My Chronicles with Nadia Boulanger

Emile Naoumoff

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My Chronicles with Nadia Boulanger

Gregory Martin *Littérateur*

"Je n'ai pas à enseigner Emile, j'épluche seulement l'orange..."

"I do not have to teach Emile, I only peel the orange..."

Nadia Boulanger

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PREFACE

I feel an enormous responsibility in being asked to preface this work that Maestro Emile Naoumoff has dedicated to our dear Nadia Boulanger, though I am also profoundly honored by the great trust he has shown in me.

No one is better qualified than he to face the challenge of passing on to the new generation of young musicians Nadia's contributions to music education in the twentieth century. He is perhaps the only one of her gifted students who truly covered the complete itinerary of her teaching – a course enriching and demanding, of which a fraction would have been enough for many students to become brilliant musicians and professors.

Emile possesses a divine gift and he is fully qualified to transmit and propagate the knowledge and ideals of Mademoiselle Boulanger. As a child prodigy, he grew under her kind tutelage. Now, in his turn, he has undertaken the task of passing on and developing her musical heritage. He is living testament to her grandeur and adds his own genius to hers, giving new life to this tradition and enriching us all spiritually and musically.

What made Nadia unique?

Her teaching encompassed philosophy, art, and metaphysics. She was open to all trends, and encouraged her students to likewise open their hearts and spirits. Curious about all cultures, she stayed faithful to her own – for music as an expression of the soul is a spiritual approach.

In a world where materialism reigns, its variables corresponding to monetary fluctuations, we need to hear musicians opening their souls in a completely pure and honest way. "Our" beloved Nadia was driven by a quasi-messianic devotion to communicate ethical values, while liberating the talents of her students from obstacles and prejudices, whatever they might be. She devoted her life to sharing her science with all those who sincerely sought to learn from her.

Thank you, Emile, for the opportunity to express what Nadia meant to me. My musical horizons were allowed to flourish greatly under her diligent and perfectionist watch.

She never ceased to amaze me by her capacity to put herself at the student's level. She pushed each one to their limits, and each one could, in an instant, perceive a genius at work.

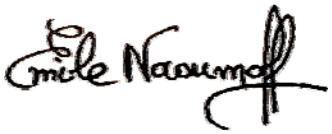
What luck we had, you as a child, Nadia at the twilight of her life, and me a young adult, to take together this step towards perfection. I had the privilege to observe with complete admiration the magnificent and nourishing process that operated between the two of you: you and Nadia were partners, and I watched with fascination. It was a delight to be a witness to the miracle of your union and to share in your unique gifts, at first just between the two of you, and then for all the world to see.

Today you radiate all this through your compositions, your performances, and your teaching.

Irène, *Princess of Greece*

NOTE OF THANKS FROM THE AUTHOR

I would like to take this opportunity to express my infinite gratitude to Marie-Françoise Vauquelin Klincksieck, whose admirable refinement and erudition almost rival her immense goodness. Her extraordinary understanding of my path is reflected in the sincere elegance of the questions asked here, and her sensitivity to the Cartesian structure[1] of my thoughts by the beautifully evocative chapter titles. I thank her for having captured the spontaneity of my story. From the very beginning of my journey, as a child prodigy, one finds, shining in full brilliance, the flexible longevity of the music teacher of the century: Nadia Boulanger. Time inexorably distances us from the decade captured in this narrative, but I will continue to attempt to convey Mademoiselle's message for the duration of my voyage – if clothed in constantly renewed ideas for successive generations, each in search of its own answers.



[1] "L'esprit Cartésien," or the Cartesian spirit, is French colloquial for a thinking pattern rooted less in daydreaming than in logic; it does not necessarily suggest a literal correspondence with the philosophy of Descartes.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The idea of translating this book came – as with all things surrounding Emile Naoumoff – from the music. I had written to Mr. Naoumoff asking if he might provide a copy of his early piano cycle *Musique dans l'univers d'un enfant* [Music in the World of a Child], and was sent not only an original print of the score, but several additional pieces, his *Passeport pour un pianiste averti* [Passport for an Informed Pianist], and *Mes dix ans avec Nadia Boulanger* [My Ten Years with Nadia Boulanger]. After working my way through the last of these, I wrote back asking whether there was an English edition in the works, to which he replied rather despondently that he had worked briefly with someone on a translation, only to find that his would-be collaborator insisted on a word-for-word retelling – the kind of rendering that would leave the poetic and sometimes idiosyncratic manner of Mr. Naoumoff's syntax sounding childish at best and, at worst, unintelligible. I knew at that moment that we shared a similar philosophical approach to the aesthetics of translation, and I quickly sent him a version of the first few paragraphs; it was a very rough draft, but I received an immediate response – almost all of his responses are immediate (how does he do it?!) – which was as encouraging as it was enthusiastic, and ended with a simple question: would I consider translating the rest?

Not far into the process, I realized it would be beneficial to get together with him and discuss exactly what he meant by certain turns of phrases and word choices – and at this point, the nature of my endeavor took a marked shift. During that meeting, and a subsequent one, and yet another, he elaborated on his points by means of stories and details that were not in the original, but which I felt a reader interested in Nadia Boulanger and her teaching might like to know. With his permission, I included several of these, and did a bit of rearranging, while still trying to respect the initial questions upon which the book was founded (as posed by Mr. Naoumoff's dear friend Madame Marie-Françoise Vauquelin Klincksieck). What began to unfold was something new enough that Mr. Naoumoff thought it merited a new name, and so *My Ten Years with Nadia Boulanger* became *My Chronicles with Nadia Boulanger*. (His one mandate was that I include only anecdotal information which he discovered during the course of his studies with Mademoiselle Boulanger; consequently – with only a handful of exceptions – quite a few astonishing tales were deliberately omitted, as they only came to light after his tenure with her had ended.)

Part of my job in preparing this volume was not only to translate Mr. Naoumoff's words from French to English, but also to present them in a way commensurate with the way English speakers use and think in their language, while still making it all sound like Emile Naoumoff. Unlike someone trying to translate Molière or Goethe, I had the benefit of knowing the author with whose text I was working, and have had a lengthy enough relationship with him (since my student days at Indiana University) to recognize the significant difference between the way he writes and speaks; I have tried to take advantage of this rather marked distinction by shifting from one manner to another depending on the nature of the material being discussed. Similarly, the content has dictated whether I use more typically "English" prose (such as regular alliteration, or a higher frequency of monosyllabic words – apparently 99% of the entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary* are of foreign extraction, and yet the small remaining native portion comprises 62% of the words most used in our language, and these

are, to a large extent, monosyllabic),[2] or a more florid "Latinate" style – this is often reserved for Mr. Naoumoff's rhapsodic excursions into, for example, the nature of interpretation or performance. This decision was purely mine, and any inaccuracies or awkwardnesses that result are solely my fault. I should also add that I have frequently chosen to translate the gender-neutral French pronoun "on" as "he" (rather than "one") for two reasons: first, reading "one" as subject or object too often in English seems to me clumsy – those instances where I have retained it were an aesthetic decision; and, two, given that "she" is regularly used to refer to Mademoiselle Boulanger, it seemed the best way to avert any confusion that might result.

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to three individuals: my wife Christina, for her unfailing support during my many hours of work on what she intuitively understood was a labor of love; Yau Cheng, who was ever-ready to forward any additional documents or pictures that might make this experience an even richer one for me; and, of course, Emile Naoumoff, for his great patience with my litany of questions and the years it took to bring this book to fruition (which I'm sure he thought would take months), for the many miles he has driven to visit with me and elaborate on this aspect or that, and – most importantly – for entrusting me with his memories.

Gregory Martin
Indianapolis, USA

Compilation assistance by Gueorgui Naumov
Illustrated by Yau Cheng

[2] John McWhorter, *The Power of Babel* (New York: Perennial, 2003), 95.

CHAPTER I – GENESIS

1) How do you explain the fact that as soon as you learned the note names, you were immediately able to recognize any pitch you heard?[3]

Lesson with Liliana Panaïotova (1967, Sofia, Bulgaria)

Well, I honestly cannot explain it. I remember very clearly being five years old, and going to piano lessons with Liliana Panaïotova – a friend of my father, who was himself a musician before deciding to pursue a medical career. I can still see her in her apartment in Sofia, standing in front of the upright piano, an old German model from before the war with large candelabras, saying to me: "My little Emile, this key" – and she would press it – "is called 'Do', that one 'Re'," and so forth. It was like she implanted electronic memories in me, and from then on, it was as if all the notes were inscribed in my subconscious, no longer waiting to have names bestowed on them.

De facto, from that instant, every time I heard a sound or a note was named to me, it rang in my ear at its own unique frequency… Whether it was a car horn or a toilet flush, I heard its pitch. My mind was miraculously able to wed rote memorization – the designation which each note had now attained – to this natural predisposition. This correspondence was so impressed upon my subconscious that today I am incapable (and I believe that I will be so until the end of my life) of singing a pitch with an incorrect name.

In truth, having perfect pitch is much more bothersome in everyday life than not having it, if one is acutely sensitive to tone. From the beginning, it led to much discomfort when listening to 33-rpm LPs, for example, which don't always play at the right speed and may thus produce sounds a half-step too high or low. I have a similar difficulty with Baroque instruments, which generally play at least a minor second below notated pitch, and even modern instruments when played out of tune. This having been said, it is a great asset as a child when one is working to advance as a musician: it allowed me to compose quickly, to imagine and cultivate a complex sound-world from a very early age. It meant that I didn't have to rely on the crutch of something like intervallic relationships in order to locate the notes I heard in my head.

The internal ear hears so much more than the external one… When I attempt to sublimate the sounds in my imagination, I do so at a table, away from the piano; there is always a moment of hesitation when it comes time to play what I have notated – so great is my obsessive fear that it will not correspond to what I hear in my head.

It is shuddering for me to think of the internal abyss which Beethoven or Fauré must have come to inhabit at the end of their lives when suffering from deafness…

[3] As is mentioned in the author's note, these questions were posed by Marie-Françoise Vauquelin; they serve as points of departure from which the narrative structure of these memoirs unfold.

2) As a child, did you feel that your relocation from Bulgaria to France had an element of exile to it?

While I certainly felt the gravity of the situation, no, on the whole, I didn't feel as if I was really in exile. In fact, at the time, I felt as much an adult as I do now – perhaps proving that I am immature now, but also probably that I was too grown-up for my age then (I say this at the risk of seeming completely immodest, and perhaps immature in retrospect).

Even as a boy, I felt no difficulty in expressing myself musically – both in terms of conception and devotion to my art, for which this serious side is necessary; that has not changed. I have never seen music as a pastime or anything along the lines of "we'll see what comes of it later… one makes of it what one wants… if it's not too difficult…" Not at all.

Of course the constraints are trying, but they've never turned me away. I've always kept that initial wonder at sounds and their vibrations, and this wonder at the multitude of possible combinations has been my driving force. From my first piano lesson, I understood the degree of dedication that would be necessary, and, though others saw me as a little boy, I was aware of a distinction between what they observed and my inner commitment.

To all this, language was essential. I was born in Bulgaria, but my mother always spoke to me in French, or rather her own kind of French: it was that of a French-speaking person with a Greco-Slavic accent, but, in syntax and vernacular, a variant of French all the same. She always loved, admired, and followed French culture as her sole moral guide and lifestyle, a dedication that had been passed from mother to daughter for several generations of her family. Hers was a Greek family in Asia Minor that safeguarded the principles of French education as imparted in French religious institutions, with one consequent being that my mother had spoken to me in French since I was a child. This would prove to be extraordinarily beneficial, as I was able to speak directly with Nadia Boulanger once we arrived in Paris.

I suspect she owed it to herself to say that it would be good for me to acquire some French, even if only phonetically: she wanted to pass on what she had learned, and probably felt that it would be to my advantage to have some French – especially if the right opportunity should arise (one always wants the best for their children). There was a wholly natural agreement, and sense of continuity in my mother, the Francophile and perfect French speaker from Asia Minor (by way of Greece): two heritages, one the mother of civilization, the other the mother of literature and culture. It was luck and destiny which saw to it that Nadia Boulanger would be Parisian.

Emile with his parents Gueorgui and Eli

I spoke Greek with my maternal grandparents, who looked after me when my parents were at work – my mother as a laboratory assistant, and my father as a radiologist and cancer specialist – and with my father I spoke Bulgarian. The last of these was the least familiar to me, as my father worked a lot and therefore spent less time at home. But no one worried about it much, because the day was coming when I would begin going to school (as it turned out, I ended up attending a year at most at the elementary school in Sofia).

My father made the acquaintance of individuals in all walks of life – many as patients. One such person was the piano professor Constantine Stankovitch. A former student of Alfred Cortot and Marcel Ciampi,[4] Stankovitch was on the fringe of the conventional conservatory scene in Bulgaria. Having studied a little in France at the École Normale,[5] he had the appearance of being an expert of rare quality in little Bulgaria (which had a population of eight million during the 1960s of my youth). At that time, most Bulgarian musicians were rather complacent, perhaps overly satisfied with themselves – insecure and self-assured behind the opaque Iron Curtain. But Stankovitch, who had tasted other fruit, even if he had not been able to continue doing so, held a broader view of things. Alas, he became amorously attached to me and it took all of my parents' tact to make sure that this did not degenerate into a dangerous situation.

Emile and Constantine Stankovitch

Eventually, my father diplomatically asked him, "What should we do with little Emile? Do we let him grow and develop in Sofia, as many of the other teachers here suggest?" Stankovitch replied, "If there is one person in the world – and if she is still alive – who can determine the right thing to do with a child prodigy, who can take on the responsibility to help him develop, it is Nadia Boulanger, whom I knew of when I was in France."

At the time, communications were not what they are today, with our instant worldwide access. It was the Iron Curtain – a lot of smoke and mirrors but without knowing whether or not there was a fire – and the echoes of the West arrived in a very deformed way.

Fatefully, around this time my father was invited to assist at a radiology congress in Rome. We were thus able to leave Bulgaria and travel to the West, via Austria by rail, on the train which was still at the time called "The Orient Express." My father resolved to profit from this trip, and our voyage towards Paris began.

Naturally, we stopped in Vienna to visit the homes of famous composers, Beethoven among them. Later, my own son would exclaim in similar circumstances: "Why do you always visit the houses of people who don't live there anymore?" This is a remark I've never made, because I feel a bond to such abstract conceptions as the notion of place, believing that these buildings act as symbols of these musicians – they are important on a personal level, as well, as my father was from a music-loving family, his mother having been an elementary school music teacher in rural Bulgaria, and he himself a musician before training as a doctor.

With Beethoven's piano

[4] Alfred Cortot (1877-1962) and Marcel Paul Maximin Ciampi (1891-1980) were famous Paris-based pianists and teachers.

[5] Alfred Cortot co-founded the École Normale with Auguste Mangeot in 1919. Unlike the Paris Conservatory, which requires formal acceptance through an entrance competition, anyone can enroll at the École Normale (the audition is a formality).

I visited the *Hochschule für Musik*, where I met a composition professor named Erich Urbanner. I auditioned at the school, and was admitted – but the prospect of attending there introduced a major obstacle: I spoke no German, and therefore couldn't converse with anyone on my own – and so in addition to constantly acting as my interpreter, my father also often spoke on my behalf (perhaps not unusual for a seven year-old who had difficulty articulating his opinions).

While my mother had been educated in French, my father had conducted his medical studies in German, and so he acted as my translator.[6] This led to something of a familial division, while also bringing the matter of my future to the fore. Because we had left Bulgaria and were now west of the Warsaw Pact countries, it was time to determine a path for me. Even then I felt the weight of this decision – it was a trip without return.

Of course, I was lucky enough to have both of my parents with me, but between my Bulgarian father (of Macedonian heritage) and my Greek mother, there was always a cultural divide, a schism reflecting two cultural points of view going back over two thousand years. It was therefore natural for me to think that there would arise another conflict, this time between the German and French languages and cultures. My interview at the *Hochschule* in Vienna had put me ill at ease with German, and when we would debate our future options, I fell silent.

The next destination was Rome, where my father had organized a concert for me. On the way, we stopped in Venice to explore those legendary places which any informed tourist must visit. These discoveries were supplemented by lyrical and intellectual commentary drawn from my mother's love of knowledge and my father's love of history: a veritable living encyclopedia on one side, and a walking dictionary on the other. Everything I saw was thus perceived as if in another dimension: that of comprehension.

Svoboda Naumova teaching solfège in rural Bulgaria

From my perspective, Italy was a magnificent country, already easier to access because all the people we met there spoke French. My father attended the conference to which he had been invited, and I performed in a very beautiful palace during a cultural soirée, playing the Bach concerto in F minor, which I had planned to perform with Professor Stankovitch on a second piano; as it turned out, visa issues kept him from making the trip, and, in his absence, I had to improvise the orchestra part.

It was my first public recital outside of Bulgaria, and it attracted quite a few offers from some more or less dishonest agents. My parents disregarded them, and we continued towards Paris, the road out of Bulgaria continuing to draw us nebulously towards the mythic entity of Nadia Boulanger, who – as far as we knew – had perhaps already passed into the next world.

[6] There was a tradition of German study in Bulgaria, due in no small part to the fact that after the restoration of the Bulgarian monarchy in 1879 (following the Russo-Turkish War), all the kings had been of German descent (from the royal houses of Battenberg, and Saxe-Coburg and Gotha). My father had done postdoctoral work in West Germany, and we had, in fact, briefly lived in West Berlin during my childhood (1964-66). The medical textbooks he authored while in Germany were, appropriately, in German, and his diploma was accepted as valid in Germany; it did not, however, have equivalency in France.

From the recital in Rome (1970)

Whatever sense of exile I did feel at the onset of our trip – somewhat in Vienna; much less in Italy (with the ruins of Rome accompanied by the familiar historical commentaries of my father) – diminished as our journey toward Paris continued. After each "port-of-call," I laid my musical eggs, so to speak. I felt the need to make personal postcards, a musical evocation of all I saw and heard. The same would later happen with the sound of church bells when I went to Berlin. (To some extent, this anticipated Nadia Boulanger's practice of celebrating my birthdays by having me compose a piece to mark each new year – making me build my own birthday present, so to speak – and then premiere it at the birthday party she threw for me; for example, a piece for two violins and piano which she asked me to write for myself and Olivier Charlier, a prodigy at the Paris Conservatory with whom she had put me in touch, and his sister Claire.)

My need to portray what had moved and impressed me was something of a duty: given my mother's remarkable emotional investment in all she saw and experienced, I could not remain oblivious. In the eyes of someone as passionate as this unique woman, by her Mediterranean nature inclined to excess, insensitivity was an intolerable odor, truly the worst of things. To her, everything was cast in relief: everywhere you looked were ubiquitous epithets, which she in turn engraved in me, who then translated them into music. (There would be a very elaborately developed psychoanalysis to make there…) This allowed me to see through to a logical conclusion the rudiments of Latin culture that I had learned from my father, and which I later tried to pass on to my son Vladimir when he was a child (after all, one can't escape the formative principles of one's youth, for better or worse – even while trying to use the best of parental judgment to discern between the two, I suppose).

Alas, eventually we had to say "Veni, Vidi, Vici" to Italy. I had been magnetized, and it is certainly thanks to such experiences that my "exile" was less dolorous than it may well have been. My age also helped, for if I had been older, I would not have had as much mental receptiveness (one could say "naïveté"), and would likely have been less flexible in my capacity to assimilate.

The true spark, however, was our arrival in France. It was grey, and very humid. Though the Seine seemed sickly and the subway gave me claustrophobia, at least I could speak with everyone. I later had a similar experience in Greece, the feeling of returning to one's origins in a distant land, but with more intellectual comfort than I felt upon arriving in France, where my sense of belonging owed much to my love of the language. But while I could write a little in Bulgarian, I wasn't able to do so in French or Greek because I spoke both phonetically, and in a manner uniquely mine.

This inability to write was not an issue, however, when it came to music. For that I kept a notebook to jot down my musical ideas (my Esperanto of sorts), sketches that would soon serve me while composing my first concerto (completed at the age of ten and conducted by Yehudi Menuhin, at Nadia Boulanger's request). When we arrived in Paris, then, I was writing music regularly, but words only on occasion (and in Cyrillic, if anything).

At this point, my mother began to introduce more Greek into our regular flow of conversational French, so as to be able to discretely instruct, even reprimand, me. This assured that any critiques on my table manners, for example, might not be general currency… until the day that I discovered that another of the students, the one who often sat next to Nadia Boulanger, was Princess Irène of Greece, and she could understand all the instructions that my mother was giving me. It was when I heard her speaking in her native tongue that I first became aware of something like exile in my situation, though it wasn't particularly painful.

Emile and Princess Irène in front of Nadia Boulanger's Paris apartment

My mother's fear of being socially out of place in the France that she admired so much, the country of Hugo and Balzac – one that had been, until now, completely unreal – would have been devastating in its way, and was certainly rooted in having had her father put in a Stalinesque indoctrination camp after the Second World War, where those who didn't naturally fall in line with the Communist party agenda were urged to rethink their position. Was it in her subconscious that my musical endowment justified a trip that was so ineffably foolish from a political and economic point of view? After all, it was a post-1968 Paris, and Hugo, Musset et al were no longer as fashionable as they once were…[7] But the individuals surrounding Nadia Boulanger comforted my mother in their regard for etiquette – and not just the woman next to me, who happened to be Greek royalty. (What is perhaps most memorable to me is that when she spoke to me in Greek, to tell me her name, I dared to say to her, "But you don't wear a crown, so you're not a princess…" That made her smile and say, "in any case, the queen of music here is Nadia Boulanger.")

Whatever the feeling of exile, my mother had seen to it that I was intellectually prepared to live in France – a duality to this little Slav that certainly appealed to Mademoiselle Boulanger, a woman who was primarily French, though also Slavic by her mother. These two personality aspects could only create immediate, even emotional, links with me during our first meeting. She insisted that I address her in Russian, calling her Nadiejda Ernestovna (using the Slavic and Cyrillic convention of founding a second forename on the father's first name, in this case Ernest). She likewise found a nickname for me, one that seemed ridiculous to me at the time, but which was intended to express tenderness (and one which soon came to feel that way, too): "Emilka." She thus actively sought to establish a relationship with me analogous to that between grandmother and grandson.

I realized then that the groping steps of my parents – who could give me no recommendation as illustrious personages, nor any prestige in music which might act on my behalf (I was neither a Jeremy, son of Menuhin, nor an Oleg, son of Markevitch) – had nonetheless succeeded in doing exactly what they had set out to do: Nadia Boulanger heard my compositions, and offered me access

[7] May 1968 saw a series of sometimes violent demonstrations, strikes, and occupations throughout France, culminating with Charles de Gaulle clandestinely leaving the country for several hours.

to her reservoir of music, immediately engaging Mademoiselle Dieudonné as my music theory tutor (which in its way was perhaps her greatest pedagogical testament to me).[8]

With Annette Dieudonné and Nadia Boulanger

I was also an object of fascination to her, to some extent. This discovery of a little Slav speaking French, years after her little Turk Idil Biret, the precocious pianist who, according to Mademoiselle, played the Mozart concertos to perfection while still a child, satisfied her need for a child prodigy. She had also trained the prestigious young pianist (and brilliant theorist) Robert Levin, now a professor at Harvard. And before then, there had been Pierre Petit and Igor Markevitch, and the young composer Jean Françaix… (These are but some examples strewn over more than fifty years.)

And here I was, arriving at the end of the calendar, so to speak. It was enough to make her smile internally: the strong and weak aspects of my Slavic origin being translated into harmonic pedals; my search for a musical identity; the way I pronounced words like "telephaune" (she spent almost an entire lesson correcting my speech, as her mother had had the same accent brimming with low-pitched vowels)… And the first thing she helped me discover was Fauré – not to erase my native voice, but rather to bring the Slavic tone-world in which I had bathed almost exclusively until then into counterpoint with that profound Latin quality. (Although I had not spent my childhood in Orthodox churches, this music was in me as if I had breathed it in the air.) After her death, I discovered "Vers la vie nouvelle" (Toward the New Life), a piece she had written upon the death of her sister Lili, a composition with low Rachmaninovian harmonies, deeply Slavic and static… which leads me to conclude that she had labored to harmonize these two rich inspirations herself – the Slavic and French – until they were able to cohabitate in her peacefully.

For me, however, she was greater than just these two polarities: she represented all music, from the ancient (Byrd and Bach) to the modern (with Stravinsky).

And that's how it was. I can say with great certainty, now that I am situated in the United States, that not only did I never feel in exile in France, but I feel more deeply formed by France than by Greece or Bulgaria – by a nostalgia for a Parisian era which I never knew, that of Cocteau between the two wars, of Satie, Picasso, and de Falla.

Paris had not asked these illustrious foreigners for their art, but rather simply to stay themselves and thereby become universally… Parisians.

It is something on which Nadia Boulanger greatly insisted: "Chopin stayed Polish, de Falla stayed Spanish; there is no reason that Emile should not stay what he is – that is to say, himself: a Bulgarian with a French intellect."

[8] Mademoiselle Dieudonné taught what in France is termed "solfège," though her responsibilities extended beyond Guidonian solfège into music theory, keyboard harmony, ear-training, clef-reading, continuo realization, rhythmic dictation – all the elements of musical grammar.

Class of Madame Monnet at the Cours Hattemer

These two cultures thus came to complement one another on a daily basis, much as my troubles in learning to write (in the literary sense) at the Hattemer School,[9] where I enrolled for my elementary education, found a parallel in the difficulties I encountered trying to master the intricacies of Mademoiselle Dieudonné's rhythmic dictations. Though I had absolute pitch, rhythm was not an element that came easily to me.

I believe I succeeded in integrating these various strands in part because I didn't need to spend time on issues of pitch, leaving me free, during those nuclear doses of theory and ear-training which Mademoiselle Dieudonné breathed into me five times a week, to acquire a broader virtuosity in writing, one which Nadia Boulanger further developed through contrapuntal studies – to the aim of obtaining a sense of constant motion that I might use to interact with my more static Slavic tendencies. This interaction ultimately yielded exciting results: my *Concerto Sacré* (Sacred Concerto), for example, is motivated by playing the Slavic church-bell sounds of the piano and the melodic Gregorian/Latinate writing of the chorus off of one another. Again, Mademoiselle Boulanger saw this polarity immediately, and encouraged it throughout my ten years with her.

She also recognized that it was imperative to achieve a fluid exchange between my inner sound-world, and its external expression (whether it be in words or tones) as quickly as possible, and "at all costs," to use one of her favorite sayings. Furthermore, while it was necessary that I be aware of the need to pace my forward progress – in order to allow my potential to surface naturally (regardless of how long that might take) – she was also far from the "wait and see" approach so prominent in Bulgaria, Austria, and Germany, which had suggested holding off my compositions until I acquired a true pianistic knowledge (at sixteen or seventeen years old, perhaps).

It was what my father had sought, and exactly what I wanted: it was the dream – and she offered it.

[9] The *Cours Hattemer* (Hattemer School) is a private school in Paris, and provides both elementary and high school training. Noteworthy alumni include Brigitte Bardot, Jacques Chirac, Prince Rainier of Monaco, Édouard de Rothschild, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

CHAPTER II – THE ENCOUNTER

1) Is it true that when Nadia Boulanger warned of the extreme demands you would face, you declared: "It does not matter – I feel in myself the strength of centuries"?

This phrase evidently came from the same place as the one I uttered to assuage my parents' anxiety when I was eleven years old and preparing to play in the Berlin Philharmonic's hall for the first time: "It [the hall] is intimate – all the people surround you…"[10]

I remember very clearly having said that in Berlin – it was an honest reflection of the unadulterated jubilation I feel sharing music while on stage, a feeling which I have never lost. Since childhood, I have always had a sincere sense of confiding something profound with the audience, an intimacy akin to the freedom one experiences when in the company of dear friends near a warm chimney-hearth.

Each time, I pursue a dialogue with the composer whose music I am playing, either through pure instinct (as in childhood) or, in the years since, with intellect and intuition in some sort of communion. The gradual incorporation of thought into the mix only came because I began to understand and learn from what I loved. For instance, a fondness for the German Romantics leads to a reading of the literature which acted as a connecting link between Brahms, Cosima, Liszt, Wagner, von Bülow, and Clara across the century, beginning with Schumann's early death. So much information flows when one plays their music – one cannot really comprehend the artistic dance in which their works bathe, only attempt to imagine it. Very often, it seems children can only conceptualize the small and internal universe of such works by creating images to work by; but even as a child, when I played music, I didn't need any kind of "program" to help guide me – I was one with the piece, intimate only with the work itself. My universe was simple.

In front of the Berliner Philharmonie

One such piece with which I felt very comfortable was Beethoven's first concerto: I played it in Paris under Menuhin (programmed with my own first concerto), and then brought it to Berlin to perform with the Austrian conductor Thomas Mayer. Because this concert was in Germany, Beethoven's homeland, there was obviously a different level of profundity to it.

This occasion also gave me early exposure to something that has become increasingly precious to me: relativity. I realized quickly that the approach to tempo changed radically once I crossed the Rhine. Menuhin had been of a quick and nervous Latin manner, but Mayer's style was more staid, more composed, at the back of the beat and markedly slower. Furthermore, the beat pattern was different: in Germany, the conductor gave four beats to the measure instead of two (which Menuhin had done). That complicated everything for a child with little pianistic technique, who could camouflage his

[10] The hall was designed by Herbert von Karajan to enclose the stage, thus placing the artist in the center, rather than putting the performer and audience opposite one another.

inadequacies more easily when moving at a faster tempo. At the slower pace, all my technical flaws were exposed, and I had to instantaneously adapt on stage – in addition to making rather significant adjustments between the rehearsal and the concert. (Nadia Boulanger was not at all happy that I was performing such a work at this age, but my father had obtained this engagement for me, and I felt parental pressure to see it through. And then there was the psychological weight of playing in the mythical hall of the Berlin Philharmonic, something of which Mademoiselle was acutely aware.)

It was an atmosphere suffused with musical Germanism, with all its traditional and disconcerting objectivity. Even then, I felt the difference of approach between the more artistically subjective and involved French manner and the German culture, where Beethoven resided at the heart of musical legitimacy. And who should show up to perform the Master's iconic first concerto but a child who, though already a somewhat skilled composer, was a rather awkward pianist. That is to say, I played like a composer, compensating for my technical shortcomings with the flow of my musicality; it was a performance by a pianist submersed in profound musical ideas, with just enough technical means to impress.

"I feel in myself the strength of centuries." This was something that I felt even in the initial stages of the trip… Having sat for days on the Orient Express, with its sleeping cars and my parents as spiritual and intellectual travel guides (with their own biases and comprehension of things, as well as a capacity to truly exchange ideas in the languages of those nations we traversed), and after having journeyed from Slavic Bulgaria, through austere Austria and flamboyant Italy, I was only too eager to arrive in Paris. While crossing the various cultures, I succeeded as best I could in sorting out my scale of values.

This experience – one that was real, not virtual – gave me a true understanding of the clock of years, a real sense of multi-dimensionality as successive events unfolded in space-time.

My maternal grandfather had instilled in me this idea of motion through space because of his culture, to which I became so affectively attached. He had fought in the Great War on the Greek side, and told me: "One day you will get to Greece and the Acropolis, and recite our patriotic poem: 'My beloved homeland, like you I know no other…'"

Emile with his father and brother (1966)

All this helped me understand how complex but necessary it was to put these coexistences in order in my young head. I was passionate about history, and the continuity of centuries represented for me a sort of battery, like the cohesion within our family-trio. (My father had another son, Nikolay, from his first marriage, though that was about fifteen years before I was born, which essentially gave him, as he liked to say, two only-sons.) Our unity was a necessity not

only in front of our friends, but even more so when confronting those unhealthy individuals who so often gravitate toward child prodigies.

We had to distinguish between the true and false prophets, the true and false friends, those who tried to obtain personal gain by manipulating the financial vulnerability of my parents, or sought to force themselves into our circle to placate their own ambition – and at the same time, we had to learn how to discern, without any preliminary data, those who represented outdated trends or merely fashionable tendencies.

Faced with so many dangerous solicitations, and trying desperately not to get lost, our trio symbolized cohesion. Growing up in a very small apartment in Sofia, I had always slept in the same room as my parents. I found myself in the same situation in Paris, where we could only rent bachelor-style studio apartments or live in the *Cité des Arts*,[11] and in Berlin when my mother and I would go visit my father – to say nothing of the night trains that brought us back to the Gare du Nord (North Station) in Paris, rain pouring down, and me with swollen eyes. (In order to support my mother and me while I was studying with Mademoiselle Boulanger, my father – who spoke no French, and whose medical diploma did not have equivalency in France – took work in West Berlin, from where he was able to organize my performance with the Philharmonic. Returning to Sofia to work would have been a futile endeavor, as Soviet Bloc currency didn't hold any substantial value in the West – and exchanging it would have been a difficult prospect, to say the least.) All this contributed to a sense of the three of us and – not "against" – the rest of the world.

And shining above all of us was the sun: Nadia Boulanger. This was an impression that was only reinforced by her status in the Parisian musical scene – a mythic figure that everyone gravitated around, but which one didn't dare look at. I took this analogy further: my father was a sort of astronaut turning around the orbit of the moon to meet our needs in Berlin, so that my mother and I could make a lunar landing (as with Apollo 11, which had reached the moon that July) not far from the sun. This led him to refer to himself as, "he who helps but isn't seen – and therefore doesn't have the aura of having walked on the moon." The other professors that aided my Parisian studies were each, in their own ways, protective satellites around the star that was Nadia Boulanger: her assistant Mademoiselle Dieudonné, and my teachers at the Paris Conservatory and École Normale - Mesdemoiselles Gervais, Gousseau, and Lengelé; Mesdames Joy-Dutilleux and Bonneau-Robin; Messieurs Sancan and Dervaux.

This impression of my father as an astronaut in his own orbit, removed and outside of ours, was reinforced by him sending me audio cassettes of composer biographies in the style of radio dramas, which he made during his free hours through what modest means he had (running his fingers over empty margarine tins to obtain the sound of horse-hoofs, etc.). Each week I received a new installment, which I would listen to late into the night before falling asleep.

[11] The *Cité des Arts* is a residency in central Paris which hosts mainly foreign artists wishing to live and work in the French capital.

These cassettes were so marvelous not just because they came from my father, but also because my quintessentially Slavic nostalgia was nourished by such imaginary trips into the past, journeys that were supplemented by the literary-based conversations I had with my mother. This all became a true splendor of riches when Nadia Boulanger began pouring allusions to her musical acquaintances from the past century into the undercurrent.

In the Cité des Arts

Because I was so naïve, it was essential for me to not only remain extremely attentive while sorting through all of this, but also to learn how to stay afloat. Acquiring an ability to sift through so much information was something my parents had been adamant about, and my "strength of centuries" comment was essentially an observation on my internal fusion of so many superimposed details with the energy that animated me each morning, an energy that to this day – even when depressed – awakens me like a rocket. I never feel more capable of giving more and working harder to better myself – per Mademoiselle Boulanger's edict to me – than when I first wake up. I wish I could give recitals at 7:00 in the morning: I am not a night owl, like Yves Nat or Samson François, who was at his best in the middle of the night and slightly inebriated. (I've never felt the need to drink, either to "let myself go" in social situations, or to find inspiration beyond my own imagination –perhaps because my mother always required me to be in absolute control of myself.) What luck to have these natural reserves of energy: as long as I can preserve them, I will feel able to continue moving forward…

It was this energy, which I have had since childhood, that contributed so much to my efforts to live up to the expectations of my parents and Mademoiselle Boulanger. Another motivating factor was the weight of knowing what my parents had sacrificed for me: though it wasn't overwhelming, it was constantly on my mind. And perhaps most of all was my awareness of what Nadia Boulanger was giving to me, including the great fortune of meeting (and working with) such personalities as Magaloff, Stravinsky, Casadesus, Richter, Bernstein, Rostropovich, Markevitch, and Khachaturian.

But instead of intimidating me, all this secured me. When Yehudi Menuhin stood in front of me to conduct the initial rehearsal of my first concerto – which Nadia Boulanger had refused to listen to beforehand, on the grounds that such self-reliance was essential in seeing a creative act through to its conclusion – I was admittedly nervous, however musically sure of myself. (It was analogous to being an actor and being presented to Jean Gabin…[12]) It's perhaps like asking those soldiers of the 1914-18 war to describe their fear: those who were most obviously heroic replied "we never felt any…" They of course certainly had done so before combat, but not while fighting. It was the same for me (if without such dire consequences) – I was anxious beforehand, but during the rehearsal itself and the concert I was like a fish in water: these were moments of sheer jubilation for my soul. In such instances, I often thank God that I am able to serve music – music which makes me quiver, and each time affords a new sense of rediscovery in a beloved and well-traveled work.

[12] Jean Gabin (1904-1976) was a French actor, particularly important in the history of French cinema.

Performing with Lord Menuhin

Menuhin said to me: "I came to you because of Enescu…," a remark I didn't understand at the time, particularly as the phonetic elisions sounded as if he was addressing me in Chinese ("beak awes a Nesco…"), and because I did not really know who Enescu was. Later, I understood the profundity of this parallel, intellectually and musically: Enescu/Menuhin and Boulanger/me. When she asked him to conduct my concerto, he had immediately made the connection between Enescu conducting him in the Mendelssohn violin concerto at the age of eleven or twelve, and him now conducting me in my concerto and Beethoven's Op. 15. Even though only a child, I was filled with infinite gratitude for what he was doing for my music, particularly because I did not feel like it was owed to me (as some child prodigies do). My parents had informed me of exactly who Menuhin was, thus instilling in me a sense of meritocracy. (Perhaps they did so to too much a degree, but can one quantify humility? One learns to become humble, or one never is.)

Because it was Menuhin, because Nadia Boulanger was there, because my responsibility was immense, because my parents had left Bulgaria for me, I didn't want to disappoint anyone (myself included). The day after the concert, I went to my lesson – which Mademoiselle had prepared with the same great attention to detail that she invested in each meeting, a sign of the infinite respect that she brought to these sessions. I arrived, as always, to find a score already opened to the day's focal piece (which I would have to sight-read). Claude Pascal had published an enthusiastic review of my concert in *Le Figaro*,[13] and Mademoiselle took it upon herself to say: "I hope that you realize, my little Emile, that you had nothing to do with what happened yesterday." "How can that be?," I responded. "Ah well, it was given to you to play this concert"… and that was all. Not a bad way to keep my feet on the ground, or prevent me from getting too big of a head (something I had in truth already noticed in many of my colleagues, who had apparently not had someone do for them what Nadia Boulanger was trying to do for me). It is so much more important to attain humility than perfection, which is an impossible goal to begin with, a horizon never reached.

Un compositeur précoce

ROND et vif, l'œil mobile, la parole nette, Emile Naoumov a tout juste 11 ans. Sa mère est grecque, son père bulgare. Il y a deux ans, Emile est venu trouver Nadia Boulanger. Que savait-il en musique ? Pas grand-chose. Aujourd'hui, Nadia Boulanger peut nous inviter à venir écouter chez elle les travaux substantiels de ses élèves — Martin Amlin, Anthony Powers, Francisco Zumaque, José Almeida Prado, Jean-Louis Haguenauer — et peut terminer la soirée en feu d'artifice avec... un *Concerto* pour piano et orchestre du jeune Emile. Un orchestre dans un salon ? Impossible. Tout en regrettant ses timbales, Emile façonne donc une version pour quintette à cordes. Au piano, l'auteur. Croyez-moi, c'est du solide ! Un jeu musclé, décidé, sans un accroc. Quant au concerto, bien tonal, fermement dessiné, plein d'allant, de vie, il m'a laissé stupéfait. Le joli thème que celui du 2e mouvement, tout pimenté de modulations imprévues !

Un gaillard à suivre de près, cet Emile Naoumov !

Claude Pascal.

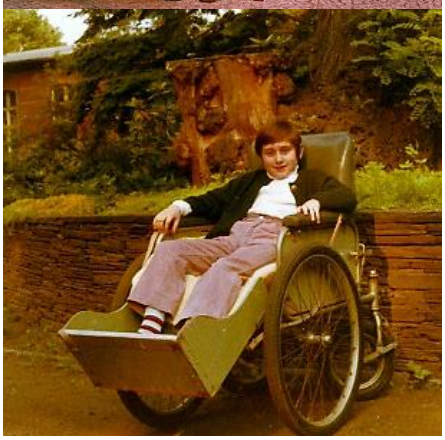
***Le Figaro* February 28, 1973**

It is all too easy to become proud if one can compose, or sight-read, or accompany, transpose, improvise, transcribe, realize a continuo, orchestrate, paraphrase – in short, exhibit proficiency in one such discipline, so as to suggest an overly-confident dilettante. But when competent in multiple areas, one becomes unclassifiable – and in those cases, it is what's inside that proves indispensable, each aspect nourishing itself through contact with the others, and the entirety becoming coordinated

[13] Prominent French newspaper famous for its classical music reviews.

into an organized unit greater than the sum of its parts. For a musician, it is the ear that weaves this pattern, in search of creativity (I was thus doubly-blessed by the gift of absolute pitch to faithfully guide me – as Nadia Boulanger said to me: "It will be your constant companion on this voyage"). Whether it is in Bach, Byrd, or another beloved composer, the ear remains one's guide through the travel-ways opened-up on the score. It is truly a marvelous thing…

But in contrast to all these amazing musical experiences, the situation of the time took a heavy toll on other aspects of my life. Foremost was the geographical distance between my parents, and between my father and me. I had never even fathomed the relationship between my parents in the years before I was born – they had managed to make me think that everything began at the moment I came upon the scene, and had directed my curiosity towards wider worlds than the one within our own limited sphere. The lack of a paternal figure during my years in Paris eventually led to something of a personal crisis, a situation that came to a head the first June after I started studying with Mademoiselle, when I caught pneumonia while visiting my father in Berlin.



I was hospitalized there, and, since that meant I was going to be late getting back to France, to participate in Mademoiselle Boulanger's summer sessions at Fontainebleau, I suggested to my father that I just stay there with him. I missed him more than anything, and he again showed his true character: he had left his home (and he was a true Bulgarian patriot), given up his career, and taken work well beneath him just so that I could study with Nadia Boulanger, and now I was proposing to give that up – and not once did he make me feel guilty for it. Instead, he enrolled me in the *Hochschule für Musik* in West Berlin, where I took some lessons with Professor Dunias Zinderman, a rather famous teacher at the time whose greatest legacy to me was helping me realize how much I missed Nadia Boulanger (I should note that none of this is meant to imply that Mademoiselle wanted to adopt me, or any such thing – to the contrary, one of the great strengths of her teaching was to liberate, rather than establish an emotional link that would ultimately suffocate, the student).

Prof. Zinderman, though a highly respected woman, was horror personified for my psyche at the time, and not only because of her intransigent German nature: I couldn't really understand her, so her beastly repetition of "the supple wrist" (in seemingly every circumstance and context) meant about as much to me as the German markings in Schumann's music. And this was perhaps the heart of the matter – I think somewhere I knew it was the language that was the deciding factor…

After much deliberation, I decided that I needed to return to Paris. When we went back, I knew that this time – for the first time since we had left Bulgaria – it was because of a choice I had made, not one which had been made for me. This awareness was what surely helped get me through the patches of pointed criticism from Mademoiselle that followed: it had been my decision. To help mollify my homesickness for my father after I returned, Mademoiselle Boulanger set up a meeting with the

Nobel Prize-winning geneticist Professor Jacques Monod at the Pasteur Institute (a hospital and laboratory in the 15th Arrondissement) in the hopes of getting my father some work in Paris – though without success. The unforgettable interview between my father and Monod did have one particularly memorable moment, however: Monod took a cello out of the closet in his office and played for us a sarabande by Bach.

In addition to these familial stresses, there were moments of significant pressure at the *Cours Hattemer*. Frankly, the Hattemer School scared me: I did not have a particularly strong stomach to begin with, and, as I always took each task very much to heart, anxiety over my coursework left me vomiting on more than one occasion. In fact, my school responsibilities caused more dread than any musical evaluations by Menuhin, or even Mademoiselle herself. On top of that, the classes were designed in a rather cruel way: we went in once a week to be intensely examined for two hours by a professor from whom we had not learned a thing – it was our mothers or tutors (for those who had one) who had taught us at home according to the printed syllabus; we simply memorized the materials outlined in the instructions, and then went in to be interrogated. Ergo, in the wee hours, often before the dawn had even begun to pale, my mother was transformed into a primary school teacher.

Emile with his mother in the Cité des Arts

And so our trio, although fragmented, continued to function, still in orbit around Nadia Boulanger, whose extraordinary kindness justified all these sacrifices.

Her generosity also helped shelter us from potentially dangerous situations, such as when an American impresario tried to "buy" me because he "needed" an un-chaperoned child prodigy to promote and tour with him. The considerable sum he offered might have driven some parents to lose their nerve, but mine had courageously given their trust to Mademoiselle Boulanger and her request that I continue studying with her was the final word. I was therefore relatively safe in my cocoon, a status reinforced by virtue of the fact that Nadia Boulanger only allowed me to present a concert when I was prepared to play absolutely exceptionally, and when the performance would help me progress – never to simply show me off or for advantage; my chrysalis was thus much more that of an adult-child than a child prodigy of the circus-show type.

My entire childhood was, in fact, rather nineteenth-century in a way, and as a result I learned to regret its lost educational values. The melancholy of my Slavic side, my love of history, of being human – all this transported me to a world of suffering, as of the 1914-18 war (which truly marked the end of the nineteenth-century), and helped me understand, through a sort of osmosis, how ingenuous patriotism can so salaciously tear the fabric of humanity: the deaths of men and their shattered destinies have never been insignificant to me. My mindset was commensurate with that epoch and its values, though my reality was something of a hybrid: I was a child who had grown up

unspectacularly in communist Bulgaria, who had been reared on fin-de-siècle thinking, in a vast and diverse landscape, and who was regularly meeting people whom he did not know whether or not to trust.

The heaviest weights, however, and those under which I might easily have succumbed, were those I felt of the sacrifices made for me. I knew what my parents had given up, and Mademoiselle Boulanger regularly stressed that I had been given a gift from God. These were near-biblical weights, and sometimes they even made me physically sick – especially when I was criticized for not being able to hear the harmonizations Mademoiselle expected for the melodies she had assigned me. With every utterance of "I don't understand how you can't hear this," I felt as if I was failing my parents… Such burdens can become one's very identity if he is not wary of it – and yet they can also be sublimated into dramatic and expressive works, such as the one I composed not long afterwards to accompany a series of paintings by my grandfather,[14] *Sinfonietta Concertante*.

A painting by Emile's grandfather

But the fact that this theme is so recurrent in my music is due not only to my having felt it profoundly from such a young age: it is also because I had received the tools to express it from so early on in my creative life through my studies with Nadia Boulanger and Annette Dieudonné. Every facet of life was embraced, because Nadia Boulanger was already elderly and because my parents had made the sacrifice of leaving Bulgaria, and that brought with it an obligation to maximize my educational "return." And yet this state of things never elicited commands such as, "You must master this now, then this, etc."

Nor was I subjected to a litany of competitions, as are so many young musicians, a course that ultimately turns most of them sour. They are, in effect, thrown into an astonishing cauldron of contests, and end up crushed by the unending plethora of rivalry. Cynicism inevitably follows as they learn the hard way that the powers-that-be have no interest in developing an artist over time, and that the impresarios who once championed them are now nowhere to be found… It is obviously preferable to develop oneself as a person, to build one's artistry over time, through repertoire, through critical analysis, and strive toward a cultivated and intuitive performance. One must nurture his own internal garden. This is not mere utopian fantasy, but rather a viable alternative to the immediate, but insidiously destructive, promises of the competition circuit – though it requires the courage for honest self-appraisal, rather than relying on the potentially misleading evaluation of others. This was a cornerstone of Nadia Boulanger's teaching philosophy.

And yet Mademoiselle herself often served as an adjudicator at international competitions – as I now do; the trick is to not confuse the emergence of true artistic values with the spectacles that promoters so often prize. She told us: "Be yourself, build yourself, take the necessary time to develop yourself

[14] Bulgarian painter Vladimir Naumov (1897-1947)

and your manner of thinking, and learn to understand music through performance, analysis, and exploration of repertoire, from chamber music to works for large forces." All this was sown in us. "Who are you? What are you going to become? That depends on you."

It was such guidance that allowed me to use music to transcend my father's absence, as art always transforms pain (of which the absence of something vital is an essential component). It was necessary that such tension be released, and in my grief I found a principal source of inspiration and, ultimately, sublimation, in which the soul elevates itself like a kite towards untouchable altitudes… Like any writer, painter, sculptor, or film director in their media, I felt the need to move people through musical intervals which, by their fundamental nature, are able to express universal emotions. The thrill of a deep D-flat and mid-register F has never left, and this expanded major third continues to resonate in me – much like certain intervals in, say, Mozart are emblematic of pain, beauty, or well-being.

All these colors of harmony, of musical tension and release, of light and shadow are what I strove to express in my own music, though the language came almost immediately. This may seem immodest, but I never needed to search for a style – it came intuitively. But for all the musical facility I was blessed with, I could not avoid another kind of searching, the kind that is never sated.

This combination excited Mademoiselle Boulanger, who, as soon as I had played my minuet for her at our first meeting, declared, "Ah! His little piece is already so personal…" Her exclamation that Wednesday afternoon, in front of a select audience, was telling: my musical style was emblematic of a sense of identity, and that, perhaps, explains why I didn't feel in exile – I had created my world, which is what one needs to do in order to communicate. In Nadia Boulanger's world, the pillars of creation were Mozart, Fauré, and Stravinsky, though she, of course, played music from all eras, never confusing or muddling them, and in so doing removed any aura of inapproachability that a work might have accrued.

This was something I understood, just like I was able to keep distinct Bulgaria, Greece, and France, or the ruins of Rome and post-war Germany. Despite the holes in my knowledge, I was aware – quite a bit for a child, I think – of multi-ethnic, geo-political, and historical fields. I took to heart all the basics that I learned in my Hattemer classes, be it Charlemagne or even more remote historical figures. This sort of humanistic curiosity was essential for me.

I was fortunate in this regard, because the capacity to distinguish between various cultures or styles or individuals and yet recognize common characteristics was necessary if one hoped to truly understand Mademoiselle Boulanger's intellectual and pedagogical outlook: all one need do to corroborate this is review the group of musicians that she attracted and who came to study with her, to become in their immense diversity what they became (from Copland to Piazzolla) – or recall her fabulous range of interests, including the "Jeu de mille francs" ("The Game of a Thousand Francs," a

quiz show broadcast at noon by France Inter, part of Radio France, which she soon turned me on to, as well).

In the same spirit, she liked to color and expand her remarks with citations from, for example Shakespeare ("Words without thoughts never to heaven go") or Pascal ("The eternal silence of these infinite spaces fills me with fear") or Valéry's final words ("…friend, do not enter without desire"). Such thinkers were at the center of her Pantheon, intimately connected to the music that she loved in all its variety – and they soon became my daily bread.

And yet, nothing was ever compartmentalized, as at most academic institutions: her specializations were never at the expense of a more universal awareness, though this never led to a confusion of the material or a sense of intellectual cliquishness. She understood that I was able to (and needed to) embrace multiple disciplines at the same time, and advocated that I be both composer and performer, unlike Gaby Casadesus, for example, who said to me: "My little Emile, you will always be able to compose, but you must focus on learning piano technique now, because you will have to work a lot harder to acquire this later in life. Do like Robert [her husband, with whom I also studied] or like Chopin, who did things in this way." It was a striking sentiment, and said with the best of intentions – but I disagreed.

Luckily for me, so did Nadia Boulanger, who insisted from the very beginning that I continue to compose, telling my father: "I will not change a single note in his compositions, but will advise him for his subsequent works…," thus intimating that with her I would follow a course designed to help me best express myself (though her eyesight no longer allowed her to read the scores her students brought in, she still invariably felt the gaucheries in their works – as had been the case with Copland in 1921 and Gershwin in 1937[15]). For Mademoiselle Boulanger, composition and performance were not exclusive: rather, to her the true musician built himself up with all disciplines, a sort of late nineteenth-century "homo-musicus," for whom artistic or technical specialization did not impede the development of other facets of the common fabric.

She never wanted me to become a monolithic circus act, and this extended beyond music. She worried about me severing parental or ethnic ties, and wanted me to enroll in life, not renounce my past. Never did she say anything like, "You are wrong to compose in a Slavic style," but rather, "I understand why you do it this way, but in this context, it is not successful because…" She was never cruel or hard in her criticisms of my "awkward moments"; instead, she explained to me why they were so. This allowed me to maintain my identity, with my ear guiding me through my new musical and intellectual acquisitions to fresh and different places.

[15] Though she ultimately refused to accept George Gershwin as a student, for fear that she would interfere with his originality, she still looked at his scores and offered her opinion.

2) Do you still remember details of your first meeting: the setting, the audience, Nadia Boulanger's deportment?

Oh, of course…

We found her information in the phonebook, and made an appointment through her Italian housekeeper Giuseppe, who informed us that "La Signorina" (Mademoiselle) received visitors after five o'clock in the afternoon, because she always went long in her analysis class and it was only then that her students would finally be filtering out of the apartment. That same day, my parents had taken me to visit the Grévin Museum;[16] as a child, I was particularly struck by the parallel between the lifelike wax figures in the museum, and the real figures in Mademoiselle Boulanger's apartment, which almost seemed to be made of wax (the meeting was after one of her ritualistic Wednesday classes). Her residence at 36 Rue Ballu was one riddled with portraits and pianos, a pipe organ (!), the decorated bust of her sister Lili, surrounded, as always, with fresh flowers… Half mausoleum and half apartment, it was as much a shrine to Lili as it was a musical sanctuary.

Bust of Lili in
Nadia Boulanger's Apartment

I knew neither of the existence of Lili, nor of Fauré, nor Enescu, nor of Valéry, or Gide – of very little, really… But I was immediately able to speak to Mademoiselle Boulanger, who, perhaps because I was a child, did not make too terrifying an impression on me with her contrabass voice and physique like a church candle – frail, tall, and austere – qualities that I later recognized often intimidated adults.

I don't remember there being the least bit of dead time, boredom, or silence during our initial meeting, and I adored that everything she said to me corresponded perfectly with my unspoken questions. The fact that she was Franco-Slavic certainly helped her better understand me, despite our almost eighty-year age difference, and I felt instantly as if she was the person I had been waiting for, a presentiment that I later found out she shared, as she intimated in her letter of farewell to me: "I know you are aware of all that you owe to me, but know also that I owe you still more."

As an eighteen year old, I had some difficulty understanding these words. What was perhaps more bewildering was the commitment she asked of my father in front of the other guests during that initial Wednesday meeting: "This little one must have no less than ten years of study with me." "I will start teaching him immediately," she said, and came up with a plan for scholarships which would make this financially possible. She was eighty-two or eighty-three, and I was almost seven and a half: it was an equation which could only seem surreal to me at the time – all the more reason for me to see the figures around her (about thirty students) as actors in a play, seated in armchairs and folding straw-chairs by the Cavaillé-Coll organ given to her by her godfather, [17] the dark-brown

[16] A famous wax museum in Paris
[17] Aristide Cavaillé-Coll (1811-1899) was a French organ builder.

