

Discussion Questions for *Last Night at the Blue Angel* by Rebecca Rotert

Some questions taken or adapted from <http://www.harpercollins.com/9780062315281/last-night-at-the-blue-angel>

1. The narrative alternates between the perspectives of Sophia and Naomi. How does hearing the story from both of their points of view affect your understanding of it?
2. How does your impression of Naomi develop as the novel progresses? Are there scenes that provoke a particularly strong reaction?
3. Naomi is a singer in a jazz club and a portion of the story focuses on her life as a performer. Do you think there are other “performances” in the book? Can you identify the ways in which other characters might be “performing,” and how these performances might shape their lives and experiences?
4. In a sense, Sophia has many “parents” in the book. Describe how each parent informs how she sees herself and the world around her.
5. Which thematic elements rear their heads during Sophia’s birthday party? Why is it such a pivotal scene in the novel?
6. All of the main characters in the novel live in Chicago but come from somewhere else. What do you suppose “Chicago” represents to these characters? What has each character attempted to leave behind?
7. In many ways, music is a character in the novel. Why is music so significant in this book?
8. How does Naomi’s relationship with David ignite both her need to be desired and her fear of being possessed? Does this struggle resonate with women today? And why, in the end, do Naomi and David not survive as a couple?
9. On p. 165 Rita confronts Naomi and says, “Aren’t you just the most normal girl now, pining over her man. Ambition? What ambition?” How does this conversation capture the conflict between pursuing a personal ambition and the cultural expectations of women?
10. Jim’s commitment to Naomi and Sophia is unflinching. Describe this commitment. Is it more about Naomi or Sophia, and does it evolve over time?
11. The two central subjects of Jim’s work as a photographer are the architecture of Chicago and Naomi. Why these two obsessions? How might they be related?
12. Sister Eye plays a pivotal role in the lives of these characters. What are the beliefs/ideas at the heart of her behavior?
13. Chicago, 1965, is a city in transformation, rife with the tensions of the day—the Cold War, Vietnam, sexual and racial prejudice. How does this political and social climate affect the characters? Did the title and cover accurately represent the book? What is the significance of the title?
14. The narration jumps between Sophia talking about today and Naomi talking about the past. Did you like this technique? What do you, as a reader, think is gained or lost using such a structure?
15. Has anyone had any experiences that relate to places or experiences in the book?
16. Any comments about the way the book ended?
17. Are there questions you would like to ask?