

# Tribute Paid to Mlle. Boulanger, Who Performed Here

(Editor's Note: Nadia Boulanger, a close friend of Dr. Helen Hosmer, retired chairman of the Crane Department of Music at State University College at Potsdam, celebrates her 80th birthday on Saturday.

Dr. Hosmer has been a close friend of the famous Mlle. Boulanger for years and through her friendship was able to get her to come and conduct several concerts here.

In 1938, Mlle. Boulanger was the guest conductor at the Spring Festival of Arts when Brahms' "Requiem" was performed. Then in 1941 the Crane Chorus sang at Carnegie Hall in New York City under her direction, when Faure's "Requiem" and Schutz's "Resurrection et altera" were performed.

Next at the Christmas Concert in 1945, Mlle. Boulanger was the guest conductor here for Faure's "Requiem," a composition by Thomas Tallis and also some Christmas music. At the Spring Festival of Arts in 1958, she again performed Faure's "Requiem" as well as Spisak's "Hymn Olympique" and two pieces by her late sister, Lili.

Mlle. Boulanger's most recent visit to Potsdam was at the Spring Festival of Arts in 1962, when she directed the Crane Chorus and Orchestra in Poulenc's "Gloria" and Pruger's "Cantate et altera." The following article about Mlle. Boulanger, whose student number among the world's leading musicians, was written by Aaron Copland, distinguished American composer, especially for the Associated Press.

Mr. Copland recalls with fondness his association with Mlle. Boulanger in the Paris of 40 years ago and, in a birthday tribute, offers an intimate glimpse into her personality and genius. Mr. Copland, 66, won the Pulitzer Prize for his 1944 ballet, "Appalachian Spring.")

By Aaron Copland  
On Sept. 16, Nadia Boulanger, one of the world's most remarkable women, will be celebrating her 80th birthday. Her fame has spread around the globe as a teacher of music and musical composition to several generations of students.

For 60 years she has uninterruptedly guided the musical training of hundreds of young people, a record in music that would be hard to match.

This slight Frenchwoman is unique in the musical history of our century, perhaps in any century. Although women have often gained distinction as English style . . . or perhaps Early American, in deep-toned Old Salem pine.

for some mysterious reason the art of composing, in its higher reaches at any rate, has always been primarily a masculine art.

This makes Mlle. Boulanger all the more remarkable, since she has risen to the top of her profession in a field dominated by men, and without herself engaging in a career as composer.

One visit with her would convince you that Mademoiselle is famous as a teacher not merely because of her command of notes, of her meter. She would have been an outstanding teacher of whatever subject, because she is, before all else, a great personality.

By temperament she is akin to those women of intellect one reads about in the past, intimates of philosophers and leaders of literary or artistic circles. She has a penchant for quoting from authors she admires: Paul Valery, Andre Gide, T.S. Eliot, Jean Cocteau. One senses, when one is with her, that her mind and interests are in no way confined to the musical field; yet all she is and knows is directed toward serving the art she loves best.

The teaching of any art cannot be based solely on a knowledge of or practices of the past. Mlle. Boulanger knows this well. It is her sensitivity as a musician and her instinctive feeling for the "rightness" if a new work that make her critical faculty so keen. Music doesn't deal in specifics. This makes it particularly difficult to pinpoint one's reaction to a brand new piece.

But that is precisely what Mademoiselle can do. She can tell where your piece is lacking where it is too long or too short; how your compositional textures might be improved, why your orchestration won't "sound." In short, she helps the student composer to see more clearly what it is he is trying to do.

It was an intoxicating experience for a young student like myself, at age 20, to meet and work with such a teacher. I was her pupil in Paris for three years—1921-24. She has nothing of the schoolmarm about her. She combines personal warmth with a lucid intelligence, and a degree of concern and enthusiasm which completely wins one over. Above all, she possesses two qualities that every student finds crucial in a teacher: She knows all the answers to any troubling technical questions, and she instills in the fledgling composer, when con- vinced of his gift, a sense of confidence in his own powers, even before they have been put to any serious test.

