

SISTER ACT: NADIA & LILI BOULANGER

Born to the civilized world of fin de siècle Paris, they are legendary in the rarefied world of serious music. Everything about them was a dichotomy; Lili's life was brief and plagued with illness virtually from infancy but Juliette Nadia Boulanger (September 16, 1887 -- October 22, 1979) lived a long and incredibly productive life to the age of 92, beginning as a composer and instructor before devoting herself solely to teaching composition at 33. For decades, she taught just about every musician you've ever heard of, particularly Americans; more than 1200 students, including: Aaron Copeland, Walter Piston and Virgil Thomson. Others include Marc Blitzstein, Burt Bacharach, Daniel Barenboim, John Eliot Gardner, Philip Glass, Ned Rorem, Gian-Carlo Menotti, Astor Piazzolla, Michel Legrand, Quincy Jones, Dinu Lipatti, Douglas Moore and Thea Musgrave to name just a few!

Funnily enough, like Ravel before her, she informed George Gershwin that she had nothing to teach him. But the list is endless... and her reputation endures as one of the major forces in the annals of twentieth century musical world. Ned Rorem called her "*the most influential teacher since Socrates.*" Her musical influence was so ubiquitous that Virgil Thomson once said: "*Every town in the USA had a five - and- dime and a Boulanger pupil.*"

Her younger sister, Marie-Juliette Olga (always known as Lili) Boulanger lived a tragically short life: (August 21, 1893 -- March 15, 1918). She was cursed from the very beginning by chronic illness beginning with bronchial pneumonia at the age of two until her death at 24, plagued with debilitating '*intestinal tuberculosis*' (retrospectively thought to have been what is now known as *Crohn's Disease*.) Yet within that short fragile life she became the first female in its history to win the Paris Conservatoire's prestigious Prix de Rome in her teens, leaving behind a significant body of more than a dozen major works for orchestra, instrumental soloists and chorus. Haunting and original, they often touch on the themes of grief and loss. They are just today beginning to take their rightful place in the Pantheon of great world music.

Music was definitely part of their DNA. Their grandfather Frédéric Boulanger was a noted cellist and his wife, Marie-Juliette, was a celebrated singer at the Opéra Comique. Ernest, their father (1815-1900) was a well-known pianist, composer, conductor and professor at the Paris Conservatoire, who earned the Prix de Rome at the age of 20 in 1835 with his one-act opera, *Le Diable à l'École*. He was best known for his choral music, but also wrote comic operas and incidental music for the theatre. He was a recognized choral director and teacher of voice; after years of trying, he was finally appointed to the Paris Conservatoire as a Professor of Voice in 1872. Their mother was the *soi-disant* Russian Princess (some say Countess) Raïssa Myshetskaya (Mishchetsky), purportedly descended from St. Mikhail Tchernigovsky who occupied the throne of Kiev in 1235!

However, further investigation by the Tchaikovsky Research Project reveals some fascinating alternative conjectures about Madame Boulanger's backstory challenging the accepted version. She was born Rosalie Ivanovna Myshchetskaya,

(either in 1854 or 1858) in Saint Petersburg, dying in Paris in 1935. Of course, 'improved' creatively embroidered backstories populate the annals of music and the theatre from Sarah Bernhardt to Mata Hari. (More recently, Nureyev and Yul Brynner's 'official' biographies depend on who was asking and how much they had had to drink at the time). Give me a good juicy story over the boring truth every time! Madame Boulanger claimed at one point that she was the daughter of a certain Prince Ivan Myshchetsky, scion of one of the oldest Russian noble families; but in his 2004 biography of Lili Boulanger, Jérôme Spycket claims that she was the daughter of Princess Yekaterina Ivonovna Myshchetskaya (née Katarina Miller) born in Germany in May of 1821, which could explain why she was christened the un-Russian sounding '*Rosalie*,' according to Lutheran rites. He also posits that she may have been an illegitimate daughter of the Imperial Family. There was a lot of that going around at the time, explaining why her plebeian German mother was provided with the bogus title and surname -- perhaps to cover up a royal indiscretion. Negotiating those Russian names is a feat in itself!

This may seem like a lot of hair-splitting over a minor character in the lives of two obscure women from another era, but the origin of these incredibly gifted sisters and from whence they came is fascinating. Rosalie/Raïssa seems to have attended a Russian finishing school for girls of the nobility, becoming accomplished in French and proficient in German with a smattering of English and Italian, qualifying as a governess/home tutor in 1873. This schooling was followed by a stint at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, suspiciously funded by a scholarship from Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich, brother of Tsar Alexander II. There is a confusion over the dates of these early days of the 1870's. The claim is that she studied there from 1874 to 1876, marrying a Mr. Shuvalov in 1873, assumed to be a 'proxy' marriage to qualify for a passport so she could leave Russia to further a vocal career on the stage, planning to train at the Paris Conservatoire with Ernest Boulanger, whom she had supposedly seen on his visit to St. Petersburg around this time. Although he was more than forty years her senior, he made a sufficient impression on her to set this elaborate plan in motion. Make no mistake: this was a girl with a mission! It was a story that seemed like an existential collaboration between Flaubert and Dostoevsky.

