

Z Evan Long

*The Art of Noise*

Logline:

In turn-of-the-century Italy, the young and brilliant painter-composer Luigi Russolo joins a radical art movement and creates a new style of music that turns the world on its head. However, the Great War and the rise of Fascism threaten to destroy everything he has created.

Synopsis:

Milan, 1946: Mussolini's fascist government has been toppled, and the new leftist regime interrogates, imprisons, and assassinates anyone with possible ties to the Fascist Party. The now 60-year-old Luigi Russolo is dragged by armed guards to the secret service chief, brought to an interrogation room, and strapped to a polygraph test. He is there to defend his innocence; as an artist, he had direct connections with Mussolini, but he vehemently denies that he was a fascist. Under threat of imprisonment or death, he recounts his entire life story.

Milan, 1909: A 23-year-old Luigi, from a small Venitian town and fresh out of art school, enters an apprenticeship in an artist's workshop restoring Renaissance masterpieces. His unconventional style is loathed by his masters, but he makes a friend in fellow painter Maria, who is able to apprentice and sell works masquerading as a man ("Mario"). Luigi's sense of style strengthens, as he dreams of being the artist that changes the world.

A couple years later, after toiling in obscurity, Luigi has his first solo art exhibition. Reaction is universally negative, and he fails to sell a single work. However, he finds two unlikely fans in Umberto Boccioni and Carlo Carrà, two avant-garde artists who invite him to the home of infamous art theorist-cum-madman Filippo Marinetti. The night of the invitation, Marinetti holds one of his trademark dinner parties: every angry, young artist in the city is there, and Luigi is enraptured. He also meets Gino Severini, a pretentious but likeminded painter. The artists drink copious amounts of wine, recite fiery verses of Dadaist poetry, swing from the banisters, and burn the Italian flag. Marinetti proclaims his ulterior motive for this gathering: he has written a manifesto for a new art movement—one founded on revolution, nationalism, and violence—and he wants Luigi, Carrà, Boccioni, and Severini to sign it. "Futurism" is born that night, and Luigi sits front and center in its ranks.

Although his work now gains infamy among his reactionary movement, the problem remains: he can't sell his paintings. Defeated, Luigi attends a concert by a Futurist composer to raise his spirits. The music gives Luigi an epiphany, that he can change the world with music instead of painting. He rushes home and writes a new manifesto that will change the definition of music forever: *The Art of Noises*. He imagines music not as notes and melody, but as the harsh noises of machinery. He builds "noise machines," Dr. Seussian metal boxes with horns and cranks, as the new instruments for his symphonies. With the help of Marinetti, who sees himself in the younger Luigi, they debut his noise music to the world. His music infuriates the audience, and his first concert devolves into a violent riot; Luigi, and the Futurists as a whole, have succeeded.

1914: War breaks out across Europe, but Italy is not initially involved. The war-loving Futurists protest their country's peace, and when Italy finally enters the conflict, the men all enlist. Luigi, Marinetti, Carrà, and Severini join the Cyclist's Battalion; Boccioni joins the cavalry and is

trampled to death during training. Luigi suffers a shot to the head in battle, and stays in the hospital for more than a year. He comes back with new compositions, ready to tour Europe with his machines, but he has found that fascism has fractured the Futurists. Marinetti has become good friends with the young fascist leader Benito Mussolini, and his relationship with Maria has strained.

1922: Luigi comes back from touring Europe. Mussolini is elected, beginning the Fascist Party's stronghold on Italy. Russolo, an anti-fascist, resists the regime, while Marinetti, Carrá and others push a new manifesto that suggests art's new purpose is advancing fascism. Luigi searches for Maria, but she was discovered as a woman and kidnapped by the secret police. Marinetti informs Luigi that Mussolini himself has requested Luigi write a symphony for the Fascist Party. Luigi declines, but a visit from the secret police lets him know that refusal isn't an option. With no allies or options left, Luigi devises a plan: he arranges a private concert for Mussolini and his cabinet. While they wait, Luigi secretly ships his instruments to Paris and boards a train out of Italy.

1946: Finished with his tale, Luigi sadly adds that his instruments and compositions were all destroyed in the Paris bombings of World War II. Having corroborated evidence and passing the lie detector test, they free Luigi. He wanders around Milan, his former home, but the war has left the city a shell of its past. He returns to his old studio, and opens a trap door where he hid his art decades ago in the event he was arrested. His original noise machine is still there, untouched; the fascists never found it. He smiles, admiring his last trick.