

# **TWO SISTERS FROM MONTMARTRE**

**By Jerold London**

**Upon the original inspiration of Mike Lipkin**

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## **TWO SISTERS FROM MONTMARTRE**

### TIME AND PLACE

1979 (Scene 1). And then progressively backwards, sixty plus years. Nadia Boulanger's fourth-floor Parisian apartment (up a wrought-ironwork elevator that might have dated from the time elevators were invented), crammed with furniture, paintings, musical scores, a grand piano (on which rests a plaster cast of Raoul Pugno's hands and a great clutter of photographs), an upright piano, a record player, oriental rugs, a marble fireplace (over which is a white marble bust of Lili Boulanger), a vase of fresh-cut flowers, and an alcove with shelves filled with

books, clocks, and souvenirs. Two French windows, **stage right**, giving on to a balcony. Off to the side, **stage left**, a hospital bed. Parquet floor. Matt surface walls. Soft pearly grey.

## CHARACTERS

NADIA BOULANGER (16 September 1887 to 22 October 1979), French composer and conductor. Likely the greatest music teacher of all time. Possibly the most influential teacher since Socrates, as one leading composer has said of her. In that capacity Boulanger has influenced generations of music, most notably in the United States and other English-speaking countries. It can well be asserted that American classical music would not be what it is today, but for Nadia Boulanger. Say the same thing for tango. And for Quincy Jones's music.

Lists of her students, in addition to Quincy Jones, include Aaron Copland, Philip Glass, Daniel Barenboim, Igor Markevitch, Michel Legrand, Gian Carlo Menotti, Ástor Piazzolla, Roy Harris, Virgil Thomson, John Eliot Gardiner, Walter Piston, Darius Milhaud, Elliott Carter, Dinu Lipatti, Idil Biret, Louise Talma, David Conte, Errol Morris, Joe Raposo and Lalo Schifrin (among legions of others). But notably not George Gershwin, whom she politely informed, "I can teach you nothing" (which Gershwin proudly repeated as a taken compliment for the rest of his life).

As an analyst of composition she was nothing short of brilliant. Her memory was prodigious. Students describe her as knowing every significant piece of music ever written. Aaron Copland said of her, "Nadia Boulanger knew everything there was to know about music; she knew the oldest and the latest music, pre-Bach and post-Stravinsky. All technical know-how was at her fingertips: harmonic transposition, the figured bass, score reading, organ registration, instrumental techniques, structural analyses, the school fugue and the free fugue, the Greek modes and Gregorian chant."

As a person she tended toward perfectionism and impatience. Composer Philip Glass, who studied with her for two years, wrote that she tried to be kind but "*stayed pretty much in the range between intimidating and terrifying*".

Throughout her later life her vision continued to fail, and her glasses progressively grew thicker and thicker. But even at 92 her voice is strong.

LILI BOULANGER (21 August 1893 to 15 March 1918). Nadia's sister, played throughout as 24.

ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ (1896 – 1991). Nadia's lifelong friend and companion, diminutive, snub-nosed, angelic, and anxiety-ridden.

LEONARD BERNSTEIN (1918 – 1990).

MICHEL LEGRAND (1932 – 2019).

IGOR MARKEVITCH (1912 – 1983).

ÁSTOR PIAZZOLLA (1921 – 1992).

SIMONE RATEL, interviewing NADIA (in Paris) for *Minerva* magazine.

A STUDENT. Female. 20's.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

She is to this day so terribly aware of time passing.

– Leonard Bernstein, 1974

# TWO SISTERS FROM MONTMARTRE

## SCENE 1 – ON HER 92<sup>nd</sup> BIRTHDAY

Fontainebleau, 16 September 1979. NADIA (92), motionless in bed, her eyes and face closed. Beautifully dressed and groomed. A crucifix gleams at her throat. At the **stage-left** side of the bed LILI is sitting in a bedside chair, silently. Lili's form is visible *only* to the audience.

**BERNSTEIN (61) and ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ (83) enter, the latter emphatically placing a cautionary forefinger to her lips.**

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

[*sharp whisper*] Ten minutes. Only.... Only.