Enter Ernest Boulanger on his supposed Russian performance tour. As fast as you can say '*samovar*,' little Raïssa spots the chance of a lifetime and in short order, arrives in Paris with a letter of recommendation from one of her royal connections to Ambroise Thomas, the then-director of the Paris Conservatoire, claiming her to be a Russian Princess. Even at this 'tender' age, this was a gal who knew how to make the most of an opportunity. Her vocal accomplishments at the Conservatoire were not particularly stellar; a realist, she soon realized that marriage to the respected composer/conductor would be far more appealing than an uncertain desultory career on the stage. She quickly set her cap for him -- the fact that he was old enough to be her grandfather did little to slow her down. It apparently worked... within less than a year, she became the very respectable Madame Ernest Boulanger. Her apparent musical talents were slim and she seems to have abandoned her ambitions for a professional vocal career soon after her marriage. Her talents seem to have been otherwise-- because, before he knew it, he became a superannuated bridegroom.

The exact circumstances remain as murky as the waters of the Neva River: conflicting facts abound about their wedding ceremony -- Boulanger's supposed marital

appearance in Russia in 1874 while apparently teaching at the Conservatoire at the same time, but the putative documents translated into French from the original Russian purport that they were married in a Russian Orthodox ceremony at the Church of the Holy Martyr Myron (*the Church of the Life Guards Chasseur Regiment*) on September 14, 1877. It was duly noted at the French Consulate in St. Petersburg, although there is the persistent mystery of how he could be in Russia and Paris at the same time, but this 'transmogrification' is what was presented by Raïssa as the only official family version in later life. Where there is a whim there's a way, and Rosalie/Raïssa's iron will was not going to let a few facts allow this chance to slip through her grasping fingers. Léonie Rosensteil in her biography of Nadia actually refers to Boulanger mère by that quaintly nineteenth-century term as "*an Adventuress...*" Shades of Madame Bovary!

In a way, this is making a big deal out of a plot played out everywhere on earth at one time or another -- particularly at that time when a woman of limited means and resources had few attractive life choices. She deserves credit for taking her life in her own hands and indomitably parlaying a small enough hand in the game of life into something more-- the cushy respectable life of the *haute bourgeoisie*. How many chickens died in nuptial bedrooms to provide the blood of a virgin? Sweet kind Ernest probably was swept away by the alluring attention of the vibrant young Raïssa.

Ernest was very well thought of and they soon settled into a comfortable life at 35, Rue de Maubeuge in the respectable 9th arrondissement. She knew what she was doing and was soon showing her mettle, organizing *soirées musicales* at which she sang and entertained his friends and colleagues, acquiring appreciation in his world for her intelligence and sociability. The nice thing about past history is that it is PAST.



Ernest and Raïssa Boulanger around the time of their marriage

She was now Madame Ernst Boulanger, held in high regard; she would remain

a formidable presence in her daughters' lives -- a significant commanding force in Nadia's professional and personal life well known to many of her students until her death in 1935.

Who knows what the real story was -- or what difference these early years made. I think she was grateful for the love of this good man. No one knows of Raïssa's early years or how she was treated. If she had suffered the stormy seas of a dicey childhood, Ernest's gentle warmth and mature intelligence were a safe harbor, a welcome change. Their guest list looks like a roster of the greats of French musical history: Fauré, Dubois, Gounod, Saint-Saëns, Jules Barbier, Tchaikovsky and Massenet. Sensitively, she refused to speak Russian with any of her compatriots because didn't want her husband to feel excluded-- nor significantly did she teach either child Russian. Like so many immigrants who fled to America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Russia was a traumatic memory to be erased, forgotten.

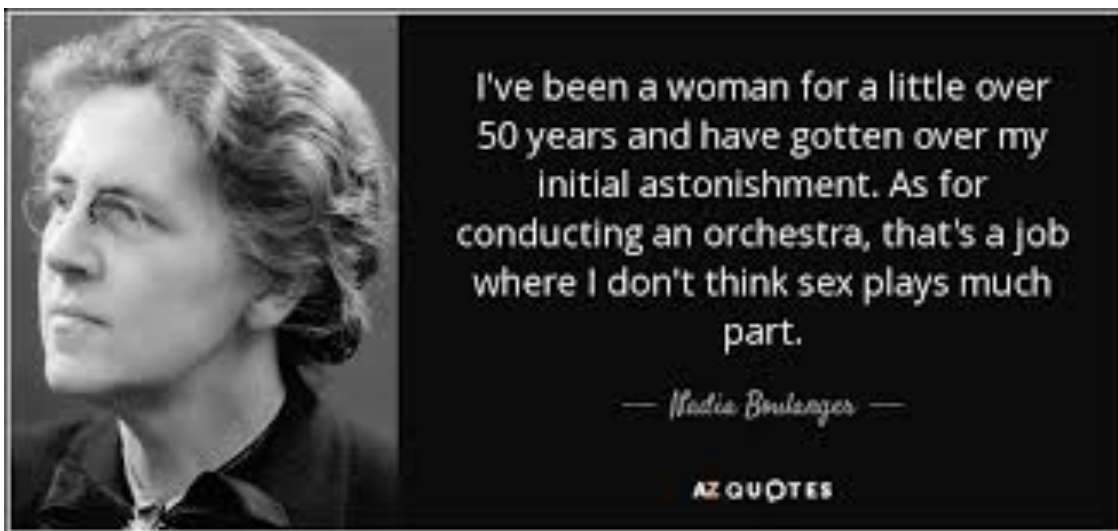
For more than seven years, the couple remained childless. Then, on January 16, 1885, Raïssa gave birth to Nina Juliette, who died shortly thereafter in August of 1886. It was at this time that Tchaikovsky spent part of the summer in Paris and became friendly with Ernest and Raïssa, who hoped to perform several of his romances (*Was I Not a Blade of Grass in the Field?* Op. 47 and *Bitterly and Sweetly*, Op. 6) to distract her from the recent death of her child. They corresponded thereafter and the composer promised to fulfill her requests for orchestrations of the above (noted in archival correspondence between them in the Tchaikovsky House-Museum at Klin -- December 1 & 13, 1886).