Erard and black American Steinway pianos, the old telephone (a model from the beginning of the century), photos of the pope and her friend Raoul Pugno (who looked like Brahms)…

Inside Nadia Boulanger's Apartment

This mass collection of symbols was a microcosm (an extremely large one, in fact) of Nadia Boulanger, compiled from her personal musical and literary acquaintances: Valéry and Gide; musicians like Annette Dieudonné, Marcelle de Manziarly, Igor Markevitch, and Jean Françaix, not to mention the "Wednesday people" – a collection which was punctuated by such names as Bernstein, when they came to play or conduct concerts in Paris; or Dutilleux, when he came for premieres; or others who came to see her, to show her their projects, or simply to attend one of her classes (her apartment was one of the last salons to which one had to be invited). It was a place for discovery, and I, evidently, was one such discovery. She remained true to her word, and continued to teach me for the duration of the ten-year program she had instituted with my father.

And it all began that fateful Wednesday. I played "The Sick Doll" by Tchaikovsky, a child's piece – perhaps too easy a piece for a prodigy, who at such an age would normally be playing more ostentatious things to assure a certain kind of impression. But I played this nonetheless, and some pieces from Schumann's *Album for the Young*.

I then moved on to a piece by Bach (I believe the Partita in C minor), but interrupted myself in the middle – she recounted this in her book of interviews with Monsaingeon – saying: "Mademoiselle…" (I don't remember if I actually called her "Mademoiselle," because, for me at the time, this term was reserved for young women, not old ladies – either way, everyone called her this, even Annette Dieudonné, until the end of her life), and I turned to her, thinking that what was most important was my original work, and, afraid that I wouldn't have time to show her all that I wanted to, said: "I am going to play for you a piece that I have composed…" This she found both peremptory and humorous, as children often are when sure of themselves. I then proceeded to play my minuet for this woman who had accustomed herself to the greatest musicians of the century; she found it extremely personal – very tonal, though not at all like Mozart or Ravel or anyone else.

The title "Minuet" may imply that I was aiming to produce a pastiche, a sort of "musical jabot[18]," or trying to compose a hieratic or stylized piece in the manner of Mozart, but it was in fact not in the least bit antique; I named it this at my father's suggestion – after all, he was the member of our trio who had experience in music (and it was in triple meter and rather lighthearted). The musical content immediately fascinated Mademoiselle Boulanger, who told my father as much (my mother was there,

[18] A shirt decorated in Rococo style.

Solfèging with Mademoiselle Dieudonné

too, but she was too nervous to listen; my father's French was rather poor, but he was adept at analyzing situations and more logical than my exceptionally emotional mother).

And thus was established the relationship between the old lady and the little boy: the wax-figure animated with a single stroke, the lessons with Annette Dieudonné scheduled.

It was actually Mademoiselle Dieudonné who made my earliest years in Paris so fruitful. I had no notion of the seven clefs (other than those on G and F), for example, and she taught me this – as well as everything else about music theory and all which that includes: ear-training, rhythmic dictation, solfège, etc. She was the kindest woman in the world, though she asked much of me (a task that required little labor on her part, because I was fascinated by what she had to say). She was a "step below" Nadia Boulanger (I know this isn't the best way of putting it), but very much her complement – and I felt more at ease with her than with Mademoiselle. Still, I never dared to ask her something that I could ask Mademoiselle Boulanger: it was very clear that Mademoiselle would never allow her to speak outside of her purview – and Mademoiselle Dieudonné would never commit such a transgression, despite the fact that she had known and studied with Nadia Boulanger since the age of ten. Three days a week, I would take the Metro[19] to the Abbesses Station and then climb a steep hill until I arrived at Mademoiselle Dieudonné's apartment, on Rue Ravignan (in the Montmartre District); two or three hours later, I would hop on the underground again, from Pigalle to Place de Clichy, to get to Mademoiselle Boulanger's home on Rue Ballu for my afternoon lessons (another two to three hour session) – from the 18th Arrondissement of Paris to the 9th, on foot, with my mother.[20]

And so I was taken immediately into the charge of these women and Giuseppe, the housekeeper at Rue Ballu, who was as much a part of the scenery as the samovar[21] in the entrance, the waiting room, the old clocks which chimed almost simultaneously, the pictures (one of which was of Berthe Morisot, a very nice neighbor of the Boulanger family home in Gargenville, just west of Paris[22]), the Cavaillé-Coll organ that so inspired me (I loved Bach and found the presence of a pipe organ in an apartment to be a magnificent thing), and the nearby photos of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and Dinu Lipatti (another of her child

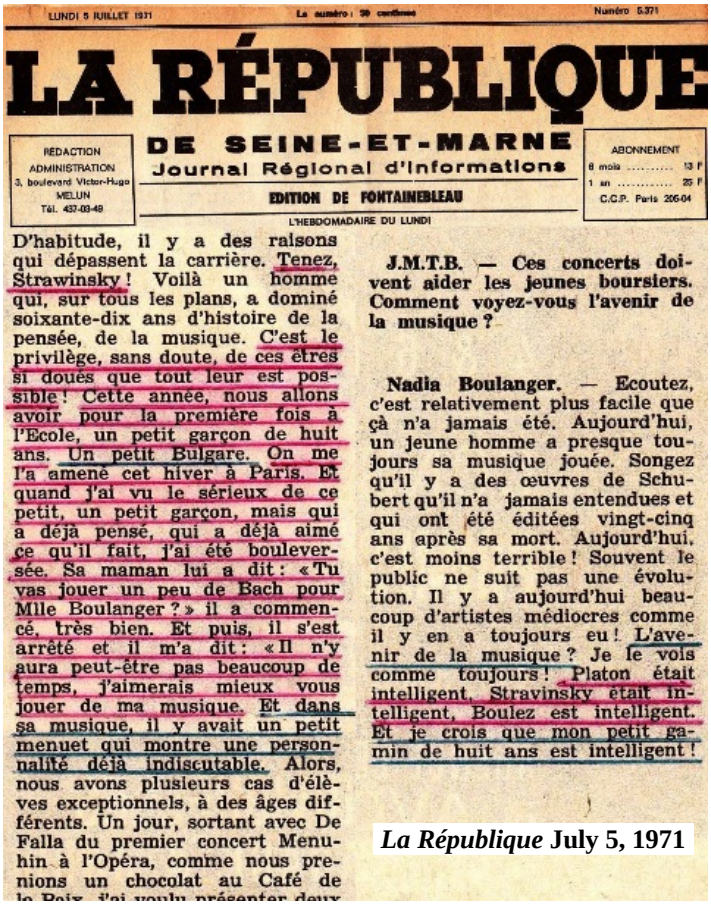
The Samovar then and now

[19] The Metro is the name of the subway system in Paris.
[20] Paris is divided into twenty *arrondissements municipaux*, or administrative districts.
[21] A traditional Russian water-boiler usually used to make tea.
[22] See Chapter III.

prodigies, a Romanian genius who also studied with Cortot at the École Normale and died too young)… all these decorations were essential to me, though I didn't know how to express it.

But most essential – and extraordinary – of all was that Nadia Boulanger wanted to teach me – and not because I was imposed on her (not that anyone ever did so to her, regardless of whatever or whoever it was), accompanied by letters of recommendation from former students or musical luminaries… No, I arrived out of the blue, and the following summer, while in her annual residency at the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau (1971), she told the paper *Le République de Seine at Marne*: "Plato was a genius, Stravinsky was a genius, Boulez is a genius, and I believe that my little eight-year-old Emile Naoumoff is also a genius…" She enjoyed herself and was certainly very emotional in these final years, not knowing how much more time God had granted her – and was always motivated by an urgent sense of needing to develop me, of needing to crystallize everything that she had learned in a boy who had arrived late, perhaps, but as a blank slate.

Because she traveled less than she had in her earlier years, she was more available to me during our ten years together than she had been to most of her previous students, pouring out a sort of condensed version of all that she was, loved, had received. This exchange was very moving in the eyes of many others, and very exciting to me, and much appreciated – as well as extremely upsetting for those jealous of the attention she gave to me, whether they be of my generation, or country, my colleagues at the Conservatory, or even individuals significantly older than me. I still find it difficult to understand why such generosity does not always lead to unanimity of joy… (Perhaps it is my lingering naïveté?)



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D'habitude, il y a des raisons qui dépassent la carrière. Tenez, Strawinsky ! Voilà un homme qui, sur tous les plans, a dominé soixante-dix ans d'histoire de la pensée, de la musique. C'est le privilège, sans doute, de ces êtres si doués que tout leur est possible ! Cette année, nous allons avoir pour la première fois à l'Ecole, un petit garçon de huit ans. Un petit Bulgare. On me l'a amené cet hiver à Paris. Et quand j'ai vu le sérieux de ce petit, un petit garçon, mais qui a déjà pensé, qui a déjà aimé ce qu'il fait, j'ai été bouleversée. Sa maman lui a dit : « Tu vas jouer un peu de Bach pour Mlle Boulanger ? » il a commencé, très bien. Et puis, il s'est arrêté et il m'a dit : « Il n'y aura peut-être pas beaucoup de temps, j'aimerais mieux vous jouer de ma musique. Et dans sa musique, il y avait un petit menuet qui montre une personnalité déjà indiscutable. Alors, nous avons plusieurs cas d'élèves exceptionnels, à des âges différents. Un jour, sortant avec De Falla du premier concert Menuhin à l'Opéra, comme nous prenions un chocolat au Café de

J.M.T.B. — Ces concerts doivent aider les jeunes boursiers. Comment voyez-vous l'avenir de la musique ?

Nadia Boulanger. — Ecoutez, c'est relativement plus facile que ça n'a jamais été. Aujourd'hui, un jeune homme a presque toujours sa musique jouée. Songez qu'il y a des œuvres de Schubert qu'il n'a jamais entendues et qui ont été éditées vingt-cinq ans après sa mort. Aujourd'hui, c'est moins terrible ! Souvent le public ne suit pas une évolution. Il y a aujourd'hui beaucoup d'artistes médiocres comme il y en a toujours eu ! L'avenir de la musique ? Je le vois comme toujours ! Platon était intelligent, Stravinsky était intelligent, Boulez est intelligent. Et je crois que mon petit gamin de huit ans est intelligent !

***La République* July 5, 1971**

Regardless, the envy among many of her other students was palpable. Most of them were in their thirties and were well-educated private students (at such a venerable age, it had been many years since she had held a position at an academic institution), and the majority either American or Japanese – and all of a sudden this child arrived whom this Grande Dame took to concerts, art exhibitions, and to the Louvre (in order to explain how, for example, the beauty of a Le Nain painting reflects the modulations in a work by Schubert), and who could sight-read with facility, readily answer the questions she posed in her analysis classes, and keep pace with the daily private lessons. (I say all of this in the spirit of truest humility: Mademoiselle Boulanger insisted that to deny an honest appraisal of a God-given talent was tantamount to sacrilege.)

From the very beginning, she was more invested in my development than even my parents could have imagined in their wildest dreams (though it was left to me to figure out what it all meant…). Who could have anticipated, for example, meetings with Khachaturian or Richter? My time with her was a splendor of gifts intended to help me develop as an individual, and not as a clone of someone else.

With Khachaturian and his wife

I could certainly argue that among these, the greatest was a special commitment to something that might even be spoken of as her magic word: attention. When she segued into one of her signature forty minute monologues during the Wednesday analysis class, ultimately tying everything together on the way back to her initial thesis, many students got lost: either they did not understand French well enough, or, if they did (and there were some native French-speakers, like Jean-Louis Haguenauer, a native Frenchman), they got tangled amid the myriad of parentheses (as one opens several windows on a computer to reach the desired destination, or explores various words in the dictionary in order to arrive at the most accurate manner of expression).

Nadia Boulanger was sometimes extreme in this way. I felt she wanted to test our attention, to make it equal to the task of keeping up with that intense concentration demanded of her by her mother as a child, when she regularly heard, "Did you do your best?" (As opposed to "Were you the best?" as one asks at a piano competition, where such a concern is the sole viable quest – and it is for just this reason that Mademoiselle distanced me from these scenarios.) The absolute demand for attention: to do one's best.

Not that she didn't urge me to succeed – of course, she did, but it was more important that I knew, in my heart, that I had reached my potential. And that, in conjunction with my parents' insistence that I see my projects through to their conclusion, gave me the strongest guides of existence; they made me something of a little adult, if on the outside I remained a mischievous little boy (though not an impolite one – I was extraordinarily mindful of the need for politeness, if fearfully attuned to the particulars set out by my mother).

And yet, for all the energy Mademoiselle exerted on making sure I learned the value of attentiveness, I would probably say that her most important contribution to my education was an insistence on humility – something she not only cultivated, but demanded. Meanwhile, she would say to friends like Jean Françaix, "I do not have to teach Emile, I only peel the orange…" All this was, naturally, said in context: she uttered lines such as "I am going to teach you this now, but refer to that…" on a daily basis. The wonderment that she shared with me from works which she seemed to rediscover after so many years moved me to such a degree that it was as if it were equivalent to my own amazement at these discoveries, a kind of reciprocal awe that gave even more import to those centuries which empowered me – for this woman of eighty-plus years, her skin practically glued to her bones, virtually blind, without teeth, would stand straight and move forward (as she said) with her shoulders, linearly like a musical phrase (her knees were perpetually sore, though she would

never deign to ask for help), a kind of living church candle always moving forward… and this image, which I saw daily, taught me more than words. She was surely one of the greatest teachers of the century, having received the keys from Fauré himself, but she never boasted of this because he had been humble, and, through her own example, she encouraged us all to be so as well. She spoke little of herself or her past, of her anecdotes or jokes with Fauré, or her fellow students at the Conservatory when she was a little girl (which included such geniuses as Ravel); I later discovered these things by leafing through her lectures and compositions, but she never directed me towards them.

She wanted me to develop on my own, not be forced into a costume woven from her experiences – an outfit that wasn't mine to wear. Instead, as she said, her goal was to "peel the orange." She knew that performing too much would derail this purpose, and so my stage opportunities were limited – and when they did occur, it was only with repertoire which helped me progress. From our first meeting, in her living room soaked in yellow-red light (this was from a time before the advent of the halogen bulb), she spoke only of work, study, and especially solfège and music theory – because she knew that without a "nuclear powered" technical ability, the most beautiful musical thoughts could not be properly expressed, and would lead only to a fiasco.

She also knew that such training could, honestly, only come from her. Academic institutions do not really accommodate students in the personalized manner she wanted for me, but rather are, by nature, designed to teach students *en masse* and therefore allocate different aspects of musical study to different age groups (in which case the development of child prodigies is significantly slowed).

She, on the other hand, initiated my instruction in all the musical disciplines simultaneously (piano, chamber music, orchestral conducting, accompanying, composition). Nor did she distinguish between them: I was to become a "homo musicus," able to sight-read, accompany, transpose; to have a lightness of spirit and a depth of understanding of texture, to be able to communicate the overall impression of a work, even while playing it for the first time, and then exploring it further during subsequent study – all while attending school to learn Latin and Greek (she rightly held Greek in high regard, for both its etymological link to the foundations of modern intellect, and its subsequent tributaries into culture). She insisted that I be universally cultivated, not someone whose ken was restricted to musical spheres.

Already by the early 1970s, the common denominator in appraising performances had become note-accuracy. Nowadays, if one plays even a little "dirty," the conclusion is that he is a poor musician, and if one dare disturb the work with personality, or depart from the uniformity which so reassures the masses (even if it drowns the profundity of the music), then heads will roll! Nadia Boulanger understood that this was becoming the prevalent mentality, and firmly rejected it – she was against recordings on principle, because they could never capture the moment, and led imperviously towards a condition in which more weight is given to the performance than the work itself. The monument to

this approach is Karajan: the performer-king, a sort of high priest of the work, who leaves behind recordings as his legacy, his priesthood – with all due respect to the composer.

For Mademoiselle Boulanger, the work belonged to humanity and it was the moment that filled one with awe which valorized it. She argued it as an empirical truth on its own terms, whose beauty is ignited when it is loved, whereas when a jury listens to a contestant in a competition, the expectation is for them to be part of the lowest common denominator, making sure that each member of the adjudicating committee is placated (though this is frequently a meaningless venture, with the verdict having often already been determined). Nadia Boulanger didn't care if one played Debussy in this way or that, but rather that one played it in a manner true to himself, understanding the message of the composer, however long and arduous a process it may be to reach that point – and this was why she never offered corrections to an awkward harmonic exercise or a performance interpretation: it is necessary for one to come to such conclusions on his own, to arrive at the goal by way of one's own diagonals.

The purpose of performance is to better understand what one loves in the music: one removes the composer and keeps only the score – composers from across the centuries blend, and the emotion or devotion which one imports to Stravinsky proves to be no different than what one would bring to Bach, because the work is more important than the composer, then the performance, than the professor – because the work excels everything: the work is God…

Nadia Boulanger was profoundly religious – not in a mystical way, but in a way that might best be compared with a child's faith, an attribute that was beneficial to me because, whatever her intellectual heights, she was never condescending, and this quality of behaving like a child of the Church was a beautiful lesson in humility for me. I had come to think that personalities like hers always risked being contemptuous – and yet she never said: "This is beautiful because…" when analyzing a work. To the contrary, she said: "I do not know why it is beautiful: it is God, it is a mystery…" "Call it what you like, I won't impose anything on you…" She rejected the mixing of incompatible things, in this case content and packaging (or matter and manner), and would never have contended that the beauty in a Beethoven passage comes from its augmented sixth, or its triple meter, or its hemiola. If all these ingredients are present and they happen to coalesce into something beautiful, Beethoven was merely the membrane through which inspiration passed – for it is greater than the composer himself: it is the look filled with wonder, perhaps redoubled by the acquisition of reading and learning, but always first the wonderment of the work itself.

It is in this way that one can play a piece by Stravinsky, followed by one of Bach, without muddling them, but also without compartmentalizing them. This allows one to have a relatively free spirit – a central tenet to the teaching of Nadia Boulanger – without needing to scour for common ground (one can always split hairs: there's a major third in both works!). She loved to combine, say, Debussy with Sermisy,[23] and yet she never confused them.

[23] Claudin de Sermisy (c. 1490 – 1562) was a French composer in the service of François I.

She was an exponent of both the enlightened amateur and, even more so, of the late nineteenth-century professional, a descendent of the "complete musician" of the eighteenth-century, when performers were – by necessity – still proficient improvisers, not only because some musical elements weren't notated (such as ornaments), but also because the scores used in palaces (and other such venues where one might hear the music of Haydn or Bach) often included ink blots or transcription errors from less-than-attentive copyists, rendering it necessary to correct such faults at sight – even if one was only a rank and file violinist in the orchestra. And then there is the matter of that era's life expectancy, which all but mandated that one develop his skills early on – an urgency not unlike that which Mademoiselle felt with me. So the musical experiences of the eighteenth-century were such that all composers were performers and vice versa; there was no distinction, just the musician serving the music in various capacities, each aspect nourishing the others – as complementary elements fueling one another.

In part because of technological advancements, nineteenth-century musicians began to focus on particular functions or niches, which led to the general disappearance of this breed of pan-musician; this became even more the case in the twentieth century, with the advent of recordings and the multiplicity of available editions.

Why, then, did I have to learn to transpose at sight a song by Fauré, if it was now available in every key? All I would have to do was buy it in the right tonality, and read it… Perhaps it was a hieratic or obsolete skill, but Mademoiselle Boulanger felt it was a necessary one. So, I had to learn it in the original key, and then transpose it in my private lessons, as well as in her public classes – as was also the case with accompanying singers, and even sight-reading orchestral or opera scores (such as *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and other monstrously difficult examples) in such a manner that the work's essential qualities were conveyed.

For her, all musicians had to be complete musicians, serving the muse, rather than their own vanity. This was a particularly stunning position coming from someone to whom musicians listened like the faithful to the pope. She spoke with the utmost humility about how music still filled her with wonder, that she loved it, that while she had learned to understand certain parts of it, its essence remained a mystery – and this was why she never allowed herself permission to attempt to define the beauty which she held as central to music.

Of course, my recognition of this remarkable attitude was made over the course of years, but I can honestly say that it was obvious at our first meeting. It was there in her way of speaking, her "at all costs" attitude, and the sense of urgency that she imposed from the very beginning: "there is not a minute to lose," or – as she said to my mother when it was suggested that I resume my studies in September after having taken some time off to rest – "one takes a vacation in order to make progress."

Even emotionally, I felt in her grave voice and candle-like physique an honesty equivalent to that in the music of Fauré, whom she perpetually kept alive to us. The appeal of the discussions that she led on Wednesday, or with the people who came to see her, lay in her constant passion – even if she was only speaking of a little dog.

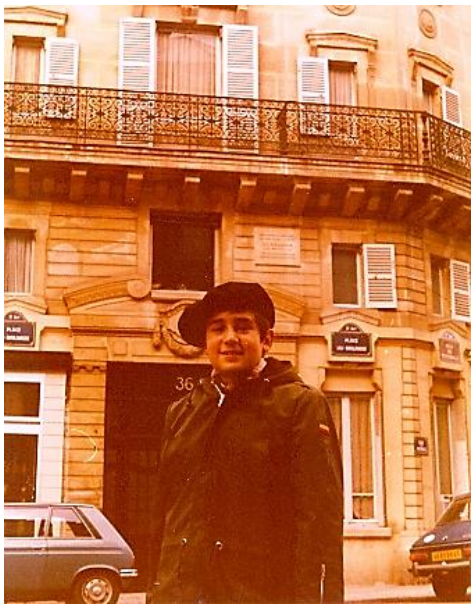
Emile, his mother and Princess Irène (middle)

This made her charisma tantamount to that of someone like the Dalai-Lama, one reason that Princess Irène of Greece saw her as a queen: she was always noble because she could speak nobly about anything, not only esoteric subjects like dodecaphonic music. Simply said, one could learn all points of view from her. And this I realized from the outset because my upbringing had rendered me a curious child (with parents who had me late in their lives, which often implies a greater awakening in the child) – something also felt by Mademoiselle Boulanger, who succeeded in convincing my parents that she was where I was supposed to be. This was not too difficult a task given her moral authority – despite the fact that she was not an institution or conservatory with the power to bestow a diploma, but an individual (admittedly of worldwide repute) liable to die the following month.

And why did she lay out a ten year plan for my development? Perhaps as a motivational tool, to establish a timeline for herself. Regardless, it immediately created a beehive-like atmosphere in her apartment.

Ah, her apartment… First came the front room – "l'antichambre," as she called it – which acted as something of a waiting room for her students before their lessons; it had five or six clocks that all kept time at a different rate, and it was a pastime of her pupils to try to figure out exactly what kind of cross-rhythm the counterpoint of these various tickings produced. Once inside the apartment, one immediately noticed that all the furniture was covered with canvass, a protective device that only came off for receptions. There was the distant table in the dining room, behind the pipe organ, separated, but not by a doorway; those walls of which not an inch was free of paintings or photographs; the pianos similarly strewn with souvenirs; the ornaments on the red carpet, which was so very Slavic in its own right…

From the doorway of this apartment, my father convinced my mother that this was the right place, and that we had to follow Mademoiselle and see her design through to its conclusion, as fantastic as it might seem. I think it also mattered to him that I was happy beyond words. As always, my parents were able to articulate things in such a way that the importance of the moment was marked as meaningful and penetrating to me. Did I realize it on my own or because of their assertion? It was certainly some of both.



In front of 36 Rue Ballu

Another detail that I remember from this first meeting with Mademoiselle Boulanger was that my parents and I asked directions to her building from a lady wandering not far from Rue Ballu – a woman whom I later regularly saw at the same location while traveling to and from my lessons. My parents only realized after having asked the question that she was a prostitute, perhaps forty or fifty years old, distinguished enough, if a little odd, with a rather pronounced nose and an

air of Toulouse-Lautrec[24] in her ancestry. My father told me that she and the other women of similar presentation in the area were guardians, like policewomen (they soon seemed to me to be a logical extension of the circles of demoiselles surrounding me in my daily activities) – and just a few hundred meters from the Moulin Rouge; it was a true omen, and when we left the apartment, my father referred to our encounter with her as a sort of lucky charm for a day in which all, truly all, was unbelievable…

My thoughts at the time were dominated by the awareness that I had been blessed with a sort of miracle: Nadia Boulanger had heard me, wanted to work with me, had immediately acceded to all of our wildest expectations. The details were deeply engraved in my child's mind, from the rotating doorbell to the apartment (as opposed to one you push), to the tiny elevator, as is often the case in buildings where such a luxury was never foreseen, with its mesh-wire door closing like a noisy guillotine, and its arrival at mid-floor (the same mid-floor that Nadia Boulanger's cardiologist would carry her across after her last stay at Fontainebleau in 1979, an effort that contributed to his own collapse and death later that day – news that no one dared to tell her).

Emile, his mother, Edward Phillips, Manoel do Lago and Douglas Buys in the Cité des Arts (Clockwise)

The following years contributed more memories: with my parents, or with Mademoiselle, or all alone, or with my fellow students during the Wednesday classes – almost all of whom were about thirty years of age, and with whom we sometimes found ourselves in a café on Rue de Clichy (a few streets south), where we would eat quiche Lorraine (which was perhaps not the best idea for someone who is lactose intolerant…), or still further south at Fauchon, Place de la Madeleine[25] for chocolate cake (proof that it was not all hard work…). These students, who were sometimes professors themselves or composers or pianists – Brazilian, American, Japanese – were sometimes amused, sometimes emotional or aggravated; I have fond memories of the group, and am still in contact with some of its members, a very beautiful and very sweet legacy from that time.

My memories of these little post-lesson tea or chocolate ceremonies (which, admittedly, did sometimes precede class – or sometimes didn't happen at all, given the impecunious situation of most students) are populated by shifting faces, because our group changed its membership every two or three years – I was the lone fixture. Of course, my dominant memories are

[24] Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901) was a French painter known for his depictions of fin-de-siècle Parisian theatrical life.

[25] Auguste Fauchon began selling fruit and vegetables from a cart in 1880; six years later he had graduated to his first store, which soon became internationally renowned for the quality of its gourmet foods. The landmark location at Place de la Madeleine remains famous for its chocolates, confections, pastries, and tea.

of my lessons with Nadia Boulanger… but I remember this group just as vividly, even the members that were rather anonymous to me – as well as those, such as Louis Leprince-Ringuet (one of the more prominent figures, whom I didn't really know),[26] who weren't even musicians, but who gave their luster to the assembly, and who, now, have rendered it a sort of "Atlantis," a world whose souls I carry in me.

Much like the sacrifice of which I spoke earlier, the grief inherent in this sort of nostalgia is the kind which one might make use of, the kind which inspires me and leads me to compose – not to transcend it, or to explain or tell it, but to sublimate it. Such grief is neither fear nor phantasm, but a symbol to which my soul – which always needs replenishment from the nineteenth century – clings (with perhaps a little more Slavic-ness than Cartesianism).

And it is this sort of nostalgia which allows me to remember my initial meeting with Mademoiselle as something resembling the warm, live embers of a fireplace at the end of the day. I felt a part of the scenery immediately. She wanted me to discover all that she had discovered at my age, and I sensed her emotion without yet being able to make the parallel with her younger sister Lili, whom she had lost at so young an age.

Also Franco-Slavic, Lili was a composer of genius with a strong personality, and because their father, a reputable musician, had died early in their childhoods, Nadia, six years the elder, was given partial charge of her sister's musical tuition. One might certainly wonder if Lili's premature death (as well as that of Lipatti) furthered her sense of urgency with me – a feeling she was not able to have for her sister – from whence these "no vacations" and "cost what it may," this increased and constant attention, this density of thought...That she was aware of the parallel between Lili and "Emilka" became all too apparent in her final letter to me.

She knew immediately to say: I am going to develop this child's personality through the analysis of works by others, while reinforcing a sense of inner freedom that will motivate him to follow his own inspiration. This basic precept was inaugurated at our first meeting, and never varied thereafter. It is very important for me to note objectively that everything she said that day about her plans for me was developed quasi-linearly, as if she had foreseen it all like a fortune-teller, and as if she had renounced the quiet of her twilight years to build someone, devoting all her energy to that cause. I think it was because she felt I was worth the investment.

With Igor Markevitch

I was certainly in some respect, then, "her" boy, but I never carried the weight of her guardianship, as had Jeremy Menuhin or Oleg Markevitch, who felt a sense of obligation – and even found themselves a little smothered, as they later recounted to me – to spend part of their childhoods with her. In my case, the immense age difference freed her from feeling invested as a quasi-parent and allowed her to focus instead on the matter at hand, one regarded as increasingly urgent given the

[26] In addition to his work in telecommunications and as a scientific historian, nuclear physicist Louis Leprince-Ringuet was a leading researcher in particle physics and cosmic rays, likely observing the meson (a subatomic particle) as early as 1944; his career intersected with those of such luminaries as Marie Curie and Albert Einstein.

pressing hand of time. But someone like Jean Françaix was put under her charge much earlier and subjected to a heavier hold, as was Dimitry Markevitch, Igor's brother, who endured the frustrating sense that she asked less of him than of his brother because she didn't esteem him as being equally talented.

Likewise with Pierre Petit,[27] especially when she learned that he had been awarded the Prix de Rome[28] (and God knows that she revered this institution: her sister was the first woman to have ever obtained it, and her father had won it also, so it constituted a sort of Holy Grail in her eyes). She said to Petit after her return from America at the end of the Second World War: "I hope you realize that you do not deserve it…" The fact is that he was an intellectually remarkable man, who had earned a Bachelor's degree in literature, was a critic at the *Figaro*, director of the École Normale, and a composer – if not one at heart. This she knew and told him as much, which saddened him, though in truth he also understood that he never lived up to his potential in this regard.

Mademoiselle Boulanger's words to Petit were almost a provocation, and one might easily argue that they were tinged with jealousy, because she had only ever received a second place in the Prix de Rome. But knowing her as well as I did, I would venture to say that what she meant was "You can serve music in another way," as she told Armand Marquiset[29] – or, indeed, as she said of herself as a composer. (Regardless of whether or not one interprets her remark as the product of jealousy, there is no doubt that, had she been granted the same distinction, her extraordinary life would not have worked out as it did.)

When it came to evaluating composers, she believed that while bad common-practice era music was boring, bad modern music is able to hide its poor composition behind a veil of superficial complexity, a curtain of smoke that can distract the listener from realizing that it isn't really expressing anything. Following the rejection of tonality in the early twentieth century, as punctuated by the twelve-tone system, new ways of creating musical worlds were explored, though these usually limited the musical structure to the parameters of the newly-developed system. But if, on the other hand, one has something to say in common time and in C major, one can still do so, as Mademoiselle Boulanger often insisted, noting that music from Bach to Ravel made use of the same tonal system – a party game that simply varied its rules over the centuries, from the Baroque to the twentieth century – and that if one wishes to communicate, his potential to express is never limited. Composers have thus repeatedly returned to tonality in some fashion: the circle of fifths merely dons the clothing of the new era and its demands. She told us: "When one has something to say, he can find the means to do so within classical strictures; in the opposite case, one can always hide its absence by smoke."

[27] Pierre Petit (1922-2000) was a composer, music reviewer for *Le Figaro* (a French newspaper founded in 1826), and director of the École Normale.

[28] The Prix de Rome was a much-coveted annual painting and sculpture scholarship begun during the reign of Louis XIV; musical composition was added in 1803, the same year that Napoleon Bonaparte moved the French Academy in Rome to the Villa Medici, where the Grand Prize winner would be awarded a residency. The last Prix was given in 1968, after which it was canceled by then-Minister of Culture André Malraux.

[29] Philanthropist Armand Marquiset had come to study composition with Mademoiselle Boulanger; eventually he founded such charitable organizations as *Pour Que l'Esprit Vive* [That the Spirit May Live] and *Petits frères des pauvres* [Little Brothers of the Poor].

In this context, the little boy that visited her on that day late in her life was a composer who, in her own estimation, had personality, a fresh view, which she found less and less among contemporary musicians, and a spontaneity that motivated him to interrupt a work by Bach to offer her his own composition… That personality to which she responded certainly came, to a great extent, from ethnic impulses and the special mingling of cultures unique to the Balkans, a specific mixture that helped save me from becoming the captive of a purely derivative style.

Leonard Bernstein visiting Nadia Boulanger

It is surely of little surprise that a woman so concerned with personality should have such a strong one herself. This was something very much on display in her apartment, which made an immediate impression on me, and not only in the details which I have already described. It was an environment designed not just for those whom she welcomed there – a young Naoumoff recently disembarked from Bulgaria, a Bernstein who came to pay his respects after a rehearsal with the National Orchestra (with the blessing of Copland, his teacher and Nadia Boulanger's former pupil at Fontainebleau), a spider's web spun across the years – but for herself, as well. Indeed, the following summer (and all her summers), I noticed that she transposed – I deliberately use this musical term – her menagerie of pictures and other such significant items to Fontainebleau, emblematic of her need to constantly reflect the world she carried inside her in the surrounding physical environment.

She rarely spoke of this inner world to me, not only because I was a child, but also because she felt that it was a waste of our valuable time together. Nor did she recount life stories, though there must have been hundreds she could have recalled: of Poulenc, who brought her so much laughter, or Debussy on the Pont des Arts, etc., without going into the particulars of her own emotional or personal life… But she didn't want to squander time opening her heart to such matters, because it was more important to work: she cited Fauré for his compositions, for his teaching and musical honesty, but didn't speak of him as a man or evoke any detail that would draw him into the realm of the familiar.

She lived in a world in which these souls that had embraced her and had then been lost were still visible. And amid this shipwreck of so many loved ones, left alone but with so many memories, she discovered a little boy who could inherit the nocturnes and *Requiem* of Fauré, the music of Byrd and Tallis, of Tchaikovsky – all the music so important to her – like her dear Lipatti… In the room adjacent to the dining room, the table was strewn with scores and stacks prepared (or in preparation) for her analysis class (her secretaries, for the most part devoted former students, made transcriptions for her, like so many bees bustling in a hive).

And then there was her old record player… For all her objections to recordings, she did occasionally play 78s for us, such as Kathleen Ferrier's performance of the Brahms songs with viola, or some interpretations by Lipatti: in private after class was over, she would play for me his recording of the Chopin waltzes to demonstrate *rubato* in the context of overall structure – the loss of time that is a

mannerism in so many was elevated to nobility at his hands, for he intuitively articulated structure by regaining lost time across vast musical distances (perhaps forty bars later, without localized zigzagging).

Listening to these recordings, in near silence, was an important part of our exchange, as were our sight-reading sessions, wherein I advanced my discovery by analyzing my mistakes. My intuition helped greatly in this, while her religiosity led her to aver that this gift from God helped me to understand in such a way that I only needed to fill in the holes; she reiterated that she was merely "peeling the orange." And so I found myself in a situation where often very little was said – and this in part thanks to our absolute pitch, which Stravinsky had defined as "that which hears all" – because there was no need to mention a whole lot more than what the music itself was already saying. She felt that I should forge certain paths on my own; if some of them led to a dead end, at least they were of my own making.

My impression of all this was intense and immediate: from our first meeting, we began a mutual quest for wonder, a humble communion in the presence of works which I was discovering for the first time, and which Mademoiselle Boulanger was rediscovering at almost eighty years' distance, with all the personal memories and emotions that this implied for her.

I found it all extremely moving, because it exceeded the framework of teacher/student or artist/apprentice: it was a common humility before the work, a kind which curbed any pride to which one that has taught much or experienced much might be prone. She remained modest, taking a young boy by the hand without condescension, but with strictness and respect. I instantly felt this intimacy, though she never showed it in an affected manner ("Come here so I may hug you close… as if you were my great-grandson," or such things).

Quite the opposite: a smile, an attitude, a dropped word, and above all a teaching manner founded on asking the essential from the start, and, in the subsequent lesson, elaborating on other things – so much so that I would ask myself why I had prepared something which she brought up one week and then left aside the next. And then three or four lessons later, she would discuss it again – and so I was constantly on the alert. Lessons were not for repeating what had already been learned, but to discover what was in you – which actually surfaced during the time outside of these sessions, and, indeed, did so more often than not during my tutorials with Annette Dieudonné.

Though I didn't physically live with Mesdemoiselles Boulanger or Dieudonné, I did intellectually; I grew up beside them, and Nadia Boulanger let my course unfold with great patience. Sometimes there were students in her public classes who had difficulty understanding what she was saying; she would tell me the next day, "You see, my little Emile, a teacher must never be impatient" – as if already, subconsciously, she was giving me pedagogy lessons, without calling them as such.

And in doing so she taught me to listen, and the importance of educating someone without breaking their spirit (even if on some occasions, especially in my harmonic exercises, I felt as if this didn't apply to me) – that is to say, she taught me the significance of achieving the balance that Paul Valéry

observed as so central an aspect of Mademoiselle's teaching, as noted in the dedication on his photo at Rue Ballu: "To the one who dictates enthusiasm and rigor." If the teacher only exhibits a student's enthusiasm, then there is no more structure, but if there is only strictness, then enthusiasm wanes. In teaching, this dichotomy cannot occur without the reciprocal enthusiasm of the student: if this is absent, the teacher's enthusiasm only breaks the mechanism.

So, both enthusiasm and rigor are necessary, but the mix is so subtle and personal that in order to really know how to avoid the potential pitfalls of dealing with a child prodigy – in our case, at least – it was almost a prerequisite for the "One Who Dictates" to have previously seen, as she had, the lives of various other prodigies, either fulfilled or shattered, by age or health or career (in my case, such traps weren't too great a threat because my parents weren't in search of financial gain, and completely respected Mademoiselle Boulanger's instructions without reservation).

And so it was, through all I have just noted, that the "Musée Grevin" which I entered on Rue Ballu was transformed into the cave of Ali-Baba. In this apartment, there was a treasure under each book, under each thought of Nadia Boulanger, under each picture, and it was up to me to make a world of it all – which I did.

CHAPTER III – DAILY LIFE

1) Regarding Nadia Boulanger's appraisal of you: "This child always does better and more than what has been asked of him" –

** did you know that she said this?*

** how much did this correspond to your true personality?*

** did it induce anxiety or stress?*

No, I did not know she said this.

Mademoiselle Boulanger did ask a lot of me, but the truth is that after my lessons were over, I went home to a mother who always did things to the extreme – effort, love, attention (as Mademoiselle likewise demanded). This can of course be a double-edged sword, and a burden to carry.

Suffice it to say that being apathetic was not an option in this kind of environment. My mother would say rhetorically, "Do you realize how lucky you are to be studying with Nadia Boulanger?," and Mademoiselle would add, "Because you are so gifted, you must work that much harder; I ask more of you than I do the others because that is what is necessary with this gift."

At the beginning, I didn't view my talent with the same religious obligation as Mademoiselle Boulanger, who thus believed that it was of the utmost importance to put in the effort necessary to progress (in accordance with her favorite formula – "at all costs" – a mandate motivated by a sort of fear of God). This was all painfully at the fore when she would say things like: "I do not understand, my little Emile, how you can be so talented, and not be able to realize this figured-bass, or transpose this Fauré piece at sight, or sight-read this opera score by Debussy…"

She always asked me not only to do my best, but to do more than my colleagues, continually reiterating her view that I owed something to Someone above. This insistence was motivated in part by her apprehension that I would not prove grateful enough to God for the gifts granted to me, that I would not recognize, per Debussy's formula, that music is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration, and that the talent assigned to me would evaporate like water from a bottle. (These Judeo-Christian precepts were testimony to both Nadia Boulanger's extremely religious side and my mother's ambition for her son.)

Such weights can crush your spirit, but I persevered – why, I cannot say other than that I loved everything I was doing, and the enthusiasm and rigor which she touted were balanced by the freedom she allowed in my compositions.

In the academic exercises she prescribed, however, such as those from Théodore Dubois's *Treatise on Harmony*, which culled examples from the likes of Léo Delibes or Jules Massenet (i.e. music of the late nineteenth-century whose harmonic structure was, let us say, "outdated"), there was no room for flexibility. These gave me fits because I couldn't intuitively hear such harmonies, not only did they do nothing for me, they didn't correspond to the harmonies of Bach or the other music I was studying with Mademoiselle, who had grown up in an atmosphere permeated by the Parisian "opéra comique" ethos that saturated Dubois's excerpts (this is probably at the heart of why she used such

examples – it cast her back to her childhood, and she wanted to share this with, and perpetuate it through, me).

I understood that such exercises were necessary – if she had never assigned them, I would still have encountered them in my Conservatory classes (I eventually had to matriculate in a recognized academic institution in order to remain in the country) – but she made me feel guilty for not having had the same childhood harmonic understanding as she had had, and it cut deeply. There was something artless about it, despite her grandeur, I feel moments like that give me allowance to tease, even be critical of, some aspects of her teaching – though always with love, as one can do to his spiritual great-grandmother.

In addition to Dubois for harmony, she used texts by Gédalge for fugal study and Dupré for counterpoint, while sending me to Annette Dieudonné at nearby Rue Ravignan for solfège, written theory, and ear-training (including Paul Hindemith's *Elementary Training for Musicians*, a sort of Bible that we consulted over and over again, each time adding new rhythmic elements – which made the examples harder than they were on the page, but contributed significantly to my quest for greater rhythmic independence). In her mission to bestow on me a virtuosity of harmonic, contrapuntal, and rhythmic musical thought as quickly as possible, Mademoiselle Boulanger helped me understand that these skills would free me from compositional clumsiness, allowing me to best express myself.

And so my music of the time – in the proto-Slavic vein on display in my first concerto (the one of which I have spoken already, which Menuhin conducted) – had nothing in common with, say, Meyerbeer's style, and yet was written in parallel to the harmony exercises of Dubois (fortunately without the one nourishing the other). She wanted me to understand that it was necessary to subject oneself to these exercises (which I was not yet fully able to comprehend) in order to arrive at agility in one's own composing.

And therein was the key to the compositional teaching of Nadia Boulanger: in lieu of imposing a style, she made one's own style work through safeguarding and encouraging independence of character and individual inspiration, trying to import a suppleness of mind and spirit to the music's inner workings without compelling it in a particular direction. In this light, she was completely receptive to my newly composed *Bulgarian Dances* for piano, a collection inspired by my father's visits from Berlin, and our Sunday walks along the Seine, during which he would teach me the history of our homeland.

Of course, if the student's work lacked personality, she would lose interest. This had been the case initially with Astor Piazzolla, who, at the beginning, dared not play for her the tangos he had composed – the most inspired of his music – and instead offered exercises written in the style of Haydn, as one does in many schools of composition: write in a style, conform to a mold. Finally, she pushed him to play something native to Argentina for her, ultimately bringing him to see the inherent nobility of his country's music – from which perspective he could then incorporate it artistically.

The same was true with a small cycle I wrote called *Le Marché aux Oiseaux* (The Bird Market). At the time, we lived in the Cité des Arts, and would go shopping nearby at the Marché aux Oiseaux, a market on the Île de la Cité. On one occasion, I heard there a bird sing a sort of musical theme resembling a cathedral carillon (F – B flat – C – F – D – F – C – D – B flat – C), which inspired me to compose a mini-triptych, at the end of which the bird flies away, in a flurry of fast repeated notes on the piano. Mademoiselle adored this piece and often told me: "My little Emile, play your little bird composition…"

This kind of thing took place with some frequency during the famous Wednesday classes, sometimes after having played the organ (none of this was as a sort of circus act, but rather was completely natural and for enjoyment, my own included). The triptych had nothing particularly Bulgarian in it, but I played it pretty regularly. Perhaps she was fond of it because it stood as proof that I was already assimilating, certainly unconsciously, the input of a certain Fauré-an levity, a specifically French form of expression – for example, as found in the music of Jean Françaix, then unknown to me.

Another feature of Mademoiselle Boulanger's method was to encourage us to acquire a diversity of repertoire from which we could incorporate elements for our own use. Take, for example, the string quintets of Mozart; the two violas – an instrument which Mozart loved to play, inciting him to add a second part to the string quartet texture – demonstrate the radiant quality of beautifully drafted internal part-writing, a mid-texture equivalent to the soprano in Bellini's *Norma*, or *bel canto* in general. One can imagine extracting such a beautiful interior voice to stand on its own, though here it is hidden in the ensemble. She liked to point out everyone's "free access to the beautiful gesture" in works of art, non-ostentatious beauty which one could receive *pro bono*, without expecting anything in return – a quality available even in the smallest detail, just as one experiences at the Louvre when standing before the paintings of Le Nain.

I had very little time for other new music, between Nadia Boulanger's pharaonic classes, the Hattemer school, and my homework for the two or three-hour private sessions with Mademoiselle – as scheduled by one of the vestals in her hive, whose various responsibilities also included inserting small scraps of paper into the massive volumes of music as bookmarks, so that she could open immediately to musical treasures such as the motet *O vos omnes* by Tomas Luis de Victoria, the Spanish contrapuntist of the early seventeenth-century, or to a Chopin waltz, or a given Bach cantata (all of which I would have been studying simultaneously).

In this context, it is important to recognize that we didn't really listen to recordings: the compact disc was still many years off, and Mademoiselle Boulanger didn't like 33s for the same reasons I expounded on above (shift of tone, etc.), not to mention the hazards that came from Giuseppe, her

housekeeper, fiddling with the electrical wiring in her apartment, which at the time only offered a fraction of the standard European 220 volts…[30]

She would occasionally play recordings for us by Lipatti or Kathleen Ferrier, whom she loved, but she disliked Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* on LP, as it compromised some of the pitch distinction – a concern that may seem somewhat surprising given that Ferrier sang the *St. Matthew Passion* in English (this didn't seem to bother Mademoiselle).

But Lipatti and Ferrier were the exceptions, not the rule; we rarely listened to recordings. The music I discovered was through score-reading at the piano, because Mademoiselle Boulanger could not play them herself (being virtually blind). She would instead sit to my right, her eyes closed, improvising fugues over the top of my part, fingers moving as by a mechanical enchantment, all while speaking to me.

She would say, "Now I will modulate to this tonality… now I'm going to leave my subject… the retrograde… the augmentation… stretto…," in sum, all the exercises she had learned to do as a child, when she won her composition prizes at the Paris Conservatory: fugue, counterpoint, improvising four-part symphonies at the organ (with all the required ingredients) – that is, she was able to improvise what today many cannot accomplish through considered writing, because it was part of a thorough musical training in the late nineteenth century.

At that time, a musician didn't need to be especially virtuosic to validate himself: he composed for self-nourishment; he transcribed by obligation (to expand the reach of his work, or to make known that of others – as Liszt did for Wagner or Beethoven); he was a chamber musician by necessity, as was Mozart and so many others before him. Like all self-respecting organists, Nadia Boulanger – who apparently often sat in for Fauré at the Madeleine Church in Paris, even when underage (if anonymously, because it was prohibited) – could lavishly improvise, and even though her strength had diminished significantly by the time I met her, she still had a sort of internal drive or inner tension, like a string pulled almost to the point of breaking.

This string was on display, in her musical acquaintances, here taut with the tension of decades. When I met, for example, Pierre Petit, it was as an applicant to the École Normale; he was not only the school's director, but also the only member of the "jury" in my audition.[31] He asked me who my

[30] Before World War II, the standard voltage in France was 110. After the war, when it escalated to 220, Mademoiselle Boulanger did not bother having her apartment properly re-wired, but instead let Giuseppe do his makeshift adjustments, which resulted in each socket working at a different capacity.

[31] Mademoiselle's Saturday morning Keyboard Harmony class was officially administered through the École Normale, so I had to enroll in order to participate. While the Paris Conservatory (the CNSMDP), a state-supported institute, enforced the mandatory national retirement age (currently sixty-five, though seventy at Nadia Boulanger's time), the by-laws of

teacher was, and upon hearing "Nadia Boulanger," immediately asked, "What Bach cantata are you studying at the moment?" When I answered him, he exclaimed, "We did that one, too!" Even with the great age gap between us, we spoke of Mademoiselle Boulanger's analysis class as two classmates, despite the fact that she had taught him decades earlier, and me the previous day.

Nadia Boulanger embodied perpetuity itself, evolving but without compromising her values. She was a sort of monument to the nineteenth century, one which could not die – one which truly seemed immortal. After her death, Jean Françaix (who had preceded Pierre Petit under her tutelage) and I developed a friendship, giving concerts together at the Maisonnettes (the summer home which she had transformed in Gargenville, just west of Paris) and collaborating on such works as his harpsichord concerto, which he had composed for Mademoiselle and which I conducted in recording (with the composer at the keyboard). A bond between us was evident, and in it was another kind of response to the matter of "more and better."


Emile and Jean Françaix in the Maisonnettes

Parallel to Mademoiselle Boulanger's demands, my mother also pushed me – in all things, including my Hattemer studies. I was always pressed to do more, to prove more, to justify my existence and the place given me. She accompanied me to each lesson, waiting in the sitting room for two or three hours without interruption (though it usually felt like fifteen minutes to me), because Mademoiselle Boulanger treated me as an adult and made no concessions for my age.

My mother wrote down everything I was taught on a notepad with a Bic pen – the scribble would make a small background noise until she had to turn the page, at which point she would soak her thumb with saliva to do so, triggering a surprised reaction from Mademoiselle: in such scrupulous attention to detail, my mother showed both extraordinary endurance – and a striking acceptance of the lighting conditions (by the piano was a single small lamp, creating an atmosphere aimed at sparing the eyes of the nearly blind woman who could not tolerate more intense illumination). After having taken notes in virtual darkness, she would read them back to me during lunch the next day, reiterating the minutiae of my lesson and reinforcing the famous refrain: "more."

In addition to everything that Mademoiselle Boulanger and my mother asked of me, I was acutely aware of the sacrifices of my father, exiled in Germany, to whom I had to show that all he had done

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the École Normale, as established by Cortot, obviated this requirement. For this reason, many of the professors who had once graced the halls of the Conservatory were seen at the École in their later years.

was not in vain. This, too, drove me to exceed: whenever I worked on my harmony exercises, I did more than I was assigned, demonstrating to each of them that I was still motivated to excel.

Mademoiselle certainly found something of her own childhood in all this, and perhaps also some of the excessiveness of the Slavic character. In his book on her, Jérome Spycket reproduces a letter from Saint-Saëns after her final jury presentation for the Conservatory fugal course, in which she offered a highly chromatic instrumental fugue with all the fixings instead of the vocal fugue which was stipulated. "Learn that to exceed the goal is not to achieve it," he wrote, adding that in aiming to impress the public, she had only hurt herself in the eyes of those in positions of influence, who saw it as mere boasting.

But in recounting this episode of Mademoiselle's own need to prove herself a practitioner of the "better and more" which she so adamantly preached, one must not forget that the subject of this anecdote was a woman at the beginning of the twentieth century who needed to affirm herself, who desperately wanted a first in the Prix de Rome – which she never obtained, again in part due to Saint-Saëns (that Lili had won the award might have only added fuel to the fire of his objection).

I believe that Saint-Saëns was not only a misogynist, but also jealous, and I'm sure he was sharply annoyed at the prospect of granting an award to a young woman from such a privileged musical background – a decision which would have seemed perhaps too predictable. I also don't believe that he was fooled by the presentation of Ernest Boulanger, his colleague at the Villa Médici, as Nadia's father. The young Nadia would have to pay for these sins – a harsh judgment in retrospect.

The same Prix de Rome fate met Ravel, but for other reasons. In his entry, rather than writing a serious cantata within the required parameters, he composed one that was tongue-in-cheek, almost mocking the institution, and knowing full well that he had essentially disqualified himself from a game that he could have played brilliantly: a pupil of Fauré, he had by that time already written his string quartet… Later, in the 1930s, Mademoiselle Boulanger, then director of the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau, asked him: "Why, when we were studying with Fauré, were you still bothering with composition exercises" – the same ones she would later make me do – "when you had already written the string quartet, a work universally recognized as a culmination of counterpoint and compositional refinement in French music?" He answered with the humility imparted by Fauré: "You know, it is necessary to clean one's house…"

She often alluded to this response when she felt me growing disconcerted by these very drills – including the "soprano harmonizations" which proved so difficult for me, and often garnered her reproach. It was all synthesized, these exemplary elements of her past and her newfound safeguarding of this young boy – either to protect me from the harmful advances of a Bernstein (whose charisma she feared might be too seductive, and lure me to Tanglewood before I was ready – the least of the possible dangers I might be exposed to under his spell…), or to assert as a general principle that she always expected more from me.

This severe righteousness sometimes ostracized her from others, but as a friend of the Princess of Polignac,[32] she had nonetheless become the musical figurehead of French music between the two wars, able, thanks to such patronage, to sponsor the works of practically all of her students.

In those days, thanks to private funds (and before subsidies from state-run departments of culture), she was able to exercise considerable single-handed influence, which some might have resented – not unlike those who had accused her of doing too much in her youth: composing the opera *La ville morte* (The Dead City) with Raoul Pugno, touring with him (something that was considered inappropriate for a young woman in those days), and giving an abundance of proof that there was a singular independence of spirit in this near-child, who carried with her something of a "failed boy" air (having lost her father at the age of twelve, and being left with a sister half as old as her and a mother whose age suggested more of an older sister than a matriarch, she ended up as something of a "little father" to Lili; the fact that Ernest had once handed the newborn Lili to Nadia and said, "From now on, you are responsible for your sister" certainly added to this impression).

All this helps explain the austerity in her personality, her single-mindedness, her need to always do more – as is so often the case with women in arenas in which they have traditionally been the minority. Opposite to this posture stood the femininity of her sister, the unconscious nature of her genius – and the many corrections on her manuscripts in the hand of her older sister, intimating the ambition which Nadia nourished to be among the important female composers of the century (that is, before she gave up composing).

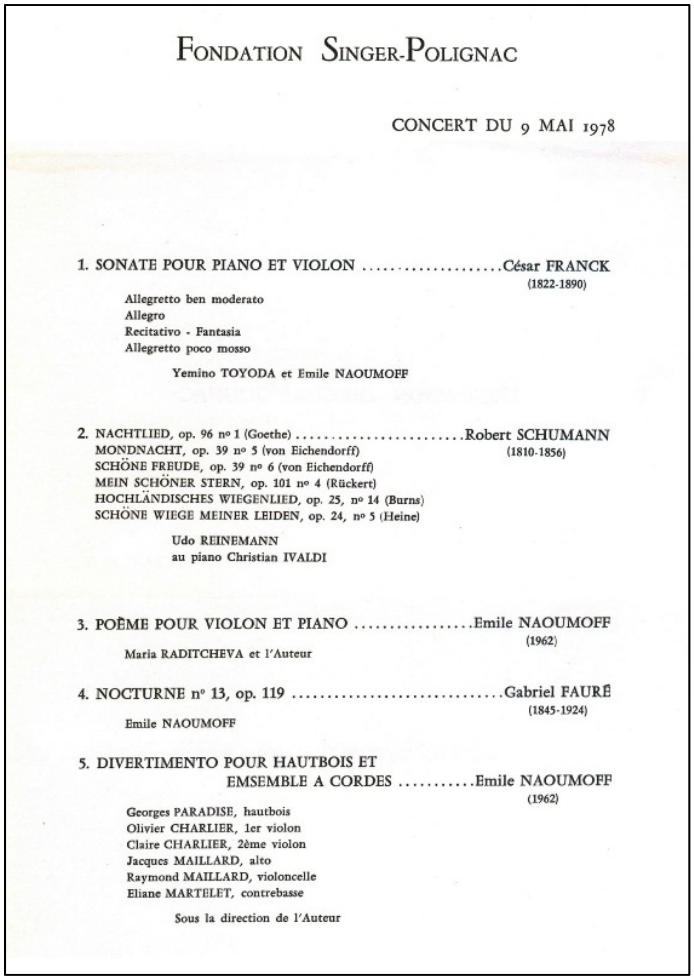
In her later years – by then a friend of the Prince of Monaco, the "little sister of the rich," as some sarcastically called her in reference to her many patron-friends (whether from the world of industry, like the Astiers, or banking magnates like the Dujarric-de la Rivière family) – she maintained a sense of that struggle, an understanding of that awkwardness, and was thereby able to help my mother comfort me when I felt out of place. Perhaps she was particularly sympathetic to me because she recognized the parallels between our respective situations: we were both outsiders – I was a foreigner, and she was… a daughter – no small burden in *fin-de-siècle* Paris – and above that the daughter of a famous father (or maybe not his daughter, which would be an affiliation one would seek to scorn even more…).

