

A GOOD AMERICAN BY ALEX GEORGE

An English lawyer who lives in the heartland of the United States, **Alex George** tells a quintessentially American story of immigration, love, music, and what it means to belong to a family and a country in his novel, **A GOOD AMERICAN** (Amy Einhorn Books/Putnam; **Publication Date: February 7, 2012; ISBN: 978-0-399-15759-2; Price: \$25.95/\$30 CAN**). The latest discovery by Amy Einhorn, publisher of *New York Times* best-selling titles *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, *The Weird Sisters* by Eleanor Brown, and *The Postmistress* by Sarah Blake, **A GOOD AMERICAN** has already generated pre-publication buzz with foreign rights sold in Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom and garnering advance praise from authors and booksellers across the country.

Reflecting on his own immigrant experience, Alex George recalls “the hope for a better life, the fear of the unknown, and the paradox of wanting to adapt to your new country without forgetting where you came from.” In **A GOOD AMERICAN** George renders a panoramic novel about the ties that bind us to one another and the land where we live.

A panoramic, multigenerational saga, the story begins in 1904, in Hanover, Germany, as love-struck Frederick Meisenheimer woos his strong-willed, unorthodox wife-to-be, Jette Furst, with glorious song. When she becomes pregnant and her mother condemn the match, they board a boat for America and begin a voyage that will transform their destinies in ways they cannot begin to imagine – one that will usher them and their descendants through the great events of the twentieth century. Their grandson James Meisenheimer tells his family’s story, but in so doing discovers that there is far more to his own story than he knows.

By chance, Frederick and Jette take a ship to New Orleans, a place they’d never heard of, rather than New York, as they had originally intended. “What’s the difference?,” Jette says. “They’re both New.” Ultimately the couple’s journey to America lands them in the small town of Beatrice, Missouri, where they happen upon a community of fellow German immigrants.

Frederick and Jette adapt in very different ways to their new country and first find their patriotism tested by America’s fight against Germany in World War I. Later, with the help of an African-American musician and bootlegger from New Orleans, the Meisenheimers weather Prohibition and the Great Depression by opening a restaurant. Crossing culinary and racial boundaries alike, they serve both German and Creole food and challenge America’s rigid racial barriers by featuring music of every kind, from opera to ragtime and Dixieland jazz.

And so it goes down the generations. Frederick and Jette's son, Joseph, courts his wife with arias and reinvents the restaurant as a classic American diner. His four sons, including James, form a barbershop quartet whose bewitching harmonies grace every wedding and funeral in Beatrice. Their aunt, Joseph's sister Rosa, is a born teacher who introduces James to the joys of chess and P.G. Wodehouse and nurtures James's secret passion to be a writer.

In George's operatic narrative, the Meisenheimers are accompanied by a quirky chorus of townsfolk, including a nymphomaniac music teacher, a brilliant lawyer who happens to be a bicycle-riding dwarf, a teenager with the body of a giant, a bare-knuckled boxer, and a preacher who believes he has seen the Second Coming of Christ. There are hilarious sexual initiations, blissful and miserable marriages, shocking betrayals, and startling turns. "Every life," James realizes, "was a galaxy of permutations and possibilities from which a single thread would be picked out and followed, for better or for worse."

As the Meisenheimer family expands and new generations grow up, so does the country, through World War II, the Cold War, the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the election of Ronald Reagan. President Harry Truman makes a cameo appearance, as does real-life jazz legend Buddy Bolden. On the radio over the years are Glenn Miller, Eddie Cantor, Bill Hailey and the Comets, Pat Boone, the Four Aces, and some young punk called Elvis Presley.

Meanwhile, James quietly pursues his dream of becoming a famous writer, working diligently after his long hours of running the family restaurant, and crafting unlikely stories in which his dashing alter ego is always the hero. One day, however, an unexpected letter sets him off on a cross-country drive that yields a stunning discovery about his family and himself.

Recognizing the inauthenticity of "those improbable tales I'd spun out of my imagination," James realizes "that there was no need to invent a single thing. This story will do." Looking forward to the future of his family and country as well as back on their history, he sees that "we are all immigrants, a glorious confection of races and beliefs, united by the rock that we live on. As the years wash over us and new generations march into the future, family histories are subsumed into this greater narrative. We become, simply, Americans."

In **A GOOD AMERICAN**, Alex George has created a vast, inspiring, and deeply pleasurable narrative of hope, and a page-turning tale about what it means to be an outsider, what it means to be an American, and our universal search for home.