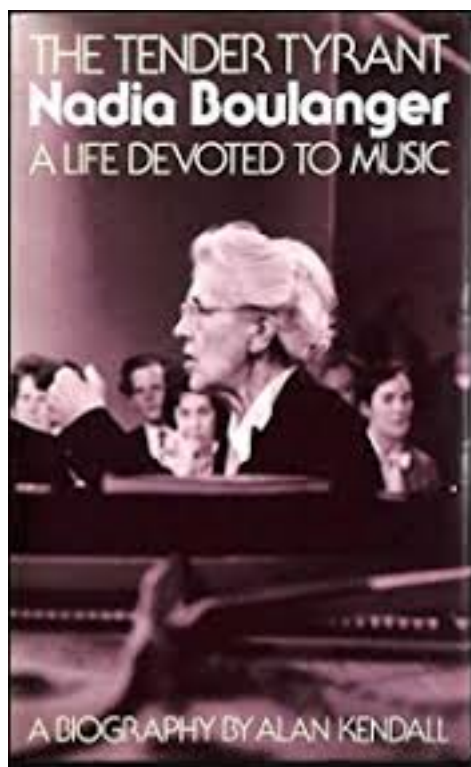
The couple had four daughters, two of whom died in infancy. It has been conjectured that the first child, and probably those that followed, were not the actual children of Ernest (who was 70 at the time) but of Richard Bouwens van der Boijen, (1863-1939), son of Ernest's friend, Dutch architect William Bouwens van der Boijen, who was a naturalized French citizen. Both Bouwens and his son were successful Beaux Arts architects, awarded the prestigious *Legion d'honneur*. Richard, slightly younger than Raïssa, married Marthe Alphonsine Lazard, daughter of the enormously successful family investment firm, *Lazard Frères*, the largest independent bank in the world. (It was founded in 1848 in New Orleans with independent branches in New York, Paris and London.) Richard became a very successful architect as well, winning the architectural competition *Concours de la ville de Paris* for his *hôtel particulier* at 8, rue de Lota. Interestingly, his biography does not suggest any connection with the Boulanger family, listing his children only as a son, Jean Lucien Otto and a daughter, Hélène Détrouat (although among the French of a certain class, these rumours usually were allowed to die with their subjects.)

But DNA is not what a father makes -- and Ernest would always treat Nadia and Lili with enormous reciprocal love and kindness; there was no doubt in their minds who their real father was. Treated in its entirety, the story of the Boulanger family is one of extraordinary mutual devotion, loyalty and charity -- each of them devoted themselves selflessly to the others, realizing and furthering their enormous God-given collective gifts. Fortunately, a number of her pithy quotes have survived and reveal a woman of uncommon common sense as well as incredible sensitivity to people as well as to music.

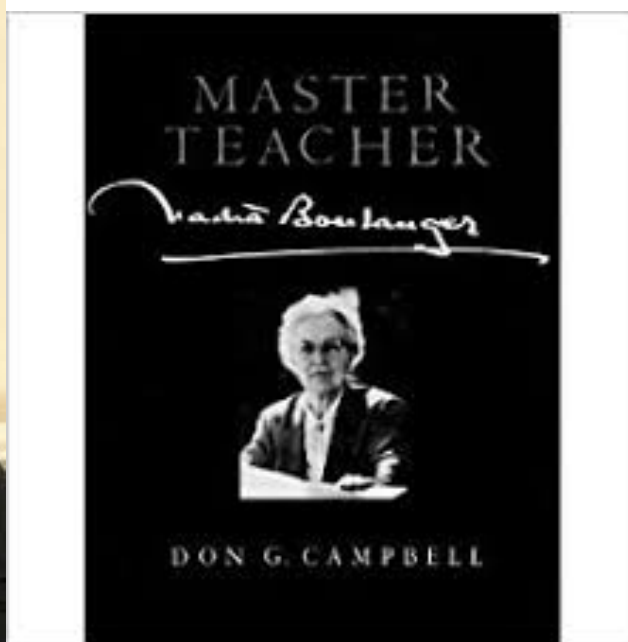
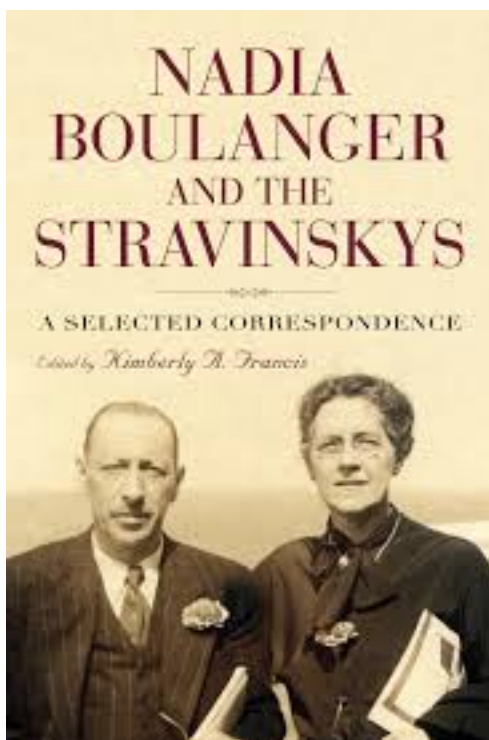