**BERNSTEIN**

[*whisper*] Yes, Mademoiselle Dieudonné, I understand.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ stands off, to the side. BERNSTEIN initially kneels at the stage-right side of Nadia's bed. Time passes, in silence. A deep-throated bell rings (offstage).**

**NADIA**

Who's there?

**BERNSTEIN**

[*standing*] Lenny. Leonard.

**NADIA**

Cher Lenny.

**BERNSTEIN**

My dear, dear friend....  
How do you feel?

**NADIA**

Quite strong.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ comes over, raises the back of Nadia's bed (putting her in an upright position), and then returns, to stand off to the side.**

**BERNSTEIN**

You mean?... *inside yourself.*

**NADIA**

Yes. *Inside* myself. But the flesh....

**BERNSTEIN**

I understand.

[*hurriedly*] I'll go. You must be very tired.

**NADIA**

No tiredness. None....

[*commanding*] And don't leave.

Help me think of our friends I have known. I've been thinking.

**NADIA drifts back to sleep. BERNSTEIN takes a seat at the stage-right side of the bed. LILI continues sitting at Nadia's left.**

**BERNSTEIN**

I'll try.

But how can I possibly remember everyone?

Just, even, the masters you've taught.

You've changed the face of music, my friend, in your life.

Aaron Copland.

Philip Glass.

Daniel Barenboim.

Quincy Jones.

Igor Markevitch.

Michel Legrand.

Gian Carlo Menotti.

Ástor Piazzolla.

Roy Harris.

Virgil Thomson.

John Eliot Gardiner.

Walter Piston.

Elliott Carter.

**BERNSTEIN**

Pierre Henry.  
Dinu Lipatti.  
Ídil Biret.  
Jeremy Menuhin.  
Roger Sessions.  
David Diamond.  
Jean Françaix.  
Ginette Neveu.  
Grażyna Bacewicz.  
Robert Russell Bennett.  
Louise Talma.  
Elie Siegmeister.  
David and Dorothy Dushkin.  
Marion Bauer.  
Gail Kubik.  
Darius Milhaud.  
Nora Baker.  
Richard Stoker.  
Marc Blitzstein.  
Thea Musgrave.  
Douglas Stuart Moore.  
Sir Lennox Berkeley.  
Elaine Bearer.  
William Sloane Coffin.  
David Conte.  
Errol Morris.  
Joe Raposo.  
Donald Byrd.  
Lalo Schifrin....  
Oh! a thousand more. It's impossible.

**NADIA**

[*waking*] What's impossible?

**BERNSTEIN**

All the names on my mind.

**NADIA**

Names?... What *music* is on your mind?  
What's going through your mind now, Lenny?  
What are you working on?



**BERNSTEIN**

Many things.

**NADIA**

Many things of what?

**Offstage:**

**Sing God a simple song**

**Lauda, Laudē**

**Make it up as you go along**

**Lauda, Laudē**

**Sing like you like to sing**

**God loves all simple things**

**For God is the simplest of all.**

Click: [A Simple Song from Bernstein Mass](#)

**BERNSTEIN**

I don't live a day without music in my mind.

Playing it. Studying it. Hearing it. Thinking it....

My Mass just crossed my mind.... And yet, now it's Mahler's Ninth.

**NADIA**

Berlin. I know

**BERNSTEIN**

And a Divertimento I'm composing for Boston Symphony's centennial.

Click: [Sennets and Tuckets from Bernstein's Divertimento for Orchestra](#) [a portion]

**BERNSTEIN**

Do you hear music in your mind? like that?

**NADIA**

All the time.

**BERNSTEIN**

What are you hearing at the moment? Mozart?

Monteverdi?

Bach?

Stravinsky?

Ravel?

**NADIA**

One music. No beginning. No end.

**BERNSTEIN**

Where, Nadia? Where is it? Where is there no beginning and no end?

**NADIA**

Are you asking me where spirits of the dead fly?  
Into music, of course. Into my thoughts, young man. Into the music of my soul.

**BERNSTEIN**

Do you *see* anything?

