

**WHAT IF YOU STUMBLED UPON A LONG-LOST MASTERPIECE THAT  
POSSESSED THE POWER TO CHANGE HISTORY?**

“A ‘what if’ novel that begins in the glittering salons of Enlightenment Berlin where, beneath the surface, are sentiments too sinister to be named and culminating in New York present day, *And After the Fire* is an intellectual thriller and a beautiful love story. Sure to establish Belfer as a fearless, provocative writer. Impossible to put down.”

—**Sara Gruen, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *At the Water’s Edge* and  
*Water for Elephants***

“Can any mortal adjective convey my adoration for this brilliant and mesmerizing story? Ask my friends: Since reading *And After the Fire*, I’ve been trumpeting it as the best novel I’ve had the pleasure of reading in years. Brava, Lauren Belfer. I thank you for this fascinating, virtuoso, unforgettable book.”

—**Elinor Lipman, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Then She Found Me***

Dear Colleague,

The unexpected discovery of a shocking *Meisterwerk* is the inspiration behind *New York Times* bestselling author **Lauren Belfer’s** atmospheric, enthrallingly suspenseful novel, **AND AFTER THE FIRE** (Harper, \$26.99/\$33.50; Hardcover; ISBN 13: 9780062428516; on-sale: May 3, 2016). Belfer explains, “I was taking a class on Johann Sebastian Bach and I thought, what if I found a work of art stolen during World War II—not a painting, but an unknown choral masterpiece, a cantata by Bach, and what if its content was, by modern standards, prejudicial and inflammatory?” The result is her best novel yet. **AND AFTER THE FIRE** is a transporting, unputdownable, multi-generational saga, spanning centuries and continents, and interweaving two women’s lives through the riveting history of Belfer’s imagined choral score.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Sara Itzig Levy, the daughter of the King of Prussia’s Jewish banker, counts herself among the elite of Berlin—though anti-Semitism simmers all around her. A gifted harpsichordist, Sara hones her musical talents under Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, son of Johann Sebastian Bach. They share a special bond, but while his life is coming to an end, hers is only just beginning. On his deathbed, he bequeaths to her the score of one of his father’s cantatas as a wedding gift—but this piece is unlike any Sara has ever seen.

In present day New York City, Susanna Kessler has a seemingly charmed life, with a loving husband and a terrific job. And then a random act of violence tears it apart, and she is left to pick up the pieces alone. Just when she feels as if she's beginning to recover, her beloved Uncle Henry commits suicide—leaving behind a cryptic note. It alludes to Henry's haunting World War II experiences as an Allied soldier in Germany . . . and to something he took from the heavily-bombed country before returning home.

The cantata's troubled journey in **AND AFTER THE FIRE** evokes that of the famed Sarajevo Haggadah in Geraldine Brooks's *The People of the Book* or the stolen Degas in B.A. Shapiro's *The Art Forger*. Framed by Susanna's urgent search for the truth about the musical score her uncle left behind, Sara Levy's rich, beautiful narrative—studded with vibrant, real-life musical figures of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, from Wilhelm Friedemann Bach to Beethoven to the Mendelssohn family—reveals the passions and politics of Enlightenment and Romantic-era Berlin. And as Susanna is drawn deeper and deeper into Sara's world, harrowing questions about her own family's past begin to surface, keeping readers turning the pages into the night.

Lauren Belfer's novel, *A Fierce Radiance*, was named a *Washington Post* Best Novel, an NPR Best Mystery, and a *New York Times* Editors' Choice. Her debut novel, *City of Light*, was a *New York Times* bestseller, as well as a number one Book Sense pick, a Barnes & Noble Discover Award nominee, a *New York Times* Notable Book, a *Library Journal* Best Book, and a Main Selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club. It has been translated into six languages. She lives in New York City. [www.laurenbelfer.com](http://www.laurenbelfer.com)

Attached are biographies of the real-life men and women who feature in Sara's story, along with an essay from the author about her inspirations for this extraordinary novel. I know that your audience will delight in this sophisticated and beautifully written work. I look forward to discussing ways you can feature **AND AFTER THE FIRE**, and to scheduling an interview with Lauren Belfer.

Best regards,

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## THE REAL PEOPLE AND PLACES IN LAUREN BELFER'S NOVEL *AND AFTER THE FIRE*



**Palais Itzig, Sara Levy's childhood home**

The Palais Itzig was on Burgstrasse in Berlin, along the river Spree. The Berlin Stock Exchange was built here in 1859.



**Mendelssohn Bartholdy family home at Leipzigerstrasse 3, Berlin**

The Sunday gatherings organized by Lea and Abraham Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and later by Fanny Hensel, took place here and brought together Berlin's cultural, intellectual, and aristocratic elite for music and conversation. The building later became the upper house of the Prussian parliament.