An unusually large number of Americans can count themselves Boulanger pupils. This is explained, in part, by her long association as teacher and later as director of the Summer music school in the Palace of Fontainebleau.

Many of these summer pupils continued their studies with Mademoiselle during the Winter months and told other Americans about her.

By the mid-30s, Nadia Boulanger had helped to train a number of men who were later to become leading composers of American concert music: Roy Harris, Walter Piston, Virgil Thomson, Elliott Carter, Robert Russell Bennett and the late Marc Blitzstein. In the decades that followed, younger men like David Diamond, Arthur Berger, Harold Shapero and Easley Blackwood came under her guidance.

Some wit once dubbed us all members of the Boulangerie—bakery—and the name stuck. Naturally, not every student turns out as well as those listed above. A friend of Mlle. Boulanger once asked her in a public interview how she managed to tell a young person full of musical ambition that he lacked the essential "spark."

"Anyone," she replied, "who has not an absolutely inextinguishable flame is immediately discouraged, because

the study of music is something so exacting—and I am so awfully exacting myself—that those two exactings, if taken into consideration, make it as though the person had decided in the beginning, quite on his own, not to go ahead.

"I know I am exacting. I say to my students: 'So long as I am exacting you can have hope. If I am nice, that is a bad sign.'"

True, Nadia Boulanger is not without a certain severity in her make-up. But she is not easy on her pupils or associates, she is also not easy on herself. She works incessantly and seems to thrive on it.

She believes that the more gifted one is the more is to be expected of one. She tells her pupils: "It is nothing to succeed if one has not taken great trouble, and it is nothing to fail if one has done the best one could."

Mademoiselle's students inevitably connect her with the Paris apartment on the Rue Ballu where she has lived and taught for the past half century. It remains just as it was when first I went there for lessons almost that many years ago. By climbing the carpeted steps two at a time you could easily reach the fourth floor landing faster than the tiny and shaky "lift" might get you there. Mademoiselle herself would

open the double doors to the salon, greet you with an encouraging smile and a "Bonjour, mon petit." The studio room was not large, but somehow it managed to accommodate two grand pianos and an electric organ.

It was here at musical receptions that I met her friends, the musical elite of our time—composers like Igor Stravinsky, Bela Bartok, Albert Roussel, Darius Milhaud, Arthur Honegger, Francis Poulenc. Conductors like Serge Koussevitzky, Charles Munch, Igor Markovitch; executants like Yehudi Menuhin, Robert Casadesu, Gregor Piatigorsky.

It is also in that same room crowded with students and an occasional guest, that Mademoiselle holds her famous "Wednesday" sessions consisting of "readings" of musical works through live performance, followed by commentary and discussion—sometimes—and tea—always.

It was at a Wednesday session that I came to know the music of Nadia's younger sister, Lili. The two girls were the daughters of a former professor of singing at the Paris Conservatoire and a Russian mother—Princess Michetsky. In 1918, three years before I met Mademoiselle and her mother, Lili had died at the age of 25. She had been the first girl in a century of

prize-giving to have won the coveted French Prix de Rome for musical composition.

Nadia's devotion to Lili's memory and to the small body of work she left behind has been exemplary. Each year in March a memorial service is held at the Church of the Trinity in Paris. Wherever she may be, Mlle. Boulanger always returns to the city for this ceremony.

Once there was an exception to this: Mademoiselle remained in the United States the year that the Boston Symphony performed works by Lili Boulanger in tribute to her gifted sister.

Despite her advanced years, Mademoiselle has continued a teaching schedule that would exhaust many a younger person.

It is a safe guess that on her birthday Nadia Boulanger

## Firemen Schedule Weekend Events

Lawrenceville — The Lawrenceville Fire Department will sponsor an auction at 1 p.m. Saturday. The following day from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. the department will serve a chicken barbecue. Also on Sunday, a baseball game between the firemen of Lawrenceville and Massena has been scheduled.

## American Legion Meets Monday

Frank Barclay Post of the American Legion will hold its first meeting of the 1967-68 season this Monday, at the Legion rooms in the Civic Center.

The meeting will be preceded at 8:30 p.m. by a covered fish supper.

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