



Book of the Month

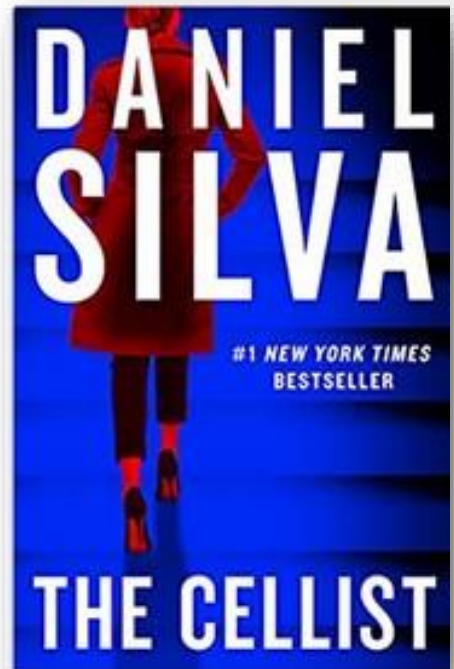
***The Cellist* by Daniel Silva**

Book Review by Eddie Keith, Friends of the Starkville Library Board Member

The Cellist, a 2021 spy thriller by Daniel Silva, is the latest in Silva's series of books featuring Gabriel Allon, an artist turned assassin/spy who is head of an Israeli intelligence agency known as "the Office." The conflict between Western democracy, including that of Israel and its allies (among them the United States), and Russian autocratic kleptocracy is at the heart of the book. Although the book is a work of fiction, the identity of some of the characters, especially American and Russian, is apparent. The specific premise of the book is that the current Russian leaders, whose background is in the old Soviet KGB, have devised a shrewd money laundering scheme that enriches them and generates funds that are used to foment conflict within democratic countries. The funds are used to drive false narratives among extremist groups, which then serve to tear the democratic governments apart from within. Those who watched the Showtime series *Homeland* may recall a similar theme in the next-to-last season, when Russian agents funded and aided extremist media outlets to generate violent dissent and insurrection in the US.

Despite the title, music plays a relatively minor role in the book. Following the assassination of a dissident Russian oligarch who was hiding in Britain, Allon and his Office colleagues identify and recruit an accomplished cellist who has worked at a Swiss bank that is central to the "Russian laundromat." Their goal is for her to help to destroy the laundering system and divert the personal fortunes that the Russian president and his main flunkies have amassed. It is a dangerously risky endeavor, as the Russians are clever and ruthless. There are some backstories between these international rivals that make the stakes both "business and personal" (to borrow a legendary phrase from *The Godfather*). Lives are literally at stake.

As with many novels, Silva bases his books on real world issues and conflicts. He began his career as a UPI correspondent with responsibilities in the Middle East, then later became a producer for CNN,



where he met his wife, who is a CNN special correspondent. Though raised a Catholic, Silva converted to Judaism, his wife's faith, which may help explain his interest in Israel. Since becoming a writer in 1996, he has written 24 books, that last 19 of which have featured Gabriel Allon as the protagonist. Although the Israeli/Arab conflict has been at the center of many books in the Allon series, the Russian government and criminals have been frequent antagonists in Silva's books as well.

I heartily recommend *The Cellist* as another in Daniel Silva's long list of highly entertaining, suspenseful books of international intrigue. The plot is complex and skillfully developed around contemporary international events. As with all of Silva's novels, it is a hard book to put down. It will make you think and make you feel. I hope you enjoy it ... and many others in his Allon series. And if you're new to Silva, no, one doesn't have to read the Allon books in order; although once you've read one, you'll probably want to go back and read them all ... and probably in order.

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