The life histories of Nadia and Lili Boulanger are inextricably linked. Although her fragile life was snuffed out at the tender age of twenty-four, the torch of Lili's incandescent genius was so bright that touched it everyone who knew her; no one as much as Nadia. Throughout her own immensely influential rôle as one of the major influences on classical music of the twentieth century, Nadia never waived in her devotion to her sister and to her memory. Years to come will reveal more of Lili's true genius to a growing audience and the richness and poetic intensity that permeates her surprisingly varied oeuvres. Yet throughout her virtual apotheosis in the annals of musical composition, Nadia remained modest and seemingly unfazed by her deserved fame and recognition on both sides of the Atlantic.





A very small sampling from the documentation of a long and distinguished life well lived





The many facets of her personality have captivated aficionados for years

Nadia was born on her father's seventy-second birthday. Although there was an obvious genetic propensity for music, as a child she was actually repelled by music. Growing up in a home where music was a constant, she would get upset and hide until the music stopped. Things changed when she was five and heard the klaxon of a fire alarm. She rushed to the piano and tried to reproduce the sound she had heard to the delight and amazement of her parents. From then on, she listened to her father as he gave singing lessons and she began to study music seriously from the age of five.

Lili was born in 1893 when Nadia was six. Her father Ernest, aged 78, made Nadia promise that she would watch over her little sister and be responsible for her sister's care. She continued her precocious study of music in preparation for the entrance exams at the Paris Conservatoire, little Lili listening in the room as her father gave Nadia private lessons. In 1896 at the age of nine, Nadia entered the Conservatoire to study composition with Fauré and Louis Vierne, as well as solfège (the European system of sight reading and singing of the *sol-fa* syllables in relation to the musical scale and melody).

Raïssa was a strict disciplinarian and taught both her daughters to strive for perfection, concentrating totally on their musical studies. Nadia studied harmony under Auguste Chapuis at eleven, having won first prize in the solfège competition in 1897. By the age of twelve, she had memorized Bach's entire *Well-tempered Clavier*. She also became an observant Catholic at an early age, taking her first Communion May 4, 1899. Both girls' faith was very important to them and they retained their connection with the Church for the rest of their lives. A significant proportion of Lili's major *oeuvres* were religious in nature: treatments of Psalms 24, 129 and 130; *Pie Jesu* and the touching

Vieille prière bouddhique for tenor choir and orchestra. The Psalms were from the Old Testament; *Pie Jesu* was the sole New Testament Christian work among her *oeuvres*, dictated to her sister when she was near the end of her life. About the eponymous *Old Buddhist Prayer* written late in her short life, Thomas Goss writes:

"In this last period, she completed the hypnotic 'Vieille prière bouddhique' one of the great choral works of the twentieth century. The text seems emblematic of her state of mind, with her music and spirit encircling the universe for one last embrace. "Let every creature, all living souls, and the spirits unborn, let every woman that liveth, without a foe, without hindrance, pain and sorrow transcend, at last attain peace and joy. Let all creatures freely move, each one in the path which to him is assigned."

There is no doubt that by this time she had had the presentiment that her days were limited. Her doctors had told her that she had only a few years left on earth, but nevertheless, she possessed a transcendental purity in her vision; from her earliest days, she created with a unique vision and preternatural maturity that belied her years.

Ernest died on April 14, 1900 at the age of 84, naming William Bouwens as Nadia and Lili's guardian. Lili was only seven. Raïssa lived another 35 years -- continuing to be a strong presence as a strict and demanding mother to the girls. Raïssa had an extravagant lifestyle and the meagre royalties from Ernest's compositions were insufficient to support three of them. Nadia worked hard at the conservatory to become the family's main breadwinner -- earning money performing on the organ and piano. She won the Conservatoire's first prize in Harmony in 1903. Nadia's first professional appearance playing the organ at the Trocadéro Palace was graced with the appearance of the President of France in the audience. She continued her studies in composition with Fauré, placing first in 1904 in the categories of piano accompaniment (studying with Paul Vidal) and fugue, composition (with Fauré) and organ (with Alexandre Guilmart).

One of Nadia's students, composer and conductor Igor Markevitch [1912-1983] dedicated the last of his *Trois poèmes for voice and piano* to the memory of Madame E. Boulanger. Obviously a powerful presence even with her daughter's students, Raïssa lived to the age of eighty, dying in 1935.)