In order to help assure that my gift could blossom on its own terms, rather than through commercial or media ventures, Mademoiselle Boulanger was able to procure a scholarship for my educational expenses from the fund established by the Princess of Polignac (my situation was precisely the sort of cause for which the Princess had endowed her grant). It was in the same spirit that Mademoiselle

[32] The Princess of Polignac was, in fact, an American woman named Winnaretta Singer (1865-1943), daughter of Isabella Eugenie Boyer, who had served as Bartholdi's model for the Statue of Liberty, and the founder of the Singer Sewing Machine Company, Isaac Singer, who made a fortune during the American Civil War by renting his machines to the military. In 1893, Winnaretta married the destitute Prince Edmond de Polignac (1834-1901) – a marriage that proved mutually beneficial, as the penniless prince was now married to the daughter of a business tycoon, and the wealthy heiress's social status could only benefit by having married into royalty. The Prince and Princess were generous patrons of the arts in Paris, hosting a salon in their spectacular home on Avenue Georges-Mandel; guests included Debussy, Proust, Cocteau, Diaghilev, Fauré, Monet, and Ravel, who dedicated his *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (Pavane for a dead princess) to the Princess. After Edmond's death, Winnaretta started the Fondation Singer-Polignac, which allowed her munificence to continue well after her own death; the responsibility of overseeing the Foundation's musical patronage, which proved so beneficial to me during my student years, was given to Mademoiselle Boulanger.

secured the use of the Princess's prestigious private mansion, on Avenue Georges-Mandel, for the debut of my concerto under Menuhin, much like she had done for the young Jean Françaix and Igor Markevitch. Among the other famous works premiered in this room under such discreet, effective, and expert patronage – a true vehicle for culture, as opposed to the current manner of sponsorship, in which commercial interests so often distort the true goals of music – were: *Les Noces* and the violin concerto by Stravinsky, *El Retablo de Maese Pedro* by Manuel de Falla, and a number of compositions by Poulenc. Nadia Boulanger was in the middle of all this, acting as an agitator for such promotion. (Even after the Princess of Polignac died and the foundation she had established appointed a new administrative head, Mademoiselle Boulanger maintained her influence, and the cultural activities it sponsored continued to grace the pages of *The Figaro* – a sort of echo of things as they had been in the elite Parisian culture of yesteryear.)

These premieres were not of a public nature, however, like those given in the Salle Pleyel with famous orchestras – even if it so happened that the *ad hoc* orchestra created by the Polignac Foundation for the first performance of my concerto engaged musicians from the Paris Orchestra and the Paris Radio Orchestra. Many of its members are remembered still, including principal cellist Raymond Maillard, whose daughter Pauline, a violinist, was later a student at my summer Academy at the Château de Rangiport in Gargenville[33] in 1998. He and others of his stature were attracted by the prospect of a financial "bonus" at the end of the month, and sat there as a little boy entered the gilded Louis XV-style room at the Hôtel[34] – an enormous space with mirror-covered walls that lay adjacent to a second, dome-ceilinged salon, which served as a reception place. It was the very essence of aristocratic privilege between the wars, and a Mecca of Parisian culture.



FONDATION SINGER-POLIGNAC

CONCERT DU 9 MAI 1978

1. SONATE POUR PIANO ET VIOLON .....César FRANCK (1822-1890)
   Allegretto ben moderato
   Allegro
   Recitativo - Fantasia
   Allegretto poco mosso
   Yemino TOYODA et Emile NAOUMOFF

2. NACHTLIED, op. 96 nº 1 (Goethe) .....Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)
   MONDNACHT, op. 39 nº 5 (von Eichendorff)
   SCHÖNE FREUDE, op. 39 nº 6 (von Eichendorff)
   MEIN SCHÖNER STERN, op. 101 nº 4 (Rückert)
   HOCHLÄNDISCHES WIEGENLIED, op. 25, nº 14 (Burns)
   SCHÖNE WIEGE MEINER LEIDEN, op. 24, nº 5 (Heine)
   Udo REINEMANN
   au piano Christian IVALDI

3. POÈME POUR VIOLON ET PIANO .....Emile NAOUMOFF (1962)
   Maria RADITCHEVA et l'Auteur

4. NOCTURNE nº 13, op. 119 .....Gabriel FAURÉ (1845-1924)
   Emile NAOUMOFF

5. DIVERTIMENTO POUR HAUTBOIS ET EMSEMBLE A CORDES .....Emile NAOUMOFF (1962)
   Georges PARADISE, hautbois
   Olivier CHARLIER, 1er violon
   Claire CHARLIER, 2ème violon
   Jacques MAILLARD, alto
   Raymond MAILLARD, violoncelle
   Eliane MARTELET, contrebasse
   Sous la direction de l'Auteur

It was also, in fact, the same place where, once upon a time, Mademoiselle had conducted a choir littered with faces familiar from the post-Wednesday class social gatherings – Doda Conrad, Hugues Cuénod, the Kedroff sisters, Blanche de Polignac[35], Paul Derenne (whose voice class I later accompanied at Fontainebleau), Gisèle Peyron… – in a seminal recording of works

[33] Originally an independent political entity, Rangiport – which sits on the north bank of the Seine – has since been absorbed by Gargenville.
[34] In France, a large townhouse or mansion which often occupies an entire city block in called a Hôtel Particulier.
[35] A cousin of Prince Pierre de Polignac.

by Monteverdi (this project came to fruition thanks to Doda Conrad,[36] who had made the necessary record industry contacts and secured the needed funding – again from Princess de Polignac). The premiere of my first concerto renewed the tradition of unveiling works in this hallowed space, while preventing me from being exposed to the public in a "commercial manner," as Mademoiselle liked to say (that is to say, we made no profit). Instead, my music was presented in a rarefied environment in which I could play under the direction of a living god, in a magnificent room before an audience of experts. It was an extraordinary situation, and yet whatever anxiety I felt was overwhelmed by a sense of calm and elation.

It was an intimate run-through, heard only by those with real musical knowledge – not an assembly gathered to admire or promote this "little one," but rather a group that would appreciate and abet the music. It was all in accord with Nadia Boulanger's aesthetic, and in its way anticipated my collaboration with Rostropovich on my transcription for piano and orchestra of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, which he found worthy enough to add to his conducting repertoire. (By that time, I was making a living as a concert pianist, and someone of his stature attesting to the value of my work did more than advance my reputation – it was a legitimization of my work by THE Russian musician of his age.)

With Rostropovich

There was another noteworthy aspect to the first rehearsal of my concerto, though I did not know it till nearly forty-five years later. Filmmaker Bruno Monsaingeon, who later produced the documentary *Mademoiselle* about Nadia Boulanger, was driving Menuhin to the rehearsal, and they began to discuss the repertoire on the program. Monsaingeon asked, "Why don't you play something by Lili?" Menuhin replied that he'd be happy to, but didn't have the music. So while we were rehearsing, Monsaingeon went back to his apartment and got the score to her *Nocturne* and *Cortège* for violin and piano. After rehearsal was over, I sight-read it with Menuhin in front of Mademoiselle Boulanger, not at all realizing the significance of the moment; Monsaingeon has since reminded me of this occasion, and made mention of how visibly moved Mademoiselle was by our impromptu collaboration.

I am more than a little sympathetic to her approach at the time: Emile will do exciting things, but we are not going to show them yet, at least not in a trivial way, which would put him at risk of getting a big head, or becoming young, rich, and spoiled instead of staying humble, proper, and intelligent. I'm exaggerating a bit, but she was always unequivocally informed by a deep-seated Judeo-Christian ethic, and wanted me to serve as an "example" to any father who didn't trust – as mine did – the importance of his child being equipped with an adequate period of study before commercial promotion.

[36] Doda Conrad saw himself as something of a manager for Nadia Boulanger – whether or not she wanted his help (Annette Dieudonné said, "Believe only a quarter of what he says"). It was Conrad who arranged the publication of her performance conducting the Fauré *Requiem* on EMI after her death, with himself as baritone soloist, despite the fact that she had aborted the project.

Lord Menuhin, Nadia Boulanger and Emile at the Polignac Foundation concert

This may suggest a reproach of, for example, Leopold Mozart, but one must appreciate that at his time the average life span was significantly shorter. In my case, it was best to have a protracted period of austere and formative study, rather than be thrown into the competition circuit, or put on display like some sort of circus act or media darling who would immediately catch everyone's attention.

I was thus allowed to develop naturally, linearly. Though I did occasionally meet individuals willing to sponsor my music, any public displays were calibrated as part of a progression toward something nobler, rather than being ends in themselves. They were relatively private affairs, never for money or a paying public, only invited guests (the Princess of Polignac's music room was composed of a handpicked cross-section of the Parisian intelligentsia – mathematicians, scientists, etc. – as well as musicians and reviewers), and I'm sure that when Yehudi Menuhin came to conduct my concerto, he must have remembered playing there himself under Enescu in his youth.

Bernstein had a similar experience, as he recounted to me years later. When he first came to Paris, he sought out Mademoiselle Boulanger, as a sort of grand-student (Bernstein had been a pupil of Copland, one of Nadia Boulanger's first American students in 1921; she later gave the U.S. premiere of Copland's *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra*). In her company, Bernstein met, in the Polignac room, all the members of "vieille France" (the Old French establishment) that a young American could dream of.

For me, being a part of this heritage was like being in a relentless fugal stretto, though without intersecting the other subjects, such as Lipatti, who studied simultaneously with Cortot and departed all too soon, or Markevitch, long ago embraced by Diaghilev (before sailing to further horizons). Of all this fascinating company, I can say that I am the only one still living. Furthermore, as far as I am aware, I was the only one of Nadia Boulanger's disciples to train exclusively and continuously with her – and this at a tender age – in the entire panoply of disciplines which she embodied, for an extended period of time (ten years); that is to say, in the over seventy years that she taught, I was the only one to have what might be called a "full course of study" with her.

Khachaturian, who visited her often during his later trips to Paris, once told her over dinner how he regretted not having been able to study with her, and how not having composed music of such rigorous intellectual dimensions as, say, Schönberg, gave him something of an inferiority complex. She responded: "What you have no one can learn, while that which you regret not knowing you will always have time to acquire." (This response alludes both to the composition of dodecaphonic music – and other such rantings of the human spirit that occupied a great deal of twentieth-century art in the wake of world conflicts – and to the Armenian folklore which contributed so much to Khachaturian's music, and gave it its sense of coursing with a quasi-telluric native idiom.) In fact, during my lessons with him, he would often ask what I was currently doing in my lessons with Mademoiselle – as if he was vicariously having lessons with her through me!

Even in music, it seems, the grass is always greener on the other side. Nadia Boulanger was surrounded by students who had succeeded in developing uniquely personal music, but came to her for something else – from George Gershwin to Astor Piazzolla; Bernstein likewise wanted desperately to be taken seriously as a composer of high art music (this despite the success of *West Side Story*…). This is not too far afield from Mademoiselle's own predicament during her early years: she had received the kind of French musical education typical of her father's era – he was a composer of operettas from 1815 to 1900 (in the Lecocq genre, as she liked to say) – but rejected this style categorically when she rejected what she saw as the frivolous quality of her father's music (it is impossible to say how much this extended into a personal commentary, as she never discussed him beyond mentioning the light or comical aspect of his music). And so she, too, had sought something different – in her case, moving towards early music like Schütz and Monteverdi, whose music she rescued from oblivion.

And yet while uncovering such forgotten masterpieces, she was simultaneously fostering new talent in the students gathered around her. It was a remarkable feature of Mademoiselle Boulanger, this ability to redefine herself through others, to repudiate her own music and that of her father, rejecting in fact the entire heritage of nineteenth-century light French music – but retaining always patrician and austere Fauré, whom she kept as a kind of immortal Grecian column, a Bach with Chopinesque sonorities, a Romantic music not yet Impressionistic, but rather profoundly Gregorian, a "Fauré-an country" which served as the landscape of her imagination, populated with works like the *Requiem*, which she conducted around the world. To her, such music was the real France, as were pieces like Debussy's *Le Martyr de Saint Sébastien* (The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian) – but not the works of Meyerbeer, Massenet, or Delibes.

2) What was your daily schedule like?

I would prepare my work for the Hattemer School with my mother from 5:00-8:00 in the morning. Then, after breakfast, my mother would go out for groceries, and I would begin my regimen at the piano. There were some technical exercises, but most of the time was devoted to literature, like the *Rondo in A Minor* by Mozart, the first piece that Nadia Boulanger assigned to me – a subtle, introspective work, free from ostentation, but a significant challenge in terms of ornamentation; it is more the work of a musician than a pianist, replete with the sort of musical intricacies that she wanted me to discover.

For lunch my mother would make something from her outings to the Marché Saint-Paul [the Saint Paul Market], not far from the Cité des Arts, where we lived in a sort of bachelor flat on the fifth floor, overlooking the churches of Saint-Gervais and Saint-Paul, and the back of the Hôtel de Ville (the Paris city hall) – an historic, panoramic view. While eating, she would read any letters from my father and the notes she had taken during my lessons the previous day. Not a second was wasted.

After lunch, we set off for my lessons, journeys often punctuated by my digestive difficulties (I have always had a weak stomach). On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, we would take the subway to Annette Dieudonné's home for a 2-hour tutorial, then walk down the hill to Nadia Boulanger's apartment for my private 3-hour lesson (the trip from our flat to the part of Paris where they lived – adjacent to both Montmartre and the red light district – and back again was also made on foot if the public transportation operators were on strike, a not uncommon occurrence in Paris).

Saturday morning was the keyboard skills class, a course which Mademoiselle had first conceived and developed in the United States during World War II under the title "Keyboard Harmony," and then initiated at the Paris Conservatory upon her appointment by Claude Delvincourt in 1945, after her return from America. By the time I knew her, at which point she was completely independent of any institution, and, in any case, had reached the mandatory retirement age, it struck me as a little unusual that she had ever had a class at the Conservatory – and, moreover, not an analysis or composition class, which, according to tradition, she would have inherited from Fauré. Now retired, she continued to teach this class under the auspices of the École Normale. It was a special course reserved for the "happy few" (myself and two or three other students) wherein we learned to become complete musicians at the keyboard (sight-reading, conducting, score-reading, transposing at sight).

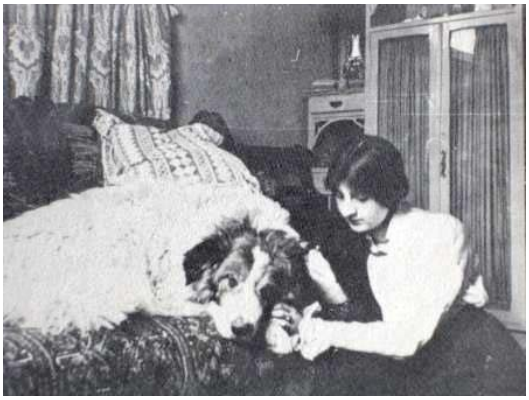
In addition, Wednesday afternoon was the famous analysis class, consisting of thirty to forty participants – a class that I used as a model for the epiphanic or "Wonder-Filling" class that forms the core of my Academy at Rangiport – in which a plethora of musical examples, especially the Bach cantatas and the works of Fauré, were utilized to help us make discoveries in repertoire ranging from anonymous Gregorian chant to the music of today.

The Wednesday classes were, generally speaking, open analysis lectures, frequented by musicians of all specialties, but also regularly visited by non-musicians from the ranks of the Parisian intelligentsia; they transcended the musical element, while nonetheless focusing on specifics with immense detail, and were moments of oratorically superior art for Mademoiselle Boulanger, in which she cited Shakespeare, Paul Valéry, and André Gide as I accompanied a Schumann song, for example, or played a Bach cantata or Mozart fantasy, or even sight-read (perhaps an orchestral score of Mozart – never a reduction).

It was always "Emile at the piano" – but any vanity that arose from this privilege was tempered by always hearing that I had to do still "more" (through the guidance of Mademoiselle Boulanger according to my mother, through the benevolence of God according to Mademoiselle Boulanger). These occasions introduced me to some exciting works, and also sparked my interest in making piano transcriptions (especially of the Bach cantatas). Each class was littered with questions from Mademoiselle that served to create a blended portrait of the considered work across the centuries and in collusion with the other arts, the entirety of which crystallized into a sort of life-lesson.

Such revelations were precisely why so many came to these classes – some who weren't even her students (roughly half of those in attendance, in fact). They would sit in the elongated part of the piano, adjacent to the dining room, in which the table sat strewn with scores wrapped in the same plastic that double-covered all the seats (this material had been salvaged from the wrappings of floral bouquets, a patent sign of a time not yet freed from the privations of war).

The Steinway was next to the chimney and its mantel, always arrayed with fresh flowers around the bust of Lili; behind it were the other instruments, each serving its double function as furniture adorned with memorabilia (medals of honor, photos with the Pope, or meetings with her favorite musicians, Lili's dog, Raoul Pugno, and so many others…).



Lili and her dog Fachoun

Among those who attended these classes were writers, thinkers, and the socialites who just *had* to be there (of the likes of Charlotte Fabre-Luce[37]) – an assembly whose spectrum encompassed the by now enormous circle which Nadia Boulanger had begun to develop between the wars, during her time as the "little sister of the rich." The size of the gathering was magnified by the children of former patrons who had stopped by; Mademoiselle was godmother to more than a few of them – a list that was astronomical in number (*mille e tre,* as Mozart's Leporello would sing in cataloguing them…) – and each of them was sure to receive a birthday card from her every year. Among this throng was included Prince Rainier of Monaco, son of Prince Pierre de Polignac[38] and husband of the late Princess Grace,[39] for whom Mademoiselle had a particularly sentimental attachment; whenever he was in Paris, he would make sure to stop by on Wednesday afternoon to give her a hug.

These classes were indeed her showcase. She printed up a syllabus of the works to be studied each week, though rarely, if ever, followed it to the letter – rather it served as a sort of calendar, allowing her "priestesses" (Mesdemoiselles Hollingue, Armagnac, Dieudonné) ample time to prepare and copy the scores, musicological notes, and any previous lectures which Mademoiselle may have delivered at Cambridge, Harvard, or the École Normale.

This Areopagus of single women constituted her musical secretariat (with the exception of Madame Orsini-Ferenczi, who occupied herself with the mail or the preparation of birthday cards), and the presence of this kind of consort during the Wednesday classes, where at the far end of the room one could meet the likes of Louis Leprince-Ringuet,[40] added even more aristocratic luster to her public image.

Naturally, there were some of us whom she more readily introduced to these honored guests, and, as she had a special fondness for me, I was fortunate to be included among the initiated; it was in this way that I made the acquaintance of Jean Françaix (after one of the classes). I met many extraordinary individuals in this way, including Alfred Fabre-Luce[41] and Professor Lucien Monod – and if it had been another time, I would surely have encountered such intimates as Paul Valéry. She presented me to others in a way that was obviously filled with respect for who I was and what I could do, not one aimed at appropriating my talent for her own vanity or showing me off for pedagogical

[37] Wife of writer and journalist Alfred Fabre-Luce.
[38] Prince Pierre de Polignac, also known as Pierre de Monaco, was related to both Princess Blanche and Prince Edmond.
[39] Through her relationship with the Polignacs, Nadia Boulanger had been named chapel organist of Monaco; she was thus the organist at the wedding of Prince Rainier and Princess Grace (Grace Kelly).
[40] See Chapter II, note 26.
[41] French writer and journalist.

validity. The last of these would have been redundant anyway, for by then she had no need to prove herself in this regard. No, these introductions were filled with tenderness.

I also met some of her acquaintances at the receptions she hosted after concerts or recitals, which I attended without my mother. I would stay at Mademoiselle Boulanger's till about midnight, and take a cab home by myself, usually getting into our apartment around 1:00 A.M. And then 5:00 would roll around again.

Any remaining time during the week was dedicated to preparing for the intense interrogations I underwent at the Hattemer School, a draconian regime enforced by Professor Madame Monet, like Mademoiselle Boulanger an octogenarian (with a younger assistant who graded and ranked us in real time; final scores were tallied to the nearest quarter-point, and points were deducted not just if the answer was wrong, but also if it was slow in coming).

Questions were answered amid an atmosphere of unbearable tension, a mood that was only reinforced by the fact that one risked losing points if the response was not given immediately. This approach to learning, one based on speed and mindless regurgitation, only triggered more anxiety.

What a contrast this was for me, who was used to the inhabited silences that Mademoiselle Boulanger ingeniously distilled after listening to a piece. The unique but precious advantage that I gained through this juxtaposition was that it constantly reaffirmed my devotion to following the path Mademoiselle had planned for me (rather than give my free time over to idleness, like some of my schoolmates at Hattemer) – this was, after all, not only my reason for being, but also my reason for being there at that time: a Paris still freshly stunned by the May 1968 protests, a city that may have moved on as far as the calendar was concerned, but which was still branded by those events – in much the same manner as how Nadia Boulanger managed to continue living in the late nineteenth century, while the rest of the world had entered the space age. This *fin-de-siècle* milieu was a time I never knew, but one which I have nostalgically fed myself with ever since (in the euphoria of one lesson in which I giddily discovered some pieces which corresponded exactly to the sound world which had begun to enchant me, I actually had the audacity to reproach my mother for not having had me earlier).

Class of Monsieur Ruols at the Cours Hattemer

Although the educational practices of the Hattemer School were very onerous indeed, Mademoiselle Boulanger viewed this portion of my education as indispensable, and so a large part of my grant from the Princess of Polignac's foundation went to pay for this private and demanding scholastic course.[42] She held true to her conviction, and often talked with me about

[42] My father paid for our living expenses, while money from the Singer-Polignac Foundation went towards my music and general education fees.

my studies (my Latin translations, for example) – not so much as a grandmother, who might ask to make sure her grandchild is making good grades, but rather to know what I was being taught, so that she could draw the most effective and pertinent connections between my academic work and her musical analogies, riddled as they were with those thoughts and quotes that were so much a hallmark of her teaching – Bergson, Valéry, Shakespeare. In this way, my lessons with Mademoiselle were an intellectual extension of the ideas on which my mother tutored me each morning as day was breaking, in preparation for my Hattemer examinations.

And that's how my days unfolded, in rhythm around those three important afternoons with Mesdemoiselles Boulanger and Dieudonné. I was rarely tired when it was time for bed, but my mother would insist that I rest for a little while, and I would try to force myself to go to sleep…

Such constant attention from my mother – who tried her best to keep track of all things practical: banking (definitely not her forte), diet, etc., and didn't want me to have to spend any time on menial or material tasks – was noble, but the anxiety she later experienced upon realizing that I didn't even know how to make an omelet was very real. My parents almost behaved like servants sometimes, and were it not for the nuclear shots of humility they and Mademoiselle Boulanger injected, I could have gone the route of so many child prodigies (running away, disowning their family), sparked by a delusional sense of false maturity – the kind that sometimes ends in ugly litigation.

I was also fortunate that my parents were willing to invest financially for profits of a greater sort: buying scores, allowing me to participate in masterclasses with great masters, making it possible to play for so-and-so – always beautiful gestures. Maybe it would have been wiser to put this money aside for my future, but this future was still very vague – if in fact it was there at all, for we lived primarily in the hopeful present (if with a sense of borrowed time that bathed in the tension of "at all costs").

Honestly, the future caused me a great deal of distress. I remember thinking, "I'll end up exhausting myself as an adult, because on the one hand I won't know how to survive, and on the other I can't possibly catch up with everything I've learned…" (As luck would have it, I did eventually find outlets to synthesize and pass on what I've learned – in Bloomington at the Jacobs School of Music of Indiana University, and at my summer Academy at Rangiport; this kind of fulfillment seemed a distant dream during my earlier, often more frustrating appointments at Fontainebleau and the Paris Conservatory.)

The internal tension and enormous apprehension about the future that governed my childhood was unfortunately exacerbated by my mother, who was fearful, emotional, and anxious to no end. I still didn't know how to tie my shoelaces by the time I was eighteen years old, for example, and so she bought me moccasins instead, "because there are more important things to do…" Such moments led me to grow up thinking that my purpose was the constant accumulation of tension; I never felt tempted to slow down and catch my breath, because I had been indoctrinated in the belief that

relaxation was the enemy. I was isolated: an only child who was the focus of my parents' energies; a boy without school friends; a music student whose colleagues were generally twenty years older, and whom I rarely saw outside of class. My only company was my mother and a hive of "old vestals."

Oftentimes, too much culture kills culture; luckily, this wasn't the case for me – not least because this trove of damsels, if elderly, was young in spirit, stimulated, and lively. One of them merits special mention: Mademoiselle Langelé, who taught music theory, ear-training, and solfège at the Paris Conservatory. One time, I ran into her in the corridor of the Conservatory and expounded on my disappointment that my classmates didn't understand Fauré, that they seemed rather unreceptive in general, that they didn't seem to hear music in the overriding spirit of general culture, as espoused by Mademoiselle Boulanger, or in light of the sort of interpretive analysis she advocated. She replied: "My little Emile, you will always feel a slight jetlag-like sensation because you are too old in your head: you appear young, but you carry a musical world unknown to others…"

This has remained true, even at my current appointment in Bloomington: when I speak with colleagues like Menahem Pressler (of the now-disbanded Beaux Arts Trio) about Gaby Casadesus or Nadia Boulanger, Markevitch or Stravinsky, they look at me as if I am simply name-dropping. They insist that I am much too young to have known them – and of course I was very young when I met many of them, but in my head I was an adult, and able to understand who they were and pull close to them – be it Menuhin, Rostropovich, or Bernstein (all of whom I was able to work with). This led Mademoiselle Langelé to say: "You will always be somewhat unhappy, because you are in an awkward position" – in sum, an orphan of history.

Dutilleux, Rostropovich, Bonet and Emile in Fontainebleau

This distance between my physiological age and my mental age, the latter being my own construct and including everything that Nadia Boulanger imported into my world, is a gulf similar to the one I experience when on stage and I sense that no one is really responding (because too few are listening deeply or linearly). Such a divorce is only encouraged by performance competitions: the spirit of musical development that accompanies this culture is trivial, merely a skill, with understanding and attention to details such as the inner voices of a texture sacrificed to what is only the visible part of the iceberg – the flashy, the brilliant, the superficial. With fewer individuals cultivating a discerning ear – less than 10% of a concert audience, according to Jean Françaix – there are fewer and fewer listeners to whom I feel I am conveying nuance and deeper aspects of structure (while still diligently working to distill the essence of the work for the sake of the audience in general).

Nonetheless, I relentlessly try to communicate such subtleties, and believe I have arrived at a point where I can harmoniously negotiate everything that Mademoiselle Boulanger taught me without losing myself in its myriad parts, rejecting it, or even, as some of her students have done, denigrating it. Achieving this symbiosis became a less and less daunting prospect during the ten years after her death, during which time I focused on developing as a pianist by dedicating myself to a performing career; it was also a time when I learned how to balance concertizing, composing, and teaching.

Summer academy at the Château de Rangiport (2008)

As a pedagogue, Nadia Boulanger was recognized for both her creativity and her eloquence. Using her approach as a model, I have been most able to freely advance these principles at my Academy at Rangiport, which I think of as a deep giving back of everything she gave me – a "breeding ground" where I can pass the baton through students like Julien Quentin, Jean-Frédéric Neuburger, Francesco Tristano, Simon Zaoui, Bertrand Chamayou, Jean-Baptiste Doulcet, Rebecca Chaillot, Justin Messina, Kajeng Wong, Yau Cheng, Matteo Corio, Jasmin Arakawa, and other musicians of such quality. This is a progression not directly *to* them, but *by* them, because they are the link – when I work with them, I feel something similar to what she must have felt meeting a little boy whom she surely knew would help see her through her final ten years. I am not yet at such an age, but may still, in turn, advise and help develop the budding desires of talented young people who are the exception to the masses.

All this has come about through a litany of extraordinary encounters, be it Marie-Françoise Vauquelin, Mademoiselle Boulanger's tenant at the Maisonnettes for forty years, or the parade of students that have passed through my life over the years… each of them is the gift of a candelabra, as Monsignor Myriel gave to Jean Valjean (in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*).

And yet one must not bemoan the passing of years, or subject himself to trivial nostalgia (oh Nadia! oh Widor![43]), because this leads only to the embalmment of meaningful legacies in museums of the mind; instead, one should bless the next generation by placing the wonders he has known in the hands of pupils who know how to harness them and make their own worlds.

The purpose is not to relentlessly strive for a world-renowned virtuosity; fate will determine if that is in the stars. To the contrary, what is essential is that one dares to take a new look at himself, to change places, and brave the opinion of others, like Nadia Boulanger did – an approach that ultimately allowed me into her life through my compositions, my thirst for music, my parents' trust in her methods – remaining alert, awake, and polite, without limiting himself to the restrictions that are so often imposed by the well-ordered conservatory curriculum.

With Mademoiselle Boulanger, each lesson was a surprise, a feast of fresh thought that didn't necessarily conform to the *status quo*. There were guidelines, of course, but there was always the moment where philosophy intervened between the essential and the detail, a blend of perfect comprehensiveness that I continue to use as a model for my own teaching. And yet I often express fundamental truths in a way different than she would have: whereas she would quote Pascal and talk about terrifying infinite spaces, I have my own style of striving for subtleties of interpretation, and

[43] Charles-Marie Widor (1844-1937) was a French organist and composer, who, with Francis-Louis Casadesus, co-founded the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau.

my own way of communicating that it is important to know that a *mezzo-piano* (or perhaps even *mezzo-pianissimo*) is maintained in measure 16 and should not crescendo too soon – one should have a rich experience within the dynamic and not be afraid of the spaces within it. The same is true of pace, pulse, and tempo, where *Andante* (i.e. "walking at ease") may fuse with *Adagio* to yield *Andagio*.

Regardless of whether or not she used different terminology than I would, the important thing was that I understood her, and because I understood her, I must have been able to make sense of her language, even as a child. I am now in my fifties, and I feel that I still have an ability to find these important truths within myself, despite the commercialism of our time and its tendency to lock up classical music within certain market-based parameters, because of her effectiveness in communicating them so vividly: creativity is always a greater option than bitterness.

This is often going against the wind, but I have found Mademoiselle Boulanger to be an inspiration in this regard from the beginning. This is certainly due in part to the parallel I recognized between the obstacles she faced as a woman in the early twentieth century, and those I did as a foreigner – something of which I was very aware: going with my mother every six months to renew my residency card at the Paris Prefecture, attending the Hattemer School rather than the local grammar school for my elementary education – all while doing advanced musical studies with a musical and philosophical Dalai Lama, who taught me an ethics of life outside of conventional frames, outside schooling, norms, or competitiveness, one which required that I put myself at the service of others in a spirit of tolerance and humility. She really was the driving force behind all this.

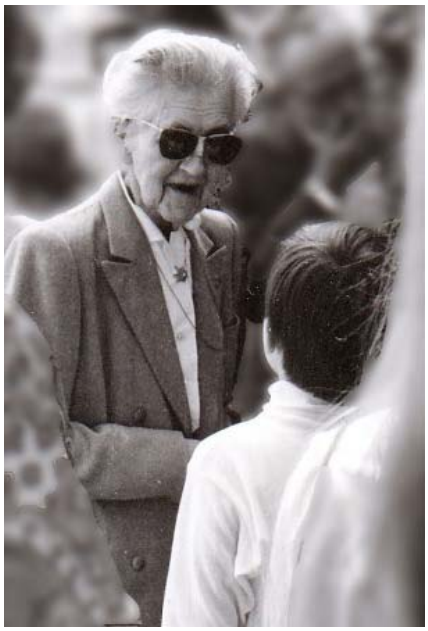
And there was another reason to internalize what she preached: some of the pettier members of her entourage (as there are in all circles) believed that upon her death I would burn out, because my light was not my own. It was a crazy brand of logic, but they seemed to think that the seeds that she had sown in me would scatter after her death; sooner or later, I would have to stop drinking at the source of true Fauré-an milk, which I needed for self-realization, and then my flame would expire. Somehow, they had concluded that the effects of such nourishment were merely evanescent…

But this sort of formative nutrition lasts a lifetime; I felt it strongly and I feel it always, even when I play Fauré today – I thank her anew for each marvelous detail she helped me discover, and to which she opened my eyes, as one opens a window. She prepared me for delight, not only in these works but in so many others that I never had time to study with her, but on which the light of her analysis has applied itself with the same force. This is what I mean when I speak of "learning to teach oneself" in the Interpretive Analysis class at my summer Academy, though I am aware that it is at odds with certain other professors, who prefer to make clones of themselves (something which is perhaps satisfying to the ego, but not helpful to a student who has yet to develop a strong enough personality of his own).

Nadia Boulanger's method was analogous to putting one in a machine factory: she showed you how to create tools which could be used immediately to build one's own vision of a work, even vis-à-vis

repertoire that was outside her aesthetic. Instead of copying the key to access her musical outlook, she helped me forge a lock of my own, one that extended beyond the limits of her pantheon – so while she privately criticized composers like Rachmaninoff (more for personal reasons than musical ones, as I understood later), she prepared me to love and not judge, advising: "Don't say 'I don't like'; say 'I don't understand.'" This is the approach of a very rare humility, one on display so brilliantly when Berg's *Lulu* was staged at the Opéra Garnier: "I have tried to like it, I am sure it is a masterpiece, but I do not understand it," she said with sincere pique and without a hint of narcissism.

Her commentaries on Bach proceeded from the same humility: "I don't know why this work is magnificent – it's because it is God, and therein is all the mystery… it is an acceptance of grace…"



And yet, I am sure I would have rejected her in some way if she had lived longer – after all, everyone "kills the father" at some point or other (though without necessarily scattering the foundational seeds). She was a father and mother for me, a mentor, the quintessence of intellect, a mismatched spirit and body – one youthful, monstrously cultivated, beautifully filled with wonder, the other decrepit, without teeth, without sight… but always with the perfect ear. And I would have rejected her, even as she had once rejected the wishes of her beloved teacher Gabriel Fauré.

She told me that she paid him a visit at the end of his life, by which point he was already deaf. She had abandoned her own music in order to concentrate on promoting the works of her deceased sister (Lili had died in 1918), a decision which had disheartened the old man: "I regret, dear little Nadia, that you stopped composing…" Then he sat down at the piano and played the themes from several of the pieces that she had composed while still his student at the Paris Conservatory. She had tears in her eyes, and could not get over the fact that this man whom she deified – then and always – had had the humility to keep her music in his memory, and that he continued to maintain that it deserved to be played. (When people criticize me for playing Nadia Boulanger's music on the grounds that she claimed she didn't want it performed, that she placed Lili's music before all and even denigrated her own compositions as "unnecessary," I fall back on this story, and the fact that she recounted it – not to mention my discovery after her death of some songs she wrote four years after she supposedly stopped composing.)

I have come to the conclusion that, even if one comes to reject what is taught – as she certainly did at some point, giving up composition despite Fauré's advice to the contrary, and as I, in turn, would surely have done in some capacity - it is always important to be there listening. It was as a result of my attentiveness during our lessons that I was ultimately liberated when she passed away. Working as a dynamo of Nadia Boulanger, under her shadow, my own light would have faded, but I listened as she trained me to achieve my own machinery of fulfillment: discovery, analysis, work, the learning of new repertoire. The moment that the countdown concluded and I realized she was no longer there may have allowed me a sort of internal freedom, but it was only a physical sensation –

like a rocket dropping its fuel tanks once it is able to soar in space – because I remained bound to her intellectually and, above all, morally through her diktat: "at all costs."

I suppose it was only natural to feel a sense of release when she passed away (and the guilt to go with it), but I never lost my immense gratitude for her, or the idea that she was my guardian angel, and that thanks to her I discovered so many beauties in music – not just in my lessons with her, but through the way she taught me to teach myself, educate myself, and compel myself forward in my pianistic studies (particularly in the works I approached after her death).

And then, after the dust had settled, I found that she had left a teacher in me – not a finished product, of course, but not one who needed any sort of ancillary pedagogical training either. She taught me how to approach a work, whether by a composer with whom she felt a particular kinship (she had known so many strong musical personalities, above all Stravinsky, with whom she inculcated us in high doses), or by one outside her legion, and through her guidance I learned how to understand a composition hewn from an unfamiliar aesthetic without having to learn a new analytical mechanism.

Emile and Souzay

This brings up another point: we all admire the strong personalities of composers like Stravinsky as communicated through their works, but she knew so many of them as people – she often spoke of Debussy's human failings as well as his musical talent – human beings, and that can't help but change things when contemplating or evaluating their music. I experienced this sort of thing firsthand with the baritone Gérard Souzay, whose musicianship I admired as a child during my summers at Fontainebleau and whom I later had the chance to accompany. I was disappointed to find that his character was not commensurate to his artistry, that his personal insecurities weakened him to the point of making him unbearable to me; even when singing Fauré or Duparc, which he did divinely, I no longer saw just the swan transcendently moving across the water – I saw the legs struggling beneath the surface. Out of respect, I limit my evaluation of Souzay to my artistic admiration when asked about him, despite the professional abuses he demonstrated toward me – not least of which was showing up just before the performance, declaring he was sick, and ordering me to transpose the entire program down a step, or even a third.

And yet, when one wants to see only the good, he can be blind to the ill. It is well known that Stravinsky was overly concerned with money, recovering his authorship rights everywhere he could, and making new arrangements of his works to extend his copyright across the broadest possible markets and time frames – but it was his inspired side, his Russian side which Nadia Boulanger admired so much, that she loved, and which was such a mutual point of contact between them that he asked her to conduct the world premiere of his concerto *Dumbarton Oaks* while they were exiled in America. She felt a true connection with him, a kind of bond which she did not for, say, Rachmaninoff: like anyone of such a passionate and Cartesian nature, there were areas of shadow within her musical spectrum.

But in her Wednesday classes, apart from the Bach cantatas, which were a fixture, the musical selections rode the range of that spectrum. Works by Xenakis were included, for example, proof that she did not seek to persuade us toward compositions of a certain ilk, or limit our exposure to music within her personal aesthetic.

I have had other teachers, but the only one who truly taught me to think for myself was Mademoiselle Boulanger. After her death, when I realized that it was now up to me to create a world, and see these seeds through to fruition (even if the countdown had ended), there still remained the urgency to do as much as possible during the allotted time, a drive fueled by the awareness that the more one knows, the more he is aware that he really doesn't know – and so I have labored to build a life with all the precepts of humility and service that she instilled in me.

This legacy is a fabulous wealth, though it doesn't stop me from contradicting her or prevent me from attempting things that she would not have liked – and I feel vindicated in such things by knowing that she was such a free spirit (especially in her time), and that I am no longer obliged to answer to her (either because of my youth or the grave)… and yet, all of my decisions are informed by what she sowed in me.

She equipped me with an extraordinary agility when looking at a score: I see not only printed notes, but data which I can use to tickle the DNA of the composer's thought – and thus engage in a living dialogue with a composer long dead. Today, dozens of different scholarly editions exist, but we do not learn the reality of music from such volumes – we do so from concrete analysis, and from this we obtain phrasing, gesture, tempo, fingering, in fact an entire world… and all this emanates from interpretive analysis.

Donna Doyle, Malcolm Singer, Emile, Grant Chorley and Neal Gittleman (Left to Right)

Mademoiselle Boulanger's Wednesday classes were not only for pianists, but also for theorists and composers (she even allowed me to present some of my compositions during these sessions).[44] She was able to make an infinite number of things accessible, for both the musicians and non-musicians in attendance, during a two-hour (or more) lecture on a single measure, a single detail or disparity, an unevenness in performance, or a rhythm that was impossible to master – such as dotted notes, which she wanted neither too relaxed (like a swung triplet) nor over-dotted (which would be distorted and dry). She told me: "My little Emile, you will find that there is nothing more difficult than to do a dotted rhythm properly, be it in Schumann, be it in Beethoven, in fact wherever it may be: either one drags the note too long, or shortens it to the point of vanishing," or "one must play a two against

[44] To demonstrate the diversity of those in attendance, one need only scan a list of my colleagues when I was her student: the well-known Brazilian composer José Almeida Prado, the Colombian composer Francesco Zumaque, the immanent Brazilian musicologist Manoel do Lago, the brilliant English composer Malcolm Singer, American conductor Stefan Kozinski, American pedagogue Marianne Ploger, Japanese pianist Yuko Satoh, American conductor Neal Gittleman, American jazz pianist Jeff Gardner, American composer Christopher Yavelow, Canadian musicologist Grant Chorley, and so many others.

three rhythm linearly, with due respect to each line, rather than as an aggregate rhythm which just syncopates one line against the other."

The interplay of strong and weak beats was one of the details that obsessed her the most: her credo was that strong beats are propelled toward the weak beats, which actually thrive on the tension of moving to the next strong beat (which obtains its very strength from this tension) – all is thus created by motion, by rebound, a trampoline effect towards the next weak beat.

She developed these details almost pathologically – details which are, after all, no different than those specific to any discipline – but never removed them from a study of the complete edifice. It is like screws in the Eiffel Tower: each must be beautiful and well-crafted so that everything fits together properly – each rivet must be prepared with this degree of intention, in order to achieve a beautiful organic whole. And yet at the same time, it is necessary to have a vision of the complete structure, otherwise one can't see the Eiffel Tower in its entirety.

In most analysis courses, structural analysis stops once the component parts are identified, at the moment when one says the bones are such, the cardiovascular system is such, and that's it – from page to page, one plays the role of surgeon. Mademoiselle Boulanger didn't ignore these elements, but she instilled in us from the start an awareness of how to use them to build a unique approach when interpreting a piece of music, thereby building something new from the analytical process.

She taught us to examine how the individual parts – and their explanation – acted as symbols of the whole. It was as much metaphysics as anatomy. Because of her guidance, I know how to search a score for details behind the notes and between the lines; it's like a diagnostic reading of an X-ray photograph, which is why I have come to refer to this process as "penetrating the DNA of the composer's thought." And then I follow, divine, critique the notes to construct alternate ways in which the composer could have used the same material, and from that vantage point I can ascertain why he did what he did (this whole course is like investigating the submerged part of an iceberg).

A phrase like "penetrating the DNA of the composer's thought" may seem immodest or irreverent, but, to my mind, it is only applying what Nadia Boulanger taught us: she held this kind of approach in high regard because through such a methodology, one can transcend mediocrity and prove his character.

And this, for me, is her heritage: humility in the face of awesome heights, though to some it may appear as disrespectful temerity – which is an easy way for those who prefer false humility to categorize someone who continues to question.

In the film *Amadeus*, one immediately notices a sort of arrogance on the part of Mozart, who is portrayed to some extent as a brat, undeserving of the gift he has been given. Salieri focuses his attention on this gift and suffers because he doesn't share the same faculty or ease. And yet he is the only one who understands Mozart – the others merely judge him.

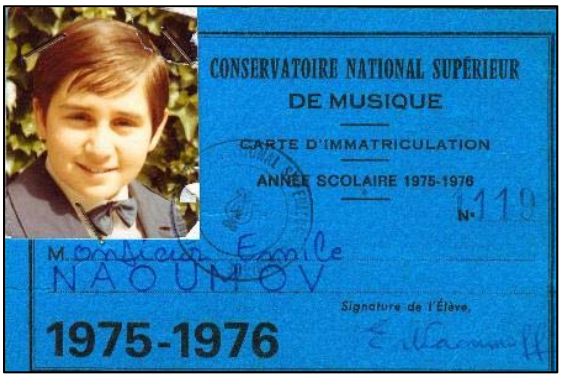
At the risk of an obviously obscene comparison, my colleagues and fellow students at the Conservatory also often viewed me as being immodest, though I felt my approach was humble. I did what I did without an ounce of competitiveness or vain superiority, but I was soon disabused of the notion that others recognized this. They interpreted the ease with which my ear propelled me to navigate and absorb music as a challenge or provocation, and I was left in an awkward position: caught between sincere humility, though one not lacking in personal security (again, this balance owed much to Mademoiselle Boulanger's stress on one's duty when nurturing a God-given talent), and the way my self-confidence was perceived.

It was something I could not countenance at the time without losing my spontaneity, because if one focuses too much on the problem in himself, he becomes paralyzed (one cannot simultaneously be player and referee and spectator…). My naïveté only led me to greater disappointment, as I continued to find myself amidst people who, through jealousy or insecurity, from my generation or a previous one, have rejected me because I represent something terrifying or invasive to them. This has certainly never been my intention.

This approach, one vibrating sympathetically with both music and humility, is not a solipsistic, Cartesian experiment in which no one else participates: it is fully human and all-embracing, and was fundamental to Nadia Boulanger's philosophy, one of self-teaching, of not being afraid to take risks or make mistakes, of looking for the coherence of the moment and an exhilarating, selfless audacity, of remaining vigilantly demanding of oneself and tolerant towards others (while the reverse is, alas, the more widespread and self-assuring behavior), of questioning after a process, but not during it – even if that means seeing an erroneous trajectory through to its conclusion. She had to be all this in order to continue feeding so culturally rich and curious a spirit, to keep building and renewing herself throughout a career of such longevity, steeped in the elegant humanism of an art cultivated at the service of both the muse and her colleagues.

Such an ethic, uncompromising and coursing with respect, was a mirror for others. One individual who acceded to this approach was Jean Françaix, a man of supreme integrity who made no concessions to external dictates, but rather lived his entire life with a rich inner spirit and independence of being – even if it meant critical and commercial marginalization. From 1930 and 1997, he consistently composed music on his own terms, transcending the fickle humors of Paris and worldly trends; in dying, he was reunited with the timelessness of his music, like Vivaldi before him. Françaix defined his own challenges and found his own answers, remaining true to himself and his audience – past, present, and future (not unlike Glenn Gould, who focused so absolutely on his recordings, and, through them, each of his listeners – while at the same time managing to remove his inherent narcissism from the process).

This is similar to what happened to Nadia Boulanger, because she wasn't an "insider," part of a clique or school of thought, but rather her own universe. She had a radiance about her – certainly nourished by the strong personalities of some of her students – which managed to aggravate and arousing jealousy in some: after all, she could not eradicate low self-esteem and the pre-formed ideas it engenders (this was not so much the case in America as in France, where from the age of twenty – and remember, this was virgin territory at the time for a young woman – she already had that wealth of knowledge and inspiration which she later revealed to me).



In 1975, I had to enroll at the Paris Conservatory and begin to work towards an officially recognized diploma in order to be granted an extension of our residency permit. Mademoiselle Boulanger wasn't happy about it, but she understood the situation and made arrangements that allowed me to matriculate without interrupting our work or narrowing its focus to a single discipline (such as piano or composition, with their attendant curricula). It was, of course, not a question of consulting one professor behind another's back – that was ugly business, and ended by completely destroying any understanding. To the contrary, Mademoiselle Boulanger's approach was to advise a teacher according to the repertoire, and to set me up with teachers who followed the same method: all the other professors that I worked with were recommended to me by her, and she made it known from the outset that I was her student. This did not always lend itself to a positive experience, as each professor had his or her own world, and these worlds would sometimes repel one another (luckily, I never faced overt pettiness as a result of this dynamic).

Given that my experience with her was so pleasurable, it always struck me as odd that some of my conservatory professors became paralyzed at the idea of even suggesting a tempo or interpretive notion for fear that it would upset Mademoiselle when I played it in my private lessons with her. I suppose I could have used this to my advantage, but I didn't; well to the contrary – I extended to each of them affection and respectful gratitude, not affectation or a sense that they were inferior to Mademoiselle Boulanger.

Nadia Boulanger, Emile, Françoise Gervais and Lélia Gousseau

My piano professor at the Conservatory was Lélia Gousseau (again, a single elderly woman – another in the litany of "white widows" that populated my youth[45]), who could no longer play with her right hand because of tendinitis. She had been a pupil of Lazare Lévy, and had posthumously premiered some works for Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-94), as well as debuting transcriptions of his music for left-hand alone. She had also been cruelly humiliated by Nadia Boulanger on my thirteenth

[45] The term "White widows" refers to the generation of women whose husbands, fiancés, or paramours were killed during World War I.

birthday during a party organized by, among others, Mademoiselle Françoise Gervais (an analysis professor at the Conservatory), at which I played the thirteenth nocturne of Fauré. In the silence following the end of the piece – Mademoiselle Boulanger always respecting this moment of contemplation, like a priest after Communion – Lélia Gousseau, caught off guard by the profundity of the heavy silence, had dared to break the mood by clumsily uttering: "Isn't this nocturne pretty, Mademoiselle?" Speaking of 'prettiness' to Nadia Boulanger was essentially to condemn oneself, and the poor woman – still a musician of great renown in Paris at the time – heard in reply: "Madame, learn that Fauré just is – beautiful or otherwise… Good-day, madame!...," and was shown out of the room by Giuseppe. This seemed terribly mean to me – very brusque, and, simply said, troubling.

But Mademoiselle Gousseau was someone who generally didn't offend Nadia Boulanger as a teacher, especially as it allowed me to be administratively enrolled in the Conservatory. After all, I was only there for the official papers – my real education was with her. It was yet another example of what at the time seemed like a relentless onslaught of dichotomies.

At the Conservatory, I also had to take a chamber music class, and for this Mademoiselle Boulanger chose Geneviève Joy, the wife of composer Henri Dutilleux and a woman whom Mademoiselle always called, with a certain snideness, "Madame Dutilleux." She understood that Geneviève Joy had wanted to keep her maiden name as an artist and accomplished pianist, but this appellation nonetheless illustrates that she was harder on women than men – in this instance, perhaps provocatively extolling what may seem to be the exact opposite of feminism (a movement that had so much wanted to reengage the first female conductor of the New York Philharmonic…).

My sight-reading class at the Conservatory was with Madame Jacqueline Robin, who had accompanied many singers in the 1950s under the name J. Bonneau and was a woman of great kindness. She had suffered a heart attack, which robbed her of some energy, but not of her pure and emotionally communicative (and imperious) musical enthusiasm. I had, of course, already devoured many scores during my marvelous sight-reading sessions with Nadia Boulanger, and in my meetings with Madame Robin, I would often exclaim: "Ah! I have already discovered this at Mademoiselle's… Ah! I have already discovered that at Mademoiselle's…" She would smile graciously, her humility conspiring with a great fineness of culture to dispel any irritation, at what could have come across as a "know it all" boy.

It must be said that, in doing so, she gave me – perhaps without her knowing it – a beautiful lesson in pedagogical humanism, one that has informed my own teaching ever since: when one is loved in his youth, he doesn't fear loving others in his turn – thus holding out the educative hand, and creating a

healthy human chain. Likewise, when one is treated with respect while still only a vulnerable embryo of conditional promises, he will respect those to whom he entrusts the inherited treasure.

And to the contrary, if one grows up surrounded by adversity, spite, or even competitive jealousy fermented by the insecurity of others and projected onto him – so they can cowardly and maliciously clear their names – one must learn from the start to be mentally and psychologically stronger, in order to surmount this quasi-insuperable emotional handicap, to dare to open his eyes and embrace, and avoid reproducing that same harmfully inoculated schema to which he has been subjected.

Likewise, the humanity of the student forms the teacher (indeed, every bit as much as the reverse). Today, I try to apply the benevolence shown to me to my students and colleagues, despite the fact that so many of them exhibit antithetical attitudes. The difficulty of sharing a student with a Nadia Boulanger must have been enormous, and I often felt uncomfortable because of this. It was an arrangement that could have easily gone sour had I not been lucky enough to have had such a diverse cast of marvelous professors.

Bascourret, Gervais, Emile
Gousseau, Boulanger, Joy-Dutilleux

Things were particularly good with Françoise Gervais, who taught the obligatory analysis class at the Conservatory, and had also been a faithful student of Mademoiselle in her time. She thus incited me to interrupt her if she said anything that contradicted the spirit of Nadia Boulanger. She was similarly steeped in her faith (which was, like Mademoiselle's, that of a candid little girl), and also burned for the musical world of Gabriel Fauré – she movingly declared that Fauré was her country! (This is something I understand so fervidly – I lose myself in concentric and exponential thoughts while playing his music, like inhaling an enormous array of evocations, which then come to populate my senses...)

All these different teachers were like satellites to the star that was Nadia Boulanger, not only from the point of view of my immediate musical instruction, but also through concerts to which she took me (to hear and see Solti, Barenboim, Rubinstein, Markevitch, Rostropovich, Bernstein), trips to the Louvre, introductions to those who came to visit her at her home, and the education I received in public manners: she wanted to make sure I knew, for example, how to cross my legs in a way that would not bother a lady – a little like my mother, but with Mademoiselle there was a unique blend of cool austerity and great tenderness.

The three years I spent at the Paris Conservatory working towards my graduation prize (as one said at the time)[46] were thus relatively agreeable – and even included playing some Rachmaninoff, which

[46] In addition to the entrance competition, one had to compete in order to exit the Paris Conservatory, as well; students were awarded prizes based on how the jury, whose members were external to the Conservatory faculty, ranked their final performance.

vexed Mademoiselle Boulanger a bit, because she had had such a difficult personal relationship with him, particularly with respect to the death of Raoul Pugno.

Pugno and Mademoiselle had been on tour in Russia in 1913 when he was taken ill. As he lay dying, Pugno petitioned Rachmaninoff to replace him, at a moment's notice, and join the young Nadia Boulanger on stage – thus saving her from having to pay a heavy revocation penalty to the impresario who had arranged the tour. Rachmaninoff refused the dying older Master. Perhaps he was wrongly accused of misogyny, and simply afraid of contracting the virus which ultimately claimed Pugno's life? (I can't say this on good authority…) In any case, Nadia Boulanger borrowed some money from Miki Piré, a well-off friend of Lili, and brought Pugno's coffin back with her to France, ultimately interring it at Gargenville, where he had once been mayor.

MINISTÈRE DE LA CULTURE ET DE LA COMMUNICATION

CONSERVATOIRE NATIONAL
SUPÉRIEUR DE MUSIQUE

ANNÉE 1978

EXTRAIT du procès-verbal des séances du Jury chargé de décerner les prix aux Élèves du Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique pour les concours de l'année 1978.

Le Président déclare, au nom du Jury (Séance du 15 juin 1978)
qu'un PREMIER PRIX de Piano
est décerné à Monsieur Kaoumov Emile, Gueorguiev
né à Sofia (Bulgarie), le 20 février 1962.
Élève du Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique.

Fait à Paris, le 30 Juin 1978
et délivré par nous, Directeur du Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique,

Signature de l'impétrant :

As far as Rachmaninoff's music was concerned, she told me that he played it brilliantly and with great uprightness, noteworthy for its chaste discipline, and distinguished by a surplus of nostalgic sentimentality – which reflected his personality – something that she regretted too many pianists attempted after his death, ultimately reducing his noble musical expression to affected mannerisms, and infesting his compositions with frequent and unmerited culminating points, excessive humpbacks which Mademoiselle called "cardiac music," a vulgar phenomenon which bothered her immensely.

That problem still lingers today, with many pianists "making a big deal" out of his music, as they do with that of Chopin, but Rachmaninoff played his own music with sobriety (much like Lipatti approached Chopin, conveying a grand architectural vision without divesting the structure of internal liberties). It is a travesty that his scores are often deformed by pianists putting on airs, crushing the music with an unhealthy dose of their own psyches, rather than conveying it in a way which utilizes the pianist as an interpreting-author, and lets the work unfold naturally in time.

