sorry.

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### **Val says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this novel. I found it under the new authors section in the bookstore while trying to find

a good mystery. Even though the story (from the book jacket) reminded me somewhat of the film "The Red Violin," I decided to give it a chance - and I'm glad I did!.

I couldn't help but feel and care for the character Daniel Jacobus. As harsh as he presents himself, you find out that he really has emotions and feelings suppressed under that hard armour.

The overall storyline was suspenseful and not at all overbearing or boring, for that matter. I find that sometimes authors describe a certain situation/character a bit too much, therefore distracting me from what is essentially going on.

I do have to note that if I did not have some background in music, I may not have been able to appreciate it as much as I did. I grew up playing the violin and piano myself and found that music knowledge to be very helpful. I also have to say that those without some musicality might have a hard time understanding. Though it might also instill a new appreciation or even curiosity.

In all I **loved** the novel and highly recommend :)

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## Thomas says

Sadly I had to give up on this one about a third of the way through.

I know, "why bother reviewing a book you didn't read??"...right?

I WANTED to like this (I live in Salt Lake City where the author currently works). So I really gave it my all and chewed through as much as I could...

The themes and characters had some real promise, but Elias seemed to genericize them into people I did not care about. Then the story just started seeming like a "standard issue" mystery novel - bleh. I went into this thing far more than I would have with any other book I did not like, out of respect for the author.

If, by 1/3 of a novel, I cannot find anything compelling me to continue, then why waste my time? I am familiar with "slow starting" books, no problem with that. Oddly, this one actually started swiftly (the brief tale of the violin's origin was very well done) but then it petered out, guttering away slowly like a candle flame struggling to remain alive.

If I was involved the business-side of symphonic music, all the insider info and terminology might well make this an entertaining and interesting book.

I leave the book 1/3 reviewed, with full disclosure. I read A LOT, so I wish to state that the fact that I read 1/3 only is not something I take lightly or simply something I did out of laziness.

Nuff said.

## Courtney says

OH MY GOD I FINISHED READING A BOOK. Not quite 7 months. I'm on a roll, people.

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## Julie Failla Earhart says

I really wanted to love Gerald Elias' debut thriller, *Devil's Trill*. I really, really, really wanted to love it. Really.

According to the jacket, the story has everything: classical music; a Stradivarius violin, in particular the Piccolino, supersititions, a crotchety protagonist, a great cover. Everything that makes *Devil's Trill* sound like the fireplace read of the Fall. Now, I'm not one to give up easily. After all, I did read every word of Peter Straub's *Koko*. But Elias needs to do what he knows best and that is sticking with playing the violin. The main protagonist is Daniel Jacobus, a blind, reclusive violin teacher, who had the talent to win the prestigious Grimsley Competition at Carnegie Hall when he was less than thirteen years old. Jacobus attended the latest Grimsley, only to be ignored, berated, and accused of stealing the Piccolino.

Daniel enlists his best friend and former musical partner, Nathaniel Williams, and a brand new student, Yumi Shinagawam to prove his innocence and find the stolen instrument. The jacket refers to the trio as "quirky sidekicks," but Elias was going for political correctness. Jacobus is an old white guy, Williams is a robust African American, and Yumi is young, Japanese, and female. They don't work.

The writing is boring, pure and simple. I was able to tolerate only one-hundred-and-nineteen pages before I couldn't take it any more. There is no tension. The dialogue is inane and does not push the story forward. The haphazard trio's characterization is over the top.

There is no doubt that Elias knows his stuff. His knowledge shines through and, while it can get too detailed at times, it doesn't get in the way. *Devil's Trill* is supposed to be the beginning of a new series. This is one reader who won't be holding her breath until the next book hits the shelves.

Review originally appeared on [www.armchairinterviews.com](http://www.armchairinterviews.com).

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## Janine Southard says

Ah, another book I gave up on reading.

Let me start by saying that the Prologue is brilliant. Elias writes it like an academic introduction, and I had to check the copyright page to be sure that "all characters and events portrayed" were fictitious. It also weaves in the pre-novel tragedy of our protagonist, a virtuoso violinist who went blind at the height of his career.

Sadly, the book goes downhill from there. The next section is an historical intro to a violin. Elias somehow manages to make scandal, sex, death, and triumph seem almost boring. But! Had the rest of the novel packed in so many enticing themes, I'd probably have finished it. It may even have won three stars.

No. When we finally reach chapter one, we are not-so-delighted to find a whiny protagonist and a whole lot of "tell, not show." Elias fills paragraph after paragraph with such un-riveting sentences as "Jacobus was depressed."

At the risk of sounding like a high school English teacher: Don't tell me he's depressed. Show me his depression. Tell me about the dishes that have piled up in the sink over the last few days that he can't find the energy to do. Or the fact that he's going out tonight so he figures he ought to take his first shower of the month. Tell me about the full container of Prozac his doctor prescribed three months ago.

Or, instead of saying "Jacobus didn't like him much", Elias could make a diary entry.

#### **Things I Despise**

1. That bastard Martin Lilburn
2. Kids whose parents force them to play music
3. Cold weather

I think the editor A. Victoria Mixon said (and I paraphrase) that modern mainstream literature has fallen into a "tell, don't show" rut. Critics believe that a book can only be good if it's difficult to read. She likes to draw a contrast to 1940s pulps, which contain better writing than highly regarded books today.

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#### **Karen says**

This was an acceptable read. The protagonist is quite unlikeable, which is always dangerous ground for an author to tread. The reader who will most appreciate this mystery will be someone with a reasonably strong interest in "classical" music, who will also preferably actually be a violinist. This limits the potential audience quite a bit. Because the detailed musical aspects were interesting and accurate, I stuck it out, but this one won't appeal to many general mystery readers.

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#### **Terrence says**

Alright, so I'm a violinist, and New York and Japanese culture appeals to me. Needless to say, this review is heavily biased. Here goes.

Elias knows what he is talking about. Being an enthusiastic musician himself, when he's on a roll talking about music and philosophy associated to it, he paints some pretty pictures and some very intriguing perspectives of it.

The characters in this book are either hit or miss. For me, it was a hit. I loved how each character was almost comical in their descriptions. The main character is a cranky, blind, smoking, rude, yet loyal to music. Each character adds great tidbits of humor every here and there that keeps this novel entertaining along its mystery on who stole the evil violin.

TIDr? If you've watched the Red Violin and liked it, read this. If you haven't or didn't like it, stay away from this book.

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#### **Michael Fitzgerald says**

This is a mystery written by a serious musician (13 years as a Boston Symphony Orchestra violinist) who has drawn heavily upon his personal experiences. The musical details, which are all too often wrong or just silly when the author is a dilettante in music, are refreshingly accurate. I spotted only one error (\*unlike\* a

sarabanda or the hokeypokey, the bossa nova is \*not\* a dance) but this is greatly outweighed by the spot-on descriptions of teachers, students, journalists, promoters, etc. and of the thoughts and actions of violin players.

Once you leave the musical aspects, the writing is not astonishing but is rather average mystery fare. There were a number of spots where I wish the author had had the benefit of a better editor - simply grammatical problems could have easily been avoided. In all, this is a good page-turner that will have special resonance for musicians and classical music fans.

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## **Ramona says**

Gerald is my good friend, and came to my bookclub to speak about writing this book. That was fascinating in itself, a ten year saga. It is a murder mystery set in the world of high level New York violin lessons, competitions, agents, etc. I found the story a great read, and I recognized a lot of personalities I have met in my career. I am waiting for the second book to come out in a few months, a second murder mystery set in the world of the violin teacher. The language of the main character is a little strong, be warned.

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