**NADIA**

Do you mean, am I blind yet?

**BERNSTEIN**

Mademoiselle Boulanger, you have one of the greatest minds I've ever known.  
Maybe ever created. Tell me. Please.  
What do you see in that place where there is no beginning and no end?

**NADIA**

I've seen it most of my life. And when I can't, Lili brings it back to me.

**With her left hand, takes Lili's hand.**

I hear *her* music. There's never enough time to have enough time with Lili....  
I've taught you a few things, Lenny, and a few things to many others.  
But never, at such an age, was there a talent to excel Lili's....  
[beat] I feel sorry for those whose lives lack the sight of music.  
Who struggle so hard to never find out what they always wanted to know.

**BERNSTEIN**

Is there anything you've always wanted to know?

**NADIA**

Promises.  
What promises people keep. And what ones they don't.

**Pause.**

What else matters more for the moment, than promises?  
Not much else lasts. But music and mathematics, of course.  
They are the only lasting things we're permitted.  
Music. Mathematics. And honor.

**BERNSTEIN**

Faith, maybe.... Maybe faith as well.

**NADIA**

Faith....

Faith to become what we're meant to become.

Faith to fulfill our purpose in life.

And an ear to hear it.

And all else is vanity.

**BERNSTEIN**

A little harsh, my Love.

**NADIA**

You've always dreamed your music would have *relevance*, haven't you?

**BERNSTEIN**

What I've dreamed of is a world that hears music. And feels it. Deeply.

Just listens to it. And can go on from there.

Where music is the reply to violence.

To make music more intensely, more brilliantly, more beautifully.

More fiercely than any enemy of man, woman or child.

To make music people's hearts hear. Here. And take with them, everywhere.

To make music to heal the harm and quiet the anger.

To make music that better lifts and tells a life than any book or play.

**NADIA**

I've dreamed the same. The freedom of it. The protection of it.

Music leading the world from senseless war.

[*beat*] You'd think people would have recognized it by now.

That life's not predicated on force and violence. It can't be. That's meaningless.

Life is predicated on *living*. On children. And new children. And love. And music.

Not on wars and soldiers. Battles and new battles.

Life is predicated on Bach.

What I dream of, Lenny, is that we're all made of stars and chords.

**Pause.**

I dream music guides my soul. Toward heaven. Toward Lili.

In my quiet hours I can see her, and how music is the structure of life's meaning.

In music is the underlying truth of the universe.

I see that more every day. How life moves to music, and death moves to stillness.

The grand silence.

**NADIA**

We're all part of something greater, Lenny. Aren't we?  
I've always believed that. Because our minds get lost otherwise.  
I've never stopped believing in music. Or God.  
Just as I've never stopped loving my sister, Lili.  
Whatever else I haven't done, I've never stopped that.

**Pause.**

But, you're right, Lenny, I *can* see something out there, at times.

**BERNSTEIN**

What?

**NADIA**

Beyond my failing vision.

**BERNSTEIN**

Yes?

**NADIA**

My sister, Mina Juliette, died of a fall, when she was nineteen months old.  
The year before I was born. In our first apartment in Paris.  
Mother was always terrified that I would fall. Or Lili would.  
I looked like Mina Juliette.  
Everybody always said.

**BERNSTEIN**

Oh?

**NADIA**

Oh yes. We both favored Father. And *I* was born on his birthday.  
That means something. Don't you think?

**BERNSTEIN**

Yes, I do.

**NADIA**

The same date. I mean, it means something to me.  
Sharing that with him, with his birthdate so many years before mine.  
We'd go to the cemetery together. On All Saints' Day. And at other times, too.  
To see Mina Juliette's grave. And the others.  
And when we'd go, it felt like he and I were part of a greater community.  
Like, we were something, the two of us,  
greater than life and death itself, and what our two lives were then.

**NADIA**

[*beat*] Death is at the heart of a life, mon cher ami. *My life*, to be sure. And Lili's. It gives it meaning. Like the heart of a home. Like a lift into immortality.