This explains Mademoiselle Boulanger's behavior in 1978, when I had to pass my prize at the Conservatory. I played the last Schubert sonata, a work she admired for its candid rectitude (she said that Schubert's music was innocent, like Lili's), but also had to include an etude by Rachmaninoff, which I dared to play for her despite her nebulous and legendary relationship with both the man and the manner in which so many approach his music; fortunately, she seemed satisfied, convinced that my little Slavic soul had found a natural nostalgic echo in this musical mirror.

This Slavic impulse was, of course, a principal reference point within both my own personal aesthetic and that of Mademoiselle Boulanger; she had added an understanding of French music to my palette, a spectrum which was further enhanced by virtue of living in France and knowing the

Casadesus family (the entire Casadesus dynasty: my interaction with Robert was limited a summer at Fontainebleau, but my relationship with Gaby extended after the deaths of Robert and Jean), as well as Nikita Magaloff, Clifford Curzon, Jeanne-Marie Darré, Soulima Stravinsky, Igor Markevitch – each of whom I met and worked with on numerous occasions, but were not a part of my daily life.

That was reserved for Nadia Boulanger, and to a lesser extent the Paris Conservatory (from 1975) and Hattemer School – which took more and more time, and more and more money. Thanks to adjusted schedules, however, I was able to cultivate all three. I reorganized my days to match Mademoiselle's schedule, sleeping little and doing everything with enthusiasm, rigor, and wonder – and always working toward more.

In my adult-like childhood, one solitary and decorated by the musings of my imagination, my collection of *Matchbox* cars gleaned as a sign of accomplishment – I would receive one from my mother as a reward for a particularly satisfactory lesson, a sort of sugar-drip to the trained circus-monkey (if I were to be sarcastic), some Tom Thumb pebbles in my vulnerable conscience. They punctuated moments in time as the countdown continued and the sword of Damocles drew ever lower. And yet, Nadia Boulanger was not only the clock, but in my wonder-filled eyes the watchmaker, too (I knew she wasn't really, of course, but I so wished her to be…).

And so I cycled through my days until, without even being aware of it, I had moved into a new and important part of my relationship with Mademoiselle: my adolescence. The transition into this new stage of life was rather seamless, a fact which continues to intrigue me – and which came to roost later (perhaps destiny was incensed afterwards for having spared me then? "Enough of this complacency now!"). Still, it was a very complex and involved time, with many blessings, continued hard work, and a vigilance against extremes. I was thus able to survive those years – a rather monastic time, if without monastic austerity – with my sense of responsibility and duty intact (qualities which had been instilled in me from the young age when my musical gift first surfaced). The entire experience was one full of a rather protean sense of thanks, initially to my parents, a feeling that lasted until their death, and then shifting its energies until completely absorbed by the enormous gratitude I feel towards my children (as always, the heart of the matter…).

I didn't really have friends my age, though, truth be told, this didn't really bother me, as I preferred talking with people like Manoel do Lago, a Brazilian friend and fellow student of Mademoiselle Boulanger who was roughly twenty years older than me, about Monteverdi. What amazes me in hindsight is that he even deigned to converse with me (I dare to hope it was not out of charity). Later, when planning his wedding ceremony, he asked me to scour the collective "Boulangerie" memory to find one of the pieces from Mademoiselle's Wednesday analysis course; it was important to him that he have one of the Gregorian chants which she had revived accompany him at the church of Saint

Germain l'Auxerrois during this sacred moment of his life, and he could not remember the name (it was "Verbum bonum," I believe).

In contrast, my cohorts from the Hattemer School – whom I saw only occasionally, and who did not understand the passionate scope of my monologues on Bach's five-voice fugues, or Pérotin's hockets, or even the nostalgic expression of *Gilles* by Watteau (which my mother had taken me to see at the Louvre, and which I had come to associate with Mozart's *Rondo in A Minor*) – had concluded that I was some kind of Richard Clayderman at the piano, aspiring to become rich and famous by writing hit songs for Dalida.[47] (They were completely wrong in their assumption that my goal was fame or fortune – nor have I attained either!)

The painting in the middle is *Gilles* by Watteau

For my part, I imagined becoming an archeologist, a dream partially realized latter while resurrecting forgotten or unfinished manuscripts by composers like Glenn Gould, Lili Boulanger, and Gabriel Dupont. I became intoxicated with wild archeological dreams, more by a desire to choose my own path in life than a fear of disappointing others. I had not, after all, been asked whether or not I wanted this gift – it was just bestowed on me, leaving me little choice in the matter, a circumstance compounded by the sacrificial (though freely offered) exile of my parents in order to realize it, and this despite apparently impassable geopolitical and economic obstacles.

A significant element of this was, of course, the valiant and knight-like idealism of my father, who took such risks for us from afar. With him firmly stationed in Berlin, I was left surrounded by women, most of them elderly and single. Such exceptional women – of all ages – have fueled the motor and shaped me in various ways throughout my life: my mother Eli; Mademoiselle Boulanger; Catherine, my wife of twenty years; Marie-Françoise Vauquelin, who has served as a model of the righteously-lived life; my daughter Nadia, who has taken up the torch of this company of my admirations; and, in more recent years, my former pupil Yau Cheng. Each has set me vibrating in unison with them in her own unique way, as have so many of my students (of both sexes).

But at the time, other than my visionary father Gueorgui, I had no male figures in my life (since then, my son Vladimir, whom I admire tremendously, has contributed incalculably to my understanding of the timeless masculine aspect of things). This was something which I missed a great deal during my

[47]Richard Clayderman is a French pianist who records popular and easy-listening albums; though born in Cairo, the popular singer Dalida spent most of her career in France, living in Paris until her tragic death in 1987.

years studying with Mademoiselle Boulanger, and is a matter I have put off discussing thus far in order to now draw special attention to Pierre Sancan, my defining male teacher.

Before we left Bulgaria, Monsieur Stankovitch, who had given us Nadia Boulanger's name, also recommended Sancan as a possible teacher, and so my parents arranged an interview with him during the same span as when I first met Mademoiselle (Stankovitch had also suggested Youri Boukoff, who always showed me great, if critical, kindness, though without ever feeling a vocation to teach me).

El Bacha, Béroff, Pommier, Collard, Sancan and Emile at La Roque d'Anthéron in 1983

Sancan was a kind-hearted man, oozing with good humor and a southern French passion for rugby. Himself a pupil of Yves Nat, he was one of those mythical Conservatory professors whose students at the time included Michel Béroff, Jean-Bernard Pommier, and Jean-Philippe Collard. He had also obtained a Premier Prix de Rome in composition, like his colleague Raymond Gallois-Montbrun. (Gallois-Montbrun was Conservatory Director for twenty years, and it was he who named me professor of vocal accompanying not long before his retirement; he thus followed the progress of my students at the Conservatory as he had followed mine under the tutelage of Mademoiselle Boulanger.)

Though he was also a composer, Pierre Sancan's legacy – like that of Robert Casadesus or Dinu Lipatti – is as a pianist. This is a significant nuance, for a composer, and a pianist who composes, are not the same thing, much as the way you define yourself and the way others perceive you may not necessarily correspond. Today, Rachmaninoff appears to us as a composer whose music is used by pianists to demonstrate their skill, but in his day he was considered above all a virtuoso who also happened to compose.

And so it goes: we work humbly, and then fate cruelly decides which of us will be remembered; even then, those spared from oblivion are not necessarily immortalized for the hoped-for reasons. Perhaps all is vanity after all – and if composition and performance do indeed prove to be incompatible, it is because in his daily work the pianist feeds his subconscious so much with the works of others that he is unable to finish his own creative spurt. On the contrary, if one doesn't play an instrument, he narrows his world as a composer and finds himself isolated in a sort of chapel.

The one nourishes the other, but can also drown it: even small doses of constant exposure to the beloved works of great, venerated masters can inhibit the urge to compose. It was with full knowledge of all this that Nadia Boulanger had me pursue both disciplines, though without blending them – and I didn't hesitate to add to the mix conducting (with Pierre Dervaux after initial studies with Markevitch) and organ (primarily with André Marchal), because these various crafts were

interdependent to me, like an internal tree with arms stretching out towards the much-longed-for plenitude. These enlaced branches unite to produce the humble being of the complete musician, as they do in all culture or education; once assimilated, they evaporate, leaving only politesse in all such cultivated endeavors.

There remain, however, those of narrow mind who insist on arguing that the mark of professionalism is targeting a niche, rather than "scattering" oneself in an amateurish fashion. I believe that one needn't be forced to embrace multiple disciplines, but neither should his possible simultaneous and wide-ranging assimilative capacities be prejudged based on the limits of others; beyond matters of skill, expertise, or wisdom, it involves asking oneself how his learning can serve others.

After Mademoiselle Boulanger's death, I continued the multifarious approach she had initiated with me, but began to venture outside my circle of female teachers and went to see Pierre Sancan again. This was, of course, not done in any spirit of attempting to replace her, but simply because during our first meeting he had had such an elegant and positive reaction to me, even helping me obtain the necessary papers at the Consulate to facilitate my stay in France by drafting an ecstatic letter about my talents and the necessity that I stay in the country to develop them.

He also recommended at that time that I enter the Conservatory in a preparatory course, a tract already by then on the path to extinction. When I did eventually enroll, as already mentioned, I studied with Mademoiselle Gousseau, obtaining my first prize while a young adolescent; she was one more satellite in the solar system of "demoiselles" of which Nadia Boulanger was the star. Unconsciously, without a doubt, I had avoided getting in touch again with Sancan when I matriculated because he was a strong personality in his own right, and it would have been impossible to balance that with Mademoiselle Boulanger (in any case, she had decided the professors with whom she wanted me to study).

Playing duets with Sancan

This world came unraveled not only because of her death, but also because I had completed my Conservatory training with Lélia Gousseau[48] – having, alas, accumulated faulty pianistic habits under her which I had until then been able to mask with my musicality. They now, however, needed to be seriously addressed by another teacher, one who, like Nadia Boulanger, would not destroy the composer in me, nor any of the other facets of the complete musician which I had labored to acquire

[48] After my first prize at the Conservatory and Mademoiselle Gousseau's subsequent mandatory retirement, my sense of loyalty led me to continue studying with her at the École Normale (see this chapter, note 31), where I completed a one-year diploma.

Emile and Gousseau

during my ten years with Mademoiselle (sight-reading, accompanying, transcribing, paraphrasing, conducting, etc.).

I thus renewed my pianistic training with Pierre Sancan, though again with a sense of borrowed time, for he was already suffering from that cruelly degenerative and insidiously relentless illness Alzheimer's disease. Nonetheless, in our brief time together I was able to incorporate the ingredients necessary to reform my pianistic technique, and thus launch the concert career that would occupy most of the next ten years of my life. From him I learned a pragmatic approach to each digital motion, a vast improvement to the body-language translation that had been my *modus operandi* beforehand (a technique woefully imprecise, because based on quasi-choreography of the music). Put another way, reliable playing soundly replaced the approximate "dropping of wrists like the rain" and Russian roulette approach of "playing with high fingers, without feeling out the keys…"

Sancan's technique sought to develop magnetic fingers, which would sink with consistent velocity, regardless of nuance, always directed toward the bottom of the key – but without an iron wrist or forearm overwhelming the sound with nervous tension. Instead of superfluous gestures that could compromise the tone, he advocated naturally and concentrically focusing all muscular weight from a loose shoulder, then through the arm, until firmly settled on the arch of the palm.

Emile and Sancan

This balance between lithe force and precise sculpting was very different from Lélia Gousseau's technique, which employed a series of perilously acrobatic hand-shifts above the keyboard, and used the wrist as a bipositional (i.e. high/low) shock-absorber – which unfortunately often hollowed out the support of the phalanges. It was based on the philosophy that gesture is a part of piano-playing – which is true – but her technique took this principle to such an extreme degree that it forbad ever positioning the hand in advance of striking the key. In this way, it was rather aleatoric in conception. Furthermore, there was so much reeling between the sublimation of one's thought and the actual sound that her method produced, that by the time the finger finally did make contact with the key – and now had to actually sink to the bottom of the keyboard, an act that should be one of supple presence – there had been too much loss of energy to really sculpt the material.

The best I could do with this approach was manage my shortcomings, but Mr. Sancan led me to completely rethink pianistic technique from the standpoint of sound production. He eliminated the extraneous gesticulating that I had assimilated, urging me to instead pre-place my hands on the keys before playing them. It was a practical methodology, one beautifully forged in the artistic smithy,

and one that sought to balance the interpretive details within a piece of music with its technical concerns. It didn't stifle spontaneous musical intuition: quite to the contrary, it cultivated a more self-assured mechanism, whereas Mademoiselle Gousseau's apparently more artistic approach perpetuated a sort of anxiety that no repetition or muscle memory could suppress.

Pierre Sancan also gave me a taste for putting fingerings in my scores which worked because they were ergonomically adapted to my hand. This was particularly revelatory, because fingerings dictated by others, as clever as they might be, often didn't feel right to me. This had been an issue with Mademoiselle Gousseau, who force-fed me the fingerings of her teacher Lazare Levy, and her assistant Mademoiselle Bascourret, who insisted on those of Cortot, and then made me feel guilty if I didn't use them because they didn't feel right to me – a little like how Mademoiselle Boulanger couldn't understand that I didn't intuitively hear harmonizations *alla* Delibes or Massenet for the melodies she assigned me.

In both circumstances, the teacher was perplexed that I didn't intuitively feel or apply an aesthetic corresponding to some aspect of her education, one rooted in her distant youth. The crucial difference was that, in working through our respective material, Mademoiselle Boulanger instilled in me the virtues of limitations, which are ultimately liberating in any discipline (in our case, it was a matter of restricting the heights to which my harmonic flights of fancy could soar). The goal toward which one strives is, to a great extent, shaped by processes which lead to it, and the formulation of the question often enlightens one's understanding better than the answer itself. On this premise, I was taught to teach myself, and gained the confidence to devise my own fingerings, judging each note in accordance with kind of phrase I want to sculpt (taking into account articulation, tempo, breathing, etc.).

But if Mademoiselle Boulanger built a framework by which I could make informed and intuitive decisions, it was Pierre Sancan who gave me the technical prowess at the piano to fully realize the musical seeds she had sown. As a result of Sancan, playing the piano became an opportunity to continue developing myself as a musician, instead of a Bedlam in which I felt I was coming undone. Nadia Boulanger had disapproved of too much concertizing while I was a child, partially because she found each day which wasn't completely devoted to my austerely exhilarating apprenticeship a lost day; it was a time for nurturing – the time to refine and display would come later.

This obsession over lost time was perhaps not a wholly lofty endeavor, for there is nothing more beautiful than the time lost when one becomes entangled in a maze of thoughts – but one could hardly blame Mademoiselle Boulanger for never fully shaking the trauma caused by the early deaths of so many dear friends and family members throughout her life. She would regularly recall the vulnerability and brevity of her sister Lili's life, then of her student Lipatti, then a pensive moment would pass as she mused over and expounded, dreamlike, on how many hours it would take to copy, never mind compose, all the works of Schubert, who also

Playing at the Berlin Philharmonic

died prematurely.

I was an obedient child, working in both a Hitchcockian sort of suspense and a perpetual, jubilant tension, so it was unthinkable that I would risk the work of sowing musical grains for the narcissistic demonstrations of a fair. (There were some special exceptions, however, such as select occasions with Yehudi Menuhin, either under his baton or in chamber collaborations; playing at the Berlin Philharmonic; or giving the Paris premiere of a concert version of my opera-ballet *The Miracle and the Child*, which I conducted from the piano.) Interrupting my precious course with Mademoiselle to the profit of vain promotions was, thus, not an option, and learning the ins and outs of performances had to wait until after Nadia Boulanger's death: the constant on-the-job adjustments; balancing the modesty she reinforced so adamantly with glimpses of success; always striving to achieve, and yet constantly self-renewing through the repertoire, through musical re-acquaintances which would fend off smugness or self-satisfaction.

Around the same time as I began concertizing – immediately following Nadia Boulanger's death – I reached legal age. With my mother now in my charge, I took full-footed to my career, attempting to gallantly face the sense of filial responsibility that would gradually evolve into a more complex situation. I eventually invited both of my parents to move in with me and my own growing family in a *fin-de-siècle* residence we rented just west of Paris: it was my attempt at a rather utopian Tower of Babel, with each generation occupying its own floor of the house – my parents on one, my wife and I on another, and our children on a third. Like all utopias, this was doomed to fail – but that is another story.

My professional career began as an accompanist, playing for the vocal class of Gabriel Bacquier at the Paris Conservatory, which fortuitously coincided with a burgeoning concert schedule – one fueled not only by word of mouth, but also by the impresario Hervé Corre de Valmalète, who arranged me as a high-risk replacement for several concerts, after which I was frequently invited to appear on well-known French TV shows, including the famed *Le Grand Échiquier* (The Great Chessboard), hosted by Jacques Chancel.

I continued to interact with Jean Françaix, whose harpsichord concerto I conducted (with the composer at the keyboard), as well as Henri Dutilleux and his spouse, the dazzling chamber musician Geneviève Joy, who taught me so much about how to play transparently and watermark the important notes in her class at the Paris Conservatory. My chamber music partners have been, and continue to be, an inspiration: Henryk Szeryng, the distinguished violinist and eclectic polyglot, whose brilliance as a thinker matched the elegance of his bow; violinist Olivier Charlier, my childhood friend; Catherine Marchese, my former wife, whose bassoon was the human voice incarnate; my dear friend Patrice Fontanarosa, who premiered my elegiac violin concerto.

Emile and Henryk Szeryng

Emile with Olivier and Claire Charlier

Performing with Fontanarosa

Once my children were born, I recalibrated the focus of my work in order to be at home with them as much as possible (fortunately, I had never been too intoxicated by the luxurious nomadic lifestyle of the touring musician). Some of the benefits of this adjustment were a new dedication to the cello sonatas of Beethoven and Brahms, in collaboration with Dominique de Williencourt (we recorded these some years later), and the realizations of my piano and orchestra arrangement of Musorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, which was in part a response to a request from Peter Hanser Strecker (president of Schott Publishers in Mainz), and was premiered at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC under the direction of Rostropovich (at the maestro's request).

Other projects that I undertook as I shifted my focus away from the life of a touring performer included: a collection of critical editions for Van de Velde (a French music publisher); a piano studio at Indiana University in Bloomington; a series of recordings for the Saphir label, which Pierre Dyens created and developed, entrusting the French repertoire to me – notably, Poulenc, Satie, Fauré, Debussy, and Dupont; a collaboration with the demanding flutist Jean Ferrandis in the poetic and musically oneiric world of the Japanese composer (with a French spirit) Yuko Uebayashi; the expansion of my piano sonata, as re-premiered by Rebecca Chaillot; the recording of my *Rhapsodie* by Gregory Martin; and my piano transcription of the Fauré *Requiem*, a work at the heart of Nadia Boulanger's aesthetic, and which she conducted throughout the world, always admiring its serenity in the face of death. These stand in contrast to the more dramatic – and public – highlights of my performing career, such as when I was called up as a same-day replacement – without rehearsal – for the Tchaikovsky first concerto in Monte Carlo; the challenges that led to such successes didn't scare me, but they didn't overly thrill me either.

What did thrill me was gathering all my family in one place; developing as a teacher; listening for the thoughts of the composer (which sometimes occurs through a transcription or improvisation). I have always tried to remain conscious of keeping that impulsive initial joy in my relationship with music, even if this necessarily depends on ephemeral pockets of time: it wards off stage fright, and assures that I feel like a fish in water when I step in front of an audience. I feel the need to take the stage as a storyteller, in communion with the public – even preferring to end a program with works lacking an uproarious close, like the Fauré *Requiem*, which leaves on tiptoe. At its conclusion there is reflection; as Sacha Guitry says, "After Mozart, the silence is still of Mozart…" The repertoire included on my first recordings, dedicated to Mozart and Schubert, is a direct result of this need to share interiority.

And this dizzying and dangerous upward climb owed so much to Pierre Sancan and his contribution to my pianistic technique. He imported into my playing a self-assured reliability – regardless of the

caliber of instrument in front of me – one founded on control of touch. Sancan and Mademoiselle Boulanger had common points within their analytical armor, though they communicated those principles differently. His came in terms somewhat specific to the piano, while hers were in the form of more philosophical meditations on music: the metaphysical anatomy; the sense of awakening to marvels; intuitive, indescribable, contagious depths. And yet each championed the synthesis of knowledge with humble, but noble, natural impulses, to yield a unique and personal musicality and humanism – an individual contribution to the vast chorus – and I continue to draw on both.

It is with an eye to passing on these lessons, and showing the same kindness that was lavished on me, that I have approached my own teaching. The need for an intense summer retreat that would allow students to deepen their musical approach led me to create my Academy at the Château de Rangiport, a dream brought to fruition through the support of André Samitier, the mayor of Gargenville; Denis Demoulin, the Academy's coordinator, as delegated by the town hall of Gargenville, and the embodiment of humanism at its finest; and Marie-Françoise Vauquelin, the very soul of the auditorium of the Maisonnettes, which Nadia Boulanger herself built in the days of old.

The Maisonnettes

Inside the auditorium of the Maisonnettes

In the early 1900s, the Maisonnettes was something of a mini-village within the Gargenville city limits, a group of houses and buildings nested within Hanneucourt[49] that Mademoiselle Boulanger's mother, Raïssa, purchased with her inheritance after Ernest's death (by that time, Nadia had begun composing with pianist Raoul Pugno, then mayor of Gargenville, so to some degree, the decision to buy the property was made in order to facilitate their collaboration). Raïssa soon invited the mothers of Markevitch and Stravinsky to live with the family on the estate, thus forming a sort of "Little Russia" commune, as happens almost everywhere Russians install themselves. There, these authoritative matriarchs reigned over their illustrious children (it was even said that, till her death, Raïssa slept in the same room as Nadia, having tragically had two previous infants die in

[49] Though it has now been absorbed by Gargenville, as late as the early twentieth century, Hanneucourt was a distinct political district; older residents still distinguish between the two.

their sleep from suffocation; this trauma led her to constantly double-check that her daughter was still breathing).

When Lili died in 1918, Nadia combined some of the houses on the property to form an auditorium (this new compound also doubled as her secondary residence), making sure to include a bar, so that Stravinsky would not be deprived of his cocktails. Mademoiselle taught at the Maisonnettes between the wars, but never set foot there again after returning from her World War II exile,[50] claiming that too many painful memories of departed loved ones haunted her there. While she was in America, Madame Vauquelin took up occupancy there, first as a house-sitter, and then, from 1945, as a renter. She eventually offered to buy it from Mademoiselle, but was denied on the grounds that it had already been bequeathed to Mademoiselle's butler Giuseppe and his wife Zita (who ended up selling it to the city of Gargenville; Madame Vauquelin continued to lease it after Nadia Boulanger's death from both Giuseppe and, later, the city). Through Madame Vauquelin's foresight and initiative, the auditorium has been restored to its original conditions, and in this environment, so rich in the history and mythology of both Mademoiselle Boulanger's life and my own, I feel able to work freely with students.

Part of what I treasure so much about the opportunity to hold a musical retreat in Gargenville is the chance to study and practice in an environment free from the strictures and orthodoxy of academia, wherein I can continue the pedagogical heritage of Nadia Boulanger – even if the skills she taught me no longer fall within the confines of a university or conservatory curriculum. On one occasion, Mademoiselle Dieudonné addressed the issue of Mademoiselle's teaching in terms that brought to the fore a terribly lucid fear about my future: "I'm so terribly worried for you – what will you do with all this knowledge?" I didn't know at the time that she was alluding to the fact that the training I was receiving from Mademoiselle Boulanger was already outmoded; both she and Mademoiselle Boulanger had an air of Louis XV about them when it came to the musical and cultural world into which I would be cast: "After me, the flood." In the chronology of things, I'm a misfit: I grew up in a culture of values espoused by people who were educated in the nineteenth century. But the techniques that Mademoiselle Boulanger instilled in me as the building blocks of the complete musician (some of which appear particularly old-fashioned today, thanks to computer prosthetics – such as being able to read in all seven clefs or transpose at sight) were not intended to be ends in themselves; rather, they were tools to assist my own overriding thirst for musical creativity.

Dining with Nadia Boulanger

The entire nature of my apprenticeship had something about it that seemed to suggest a bygone era. Unlike most contemporary students, for example, or indeed my classmates at the Hattemer School, my weekends were nonexistent: Sundays were spent taking exams in that same famous dining room at Rue Ballu (it is a wonder that one was ever

[50] Mademoiselle Boulanger's Russian-Jewish heritage on her mother's side certainly contributed to her decision to relocate to the United States (Judaism is passed matrilineally).

able to take a meal there, and yet I dined in the company of legends at that table, with Giuseppe her butler serving soups and other dishes suitable for a woman unable to chew anything too tough).

These Sunday exams were solely for students from the Wednesday class, and took the form of dissertations on the works we listened to, worked on, and analyzed, with pointed and specific questions that she evaluated through her strong and enriching commentaries. (These were not exams in the academic sense – we were not graded on them, and, in fact, few students even came, so intimidated were they by the prospect of having to expound on these works in front of the High Priestess.)

I can remember a rather amusing detail from these sessions. When our long Sunday meetings were in May, they corresponded with the Roland-Garros tennis tournament.[51] Through the open windows of the interior courtyard would come the sound of televisions from other apartments, and the clamor and commentaries that followed the sets between Borg (the top-ranked player at the time) and his opponent, all playing out over the background of copious ball exchanges. Immediately afterwards, we would hear the applause and cheers of the crowd, a noise magnified tenfold by the number of televisions. This added a strange variable to our rhythmic dictation exercises – just one element of an hours-long exposition on the importance of Frescobaldi with respect to Debussy, by way of a two-viola string quintet by Mozart.

All this was done without any scores or books: one had to have it all in his head, including the musical examples – noting from memory the introduction to the Dissonance Quartet by Mozart, where in the repeated notes of the bass ostinato would converse in a two-against-three rhythm with the tennis match…

My days often lacked childlike activities – movies, parties, frivolities… To some extent, I wanted to experience them, but I never really felt deprived by their absence. I may be wrong, but I believe that when one is lucky enough to do what he loves, regardless of age or task, the awareness of his good fortune is essential, and the repetition of those processes that refine his ability is never rebarbative. If I had not been conscious of this, but instead had only my facility – which I could have ultimately abused (as Mademoiselle Boulanger would have said) – I would certainly have come to a crisis, and not only one of adolescence…

In fact, the only one of my responsibilities that I didn't love, that truly felt forced to me, was the Hattemer School. I adored learning, but there I was only interrogated. It was while being questioned in our small groups (after having advanced by two years, thus making up for my late arrival from Bulgaria) that I first came to imagine a derisory but infantile sort of similarity between the students and the soldiers at Verdun. The students would find themselves facing their interrogators, with the mothers in the back of the classroom; in the case of a hesitant or erroneous response, a noticeable and reproving groan would arise, sending chills down the spine. I imagined myself in the trenches, flushed with fear from the questions being launched from across the room (as if from the Germans),

[51] The official name of the French Open is *Les internationaux de France de Tennis, Roland-Garros.*

and, if ever I gave myself over or capitulated, I would be shot by someone from our side (the mothers).

It didn't help that I was rather slow in my mental calculations – I still thought of numbers in Bulgarian, and the time it took me to translate my answer came across as a hesitation; this lasted until I was able to think in French, like reading solfège when moving from clef to clef.

In addition to French, which I only knew orally, I also had to learn English; this was a particularly important skill given that, as so many of Mademoiselle's students only spoke this language, she often taught in it. I took English at the Hattemer School, but I really learned it phonetically, through almost daily practice – particularly during the summer months with my fellow students at the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau.

Emile and the American students in Fontainebleau

I was also lucky that my mother, who had received her baccalaureate from the good French-speaking nuns of Eastern Europe, knew English, and could help me understand the syntax. She was my tutor at home, and didn't approach education with the eager and ridiculous competitiveness of the typical Hattemer mother; whatever pressure I felt pertained to my musical studies rather than my general education, and this came primarily from Nadia Boulanger.

My mother and I nonetheless lived in an apartment divest of distractions. Our residence was one without television or radio, except for the "Jeu des Mille Francs,"[52] and a turntable sent from my father in Germany, for me to listen to composer biographies (as told by Gérard Philipe). I did share some musical moments with other residents at the Cité des Arts, including the late pianist Catherine Collard, but all of my co-conspirators were much older than me.

But then again – was I a definite age? I suspect it probably changed according to subject and discipline, even my little row of toy cars. If anything, I was a little old man in a boy's body.

[52] A quiz show which was broadcast on French radio; see Chapter II.

CHAPTER IV – SKILLS

1) How did you manage all the skills that Mademoiselle Boulanger taught you? Which interested you, and which gave you difficulty?

Nadia Boulanger adapted her teaching style to fit each of her students. It is possibly for this reason that she never wrote a pedagogical treatise, and only in her last years did she authorize Bruno Monsaingeon to record parts of her analysis class, permission given at her own risk because: 1) she knew full well that when one records, one always assembles montages, and, as she said, "I don't like someone slicing up my thoughts…," and 2) while taping, the camera crew would interrupt the class, sometimes several times an hour, in order to recharge the film cartridge. The latter was particularly detrimental, as she ran the class so spontaneously: her thoughtfulness was sharpened by embracing the ephemeral nature of things. Her thought process was much more Latinate than Anglo-Saxon – that is to say, more intuitive than systematic or chronological. She had a very personal way of organizing her thoughts, one which challenged one's attention if he truly wanted to follow the course of her citations and analogies through their vertiginous and stratospheric intellectual flight.

In private lessons she was a case study in malleability. As far as I was concerned – and my situation was, admittedly, somewhat peculiar: a child composer with perfect pitch, advanced in some respects for my age, though not in terms of rhythmic subtlety, a young boy already struggling to recover lost time – it was particularly essential that I learn to notate the musical complexities I imagined. Even from my earliest compositions and improvisations, which I would play into a reel-to-reel tape-recorder and my father would subsequently write down, as if taking dictation, I realized that – despite his best efforts – my conceptions were not being fully captured.

I was, of course, grateful for his attempts; I simply recognized that in order for me to respond to this urgent need to compose ("at all costs," and not due to any external pressure), I had to become capable of notating the complex rhythms of the music I imagined with ease and fluency – that is, in total osmosis with my thoughts.

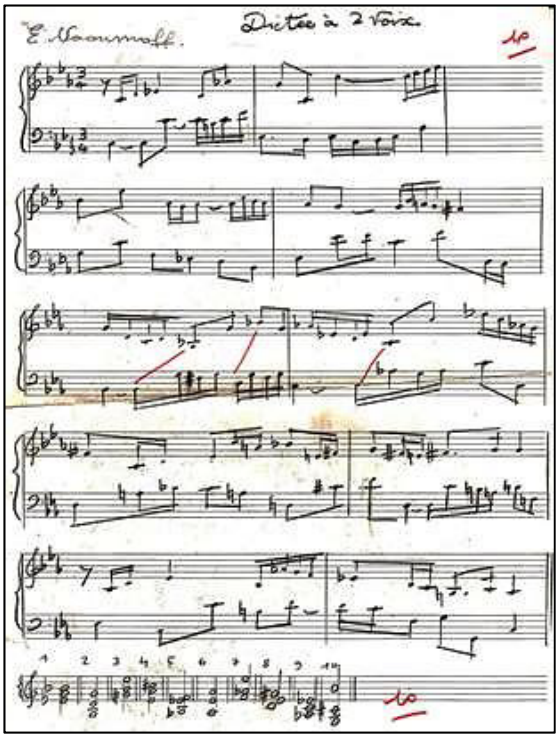
Now, it is true that the result portrayed on paper is a filtered simplification of the living music – but perhaps it can reveal some of the silent and buried treasures dwelling in the depths of oneself. There is also the risk that one might get too elaborate in trying to notate a given rhythm, which, if overly complicated, doesn't always translate in its execution. It is nonetheless necessary to attempt to use the kind of notation that will arouse in performance the entire inner world which one carries in himself – and so, one of my major tasks was learning to slalom between simplicity and complexity on a narrower track. Mademoiselle Dieudonné quenched this thirst through a rigorous cocktail of theory and solfège technique – not as an end in itself, but as a vital tool for my creative thought. Pianists often wrongly separate technique from music-making, but only the fusion of the two is elevating – and so it goes with the entire human condition, attempting to reconcile science and consciousness with metaphysical anguish.

Dieudonné and Boulanger

Jean Françaix once told me: “One must always first serve the performer – the public joins afterwards.” There is profound truth in this, because if the performer is satisfied, even in a difficult piece, if he feels that the music is rewarding and worth the effort to learn, if the notation is not impenetrable, if the core of the work’s musical thought corresponds to its visual representation, then everything will flow seamlessly – to the delight of the audience. Mademoiselle Boulanger’s analysis classes were fascinating because they, rightly, juxtaposed different historical periods, and their respective ways of expressing recurrent and relatively essential aspects of the human soul: anguish, helplessness, sadness, jubilation. Notation has evolved over time and varies according to instrument, but it has always found a way to harmonize thought and its appearance on the printed page.

My rhythmic limitations remained my principal obstacle as I began with Nadia Boulanger: I was still improvising music that I wasn’t capable of writing down. To this end, she asked that I learn to work on reflection – that is, develop my musical ideas in my head first, and then write them down all at once, rather than do a sort of piecemeal notation. This technique is not unlike doing mental calculations, by which one internally works out difficulties, so that they might loosen and flow fluidly at the moment they’re committed to paper. After all, any notation is a translation of ideas that have already vanished.

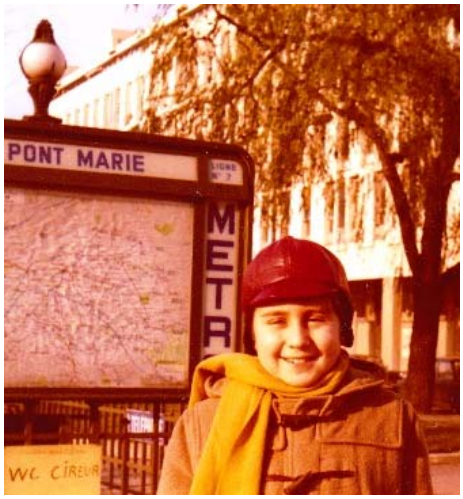
Applying this to free improvisation is a challenge – the ephemeral mental architecture of the instantaneous, which wants to remain in a continual flux of thought, is hard to capture long enough to write down accurately; the act of notating its intricacies assures that it (alas!) often only proceeds by fits and starts. Liszt and Chopin followed a similar course, improvising in salons, and afterwards writing down and publishing their musings for enlightened and eager amateurs to play (in our time, such aficionados just buy a recording).



For me, my innumerable lessons with Mademoiselle Dieudonné were the nexus between the improvised and the written. They consisted of a heavy dose of rhythmic dictation, with an enormous number of exercises aimed at developing rhythmic independence between the legs and arms; atonal dictation; clusters of dissonant chords which I had to dissect by ear; sight-reading six-part motets at the keyboard, like those of Claude Goudimel (1510-72), in various clefs, with a piece of paper scrolling across the score (which forced me to read ahead) and the keyboard covered by a cloth (to develop the tactile sense); theoretical questions which required me to read transposing instruments… it was like participating in a short survey of music history.

My homework for these sessions included preparing exercise from the highly stylized little music textbook by a certain Mademoiselle Donne, which contained various lessons, each accompanied by ten questions. My mother, who didn’t know any music theory, would memorize the responses provided in the answer key by heart, and then quiz me in the Metro

(when we were in our humble studio apartment, all my time was occupied with piano practice and homework for the Hattemer School). When making our way to Mademoiselle Dieudonné house for my lesson – by Metro, from the Cité des Arts in the Marais district (the Pont Marie station) to Rue Ravignan (Abbesses station), near the Sacré-Coeur – I would bring a little toy drum on a shoulder strap, which I used to beat out various rhythms, and would sing or solfège the rhythms found in the Hindemith book,[53] a practical manual aimed at acquiring exemplary solfège and ear-training. I used this text constantly, because Nadia Boulanger believed that music theory is an essential tool in acquiring compositional technique, even saying of the summer sessions in Fontainebleau: "Ah! They all come as composers, but leave as theorists…" – that is, "Each of them comes as a composer who writes down whatever comes into his head, though without sound fundamentals, and leaves having acquired a technique."



In those days, the Metro was very noisy – the opening and closing doors at each stop would resonate like cymbals – and so my little noises to myself passed completely unnoticed. I studied this book by Hindemith chapter by chapter, and when I finished it – which could take about a year – I would start again, now adding superimposed rhythms, even in canon, and other similar elaborations. This aspect of my lesson preparations had some rather amusing overtones: with all those additive rhythmic exercises, my little drum gave me something of a "Krishna" aura, which was very *à la mode* at the time in the Paris subway system.

The exercises which Mademoiselle Dieudonné assigned me – so I could acquire greater rhythmic independence – were a counterweight to my studies in counterpoint with Mademoiselle Boulanger, who repeatedly made reference to the beauty of the internal voices in Mozart's string quintets, showing us at which points the part-writing details resonated as especially noble, yielding a natural interior jubilation, reflecting the beauty everywhere and in all things.

Likewise, she insisted on respecting Schumann's fingerings and chordal distributions in his keyboard works, with the thumbs crossing each other to garner greater tension in the inner voices than what might be contained in the outer ones (e.g. crossing the tenor over the top of the alto). At the opposite pole, she directed us to Beethoven, where there is often clusters of strident chords in the right hand, high in the keyboard, against a single low note in the bass – a disorienting effect, one touching the extremities, with its broken balance already pushing one toward (and beyond) the limits of the instrument (this was in part surely due to his deafness, which apparently only allowed him to hear certain extremely high and low pitches). It seems a natural conclusion of his frustration at the human condition, stretched until at the breaking point,

[53] *Elementary Training for Musicians* (1946)

yearning to embrace that destiny which would elude him till the end: the creation of a symphony for the piano, something that could be realized only by seeing his musical ideas through – and even beyond – the limits of the instrument.[54]

To Mademoiselle Boulanger, basic sonorities were tools by which she could expound on things like the creation of aural illusions. One example she loved to give to illustrate this was the aria from Bach's cantata BWV 202, where the string accompaniment is written in "trompe-l'oeil"[55] – that is to say, one hears it as a chord and its inversions, though it is written as arpeggios in canon.

Such fundamentals could also serve as a means to expound on the difference between what is forbidden in art and what is merely an aesthetic preference. This is on full display in the evolving attitude towards parallel fifths. The earliest conception of music, including Gregorian chant, was monophonic. Medieval monks increased the number of parts by singing in parallel at the fifth, though in later centuries, the avoidance of these same parallel fifths became the golden rule of part-writing. Rather than mandating this kind of rule dictatorially, Mademoiselle Boulanger elaborated on the reasons for this evolving taste by placing it in its various stylistic contexts. She helped me make sense of this shift so that it would free me musically: understanding the rules of art ultimately serve to open up one's creativity.

She loved to tell me that when Jean Françaix came to her as a student before the Second World War, he intuitively avoided parallel fifths in his exercises: his ability to circumvent this harmonic *faux pas* was instinctive – something she would recount to me with a mischievous smile, because I, with my need for Slavic self-expression, arrived at her doorstep without the innate harmonic understanding of a Jean Françaix, whose father had been an inspector of music conservatories throughout France.

But while I had some difficulties adapting to these limitations in my exercises, she encouraged me to move beyond such rules in my own compositions (though never foolishly or for its own sake).

The attention to parallel fifths (or octaves) was but one facet of what she most insisted on, whether in composition or performance: linearity of listening. That is to say, instead of hearing arpeggios superimposed on each other in the aria from cantata 202, she urged us to hear each internal voice in its own motion, a form of tiered listening which demands an acuity and effort on the part of the listener obviously greater than the passivity to which we have become accustomed.

Very few people, even those with well-trained ears, can follow the middle part in an orchestra for the duration of a symphony. Let's take the example of a Mozart symphony, which has a relatively clear texture from the orchestral point of view, and is – at heart – an enlarged piece of chamber music. It is no small achievement to listen to the viola or second violin part for the length of the work, with or without the score.

This is not something that is easy to do because it is not as natural as hearing things vertically, in clusters of sandwiched sounds – the ear has trouble hearing musical elements when superimposed

[54] The late piano sonatas stretch the limits of the instrument, as if Beethoven is trying to wring an orchestra out of the keyboard.

[55] Trompe-l'oeil is a technique in painting which creates the illusion that the objects depicted on the flat canvas or wall actually exist in three dimensions.

upon themselves, preferring to assemble them in a simplified conglomerate (which the decay of sound on the piano only amplifies). Mademoiselle Boulanger called the vertical ear the "postal package," stacking one pile next to another; we initially hear these "stacks" as disconnected (or only fleetingly connected) columns of sound, but our minds quickly organize them through sensations of warm and cold, of major and minor, of basic and essential things.

A composer's mastery at connecting these packages is revealed in the interior voices, though we often miss them at the get go. And yet they need not elude us: instead, our attention must be directed there by the performer, whose objective should be to cloak the complete structure beneath a veil of simplicity, while still expressing the intricate voicing of every detail – thus giving an interpretation which conveys different tiers of sound, and satisfies both the connoisseur and the casual listener.

Naturally, this kind of horizontal listening is imposed more when the music is purely polyphonic, as in Bach's divinely mischievous trio sonatas for organ. But before graduating to those, Mademoiselle Boulanger had me study both books of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* by Bach, from which I was assigned one Prelude and Fugue each week. Before I was permitted to play the fugue, I had to know it and its individual voices by heart: I would have to copy the score, with each voice on its own staff, essentially creating my own edition from which to work (usually starting with the bass), and learn each part by singing it in solfège; then I would begin to fuse them combinatorially by singing one part and playing another at the piano until all the parts could be mixed in every possible permutation; then more complex arrangements would follow, often with the hands crossed: for example, playing the soprano in the left hand, singing the tenor part, and then crossing over with the right hand to play the bass part. Amid all this would come "pop quizzes," when I would have to write out portions of the full fugue (that is, all the voice combined) for memory.

Through this method, I could arrange the voices in all possible and imaginable ways, extracting them from their intended placement and seeing them anew in a sort of zero-gravity where everything floats, and, at that moment, attempt to follow each of the parts in and of itself. It was fascinating. Mademoiselle was adamant that this kind of listening was indispensable when performing, and likewise insisted that such effort be exerted when listening. This is not too far afield from Bach's own course to his students, as emphasized by Gilles Cantagrel in his book *Bach En Son Temps* [Bach In His Time[56]]: he would begin with extensive work in counterpoint, the motivating engine behind not only fugues, but his inventions as well, and would encourage the student not to regurgitate his inventions as they were, but to reinvent the decorations, patterns, and outlines (wherefrom the title).

[56] Fayard, 1997.

This grand and unrelenting requirement – to invent and follow a large number of independent parts at the same time, all of which seem to spring from a volcanic interior with serene complexity – certainly makes such music demanding to listen to, and even harder to execute (those with more pedestrian sensibilities often abandon the attempt altogether). But it *is* possible to bring out this multiplicity of endless melodic blossomings, each superimposed amid the fertile texture, for the duration of a piece, not only when pianistically convenient. One can detect playing imbued with horizontal listening by its absence of ostentatious effects. The punctuations at harmonic cadences become almost diaphanous, the felicitous meeting of multiple voices aligning without heaviness or sonic opacity, an instant of vertical illusion creating tension and release, all while floating in the air.

In an inspired, even playful manner, Mademoiselle Boulanger loved to examine my progress as a purveyor of linearity, either at the Cavaillé-Coll organ in her apartment, where I reproduced my exercises with an additional pedal part, or at the piano, with musical riddles from days long past – such as, for example, the canon of Josquin des Prés, comprised of multiple voices, each with its own triple meter impulse (that is, each with its own individual downbeat): it is thus necessary to play each voice truly independently, not with one overriding meter that ends up relegating most of the parts as syncopated accompaniments to the highlighted one(s) .

The same principles apply to other genres. In a *lied*, for example, the beauty of a properly sung melody is nourished by the interior voices of the piano accompaniment, especially in Schumann, where the keyboard part's texture is deployed like a string quartet – just as it is in the *mélodies* of Fauré, in which the vocal part itself is not as unforgettably seductive as a *bel canto* melody might be (one does not leave a performance of them whistling the tunes in the street). Their beauty resides in the way that the piano adapts to the thoughts inherent in the text; the vocal line then springs forth from the accompaniment, the two parts in complete union. Here, too, Mademoiselle would stress independence of line, and the importance of the inner voices: "Among all the many performers out there, you will recognize the true musicians if they make you love the inner parts, even the bass part, in music like that of Fauré."

In this was also a lesson on how to lovingly trace the accompanimental gesture of a Chopin nocturne in such a way that one fully tastes its charms, all while singing the melody in relief, in the purest *bel canto* style – or a seminar on the need for subtlety when pedaling: how to do so in the service of the melody, aerating the texture, collaborating with a true legato touch, one rendered by magnetically drawing the fingers to the keys, sculpting the keyboard, carving the phrases…

Throughout her teaching career, by virtue of musical, literary, or pictorial examples, and in illustrations of her own, Mademoiselle Boulanger always tried to define the ABCs of music through limpid explanations. This disarmed and even annoyed some know-it-alls, but those who were not insecure or competitive, who knew, as by revelation, what they needed to obtain in order to fill in the gaps of hastily learned ideas, found in her lectures what they were looking for.

From the circle of fifths to tetrachords, from the tritone to contrary motion, each of us had encountered the building blocks of music in his own way, and each of us had some shortcomings in our comprehension of them; the important thing was that Mademoiselle Boulanger turned these holes in our knowledge into opening through which her words would rush, like irrigation canals of musicality. Proving oneself accomplished enough in solfège or music theory to tackle each stage of development as a musician was, thus, something like a badge of honor. She was demanding, but by training us to isolate and understand each part of a contrapuntal structure, for example, rather than approach the entire work as an indigestible amalgam, she sharpened our ability to listen discerningly to the polyphony in all things.

As a part of this process, she invited us to become conscious of our allegiance to the downbeat in a polyphonic setting. To remain true to the connection between tension and release in moving from the offbeat to the downbeat, one must articulate this motion in the same way for each of the parts, independently of the others and not with respect to them, otherwise the result is a merely reductive syncopation of the many voices to the one (as in the Josquin example).

Naturally, when a singer or monophonic instrumentalist joins in concert with others, he doesn't have to manage his colleagues in order to produce the polyphony, but a pianist, who is solely responsible for all the parts and their respective rhythms on his own, is in his way more an orchestral conductor than anything else.

Strict attention to this kind of melodic and metric independence was a daily discipline for Nadia Boulanger. In this regard, she greatly admired Sviatoslav Richter's recordings of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. On one occasion, I asked him about his choice of tempi for such contrapuntally dense repertoire, and he disoriented me a bit by saying: "The next day I would have chosen them [the tempi] differently…" He explained that he wanted to avoid the trap of recording fugues that sound like one wondering voice, in which each subject entry is stressed – a technique that only draws attention to what is already the most recognizable part – while the countersubject (its parallel counterpart) and the other freely contrapuntal voices, each with their own identity, are played so quietly that they all but vanish.

Counterpoint was ingrained in the Renaissance; it was a repertoire founded on vocal music that measured its virtuosity by the number of voices it incorporated – in his *Spem in Alium*, for example, Thomas Tallis treated forty of them. Mademoiselle Boulanger admired this work, but carried a sweeter tenderness for the expressive frictions of his five-part motet *O nata lux*. To this day, I get as emotional recalling the times I spent sight-reading this music with her, as I do actually listening to it – in those moments, these works share in the timelessness between an old woman, so eternally young of spirit, and a little boy, already so old.

The Renaissance, in which Europe's cultural values assured that sacred music would be expressed in vocal forms, ushered in the rise of the bourgeoisie, a caste that – wittingly or not – replaced this repertoire with the more vain virtuosity of instrumentalists. In enriching itself, this new and dominant social class also freed and differentiated itself from the Church and royal courts, offering music for the home. In the twentieth century, however, with the advent of the radio and the robotic presence of the recording, humanity began to deprive itself of living music.

In a nutshell, then, music history reads as thus: the enlightened amateur of the Renaissance wrote poetry which he then set to music in contrapuntally elaborate motets; in the eighteenth century he played them in string quartets at friends' homes with performers and composers of renown, with a Haydn or Mozart joining with the great amateurs and patrons of the time; at best during the last years of the nineteenth century, the young ladies of high society were expected to have some capacity at the keyboard, particularly in four-hand music, part of the panoply of attractions that went into arranging marriages; and then we arrive at the enlightened amateur of the late twentieth century, who is more often than not a listener soaked with music from electronic media that he cannot play himself, and is perhaps too easily fooled by the visual show of a "virtuoso." And yet many such virtuosi end up breaking their teeth on tasks that were standard fare for advanced amateurs during the Renaissance – such as giving each voice its own identity in performance – and more than a few walked away from Mademoiselle Boulanger in astonishment at their own shortcomings (alas, some students – mainly adults – left her classes in tears, I remember only too well). She never sought to humiliate, that was not at all her goal – she simply wanted to always put things in perspective: she spoke truths like only great philosophers can, while the lesser among them spin a more obfuscated web of logic in an effort to make themselves look more brilliant. With Nadia Boulanger, one worked in absolutes, not compromises, though she detested when one spoke of the great this or the great that, adding: "Never say this composer is a great composer, say only his name."

For all her stress on horizontal thought and listening (melodic as well as rhythmic/metric), and all her attention to detail, she always taught in a way that was simple enough for general consumption, which allowed her to cultivate many amateurs. She was insistent that her classes were not designed specifically for musicians, and opened them to non-musicians as well as performers, composers, and musicologists. Her non-pedantic language cut to the heart of things, nourishing the inquisitive spirit for those in search of anything along the musical spectrum.

For some, it was like trying to force a square into a circle, but for spirits like mine, it was as if she had ignited an inner fire, the smoke of which was released through my music.

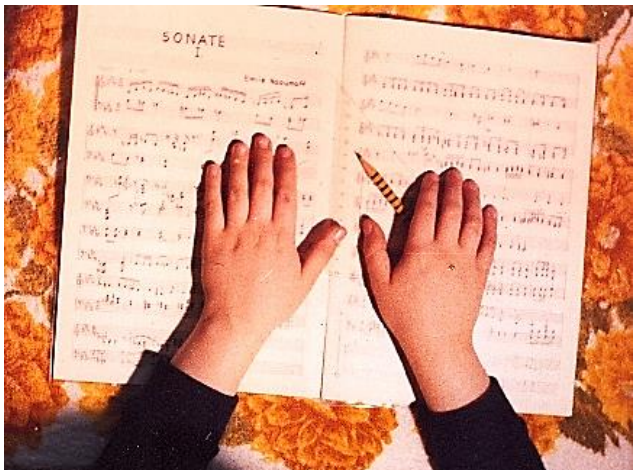
Perhaps this was the most outstanding aspect of her pedagogy: after almost seventy years of experience, she continued to continually search for a stream of clarity, taking basic questions and trying to answer them with ever greater refinement and purity. The exercises she assigned, the way

that she expressed things, always related back to her quasi-childlike and contagiously communicative personality.

In so doing, she, by some sort of osmosis, met me in my childishness – not so that she could become youthful again, but so I could communicate my concerns with her directly.

For example, the parallel fifths of which she spoke in regards to Jean Françaix (which he knew to avoid intuitively, but which gave me such difficulty): she spent a great deal of time extolling the exact opposite of what I read in Dubois's harmonic treatise, and explained that it is never necessary to say that parallel fifths are bad or ugly – rather that they are forbidden within the framework of common practice harmony, and within those strictures one must obey this rule, as one would the rules of a party game. This was just one example of how she tried to help me learn to distinguish between what is undesirable but tolerated, and what is truly forbidden.

Truth be told, she did not like to forbid such things: she wanted us to both understand that such bans emerge from aesthetics (and are therefore simply contextual), and learn to use such rules to help develop a more flexible and virtuosic musical thought. From the moment such a thing is uttered, a composer – especially of the sort that I was at the time, a child and still a developing embryo – is able to free his creativity from repressive regulations, especially those that were conceived outside of his milieu (i.e. an archaic brand of tonality).



I wrote neither in the manner of Mozart, nor of Fauré: my style was my own, one necessarily Bulgarian and Slavic, but not consciously folk-like because I wasn't immersed in that culture, even if I did import some of my own tendencies toward folk expression. She did not encourage me to compose in the style of others, nor did she discourage me if imitations occurred. At the same time, she hoped that I would understand sooner rather than later the difference between abiding by the parameters of a given exercise by Dubois (whose only merit is in the technical facility he affords), and my own composing – an immensely liberating distinction, and one which I learned how to make thanks to her.

But while I needed to stay free to be creative – and I continued to write whatever pieces she assigned to me (themes and variations, etc.), as well as my own projects, which were never short in coming – my technique had to be nourished by the rigors and penalties of academic work (and not by pushing me to write a string quartet in the style of Haydn one day, and an *opera-buffa* in the style of Mozart the next…). She wanted to make it clear that one works towards a consistent way to free the spirit through the constraints of academic work – keeping alive the possibility of composing a work with parallel fifths because such writing evokes the music of the post-Gregorian time period, or perhaps a culture remote from Western Europe. She also wanted to establish this difference so that I would not fall into the trap of composing "in the style of," and being satisfied with it.

But this never posed a problem. It may sound arrogant, but I had the great fortune of never needing to search for myself as a composer – my musical voice was given to me straightaway. I had but one task, though it is the most difficult: to express my thoughts and feelings as best as I could. And yet to cultivate this torrent of ideas, I had to acquire a technique, and that came through the physical act of composing, through notating, developing linear thought, harmony, counterpoint, fugue, and solfège – ultimately to step aside from them all, and find myself now better equipped to more purely convey the content that enlivened me.

2) Among the techniques Nadia Boulanger taught you, which interested you the most? Which caused the most aggravation?

I was most interested in composing (naturally) and counterpoint, but I felt less at ease with harmony, because of the book by Dubois, which was steeped in a style similar to that of Meyerbeer; it was never easy for me to do these exercises because I never felt at home with that harmonic language.

I really loved counterpoint, for which we used the book by Marcel Dupré: the challenge of making the music bloom across multiple invertible voices, each with its own independence of thought – that is, navigating through timeless intervals rather than dated harmonies (as were used in the Dubois book) – was a source of great joy to me. Mademoiselle loved when I played these exercises for her at my lessons; she would say things like: "You didn't highlight this or that aspect, you can't hear the inner voices, it must all be shown to advantage…" And so, each exercise had to be played beautifully. She made true music out of routine writing, the sort of assignments that students often do with a pencil in the mouth and then play like clumsy ducks at the keyboard.