**Sara Levy, by Anton Graff**

Sara Levy (born Sara Itzig, 1761–1854) was the tenth child of the prominent Jewish banker Daniel Itzig. A talented keyboard player, Sara was the favorite, and most probably the only, Berlin pupil of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, son of Johann Sebastian Bach. She married the banker Samuel Salomon Levy and for over fifty years hosted a prestigious musical salon in her home on what is now Berlin's Museum Island. She was the great-aunt of composers Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Fanny Hensel. Her extensive collection of music manuscripts, including many compositions by members of the Bach family, was left to the Sing-Akademie of Berlin. Unlike many Jews of her background, Sara did not convert to Christianity. Sara and her husband had no children, and Sara became closely involved with the Berlin Jewish orphanage. Upon her death, she left the bulk of her estate to the orphanage, which remained in existence until 1942, when the children were deported to Auschwitz.



**Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, by Friedrich Georg Weitsch**

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710–84) was the eldest son of the composer and musician Johann Sebastian Bach. His father guided Friedemann's musical education and career, but despite Friedemann's great gifts as a composer and organist, he suffered from psychological instabilities (of a nature difficult to determine in retrospect), and his employment was erratic. He died impoverished.



**Daniel Itzig, Sara's father, by Joseph Friedrich d'Arbes**

Daniel Itzig (1723–99), known as “the King's Jew,” was the banker of Kings Frederick the Great and Frederick William II of Prussia. He served as Master of the Mint. Because of his services to the nation, Daniel Itzig was the first Jew in Prussia to receive full citizenship privileges from the king. Highly cultured, he and his wife collected the music of the Bach family.



**Amalia Beer, Sara's friend, by Johann Karl Kretschmar**

Amalia Beer (1767–1854) was well-known for her musical and theatrical salon, as well as her philanthropy. Among her sons was the composer Giacomo Meyerbeer. She was awarded the Order of Louise by the Prussian king for her philanthropic assistance to the wounded during the Napoleonic Wars. Unlike many in her milieu, she and her family did not convert to Christianity. Her gravestone can be seen today at Berlin's Jewish cemetery on Schönhauser Allee.



**Alexander von Humboldt, scientist, by Joseph Stieler**

Renowned in his day, Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) was a Prussian explorer, geographer, naturalist, and diplomat. He frequented the salon gatherings of Sara Levy, Lea Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and Fanny Hensel. In the garden of the Mendelssohn Bartholdy home at Leipzigerstrasse 3, he set up a scientific station to take magnetic measurements of the earth.



**Moses Mendelssohn, philosopher and grandfather of  
Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Fanny Hensel, by Anton Graff**

Born to a poor Jewish family in Dessau, Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86) went to Berlin and became a leading Enlightenment intellectual figure among German Jews and Christians alike. He championed the ideas of the *Haskalah* movement, teaching that Jews should adapt to the customs of the nations in which they settled while retaining the faith of their forebears. Four of his six children converted to Christianity.



**Abraham Mendelssohn Bartholdy, by Wilhelm Hensel**

Abraham Mendelssohn Bartholdy (born Abraham Mendelssohn, 1776–1835) was a German banker and philanthropist. He was a son of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn and the father of composers Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Fanny Hensel. He joined his brother Joseph in partnership at the Mendelssohn & Co. bank, which remained in business until it was liquidated in 1938, under pressure from the Nazis to Aryanize. Abraham was a patron of the arts and collected music manuscripts of the Bach family.



**Lea Mendelssohn Bartholdy, by Wilhelm Hensel**

Lea Mendelssohn Bartholdy (born Lea Salomon, 1777–1842) was the wife of the banker and arts patron Abraham Mendelssohn Bartholdy. A gifted musician in her own right, she was the mother of the composers Fanny Hensel and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, as well as the singer Rebecka Dirichlet and the banker and cellist Paul Mendelssohn-Bartholdy.



**Fanny Hensel, by Wilhelm Hensel**

Fanny Hensel (born Fanny Mendelssohn, 1805–47) was a German pianist and composer. She wrote over four hundred works, including songs, piano solos, orchestral pieces, and cantatas. She married the well-known artist Wilhelm Hensel. Fanny's younger brother Felix, also a composer, would not allow her to publish her music. Nonetheless, a half-dozen of her songs were included, under her brother's name, in his published collections. When Queen Victoria admired one of these songs, Felix confessed to his sister's authorship. Only as she entered her forties did Fanny feel able to move forward with the publication of her work. After her death, her compositions were essentially forgotten. Today her music is being rediscovered, and she is finally receiving the recognition she deserves.



**Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, by James Warren Child**

Born and usually known today as Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47), Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy was a German composer, pianist, and conductor. A grandson of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, Felix was born into a prominent Jewish family which later converted to Christianity. He was among the most renowned, popular, and beloved composers of his day. Among his most famous works are the *Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture, the *Italian* Symphony, and the *Songs without Words*. He died at age 38, five and a half months after his sister Fanny's death.



**Paul Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, by Eduard Magnus**

Paul Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1812–74) was a gifted cellist, and his brother, Felix, composed cello pieces for him to perform. Paul joined the Mendelssohn & Co. bank, where he experienced great success and expanded the bank's reach to Russia.



**Wilhelm Hensel, self portrait**

Wilhelm Hensel (1794–1861) was a German artist and the husband of composer Fanny Hensel. During his lifetime, he was famous for his portraiture.