**Pause.**

I see myself on a barge, floating down a long, long river, in the moonlight. Silently. Shining. Water lapping at the sides. Above, like you asked me, there's music. Just beyond reach. And voices....

**BERNSTEIN**

[*beat*] And voices?

**NADIA**

Maman covered me. Her voice, and her shadow. She was so brilliant, and so cultured. And I? I know nothing but music.

**BERNSTEIN**

*Nothing but music?!*

But you know *everything* there is to know about music. And you've taught it. For 75 years you've given your students the key to the storehouse. My Lord, Mademoiselle, what more can one give to others? than the confidence you given your students?

**NADIA**

I know nothing but music. And it's been my life.

**BERNSTEIN**

To be praised to the heavens, for how far you've gone. Just listen, in your mind, to all the boundaries you've crossed. I can barely imagine.

Piazzolla, for one.

Click: [Piazzolla's Adios Nonino](#) [a portion]

And Quincy Jones.

Click: [Quincy Jones's "Beat It"](#) [a portion]

Philip Glass.

Click: [Music with Changing Parts by Philip Glass](#) [a portion]

Michel Legrand.

Click: [I Will Wait for You](#) [a portion]

Donald Byrd.

Click: [Black Byrd](#) [a portion]

Lalo Schifrin.

Click: [Mission Impossible theme](#) [a portion]

### **NADIA**

I should imagine music was born in me.  
That's why I hear it all the time.  
Grand-mama Marie-Julie sang at the Opéra-Comique in Paris.  
I have pictures of her.  
She was brilliant.  
Grandfather was a prize-winning cellist, and taught at the Conservatoire.  
Papa also taught at the Conservatoire; and he was famous for his operas.  
And choral music. He won the Prix de Rome at age 19. Like Lili did.  
Maman was one of his students. At the Conservatoire.  
Music was always in my family. What we talked about all the time.  
Music was born into me....  
Strange how one thinks, at my age.

### **BERNSTEIN**

At your age?

### **NADIA**

Music is where I began. And shall end. And shall begin again.  
I'm not six. Nor 16. Nor 60. Nor 92. I'm all of them at once.  
And what happens today illuminates what I felt at 6. I've not change in that way.  
The one difference is that I know more clearly that my time is limited.

### **BERNSTEIN**

Is that what you mean, when you say how one thinks at your age?

### **NADIA**

Maman taught me never to be satisfied with less than my best. Ever.  
She had no tolerance for anything less from her daughters.

### **BERNSTEIN**

Is that how you still feel?

**NADIA**

I never used to think about it. Never had the time. Up teaching by eight.  
Often going till ten at night. Sometimes later. Sometimes eating while I taught.  
Once I remember asking an interviewing student to play piano in my bedroom.  
I was too exhausted at ten, and had to lie down. But he'd waited so long....  
What energy I had then! I'm a strange Boulanger, aren't I, Lenny?

**BERNSTEIN**

Do you remember how you felt, when I sent you West Side Story?

**NADIA**

I loved it, Lenny. You know I did You're a wonderful composer.  
It was too beautiful not to be true.

**BERNSTEIN**

But you cautioned me, I think.

**NADIA**

I did?

**BERNSTEIN**

Perhaps facility is a danger, you said. But it's enough to be aware of it.

**NADIA**

I always trusted you.

**BERNSTEIN**

That's my point. You sense the special talent of each musician beneath your hand.  
From a single page of music, what a person can accomplish.  
You don't know how rare those instincts are.

**NADIA**

I never taught any musician to be great.  
I taught musicians who could, to discover the greatness in them.

**BERNSTEIN**

They say life can be like clockworks, and music brings it all to order.

**NADIA**

Oh, true indeed. It brings order to broken promises, and disappointments....  
Do something for me, Lenny. Please.  
I made a promise I haven't kept.  
Do this for me.  
Don't let the world forget Lili's music.

**BERNSTEIN**

I won't.

**NADIA**

My sister was a musical giant. Especially her Psalm 130. A masterpiece.  
And I promised I would look after her.

Click: [Lili Boulanger's Psaume 130](#) [a portion]

**NADIA**

I feel horrible that I haven't been keeping my promise to protect her work.