Nadia's first professional appearance was followed by taking 1904 Conservatoire Firsts in organ, fugue and *accompagnement au piano*. Exhibiting the work ethic and indomitability inherited from her domineering mother, by the autumn of 1904 she began to teach students professionally at seventeen from the more modest family apartment on the fourth floor of 36, rue Ballu where the three women had moved from rue Maubeuge. Nadia lived and taught there until her death. (Originally deeded to the Institut de France, today it is the headquarters of the Nadia and Lili Boulanger international Foundation.) Teaching continued there almost till her death-- followed by her famous Wednesday "*at homes*" where students and mentors mixed, an easy mixture of professional musicians, poets and artists including Igor Stravinsky, Fauré, Paul Valéry and others.

Since 1906, she had stubbornly continued to strive for the First Grand Prix de Rome competition won by her father. At that point, it had never been won by a woman. Dignified but fiercely competitive, she persevered; her 1907 cantata *Selma* failed to win a prize, although in 1908, she entered a fugue for string quartet, rather than the requisite

vocal work that was the rule. Yet this transgression, as well as her gender, resulted in the judges awarding her the Second Grand Prix de Rome on its merits in the first round. This was followed by a second place with her cantata, *La Sirène* -- a text which was later assayed by Lili six years later with the haunting *Les Sirènes*...

"Its descriptions of the carnal beauty of women and their maddening allure are especially poignant coming from a woman whose whole life was denied the possibility of romance by her condition." Thomas Goss.

Undaunted, she continued to concentrate diligently on her work as a composer in addition to her teaching and performing. Unusual for a female composer -- and one so young, she began to attract serious attention in the French musical press.



Plaque on 36, rue Ballu-- now 3, de la place Lili-Boulanger, renamed by decree in 1970.

In 1904, Nadia met renowned French composer and pianist Raoul Pugno (1852-1914) in Garganville where the Pugno family had a summer home. Their two families became close friends. He taught her and promoted her career as a concert pianist and organist, often including her in his appearances, performing joint concerts. His support was crucial in these early days when she was still quite young. His keen interest in her became important throughout the following years. They would perform together and he began directing students to her for much needed funds. They later collaborated on a number of compositions.

He was known primarily as a concert pianist, although his compositions in the opéra-comique genre were notable at the time for their charm and grace -- a cut above the usual fare being offered. Pugno collaborated with André Messager on the ballet *Viviane* (1886) and with Clément Lippacher on *Le Chevalier aux fleurs* (1899). His first joint effort with Nadia was the song cycle *Les heures claires* in 1909. The following year, she began collaborating with Pugno on an opera based on Gabriele D'Annunzio's *La ville morte*. It was originally written as a play for Sarah Bernhardt, premiering at the Théâtre de la Renaissance in 1896. The Symbolist drama was an attempt to fuse ancient Greek tragedy and modern times (fin de siècle Paris at the time), beginning with an epigraph from Sophocles' *Antigone*...the Greek chorus replaced by the young heroine reading to a blind woman; proceeding in a decadent time-warped plot of murder, incest and hidden Mycenaean gold.

Work on the opera based on D'Annunzio *La ville morte* occupied Nadia and Pugno between 1910 and 1912 -- the libretto slightly altered by D'Annunzio from the original play. Pugno was a known interpreter of Debussy's work as was Boulanger and a fragrant whiff of the evanescent lyricism of *Pelléas et Mélisande* pervaded the work. D'Annunzio eventually became disinterested in the project and although there was a four-hand score and an extant prelude as a stand-alone piano piece, it was never performed during their lifetimes. A premiere of the work was cancelled by the outbreak of the First World War and it was never staged during her life.

But never say never. Drawing from autograph scores, the working libretto and personal documents housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, *The Dead City* finally came to life in July of 2015 during the First Siena (Italy) Music Week in the Sienese Church of Sant'Agostino. Under the auspices of the Accademia Chigiana, it was given its absolute premiere, with a new orchestration by composer Mauro Bonifacio, lovingly reconstructed in the land of D'Annunzio with a few cuts and minor accommodations of the murky Symbolist work to modern era sensibilities. Italian critic Maurizio Schiavo found it "*imposing...its emotional growth in the light of concrete realism among adulterers, incest and murderers.*" The plot is French Verismo finally brought to life after a century in obscurity, directed by Massimo Luconi with conductor Luca Pfaff with the Camerata Strumentale of Prato. It featured mezzo soprano Letitia Singleton, bass Randal Turner, soprano Michelle Canniccioni and tenor Lorenzo Carola with costumes by Paola Marchesin. Presented in four acts with the original French text in the vast atmospheric church setting, it revealed an intense but compact score that heightened the stark tragedy of Sophocles' *Antigone* -- interpreted through diaphanous water-colored symbolic imagery.

Giornale della Musica applauded this *Ville morte* as "a document of great interest in a literary, theatrical, musical era; (with) Debussian influences on the harmonic and timbric color, on the song(s) that float in almost-spoken curves as in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, even the commonality of certain symbols and emblems (water, hair); above all, the general concept of a (classic work) whose characters may have suffered their passions but also...(with) dramatic thrust, until the final song of Hébé.

With the nitpicking that delights musicologists and archivists, there is a delicious confusion to be drawn between this dramaturgid epic and the opulent 1920 Korngold opera *Die Tote Stadt* based on the Georges Rodenbach novel *Bruges-la-Morte*. (The libretto

is attributed to a certain 'Paul Schott,' a sly fictitious *nom de plume* for the creative efforts of Eric and his father). It's one of my favorite operas and I feel it's my duty to share at least this single aria, *Marietta's Lied* with you:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEUbD8KTfxQ>.