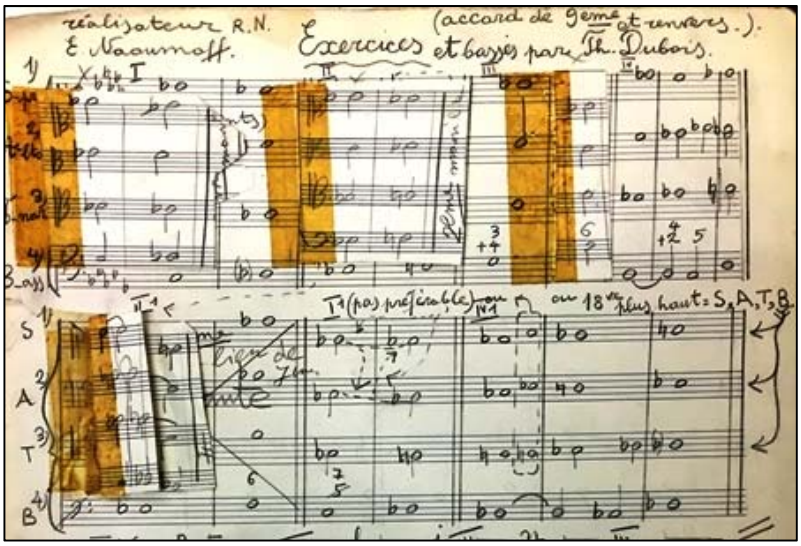
Nadia Boulanger held that there was no reason to underestimate the value of these counterpoint assignments from a performance point of view, a perspective she reaffirmed in piano technique exercises, such as those by Czerny or Kessler (notably his ineffable Etude in B-flat major, a six-page study for crossed hands, which was a veritable poison for me). Sure there was the spectacular side – she amused herself watching me fuss like a circus animal ill at ease on his bicycle – but she insisted that I always be able to find an artistically satisfying solution, even in an exercise whose sole purpose seems to be mechanical development. It was an ethical quest for her. Likewise, she believed that one should never forbid some aspect of harmony simply because it doesn't agree with his aesthetic.

When I eventually entered the Paris Conservatory (in my early teens), I noticed how "old-fashioned" her approach was – exercising her authority over me, making me feel small next to the gift I had been given and the work it demanded. What made things particularly difficult was the fact the she wanted everything so immediately. I was soaked in the certainty that I wasn't good enough.

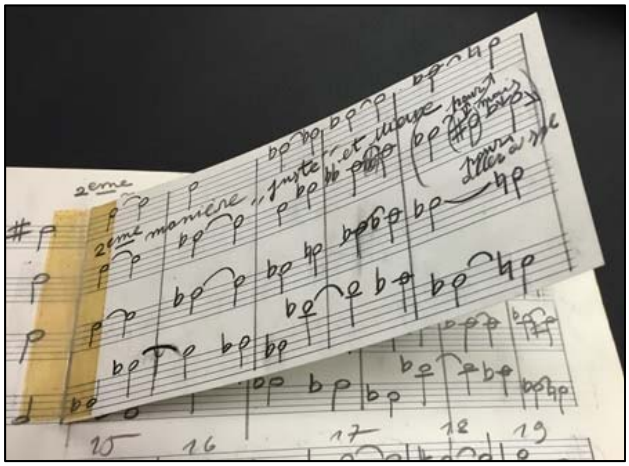
But in my classes at the Conservatory, wherein I could observe the level of the other students, I began to realize that I had become a hyper-virtuoso of oral and written theory (any tendencies toward cockiness were tempered in my continuing lessons with Mademoiselle). In most cases, my classmates wrote their harmony homework on two staves using the treble and bass clefs, and would then copy them afterwards in four parts; I wrote them directly into the diverse alto clefs, as I had done since childhood – I thought through my exercises in this way, and read and wrote them in the

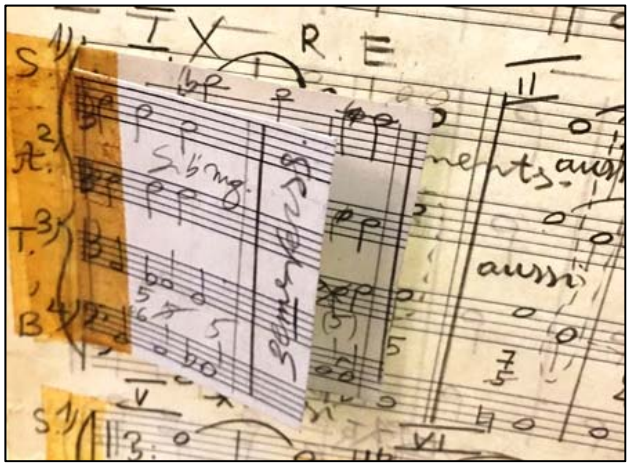
same fashion. They erased their mistakes, while Mademoiselle Boulanger insisted that I instead compile solutions until I arrived at the best one.

When they played their exercises, I could see on the score where that had made erasures, but not what they had erased (they themselves didn't always remember). Mademoiselle wanted to make sure that I never forgot, and so mandated that, to this end, I make various "windows" that could be superimposed over each other – but without erasing any of the possibilities that I had decided against. With scissors and Scotch tape, I thus made little rolodexes for each of the dubious measures. For every written harmonic exercise, I had to prepare – before she would even look at it – several windows, each with a different possible solution, at various locations (that is, several possible branches in the same exercise), and then perform them for her. I would show her version one, version two, version three by lifting the little papers.



And so, when she made me do corrections (without ever giving me the answer she sought – that would have been unthinkable!), she would say: "Next week, you will report to me that you have found a solution for that passage, in which you will have integrated such and such a precept that I have given you" – but it was never: "Here is how…" I sometimes found myself with four or five proposals for two or three measures, all taped over one another!





Another technique she stressed was sight-reading, the very essence of the musician for her – be it an orchestral conductor, or composer, or performer. This was so that one could have access to a work on his own, without needing the intervention of an aesthetic "dictator" to perform it. One can then use

his own knowledge to organically form his own opinion; for one only forges an opinion through personal access.

It's true that it is more difficult to have this personal access to a work by, say, Mahler without a recording (or without a live orchestra), especially if one cannot score-read. And yet, even when there were piano reductions of such pieces – and there weren't always – Mademoiselle Boulanger never allowed me to use them; I had to sight-read the orchestral score, whether it be an opera, for which I would sing some parts (such as Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, or Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*), or a symphony, quartet, octet: all these were reduced at the piano in the keyboard skills class at her apartment on Saturday morning.

This class was more of a hybrid than the kind one usually finds offered at conservatories: for example, we didn't just accompanying singers, but did so while transposing at sight, according to their tessitura, and without pausing – she never allowed one to stop when he had made a mistake, as to her it was the equivalent of stuttering. She preferred that one be able to fly through a work from A to Z while keeping an absolutely rigorous sense of rhythm, even if there were holes or moments of hesitation (though never at the expense of the rhythm!), always maintaining the skeletal structure of the piece.

A second, or even a third, reading finished the process, filling in these "holes" immediately after the initial read-through – a method unlike that used by many others, who stop and fix mistakes as they go along. But the goal of sight-reading is not to play all the notes, it is to capture the spirit of the work. In order to do that, one must immediately see what is important, while in the case of score-reading simultaneously reducing it for the piano – all while making allowances for the shift in medium, of course. (This imperative of keeping things going was infinitely useful to me when, after her death, I went to study orchestral conducting with Pierre Dervaux. He would place errors inside the score, which I had to detect while conducting, but without stopping to correct them. At the end of the passage, I had to note where the mistakes had been placed and in which instrument.)

When one sight-reads a harmonically predictable work, he may easily improvise to fill in the gaps. But Mademoiselle Boulanger assigned me miles and miles of scores from all centuries, from the time of Pope Gregory to that of Xenakis, which essentially guaranteed that there would be many works of disconcerting unpredictability. On these occasions, regardless of the texture – a task that often presents near-insurmountable problems for many excellent performers (while at the opposite extreme, excellent sight-readers can be pitiful performers) – she appealed to the ear and eyes with which I have been blessed. The difficulty is rooted in forcing oneself to read in advance, and in order to train this, she had a simple method: a friend, or my mother, would cover the music up to a bar or two ahead of where I was playing with a piece of paper, and mechanically slide it forward. It was a mnemonic device designed to add to my pianistic technique.

She was also adamant that one should not look at his hands when playing, a perpetual problem for pianists. She insisted that it was necessary to play as if there were magnets on the tip of one's fingers which were irresistibly attracted to the notes one was reading, an image which I particularly enjoyed, because it equates the process to the fact that the tip of the finger is where the sound begins to hatch. To avoid the pianist "saluting" each beat by looking back and forth between the score and the

keyboard (and thus losing his place), she established a sort of "torture": she would install an apron onto the fallboard of the piano, wrapping the other side around the neck of the pianist. The pianist cannot see the keys in this arrangement – and if he tries to cheat, by looking aside to glimpse under the apron, he involuntarily pulls on the apron, which releases the fallboard to come crashing down on his hands. But I think that this "masochistic" aspect of the design had completely escaped Mademoiselle: it had never occurred to her that one would want to cheat…

These two techniques – the apron and the sliding paper – made sure that one never stopped while sight-reading, even after a mistake, and this was the primary requirement for her. We thus drilled rhythmic stability, short-term memory, and devotion to the temporal pull of music all at the same time.

3) On one occasion, while sitting in the garden of the Maisonnettes at 1:00 in the morning, I heard one of Nadia Boulanger's students practicing scales. And yet, no less a pianist than Richter boasted of never having done scales or other such exercises. What did she require from you in this domain, and which do you still use?

Mademoiselle Boulanger's position was a little ambiguous when it came to the piano: she was not, strictly speaking, a piano professor, but rather gave what we call today "masterclasses," a name that was used less frequently then. She was the sort of musician that one went to see before an important performance or recording – like one consults a renowned practitioner when seeking a sound diagnosis.

You didn't have to be a student to meet with her. There were many pianists who came to her for counsel, but never studied the instrument with her – whether it be during her years at the Paris Conservatory or the École Normale, in between the wars at the Maisonnettes in Gargenville,[57] in private at her apartment on Rue Ballu after the Second World War, or during the summer at the Château de Fontainebleau. Over the years, musicians of every discipline consulted her: her musical knowledge was so broad that she could advise any musician on any instrument.

In my case, she was concerned that I would spread myself too thin, and thus never move my pianism beyond the realm of dilettantism. She loved when my childhood compositions were too difficult for me to play (as my first concerto clearly demonstrated): she wanted the musical ideas to spring forth as they wanted to be expressed, without compromise to my pianistic capacity. It was also a major concern for her that I not play like a composer – which was something that she loathed – and she loved that when I worked at the piano, I played like a pianist, even when I played my own music (it is not uncommon for composer-pianists to, naturally, experience great difficulty in expressing their own thoughts when performing). Furthermore, if one uses the piano as a compositional accomplice,

[57] As noted in Chapter III, she never set foot at the Maisonnettes after returning from America.

which she formally forbad me to do, one often ends up only composing within his pianistic means (I didn't come to avoid using the piano when composing out of mere coquetry…) – though, of course, doing so is marvelous if one is a Liszt or Chopin improvising in the salons, as was the case with the transcriptions and paraphrases of Rachmaninoff and Busoni: they produced works which fit them like gloves and catered to their talents, music which radiated through their extraordinary abilities, in the same way that Paganini had used his violin.

Mademoiselle Boulanger wanted the expression of my musical thoughts to be more technically advanced than my performing abilities allowed because she believed that if I wrote them to play them, it would reduce the very nature of those thoughts. It was for this reason that she insisted that I not write at the piano – so that my thought could be as free as possible.

This dialectic – between imagined and applied – initiated an exciting quest, as if ascending an upward spiral. As a result, to this day I sublimate the sounds in my head first, until they reach the point where I have no other recourse but to turn to the instrument and try them in the extramental world – even though they never match the sounds I have imagined… There is always some sort of gap, like one senses in certain harmonic frictions in Beethoven or Fauré (particularly at the end of their lives, when their work exceeded audible beauty and became instead a kind of sublimation culled from an internalized harshness of sound, as it should be: one fundamentally heard in the mind, uncluttered by embellishment, which dares… to be – a little like a Greek column, which is not beautiful in itself, but rather by the purity of its line (for one who knows how to be moved beyond its mere function, of course – by its rectitude, its demonstration of simplicity without the need for elaborate decorations).

All this is not to say that Mademoiselle Boulanger frowned upon musical invention at the keyboard. She loved organ improvisations, having learned to do them herself while still a student in the days where improvising was a skill practiced by any respected organist: Widor, Vierne, Dupré, Guilmant, Gigout, Marchal (with whom I studied), all who could easily improvise symphonies in four or more movements from a theme a few measures long – i.e. what they considered their ephemeral craft.

But her greatest admiration went to the written, the considered, all the more if it demonstrated a fluidity of thought, be it from a child prodigy like Mozart, or an adolescent Mendelssohn, whom she never failed of marveling at, or an old man like Verdi, who at the age of eighty found the youthful inspiration to pen *Falstaff*. I believe that while she was extremely sensitive to the supple and rapid gushing forth of thought, she was even more responsive to the brilliance of a musical framework in which the work's complexity is clarified through the natural unfolding of its argument, a work in which the internal discourse legitimizes each successive note.

In her all-encompassing instruction, which for me included three weekly private lessons, each at least two to three hours long, we covered many things, but not much piano technique. She assigned me

works complex in their refinement, like Mozart's *Rondo in A Minor*, but she didn't teach me from a pianistic perspective. Because of this and her fear that my pianistic constraints would eventually compromise my musical thought, there arose the need for a separate piano professor, one who would make me work the instrument from a technical standpoint (my own personal urge to develop as a pianist contributed to this decision in no small way).

I should note that I am not being critical of her when I observe that Mademoiselle Boulanger was not a piano professor – I simply believe that, pianistically speaking, one would get the most out of studying with her if he was already an accomplished artist. In such instances, one went to her for her great vision, and for her advice in terms of shaping one's conception of the piece. It was through this sort of guidance that I was able to come to certain conclusions very early on in my training.

That being said, she did spend time on some technical details, such as equality of sound, or making sure that voices stayed within the context of their tessitura. Her most important contribution to my early pianism, however, was the great esteem she put on the importance of learning how to work, and how to approach the interpretation of a piece – she preferred addressing matters like this instead of going over finger work or purely mechanical repetition.

It was in this context that my increasing certainty that I wanted to perform in public was continually rejected: she felt we would lose too much time. She did not object to the time it would take learning new repertoire – this would expand my knowledge of the canon, and of this she approved – rather, it was the time needed for performance preparations, which meant repetition, that met with her scorn. In her opinion, this was time better spent acquiring greater familiarity with the literature and gathering knowledge – and yet this aspect of music-making, actual stage experience, brings with it a unique kind of knowledge, one which cannot be obtained elsewhere and of which I was sorely lacking.

Serendipitously, my desire to develop this skill was coming to a head at the same time I entered the Paris Conservatory, at which point I began my studies with Lélia Gousseau (if in the awkward manner I have already noted). It completely cleared Nadia Boulanger from occupying herself with me as a pianist, though she still insisted that we continue to work through some technique in my lessons (scales, arpeggios, exercises to develop finger independence, etc.), each week by ascending fifths, and then beginning again after twelve weeks in the opposite direction (one time through the sharps, the other through the flats). And so while my lessons continued to include exercises in harmony, counterpoint, and fugue, there was little talk of the piano from a practical standpoint.

Part of the reason she didn't engage too thoroughly with the piano from a technical perspective was that she had been first and foremost an organist, and her fingerings were those of an organist, all the way to the phalanges of her supple thumbs, which would crawl across the keys in a pure *legato*. It was, thus, all the more exciting when the moment came that I, filled with love for old music, so rich

with independent voices, was finally permitted to ascend to the famous Cavaillé-Coll in her apartment (despite the fact that it was too high for my childish legs to reach the pedals).

Playing both the piano and the organ while learning the piano is dangerous, because if one plays the piano like an organ, it can harden the touch and sound, whereas if one articulates the organ like a piano, it sounds like glue. One must release organ keys in such a way that the church acoustics allow the music to be heard with clarity, while at the piano one must play legato without it sounding overly sticky (which is accomplished by the correct transfer of energy between the knuckles, even if a finger or two sometimes overstays its welcome amidst the expressiveness of a voice-like rubato).

No sooner had I been put at the organ than Mademoiselle Boulanger took me to the home of André Marchal, with whom I developed a very good rapport. He was a marvelously erudite and irresistibly optimistic French organist (this despite his great age at the time), who, having been blind since birth, inevitably knew all his music by heart (there is a hall bearing his name at the Institut National des Jeunes Aveugles[58]). He had memorized the various stop-displays and playing systems of all the consoles of the great organs in France on which he had played, and so when he came to Fontainebleau for a recital and masterclass, he was able to recall immediately the exact placement of the bourdon, the nasard – all the stops. I once asked him how he remembered these, and he replied: "Each organ is different, and so I commit each to memory." (I must admit I found his answer a bit surprising, but it reinforced one of Mademoiselle Boulanger's life lessons: simplicity is accomplished by overcoming complexity. She always urged me to see the simple – not the simplistic – in everything, and examples such as Marchal's response helped a great deal in my understanding of this.)

Marchal also loved hearing me occasionally play Fauré on the piano, but would add: "You must work on your organ playing" (alas, this is no longer possible, for I simply don't have the time – even when hyper-organized, one has to make choices, not out of pique, but to ensure that he doesn't spread himself too thin). To this end, Mademoiselle Boulanger worked with the appropriate authorities to allow me access to the organ in the church of St. Gervais, which I could see from my balcony at the Cité des Arts. It was a splendid instrument – from the Couperin dynasty – and I played it for an hour each week; it may not have been much, but it was something, and, more importantly, regular. I began my work at this organ with the first Trio Sonata of Bach (E-flat major), the very manifestation of jubilatory counterpoint: the left hand plays one part, the right hand another in canon or imitation, and the feet play the third – a conversation that unfolds over the course of three movements. It was a perfect communion of elements, each of which I could solfège individually, but now had to unite and physically coordinate at the organ.

[58] National Institute for the Blind

My focus, however, remained on the piano, though like all children, I had the tendency of skipping over what didn't interest me. Furthermore, since I only went to the Hattemer School in a limited capacity, my mother spent a fair amount of time working with me on French grammar, with all its special exemptions, time that ate into my practice sessions at home. To make up the difference, I confess I didn't work on my technique very regularly; this neglect showed in the unevenness of my fingers, particularly the weakness of my pinky finger (or so I was told[59]).

With Pancho Vladiguerov

Another issue was my fingering. I had figured out how to manage myself a bit like a circus monkey, learning to play a fugue by singing individual voices while playing the others, something which requires a unique kind of mental dexterity, but from a pianistic standpoint, I was still rather lost at sea. As I mentioned earlier, the matter of fingering became a point of contention with Mademoiselle Gousseau, who wanted me to use prescribed fingerings – usually those of her teacher, Lazare Lévy. Mademoiselle Boulanger's approach, however, was more like that of Pierre Sancan (who at this point still lay in the future) – it is certainly not an accident that both had been composers. Because she was almost completely blind, Mademoiselle could not notate fingerings for me, and so had me do so for myself. She advocated that I arrive at a solution on my own, instead of simply using the fingering provided in some edition or other (which often didn't fit my hands). This may be a more drawn out approach, but is ultimately the product of a true internal working out and understanding of the piece: in this way, one comes to really know the structure of the work, and can therefore find a natural fingering to match that structure – but this is a process achieved more easily as one matures, and poses difficulty in childhood. It allows one to develop a fingering that provides a vantage point wherefrom he can survey the composer's mental DNA: at that moment, the interpretation becomes something deeper than just the "visible part of the iceberg."

As a child, I often circumvented these concerns by faking a bit, as children do, and through such means I was able to dodge things enough to make it through a performance, compensating for my clumsiness with my natural musicality. It was only too easy to use the pedal to cover up shortcomings here or there. Mademoiselle Boulanger – who had an almighty horror of the *una corda* pedal, which, she liked to say, masked psychological fears – believed that when one plays with too much right pedal, he is ill at ease and fears the silences, the very breath of the music itself (although the piano does not, of course, have this need physiologically and may easily be played to the point of suffocation…). And so when one uses the right pedal irresponsibly, like a long coat, it covers everything, the mistakes and the breaths; it can be poisonous, and Mademoiselle knew very well when I was not comfortable with a passage. When she heard weaknesses, she frankly told me as much, but didn't spend time fixing them. I knew my deficiencies, I knew I could mask them, I knew

[59] Bulgarian composer and pianist Pancho Vladiguerov (1899-1978) had told me this before we left Sofia, and it had lingered in my memory well into my time in Paris.

she was not duped, and I knew she didn't want me to continue in this fashion – not least because if I continued to be a "dilettante" at the piano while still developing as a composer, I would eventually arrive at a point where I would have no choice but to abandon the piano.

Masterclass with Clifford Curzon at Fontainebleau

At the summer course at Fontainebleau, I was lucky enough to work regularly with some brilliant pianists, each of whom helped me immeasurably in my development at the keyboard.

From Clifford Curzon, whose pearly tone in Mozart inspired my apprehension of the late concertos forever, I learned a particular kind of touch: a sort of aerated *legato* that he couldn't explain to me, only demonstrate – an exchange which permeated me as soon as I heard it and saw it done. Forty years later, the Venerable Michael Lawson, who studied with Nadia Boulanger during the 1970s and is now Archdeacon Emeritus of the Anglican Church and chairman of the Church of England Evangelical Council (as well as a composer, pianist, author, filmmaker, and creative director of the Pipe Village Trust, focusing on the plight of India's Dalits, formerly known as the Untouchables) wrote to me: "I was a composition student of the wonderful Mlle Boulanger at that time. I have lots of memories of you. I vividly remember you playing the F-sharp minor movement of [Mozart's piano concerto] K488 for Clifford Curzon. You won't know this, but during some of Clifford Curzon's masterclasses in the Jeu de Paume, I was sitting between Mlle and Curzon, and he suddenly stretched over me and said to Mlle Boulanger, 'Where does a child get experience of life like that? I can't play it as well as he does.' You were a delightful child."

With Robert Casadesus, I studied, above all, the works of Ravel, including the *Sonatine*. He was one of Ravel's favorite interpreters, and was often given the privilege of premiering his new works; it was an honor to have known him. There was the somewhat austere Jeanne-Marie Darré, whose attitude was more pianistic than musical, and, later, Gaby Casadesus, with whom I worked extensively for nine summers; she worked diligently on developing excitement in my touch – though never at the expense of clarity – and joyfully carving the cute end elegant in every piece (perhaps too much so…).

If there was someone who knew how to force the most self-assured of individuals to question themselves, and in this respect was extremely beneficial for some, it was Nikita Magaloff. Magaloff always told the student that he didn't really understand how to play the piano (technically speaking), and wanted him to begin again from scratch. The first time I played the Bach C Minor Partita for him, as a child, he said to Mademoiselle Boulanger, "I have nothing to say, it's perfect!," which I

didn't quite understand, though I let it fill me with pride; when he returned the following summer, I, emboldened, played for him some other pieces, and he tore me to shreds – dissecting everything, finding fault in everything (which *was* the case from a technical standpoint), and insisting that I had to rework it all from the bottom up. I said to him naïvely: "I don't understand, sir – last year you found my playing perfect and now everything is bad…" He answered: "That's because now we can work…" I really liked this response, and experienced it again on various other occasions; my work with him, even after Nadia Boulanger's death, continued to be based on self-questioning, and was always both humbling and enriching.

Masterclass with Gaby Casadesus

With Soulima Stravinsky

In this regard, another important piano professor was Soulima Stravinsky, especially when it came to his father's music. He very much helped me to understand the rustic quality in certain pieces, which he had suffered to hear played with too much brilliance – *Petrushka*, for example, which had been adapted for the piano at the request of Rubinstein after its success with the *Ballet Russes* (as it turned out, so I'm told, Rubinstein never played it). This arrangement is unpianistic, even a little clumsy, in its attempt to convey the orchestral colors, like the idiom used by Mussorgsky in *Pictures at an Exhibition*, in which many pianists stress the brilliance brought to the fore by Ravel in his colorful orchestration, with its sparkling brass. But in fact, the work is primarily rustic, like *Petrushka* – inspired by the eternal and folkloric Russia, and soaked in the beauty of bittersweet things, of brutal angles, of objects carved in wood. Later, when I transcribed *The Firebird*, I often referred to this experience with Soulima Stravinsky, who was a composer himself.

Through the intervention of Lipatti from beyond the grave, I learned the essence of that *rubato* which is so sought after in Chopin, though so rarely achieved with taste – if ever one achieves it at all.

I had, in sum, a plethora of part-time piano teachers, in addition to Mademoiselle Gousseau. Despite some of the awkward moments, I was fond of her, and wanted to remove the distance between us. She counted the First Prizes earned by her students like trophies on a chimney mantle, and so I was happy to be able to bring her, as she loved to say, the last First Prize of her career before her mandatory retirement in 1978 – by unanimous decision, and accompanied by the congratulations of the jury and all its attendant folklore (for example, the importance of being the "first named," which I was – it all seems amusing now, but it was very important to her). What mattered to me was that I

realized I wasn't a pianistic failure, though I did sense that something was missing (this hole, this need for regular instruction in a more pragmatic approach to the keyboard and a greater understanding of hand placement, was what drove me to Pierre Sancan). I tried to further mend the distance between Mademoiselle Gousseau and myself – a distance which was perhaps inevitable given the shadow of Mademoiselle Boulanger – by composing a work for her for left hand alone (her playing had, alas, left her with a crippled right hand). I similarly wrote a piece for two pianos for my chamber music professor, Geneviève Joy, emeritus pianist and expert in twentieth-century repertoire (an expertise that extended well beyond the music of her husband, Henri Dutilleux), who had a duo with Jacqueline Robin; Madame Joy and I premiered it at the Maison de la Radio.[60]

Though Mademoiselle Boulanger was somewhat afraid that working too much on my piano would turn me off from the desire to compose, which so often happens, the pianist in me has always been inspired by the composer. By the same token, playing in public has always stimulated me. Mademoiselle Boulanger never sought to make me choose between composition or the piano – I think she wanted both the intelligent interpreter and the inspired composer (if deliberately favoring the latter). In the end, it mattered little, because her way of teaching was not particularly compartmentalized: it was up to each of us to prove himself through his own awakening, his own curiosity as a student, and follow his own path to create a unique and personal blend of all facets of human endeavor.

4) So many pianists, even those who are technically irreproachable, seem to play with a sort of lassitude, detachment, or routine. How have you kept such a sense of joy in your playing?

If it seems that way, it's because I try to extract not merely the notes from the piano, but a deeper sense of the work, beyond the instrument, guided as by an invisible thread or rope – like being towed by the very thought of the composer, which I then try to enter through some brand of metaphysical osmosis. What is remarkable is that I often end up arriving back at myself, filled with wonder at the beauties I have rediscovered, beauties completely of the moment, even in an often-played piece – like entering another dimension, because, this time through, a certain detail has been made iridescent through the light of another. It's like choosing a new path through the forest, one which allows me to survey the woods in its entirety, and, suddenly, this detail comes out in such relief that others are explained, as well.

During a performance, I try to establish in real time an internal dialogue with the essence of the work, which then geographically spreads itself out and reassures me, or intrigues me – but never leaves me indifferent. This dialogue expresses itself in musical terms, unconsciously unwinding and translating a sense of plenitude without actively forcing it into being; it is a way of visiting the

[60] Headquarters of Radio France

subconscious… Simply put, I feel a complete union with the music, a sort of communion that relieves me from the pressure of needing to produce a note-perfect performance.

When Mademoiselle Boulanger cited Shakespeare – "Words without thoughts never to heaven go" – she was illustrating this sensation: the inability to play a single note without feeling or meaning. While playing, I am in a state of complete gratitude for the opportunity to resound so closely with the work; I try to examine each and every passage, but without an overt need to vociferously highlight any of them. I have always appreciated such experiences: to be able to serve a work by sharing it with an audience gives me an exceptional pleasure and sense of purpose, one in which I become a sort of "involved-listener," or "listener-plus" (that is, one who listens while in some sense determining the sound).

When one arrives at a movement in a Mozart concerto which expresses an infinite density of the soul, or a moment of weariness, it is necessary to detach oneself from the technical demands and be guided solely by this inspiration until arriving at this state of "listener-plus," from which point one may gaze across the work in its entirety, ultimately realizing that he has the privilege of touching it. Some part of this is almost carnal, but at the sensorial level of communion between body and soul.

I am always happy to resume this process, particularly in front of an audience, where one has the advantage of not being able to stop: in this setting, one plays with a unique and time-specific progress, and therefore sees (or sees anew) an adventure which will never be the same again, no matter how many times he may play the piece.

Each performance is a new exploration, as if repainting on the same canvas, if one allows himself to be lulled into it, an experience only possible if one has obtained a colossal mastery of touch which can free himself from concerns over keyboard responsiveness (that the keys react properly, that the tone sustains in such a way that permits continuous melody, etc.). If one's pianistic technique – his capacity to sculpt the keyboard as he wishes – is assured, he is free from such worries and able to devote himself to phrasing, distance, and internal breathing. In the intoxication of the moment, one may then engage with some supplemental risk-taking during the course of the journey: perhaps some *rubato* which suddenly opens a door to another way of understanding a section; or a new tempo, because of fatigue, inspiration, acoustics, or the restraints of the instrument you are playing; or you may prefer a new program order, one that allows you to warm up at the beginning and reserve the most extreme exaltation for the end.

All these may take the music to another dimension. There is such an infinite number of ways to approach a program that one can only but bathe in exhilaration – this is one of the reasons why I feel such joy in serving the music I love, and this must be what comes across in my playing. I am snatched away, towed by this love towards something greater: the musical phrase expressing tension or relaxation, propelling me, filling me with wonder, giving me the sense of abandonment that allows a glimpse of the woods in its entirety, while still being on the intimate paths where one can breathe each tree and herb individually.

In the case of difficult works, or poorly understood works (as Mademoiselle Boulanger would say: "poorly understood," not "unloved"), it is necessary to play with even greater conviction, to defend them. In most cases, however, this is not too grave a concern when it comes to performing a

masterpiece. In that instance, one has only to serve it – it says everything by itself: that it is complex in composition, but simple in expression. It asks one not to add to it, or make it up, not to go into raptures at each detail, not to try to express everything or inhale the scent of each rose – Sviatoslav Richter often told me to smell every other rose in the musical garden while playing in it – but to choose hierarchically, to determine which rose's fragrance is most important or compelling. Some decisions are made in preparation, but under the spell of playing in real time, new miracles may be revealed (unlike in a recording, which freezes a performance). The unique performance is both reflective and animalistic, in the best sense of the word: one is simultaneously conscious and unconscious. There is an aspect of intuition which nourishes the inspiration of the moment, rendering the performer more transcendent at one moment than at another, but the whole is a uniquely blossoming framework founded on a solid understanding of the text, which protects one from emptiness or mannerism, all while allowing a moment of breath – the kind of time that separates two sentences – at the moment of execution, during which the performer may feel the same wonder as the listener. They share in the experience together, and so it is not too far afield to think of the performer as one who takes the audience by the hand on a fairy-like voyage, visiting this garden or that forest… This moment of abandon, of complete unity with the work, is the most captivating one: even if you already know the piece, you rediscover it.

Emile, Nadia Boulanger and Sviatoslav Richter

Not that it is necessary to add eccentricities just to be different – the twists and divergences of which I am speaking should be used to reveal some new little path which the listener is invited to take, following the performer in confidence towards a common wonder. What results is a moment of complicity which is transformed into a true communion: the audience forgets that the pianist is playing, as does the pianist himself. It is a collective act of listening, a sort filled with wonder; without this kind of active listening, there is no art, only voyeurism.

Bernstein conducted with an abundance of gestures; it was borderline choreography, and those who didn't like him mocked his style, or derisively marveled at his stage persona. In rehearsal, however, he only listened, intensely watching the score through his bifocals, and emending what needed to be fixed. Once in performance, knowing that all had been managed in rehearsal and that he could do no more with the orchestra, he began to intensely live the music through his body, moving the ensemble with a profoundly natural charisma; others may try to imitate his manner, but this is insincerely cinematic – it is like reading Victor Hugo: certain epithets or adjectives would be over the top when said by another, but in him this grandiloquence is his signature, and as natural as can be. This total mastery of literary or musical technique leads to metaphysical thought, whether it be in a sonata by Beethoven or Schubert, a passacaglia of Bach, a mazurka by Chopin – the piece is irrelevant if it is inspired and sincere.

When this kind of acute listening is replaced by other priorities, performances end up sounding detached, even routine (in pianists, the main epidemic is a commitment to note-perfect playing). In

such instances, the pianist is so obsessed with reproducing all the elements of the score that he has lost sight of the reason these elements are present in the first place – his face becomes foggy, his body stops breathing. This is when true performance can become affectation, leaving the music bereft of meaning. Another distraction is excessive importance on the make of the piano, or its sound, which in such cases turns out to be an excuse used to fill in the void between the performer and the composer's thoughts.

But once one grabs the thread which leads to the author's intentions, he has the impression of composing the piece anew, as occurs when Glenn Gould plays *The Art of the Fugue*, a work left unfinished at the time of Bach's death. In the measures preceding the abrupt cut off in the manuscript, Gould's absorption even led him to dare to detect a feebleness of counterpoint by the Master (possibly attributable to errors by the faithful Altnikol[61] in his attempts to notate the last thoughts of his father-in-law, as dictated by the near-blind Cantor; or perhaps these bars are from Bach himself, following a fit of apoplexy in the moments before death).

The very idea of a contrapuntal mistake coming from Bach's pen seems a blasphemy, and yet Gould dared to suggest it. Naturally, the critics were outraged (and no shortage of them held posts at the Paris Conservatory[62]): "Who is Glenn Gould to critique Bach? We must honor the original text, for everything is there…" And so on, and so on, to the Nth degree, without ever reading between the lines, without endeavoring to follow, as Gould had done, the thought of the composer and its intrinsic progress – all the way to the point where he ascertained errors in this most adulated of composers, a state of musical weakness commensurate with the illness that had plunged his body to the brink of the grave. To dare to say such a thing is to have already traveled a long path, the analytical one that every performer should tread, which leads him to the mind of the composer.

The possession of so draconian a technique is as vital to a composer as it is to a performer – in fact, technique actually frees creativity; without it, a composer is enslaved. This paradigm is true in performance, too: when one is a complete performer, he has the impression of becoming the composer – not by abduction, but by adhesion to the ideas served during the fleeting moments of the concert, wherein he follows the development of the composer's musical ideas through time.

When I was recording the disc of Glenn Gould's original compositions for Sony, we realized that the manuscript photocopy that we were faxed of the Sonata, which he wrote in 1950 but never completed, had arrived for the session with a page having been lost in the transmission. As the recording date was non-negotiable (the release date of the disc had already been set), I had to improvise

Recording Glenn Gould's bassoon sonata with Catherine Marchese

[61] Johann Christoph Altnikol (1720-59), was the only son-in-law of J.S. Bach, father of twenty.

[62] At the time, there were only three television channels, and during labor strikes which effected their operation, French law dictated "unique programming" be substituted for the usual fare. Viewers would thus be forced into watching, for example, Sunday night broadcasts of Bruno Monsaingeon's documentaries on Glenn Gould, the contents of which often sent professors at the Paris Conservatory into fits.

the missing page, hoping to be as close as possible in my understanding of the logical development of the music to what Gould had actually written.

The disc was almost ready to be pressed when the missing page finally arrived, and the artistic director called me: "You'll never believe your eyes – 70% of the page is what you had imagined when improvising it!" I responded playfully: "I'm not clever enough to have seen it clairvoyantly, because a composer often surprises us with the unexpected…" I honestly do believe that if I was able to figure it out, anyone could have. Nonetheless, I was happy and humbled to have come that close to the composer's intentions when I entered into his thoughts.

Of course, none of this means that a performer can recompose passages (except when needing to complete a work or when improvisation is suggested), but I do think that the performer has to appropriate the spirit of the piece, not just adjust it to what is most idiomatic for him individually (as Mademoiselle Boulanger would mockingly say, "*My* Beethoven sonata, *my* Mozart sonata…"). And yet, one must become a subjective guide, taking by the hand the curious and eager listener who wishes to be moved, and allowing him to live a privileged instant – with love for the music opening up the work, like one opens a chest to contemplate the jewels inside. If the performer is obsessed with technical issues, if his mind is 90% occupied with sound production or articulation, then the means has become the end, a hang-up that replaces the spiritual elevation towards which the performer should be leading the listener (again, I come back to this metaphor of walking down a path…). There must be unity between the doer and the thinker.

The best link between the visceral, even the physical, and the intellectual – that is, the best way to truly live the music – is not by means of acting like Marcel Marceau[63] at the piano, an approach that some obviously think is the only way of expressing music for others. A good case in point is the music of Rachmaninoff. In Mademoiselle Boulanger's opinion, many performers seem to take the sentimental quality of his music as license to express soppy, reductive emotions. But when Rachmaninoff performed his own music, he conveyed the nostalgic soul riding on the surface with a detachment and elegance that lifted the work into a more elevated spiritual realm.

Nadia Boulanger and Emile's grandmothers Yevsevia and Svoboda

There is no need for choreography: the music will tell you what it is about. When one plays a work like Schumann's *Fantasy* – which holds at its very center the magnitude of his love for Clara, a carnal, human, passionate love, one seemingly impossible at first, like all fantastic stories of romantic love – there is an elevation of the soul, a spiritual ascension, a profound emotion that transcends even the spirituality of the Church. Likewise, if you play an organ chorale by Bach in a church service at the moment of communion: it is foremost a music of reflection, and therefore of meditation, of prayer – and if you play it as an encore in a piano recital, even following a program blazing with extroverted music, I would say that suddenly the occasion takes on an ecumenical dimension, a non-denominational liturgy of being and religion

[63] Marcel Marceau (1923-2007) was a famous French actor and mime.

and the elevation of the soul. It is there for anyone to partake in, a shared moment of introspection (as in any true church or concert hall).

In such moments, each of us finds himself alone in an intense conversation with the soul of the author through his work, while looking almost physically on this work in Euclidean space – the privileged listener and the performer (*cum* "listener-plus"). In order to achieve this state, the public must afford the performer a certain confidence, and this trust in turn frees the performer from all textural and technical concerns.

It is analogous to the way Mademoiselle Boulanger moved at the end of her life: "I lead with my shoulders…" She had a very diminutive physique, and her shoulders effected a sort of linear motion (like a musical phrase); her feet followed them, no longer depending on the complex mechanics of the legs – as if moved by the spirit alone.

And all this seems to me what one would wish to hear: a performer immersed in the music, giving expression, in real time, to both the essence from which its wonder emerges and the simplicity of its anatomy.

This is no different than reading a book: it is necessary to read all the explanations and footnotes, but it is the way it is communicated in a single stroke, with all its breaths and intonations – taking all these asides into consideration – which gives it its true dimension.

After playing a piece, I often have the impression of having said it in a rhetorical sense. I often say to my students: "Don't play the piece, speak it… Speak your *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* – express it, say it, move it beyond the beautiful: make it meaningful." I feel like an actor who, having rehearsed my lines and played a great role with extraordinary tirades a thousand times, has evolved his approach and arrived, in the spontaneity of performance, at the mastery which illuminates the drama. This is how I approach the piano, always aiming to be filled with wonder, and to bring my audience with me – to let them close their eyes and share in the authenticity of the moment, as a gardener of the interior. If sometimes my face expresses the musical elements traversed, enlightened or darkened like so many visited landscapes of definite colors, it is the result of engaging with the music not merely in a literal sense, but rather through the insights gained by an interpretive analysis

(but not the sort a doctoral student would submit: one cannot imagine a musicologist playing his analysis of a work – how abominably boring!). The further one advances in music (or literature), and the smaller one feels in front of the works he encounters, the more one analyzes them, and feels nearly crushed by their grandeur – then the more one wishes to serve them by sharing some piece of what is discovered therein. The most important thing is to have lived intensely during this moment of communication…

In music, there is always a way to carry something to others. Today, this often involves films or advertising, in which the music supports the fundamental thought or affect to which the producer is hoping the viewer or listener will respond. But originally, music was conceived for the different

stages of life: for baptism, marriage, burial, for social distraction… At church, its essence is to elevate the soul for reflection, meditation, glorification (Martin Luther based his hymns on popular songs, thus condemning the elitism of a religion that he had rejected).

In this light, the height of aberration is to see the name of the performer more prominently placed on a record sleeve than that of the composer: the work is no longer served – the ego is.

And what has all this to do with the initial question? The truth is that so much of my education with Nadia Boulanger concerned the role of a musician: performer, thinker about music, artist learning to learn, communicator whose ideas are accessible even for the uninformed listener. From her, I learned to let music fly in the air like a kite which one guides with an ever-alert understanding.

It was what she taught me of such elevation that has led me increasingly to think of music as a tango danced between the performer and the work, a constant and internal dialogue in which one becomes adhered to the composition, merging in its gestures and movements, not hesitating to move in opposition – because you will catch it again at the next turn. This dialogue isn't that of a narcissistic performer speaking to himself, but rather one between the performer as individual (even egoist) and the performer as empty vessel for the piece: one can try to control, even manicure, the music all he likes, but at some point, in order to truly make music, he must let go and allow the music to speak for itself. It's a bit like trying to hold back a pack of wild horses – at some point they have to break free.

All these analogies are merely attempts to represent the sublimity to which a well-prepared performance can lead the performer, and allow him to bring along those who listen to him in communion with the work. While standing in front of the burning bush, Moses is in intense communion with God – I dream of being able to assist in such an experience, looking through the workshop keyhole and seeing Bach composing a cantata aria at the very moment when inspiration spilled forth… Was he moved? How intensely did he feel this emotion? Or was he just God's craftsman?

Simply put, what the performer should seek is to let himself be filled with wonder, and act as a vehicle to give the same experience to the listener. One arrives at the unique sensation of a cyclist pedaling through a landscape, admiring it at his leisure while his legs go on automatic. If one only does the Tour de France for the cycling performance, he might as well ride in a gym on an exercise bike, with extra resistance to simulate the climbs – but the initial goal of the event, which has disappeared little by little, was to help participants rediscover the beautiful landscapes of the country, and the history of each village; each year, the Tour has a new route, affording one the pleasure of continually seeing the country in new ways.

If the yellow jersey isn't the goal, and the cyclist doesn't care about how he places, then he can pedal to observe the landscape. But if one can do both – be as competitive as possible, and at the same time marvel at and be conscious of the places he traverses at great speed, with a church tower evoking the sixteenth century, the struggles between the Protestants and Catholics, or whatever the local history may be – then one has mastered the controlled glance, the learned glance, regardless of how furtive or fleeting it is.

And this is exactly what should happen when one performs a Schubert sonata: during a forty minute sojourn within B-flat major, one may move furtively, for four measures, into B minor – a handful of precious seconds that are essential because they justify the rest of the piece, and support the structure of a work built with spacious proportions (perhaps a little too spacious for the modern attention span)… Such modulations recall a glass of red wine held by a villager in a painting by Le Nain, enlightening all – and suggesting (though without explaining) the sort of joy that I experience when performing.

CHAPTER V – INFLUENCES

1) What were the most noteworthy aspects of Nadia Boulanger's influence on you during your time together? When discussing her, can one actually speak of musical exclusion?

Nadia Boulanger didn't really exclude things, but she did organize them into a hierarchy of importance. Of course, there were musicians with whom she had some differences (I have already noted Rachmaninoff several times). There was also Debussy, whose scorn for the Villa Medici – as a boring place, one bereft of inspiration, and one which only served to make him want to return to Paris – deeply insulted her. For Mademoiselle, the Villa Medici was a sanctuary that represented her sister Lili, as well as her own ambition to win a Grand Prix de Rome… it was a sort of Holy Grail. She often spoke to me of the inspiring mornings there, of the awakening of the pines, of Rome, the sun, the people, the gardeners of the Villa – as if it were a sort of lost paradise, with the expulsion from Eden paralleled by the cancellation of her opera because of war (*La Ville Morte* [The Dead City], co-written with Pugno after the work of Gabriele d'Annunzio, was supposed to have been produced in September 1914 at the Opéra Comique). All of this also suggested to her Lili's opera "Princess Maleine" (based on the work of Maurice Maeterlinck), a project allegedly still incomplete at the time of its composer's early death… So many things that were to be, but which never came to pass.

Debussy's contempt for the Villa Medici was but one aspect of his character, which Mademoiselle could not abide (a view shared by many others who knew him). She told me, in language appropriate for a child, that he would rather wait for his "lady friend" at the Pont des Arts than work at the Villa. Yet at the same time she openly admired *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* [The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian], and his vocal works on poems by Charles d'Orléans, such as "Dieu! qu'il la fait bon regarder" [God! but she is fair!], with its nostalgic nationalism of exile, all soaked in neo-classical and neo-renaissance sonorities (after the neo-Gregorian music of Fauré).

Nadia Boulanger spoke of works as distinct from their creators, and often admired the music of the composers she knew personally more than she cared for them as people; she would often allude to

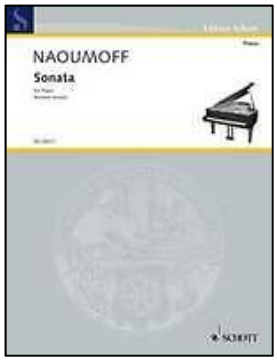
Valéry's maxim that, "moments of grace are sometimes given to creators which allow them to produce timeless works that transcend the destinies of their authors." I think that she really did dissociate the one from the other, even regarding Rachmaninoff – whose performances she could admire without subscribing to the actual composition. She never sought – nor needed – to valorize herself by name-dropping, but she often cited works (she did sometimes draw on memories of their composers, like Debussy and the Villa Medici, or Rachmaninoff and Pugno, but this only happened on rare occasions).

This capacity to separate the human being from the creator, to address the matter that so much of Fauré's work is still deemed incomprehensible, while Rachmaninoff's is so obvious that performers often try to push it beyond even what it attempts to express – this was the importance of her analysis class: it situated the music we studied,

and asked questions like, “Is it necessary to redouble what the music is already saying, or can one just let it speak for itself?”

As for the “neoclassical” label, it was affixed by those who wanted to frame her or attempt to limit her influence; what other explanation could there be but jealousy? A few years after her death, I was invited by France Inter (a Radio France station) to plan an episode of the Sunday afternoon program “L’Oreille en coin,”[64] in which I could meet a musician of my choice. I opted for Iannis Xenakis,[65] because we had sung “Nights” in Mademoiselle’s Wednesday afternoon class (though it was something very foreign to her aesthetic), and I wanted to meet him, if only to show him what I did and better understand his creative choices.

The show’s producers arranged everything, and I went to visit him. Since he was also an architect, my first question – a banal one, I confess – concerned the relationship between music and architecture; he responded that all I had to do to find the answer was read his books! Then, at his request, I played the opening of my piano sonata, which is in a neoclassical vein (and was the first work of mine that Schott published, in 1980). I was hardly three measures into it when he interrupted me, saying, “But this is neoclassical…” in a tone of disdain. “What is the use? Are you trying to enrich the nineteenth century?,” he continued, thus repudiating my entire approach in and of itself. It disturbed me more than a little that he didn’t even want to listen to it, and so, without doubt inspired by the memory of Mademoiselle Boulanger – who dared to assert herself in such intellectually dangerous situations – I answered, “Yes, I wanted it to be neoclassical,” and thought, “and in so much, I have succeeded!”



He then looked at me with a distraught air (something habitual to him), and we parted ways with a complete lack of understanding. He clearly didn’t seek to understand in the way Mademoiselle Boulanger had – it was the polar opposite of what had been instilled in me up until then. She took any opening to illustrate the dodecaphonic system to students who needed or wanted to understand it better, even though it wasn’t apace with her outlook, and had the capacity to listen to neoclassicism at the same time as she was making us study Xenakis… She was intellectually capable of helping someone form himself in an aesthetic other than her own, while he was incapable of listening more than a few moments to a music which he categorically rejected.

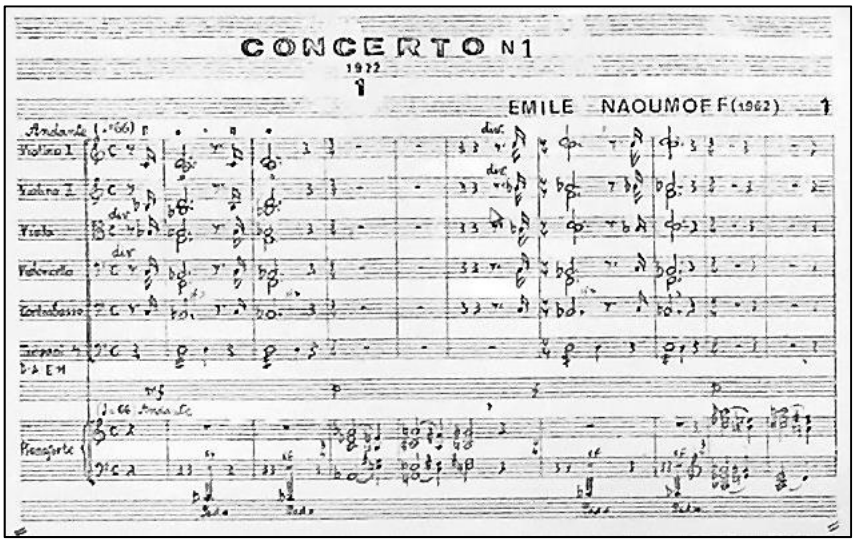
In fact, Xenakis wanted to make me ashamed of my work, something that Nadia Boulanger never did in the ten years I spent with her, neither towards my Bulgarian inflections, nor my childhood awkwardness, nor by imposing Fauré on me when it seemed at odds with my Slavic origin – she had not made me study the style of Dubois and Delibes to undermine my own inspiration (which she left to blossom in my compositions), or to impede the spilling forth of personal thought. She elaborated on this when Bruno Monsaingeon interviewed her about me:

[64] Literally, “The Ear Corner”; this title refers to the gesture of tugging on the corner of one’s ear, as if listening as intently as possible.

[65] Iannis Xenakis (1922-2001) was a Romanian-born Greek composer, theorist, and architect whose music is infused with the application of various mathematical processes; he later became a French citizen.

> "Little Emile Naoumoff, who is Bulgarian, is a gift of my old age. He has been with me five years now, and his personality as a composer has developed naturally without being enslaved to any school. From the beginning I said to him: 'Never do what I, in my weakness, might say to you if it seems that I am mistaken.' Some of his works can be formally critiqued, but I have decided not to do so, in order that he may develop on his own. Sometimes I ask myself: 'Let's see – is his music influenced by Stravinsky? No. By Bartók? No. By Shostakovich? It is a little more in this direction, but not completely resembling it.' I let him speak. He does what he wants. When he does a harmony assignment, I make him do each correction six times, until it is perfect from an academic point of view – but when he composes, I want him to be absolutely free." (*Mademoiselle*, ed. Van de Velde)

But not everyone is fated to be the pedagogue that Nadia Boulanger became – a destiny that was to some extent because she renounced her other ambitions, but more so, I believe, because of her genial disposition towards those who came to her for guidance. She despaired to see so many gifted people who – through condescension from others, or by cowering in the face of established masterpieces – collapsed from self-censure before even really attempting to compose.



She was convinced that the act of composing was how one learned to compose; this was something I experienced firsthand when I wrote my first concerto – she did not impose her ideas of form, musical conception, or orchestration, but simply told me: "You write and when it is done, it will be played…" If there was a student whose music stood out as having personality, even if clumsily expressed, she would help him to develop, to find himself, by removing little by little the flaws of his language without changing its essence. Many composition professors, for example Olivier Messiaen, who taught while still actively composing, create "followers" – that is, disciples who write in the wake of their master's aesthetic (often unconsciously, and even when the master is opposed to such imitation). Since she no longer composed, Mademoiselle Boulanger didn't exude a "sound" that her students absorbed into their own work, consciously or not. More importantly, she didn't recompose for others; she was thus able to be judicious in her diagnoses of their works, without exercising any stylistic influence. The proof is in the extreme diversity across the swarm of students that she trained.

Nadia Boulanger never imposed any aesthetic, much less her own. What charmed her in the music I was writing at the age of nine – despite its weaknesses and gaucheries – was, if I may say so, its audacity of personality. She was attracted to what she felt were an evident curiosity and a sense of awakening; she immediately showed me respect, and this won me over.

But all this was something incomprehensible in the eyes of someone like Xenakis. He was the polar opposite of Mademoiselle Boulanger: a man of intransigent character who could not abide a point of view different from his own, and whose default was to erect a wall of derision towards a differing aesthetic. He was rigidly doctrinal, and advocated the abolition of melody and harmony; for Xenakis progress was electronic and mathematical – whereas Nadia Boulanger saw the continuity in all, a kind of neo-timelessness. What do such students and styles have in common: Astor Piazzolla, Quincy Jones, Leonard Bernstein, Jean Françaix, Markevitch, Menuhin, Penderecki, Copland, Carter, and so many others? Nothing! The only common denominator is that each was a strong personality, whether it found expression in music that incorporated folk elements (such as the tangos that she encouraged in the works of Piazzolla) or jazz (as in the music of Quincy Jones).

Quincy Jones, Emile and Henri Salvador in the Auditorium of the Maisonnettes

When Gershwin came to Mademoiselle for counsel, it was on the recommendation of Ravel, who judged her more apt than he to take on the responsibility of giving further guidance to the young American. In the eyes of Ravel, then – her classmate with Fauré – Nadia Boulanger represented the Teacher who knew how to respond to all musical talents without breaking any of them (as Xenakis tried to do with me, after only a few seconds of listening).

This luminous quality was obvious from my first meeting with Mademoiselle: her generosity of soul, her grandeur of spirit, her vision of the future, her teaching philosophy (let the student create himself through a reassuring of his individuality), all without promoting immodesty or condescension towards others, but rather requiring that each answer to and strengthen his gift through hard work, humility, and steadfast character.

It was a mix that was unique to her, and I was fortunate enough to have partaken of it – not sporadically, as was the case with most of her students (for example, those who only studied with her during the summer at Fontainebleau), but completely: continuously integrating her intellectual, aesthetic, and philosophical concerns. I am, in fact, much more than just Nadia Boulanger's disciple: I believe I received from her the quintessence of the "homo musicus" that she hoped I would become. That isn't to say that I became such, but that the tools to become so were given to me – despite the travails of life and difficulties of existence (the perpetual need to strive, teach, play, and develop my gift through the agency of a charisma that can never hold a candle to hers, but is my own) – inspired by the basic precepts she inculcated: open-mindedness, attention, self-discipline. These remain qualities which I hold dear, as would anyone who saw how much she asked of herself (and which she, in turn, asked of her talented students). In light of this work ethic and diligence, the mediocre could be nothing *but* jealous of her – or any of her pupils who abide by these principles.

Her greatest concern was one's character. When she spoke about the members of her entourage, past or present, she focused primarily on this aspect – their talent was secondary. She insisted that it was both imperative to reinforce talent with strong character, and necessary to keep a healthy distance

from those with questionable attributes; one must cede neither to self-satisfaction nor self-destruction.

The life of Jean Françaix is an eloquent example. Despite all the obstacles and criticism he encountered, he remained truly himself to the end. He displayed such integrity, standing firm amidst so many cliques and fashions, sympathetic or otherwise. Now that he is dead, it is perhaps easier to judge him and his work as a whole: it is what it is – it excels and continues.

It is difficult to live a life of constant vigilance and hard work, one attentive to others, and yet uncompromising to oneself – which perhaps explains in part why Mademoiselle Boulanger never married (this and the fact that she was perpetually attracted to inaccessible men, like Raoul Pugno, Prince Pierre of Monaco, or Igor Stravinsky – it really is lonely at the top). But her relationships that were based on intellectual sympathies were very strong and very diverse: a sort of "Boulanger planet," on which I am some kind of ferryman.

2) Before Raoul Pugno became a dominant figure in her musical life, Nadia Boulanger's teacher Gabriel Fauré was a frequent guest at Rue Ballu. What was left of this Fauré-an phase when you studied with her? Similarly, was her pre-World War II Monteverdi period still an important part of Mademoiselle Boulanger's teaching during your tenure with her?

By the time I arrived, her experience between the wars – when her friendship with the Princess de Polignac and Countess Marie-Blanche helped make her the most influential woman in French music – was no longer a dominant aspect in her teaching, but she continued to speak frequently about what she had learned before 1918 – that is to say, the time of her true musical education (Mademoiselle Boulanger had taken her *premier prix* in harmony, as well as in a plethora of other musical disciplines, at the Paris Conservatory in 1903).