**BERNSTEIN**

You've not been failing her.

**NADIA**

It was better when I was conducting and performing.  
I did the very best I could, then, to include her pieces.

**BERNSTEIN**

You did. Absolutely.

**NADIA**

What else is there worth leaving? but the very best we can do.  
She died, at the end, struggling to get out all that she could.  
Buried inside her. Her genius....  
[beat] I've never forgotten what Lili did in her short life.  
I've never forgotten that.  
She's present with me, right now, Lenny.  
Right here. In this room. With me.

**BERNSTEIN**

[beat] At my father's funeral, Rabbi Israel Kazis eulogized him,  
saying he had a mind always in contemplation,  
a heart always filled with love, a voice always in song,  
and a body always in dance. Those words have stuck with me....  
There's something to be said for ritual.... At a loved one's death.

**NADIA**

Rituals are like blossoms. Like good religion is.  
That open to a people's love.

**BERNSTEIN**

I'd say, like music, too.



**NADIA**

Lili's talent was rooted in her relationship with God.  
And with grief.

**BERNSTEIN**

I loved my father.  
But conscience, and faith, would have bound me to him regardless.

**NADIA**

Papa was 62, and Maman 20, when they married. And 72 when I was born.  
I loved him.  
But all those years between us.  
All those years.  
He was the old man with the white beard, I used to say.

**Pause.**

I wasn't raised for marriage like most girls. Or having children.  
I was raised to take care of Maman, and Lili.  
Papa knew he would be gone.  
And talked to me about it.  
He made me promise I'd be the one to look out for them.  
And who better else?  
Maman and I shared a bedroom. Even when they were married.  
Even at the end, when Maman was in a wheelchair.  
"You'll rest in peace if your heart reproaches you for nothing," she told me.

**Pause.**

When I was young we took walks together. *Long* walks. Maman and I.  
You remember things like that. At my age.  
And when I was young that meant more to me than music.

**BERNSTEIN**

When I was young, seven or eight,  
I already felt music stirring in my bones.  
Already felt it becoming my reason for being.  
Burning in me, to tell the burning story inside.

**NADIA**

Maman was a princess, you know.

**BERNSTEIN**

Music communicates the unknowable.

## NADIA

I can't tell you the losses I've had, Lenny. Not in words.  
Words isolate feelings. Put rings around them.  
Lili's loss. Maman's. Raoul Pugno's. Fauré's.  
So many. Many. I've lost in my life.  
And what I do is what I always do.  
I wrap myself up. In music and busy-ness. And I go on.  
Notes speak deeper to me than words. It's in the notes I can grieve.  
Notes comfort me. And the constant activity of my life.  
If I chose not to allow myself hours to grieve,  
I chose not to lose hours of my life. But the hours come back. Unexpectedly.

### **Takes Bernstein's hand for a minute.**

Click: [Bach BWV 244-3, Herzliebster Jesu.](#)

Look at Stravinsky. When he joined me in Gargenville.  
He'd lost a mother, a wife, and a daughter.  
One right after the other, in 1939.  
I urged him to leave for America.  
To take up the position offered him at Harvard.  
I urged him it would bring him peace. To go back to his work.

[beat] I'd lost hope of ever seeing you again, Lenny.  
I haven't the words to tell you what it means to me that you came.  
Thank you. I love you....  
[beat] Maman, the princess she was, was ever strict.  
Ever demanding. Ever severe.  
Harshness, on occasion, but soon wrapped up in tenderness.  
Ever the stickler for precision. To her, there was one correct way to do anything.  
Like love. A quality that she said never altered.  
Love was always unconditional to her. Whether or not reciprocated....  
I've loved like that, too, you know.  
Authoritarian, many people have told me. Stern. Rigid. Too demanding.  
Agelessly middle-aged. Many people haven't loved me.  
But I love *you*, Lenny.  
And I ask myself, why? Why does a woman love?  
Because a woman knows: It ties things together.  
Love betters life.  
For oneself. But selflessly, too, for the other.  
And it's music that preserves the purest chords of love.  
Music expresses it all; and excludes nothing.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ comes to  
BERNSTEIN.**

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

[*sharply*] It's enough, Maestro Bernstein.  
She is tired.  
It's quite enough now. She's given so much.