Sung here by Renée Fleming, it caresses the voice with iridescent lustre and schmaltzy Viennese Romanticism. It has been performed as a concert piece by every soprano who has ever come upon it. I'm so pleased that this opera-- and Korngold in general -- are finally getting the exposure they merit. Amazingly, it was written when he was only 23 with the hopeful vision of a world welcoming the precocious *wunderkind* with heady celebrity as the new Mozart. There used to be the dismissive curse of his later fame as virtually the King of Hollywood film scores -- all those Bette Davis movies after emigrating to America to escape the Nazis in 1938 -- but he's a heavy hitter with a vast output of delightful operas and symphonic works still being discovered by the music-loving public here and in Europe. During my 'salad days' in Manhattan, it was a staple of the New York City Opera which would produce it virtually annually. The recording to hear is still the 1975 RCA Premiere recording with René Kollo and Carol Neblett with Leinsdorf conducting.



Little Lili (Marie-Juliette Olga) was also a child prodigy virtually from the age of two when family friend Gabriel Fauré discovered that she was blessed not only with perfect pitch but an almost photographic note-memory! Encouraged by her parents, she would accompany ten year old Nadia to classes at the Conservatoire when she was only five, sitting in on classes on musical theory, singing and studying organ with Louis Vierne, piano, violin, cello and harp with Marcel Tournier and Alphonse Hasselmans. She was soon able to speak three languages. By the age of six, she was filling notebooks with harmony exercises, even though her health continued to be fragile, plagued by chronic illness. The constant presence of and encouragement from her older sister was a continuing influence on Lili's latent talent, but this was punctuated by collapse and consequent convalescence. (One is reminded of the indomitable spirit of the later chanteuse, Edith Piaf -- dramatically veering between performance and hospitalization for much of her life.)

Life studying at the Conservatoire was exciting but unfortunately, her health was not as robust as her musical genius. During the 1912 Prix de Rome competition, she collapsed during her performance, but she returned on July 5, 1913 to triumphantly win the competition with her cantata, *Faust et Hélène*, to the Eugene Adenis text based on Goethe's *Faust*. It was dedicated to her sister Nadia. Not only was she the first woman in the august institution's 115 year history to win the coveted prize -- she was only nineteen! the news swept France and the entire musical world. She was awarded a contract with Puccini's publisher Ricordi and the cantata became a popular work that was performed numerous times during her lifetime.

This achievement is more incredible when viewed in the context of the times. This was during the last days of the glamorous Belle Époque where women were regarded as decorative accessories to be spoiled and pampered, but seldom to be taken seriously.

(Think *Gigi*!) Although she was born into a home in which music permeated every niche and corner of her world, she was competing against men who were at least ten years older than she. Although she was recognized as a prodigy by major composers of her time, the era and hide-bound institutionalized sexism permeated the formalized proceedings of the hallowed competition; but she was determined not to be deterred by her delicate health, perhaps spurred on by the memory of her father's achievement winning the prize years before.

Nadia had given up her attempts to win after four unsuccessful attempts and generously focused her efforts on her beloved sister Lili; first as her student and later when Gabriel Fauré, whom she had known her entire life, began her training. Nadia reminisced later that Lili mastered composition studying with Paul Vidal and Georges Caussade in only three years. (Fauré was awed by her talents and frequently brought songs for her to read.) So much of her young life already marked by serious illness and prolonged attempts at recovery, it became clear that she was too frail to contemplate a normal life of marriage and children. Raïssa, the tough realist, confronted the situation plainly-- but Lili was resolute in her drive to study composition and win the elusive Grand Prix de Rome with its reward of residence in the Villa de Medici for several years as a professional composer. There was no question of her being there alone. As an invalid, she would perforce have to be dependent on the support of her mother and her sister for the rest of her short life.



36 rue Ballu, later 3. place de Lili Boulanger (The plaque above the pediment is on p.9)



Lili with Nadia around the time of her prize winning celebrity

With the time she had on earth, she would become a serious professional composer-- to use Sarah Bernhardt's motto: *Quand même*. No matter what. It is a testament to their mutual devotion that this was never a problem for any of them.

How do we judge a life? Here are two extraordinary sisters, both immortal, both prodigies almost from birth. Nadia -- one of the seminal forces in twentieth century music-- lived to be ninety-two. Productive since early childhood. virtually the single source of income for the three women since the age of seventeen, she was arguably one of the most influential forces in musical composition of her time in the entire world.

Lili, frail and ethereal, was dead at twenty-four after a lifetime of pain and suffering. Yet in those few short years she was capable of creating memorable music --haunting, spiritual works of extraordinary depth and originality that are yet to be fully appreciated

by an admiring world... major works for chorus and orchestra, songs, cantatas, the beginnings of an opera -- extended vocal works that live on. Even now, there is so much to be discovered and appreciated by even the most knowledgeable serious musical community.