She occasionally mentioned Alexandre Guilmant, her organ professor, as well as her vast array of students, but most significant of all was Gabriel Fauré. He always remained her mentor, the man she most admired, the father of her aesthetics, and she became something of a spiritual daughter to him, a relationship manifest in the funeral eulogy she delivered for him on the monumental steps of the Madeleine Church. Fauré generally had good rapports with his young female students, including pianists Magda Tagliaferro and Marguerite Long; in the early years of the century, Nadia Boulanger – then a composer and organist, a young woman who must have had a certain austerity sweetly emanating from her – certainly justified a mix of great tenderness and great admiration… and great sadness, when her apprenticeship came to an end. (I don't believe he ever taught Lili. A couple of times around 1900, after dinner at Rue Ballu, he accompanied her on some of his newly-composed songs, but he never involved himself in her musical development, which was instead entrusted to Georges Caussade.)

Mademoiselle venerated the atmosphere which Fauré had fostered in his lessons, and the humility which assured that he never musically referenced himself – something which she found admirable enough to begin with, but was even more stunning when he would cite her own works to her… And then there was the fact that in this same studio, a genius such as Ravel would continue to work on the same exercises as she, despite having already composed his string quartet; it left a profound impression on her, and surely contributed to her resolve to incessantly re-examine and explain the ABCs of music when she became a teacher.

Fauré's studio was littered with other remarkable musicians: the Romanian composer Georges Enescu, who would later mentor Menuhin (it was through this connection that Menuhin eventually came to Mademoiselle Boulanger); Florent Schmidt, whose humanity she greatly admired; Jean Roger-Ducasse, to whom she felt a special attachment, and who she believed to be a sorely misunderstood composer. It is also necessary to add Claude Delvincourt,[66] who won the Prix de Rome with Lili Boulanger in 1913.

Such names peopled the world of this young girl, and it was these individuals and her time with them before the Great War that served as her primary point of reference; it was an exceptional group of classmates, each of whom was older than her (I believe), but of which she was nevertheless an equal.

I view the relationship between Fauré and Mademoiselle Boulanger to be similar to the one I had with her, a bond between master and disciple – all the more so because she was one of his few pupils in Instruction, as one said then, a discipline that she elevated during her life to the rank of Pedagogy (many active composers, like Ravel, didn't really teach – whether by necessity or conviction). I humbly feel that I am her legacy in this regard, having been invested with her teaching through her example, her thought process, and the entire intellectual world that she opened up for me – so that I could develop on my own.

Fauré was a composer and pedagogue, Mademoiselle was a pedagogue who had been a composer, and now I am both a composer and professor (and I hope a pedagogue in the sense that I use with respect to Mademoiselle – that is, a word infused with great height). We pass on what we have received, and I feel this constancy being transmitted to my students. I know it may sound pretentious, but it really is the student who creates the master through the student's awakening and listening and sensibility. For Fauré, it was the École Niedermeyer, where he soaked in Gregorian music; Mademoiselle bathed in both ancient music – through her rediscovery of Monteverdi, to say nothing of Buxtehude and Bach – and new music, especially through her students and friends. Now, I have the opportunity to cast this tradition into the future – if life allows me the time – through Francesco Tristano, Jean-Frédéric Neuburger, Julien Quentin, Simon Zaoui, Jean-Baptiste Doulcet, Rebecca Chaillot, Jasmin Arakawa, Yau Cheng, and others of the same fabric. Through the transformative continuity of their personalities, the past, present, and future will become one (Nadia Boulanger

[66] See Chapter III.

never spoke of the past for its own sake, but rather to affect the present; as for the future, it was always today).

The countdown that I felt from the moment we met until the day she died – an internal tension wrought from the hope that the fine string of extraordinary luck which allowed us to find each other in time would not break prematurely – assured that I would live those ten years in such a way that, when my turn came, I could help shape others.

3) You have such a unique and natural way of sitting down at the piano, and immediately starting to play without hesitation or apparent concentration; is there something of Nadia Boulanger in this?

Yes, because she gave examples at the piano all the time. Even handicapped, she would acutely lean on the keys, appropriating a myriad of individuals and thoughts to elaborate on a Bach cantata or a Mozart aria or a Schubert Mass. Mademoiselle Boulanger had a treasure-trove of musical examples that she would invoke with alacrity, as if this constant stream had neither beginning nor end. She would say, "Like this idea of Ravel…" and play fourteen measures from the middle of the Menuet from *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, reinforcing it by a quote of Bergson, then move seamlessly into the Kyrie from Byrd's Mass for four voices, which she would play without preparation or hesitation. It all seemed a bit unfair to us, because, naturally, we could not know all these references.

Such displays were never planned. Rather, they were the logical result of: "I play the essence of the work, I am in the thought of the composer; I gather these elements to nourish the intellect, which analytically understands the music, but also to nourish the performer, who plays it – all while nourishing the creator, who wishes to express his own spilling forth." It was at once musical, intellectual, metaphysical, and – foremost – an address to God, returning to Him what belongs to Him.

Her need to play examples at the piano was both spontaneous and deeply personal. She cut directly to the spirit of the work – without ever reducing it to her own psychological limitations, or adapting it to her personality, or capitulating to a need to be original (as some performers do), or being restricted by the mandates of performance practice. She wanted foremost to be at one with the thought of the composer; she went there, and we followed.

I have inherited this impulsive attitude toward the instrument: when I play the piano, it isn't merely to make some sonorous effect or valorize myself. It is because the piano is the link, the accomplice – it's the vehicle by which I can obtain a well-structured thought that lays somewhere upstream of the moment I begin to play, and so I feel no apprehension toward it. It is a friend, and the translator of my thoughts. The adjustments one must make from piano to piano can perturb some, but Mademoiselle Boulanger insisted, "There are no bad pianos, only bad pianists…" She took as an example the old Erard that sat next to the Steinway in her salon: "It is an unplayable instrument,

except by Jean Françaix, who plays with the lid up and still never covers Maurice Gendron's cello." And that without relying on the soft pedal, which she found the height of success at the piano: to play thick textures transparently.

4) Did Nadia Boulanger follow a prescribed plan? Did she make pains to be clear?

Yes and no…

Her approach was very Latinate in that she would begin on a given subject, a starting point by need of convenience, but it was merely a foil to branch out in various directions, letting each detour blossom and develop. She could, thus, simultaneously open windows to various different thoughts, all connected by an invisible thread which only became evident at the end of her long exposition.

She would often stand up while expounding on a topic, and, as I was frequently at the piano to her left (a place of honor), I was regularly made a privileged interlocutor. At these moments, my image of her as a candle was reinforced, so thin and threadbare was she in her comportment and behavior.

She would speak for a while about a Bach cantata or Beethoven sonata – whatever piece was fixed for that week – and then we would sing it phrase by phrase, in order to feel it, to really understand how it breathes. After that one of us – often me – would play it, and she would pose some questions (which, in my childish euphoria, I always felt able to answer).

In her answers, she would cite philosophers, theological considerations, former friends, give musical examples in abundance – from Josquin des Prés to Ravel – and then, all of a sudden, this genial mess of thoughts (or so an adherent to strictly causal, successive reason might think) would transform into a magisterially limpid display as she tied it all together in her conclusion.

For me, at least, her hours-long orations passed as if only a minute, and whenever I recall them, I am still that little child sitting at the keyboard and surrounded by the "old sirs and madams," all of us trying to sing together some new score (and usually massacring it – after all, we didn't listen to recordings for guidance). After we finished kneading the music around the piano, Mademoiselle would begin discussion, though ninety-nine percent of the people in the room never opened their mouths, even when called by name – so afraid were they of not being brilliant enough.

There was also the issue that so many of her questions took a sibylline form – often regarding the very basics of music and genre: "On how many lines does one write music? With how many notes does one write in the tonal system?" Some of these questions were deliberately deceptive, though never asked with viciousness – rather, they were to test our attention within a flexible framework (in my case, there was a little more structure afforded to help focus my youthful thought processes). We were reflecting with a priestess of music, who, from time to time, asked questions of such simplicity that even the abstruse became clear.

For example, the number of lines on which one writes music is eleven – taking all seven clefs into account and not including ledger lines, beginning on the bottom line of the bass clef (which is a G) and going to the top line of the treble clef (an F). This question is a little like a game of words: the more obvious answer is ten lines, not eleven, because the two staves we usually read while playing the piano each have five lines, but middle-C is made available through the application of the alto clef.

As to the question about how many notes are in the tonal system, everyone says twelve, one for each note of the chromatic scale, but this number includes sharps and flats – that is to say, pitches that have been altered either up or down by a semi-tone; the answer is actually seven.

From this sort of self-examination comes questions such as: what note is the first of the seven perfect fifths in the key of C major? Many students would get stuck on this question because they would think that one must start on the tonic, which works fine until one reaches the fifth from B to F, which is a diminished fifth rather than a perfect one. If one starts on F (the subdominant), however, he can obtain all the pitches in the diatonic scale by means of ascending perfect fifths. Mademoiselle Boulanger always reiterated that we must continually take such fresh looks at the circle of fifths, for it is the very essence of tonality, a permanent part of the machinery, though it is often invisible, like the roots of a tree or the legs of a swan – without which there is not growth for the one, nor propulsion for the other. One must be able to detect the underlying movement of the circle of fifths, even if its use in, say, Ravel's music seems an alteration of the one used by Bach.

It may be truncated in some instances – jumping over a fifth to produce step-wise motion, or over two fifths in order to obtain a third – but all these are emanations from the circle (one that can indeed by vicious, when one accounts for the tritone, what the ancients called *Diabolus in Musica*, the 'devil in music') – bringing us back to the necessity of having a solid grounding in the basics in order to understand their variants.

She loved to give examples of the circle of fifths… With her long and boney fingers, she would pivot her hand to show us how it turns, to the right for the sharps and to the left for the flats. If she was going to use her left hand to demonstrate it, she would put her right index finger on the tonic, like a compass which she could turn from the north to the south, or from the east to the west. Then she would say, "to the left is the subdominant, to the right is the dominant," thus establishing the equilibrium of the tonality: the dominant is the fifth above, the subdominant the fifth below – that is to say, the subdominant is not a melodic invention (the fourth scale-degree), as is so often taught.

This equal accord given the subdominant in cadential situations, an ancient technique to which Fauré had returned in his music – the so-called Plagal cadence, a motion from the subdominant to the tonic without going through the dominant – avoids the sort of tension and release obtained in an authentic cadence because it circumvents the leading-tone. This kind of cadence is more relaxed, more antiquated in the sense that it is rooted in modality rather than the tonal system (Phrygian,

Mixolydian, and the other Greek modes, as they existed before being assimilated into Gregorian chant).

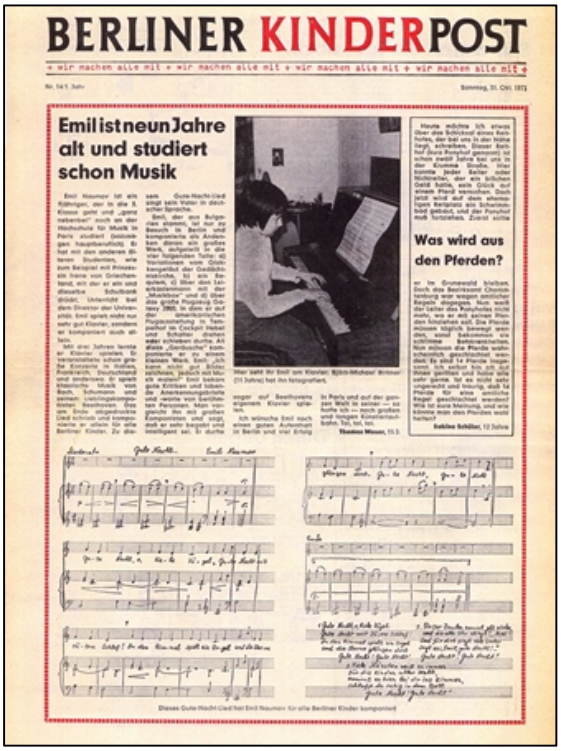
Mademoiselle Boulanger loved showing us that, in the distant past, these modes were sung from top to bottom. She always used the *Illiad* as an example, noting that Homer would have recounted Odysseus's exploits while accompanying himself on the zither, and then she would play the sounds of a descending Dorian scale, which assured that the note a fifth below the tonic was what we today call the subdominant (one finds this also in neoclassical settings like Stravinsky's ballet *Orpheus*).

She made us rethink the chain of events that created, or rather established over time, the tonal system, so that we could better understand how to develop it towards our own expressive ends, and eventually – if we so chose – to abandon it.

She veiled her own aesthetic, and moved us to discover our own ways to find personal nourishment. She was a motor of research (well before the internet), basing her pedagogy on her childlike gifts. It was almost like a game for her, a challenge to find new ways to both relax the atmosphere while we studied a particularly complex work, and simplify a perhaps puzzling path for those who got lost trying to follow it into the depths.

And that was the essence of her teaching: proving that in revivifying well-known and oft-visited things, there comes a moment where they become even more purified, allowing one's knowledge to spread still further. Her philosophy was that it is more important to know how to ask good questions than to arrive at half-baked answers. Sometimes in her Wednesday classes, I would hear students in their thirties say, "We know all this," while others would admit, "I never thought of these things as being connected in this way." There was revelation in her teaching.

Yehudi Menuhin told me that when he was younger, he knew so intuitively how things were done that he didn't ask questions or need them answered; the problem was that when he got to the point where he needed guidance, he no longer knew how to approach the matter. He ended up having to re-explain it all to himself – not to find the origin of things (which is a state of pure innocence, a sudden appeal to the senses by a particular art – in his case, sound), but to discover how he learned, and on what foundation his intuition was built.


BERLINER KINDERPOST

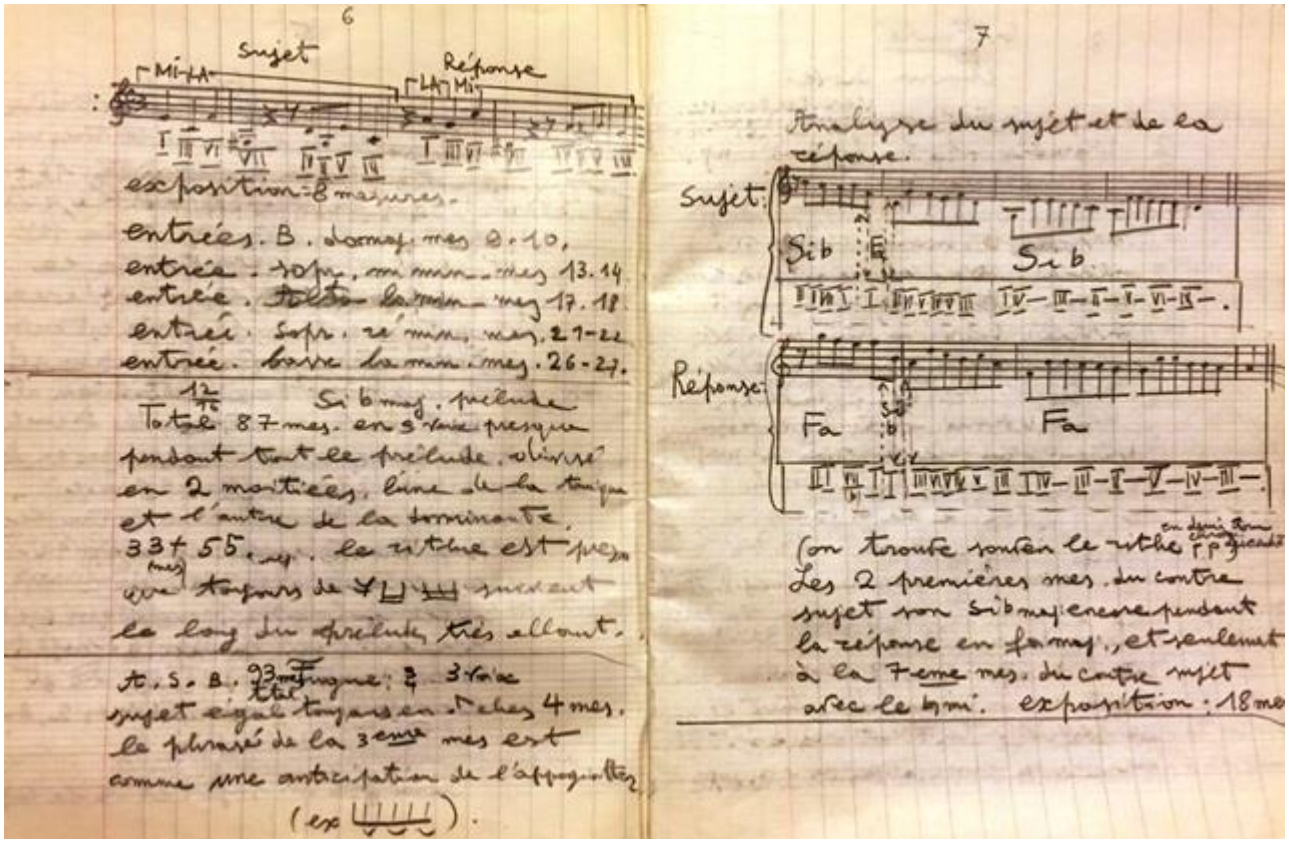
wir machen alle mit

Emil ist neun Jahre alt und studiert schon Musik

Was wird aus den Pferden?

Arranging notes without depth of thought – that is, without an accomplished technique – will produce a composition that makes no sense. Sound fundamentals must be behind what one does: music built of merely clever decorations is just as bad as uninformed simplicity. The dangerous seduction is that one always thinks he knows enough of these easily-absorbed tenets, and that he is ready to advance to more rewarding complexities…

If you get by purely on talent, you may advance quickly, but you will do so without having accrued a strong foundation – and when you eventually do face a difficulty, perhaps one to which you cannot respond intuitively, you will find yourself like the young Menuhin, not understanding how you do what you do. Then you either cut the cord, or you search for the answer by reconstructing the logic for yourself from its rudiments, replacing intuition with fundamental explanations that reopen the door – to a fresh start and towards greater development.



Emile's music analysis notebook

In front of the Panthéon in Paris

CHAPTER VI – HIGHLIGHTS OF THE TEN YEARS WITH MADEMOISELLE

1) If you were to pick up your photo album and scroll through the years, which of the illustrious people you've met (regardless of whether or not you got to know them on a more personal level) would be most memorable? Did these contacts have important consequences for you?

Yes, their examples were decisive in how I conceived of my place as a musician: Bernstein as composer and conductor; likewise with Markevitch; Magaloff the pianist; Françaix, a composer and beautiful pianist; Gaby Casadesus, who exhibited such strength of character – wife and mother of two other extraordinary pianists (her son, alas, died too young); Jeanne-Marie Darré, who stood for all the best in the French pianistic tradition of Isidore Philipp; Gérard Souzay, who, with Bernac and Poulenc, personified the French *mélodie* through the moving emphasis with which he sang; Giorgio Questa, the illuminated Italian who travelled with a portable organ which he had built himself and which could be dismantled and reassembled in two hours – and on which he would then inimitably play Frescobaldi, using scores he had copied from the originals in various monasteries; André Marchal, disciple of Gigout,[67] defender of Clérambault,[68] a last Mohican in the line of great French organists, and a man of infinite generosity of soul.

Performing with Rostropovich in Evian (1989)

Nadia Boulanger loved to surround herself with Russians, like it had been when her mother was alive; it seemed only appropriate, then, for me to keep in touch with musicians like Rostropovich and Igor Markevitch after her death. Soulima Stravinsky and Dimitry Markevitch remained the most traditionally Russian (wherever they lived): in their presence, one understood the eternal Russia.

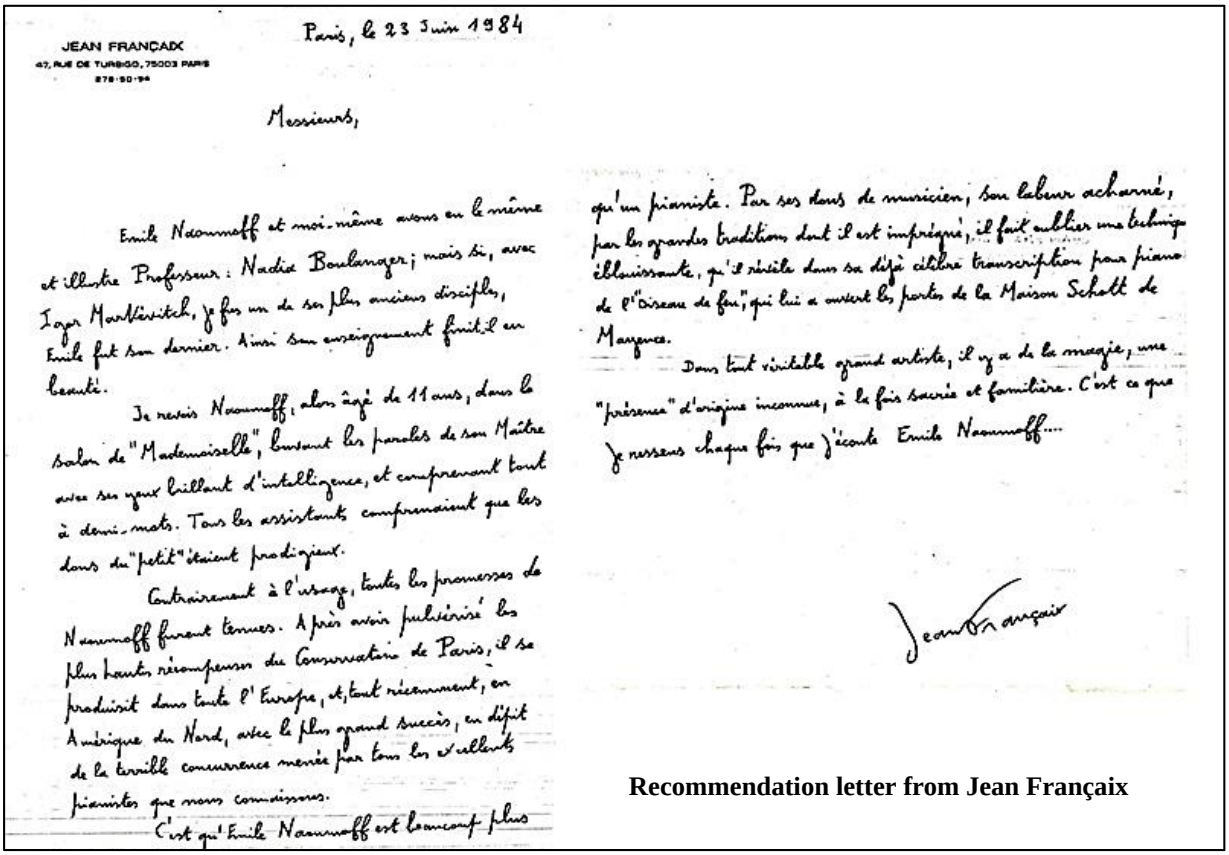
Yehudi Menuhin was also a recurring leitmotif. He invited me to co-sponsor his foundation *Live Music Now*, with the objective of bringing music to places where it so rarely goes (I played in hospitals, prisons, police academies, the army – all as a result of Menuhin's humanist and philosophical conception and approach – and was later joined in these pursuits by other young musicians, like Pastor Jean-Christophe Robert on oboe and violinist Annick Roussin). I later invited Menuhin's son Jeremy to play at the centenary concert for Lili Boulanger at the Maisonnettes.

Of all the musicians I met during my years with Mademoiselle, however, I maintained the most consistent and constructive relationship with Jean Françaix, who always offered to look over my music if I sought an opinion. (Around 1935, Nadia

[67] Eugène Gigout (1844-1925), pupil of Saint-Saëns, was a French composer and organist, including a 62-year tenure at Église Saint-Augustin in Paris.
[68] Louis-Nicolas Clérambault (1676-1749) was a French organist and composer.

Boulanger herself had recommended him to Schott in Mainz, the publishing house whose great tradition dates back to the first Viennese school.)

As we were leaving the cemetery at Montmartre after Mademoiselle's burial, Françaix, trying to bring levity to the situation, asked me, "Did she pass on to you the secret of composition?" I answered, "But how? It is a mystery, it is God – she always said that…" I was bewildered, and this amused him. "I ask you this because, not long ago, she confided in me during one of her Wednesday gatherings that your counterpoint exercises were getting more and more elaborate, and she was beginning to have trouble following you. From the way she spoke," he added with a cunning smile, "I thought that you had figured out the secret to composing…"



JEAN FRANÇAIX
47, RUE DE TURBIGO, 75003 PARIS

Paris, le 23 Juin 1984

Messieurs,

Emile Naoumoff et moi-même avons eu le même et illustre Professeur : Nadia Boulanger ; mais si, avec Igor Markévitch, je fus un de ses plus anciens disciples, Emile fut son dernier. Ainsi son enseignement finit il en beauté.

Je revois Naoumoff, alors âgé de 11 ans, dans le salon de "Mademoiselle", buvant les paroles de son Maître avec ses yeux brillant d'intelligence, et comprenant tout à demi-mots. Tous les assistants comprenaient que les dons du "petit" étaient prodigieux.

Contrairement à l'usage, toutes les promesses de Naoumoff furent tenues. Après avoir fulguré les plus hautes récompenses du Conservatoire de Paris, il se produisit dans toute l'Europe, et, tout récemment, en Amérique du Nord, avec le plus grand succès, en dépit de la terrible concurrence menée par tous les excellents pianistes que nous connaissons.

C'est qu'Emile Naoumoff est beaucoup plus qu'un pianiste. Par ses dons de musicien, son labeur acharné, par les grandes traditions dont il est imprégné, il fait oublier une technique éblouissante, qu'il révèle dans sa déjà célèbre transcription pour piano de l'"oiseau de feu" qui lui a ouvert les portes de la Maison Schott de Mayence.

Dans tout véritable grand artiste, il y a de la magie, une "présence" d'origine inconnue, à la fois sacrée et familière. C'est ce que je ressens chaque fois que j'écoute Emile Naoumoff…

Jean Françaix

Recommendation letter from Jean Françaix

This was especially gratifying coming from Jean Françaix, whose productivity as a composer made him something of a Vivaldi in our time: he wrote with such facility, and even when criticized for his style, his music remained honest and sincere of language. Its content stands in perfect harmony with his virtuosity of writing, denoting a great inner nobility, something not unnoticed by the performer (whose technical prowess is rewarded in Françaix's scores, unlike in some contemporary music, which demoralizes the performer who labors to relay extreme complexities that ultimately afford the audience nothing more than discouraging apparent randomness). Françaix was able to withstand the shifting musical trends of his lifetime because he didn't depend on them – his privileged background meant he didn't need to earn a living – but at the same time, this sort of stance meant that he needed to have an abundant inner life to fuel his creative drive; it was precisely this internal richness which found expression in his music.

Jean Françaix

I am reminded of an amusing anecdote from his youth, which he recounted to me on one occasion. Nadia Boulanger had contacted Sacha Guitry[69] to ask if he'd consider engaging Françaix to compose some film music for him. Despite all his admiration for her, Guitry was hesitant to accept sight unseen, and so set up a meeting with Françaix, during which he asked him rather nonchalantly if he could improvise some second-rate funeral music at the piano… He wanted to get across the sort of musical subtlety that the psychological aspect of his films demanded (at the time, he was producing *Si Versailles m'était conté* [Royal Affairs in Versailles; 1953], *Si Paris nous était conté* [If Paris Were Told to Us; 1955] – films for which Françaix eventually wrote such effective music).

As Guitry had tested the young Françaix, the great personalities with whom I was fortunate enough to meet and work never pampered me, but rather posed challenges. So when it eventually came about that I was signed by Schott, a relationship which has lasted for several decades, it was a collaboration of which I could be very proud, because it is rooted in my education – not in the splendor of riches which a child prodigy can provide, nor as a result of some sort of cultural, ethnic, or political hijacking by the media (as occurred when Rostropovich was stripped of his Soviet citizenship). Such sensational events can sometimes lead to greater exposure or more performance engagements, but they are merely peripheral details, and can never really take the place of pure humble work, which should and must always remain at the heart of things.

It is fascinating to think that Mademoiselle Boulanger always believed in the possibility of making a career by word of mouth, through intelligent, benevolent, and well-informed people – a system which admittedly suggests a certain elitism, but which creates a fluid mechanism wherein one is appreciated for the quality of his work and not for his marketability. This is in stark contrast to the superficiality that so frequently intrudes into artistic commerce, where mediocrity is inflated with the helium of vanity in order to dupe uncultivated decision-makers and promote products instead of values.

And so Mademoiselle offered a tray of opportunities to Françaix – commissions from the Princess of Polignac, film music for Guitry, concert tours with cellist Maurice Gendron, the orchestration of works by Stravinsky and Poulenc – but it was his gifts and diligence that justified them.

Apparently seeing something similar in me, Françaix asked me to conduct his harpsichord concerto – a work written for Nadia

[69] Alexandre-Pierre Georges Guitry (1885-1957), known as "Sacha", was a French film star, director, and playwright.

Boulanger – for a recording with the Radio Orchestra of Sarrebruck (Germany), with him at the keyboard. The harpsichord is an instrument in which the attack of sound is of crystalline precision, and in Françaix's piece, the string orchestra is almost entirely pizzicato, thereby requiring impeccable accuracy and necessitating numerous takes; it is a marvelous school for orchestral conducting. At one point Françaix, who had very definite opinions and oozed of French humor, said to me from the keyboard: "Emile, would you tell the concertmaster" – Françaix spoke no German – "to play this passage as if it was by Massenet, but with good taste…"

I began to translate his request, and immediately the concertmaster started to play the opening notes of the Meditation from Massenet's *Thaïs* in an overly-unctuous way. The exaggerated expression with which he demonstrated was the very antithesis of the good taste that Françaix wanted – he believed that there was indeed elegance in Massenet, if one knew how to access it (as is the case for so many hackneyed works – music which is often played with poor taste, indeed, stuffed with mannerisms, but which has something to say when played simply, naturally, and without artificial flashiness).

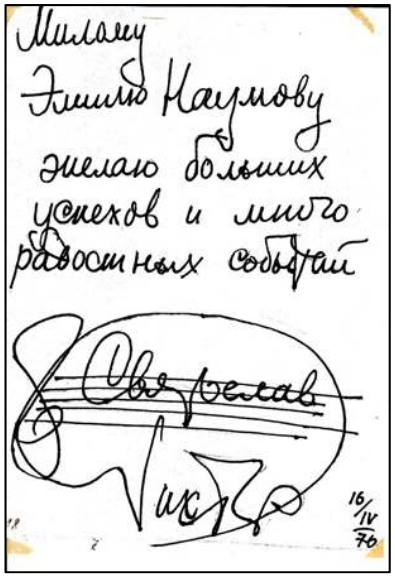
For the length of the almost twenty years that he survived Nadia Boulanger, Jean Françaix not only continued to ask me to conduct his works, but also trusted me with the premieres of numerous works for solo piano and bassoon/piano; there was something of a student/teacher dynamic to our relationship, if through the intervention of Mademoiselle (not unlike the case of Copland and Bernstein) – a true mutual recognition, though one not divest of criticism when necessary.

Our rapport owed itself, to no small extent, to the fact that we shared an enormous curiosity, by turns playful and spiritual, and each of us was fervently of his time, while able to live outside of it – rejecting the intelligentsia's insistence that culture survives by embracing only the avant-garde. (I remember the composer Jacques Chailley saying to me that after the war, "one didn't dare to write tonally any longer." Confronted with his sense of helplessness, Nadia Boulanger replied: "Be yourself" – for she believed that after what humanity had endured, it was essential to have the strength to go against the current, to be an individual rather than a conformist, to maintain the means to one's independence.)

It was more than just the genuine personality of Françaix's music, however: I also admired the technical achievement of his compositions, and the manner in which he lived his life – as demonstrated by his devotion to his family and his respect for his wife (he always signed his manuscripts 'JB,' for 'Jean and Blanche'). I projected myself onto him sometimes – not to imitate him, but to imagine what my life would have been like had I known Mademoiselle at the time when he first met her, in the 1930s.

Another artist whom I met through Mademoiselle that stood out was Sviatoslav Richter. He would spend several months each spring in Paris, and I would meet with him throughout these mini-residencies – for lessons (maybe ten per year, which were more discussions about music than lessons in the traditional sense, and were conducted in a mixture of German, Russian,

and English), for dinner, or to attend his practice sessions and dress rehearsals at his invitation. I continued to interact with him a bit after Mademoiselle's death, and would often listen to him rhapsodize on his admiration for Benjamin Britten. In the last years of his life, Richter rarely announced his recital programs, and took joy in offering unexpected music, inspired by the moment. To do so at that age shows an intense inner life, as well as an exceptional ability to continually re-evaluate and challenge oneself.


Милому
Эмилю Наумову
желаю больших
успехов и много
радостных событий

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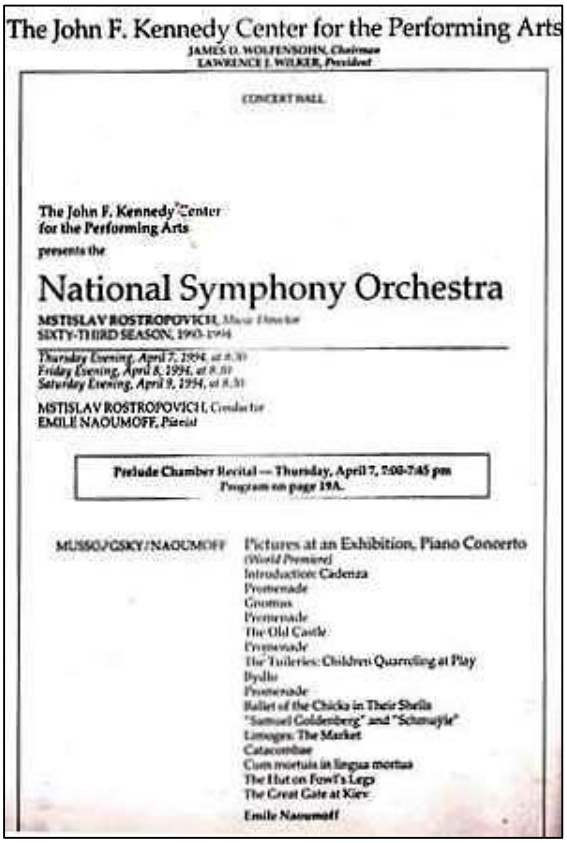
Richter's note to Emile in Cyrillic

I also continued to see a lot of Nikita Magaloff, because he continued to guest teach at the Paris Conservatory with some regularity, but I didn't really have an overly intimate relationship with him (I say this with no hard feelings).

This was not the case with Leonard Bernstein, however, with whom I had a rather personal rapport from the mid-1970s until his death in 1990. One of the first pieces of mine which I showed him in his Paris hotel suite was a concerto for piano, orchestra, and three choirs. I remember him noting my tendency to double the strings with the woodwinds, and then mentioning that Mahler would often double the winds upon themselves – for example, the oboe and the clarinet, in order to get a tragic or ironic sound, the kind of Klezmer coloring that could invoke the legend of the Wandering Jew. This was one of my first and most important lessons from Bernstein: you do things you're not supposed to do in order to get the sound you want. I continued to study orchestration and conducting with him, and we would meet up whenever he was in Paris or I was in New York. He also gave me special access into the recording part of the music business. One particularly memorable instance was when he invited me to the studio sessions of his performance of Ernest Bloch's *Schelomo*, with Rostropovich as soloist. Upon my arrival, he proceeded to tell the sound engineers, "I only trust the boy's ear." He saw me as the "dear student," the spiritual grandson of Nadia Boulanger, homegrown by Mademoiselle, but never did he (or anyone else) take me under his wing to help me put together a career – and just as well, because I never would have wanted to benefit from such special privilege.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MSTISLAV ROSTROPOVICH, Music Director
SIXTY-THIRD SEASON, 1993-1994

Thursday Evening, April 7, 1994, at 8:30
Friday Evening, April 8, 1994, at 8:30
Saturday Evening, April 9, 1994, at 8:30

MSTISLAV ROSTROPOVICH, Conductor
EMILE NAOUMOFF, Pianist

Prelude Chamber Recital — Thursday, April 7, 7:00-7:45 pm
Program on page 19A.

MUSSORGSKY/NAOUMOFF Pictures at an Exhibition, Piano Concerto
(World Premiere)
Introduction: Cadenza
Promenade
Gnomus
Promenade
The Old Castle
Promenade
The Tuileries: Children Quarreling at Play
Bydlo
Promenade
Ballet of the Chicks in Their Shells
"Samuel Goldenberg" and "Schmuyle"
Limoges: The Market
Catacombae
Cum mortuis in lingua mortua
The Hut on Fowl's Legs
The Great Gate at Kiev

Emile Naoumoff

Two or three years after Mademoiselle's death, Bernstein came to Fontainebleau to give a masterclass, and asked me to come up with a project for the two of us to do together, because "Nadia Boulanger would have liked it." Unfortunately, he passed away before we were able to realize that collaboration (it turned out to be my piano concerto transcription of *Pictures at an Exhibition*); it was thus premiered with Rostropovich on the podium.

As for other orchestral conductors, there were definitely some who put me through a baptism by fire, like a branch which one shakes to test adherence to tempo or *rubato*. Most conductors are essentially despotic, only varying in the degree of psychological manipulation that they impose on the musicians with whom they are working – in order to take them, as if by hypnosis, to a place where everyone adheres to the Maestro's vision of the work. In the eyes of such an individual, soloists are spoiled and over-adulated, and so the conductor must be sure to darken rehearsals in order to set things aright.

Sometimes, however, a musical affinity with the conductor *is* possible – perhaps even more so when forged through adversity (though this can only be learned on the job, as I quickly realized). One technique I use is giving the conductor a description of the atmosphere I envision for the work, almost like a stage direction – I might say with reference to the Tchaikovsky first piano concerto, for example, "I want to play this in a B-flat minor atmosphere, not in a D-flat major one" (that is, dramatic rather than pompous, as might be suggested by the opening section). In the case of this work, as with the concerti of Grieg and Rachmaninoff, any such statement that can serve as a précis for one's conception is doubly important, because in these warhorses, fame has had the adverse effect of allowing mannerisms to accrue which one must scrape off, as if with a spatula, in order to rediscover the freshness. *Sic transit gloria mundi!* Sometimes I push and shove the phrase to obtain the tempo I want, not because I mean to impose myself as a surrogate for the conductor, but rather because the orchestra often functions as a single inert mass; pulling the music from the gravitational torpor of the downbeat thus becomes something of a dance with the conductor. If the exchange is convincing, a coherent expression – no matter how ephemeral – may be obtained.

Occasionally, there isn't time to rehearse. In 1984, when I played the Tchaikovsky with conductor Yuri Ahronovitch in Monte-Carlo at a moment's notice, replacing Bruno Leonardo Gelber, who had played the dress rehearsal that morning, but then slipped and injured his leg in the interim. I was called to fill in, and flown down by helicopter – a detail which Jacques Chancel made light of on his television program *Le Grand Échiquier* [The Great Chessboard]. Given the circumstances, Ahronovitch didn't even consider the possibility of an artistic interpretation – instead, we relied on animal-like instincts; he said, "You will know how I want to play it by the sound of the opening notes," and I was unleashed like a beast into the arena. That visceral performance stands in contrast to later, rehearsed presentations of this masterpiece which I have given – interpretations which I hope displayed its genius more thoughtfully, even if under more adversarial conditions on stage…

There are two kinds of experience which build a musician's personality: that on stage, which demands sharpness, and that which comes afterwards, which requires reflection – and both must be uncompromising. This sort of intransigence doesn't necessitate being at war with the other musicians involved, however; we must find common ground, though for all the discussion spent trying to obtain it, there is always a moment when one's playing makes the argument words cannot. And that is as it should be: in the magical duality that is music-making, one must be able to express and convince without resorting to words.

It was this kind of communication that was at the heart of the musical collaborations I developed after Nadia Boulanger's death. Other than Françaix, Menuhin, and Bernstein, the individuals that I knew through affiliation with her either passed away soon after she did, or remained acquaintances

without adopting me, *per se*. This situation and led me to develop artistic relationships outside of her sphere of influence, with musicians like Gidon Kremer, who often invited me to his Lockenhaus Festival in Austria, or Henryk Szeryng, a fabulous man from whom I learned how to approach all aspects of performance – from chamber music to concerto rehearsals – without compromising my principles. Szeryng and I would meet at the residence of Madame Morhange, at Porte Champerret; after teaching me how to make tea, he would instruct me in the subtleties of bowing, instilling a soberness of approach when dissecting even the most hair-raising of pieces. I learned much about the integrity of music from him, as well as from Dominique de Williencourt, with whom I worked on the Beethoven cello sonatas – we concertized with the complete cycle for many years, allowing them to ripen before recording them. More recently, I have had a similar kinship with flutist Jean Ferrandis premiering and recording Japanese composer Yuko Uebayashi's highly inspired music.

With Dominique de Williencourt

One matures in part through the grace of others – for example, as I did with Olivier Charlier, a childhood friend for whom I composed some pieces for two violins and piano (his sister Claire also being a violinist), and with whom I premiered Nicolas Bacri's demanding sonata (under the composer's tutelage). We have continued to perform together, even making some recordings – including one in homage to Lili and Nadia Boulanger upon the centenary of Lili's birth.

And then there was Patrice Fontanarosa, Augustin Dumay, Frédéric Lodéon, Philippe Bernold, Michel Moragues, Gary Hoffman, Yo Yo Ma, Roland Pidoux, Régis Pasquier, Narciso Yepes, Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, Eli Eban, David Grimal, Pryia Mitchell, Philippe Graffin, Leonidas Kavakos, Joshua Bell, Paul Meyer, Kim Kashkashian , Patricia Stiles, Mady Mesplé, Irène Joachim**,** Mary Ann Hart, Gérard Caussé , Yau Cheng, Nokuthula Ngwenyama, Rebecca Chaillot, Emilia Baranowska, Jacques Saint Yves, Michel Arrignon, Jean-Pierre Rampal, the Fine Arts Quartet, Fabrizio von Arx, Michel Michalakakos, Meir Rimon, Jacques L'Oiseleur Des Longchamps, Catherine Marchese… these are but some of the chamber partners with whom I have shared a significant musical path.

With Yo Yo Ma and Lynn Chang in Boston

Having been removed from Nadia Boulanger's circle at the beginning of my career, I was, thus, very much a musical orphan, vulnerable and all too susceptible to anyone who wants to take advantage of the situations. And yet no one attempted to adopt me, so to say, because I continued to carry Mademoiselle Boulanger's inner light within me, and because the longevity of my apprenticeship with her left me soaked in her charisma.

There was no doubt that my affiliation with her drew fear from those who were irritated, indeed even threatened, by her, and assumed that my training with her drove me to implacably crush others. In my naïveté, I was completely unaware of this pettiness, so contrary was it to the way that I was brought up by my parents and Mademoiselle. Such conclusions denote, I believe, personal insecurities which stands in stark contrast to these individuals' great gifts. What else could explain why someone's spontaneous enthusiasm would be met with mistrust rather than encouragement?

I experienced this with, for example, my version of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*: some critics fumed, "How dare he change a note of a masterpiece?" But I never saw what I was doing this way – it was the product of jubilation, not vanity, perhaps like the exaltation Liszt felt in his transcriptions and paraphrases, or Busoni in his arrangement of Bach's Chaconne (this is not to compare myself with them). My approach was healthy and humble, though it elicited suspicion from those of narrow mind and spirit.

I thus had no choice but to confront the chasm between my spontaneous nature (and how I see and project my inner self) and how it is perceived by others – including issues such as my privileged childhood, a matter which has often aroused jealousy. It's tempting to ruminate on grandiose historical concerns – be it the purgatory of the forgotten composer, or the iconic notoriety of Bach – but the living artist knows the same extremes at various points of his career, if on a more modest level (after all, perception is central to such considerations).

My childhood was what it was. Was I destined to meet certain individuals? Think of Schubert, who lived in Vienna at the same time as Beethoven: he worshipped him, lived in the same city as him, was a mere twenty years younger than him (though he survived him by only a year) – and yet they allegedly never met. And, all musings on fate aside, how much was I responsible for the issues others took with my good luck, or the encounters I was fortunate enough to have? I learned early that one mustn't judge – Nadia Boulanger always said, "Learn to love, and if you don't love, say you don't understand." This was advice I learned to apply to life, not just music – an approach that might get you slapped in the face, but is ultimately a more gratifying way to live. They aren't always easy, but I do think that true values prove constant: they may not be more successful than the more fashionable ones – they simply endure.

My intellectual and moral inheritance from Nadia Boulanger has thus been a double-edged sword, and has motivated me all the more to instill in my students a sense of humility – above all, because I have learned that the only thing that can sully a truly talented individual is arrogance.

2) One of your running jokes is to refer to Nadia Boulanger's immediate circle as having been comprised of "students and slaves." How do you defend this statement? Were the categories really that exclusive?

Her entourage was, of course, much broader than that (a matter on which I will elaborate in the next question, as well), but it is true that she saw things hierarchically, and there was a very clear pecking order; there were those whom she admired, and those few to whom she felt a tender attachment – especially those who served her in a domestic capacity.

The "slaves" included such individuals as Mademoiselle Hollingue (one of her earliest secretaries; her tenure with Mademoiselle was before my time, though I did meet her), Mademoiselle Dieudonné, and Mademoiselle Armagnac (both of whom I knew well). They were financially independent, and didn't really need employment, *per se*; their work for Mademoiselle Boulanger was more like a vocation. Although each had her own residence, they were frequently housed and fed at 36 Rue Ballu, where they spent their days and nights copying scores or addressing envelopes or working out logistics for her classes (seeking out and obtaining the requisite scores or anthologies, etc.). Their role was polyvalent: librarians, secretary-scribes, and, at the end, nurses. In their way, they really were like vestals, women whose lives only had meaning through extracting a sense of purpose from the High Priestess that was Nadia Boulanger. And yet, there was no chance that these women would ever get particularly intimate with Mademoiselle, so imposing were her charisma and intellect: even Mademoiselle Dieudonné, who was with Nadia Boulanger every day and her dearest friend, called her "Mademoiselle," and addressed her with "vous" [the formal variant of "you"] until the end – this despite the fact that she had known her since the age of eleven and was only just her junior.

As a result of the 1914-18 slaughter, the number of women trying to find a place in active French society in the years between the wars was much greater than ever before, and many of these were unmarried.[70] Nadia Boulanger was one of the stars around which such women gravitated to find some meaningful fulfillment. I find it rather appropriate that so many women were pulled towards her, because she, too, had built herself through others (by choice, as well as various renunciations) – especially, for the greater part of her life, her students.

Foremost among her entourage was Mademoiselle Dieudonné, Mademoiselle Boulanger's only true confidant and, I believe, the only one of her circle whom she really respected as an intellectual. She was a woman of great character who, during the German occupation, was resourceful enough to smuggle some original Mozart manuscripts out of the Conservatory library and hide them from Nazi eyes – including that of *Don Giovanni* – for which I think she was later awarded the Legion of Honor. And yet, despite her own merits, she ended up as what might be called Mademoiselle Boulanger's "alter ego."

I believe Mademoiselle Boulanger also had an enormous soft spot for Cécile Armagnac. Much of this surely came from sympathy – there was a remarkable parallel between her sister Lili's death and that of Mademoiselle Armagnac's own young sister, who was tragically killed on the day of her wedding by resistance militia – but also because she shared her name with the patron saint of music,

[70] See Chapter III, note 45.

St. Cecilia. Mademoiselle Boulanger would often pronounce her name in Italian, which I can't help but think sweetly reminded her of her youthful days at the Villa Medici.

And then there was her secretary, Diana Orsini-Ferenczi. She was a full-time paid employee, which led to a fair amount of conflict with Mademoiselle Armagnac – after all, they viewed the purpose of their work with Mademoiselle Boulanger through different lenses.

This learned assembly of damsels would congregate at Mademoiselle's apartment near Place Clichy, where Giuseppe reigned as project manager. He was not only an exception in that he was a man, but also in that he was paid for his services. Mademoiselle took pleasure in speaking to him in Italian, too, for – as was the case with her interaction with Mademoiselle Armagnac – it reminded her of her time in Rome. He would drive her around in a white Peugeot 404, harried by her constant stream of directions – which only proved that she saw much better than she would have him believe, as the elderly often do for reasons of diplomatic convenience (Doda Conrad – the impresario, Jack-of-all-trades, and quite delicious narcissist who was a very active agent in her entourage – told me that in her earlier years, when she was still driving herself, she would push her Hotchkiss to breakneck speeds, roaring the engine while still in first gear, too absorbed by conversation to think about switching gears). Giuseppe was like a character out of a Molière play, a valet with multiple caps: chauffeur, footman, doorman, butler… He lived at Rue Ballu with his wife, Zita, and their children, whose education had been generously underwritten by Mademoiselle Boulanger.

Her pupils could be divided into several categories. There were, of course, her private students. Then there were the Wednesday class students, many of whom only attended for a year in between degrees at some accredited institution of higher learning, and those who studied with her at Fontainebleau. Such occasional students only really "studied" with Nadia Boulanger by attending her group classes (so they could put her name on their CV): one or two lessons in the winter, a few analysis classes, or perhaps a summer of study, before returning to their homes to obtain a university job; these students were, for the most part, American (because, the 'Boulangerie' was still a powerful force in the United States at that time, a diploma from the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau was an incomparable "Open Sesame"). Such individuals preferred to enroll in established institutions, and pursue a career through more traditional academic avenues, than absorb the approach and timeless essentials that Mademoiselle Boulanger promoted. (There were exceptions, however, like pianist Jean-Louis Haguenauer, who combined her classes with his institutional studies, or, later, composer Jean-Christophe Marchand.) Mademoiselle was, of course, aware of this trend, but nevertheless continued to include such students in her roster, and even became attached to some.

Emile and Jean-Louis Haguenauer

There was also the fascinating intellectual entourage which always surrounded her, many of which I have already mentioned. To these names may be added: Brazilian musicologist Luiz Heitor Correa de Azevedo, who was based at UNESCO; a descendant of the Queen of Italy who often attended classes; Princess Irène of Greece, who had studied with Gina Bachauer and was an active participant

Queen Sofia of Spain, Emile and Princess Irène of Greece

in our classes; and Madame Dujarric de la Rivière, heiress of a reputable financial institution and longtime patron of Mademoiselle Boulanger, who also used her resources to perpetuate Lili's memory (including the financing of the Lili Boulanger Awards to help students pay for lessons with Mademoiselle, of which I was a recipient). There was the tenor Paul Derenne, a member of Mademoiselle's vocal ensemble between the wars; Doda Conrad, of whom I have made note several times, and who was also an amateur baritone; the Catalonian composer, theorist, and conductor Narcis Bonet; Father Edward McKenna, an American composer and man of the cloth; and oodles of other former students – representing a diverse array of peoples and talents – who were perpetually drawn back by her magnetic aura. In addition, there were the peculiar and eccentric individuals (or so they seemed to me as a child) that would drop by her salon, to whom I appreciated having access and who seemed to view me as some kind of adorable pet. I believe that she had a need to be accompanied by such colorful personalities – even those not in agreement with her, whom she liked to provoke (indeed, the most profound truths are often revealed in brothels rather than convents).

It was an eclectic bunch which gravitated toward her, but there was never elitism or cliquishness or learned bombast about it. Well to the contrary: a sweet atmosphere reigned in the depths of those conversations which were the hallmark of their reunions.

In this light, Mademoiselle Boulanger said to me: "My little Emile, learn that it is the quality of your entourage that determines your value!" This was not so much to say that I was of weak character and needed an appropriate assembly to impart proper values, but rather that all too often one surrounds himself with individuals who diminish rather than elevate his character.

3) Nadia Boulanger knew many luminaries from the world of arts and letters who weren't necessarily a part of her daily entourage. Do you have any special memories of these individuals from your ten years with her, or do you recall her telling any anecdotes of friends from the past?

Of those who were no longer alive, she often evoked the writer and diplomat Saint-John Perse and the poet Paul Valéry, one of whose philosophical thoughts is strikingly inscribed in gold letters at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris: "Whether I am tomb or treasure… friend, do not enter without desire." This was fundamental to how Mademoiselle taught us to face our responsibilities in her Wednesday classes: "Who are you? You alone know that. What are you going to become? You alone will decide." She had a very strong belief that there were some in the mass of humanity whose genius

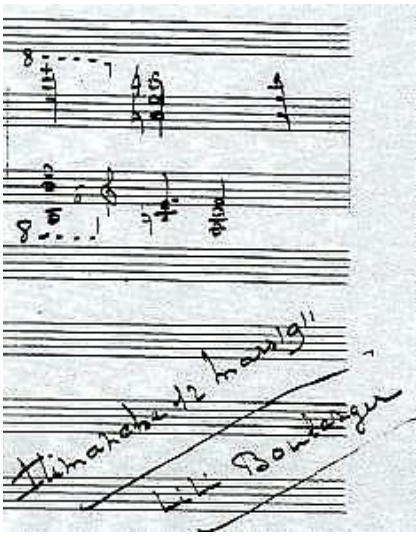
shone, the awake among the sleeping, the enlightened amid the despotic. As early as April 1926, she had articulated her intellectual beliefs to the students of Rice University in Texas at a conference on new music: "Music, like life, is constantly evolving… We are too inattentive, our spirits too passive to harness or observe, much less seize, the gears!"

She also regularly referenced Bergson, as well as Gide (whose *Perséphone* was set to music by Stravinsky), though she didn't know them as closely as Valéry, who had been her neighbor at Hanneucourt.

Her aesthetic – one of the spare and timeless beauty of ancient Greek columns – came together in the world of her dear Fauré, whose influence cannot be overstated.

Likewise, it is almost redundant to elaborate again on Stravinsky's importance: she admired him completely, even after the dissolution of a probable love affair (which did not end as she would have liked). She adored the infinite care he brought to his shirts and the tidiness of their collars – the same sort of meticulous attention he brought to the pages of his scores (if he made a single mistake, he began the page again from scratch – no detail was insignificant to him…). He would play a hand of cards with the same intensity that he put into the writing of his sacred works. Mademoiselle spoke of him as one speaks of Father Christmas to children: having never married, she had all but sanctified him in her mind (I doubt their respective natures would have led to a happy union had nuptials actually been in the offing…).

Principal among the dearly departed was, of course, her sister Lili. She said little about her family, and when she did it was always the same stock phrases, even to the point of using identical wording every time (which aroused suspicion in some of her students). Her comments seemed to have a difficult or embarrassed air about them – like lessons learned by a schoolgirl who recites her rehearsed lines, concluding them with a sense of achievement or satisfaction at a job well done, and doesn't dare offer anything more. Her modesty forbad her from openly expressing her feelings, and the austerity of her upbringing – which required her to stifle even her sneezes – would not allow her the leisure of too tender or personal an evocation. Since we all already knew the details of Lili's life, however, Mademoiselle did allow herself the liberty of referring to her by name, rather than as "my sister" – a unique distinction in her familial invocations.



Still, we were led to think of Lili more as a composer than a person (except for the bust surrounded by ever-fresh flowers in the salon). When I played the "Nocturne" for violin and piano, for example, which begins with a gentle ostinato of "C"s spangled across the keyboard, she made me practice the connection between them an infinite number of times, paying special attention to the individual identity and function of each successive note: the C which supports the structure, the C which sets everything in motion, the C which leads onward, the C which thrusts the music downward, and the C which releases everything, remounting to yet another C – a melody made from a single pitch rather than a mere ostinato dispersed over the keyboard: "la note choisie," the carefully

chosen note. And yet she spoke barely a word of Lili as a human being, and still less about the rest of her family circle (her mother or father, Pugno, etc.).

