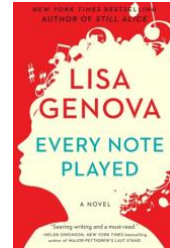


## Discussion Guide

### *Every Note Played: A Novel*

By Lisa Genova



1. Why do you think Lisa Genova chose the title *Every Note Played* for this novel? How did the title help your reading of the novel? The original title for this book was *Diminuendo*. Why do you think she changed it?
2. Why do you think Lisa decided to make Richard an accomplished professional pianist? How does his life before his ALS diagnosis compare to life after?
3. Describe how both Richard and Karina relate to the music they played. How did music inspire them, define them, trap them, free them, save them?
4. While visiting Richard, Karina reflects on how “the story of their lives can be an entirely different genre depending on the narrator.” (p. 29). Explain this statement. How would you characterize the story of Richard and Karina’s marriage as told from Karina’s perspective? What is Richard’s point of view? Are there other instances in *Every Note Played* when two characters experience the same event completely differently based on their limited perspective? What are they?
5. Upon learning of Richard’s diagnosis, Karina pays him a visit. “She had such good intentions,” and wonders how it went “so wrong.” (p. 32). Lisa Genova wrote in her writing journal, “What is unsettled in Karina and why is seeing Richard again such a necessary risk? What does she want?” What are Karina’s motivations for visiting Richard? Did she get what she wanted?
6. Richard comes to think of Bill as “equal parts brother, doctor, parent, and friend.” (p. 96). What did you think of Bill? How does he help Richard preserve his sense of dignity, humanity, and humor? How does Bill help Karina?
7. While Richard’s ALS is progressing, he reflects on how “in a million ways, living with ALS is a practice in the art of Zen.” (p. 98). Can you think of any moments when Richard practices “the art of Zen”? What else did ALS teach him?
8. Seeing Alexander Lynch play jazz in New Orleans was a transformative experience for Karina. What changed in her? Why do you think Karina resisted going to New Orleans for so long?
9. Describe Richard’s relationship with his brothers. Were you surprised by Tommy’s apology? How does Tommy’s apology and the ensuing conversation unlock a new way for Richard to see his brothers? What does it heal?
10. As Richard begins to lose his voice, Dr. George suggests that Richard consider

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recording “legacy messages.” What are these?

11. What does Richard think his legacy will be? Discuss legacy messages with your book club. If you were in Richard’s situation, for whom would you want to record these messages? What would your messages say?
12. At the clinic, the practitioners use the term care, “and Richard doesn’t openly object, but care is not provided every three months when he comes for his appointment.” (p. 51). Why does Richard continue to go to the clinic? Does Richard’s opinion regarding the “care” at the clinic change? Are there different ways to provide care? What kind of care does Kathy provide to Richard? Compare and contrast this with how Bill and Karina care for him. How does Richard eventually care for Grace? For Karina?
13. This is very much a story about the unrelenting, progressive paralysis of Richard’s body. In what ways were Richard and Karina emotionally paralyzed? Are there ways in your own life that you’re stuck—in the past, in excuses, blame, or fear? Lisa Genova begins the book with a quote by the poet Rumi: “Why do you stay in prison when the door is so wide open?”. Why do you think she included this quote?

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