Janet Horvath in *Interlude* on October 4th, 2015 wrote:

The Great Women Artists Who Shaped Music



"So far as musical pedagogy is concerned —And by extension of musical creation — Nadia Boulanger is the most influential person who ever lived"— Ned Rorem

"High praise indeed! Nadia Boulanger influenced an amazing and diverse group of artists during her long life. Her "boulangerie" included Phillip Glass, Quincy Jones, Thea Musgrave, Walter Piston, Elliott Carter, Virgil Thomson, Aaron Copland, Igor Stravinsky, Astor Piazzolla, Daniel Barenboim, Yehudi Menuhin and others. Ms. Boulanger was the first woman to conduct several major orchestras in America and Europe including appearances with the BBC and Boston Symphonies, the Hallé and Philadelphia Orchestras and the New York Philharmonic."

With the current rise of #MeToo and The Women's Movement, this story is uniquely prescient. At a time when women are just beginning to have equal footing with men in all areas of creative endeavor, the sisters quietly, modestly and confidently asserted their right to be heard, influencing a competitive field chockablock with the major talents of the day. Their output, although perhaps not as widely known as their compatriots, is universally accepted to be equal in stature to their peers. Seen in the context of the social history of intellectual life more than a century ago, it is nothing short of miraculous.

France has always been a country that lionizes its musical and intellectual elite, particularly in the Belle Époque era. The Conservatoire, the Opéra, the Comédie-Française are living breathing parts of the day-by-day life of Tout-Paris, and now Place Lili-Boulangier in the Ninth Arrondissement.

Lili's victory caused a sensation in Paris. *Le Monde* applauded her "for having, at her age, such an ability...a sense of the stage, a touching musicality... the innate ability to see and attain exactly the right means of expression. Her cantata was the revelation of the day." Émile Vuillermoz in his review in *Musica* entitled "War in Laces" waspishly wrote: "I warned musicians of the imminence of the 'Pink Peril:'... Mademoiselle Lili Boulangier has just triumphed in the last Prix de Rome competition over all the male contestants, and has carried off the Grand Prize with an authority, a speed, and an ease apt to seriously disturb the candidates who ... sweated blood... Do not be fooled: this deed stands on its own merits...they were stricter on this young girl of nineteen than her competition. The misogyny of the jury was known....

The following months were filled with courtesy calls to members of the Académie. (The last stage of the competition was voted on by the entire membership of the Académie, making it even more incredible!) There were interviews, award ceremonies and talks with publishers-- vital since her goal was to support herself. Ricordi granted her a stipend in return for first refusal on subsequent works. By 1914, she had become a self-supporting professional composer with the esteem of both the public and the musical intelligentsia.

But success had its costs. Following a series of successful concerts in 1913, her resistance flagged and she caught cold, followed by the measles-- in those days very serious, and she nearly died. Hanging on by a thread, she was given an extension on her expected departure for Rome where she was expected to live for several years, sending compositions that she would create back to the Académie regularly. She slowly made her way to Italy with necessary stops along the way.

The director, Albert Besnard, was not thrilled with the prospect of welcoming this apparently neurasthenic young woman to his all-male domain, protesting her refusal to eat meals in common with the other artists and the need to board her mother and a maid at the Villa as well. As much as possible, she tried to keep her condition secret, rarely leaving her room, causing the indignant Besnard (himself quite the prima donna) to regard her as a self-important little diva, I'm sure feeling upstaged by his frail but famous resident of his sacred domain. Fortunately however, the members of the Académie were sympathetic to Lili and dismissed his outrageous complaints and concerns, urging patience and understanding.

Back in Paris, Nadia went on with her teaching, establishing herself as a major force in music while still in her early twenties. There are conflicting reports about whether she went on composing herself-- some people reporting that she considered her compositions of little merit, calling them "useless." But incontrovertibly, these two sisters made an indelible mark on the pages of musical history with their humanity, their devotion to each other and their contribution to the art in a way that is an example to us all -- of modesty, diligence and selflessness in the face of incredible odds. Nadia devoted herself to the dissemination of her sister's music -- becoming a legend herself in the process. Her teaching studio was crammed with reminders of the past-- pianos, photos

furniture and memorabilia. Her home became a mecca for students and musical luminaries who would come to her Wednesday soirées to mingle--Stravinsky, Paul Valéry, Igor Markevich, Eliot Carter, Walter Piston, and others. Leonard Bernstein met her when he was fifty-eight. She made him feel like a twenty-one year old beginner, but he never forgot her birthday. She inspired this kind of loving devotion from everyone he came in contact with. When Argentine Astor Piazzola came to her to become a 'classical' composer, she told him to play some of his own music. "But I play tango," he said. Nadia responded "This is Piazzola!"

In addition to her teaching, she conducted many world-premieres including works by Stravinsky and Copeland-- championing the early works of Monteverdi as well as those of Fauré and Lili after her death at 24. She toured the United States performing the premiere of Aaron Copeland's *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* (dedicated to her) but it was only after 1935 when her mother died that she felt free to travel ---to become the first woman to conduct both the London and Royal Philharmonic Society Orchestras. In 1938, she made her debut as the first woman to conduct the Boston Symphony and began a tour giving over a hundred lectures to such prestigious institutions as Harvard, Radcliffe, Wellesley and the Longy School of Music.

As war threatened, she returned to Cambridge where she gave lessons in composition until the end of World War II, making an enormous impact on American music and composers. It was then that she began a continuing association with the American Conservatory of The Fontainebleau School where she taught every summer until her death in 1979, when her position was filled by her last prodigy student, Émile Naoumoff, whom she called 'the gift of my old age,' who began studying with Nadia at the age of eight. Yehudi, Lord Menhuin, conducted the premiere of his First Piano Concerto with him as soloist at the age of ten!