She saw Lili in the same light as Schubert, frequently referring to them as "innocents in music" – an honor which she also bestowed on her former student Dinu Lipatti, another angel who felt with profound nobility and similarly passed prematurely into eternity. She often alluded to the last letter he wrote to her, just a few days before his death from, I believe, leukemia: "And so it must be that I am wracked to the point that I can no longer hug you." I believe that he truly saw in her a mother of his own choosing – a musical mother.

There were also the persons in the portraits and photos peppered throughout her apartment, which not only added a certain affective value to the milieu, but also afforded the apartment a profound and intense inner life (even if I wasn't able to ascribe names to all the individuals in them).

My fundamental impression of all these people was that they were still alive – Mademoiselle Boulanger didn't speak of them as if they were in the past: she made them live in the present. It was this, as well as the various daily repetitions that had been quasi-ritualistic for me since childhood, which gave me a taste of the timeless and infinite. This sense of cyclic continuity was reinforced by the regular barrage of new students, which necessitated that she repeat certain things; such occasions allow one the opportunity to reabsorb ideas into his intellectual construction with a new depth: what might otherwise be drivel becomes enlightened, until finally truly understood. I often told myself: "Never forget that repetition is not mechanical – to the contrary, it is to go further into thought." This goes for the repeats in music as well.

Emile's mother, Boulanger and Menuhin

As for the members of Nadia Boulanger's entourage who were still alive during my time with her, many of whom I have already addressed at length (including in the previous question), I would like to reiterate the great attachment that she felt towards Yehudi Menuhin and his post-prodigy experience of self-reconstruction. She maintained constant communication with him, even giving classes at his music school near London.

The biggest impediment in her continuing relationship with her students was that so many of her elite students' spouses – Blanche Françaix, Diana Menuhin – were a bit jealous of the sway that Mademoiselle Boulanger exerted over their husbands. An extension of this was the fact that a pupil like Jeremy Menuhin or Oleg Markevitch had been almost predestined to study with her – a decision that was, frankly, more a product of filial obligation or family ritual than the child's choice. I can remember, for example, a teenaged Oleg being notably unenthusiastic during Mademoiselle Dieudonné's mandatory solfège dictations, while for me each crumb was like manna.

And yet I understand that we came from very different places. We both loved and admired our parents, but while the worldwide fame of their fathers inevitably cast a shadow over Jeremy and Oleg, my dad's reputation, though immense in the Bulgarian medical community, was not really a

burden for me (it was, however, something of an onus for my brilliant half-brother Nikolay, now a professor of medicine in Sofia, during his student years).

Regardless of the pressure that the situation may have put on her "grand-students," the load remained even heavier for their fathers. At the end of a concert he gave with his son Jeremy at the Polignac Foundation, Lord Menuhin asked Mademoiselle Boulanger, "Do you think that Jeremy has made progress?," to which he received the surprising retort: "Yes, he has, but not you…" He was by then a grown man, mature in his artistry – but she always believed that he could do better. In her eyes, everyone was a youngster. She often spoke of Rubinstein, whose pianism she admired (if not his hedonistic lifestyle), in terms that stressed how much younger he was than her, though he was in fact several months older. It was as if she was in another temporal dimension – a dichotomy which was reflected in her use of terms of endearment that often led to an unconsciously distorted chronology.

Of the other students who remained a part of Mademoiselle Boulanger's circle, some of her favorites were those who represented her link with America (where her former students *en masse* comprised the so-called "Boulangerie"). Copland had been one of the first; when he returned to his country, he developed into the father of American music, a sort of musical root for all American musicians, both in terms of style, and the folkloric and mythological inspirations which his music so strikingly evokes (Nadia Boulanger later helped sponsor his *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra*, for which she also played the organ part in the premiere). One of the first things he said to me at our initial meeting was, "Young man, melody is dead!" This provocative statement came to me at a time when I didn't know his music well enough to see the irony in such an utterance coming from this supreme melodist. He later recounted to me that as soon as he arrived in France in 1921, he sought out a library to research whether any great composer had been taught by a woman. Not finding any such example in the musical dictionary he was leafing through, he became determined to become the first (one must properly situate this anecdote: in 1921, Fauré, Saint-Saens, Ravel, d'Indy, and Widor were all still alive and well…).

Leonard Bernstein, Malcolm Singer and Emile

It was, thus, a logical progression for Copland's student Bernstein to also go to her once he had made his way across the Atlantic – at which point he, too, would encounter her stunning perspicacity. In Bruno Monsaingeon's film documentary *Mademoiselle*, Bernstein brilliantly describes one occasion in which he met with this acumen firsthand. He had played for her an excerpt from *Songfest*, a work he wrote for the bicentenary of the United States; one hears a B-flat in the right hand before it arrives in the left hand (in the orchestrated version, it is played pizzicato by the basses). She stopped him and said, "You must find another note than one you have already introduced in the right hand." She would not say which one, nor offer a suggestion: a true pedagogue, she simply indicated that there was a gap in the progression – from which came its gaucheness – and then he, the student, was utterly free to modify it or not as he saw fit.

Mademoiselle was blessed with a visionary gift: as soon as she opened a score, she could detect any weaknesses that might interfere with the composer's intentions. This is not to say that she then imposed her own predilections – simply that she could locate the inadequacies like a sage doctor who, upon opening the body, sees immediately what is in need of repair. She was able to find shortcomings without distorting the style: hers was a flawless intuition which guaranteed a sound and absolute appreciation from her students. The vigilance which Bernstein observed remained with her all her life.

As for Bernstein's excesses, Mademoiselle Boulanger was both amused and outraged by them: his flamboyant personality; his humanity, at the same time both profound and eccentrically exceptional; his heart-on-sleeve way of living; his ardor. She managed his elaborate displays with a remarkable sense of humor, something that one might not expect from such an austere woman. I remember him crying theatrically in her arms as she bestowed on him the coveted Legion of Honor, on behalf of the French government; she responded simply: "Compose yourself, old chap!"

Her strict behavior and reluctance to share personal memories guaranteed that some would find her aloof, but those individuals never saw her surges of Slavic tenderness. She was a whole which could not be dissected: "enthusiasm and rigor," as Valéry said, to which might be added Stravinsky's appraisal – "She hears everything" (Она все слышит). These were all undeniable facets of her character, and I hasten to add to them that she was, above all, open to others: she listened to all points of view, and, as she had the years behind her to promulgate truths with that strong intuition that I have noted time and again, she could then not only advise students on their works, but also on their lives if she felt there was some aspect that invited guidance. If, for example, she felt that one was wasting time by pursuing a performing career, she would urge him in other directions – always doing so with an air of decency rather than one of cruelty.

If she was going to be respected and not despised for what she said, it was necessary that she have great moral authority – even if her judgments were a double-edged sword for those of a weak constitution. But then, her students didn't go to her for empty flattery: we were trying to find our way, and she illuminated the steps of our paths as with a flashlight. Sometimes this even meant counseling a pupil in how to serve music outside of actually doing it. In this way, she encouraged the French philanthropist Armand Marquiset, who had come to study composition with her, to establish foundations like *Pour Que l'Esprit Vive* [That the Spirit May Live] and *Petits frères des pauvres* [Little Brothers of the Poor]. On the flipside of the coin, she regretted that Markevitch, who like Bernstein was extremely busy as a conductor, had all but given up composition – just as Fauré had regretted that she had done so (and as she feared I would do in turn).

Back in the day when having Mademoiselle Boulanger in your circle of friends was a status symbol, the gossips had labeled her the "little sister of the rich." In terms of influence on Parisian musical life, she was the *éminence grise* of the Princess of Polignac (commissions, premieres – the things that

led to the adage that playing at the Polignac home was the true gauge of one's career). Nadia Boulanger knew how to endear herself to wealthy patrons and, in so doing, profit both her dear Stravinsky and pupils like Markevitch and Françaix.

Her goal was, of course, not merely high-society for its own sake, but what she could do for music, whether it be new or canonic: there were commissions for her students, the recording of works by Monteverdi which she had salvaged from oblivion and performed with her vocal ensemble (under the sponsorship of Countess Marie-Blanche de Polignac, an enlightened amateur and herself a musician of talent), and concerts at the Cercle Interallié[71] between the wars – to name but a few instances.

Her role in France's musical and artistic culture from 1919 to 1939 was massive, and though its prominence abated somewhat after 1945, she nonetheless always retained what I would call an air of royalty, with, for example, Annette Dieudonné courageously and devotedly keeping the apartment at Rue Ballu from expropriation or requisition during the German occupation until Mademoiselle Boulanger returned from her exile in America – this despite Stravinsky's hope that she would remain there…

She had been particularly close to him after the death of his first wife, Catherine, and had joined him in the United States during World War II. There she conducted the premiere of his *Dumbarton Oaks* concerto, a landmark premiere for him in the New World, and a work she had commissioned on behalf of the Bliss family, who offered the composer a handsome sum for six concertante pieces in the spirit of Bach's Six Brandenburg Concerti (being rather poor at the time, Stravinsky made sure to market himself as a composer of a certain rank, and therefore raised his commission price so as not to appear second-rate; as a result, he only wrote one concerto in return for the amount offered by the Bliss family).

Mademoiselle Boulanger became so affiliated with such eminently neo-classical works as *Dumbarton Oaks* – a style which Boulez mockingly compared to Greek columns made of plastic – that when she died, one German newspaper reported it with the headline: "Death of the Mother of Neoclassicism." This illustrated all too well the reductive and clichéd view that some held of her (this neoclassical aesthetic, to which she was so attached, was in fact not too far removed from the neo-Gregorianism of Fauré).

After the horrors that climaxed in the First World War – and the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which signaled the collapse of Europe's long-established (and imposed) order – composers began to import new logics into their music: the dodecaphonic research of the second Viennese

[71] Also known as the Cercle de L'Union Interalliée, 33 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, the Cercle Interallié was a social club founded in 1917 to provide spiritual and material resources to members of the Allied nations upon the entry of the United States into World War I.

school (Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg), the whole-tone scales of Debussy, and musical explorations inspired by the Middle East and other even more exotic locales (as is evident in Messiaen).

But Mademoiselle Boulanger routinely stressed that, despite the musical and worldly upheaval of the two wars, tonality had survived – if with different casings or adaptations, as she liked to say. She pointed out, for example, that if one removed the tonal alterations to the circle of fifths in the Forlane of Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin,* the result would be a harmonic course identical to that of the long subject in Bach's organ fugue in D major.

Emile visiting Chopin's grave at Père-Lachaise

She stressed that Chopin, Schumann, Schubert, and so many others, had composed within the tonal system, using the same fundamental tools as Bach – albeit infused with their own personalities – without being suffocated by its limitations. In a time like the twentieth century – a period of doubt, of change, of the collapse of values and the end of an order, of rejection after decadence – one is prone to give up intellectually, and resort to creating artificial worlds in which to satisfy a de-hierarchical urge (whether through atonality, serialism or micro-tonality). For some, these intellectual approaches imploded on their creators yet again, whereas tonality continues to have – for those with the audacity of a sufficiently strong personality – the power to help one cast himself in color against the grayness of others: its versatility affords it a unique advantage in self- (and sometimes ethnic) expression.

Mademoiselle did not believe in diktats, but rather in an honest response to oneself and the needs that long to be expressed. If those needs demand a new structure to exist and function, then so be it. But if they accord with an already extant one, then there is no need to reject it – one may instead merely adapt it to his language. As a result, there is a plethora of distinct and individual styles built on the common tonal premise of "tension & release," as founded on the tritone (which is, in fact, the cornerstone of Western music, though frequently decorated by various regional modal contributions).

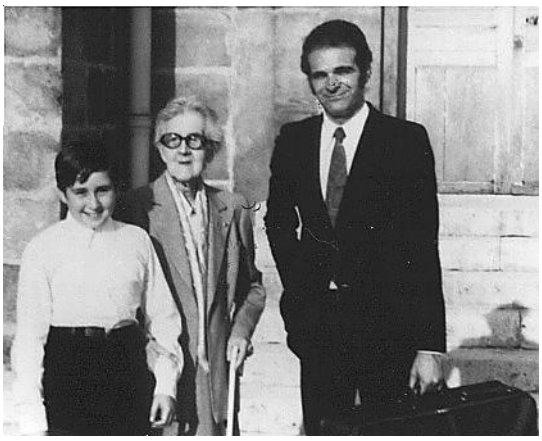
She would give examples of chronological stylistic collisions, such as that between Brahms and Debussy, who had already completed his *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* [Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun] by the time the aging Brahms came to compose his late piano intermezzi (Op. 116-9). Were they ignorant of one another? Probably not, especially if one gives credence to the story that Debussy was dismissed by Brahms's chambermaid in Vienna on the discriminating grounds that her master would neither entertain nor acknowledge a French composer… (the usual clichés and blind nationalism which perpetuate misunderstandings and keep mental wars alive; whether the product of a profound or frivolous mind, such tempers are the sort of caricatures which continue to dehumanize humanity by belittling those that are different). The music of Fauré transcended all that, because he was more than a French musician: he was a truly Gregorian one – that is, reaching back beyond the classical era to a sort of pan-cultural Western expression.

Stravinsky likewise found a response to his artistic urges by turning to earlier forms – in his case primarily from the Baroque era – and then transforming them through his genius (cynics such as Bulgarian composer Pancho Vladiguerov said it was just Bach with wrong notes). Mademoiselle always referenced Stravinsky's ability to continually surprise his public by composing something radically different in the wake of a spectacular success like *The Rite of Spring* or *Petrushka* – he remained true to himself, but challenged his creative bounds in practically every piece, which brought him by turns to jazz, neoclassicism, even serialism. Mademoiselle Boulanger was certainly more sincere when professing her admiration of his neoclassical compositions than when doing so with regard to his serial works, though, truth be told, she really did love all of him… Above all, I believe, she admired the fact that he was able to stay profoundly Russian despite all his musical peregrinations: it must have reminded her of her family days at the Maisonnettes. (In light of this sense of artistic community, it is perhaps fitting that during the Second World War, Stravinsky, Mademoiselle Boulanger, Schoenberg, Rachmaninoff, Milhaud, and Hindemith all lived within a few miles of one another in California.)

And yet, for all her relentless promotion of his music, Stravinsky never really reciprocated with the same sort of gratitude. While his admiration was surely diluted by the cultural misogyny of the day, I also can't help but think that her intellectual lightning must have intimidated, even overwhelmed, him. Or perhaps he was just too distracted arranging assignations with his mistress (and eventual second wife). If he had instead asked Nadia Boulanger to be his bride after his first wife's death, I suspect that she would have remained in the United States with him after the war. But enough of this historical fiction and daydreaming…

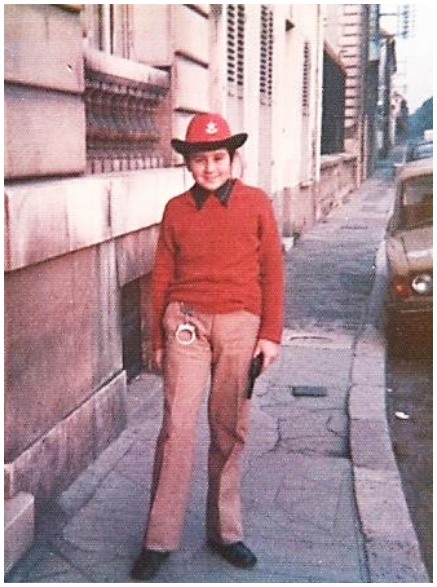
CHAPTER VII – FONTAINEBLEAU

1) There is a photo of you at Fontainebleau with Nadia Boulanger and Patrice Fontanarosa, who likes to recount that immediately after the picture was taken, you put on a cowboy hat and began fidgeting with some toy revolvers. Did you miss having more playtime during your childhood?



First of all, you can't really compare my childhood with that of most children.

Child prodigies are often viewed rather pedantically – a perspective which was exemplified in a French television program made during my childhood, in which music critic Bernard Gavoty investigated the topic of child prodigies by way of several current examples, myself included. Professor Albert Jacquard, a prominent geneticist of the time, was brought in to comment, and argued that prodigies are essentially defective creatures, monsters as interesting to study anthropologically as mentally-challenged children: these are the two ends of the spectrum of exceptional children, he claimed, each handicapped by the uniqueness of their mental faculties – either too precocious or insufficient by society's standards, as the case may be (luckily, when one *is* a prodigy, it doesn't extend into all avenues of life…).



I can think of certain prodigies whose childhoods were not as fortunate as mine, because they were surrounded by people of low character, people who didn't respect these children and had no reservations about taking advantage of them – this in spite of the fact that such children often valorize the adults around them. In these instances, the parents are as liable to exacerbate things as they are to overprotect.

In sports, there is a sort of "return on investment" effect, in which a coach puts himself in the mindset of the youth; the young person then adopts this persona through a sort of psychological exchange, with the coach's instructions being transplanted into his psyche quasi-scientifically. The athlete-in-training can then mechanically reproduce the coach's instructions in his head, hearing his mentor's voice repeat the mantras of their training – this despite the fact that the vulnerable and powerful human intellect is an aphrodisiac which must be subtly managed, and can only develop at its own pace. I was spared such mental mind-games by having always needed, as a composer, to maintain an intense and secure inner life, undeceived by wild dreams. Without such an interior guardrail, a talented child is prone to smash his wings through his own prodigious mechanics, like a wave on a cliff.

As for the photograph, Patrice has reminded me many times over the years of this episode, enthusiastically recalling his experience of playing Bach and Mozart sonatas with a kid in a cowboy

suit. Mademoiselle Boulanger never sought to curb my childish fervor, and, like all children, I enjoyed playing dress-up, except that I often had to break off my role-playing in order to resume playing the part of myself (all the world's a stage…). A healthy education assured that I didn't confuse the two *dramatis personæ* – the playful child and the (sonata-)playing child, as it were – when it came time to rehearse with Patrice.

When Mademoiselle first invited him to play with me, he was the main up-and-coming violinist of his generation. He was young and handsome, and came from a family of remarkable painters (and exceptionally musical siblings), which meant that he didn't feel the need to showboat. He often humorously recounts how he felt as if he had aged dramatically on the first day that we played together, because up to that point he had been the youth on the rise, the darling of promoters and impresarios – and now he found himself assisting in my development. Since then, he has premiered various works for me, including my elegiac concerto *In Memoriam Nadia Boulanger*, and we have undertaken many other projects together, not least of which was a recording of the Brahms sonatas.

Patrice has also come to coach the students at my summer Academy at Rangiport numerous times, and on one such occasion, I had the good fortune to introduce him to Jean-Frédéric Neuburger, who was about ten years old at the time and had just composed a violin concerto. Patrice was gracious enough to read through it with the composer at the piano – a deeply touching moment, and one in which I was acutely aware of the generational wheel turning: as Enescu had done for Menuhin and Menuhin for me, so was Patrice now doing for Jean-Frédéric. A particularly memorable part of that meeting was when Patrice delicately pointed out a passage that did not sit well on the instrument, something entirely natural in the music of so young and inexperienced a composer. Jean-Frédéric responded that he would change nothing, even insisting that such technical challenges would serve to help Patrice improve as a violinist. I was stupefied by this remark, because if it had been me in his position at his age, I would have acknowledged this advice with appreciation, in part because my parents would have insisted on true respect and general politeness, and left no doubt in my mind as to who Patrice Fontanarosa was, or the importance of his input – but personalities assert themselves differently…

In any case, getting back to the initial question, other than those occasional moments such as the one Patrice witnessed in Fontainebleau and likes so much to recall, I didn't really have time devoted specifically to playing – but to be honest, I didn't particularly feel the need to counterbalance my

studies with childhood games (I didn't even really view myself as a child, for that matter). I had a better time constructing invertible counterpoint than mountains out of Legos, though this was a pastime I also enjoyed well enough. As to my schooling – musical or otherwise – neither my parents nor Mademoiselle Boulanger ever had to appeal to my creative side or my work ethic. I think this is due in no small degree to the fact that from the beginning, I understood my good fortune at being able to do what I loved. I was an obedient and grateful child, with a prematurely astute sense of responsibility towards my scholastic and professional obligations, as well as towards my family.

Another aspect of all this was that I never felt the need to take time off or relax, since I never felt tense or overworked; I was happy in my own inner world. True, not having any friends my age to share in my games only perpetuated this condition, but the fundamental matter was that I didn't need distractions because I was conscious of living a life of great opportunity. I was fortunate to be sheltered from the culture of consumption in which most individuals function, abiding through the daily frustrations of their work to afford themselves some modicum of leisure, laboring in a joyless job just to earn some free time that they can then go about wasting. From the moment that I was able to devote myself to music, I never craved free time. I have often been asked by taxi drivers on the way back to the airport after a concert, "What do you do besides music?" I am fully aware that to live by studying and playing music is a rich privilege. So when my father would write to me and broach the topic of some sort of vacation from my studies, I never quite understood, because for me there was no clear line between work and vacation – I took pleasure in my vocation.

Emile and his father in front of the Château de Fontainebleau

And Fontainebleau in summer was something more than just leisure – it was the very essence of joy. In addition to the many Rue Ballu regulars who attended, I made the acquaintance of students from other backgrounds, as well as the musicians who had been invited to give masterclasses (notably Gérard Souzay, whose smooth voice I drank in with ever-renewed enchantment in the Salle des Colonnes). It was a hive where one could compose, do homework, develop ideas, and sing Bach cantatas. It had the feel of an intense musical retreat, and it is this atmosphere that I have tried to recreate at my summer Academy at the Château de Rangiport – not only out of nostalgia, but through an overwhelming sense that it is vital to pass on such experiences (this is at the heart of why, after the first Academy, I exclaimed, "It works, it really works! She's alive!").

During a class at Fontainebleau

I honestly never tried to show off, but because I was only a child, the ease with which music came to me resulted in a state of affairs which perhaps irritated some of my colleagues. Mademoiselle Boulanger undoubtedly recognized that I was in the

same situation as she had been in as a child, while studying with Fauré, and so she was able to find a solution that was logical, elegant, and effective. Both she and my parents repeatedly urged me to not view myself as a prodigy, but rather as someone consumed by wonder in the presence of music, a mindset that led me to take joy in doing complicated exercises to meet my own creative needs. I am convinced that part of the reason why Mademoiselle Boulanger spoke so insistently to me about humility was because she began nearly every class by saying, "Emile at the piano"; she needed to make sure that this kind of attention didn't go to my head. Likewise, she forbade me from answering her questions in class, because I was so immersed in her teaching that I could almost always respond before anyone else, which would have risked alienating others and creating a climate wherein they might lose interest. As a result of these strategies, many of my fellow students, whom I admired for their own individual talents, ended up showing me respect rather than annoyance. (It was for similar reasons that, when I *was* allowed to give concerts, she prohibited the promoters from making any mention of my age, and when interviewers asked her about me – for example, in the newspaper *La République de Seine et Marne* [The Republic of Seine and Marne] – she answered through comparison to Plato and Boulez: that is, by evaluating my intelligence rather than my precociousness, a kind of appraisal which she found reductive.)

Emile conducting in the Jeu de Paume

In addition to our more conventional lessons, Mademoiselle Boulanger found a way to use the architectural idiosyncrasies of Fontainebleau as a tool for instruction that was as practical as it was musical. I accompanied her to multiple concerts at the Salle de Jeu de Paume[72] at Fontainebleau, the exit of which has high, steep stone steps and a handrail of somewhat thin iron; she would never use the rail, and when I offered her my hand for assistance, she would decline: "At my age, it is best to lead with the shoulders and ignore the feet." It was yet another linear image, akin to what she cultivated in listening, advocated in performance, and, above all, instilled in composition through the creation of successive horizontal lines, superimposed but independent, each advancing by its own internal pulses and motivations.

She elaborated as such: "I want to get from one point to another: you see how I use my shoulders – although I am very old, I will get there by using them…" and she would vaporously throw herself forward. You couldn't see her feet, because her long grey tube skirts fell to the base of her ankles, almost covering her shoes, which were of the same color and which failed to convey any especially aesthetic effect, despite having been tailor-made for her in England (some students called them – a little nastily – her "violin cases," per the example of Madame Orsini-Ferenczi, who, like a typical subordinate, never showed how much she admired her genius employer).

[72] The Salle de Jeu de Paume is the hall where Jeu de Paume – a sport similar to tennis, though in which the players initially used the palm of their hand rather than a racket – was played. As it was a favorite game of Kings François I and Henri IV, many French palaces of the era had a court installed. When the Château de Fontainebleau became the home of the Conservatoire américain in 1921, this space was converted into a concert hall. In 1990, however, it was restored to its original function, and today it regularly hosts various international tournaments.

Annette Dieudonné, Emile, Nadia Boulanger and Clifford Curzon in the courtyard of the Château de Fontainebleau

Mademoiselle Boulanger's commitment to this uniform-like ensemble was unwavering: a simple blouse of immaculate white; a grey vest, matching her skirt; a rather bright bejeweled broach pinned in front of her neck; her white hair tied up in a bun; and, perhaps most conspicuously, her glasses, which got thicker and thicker, and were also perfectly useless, as the light bothered her so much that wearing such magnifying glasses didn't really serve any function – nor did she need them: she no longer read scores, knowing all the music that mattered to her by heart, and could improvise to give examples to her liking during class or to nourish her musical needs, feeling the keys without needing to see them and playing with such surety of fingers that one might be forgiven if he thought that there were magnets on their tips.

Fontainebleau was a place where such predictability was juxtaposed with the magical. It was like a musical Disneyland, an enchanted park where one's sole function was to absorb knowledge from Mademoiselle Boulanger – to analyze, sight-read, and engage with the most mesmerizing people in a setting that was beyond compare (i.e. the famous Louis XV wing of the palace: classes were given in the salons, and practice pianos were provided in the attic garrets). Moreover, there was no transportation issues to worry about, and so none of the odious lapses they occasioned between all my fascinating experiences. I hated the public transportation in Paris – those endless machines that ran ceaselessly in the gray, the cold, the rain, and which were soaked in a stink that put me to sleep. In Fontainebleau, such vehicles were unnecessary. My mother bought me a piece of rolling luggage so I wouldn't have to carry all my heavy scores – Princess Irène would laugh at the racket it made on the cobblestones of the Cour des Adieux,[73] as I ran from place to place (I never wanted to be late… and I was a child with a child's energy).

Emile and Princess Irène on the cobblestones

One particularly memorable occasion was during the summer of 1977. Marion Tournon-Branly, who directed the École des Beaux-Arts (School of Fine Arts) division of the École Américaine of Fontainebleau, was secretly organizing a dreamily extravagant ninetieth-birthday celebration for Mademoiselle in the spirit of the Sun King. Built around the idyllic framework of the carp pond, her plan was to transport a piano by helicopter to the little pavilion in the center of the pool; on the night of the party, Mademoiselle Boulanger and I would take a boat to the gazebo-like edifice where, in private, I would play for her a piano work I had written for the occasion. But this proved too impractical a project (not least because of Mademoiselle's increasingly frail condition).

[73] The Farewell Court, where Napoleon abdicated in 1814.

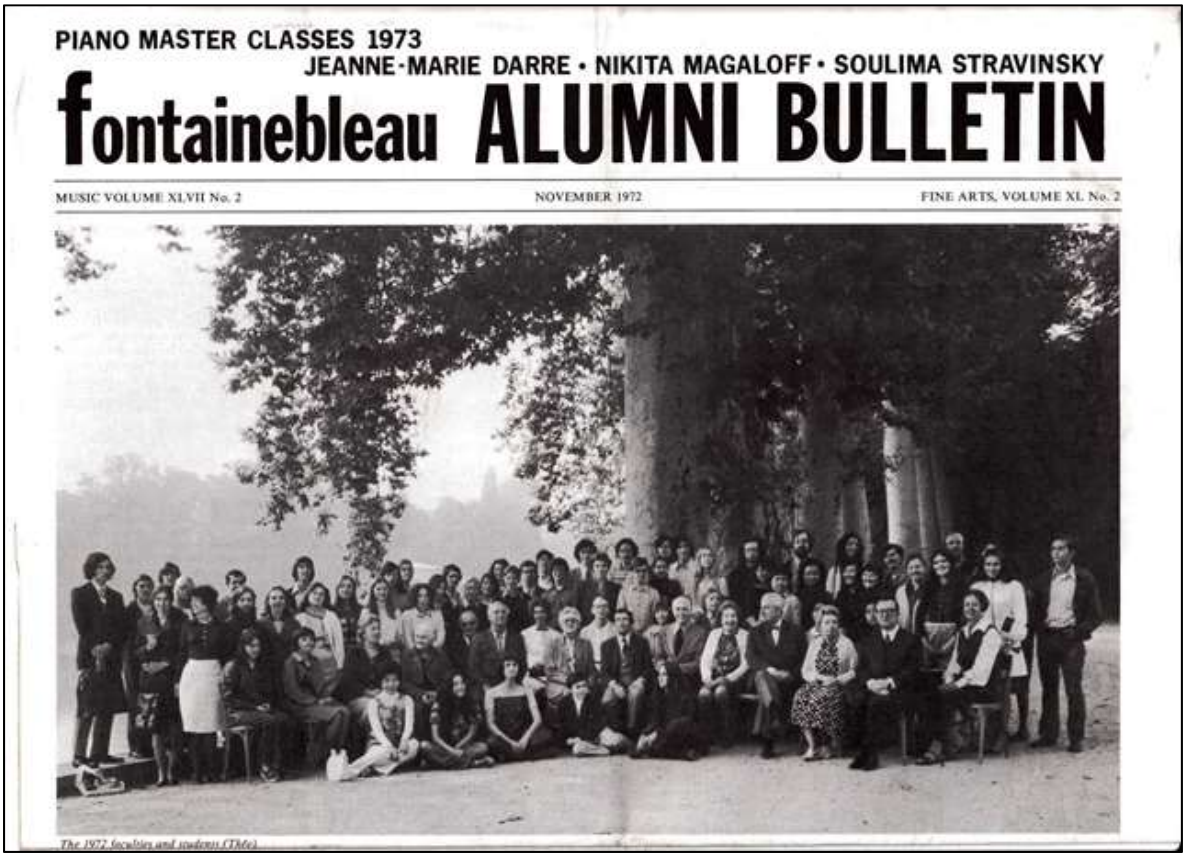
So instead of such elaborate proceedings, Marion amended her original design to accommodate the more limited means at hand – and was still able to create an atmosphere bathed in inspiring, evocative illusion. Mademoiselle stood with everyone else at the edge of the pond, in the English garden beside the Louis XV wing (where the École Américaine has been headquartered since 1921). Ninety candles were lit and placed in containers which allowed them to oscillate freely on the surface of the water. I had suggested that a solo violin piece might be a more pragmatic venture, and composed a sonata in G minor for Stefan Stalanowsky, an artist in residence at Fontainebleau that summer; he stood outside the pavilion, with the intention of using the water's surface to help carry the sound of the violin to the audience on the bank. It was an enduring memory, a mystical moment in the embrace of the natural elements: the wood of the violin, and water as its buoyant carrier…

I stood beside Stefan, holding the stand, which the wind continually threatened to blow over, and giving performance instructions on the piece, which we had not had enough time to properly prepare. As it turned out, the water proved to be a conductor not only of the sounds of his violin, but also of my voice, and I found out afterwards that Mademoiselle Boulanger later asked Stefan to come back to her apartment in the château by himself and play it for her again, this time without distractions: "Emile was talking the whole time!"

Not long after her death, I began composing a *Sacred Concerto* for piano and choir in the same mystical spirit of that beautiful night in Fontainebleau. A religious yet concertante work, it was conceived as a Requiem Mass in Latin, with the piano acting as an Orthodox element in the texture, commenting on and amplifying the text, all the while evoking Slavic church bells.[74] It was thus an attempt to ally the two dominant aspects of my life – East and West.

[74] The score has been lost. The *Concerto Sacré* that was ultimately completed (see Chapter I) is a distinct work, and employs the Ordinary text of the Mass, rather than that Proper to the funeral rite.

Fontainebleau class of 1973



PIANO MASTER CLASSES 1973

JEANNE-MARIE DARRE • NIKITA MAGALOFF • SOULIMA STRAVINSKY

fontainebleau ALUMNI BULLETIN

MUSIC VOLUME XLVII No. 2 NOVEMBER 1972 FINE ARTS, VOLUME XL No. 2

The 1972 faculties and students (Théo)

CHAPTER VIII – PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH NADIA BOULANGER

1) Setting aside the deep esteem that she had for your musical gifts, Nadia Boulanger bore you an immense personal affection. How did this express itself? And were you aware of it?

I think that my relationship with Nadia Boulanger rested first and foremost on her reverence for God and the gift that He had given me, and on her awareness of being involved in shaping an emerging personality (rather than constructing a clone of herself). She was far from being a mother-hen (such a description would more aptly portray Lélia Gousseau at the Conservatory); instead, she liked her students to contradict her and defend their position through cogent argument – in this way, they could learn to respect and disagree at the same time. Asking a student to devise several versions of the same exercise – as opposed to asking for a single solution, correcting it in front of him, and then having him bring it back reworked at the next lesson – is a pedagogical philosophy based on allowing as much time as is necessary to really grasp a concept: it is a long-term strategy, and significantly more effective at producing work of intrinsic quality than more-expedient alternatives generally are.

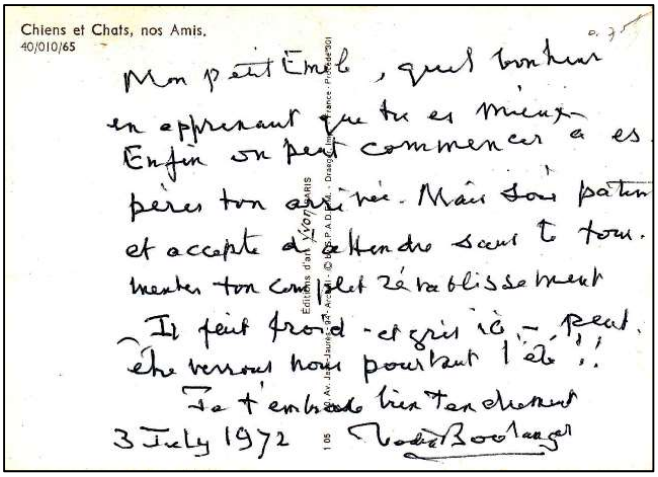
On a personal level, she demonstrated her affection for me in the same way that I suspect it must have been shown to her as a child: through great demands punctuated with flashes of tenderness. What she said to me on the day after the premiere of my first concerto, which I have already related, was typical: "I hope that you know that you had nothing to do with it…"

At the same time, she asked me to bring toys to play with after my lessons, most notably a little battery-powered remote-control dog that my father had sent to me from West Berlin, which we named 'Toby' (this was in part related to the fact that I could not have a pet in our tiny apartment). Mademoiselle loved that I would sometimes leave him at her home, and she suggested that we take turns looking after him (eventually, he made his permanent residence at Rue Ballu – where he remained until her death). When it was my turn to bring him home, she would ask the next day, "Did he not ask to come back to my house?"

Toby

She was fascinated by a model train store called 'Le Pullman,' Rue d'Amsterdam (near Place Clichy), and would take me there to see the trains, sometimes even offering to buy me one. I think that in her eyes, this was the quintessential little boy's toy, and I found it extremely kind of her to occupy her time with such matters.

She did little things like that from time to time… Were they to reassure her that she wasn't turning me into an erudite monster? Or did they stem from a maternal instinct that she was never able to truly realize in a life where, other than her godchildren, she had never really had close contact with children? In any case, such impulses of tenderness were indeed there, though never sugary-sweet. The warmth she showed to my little dog surprised me, and after her death, Mademoiselle Dieudonné told me that Toby had been one of Mademoiselle Boulanger's favorite things.


Chiens et Chats, nos Amis.
40/010/65

Mon petit Emilk, quel bonheur
en apprenant que tu es mieux.
Enfin on peut commencer à es-
pérer ton arrivée. Mais sois patien
et accepte de bien rendre soin à ton
maître ton complet rétablissement
— Il fait froid et gris ici, — peut-
être verrons nous pourtant l'été !!
Je t'embrasse bien tendrement
3 July 1972 Nadia Boulanger

She also expressed her affection through cards – as was the custom at the time – and she often sent notes telling me how a work, or even an exercise, had intrigued or impressed her. There were, of course, cards for major occasions, as well – always handwritten, which was the biggest sign of her love, because in doing so she had battled her poor eye-sight and her trembling hand.

Every year, she threw a birthday party for me, for which I was obliged to compose new pieces that my colleagues (most of them older than me) would premiere that evening. It was a heartwarming responsibility to provide music for that tender shared moment, as we gathered around a generous cake with an ever-increasing number of candles on it.

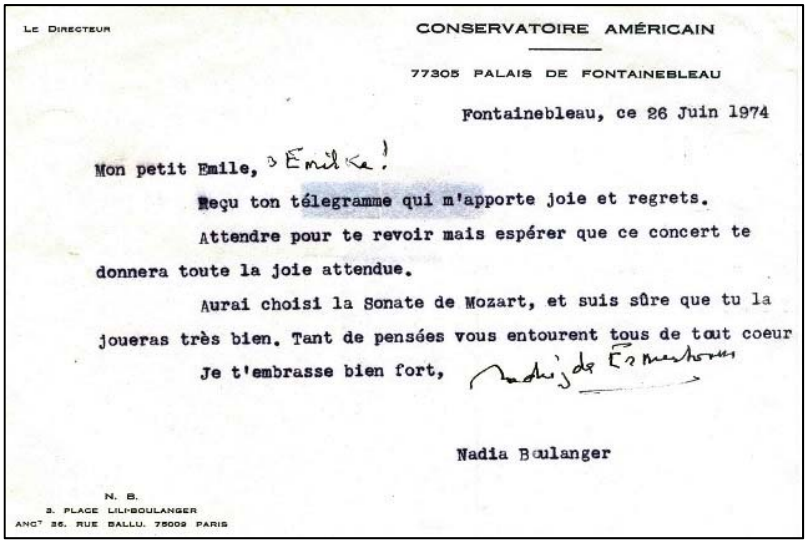
During the first year of my studies with her, when my mother and I still didn't really know anyone in Paris, I caught a nasty case of pneumonia. Mademoiselle arranged a house-call from the most renowned pediatrician in France, Daniel Alagille,[75] who wrote anonymously of our encounter in his book *L'enfant messager: souvenirs d'enfances* [The Messenger Child: Memories of Childhood] – assuring him that the costs would be covered. This is an extremely touching memory for me, and one with something of "Jean Valjean caring for Cosette" about it.


De
NADIA BOULANGER
pour les 18 ans
de son Emilka

Later, when she contacted Prof. Monod, head of the Pasteur Institute, in an attempt to secure a position for my father in France, it was because she felt that my mental equilibrium depended on it. She understood the toll that our trips to visit my father in Berlin took on me: traveling through the night in total discomfort, waiting at the border as we exited East Germany while customs officials brought out their enormous mirrors to check the underside of the train carriages for stowaways, sleeping curled up on my mother's knees, where I would cry so vehemently on the way back that I developed persistent inflammation around the eyes… And though her effort to gain my father employment in Paris was ultimately unsuccessful, it was nonetheless emblematic of an infinite degree of concern.

This great tenderness was, of course, reciprocated. When it was time for my lesson, she would call "Emilka!," and I would rush from the front room to hug her – it was an embrace both gentle and warm, though never easy, for not far behind her great kindness were stringent demands and deadly expectations. But as her admiration was never so extreme as to render her speechless, neither were her mandates ever nasty.

[75] Daniel Alagille (1925-2005) was an eminent pediatric hepatologist; Alagille Syndrome is named after him.



LE DIRECTEUR

CONSERVATOIRE AMÉRICAIN

77305 PALAIS DE FONTAINEBLEAU

Fontainebleau, ce 26 Juin 1974

Mon petit Emile, > Emilka !

Reçu ton télegramme qui m'apporte joie et regrets.

Attendre pour te revoir mais espérer que ce concert te donnera toute la joie attendue.

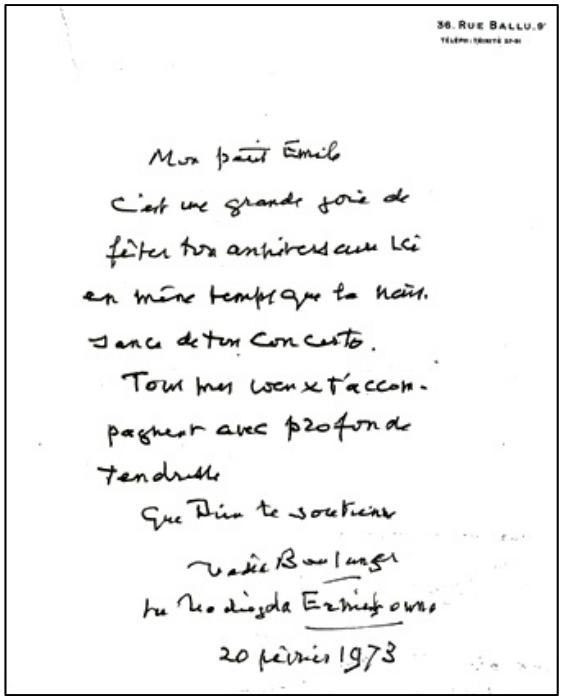
Aurai choisi la Sonate de Mozart, et suis sûre que tu la joueras très bien. Tant de pensées vous entourent tous de tout coeur

Je t'embrasse bien fort, Nadia de Ernestovna

Nadia Boulanger

N. B.
3, PLACE LILI-BOULANGER
ANCT 36, RUE BALLU, 75009 PARIS

This duality was very revealing, and it endured until the end. During her last summer at Fontainebleau, in 1979 – by which time I had become part of the furniture, so to speak – I went to see her after a recital I had given in the Salle de Jeu de Paume. She was by then too sick to move, and had stayed bedridden in her room during the performance. Upon my arrival, she asked Mademoiselle Armagnac to read to me a letter which she had dictated, but no longer had the strength to read aloud; it concluded, "As I softly pass away, I do not wish to leave without saying that I know you are aware of all that you owe to me, but know also that I owe you still more. Your, Nadiejda Ernestovna."



36, RUE BALLU, 9e

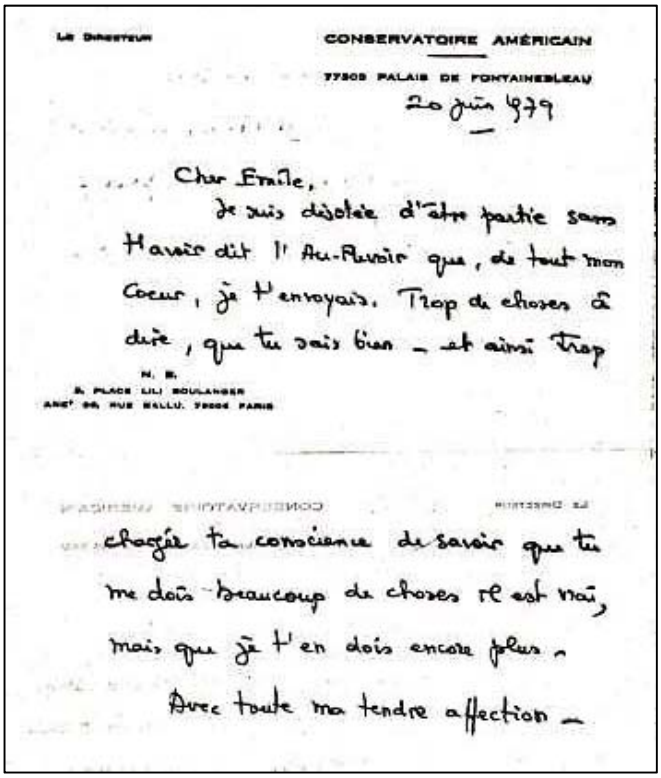
Mon petit Emile
C'est une grande joie de
fêter tes anniversaires ici
en même temps que ta nais.
dans de ton Concerto.
Tous mes vœux t'accom-
pagnent avec profonde
tendresse
Que Dieu te soutienne
Nadia Boulanger
tu Nadiejda Ernestovna
20 février 1973

As Mademoiselle Armagnac read, her eyes full of tears, Mademoiselle Boulanger lay silent, looking virtually unconscious. Having just finished performing and still running high on adrenaline, it took me a while to come to terms with the gravity of the moment, the sincere and moving importance of this letter of farewell, which she wanted so badly to deliver to me from the extreme limits of her consciousness.

It was something I didn't quite comprehend: she had always been there, self-perpetuating her own rites, increasingly aged and tired, for sure, but there nevertheless – and she could not disappear now. After Mademoiselle Armagnac finished reading, Mademoiselle Boulanger conjured up enough energy and awareness to say to me: "Eh! Well now, go eat your soup…" (At night we would all get soup – or "potage," as it was called – and a light dinner in a refectory on the other side of Rue Royale, a ritual of camaraderie that began many a friendship between students.)

I replied that I was not hungry in the least, and that I was happy and honored to be with her – though at the same time I felt a mounting fear (no doubt a consequence of my mother's stewardship) that I would not be able to express the extent to which I knew I was beholden to her, much less articulate my awareness of how privileged I felt to be there with her in her final days, having just heard her unbelievably generous testimonial. I tried to tell her, but she insisted: "No, no, no, it is very important that you get some nourishment – you must go eat your soup…," with the touching attention and sweetness of a grandmother.

I still cannot get over the fact that it was so important for her to say that she felt indebted to me… I hope I did indeed give her some refreshment, even hope, at the twilight of her teaching career – especially as by then we were almost at the end of the ten-year term that she herself had prescribed as the necessary span for me to receive the essentials of her art (never implying, of course, that my learning would be fully accomplished within that period).



LE DIRECTEUR

CONSERVATOIRE AMÉRICAIN

77305 PALAIS DE FONTAINEBLEAU

20 juin 1979

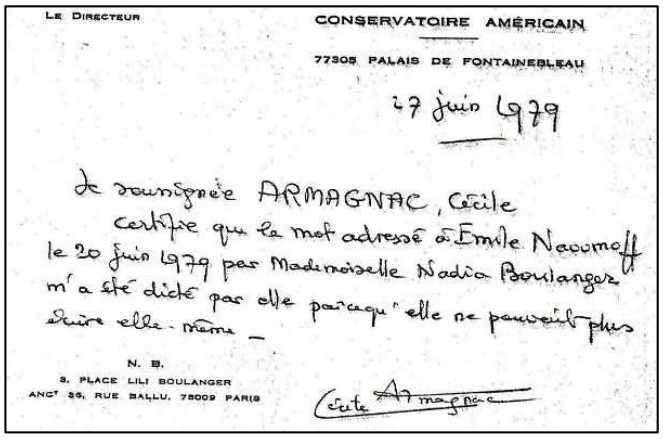
Cher Emile,

Je suis désolée d'être partie sans t'avoir dit l'Au-Revoir que, de tout mon Coeur, je t'envoyais. Trop de choses à dire, que tu sais bien – et ainsi trop

N. B.
3, PLACE LILI BOULANGER
ANCIENNE 36, RUE BALLU, 75009 PARIS

charge ta conscience de savoir que tu me dois beaucoup de choses et est moi, mais que je t'en dois encore plus.

Avec toute ma tendre affection –



LE DIRECTEUR

CONSERVATOIRE AMÉRICAIN

77305 PALAIS DE FONTAINEBLEAU

27 juin 1979

Je soussignée ARMAGNAC, Cécile

certifie que la mot adressé à Emile Naoumoff le 20 juin 1979 par Mademoiselle Nadia Boulanger m'a été dicté par elle parceque elle ne pouvait plus écrire elle-même –

N. B.
3, PLACE LILI BOULANGER
ANCIENNE 36, RUE BALLU, 75009 PARIS

Cécile Armagnac

Seeing her so depleted, I asked if I could be of some help, perhaps pick up some of her workload for her – but she thought I was too young to begin teaching, and felt that there was still much for her to clarify that summer. The irony is that the following year (1980), Narcis Bonet, a Catalan pupil of Nadia Boulanger who had been named director of the summer program at Fontainebleau, took advantage of my knowledge of the institution's workings, and asked me to take over most of Mademoiselle Boulanger's public classes (which she had always given in English, a language which Bonet did not speak at the time). Communications were not as immediate then as they are now, and some of the American students who came – in droves, as they had since Copland in 1921: students of students perpetuating the tradition of pilgrimage to this sanctuary to learn from the High Priestess herself – were shocked to find that she was not there.

And so I was thrust into teaching. I brought serious and intense joy to my responsibilities, a jubilant dedication which occupied and captivated me almost around the clock. I could, of course, never claim that I was continuing "her" classes, but I did approach them in her spirit – even if my lack of teaching experience rendered them somewhat awkward. I was barely eighteen years old – the same age Nadia Boulanger had been when she began her pedagogical career (she said *a propos* herself: "I have taught since 1904…").

She was, of course, irreplaceable, but the poor self-esteem of some board members nevertheless assured that there would be a lingering hostility toward any attempts to perpetuate her legacy. And so I found myself in a tricky position – a particularly poignant situation for me, because it was at the gates of an edifice which encapsulated the cultural heritage of my teacher. The fact that this pimply youth who was just starting a concert career was given such responsibilities at this most hallowed of

institutions certainly irritated a few individuals – not only because I was so young, but also because I perhaps too strongly resembled Mademoiselle Boulanger: in the ten years after her death, during which time I concentrated on building a performing career, her spirit continued to act as my guardian angel every step of the way.

Emile, Louise Talma and Narcis Bonet

My transition into teaching was further complicated by the fact that Mademoiselle Dieudonné, herself now well-advanced in years, had also given up her classes that same year – and so it befell on me to begin teaching theory and ear-training, as well (this included solfège, clef-reading, continuo playing, rhythmic and melodic dictation, keyboard harmony – the grammar of music). I had the enthusiasm of a young man yearning to clear ground, and already felt the urge to pass on the heritage I was steeped in – and yet it never ceased to amaze me that, thanks to Narcis Bonet's trust in me, I had inherited such great responsibilities in this holy place, and all so much earlier than I could ever have imagined.

When I went to see Mademoiselle Dieudonné before leaving for Fontainebleau that summer (1980), I asked if I could borrow her books on theory and musicianship skills, as my own scholastic studies in Paris did not allow me adequate time to prepare my own curriculum – something made all the more disconcerting because she and I had never focused on much other than rhythm (my perfect pitch meant we didn't need to spend too much time on melodic issues). Her classes at Fontainebleau, on the other hand, were designed to also develop pitch, and, as this had never been an issue for me, I was totally ignorant of how to teach it. When I inquired as to how she structured all this in her classes, she replied, "Oh! You'll figure it out. Play it by ear…"

I therefore threw myself into learning how to train others to take melodic dictation: by hearing intervals, by listening with respect to a fixed sound (that is, relative pitch) – all sorts of "crutches" which inevitably slow down the speed of pitch recognition. It didn't seem to take long for me to figure out how to convey to others the seeds of knowledge which Mademoiselle had sown in me – and I was delighted when my students began to show early signs of improvement.

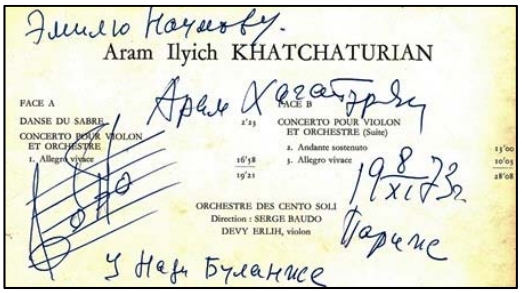
Those four years of teaching at Fontainebleau were important training for my current pedagogical responsibilities – and yet, the part of me that carried Nadia Boulanger's legacy, and the part in which my own, distinct spirit was beginning to emerge, remained blurred together. It was all still too close: I needed more distance to separate the two aspects, one from which I needed to diverge, and the other not yet adequately developed.

2) Nadia Boulanger said: "I need Emile to always be next to me…" What activities did you do with her other than those that were part of your musical tuition?

**Dinners on Wednesday evening? From what age?*

**"Distractions": The Louvre, the Orangerie Museum?*

To begin with, I didn't know that Mademoiselle Boulanger had said such a thing about me, though I am flattered and humbled to hear it. It explains, in part, the sentiments in her last letter to me, as I recounted above.


Aram Ilyich KHATCHATURIAN

FACE A
DANSE DU SABRE
CONCERTO POUR VIOLON ET ORCHESTRE
1. Allegro vivace

FACE B
CONCERTO POUR VIOLON ET ORCHESTRE (Suite)
2. Andante sostenuto
3. Allegro vivace

ORCHESTRE DES CENTO SOLI
Direction : SERGE BAUDO
DEVY ERLIH, violon

I was privileged to be invited to Wednesday dinners with Mademoiselle throughout the course of my studies with her, and have already made mention of the exceptional encounters I enjoyed during these occasions, whether musical (Richter, Bernstein, Khachaturian, Markevitch, Magaloff, Soulima Stravinsky) or otherwise (for example, the scientist Louis Leprince-Ringuet).

As for excursions, the Louvre was her destination of choice. I have spoken of the paintings by Louis Le Nain, particularly *Famille de paysans dans un intérieur* [Peasant Family in an Interior], in which Mademoiselle Boulanger delightfully found the contrast between the greyness of the painting's surface and the striking red of the wine glass to be a poignant analogue for one of the enharmonic modulations in Schubert's *Moments musicaux* – a work we were studying at the time.

Other "distractions" generally took the form of outings to rehearsals and recording sessions, very often of Markevitch and Bernstein, and concerts of artists like Rubinstein ("look at the white cuffs of his shirt sticking out from his coat – see how he plays without any excess movement?") or Barenboim ("notice how he conducts by using his shoulders…"). She found that Markevitch's conducting matched Slavic power with Cartesian intellect, thus combining and making sense of two aspects to which she found herself personally attracted – the overflowingly emotional Slav, as typified in the deepest utterances of Tchaikovsky (which served as the starting point for Markevitch's interpretations); and a relatively cerebral vision of music and the world, thus exemplifying the French mind at its best.


Le Nain's *Famille de paysans dans un intérieur*

And, of course, there were concerts. In my mind's eye, I can still see her entire "Musée Grévin"[76] – in no sense do I mean this pejoratively – gathered in the ground floor of the old Pleyel Hall, with its elaborate *corbeilles*…[77] After the performance, we would all adjourn to a reception at Rue Ballu, where the initiated flocked as to a sanctuary.

[76] The Musée Grévin is a wax museum in Paris; see my response to Chapter II, Question 2.

[77] *Corbeilles* are luxurious seating implements, common at the Bourbon court.

3) Nadia Boulanger was very much a believer, and you met some very religious people in her entourage (including Richter, who said one evening in a conversation with you that he had "seen God" while playing a passage in his recital).

