

A journey for readers to visualise their universal power

› Lương Thu Hương

Does destiny exist and is everything planned? If so, is it worth trying at all in life? Are efforts in life still necessary or should we only wait for life to pass by? Is there a higher power, a God? Readers might find their own answers to these questions in a new novel by Vietnamese-German writer Isabelle Müller.

The novel, entitled *Just a Heartbeat Away from You*, is published in Việt Nam by Hồ Chí Minh City General Publishing House on the occasion of International Women's Day – March 8, under the title *Chi Cách Người Một Nhịp Đập Con Tim*.

The story begins when Anna, a young woman with an affinity for spiritual, esoteric topics, experiences a bitter disappointment and decides to commit suicide. However, she is unexpectedly rescued at the last second by her best friend Johanna and then lies in a coma for weeks in a hospital.

Marc, a young, successful cosmetic surgeon and rather superficial man who wants to explain everything in life scientifically and pragmatically, takes his dog for a walk in the evening and is hit by a car. He is in a coma in a hospital with serious injuries.

In their comatose states, the consciousness of the two is alive and well. Anna wants nothing more than to die, while Marc just wants his old life back. On the threshold between life and death, Anna and Marc's souls involuntarily spend this time together. Both of them are suddenly in a mysterious room full of magic called "Nowhere" that they have to share. They no longer appear as human beings made of flesh and blood, but as glass, energetic shells that only contain their true essence.

In this place, between heaven and earth, they receive instructions from a voice that knows everything



READ ALL ABOUT IT: The cover of *Just a Heartbeat away from You*, the latest novel by Vietnamese-German writer Isabelle Müller. Photo courtesy of Hồ Chí Minh City General Publishing House

about them and explains important rules to them.

After a long recovery period, Anna and Marc resume normal everyday life on earth. They can remember everything well. Unhappy and sad on earth, they embark on the journey to find each other in real life.

"People have primal fears, like fear of death and what comes after, fear of the unknown," Müller told *Việt Nam News*. "This book should give them comfort, hope, strength, understanding for the unknown and confidence. This is the central theme of it. But the theme goes much deeper than this if you read and reflect on the messages I have put in it, in some dialogues."

The most important message that the author wishes to convey through her latest book is to describe the relationship that human beings can develop to the Universe, in order to find happiness and stay confident when struggles appear.

"Even if my novel is hidden behind a fictive 'simple love story', this book is mostly to help people to trust in the immense, supra-existential power of the Sky. The power of the Universe expresses itself

through us (we are a kind of channel for universal energy).

"The novel is to help people give up their fears of challenges, and mainly the fear of what is coming after death. It is talking about the power inside us, the power of our thoughts and words, mostly about the energy that thoughts and words consist of.

"In general, people are too busy with their ego and human shell, instead of taking care of their true (inner) essence. They often focus one-sidedly. I think that they should change their perspective in order to better recognise things and make better decisions, in order to change their future for the better, accordingly," she added.

"Moreover, this novel shows that I am a writer and not only a chronicler. I have much more to share."

Müller said, the inspiration for *Just a Heartbeat Away from You* comes from her own life experience of facing death.

"When I was age four, I had a near death experience in which my soul left my body. It is an unforgettable experience that shaped me, my way of thinking and believing.



WAY WITH WORDS: Vietnamese-German writer Isabelle Müller, founder of the non-profit LOAN Foundation. Photo courtesy of the writer

It still accompanies me until today. And some scenes of the book are visions I had," she recalled.

Müller hoped that readers will find happiness and confidence in themselves and life after reading.

"In fact, they can decide if my messages are real or fictitious. I give them the opportunity to visualise the universal power through my words. It is up to them to act, to believe or not.

"Finally, I am happy to share my feelings and thoughts with the audience. I bring them to another world, to Isabelle Müller's world," the writer said.

Isabelle Müller was born on May 25, 1964 in Tours, France as the youngest of five children of a

Vietnamese and a Frenchman. She is now based in Germany.

She is the founder of the non-profit LOAN Foundation, which carries out educational projects for children of ethnic minorities in the poorest mountain regions of north Việt Nam. The foundation was honoured as an inspiring project by Human Act Prize last year. The author donates all royalties to the foundation, including those of *Just a Heartbeat Away from You*.

The novel is her fifth publication in Việt Nam, after two biographies – *Phoenix Daughter - Hope was My Path*, *Loan - From the Life of a Phoenix* and two children's books – *Hip Hop in the Land of Ellsaby* and *Hip Hop and the Golden Forest*. VNS

Soprano pens first Vietnamese-language book about origin of Italian opera

HÀ NỘI The first ever Vietnamese-language book about the origin of Italian opera has been launched in Hà Nội, offering music lovers a new source of information about this theatrical art.

Entitled *Lịch Sử Opera Ý* (History of Italian Opera), the book has been penned by Italian Musical Prof Gianni Kriscak, currently a lecturer of theatrical music at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz, Austria.

The book has also been completed with the contribution of two Vietnamese authors – Vietnamese soprano Hiền Nguyễn (real name Nguyễn Thị Hiền), who was a student of Prof Kriscak, and vocal lecturer Trịnh Thị Oanh, currently working at the National University of Art Education in Hà Nội.

Talking about her reasons for working on the book, soprano Hiền Nguyễn, who spent three years working in Italy, said that she has

nurtured the idea for many years, especially when she became involved in teaching music.

"Contributing to the classical music in Việt Nam, at the same time, being a representative to introduce Italian cultural heritage to art enthusiasts in Việt Nam – those are my missions and responsibilities," the singer said.

Hiền Nguyễn has a special bond with this Mediterranean country. In 2012, she won a scholarship to study Italian language and culture at the University for Foreigners Perugia in Perugia, Italy. A year later, she was the only graduate of Việt Nam National Academy of Music to win a scholarship from the Milan Conservatory where she studied for two years.

Over the years, the singer has realised that not everyone knows about the origin of opera, especially in Việt Nam where it is very difficult to find books about opera.

"Luckily for me, when I shared

this thought with Prof Kriscak, he expressed the ambition to write a book about opera to publish in Asia. So, we have joined hands, resulting in this book," Hiền said.

The singer started her book project in the beginning of 2022. In December 2022, Italian opera singing was recognised by UNESCO as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

"This recognition is a huge motivation urging me to complete the book. For five months, every day, after coming home from classes or performance, I was awake until 4am to work on the book," Hiền Nguyễn said.

Talking about the book, Prof Kriscak, who was a guest lecturer at the Việt Nam National Academy of Music in 2016, said: "It was written for opera singers and anyone who wants to learn about opera and its history."

The cover of the book features the



IN GOOD VOICE: (From left) Authors of the *Lịch Sử Opera Ý* (History of Italian Opera) soprano Hiền Nguyễn, Prof Gianni Kriscak, and vocal lecturer Trịnh Thị Oanh. Photo courtesy of artist

painting of Orpheus and Eurydice, two famous characters in Greek mythology, whose love story was adapted to be the first opera of Italy.

To celebrate the book launch, Hiền Nguyễn will have a concert

entitled *La Passione* (The Passion) at the National Academy of Music tonight. Nearly 20 timeless classic and semi-classic tunes of both Italy and Việt Nam will be presented during the concert. VNS