In a labour of love, Naoumoff was instrumental in the organization of a special concert *In Memoriam Lili Boulanger* at the Thirteenth Festival d'Auvers-sur-Oise, in June of 1993 which was recorded in the Church of Notre Dame d'Auvers-sur-Oise, featuring nineteen works by both Lili and Nadia Boulanger which was recorded by Marco Polo records (#8.22363). A quick search of Amazon on the internet will reveal the music by both Lili and Nadia on this recording. Rather than list the various music that is available, a desultory search of You Tube under both of their names will present you with a cornucopia of actual performances by a number of players that will be more eloquent than anything that I could say here. The proof of the pudding is in the eating -- Allow yourself the luxury of discovery of these rare gems gathering dust for too long. But do not neglect this video of her "*Old Buddhist Prayer*." Start there and continue with this enchanting and very personal journey in music. This prompt will lead you to a number of other videos and recordings of her and her sister's works, rather than yielding to the temptation of listing sites that may no longer be current when you access them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CwuXbioiV4>

As they say, the rest of course is history. Their story is a romance of sisterly love taken to an Olympian level. United by the love and creation of music, they rose above almost unbelievable adversity to quietly become immortal -- at a time when celebrity is

so often associated with compromise; with an unparalleled purity of purpose, sacrifice and selflessness.

There are a number of books available in French and English that explore the many facets of their accomplishments. I hope this introduction has piqued your interest. With the wonders of the internet, it is easily possible to explore their unique accomplishments on YouTube and other media through books, videos of performances and recordings. The following Wikipedia entries present a full listing of compositions by both sisters, as well as interesting more complete information than the confines of space allow here.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lili_Boulanger

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nadia_Boulanger

But things are looking up. In 2017, Delos has released a 2 CD album entitled *Mademoiselle: Premiere Audience -- Unknown Music by Nadia Boulanger* here are notes quoted from ARKIV MUSIC's presentation of recordings on the album available on line at this time:

Notes and Editorial Reviews

"Delos has the tremendous honor of issuing the first-ever album devoted to the wonderful compositions of Nadia Boulanger: truly a release of great historical importance. None dispute that Boulanger was by far the twentieth century's most influential composition teacher. Yet "Mademoiselle," as she has long been known in the music world, dismissed her own works as "useless," with the result that they are almost completely unknown to the musical public today. But not anymore. Music lovers everywhere can now hear Boulanger's complete works, published and unpublished (including 13 world premieres), in the genres of the art song, solo piano, cello and piano, and organ, as performed by an all-star array of musicians. Mademoiselle's music, with its beauty and originality, will amaze listeners everywhere."



Release Date: 03/10/2017

Label: Delos **Catalog #:** 3496

Composer: Nadia Boulanger

Performer: Lucy Mauro, Nicole Cabell, Alek Shrader, Edwin Crossley-Mercer

Number of Discs: 2

Review from *The Buffalo News* by Jeff Simon

Absolutely nothing about this record denotes one of the most important classical records of this or any year -- not the venerable but small American label Delos or the French, Israeli, and American musicians involved.

But what you've got here is historic and very great indeed: the first recording of music by one of the most important figures in all of 20th century music but one whose own music has been kept under virtual lock and key since her death in 1979 at the age of 92.

Nadia Boulanger's own compositional life occupied only a small part of her very long life: from 1901 to 1922. She didn't think her own music was worth much. You will differ completely after hearing these two discs. Listen to these songs, piano pieces and works for cello and piano and you'll, in fact, be dumbfounded that it took so long for this music to have its world premiere on record.

Recordings:

Versailles by *Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

J'ai frappé by *Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

Chanson by *Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Alek Shrader (Tenor)

Chanson by *Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Alek Shrader (Tenor)

Heures ternes by *Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

Le beau navire by *Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

Mon coeur by *Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

Doute by *Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Edwin Crossley-Mercer (Bass)

Un grand sommeil noir *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Edwin Crossley-Mercer (Bass)

L'échange *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

Soir d'hiver *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

Ilda *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

Prière *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

Cantique *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Alek Shrader (Tenor)

Poème d'amour *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Alek Shrader (Tenor)

Extase *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

La mer *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

Aubade *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Edwin Crossley-Mercer (Bass)

Au bord de la route *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Edwin Crossley-Mercer (Bass)

Le Couteau *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Edwin Crossley-Mercer (Bass)

Soleils couchants *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

Élégie *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

O schwöre nicht *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Alek Shrader (Tenor)

Was will die einsame Thräne? *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Alek Shrader (Tenor)

Ach, die Augen sind es wieder *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Alek Shrader (Tenor)

Écoutez la chanson bien douce *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Nicole Cabell (Soprano)

Vers la Vie nouvelle *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano)

Pieces (3) for Piano *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano)

Pieces (3) for Cello and Piano *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: Lucy Mauro (Piano), Amit Peled (Cello)

Improvisations (3) for Organ *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: François-Henri Houbart (Organ)

Pièce sur des airs populaires flamands for organ ("A ma petite Lili") *by Nadia Boulanger*

Performer: François-Henri Houbart (Organ)