**What did you deduce from her devotion, as far as music was concerned?*

**How did her piety influence your own attitude toward religion?*

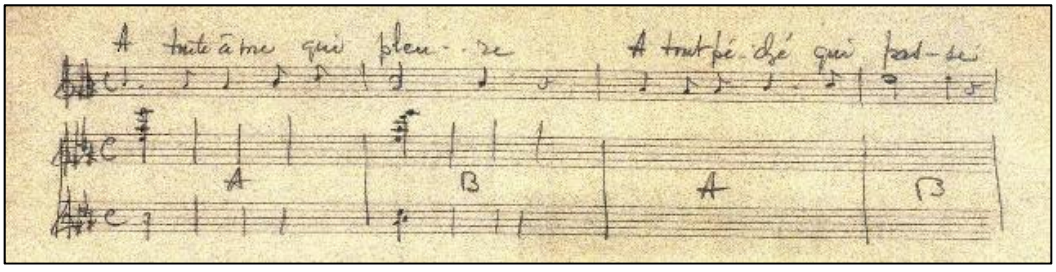
**Did she ever discuss this issue with you specifically?*

She, who could make all the fundamental elements of music work together so brilliantly from a technical point of view, never believed that therein lay an explanation as to why a piece of music is beautiful. Rather, she would speak of its soul, concluding, as I have already noted, that ultimately she did not know why it was beautiful, that the only explanation is God – that is to say, the creative force: the mystery. I continue to call upon this definition, not out of convenience, but from humility in its presence.

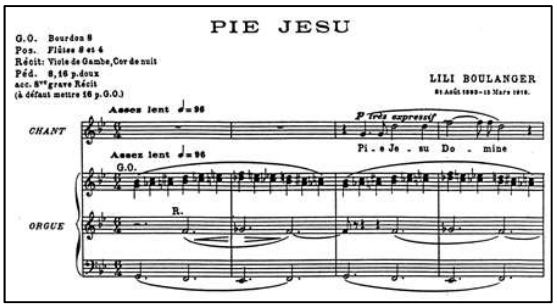
But, no, Mademoiselle Boulanger never openly spoke of religion with me, other than when discussing the intent behind words – which she did often. She regularly cited Shakespeare and his famous axiom: "Words without thoughts never to heaven go," applying this to the Lord's Prayer and saying that she strove to think of the meaning of each phrase every time she recited it.

She believed that if one took something like this prayer – literally the "daily bread" for someone of her faith – and repeated it mindlessly, then one never deepened himself on his journey, because the sense of the words is more important than the words themselves. From this belief came, on the one hand, her great tolerance for others, including her students (their musical idioms; their personalities; their aesthetics, even when contrary to hers – in short, an understanding which freed her from the prison of dogma when relating to others), and on the other a personal religiosity that was rigorous, strict, and almost confined by doctrine when applied to herself. I sincerely hope to have inherited this credo of intransigence towards myself and tolerance towards others – and yet the opposite is so much more convenient…

The quasi-religious way in which she honored the memory of her sister was articulated every year by a Mass on March 15 in memory of both Lili and her mother. This mourning was, I believe, of a fundamental importance in her life, though it didn't seem disturbingly morbid to me. I think that by the time I knew her, Mademoiselle had been freed of her survivor's guilt – and yet she never really gave up her sister's ghost, either: "I'm trying to remember what Lili was doing at your age" was something of a mantra during my lessons. I think this is another quality which I inherited from her, because I also feel that the dead have as powerful a presence as the living.



The opening of Nadia Boulanger's *Cantique*



There were, to be sure, moribund aspects of her commemoration – constantly re-decorating the many busts of her sister with fresh flowers (each mantelpiece in her apartment received similar treatment), donning a black armband for the duration of the month of March – but not so, I feel, the annual memorial Mass. This struck me as a healthy outlet for her tribute, because it allowed her students to become involved in her sister's music: we participated in performing Lili's *Pie Jesu*, and – extraordinarily, as she no longer promoted her own music – Mademoiselle's *Lux Aeterna*, an adaptation of an earlier work (a setting of Maeterlinck's "Cantique": "À toute âme qui pleure…" [To all weeping souls…]) done in response to Lili's final piece (which itself owes something to the same movement of Fauré's *Requiem*, though more somber and chromatic; it was dictated note-by-note to Nadia from her sister as she lay on her deathbed).[78]

These two emblematic works, beloved by the "Boulangerie" of the time, framed the *Ave verum corpus* of Byrd, who, with Tallis (especially his *O Nata Lux*), was so much at the heart of Nadia Boulanger's love of old polyphonic music; she had done a string quartet transcription of the *Ave verum* for this commemoration.

Emile conducting from the organ at the March 15 Mass

Conducting responsibilities for the Mass were divided between Mademoiselle and her students, with a rehearsal the day before in her apartment, accompanied by the Cavaillé-Coll organ. The next morning, the other necessary instruments were transported to the freezing Église de la Sainte-Trinité [Church of the Holy Trinity], where the musicians soon gathered: Fontanarosa, Charlier, and Régis Pasquier on the violin; Jean Reculard on cello; soprano Claudine Collard; Francis Pierre on the harp; and Jean-Jacques Painchaud and Dominique Merlet (among others) splitting organ duty. I carried on the tradition afterwards, sometimes even conducting from the organ – and always with the same selections, fixed in their allotted place within the liturgy, as immutably appointed by Mademoiselle Boulanger. In the last years of this memorial – a decade or so after her death – I introduced a meditation for string quartet which mirrored her arrangement of Byrd's *Ave verum*.

At the end of her life, she received a priest at her apartment every week for Mass. I was struck by how scrupulously she observed her faith (fish on Friday, etc.), and saw in this strict observance a little girl's devoutness where I had otherwise seen only the Grand Dame of music. She responded to Someone higher, and this outlook naturally instilled in me a sense of the sacred.

[78] Lili's *Pie Jesu* is for voice, string quartet, harp, and organ, and Nadia's *Lux Aeterna* for voice, violin, cello, harp, and organ; Mademoiselle Boulanger thus arranged her work for forces that would facilitate the performance of both pieces side-by-side at the same occasion (namely, the March 15 memorial).

Mademoiselle never spoke to us of her faith in a homiletic sense, but rather in a theological or metaphysical manner – and even then, principally as an aspect of the works we were studying in the Wednesday classes (which was almost a necessity when engaging with pieces like the Bach cantatas – which draw heavily from the Gospels – or Gregorian chant, or music of the Renaissance, so much of which emanated from the Church). She had students of all religious beliefs, but she always spoke of God in a sense that was applicable to all (this while having extremely focused personal beliefs).

Every summer in Fontainebleau, upon our arrival in July, we would begin preparing a cantata by Bach, with the goal of performing it at the Mass of St. Louis in late August, on the feast day of the patron saint of Fontainebleau.[79] We would meet each evening to rehearse and put it together under Mademoiselle's guidance – sessions which also doubled as a sort of preface to whatever social gatherings the night might hold (ping-pong, ice cream, etc.).

The year of Mademoiselle's ninetieth birthday (1977, the same summer as Marion Tournon-Branly's elaborate birthday celebration for her), we learned the twelfth cantata (*Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*), the opening chorus of which contains music that Bach later reworked as the *Crucifixus* of the B minor Mass – though in this latter incarnation accompanied by a Latin text (while his cantatas were written for the Lutheran church, and are accordingly in German, the Mass was composed as a commission which he hoped would be played at the dedication of the new Catholic cathedral in Dresden, thus explaining its Latin setting). At the time, however, I knew none of this.

We were scheduled to perform the cantata at the Catholic church in Fontainebleau, but when the priest discovered it was Protestant music, he was furious and forbad its inclusion in the Mass. Because I was conducting the cantata that summer, I consulted Mademoiselle Boulanger on the matter; she replied: "Don't worry yourself – tell him you will sing the Latin *Crucifixus* instead." I expressed my anxiety over having to learn a new piece in so little time, to which she immediately responded: "But no, it is the same music: if Bach was flexible enough in his faith to rearrange it, then Father must also be flexible." This showed me that she was more malleable in her thinking than one might expect from someone who followed her faith like a scrupulous little girl; it was an aspect that pleased me very much.

Christmas card from Richter

As for the matter of language, I was put at ease by her decision to maintain the German text while claiming it was the *Crucifixus*, because we really didn't have the time to relearn it in Latin; she noted that the difference would have been virtually inaudible – as no one can really understand the words swimming around in a church's acoustics – but *we* knew, and had also learned something of relativity through the whole matter (from both Mademoiselle, a Catholic, and Bach, a Protestant). It was astonishing to us that she of such staunch religious views had approached the whole situation with so much levity, and that she had encouraged us to do so, as well.

[79] The feast day of St. Louis, Confessor and King of France (1214-70), is 25 August.

As for the account of Sviatoslav Richter seeing God, he shared this experience with Mademoiselle and me after a concert he had given at the Polignac Foundation – an extraordinary environment where edified spirits were still gathering to listen to great music. The receptions after these concerts were at least as important as the concerts themselves: these assemblies were exchanges of a rare quality between researchers, writers, and musicians, and were the descendants of the soirées of yesteryear, in which Poulenc, Cocteau, Satie, Fauré, and so many others participated.

The focus that night was on Richter, and he obliged by presenting three of Beethoven's sonatas with the unique and inimitable concentration that were his hallmark. Here was a pianist who was a wild animal at the instrument, an ogre with velvet claws, sculpting an unmatched inner world, but whose personal sweetness once he left the stage sparked an almost shocking contrast.

After the recital, when Nadia Boulanger and I were talking with him about the performance he had given earlier in the evening,[80] he intimated that he had seen God in the striking silences which punctuate the opening measures of the C major Largo from the Sonata in E-flat, Op. 7. At that moment, Mademoiselle raised her hand – which by then was so boney and had such little skin that it resembled a bat's wing – with the sort of eloquent gesture that one would see in a religious painting by Da Vinci or Michelangelo. This was, naturally, a topic to which she was extraordinarily sensitive, and she regularly referenced this conversation afterwards. I witnessed it all intensely, aware that I was living one of those extremely rare moments in which one is in communion with the beyond. Again, the idea that the unexplained and the inexplicable are the domain of God was preeminent, reinforcing both Mademoiselle Boulanger's conviction that it is a point of honor to be called to translate them through music, and her commitment to exploring them in her teaching.

Richter made his claim amidst the brouhaha of a myriad other ambient conversations – and as he described his experience, he seemed to float in a sort of bliss. It was a declaration that had nothing of the conventional about it: we were neither in a church, nor at a funeral, nor within any general framework in which one usually speaks of God – quite to the contrary, we were in a milieu saturated with Parisianism and high society gossip. It was proof that profundity so often flowers in the most unexpected of places.

These two souls shared a common view of the mystery of beauty. Richter reaffirmed to me the humility which the performer must maintain in the presence of the work, an approach that reinforced Mademoiselle Boulanger's conviction that the glance given to the loved work at a specific moment in time is what makes it what it is, not the work in and of itself (much less the manipulations of a performer who only uses the work to valorize himself).

[80] They spoke in German: Richter was Russian, but of German descent and spoke that language very well, while Mademoiselle Boulanger's Russian was at a child's level, which modesty precluded her from demonstrating.

It was this position that put her at such philosophical odds with someone like, say, Glenn Gould. Gould saw modern technology as a tool he could utilize to reach a mass audience, offering a meticulously recorded work, an idealized presentation of his conception of the piece, thus resulting in a fully realized incarnation of his intellectual and philosophical vision. To Nadia Boulanger, a performance was instead a unique, intense, and ephemeral moment of life, made in real-time from both superb inspirations and faults – a double-edged sword. It irked her that a performer, by means of technology, could portray a piece of music as something devoid of these qualities; at this point, she felt, it is no longer the work. A musical composition is in constant movement – not just unfolding in performance, but also as it evolves over the course of a lifetime, and should not be ossified by means of a record, at which point its development is rendered static, even frozen, and perhaps emptied of all its vitality until it is nothing more than a reference point to gauge the manner in which others have played it.

Mademoiselle believed that one only truly gains access to a work of music by studying and playing it, by understanding the text, getting behind the notes, and taking into account the musical, aesthetic, artistic, philosophical, and historic and geographic context in which it was written – not to relegate it to a museum by its academic particulars, but rather to reaffirm its universality. It was a mindset which was more that of a modernist than a pedantic, one oriented towards exploring the DNA of the composer's thought process, instead of passively reciting his notation.

She was upstream of the performance, and brought to me, as a student, the desire to get closer to the work's conceptual heart than any other aspect of it – to regard it with a composer's understanding, and try to unfold the path of his thought process. She thus ordained the humility with which one approaches a work as all the more essential, since the work is perpetually evolving, according to who looks at it and the ways he does so, the aspects of which change with time, and, necessarily, with the performers, the incorporation of period instruments and performance practice (or not), etc. All of this is connected…

For Mademoiselle, a performance was something intuitive and living, something of the moment. It matures during practice, of course, but in the concert one hopefully doesn't play like an arid academic: he is instead in complete reflection of the work, a musician filled with wonder who conveys this experience. This is the essence of performance: to make oneself receptive in this way and vibrate accordingly in communion with the public, letting the work carry him away with abandon after rigorous preparation – not fabricating the music, but rather releasing it.

For these reasons, Mademoiselle Boulanger always wanted to make sure that I understood the role of musicians in music: the humility of the performer in the presence of the work, the humility of the composer in the presence of the work – humility in all, in the presence of God.

And it is from this point of view that I always approach the question of Nadia Boulanger's religiosity, and the manner in which she addressed matters of the spiritual realm. On a personal level, she taught me about the divine not only explicitly – be it the importance of humility, or the somewhat mystical apprehension of music she extolled – but also through her example: I was able to witness a noble soul naturally exuding itself, whether through her aesthetics or her attitude toward life.

CHAPTER IX – THE FINAL DAYS

1) How did Nadia Boulanger envision death?

She always said she viewed it with serenity, like Fauré's *Requiem*. Unlike the more operatically dramatic examples in the repertoire, in which a revolt against death is portrayed as closer to the true human instinct, Fauré's masterpiece is a work of abnegation and profound acceptance (though not a *berceuse*, as it is often called – I find it rather derogatory to treat such a meditation on the mortal condition as a mere lullaby). Through his faith, Fauré transcended this sense of riot and upheaval, and Mademoiselle Boulanger, who had lost so many dear to her too soon in life (and survived her sister by two lifetimes), had attained much the same kind of tranquility.

That is not to say that she spent her days waiting to die. Instead, she occupied herself with all the concerns of a woman who still had much to live for. I was so privileged that one of her main priorities was the daily countdown she had established with me. Her sensitivity to just how much she was contributing to my development came through in statements like: "Emile builds his life up while I leave mine to ruin."

She said this to my father during one of the medical consultations with him that had by then become a regular part of her schedule[81] – meetings which were rather exceptional because in her later years she didn't like seeing anyone other than her fellow musicians and the priest. After she was done teaching on Friday, my father would stop by to take her blood pressure and do other routine exams, and the two would converse (in German) on a variety of subjects. These tête-à-têtes led to her comical assertion during one of the Wednesday classes that, "Among all you theorists and solfegists here" – thus underlining the importance she affixed to these techniques, not as stepping stones, but as rejuvenating experiences for any musician – "there is one who exceeds you in delivery speed of the recited notes: it is Doctor Naoumoff!," to the great surprise of us all. (My father, the son of a music teacher, had bathed in this atmosphere his entire childhood, and it was this facility that had allowed him to notate the piano improvisations I did as a child.)

One of these appointments with my father just so happened to be on my birthday (February 20), right after the party that she had organized for me (as she did each year). Cécile Armagnac had just contracted the flu, and so when Mademoiselle Boulanger began to demonstrate increasingly similar symptoms during the following days, my father ordered her to the hospital – this despite the robust constitution that led her secretary, Madame Orsini-Ferenczi, to exclaim that she had endured like "Russian leather." I couldn't escape a feeling of profound guilt: if it hadn't been for my party, during which she likely caught the virus, I thought, then she wouldn't have taken ill.[82]

[81] My Father had joined us in Paris in the late (almost too late) 1970s.

[82] With the benefit of hindsight, I believe now that the fatal moment was likely when she greeted Mademoiselle Armagnac with the traditional three kisses, something French people always do without thinking (and very often before any mention of illness).

Prof. Boyan Christoforov, a colleague and friend of my father, generously came to pick her up and drive her to Cochin Hospital, where he was the resident department head. After hooking her up to an I.V. drip and giving her a blood transfusion, he ran some additional tests – I was told – and found that she, in fact, had a dormant strain of tuberculosis, which her body had in all likelihood been warding off for over half a century (though which was not responsible for her current condition).

Her closest friends said that they had never before seen her so gravely affected by an illness like influenza – and she never really recovered. She left Cochin Hospital re-invigorated that fateful February, but under strict orders to drastically reduce her teaching load. Without the physical strength to support the intense concentration she demanded of herself, she no longer wanted to commit to anything other than what she deemed essential; I remain flattered and immensely grateful that she included me in this category. It never fails to amaze me that my lessons afforded her such a sense of purpose at the twilight of her life – and this is yet another reason why I feel the need to share with others what I learned from her, whether from our lessons during my first years in Paris, or those final ones, which came more and more from the very limits of her consciousness.

Modesty kept her from ever mentioning the agony she was in, this despite the fact that those closest to her – Mesdemoiselles Dieudonné and Armagnac, Giuseppe and his wife Zita – were reduced to an infirmary, constantly attending to her so that she could see through her promise to me of ten years. I still often had lessons every other day, and sometimes on successive days if she was feeling well enough. When she had gathered enough strength, she would tell Giuseppe to "Call Emile," and at noon or one o'clock, he would telephone to say, "Voilà, *La Signorina* feels better: can you come at two o'clock?" The time or frequency was irrelevant – I was on constant alert.

Yuko Satoh and Emile

I was the only private pupil she maintained on a fulltime basis, and these lessons never lost their freshness (Yuko Satoh, now a piano professor in Japan, also continued to study with Mademoiselle, but they met less frequently). She also continued the Saturday morning accompanying class and her sacrosanct Wednesday analysis class, which was canceled only when absolutely necessary. None of these sessions were truncated, nor did they ever lose their intensity, even if her head now habitually slanted to the right, like the flame on a candle, and the joviality of earlier years was now punctuated by long silences (which some mistook for lapses into slumber).

I still remember, before leaving for Fontainebleau in the summer of 1979, watching her improvise a fugue for me in the crepuscular light of her apartment, announcing in succession all the techniques she was going to introduce (augmentation, diminution, retrograde, etc.). She proceeded to integrate

them all exactly as planned, and then added a stretto – the often closural fugal device in which voices are intricately superimposed. It was a display of elaborate complexity, the likes of which usually takes students weeks to produce in a palatable form.

Few composers after Bach have succeeded in composing fugues that are both easily digestible for the ear and nourishing for the intellect – and this was what she helped us learn to love in him: one could adore his music without understanding it, satisfying both the ear and the soul, and then marvel all the more when critically examining how such extravagant complexity could be expressed with such utter simplicity.

In Bach's music, heaven and earth embrace each other. As Gilles Cantagrel writes (in *Bach en son temps* [Bach in His Time]), his works are as grounded as one can fathom, and yet they are at the same time eternally in the spheres. Such inspired music is all the more extraordinary because a fugal exercise can end up being a little bit like medicine: one adds the necessary ingredients only to end up with something monstrously acidic, in this case, an arid, academic edifice which does nothing more than prove that such a structure can be built (a task that every student must attempt at least once during his apprenticeship, which can prove a particularly daunting endeavor given that the contrapuntal rigor of the Renaissance and Baroque is no longer genetically encoded in each self-respecting musician).

But such practices – obsolete to most music teachers already by the 1960s – were central to Nadia Boulanger's aesthetic. For her, the most important thing was becoming a complete musician, one who could accompany, sight-read, transpose, transcribe, and adapt music to its surroundings with great suppleness of spirit – something that came naturally to her, in large part because of her amazing ear. Such acquired knowledge and versatility of skill not only provides intellectual fulfillment (if one has studied the work to create what I call a "performing analysis"), but also allows the music-lover in the performer to flourish – that is, above and beyond the mechanical aspects of his technique (no matter how brilliant). This path provides the impetus and ability to continue learning, and to teach oneself and others how to learn, all while deepening and further developing oneself, without having to resort to robotically replaying the same repertoire. The contrapuntal facility necessary to compose – and improvise – a fugue was but one component in achieving this end.

And so I watched as Nadia Boulanger, at the twilight of her life, sat at the treble end of the keyboard, nearly blind, handicapped by a neck which no longer held her head upright, and with hands that were frail but sure of themselves at the keyboard – like a puppet with bony, crab-like fingers (to appropriate the metaphor she liked to use in describing the first etude of Chopin's Op. 10, which she saw Rubinstein play in her youth; she felt the opening and closing of his hand in its deployment of the arpeggios resembled a crab, and the image stuck with her) – and listened to her improvise a fifteen minute-long fugue with an infinite variety of combinations, never pedantically, but with the same inspiration at ninety-two as she had surely displayed at the organ when she was fourteen. Each

moment was invested with beauty, with tension, release, ritardandos, appoggiaturas, ornamental fioraturas – and all held together with the same "beauty in the machinery" that she loved so much in the Mozart string quintets.

This fugal improvisation was music driven by artistic considerations, not superficial flashiness. It wasn't intended to dazzle me – by that time I had been working on composing fugues with her for three years,[83] and certainly needed no demonstration of her proficiency. Rather, it was to show that one could find musical inspiration even at the core of a rigidly academic work (as opposed to the utterly banal use I had made of the chromatic F minor subject she had assigned me).

In these last months of her life, she also intimated to me that she regretted having rejected the light-music "Lecocq operetta aesthetic" of Ernest Boulanger, whom she still insisted on calling her father (she had her own reasons for this, not least of which was the culture in which she had grown up).

She acknowledged that she should not have repudiated his work on the grounds that it wasn't earnest enough, because she had come to understand that there was greater profundity than she had imagined in his style of writing, whereas serious music is often cluttered with learned boredom. (Jean Françaix often found himself subjected to such compositions while traveling with his father to inspect conservatories as a child; he told me that he had made a pledge then and there to never write anything boring.)

There was something so revealing about Mademoiselle Boulanger's effort to revise and transcend her opinion of her father's music after all those years, trying at last to promote an understanding of the nobility in his art. Perhaps it wasn't as technically brilliant as Lecocq's output, but – at the very least – it was well-crafted, the kind of music that revived her childhood memories – memories rarely shared, but which she would sometimes recount to me in glimpses of family life "at the house," where the Boulanger sisters had been assimilated into the small group of friends that so often gathered there (as artists did in those days). After dinner, the party would adjourn to the evening's musical offerings, with Lili singing and Nadia at the piano, sight-reading newly written *mélodies* by guests such as Gabriel Fauré and Charles Gounod (among others).[84]

French art-song of this time was of a special intimacy. *Mélodies* are true responses to the emotions aroused by a poem (as opposed to music which merely employs a poem), with piano parts that emphasize the "complete musician" rather than relegating the pianist to a secondary role. This repertoire was often written for performance at soirées, where the enlightened amateurs who hosted such occasions would mingle with the battle-hardened professionals who regularly enjoyed the patronage of said hosts; together, the two would tease the muse. Out of this environment came individuals like the great scientist Prof. Jacques Monod (winner of the Nobel Prize in genetics), who played the cello for my father and me in his office at the Pasteur Institute of Paris.[85]

[83] I should note that my work with her in this regard was on composing fugues, not improvising them; Mademoiselle Boulanger was against me improvising too much – she wanted me to focus instead on developing a concise thought process.

[84] More often than not, the retelling of these memories began with, "Let me try to remember what Lili was doing at your age…"

[85] See Chapter II.

Such music responded to a need for immediacy and affection. Sometimes this came across as elitism – one cannot be intimate with everyone – and sometimes it expressed itself as lighter music. Mademoiselle Boulanger had rejected the latter aspect because she had rejected her father, and because it was perhaps better to plant her roots in what many considered more profound works if she wanted to be taken seriously as a woman, particularly in the early twentieth century; in any case, this music corresponded well with her character, as well as that of her austere musical father-figure Fauré, and helped furnish her reputation as a priestess of high and rigorously intellectual music. After a lifetime cultivating this image, her serenity at the end was obvious – even if the continuation of her daily routine, and her clinging to consciousness in order to keep teaching me ("at all costs") shone as proof that she was still chasing something… In this context, her final letter to me, the testimonial delivered during that last summer at Fontainebleau, takes on a new meaning: the ten-year countdown she had instituted at our first meeting may have been as much for her as for me, giving her a new sense of purpose during her eighth decade of life.

But if the countdown allowed her some semblance of peace as she approached death, it proved increasingly harrowing for me. With every passing day, I became more and more aware that the end was drawing near, like the Sword of Damocles slowly descending. I felt as if everything was on the verge of collapse. We had left Bulgaria, our family, our apartment, our situation – and what we had created for ourselves, a perhaps illusory framework of familial and social structure in a foreign land, from which the political climate of the day assured that there could be no real possibility of return, was a sort of puzzle which only Mademoiselle Boulanger could hold together (or so it seemed to me at the time). The thought of her disappearing from the equation brought my fears to vertiginous heights, an anxiety that was only reinforced by my growing responsibility for my mother – she who had made me so acutely conscious of how privileged I was to have had so many extraordinary opportunities. But isn't it always the case that you never really understand these things until it's too late?

The fact that most of Mademoiselle's immediate circle passed away not long after she did only complicated matters further (they were, after all, more or less contemporary to her). Many of the more peripheral figures of her entourage now began to show their true colors – disappointing shades of pettiness, or jealousy, or even complete incomprehension in their dealings with me, character traits that had previously been overshadowed by the strength of Mademoiselle Boulanger's personality. Even at Fontainebleau, which was ravaged by internecine fighting after Narcis Bonet was forced out from his gentle directorship (one respectful to the Boulanger heritage), I became the target of mean-spirited

With Narcis Bonet in Fontainebleau

individuals: not only was I too young in their estimation – I also represented the intellectual reservoir of an artistic and pedagogical legacy that they were too cowardly to confront when she was still alive.

In one of her last summers at Fontainebleau, Mademoiselle programmed Bach's eighth cantata, *Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben?* [O beloved God, when go I to death?]. There is a repeated high note in the flute which she viewed as symbolic of the Angel of Death's arrival. In lessons, I would play the two canonic oboe parts with my right hand, while my left hand accompanied with the figured-bass continuo (which I had to realize at sight). Not having enough hands for everything, Mademoiselle's faithful Japanese student Yuko Satoh would play the repeated flute notes at the very top of the keyboard, notes which seem to sprinkle down on everything and prepare the choral entrance in a radiant E major tonality. There is in this music a vision of the Moment of Departure, but not one of anguish.

The selection of this cantata that year was certainly not accidental. Mademoiselle Boulanger felt this moment encroaching, and faced it with great courage despite her diminished health and weakened physical state.

I will never forget the lesson when Mademoiselle herself played those notes…

I had the opportunity to conduct the choir at these annual Bellefontaine[86] cantata concerts several times during my summers with Mademoiselle Boulanger. They were markedly different experiences than my conducting lessons with Markevitch, in which I beat the measures in silence to an empty room, or, occasionally, to a piano (and was then corrected upon the least bit of delay in the cues I delivered to the imaginary players), or even later at the École Normale with Pierre Dervaux, where I conducted a chamber ensemble which functioned as a sort of laboratory orchestra.[87] In Fontainebleau, before conducting my classmates in a choral composition, I would work with Mademoiselle Boulanger on how to best present the gestures necessary to obtain roundness in the voices, the correct kind of onset, how to articulate consonants in such a way that they would cut through a church's acoustics (she had, after all, conducted vocal ensembles her entire life, many of which she had formed).

It was not just inspired tuition: it was practical, too – the same kind of pragmatism which assured that all of her everyday matters were in order before dying, even her account with the flower shop on the corner. She would tell me to be conscientious of not accruing debts I couldn't repay: I remember her saying, "I leave with no financial burdens unsettled" – not that she was rich (at least as far as I could gather from her austere lifestyle).

What I did know was that she was infinitely generous to me, having given not just so much of her time, but also the essentials of life, through lessons, examples,

[86] I.e. "of Fontainebleau."
[87] This group consisted of members of the Orchestre des Concerts Colonne.

attitudes – in sum, a philosophy that extended beyond the mere accumulation of abstract musical skills into realms such as the "complete" musician (at least, as was represented by the last existing model of such – that of the late nineteenth century), the place of the musician in society, the timelessness of a very old woman traveling with a very young boy on a journey of discovery and rediscovery, the perpetual filling of the soul with wonder…

With all her amassed knowledge, gathered over the course of a long life in the company of the century's greatest musicians, to remain so filled with awe before the discoveries and modest creations of a little child, whose intellect had not yet begun to scratch the surface of things (as she liked to say), and to find a sort of timeless complicity with him… There can be no more exquisite proof of her exceptional love of music, one repeatedly renewed and shared with me – and worthy of the God whose work she fervidly believed she was doing in helping to develop my gifts.

It is because of her guidance that I am able to hold this vision of music for my students: always place yourself in humble awe before the music you serve, and carry it with you jubilantly as you choose your path, for you never know where that path may lead.

The freedom to choose one's interpretive direction and the abandon of letting oneself be surprised by what may be discovered off the beaten track help one become a listener who can hear the commonplace as if for the first time while performing – a privileged listener, an active listener. This applies every bit as much to an orchestral conductor, who must oversee and navigate a great mass of musicians as one unit, as to a solitary pianist, who alone must digitally sculpt the musical phrases and paragraphs of his performance (that is, as opposed to just mechanically playing them by muscle memory).

In Mademoiselle Boulanger's analysis class, we were explicitly encouraged to transcend the composer/performer dichotomy, or that of theorist/practical musician: skills should not be learned for their own sake, but rather to nourish one another.

This applies to "pianism," as well. By this, I mean that the two conceptual approaches to keyboard composition are not independent of one another: the alluring animalistic pianism of Rachmaninoff, Chopin, Liszt, Scriabin, or Busoni – composers who notated the volcanic improvisations that erupted from their innermost cores – is not divorced from the style of Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, or Stravinsky, whose keyboard works are translations of their intuitive devotion to other genres, be it symphony, string quartet, or even opera.

And then there is Bach, on display so brilliantly in his *Well-Tempered Clavier*, which Mademoiselle Boulanger made me study so thoroughly. She would have me meticulously dissect those celestial mechanics, uncovering the gestures redolent of his sublime sacred works, and analyze how in each prelude they had been grafted onto an harmonic skeleton replete with improvised decorations, a construct motivated by the subtle throbbing dialogues between pulse and phrase structure, and then – like its attendant fugue – infused with the

dexterity of a master organist. It is music stunning in each detail – an elegance made particularly obvious when one is assigned to write it out from memory before he is allowed to even touch the keyboard.

And yet she never fell into the trap of trying to explain to us *why* this music is beautiful – this despite the fact that if there was anyone equipped to expound on such a topic, it would have been her (after all, so many masterpieces of twentieth-century music were composed by her students and colleagues, and benefitted from having passed through her hands). Instead, she devoted herself to explaining how music is put together – both in terms of its anatomical craftsmanship and metaphysical transcendence.

This woman who was so chromatically intelligent and oratorically gifted lavished her genius on us as one filled with humility. Even if you didn't understand everything she said, you left with your soul having been moved – rather than just groggy with information, as so often happens – and when we would gather at the café after class, it always struck me as interesting how we had each understood her lecture differently, and each taken something unique from it (due to age, culture, upbringing, etc.). She was both uncompromising with mechanics and completely open to inspiration, sharing that same communion which she rightly loved in Bach: the earthly and the celestial.

It was in the context of all this that I saw her approach death, and her apparent serenity – informed above all by her faith – was especially poignant when placed opposite the frenetic urgency with which she focused her energy to teach me.

I had neither been referred to her by an illustrious former student, nor was I part of her family – it had all been a matter of choice (for both of us), and I felt rather spoiled by the affection she showed me. I recognize now that our abyssal age difference – never mind the fact that this distance was blurred when under the spell of the muse – could have led to an unhealthy situation, especially as I became more and more wracked with the fear that it could all end at any time (a fear I would not have encountered so baldly if I were studying with a woman in her forties). My parents shared some of this anxiety, and my father even deliberated asking Mademoiselle for a new ten-year plan to follow after her death. On at least one occasion, he inquired of her, "What do we do with Emile?" She answered simple, "He'll find himself." I knew she would always be a part of me, and yet the prospect of her leaving me an orphan, of sorts, still scared me immensely. If she was similarly afraid, she never said so.

2) What place did music have in Nadia Boulanger's final days?

When Mademoiselle returned to Paris from Fontainebleau in September 1979, her cardiologist met Giuseppe at the apartment to help him carry her up the stairs in a wheelchair (the elevator being too small to fit the wheelchair). As soon as he got home, the doctor, who was about fifty years old, collapsed and died from cardiac arrest; this struck us all as a dire premonition, and we never told Mademoiselle about it (not least because she would have been overwhelmed with guilt).

Mademoiselle had been bed-ridden much of her last summer in Fontainebleau, and things only got worse after she got back to Paris. She was so immobile that it was like she had entered a sort of comatose sleep-state: no longer completely conscious, lying prostrate, and neither seeing nor hearing us (she did eat, however). She didn't address anyone specifically, but spoke in fits and starts, giving virtual lessons – as if teaching was an involuntary function which she was unable to stop or control. Amid the mental porridge which would spill out rather uncontrollably, one would hear: "No, no, no, play the tenor in the left hand," or "Do not repeat the tied notes that occur within this chord progression," or "Pay attention to the dotted rhythm figure" (that is, avoid the common traps of tripletizing or double-dotting) – in effect, all the leitmotifs that had danced across the days of her musical life. As I had benefited from so long and concentrated a course of instruction from her (one of the few to have had such a privilege), I felt like I was still able to follow her train of thought – only now, the lessons were like puzzles in which her demands were laid out at random, almost aleatorically and often illogically or incoherently. It would have been funny, had it been intentional. In any case, it was always soothing when she uttered something, even if incomprehensible or pathetic. When she came into focus, I would be called in for a lesson.

I had the impression that she was forcing herself to continue teaching, flush with all her usual precepts – principles which, uttered in the disorder, became profoundly moving. She who had insisted so much on the consciousness of words and thoughts was tragically condemned to mentally wander. Cruel the fate which deprives you of dignity before divesting you of breath…

Naturally, given her state, it was no longer a question of actually making music at her home during the last few weeks. That only began again when she was in her casket, in the days before the funeral ceremony, as we renewed the ritual formerly reserved for March 15: rehearsals of Lili's *Pie Jesu*, the "In Paradisum" from Fauré's *Requiem*, and Mademoiselle Boulanger's own *Lux Aeterna*. I remember very well sitting at the Cavaillé-Coll organ in her apartment, her body lying in the adjoining room, as we prepared for the public farewell, held at the Église de la Sainte-Trinité [Church of the Holy Trinity] on October 26. That day, the sanctuary was bursting with dignitaries, from Prince Rainier of Monaco (her godson), to musicians and students such as Dutilleux, Françaix, and Michel Legrand.[88] Afterwards, we adjourned to Montmartre cemetery and, beneath a cold October rain, paid our final respects at the grave, near the stele that had been erected by admirers of her

[88] Michel Legrand (b. 1932) is an Academy Award-winning French composer, arranger, and songwriter; he has written over two hundred film and television scores, including *the Thomas Crown Affair* and *Yentl*.

grandmother (a singer at the *Opéra-comique*).

Not long after the funeral, a Bulgarian television team (music rédacteur Petar Angelov and camera operator Vassil Mladenov) came to Paris to shoot footage of me, with the intention of returning home to produce a documentary celebrating a child prodigy born of the Bulgarian state. The original plan was to film my lessons with Mademoiselle; what eventually aired was necessarily a different production.

The cameras rolled as I sat at her Steinway piano, still covered with photos and souvenirs,[89] and played the 198th cantata of Bach, a work I chose because it was composed upon the death of Christiane Eberhardine, Queen of Poland and Saxony. It is a poignant work, and was one well loved by Mademoiselle. I was a pimply adolescent in a thick pullover sweater, in an apartment saturated with her spirit – and it was at that moment that I made my true final farewell to the places of Nadia Boulanger.

After this last *adieu*, I never again returned to 36 Rue Ballu, that place where music had been so dominant a force, a place that was, for me, quasi-religious – where I had encountered a link with God: she.

[89] After her death, Mademoiselle Dieudonné donated the larger contents of Mademoiselle Boulanger's apartment (furniture, etc.) to the French Institute, while her personal belongings were given to the Ministry of Culture, which intended to use them to recreate a scale-model replica of her salon at the Paris Conservatory. This project was never realized, and Mademoiselle's belongings are now in storage at the Château de Fontainebleau.

CHAPTER X – THAT WHICH REMAINS

1) In which way do you think you best represent Nadia Boulanger's heritage – through your teaching or your performing career?

Emile and his students at the *Jeunes Vocations Artistiques, Littéraires Et Scientifiques* (A club for gifted children)

My students evidently see me as the avatar of Nadia Boulanger's pedagogical legacy, even if they don't know who she really was, or know only that she was someone of importance. This is a great honor – after all, she was the ultimate guru when it came to teaching someone how to become a musician: how to think as a musician and evolve in music, regardless of the genre or style.

My summer Academy at the Château de Rangiport attempts to offer a condensed version of what I learned from Mademoiselle: acquiring an intimate knowledge of a piece, gaining true contrapuntal proficiency, paying special attention to inner voices, avoiding accents on downbeats, etc. Without imitating her, I try to keep true to her spirit when promulgating the precepts of being a musician, and the rules of interpretative reflection. (In this respect, the Academy is a parallel effort to this book: when a student comes to my Academy, it is because he wants to inherit some aspect of this heritage – through practical application; this book communicates the same approach, tradition, and sense of lineage, but through a narrative medium.)

But while I endeavor to follow her path, I don't try to clone her: I affirm my own manner of teaching, and in doing so, naturally cultivate avenues not explored with her, even if they were there in some sort of embryonic fashion. I work to avoid bringing prefabricated ideas to students, and instead reinvent concepts that have ripened in me since my studies with Mademoiselle Boulanger, in order to fit each student's needs; it is an approach founded on the individual. I don't impose time limits on lessons, but rather work until we have reached the very heart of things. I try to give them the tools that will allow them to self-teach after they leave, a method founded on her philosophy of teaching one how to ask oneself the relevant questions, rather than falling back on template answers – just as she provided me with the tools to build a lock, rather than simply handing over the keys. Students need to know how to listen critically to what they are doing; to devise ergonomic fingerings on their own; to manage their gestures, phrasing, direction and scope of line ("la grande ligne"), breathing, and sense of pulse; to allow the proper time and space between notes, so that the inner life invisibly nested there can flourish; to understand when and where to express an architecturally sensitive touch and a subtle *rubato*… not to mention how to simultaneously hear both harmony and counterpoint, or how to judiciously and subtly place the right pedal while avoiding the soft pedal as much as possible – in sum, becoming a sculptor at the keyboard.

I hope that my teaching stimulates a true inner calling to perpetuate, develop, and continue to share the pedagogy of Nadia Boulanger – at least, as it lives in me, having been one of the few to have studied with her for a full decade, and, to my knowledge, the only student she saw through what might be called a complete cycle of musical education (from childhood to young adulthood, at which

Emile, Serge Lifar and Jean Françaix

point I launched my professional career). My story is not just one of a student, but of the acquisition of a musically coherent path, wrought by a privileged – though highly demanding – one-to-one master/disciple relationship, and that of a little boy alongside a marvelous woman who filled him with wonder, provided him with ordinary extraordinary encounters, and plunged him into a rare environment populated by a rare breed of individuals of the highest quality, all done in complicity and with mutual and profound respect, as was magnificently summarized in her testimonial letter to me during that last summer at Fontainebleau, and exhibited with tender humor by Jean Françaix at her burial.

She lived almost long enough to see through the cycle that she herself had instituted at our first meeting, and it closed in the best possible way. Since then, almost forty years have passed (that is, four times the cycle), and I have developed in new ways, concentrating on my performing career at the beginning, and afterwards focusing more on my vocation as a teacher, all while remaining true to my creative impulses: composition, various forms of transcription, and improvisation. I hope that, for all these varying hats, I don't show myself as "The Professor" while on stage, but rather as a performer who nourishes himself on musical reflection and the sense of awe that accompanies it – a stage animal who shares musical humanity with his audience, narrating the musical discourse without coming across as didactic.

When I teach *ex cathedra*, for example at Indiana University in Bloomington, I attempt to assure that these young virtuosos acquire the technical reliability they need, not only to realize their nascent musical thoughts in the practice room or our lessons, but also to be able to articulate them soundly on stage – both at that moment and in the future. It strikes me as particularly important in this context to avoid becoming too pedantic; one must not be vapid or mundane, for we are talking of nuance and perhaps inexplicable things, where the merest hint can yield an exaggeration.

One must maintain humility before such ineffable beauty, as Mademoiselle Boulanger insisted. This may seem at odds with taking apart the machine to understand how it works, but such a process is necessary when teaching, both for the student, who doesn't always understand at which point he is awakened to the work's mechanics (often, a student's potential only blossoms after he leaves the beehive and flies on his own in new skies), and for the teacher (ultimately, if one teaches, he teaches himself, too).

The exchange between teacher and student is a marvelous elevator, a fluid enterprise that travels in both directions. Often, when he begins learning repertoire, even a talented student does not really comprehend the machinery of the compositions he is studying, but rather flits and runs through its musical subjects, eluding some tangents in order to evade others, and getting by on facility of ear or fingers (a sort of inertia which allows him to avoid dealing with essential questions) – and it is only when he begins to teach that he fills in the gaps, completing his understanding of a work's true genetic map. At that point, he can finish the process by incorporating these newfound ideas – come what may – into what is, after all, a litany of fleeting connections: everything is of the moment, and

one manages the errors and contradictions conferred upon his thoughts in the lightning of an instant, with all this entails of intuitive impulse and charisma.

And yet, one never need be professorial when performing; in recital, the teacher is one of many students in the presence of the work. I find it gratifying when my students in Bloomington remark that I am much freer on stage than in the classroom – I may instruct one of them in a piece included on my program on that same day, but the precepts that I have adapted to fit the student's needs may then be impetuously overruled at any given moment in my performance of, say, Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales*.

In this regard, we should remember what Anton Rubinstein asked of his students at the St. Petersburg Conservatory: not to bring the same piece each week, for he would then risk contradicting himself. The intuition of the moment is sometimes at odds with the well-ruminated thought, but if one trusts his intuition to guide him (and is free of technical limitations), he can establish a continuous dialogue between the thoughts that lie upstream and the impulse of the moment. This impetuous and instantaneous alchemy – which is life itself – is what captures the audience.

Nadia Boulanger speaking to Emile's mother

It's like culture or civility: in order to live it, you must be able to internalize it to the point of forgetting it. In concert, I don't self-consciously incorporate my teaching principles, nor do I worry about convincing my students that I am right when I ask them to do this or that – I just let the music happen spontaneously. I play by the inspiration of the moment, not by some learned definition. Playing academically, in a manner that promotes one's pedagogical maxims, and thus self-reflexively validating one's teaching, may be intellectually reassuring, and in as much is terribly tempting, but is ultimately unnecessary: the important thing is to stay alert and continue asking questions. Intuition must replace intellect, though the intellect is still gleaned (if just beneath the surface). By musically living the moment in this way, students will recognize that something inaccessible is being shared – something as inaccessible for me as it is for them, because it is something ephemeral, and cannot be appropriated by anyone. A work by Ravel or Debussy was ephemeral when they wrote it, and it remains so, even if it has crystallized a bit by now (perhaps even become stiff) under layers of understanding.[90]

And so when I teach, I try to encourage a spontaneous approach to concertizing, and nourish this sense of building an edifice of ephemeral dreams, a structure that will erase itself in the moment of performance – like drawing imaginary railroad tracks in the sand, on which one can move a shared moment. In doing so, the story I am sharing with the audience is made only more sincere – it is a communal spontaneity, the opposite of the rehearsed or pedantic.

In many respects, my teaching at the Academy in Gargenville, with its ties to the *art nouveau*-style auditorium of the Maisonnettes (as erected by Nadia Boulanger, and splendidly restored by Marie-

[90] I often wonder what Mademoiselle Boulanger would think of the new "urtext" craze, in which a handful of dominant editions have replaced the culture of more personalized (and local) editions which flourished before World War II.

Françoise Vauquelin), and at Indiana University in Bloomington, are complimentary, though I necessarily bring different dynamics to each, thus creating environments unique to the functions and expectations of each situation. I try to adapt – with all humility – the musical legacy I have inherited to each student on a case-by-case basis.

Jean Françaix, Marie-Françoise Vauquelin and Emile

It is a very moving experience to continue this heritage, spreading it like a great internal landscape – one no longer bound only to the places which Mademoiselle Boulanger herself called home. My intention when teaching outside those old haunts isn't to artificially recreate the emotions I feel there, or try to synthetically reproduce the sense of nostalgia (even for times before I knew her) which penetrates my soul in such places – rather, I dare to believe that the substance of what I have to say will prove meaningful on its own merits.

2) What are your most prominent memories from Nadia Boulanger's funeral ceremony?

My role was to coordinate the music, a responsibility which, luckily, helped to abate much of the deep pain I felt. From the organ loft, I could see the massive congregation, and I recognized so many of those who, like me, realized how much more edified they had become simply by having been around her, students and acquaintances who had come to show a final testimony (even while mine was only just beginning). This conglomeration of visual, literary, and musical artists was a true representation of her entourage – or rather, it was an accurate reflection of her entourage, for most of her true traveling companions had already gone ahead, preceding her in their departure from this world.

A few days later, I went to Montmartre Cemetery with some fresh flowers, and arrived to find a woman I had never seen before crying in front of the grave. She was a Polish woman professor of music, perhaps in her forties, who had learned of Mademoiselle's death while abroad, and had thus been unable to pay her last respects at the funeral. She asked me this question, which alone justifies the writing of these memoirs: "But tell me, who was Nadia Boulanger, really?"

The many facets of her personality – be it a lifetime of musical reflection, or her extensive relationships with so many thinkers, artists, and writers from outside the realm of music, or her (equally vital) personal renunciations – repeatedly confounded

those who wanted to classify her (as was the case with the MLF,[91] for example). She taught many of the most significant twentieth-century composers – though had herself given up composing decades earlier; she taught her students the essentials of pianism – despite having last toured on the eve of the First World War, in Russia with her dear Raoul Pugno; she taught orchestral conductors – and had, indeed, been the first woman to conduct the New York Philharmonic – but declined many earnest offers to return to the podium. As generations pass, and impersonal history replaces whatever memories remain of her, musicians will want to understand who she was and how she taught: the intensity that characterized her as a pedagogue from 1904 to 1979, and the diversity which continually defined her. I believe we are at that moment, the time when personal testimony is modulating into history. I can't breathe life back into her ashes, but I can preserve my experiences of her and filter them through my teaching.

For me, this is not a question of mere nostalgia; quite to the contrary, I feel I am conveying Mademoiselle Boulanger's timeless message to others, hoping to revivify and inspire them through my own understanding (and decades-long fermentation) of her profoundly organized pedagogy – one steeped in "enthusiasm and rigor," as Paul Valéry said, like she alone knew how to gauge them. What she bestowed on me came to fruition because I was receptive, because my parents had equipped me to understand the gravity of her message, and because they had taught me how to accept it with boundless gratitude – even if it was a life's worth of message condensed into ten years.

3) Can you speak to the role your father played in Mademoiselle Boulanger's final days?

I should preface this final answer by saying that I find it a rather poignant detail that my father claimed to be an atheist. He was a profoundly mystical person, and had been so ever since his youth, but he grew up in post-constructivist Bulgaria (a neo-communist state where, by dictatorial fiat, to be scientific one had to embrace the idea that science is absolutely divorced from any sort of Pascalian metaphysics). He had artists for parents and was raised as a musician, but soon realized that pursuing this as a vocation would be harshly impractical in the new political climate – and so he became a doctor, a professor of medicine, authoring instructional books which were to become foundational for Bulgarian science. And yet the musician in him remained, as did his capacity for visionary boldness, a product of the same abnegation and strength of character that allowed him to carry me, like an Olympic torch, all the way to Paris – so that I could obtain the self-fulfillment that had been denied him.

Emile's father and Marie-Françoise Vauquelin

For an atheist to view what was at that point still only a vulnerable embryo of promise as a gift from God,

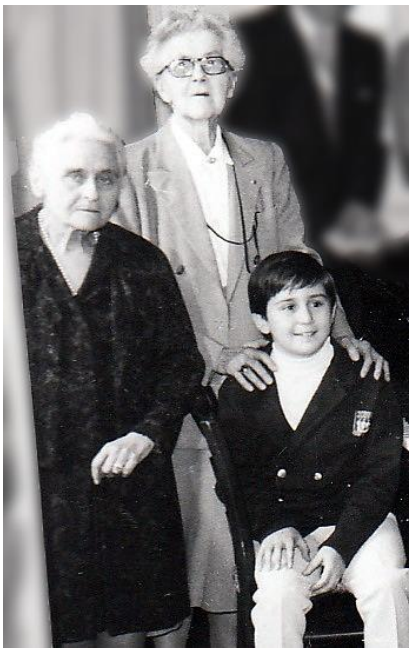
[91] The *Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes* (Women's Liberation Movement). While this is the name of an actual organization, it has become shorthand for the entire feminist movement in France. The MLF wanted to use Nadia Boulanger as a flagship for their cause, but she refused to cooperate: as she said, "I have been a woman for several decades now, and I am no longer surprised by this fact."

and lay it in the hands of someone who wanted to help foster it, leaving everything and risking all to get me to Paris… No, this was an act of faith, not unlike that of Joan of Arc, which I feel could only have been the act of a believer (which I think he was, though he didn't want to admit it).

His vital role in bringing me to Rue Ballu found both symmetry and closure in the part he played in helping Mademoiselle take her leave. But his efforts to keep her alive were not unequivocally appreciated by her entourage, which had been transformed into a groaning infirmary poised around a recumbent statue. They continually complained about the situation, even tacitly asking him to euthanize her (if only by means of simply letting her go).

These same individuals had ruled out any hospitalization that would enable the dying woman to receive the care my father recommended to help restore some modicum of strength during her last days (she couldn't contribute to the discussion, as by that point she rarely spoke). All we could do to argue in her defense was evoke the furious energy that she had formerly exuded against her increasingly frail body, a spirit that rose above her failing health – which showed itself, to a great extent, in her desire to continue teaching me. So for someone to ask my father, who had brought me to her for precisely this reason, to go against his Hippocratic oath and stifle such a perpetual flow of marvels because they were worn out by the circumstances was tantamount to asking him to violate his entire moral code, even if the sense of Christian charity which they invoked might have cleared him of culpability…

My thoughts turned to that same Bach cantata, the eighth, which Mademoiselle Boulanger had chosen for study in Fontainebleau the previous summer, and her implicit commentary in its selection: "the hour of death is serene." When one's life reaches its end, all he can do is let himself be lulled, even carried away into the next world (as I have already noted, this is a tenet which is central to Fauré's *Requiem*, a work which, by uniquely qualifying the *berceuse*, transcends it). My father shared this perspective, and this left him even more agitated at the prospect of not offering recourse to all the medical aids available, and in so doing expedite the decline of a life which could have still been a blessing for others – as is all life, is it not?



Like my father, I was troubled by the unreal *danse macabre* being tendered by the old women surrounding Mademoiselle Boulanger. The sad truth is – and this is not something I say out of cruelty – they didn't know how to remove themselves from their hive of activity, even if it was inevitable that the caravan in which they had traveled for so long would cease eventually for want of a guide. I believe they (unconsciously or not) saw her death as the liberation which would allow them time to prepare for their own – so much was she the meaning behind their daily lives.

As for me, I couldn't even really fathom the prospect of her leaving: she had come to seem so eternal that all of her students, from whatever generation, many of whom I had met – be they twenty, forty, sixty years older than me – had the impression of being part of a singular continuum, fluid in time. There didn't seem

to be any expiration date, and so I couldn't imagine her disappearing from the equation.

The pressure on my father became increasingly stronger, especially from Mademoiselle Dieudonné – who was at the head of this anthill of vestal-nurses, and who fervidly insisted that my father stop any additional medication not only because everyone was so exhausted, but also to do Mademoiselle Boulanger the honor of letting her die in her home – until eventually he felt he had to concede. As we walked through the anteroom leaving Mademoiselle's apartment on the afternoon he ceased treatment, past her mother's samovar and the walls lined with shelves of scores, he said to me: "I give her no more than two days… *Exitus letalis*."[92]

It was in fact the very next day that my mother called me at the Hattemer School. I took her call in the supervisor's office, and her first words to me were: "Come home at once – Mademoiselle Boulanger has left us…" She cried; I did not.

When I arrived at our apartment, my father, a man who rarely showed emotion, said simply: "We must go immediately to Rue Ballu…," and I thought, "Why? Why go if she is no longer there?"

For a moment, my parents had the terrible impression that I was not affected by Mademoiselle Boulanger's death. But the truth was that I felt she was still alive in me, in much the same way that, as a child, I had said of the Berlin Philharmonic's rounded hall, to my mother's surprise (and relief), "I like it – it's intimate, it feels like the audience is surrounding me."

Of course, I was staggeringly sad, but that didn't rouse a need to see her body "in state." I was still so deeply moved by the virtual lessons in her final days that seeing her laid out on her deathbed seemed to me uselessly morbid: her spirit had gone ahead, even if part remained behind in me.

After the painful moments of farewell, and the burial, after the crying, the grayness, the forced interaction with people you'd rather not see, and after that period during which your true memory of human contact with the dearly departed begins to slip away, a new equilibrium is established in which you are nourished by the lingering spirit and attitude of the loved one – and in this case, more than just a loved one: one who gave every indication that she loved in return.

When someone looks after you like she looked after me, shares the sum of their experience and being as she did with me, thinks of you as she thought of me, opens their world as she opened hers to me in pure generosity, and through the generosity of others, the only way I could respectfully take leave of her was to recognize that with her death, I could now free myself (not that I was ever stifled) and begin to prove that I was able to think independently and create a world on my own – as she taught me to do.

Of all the elements that made up Nadia Boulanger, these two seem most prominent to me four decades on: humility towards the service of art, and discernment when choosing one's friends (while generously sharing a sense of goodwill with all).

[92] Latin for "fatal way out" or "death"; when discussing medical matters, my father often liked to conclude his statements in Latin.

In this light, I must again acknowledge Marie-Françoise Vauquelin, who authored these questions, and whose generosity as living guardian and soul of the Maisonnettes allowed me to witness my children grow up, at least in part, at the villa which had been so dear to Mademoiselle Boulanger… Such friends affirm to me Mademoiselle's assertion that, "You are only as good as those with whom you surround yourself." This generosity of spirit is especially important in the context of the Academy at Rangiport, which is in its way a descendant of the concerts Mademoiselle used to host at the Maisonnettes – and, by extension, the entire milieu there between the wars, in which such fellowship was so essential and perennial a component. An echo of these performances resonated again years later in those historic walls because of Madame Vauquelin's visionary commitment to reviving their spirit, and I was honored to be associated with them: for they were not mere museum-like embalmments - rather, they were a living truth passed to another generation.

Sometimes, when faced with a particularly bright student (though not necessarily so), I ask myself: what would Mademoiselle Boulanger do if she were in this situation? (Perhaps not unlike how Mademoiselle used to ask herself "What was Lili doing at your age?" during my lessons…) Am I going to mimic her? Am I going to inspire the student who inspires me? Will he walk away thinking only about his shortcomings? Will I do my best to instruct him and his friends on how to face the dangers he is liable to encounter? Am I going to peel the fruit within him? All is vanity – and what an exercise in humility teaching is – but at such moments, I am happy to know that, decades after her death, I have, like a good farmer, sown something useful.

There will be new students who come to study with me, by destiny or through pure serendipity (or whatever vehicle drove me to Mademoiselle Boulanger) – but for all those I won't meet in this capacity, I am humbly grateful to be able to give testimony, through this book, to the intellectual and human nourishment which I have been so lucky to receive, and which I am doubly fortunate to pass on.

On the staircase at the Maisonnettes

1910

1993