**BERNSTEIN**

Indeed. She has.

**Standing.**

I'll leave.

**NADIA**

No. No. It's no trouble for me, Annette.  
No trouble at all.  
Let him stay. Please.  
There's only so much time left, passing.  
He's my tonic. He's my joy.  
Let him stay.  
At least until I fall asleep.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ returns to  
where she had been standing, as  
BERNSTEIN again sits.**

**BERNSTEIN**

You have given so much, Mademoiselle, for so long.  
How can we ever give *you* the appreciation we owe?

**NADIA**

Who's counting?

**BERNSTEIN**

I brought a note with me, I'd quite forgotten earlier.  
It might entertain you.

**NADIA**

Oh? From you?

**BERNSTEIN**

From Aaron Copland. From almost twenty years ago. But who's counting?

**NADIA**

What does it say?

**BERNSTEIN pulls out a folded page  
taken from a magazine.**

**BERNSTEIN**

It's from Harpers Magazine.

[*reading*] "It is now almost forty years since I first rang the bell at Nadia Boulanger's Paris apartment and asked her to accept me as her composition pupil. Any young musician may do the same thing today, for Mademoiselle Boulanger lives at the same address, in the same apartment, and teaches with the same formidable energy. The only difference is that she was then comparatively little-known outside the Parisian musical world, and today there are few musicians anywhere who would not concede her to be the most famous of living composition teachers."

**NADIA**

Oh.

**BERNSTEIN**

He said you captivated him.  
That his career was inextricably bound up in your methods.

**NADIA**

Copland was forever too kind to me.

**BERNSTEIN**

He should have been! You taught him. You helped introduce him to his career.  
Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony.  
Serge Koussevitsky and Boston.  
And you premiered his organ symphony at your American debut.

**NADIA**

You talk a lot about me, my friend....  
But have I? Been what Copland said?...  
I can't deny I've been in the same apartment all these years.  
On the fourth floor. 36, rue Ballu.  
Place Lili-Boulanger now.  
The furniture, even. My grandmother's.  
Furniture she had in 1835. The same.  
*I've changed.* Though people always tell me I haven't.  
But the furniture's the same.

**BERNSTEIN**

We are so proud, just to have spent time here with you.

**NADIA**

She won first prize at the Conservatoire. My grandmother. In 1812.

A mezzo-soprano.

Then she had my father. On *my* birthday.

In 1815. At age twenty-nine....

*He* won the Prix de Rome, you know. When he was nineteen.

Oh, I've said that already, haven't I?

And my sister Lili. When *she* was nineteen.

I never did. Second prize was my closest....

Oh, Lenny! Who am I to leave all of this to?

I haven't any family left. Only Annette.

**BERNSTEIN**

*Things* will take care of themselves, trust me.

People, and what you've taught them are what matters. They're your great legacy.

**NADIA**

Every day was a new adventure for me. Teaching. Every pupil.

When you take on new students, it's on *you*. It's a privilege *and* a responsibility.

You must understand their intuitive talent. Feel inside what they're capable of.

It's a matter of respect. You just can't go ahead and develop a child,

without being certain he has a talent that should be developed. That's wrong.

You just can't give talent to everybody. That would be madness.

One must dare to choose. Correct?

**BERNSTEIN**

I agree, of course. You must foresee what they're capable of.

**NADIA**

Absolutely. You must find out, if they have the heart and stomach.

To love what they're doing. To devote *all* their energy to it.

It's no use otherwise, for extraordinary people.

Without work there can be no inner satisfaction. It's what separates people.

It's what separates out what I call the "Sleepers."

People who you should let lie. No point in waking them.

Let them sleep. They're nice enough. They're what they are.

A person who is gifted is not at fault. But he has an awesome responsibility.

And some do not have the strength and character for it.

Because, if he lacks sufficient character, the extraordinary gift will go to waste.

The gift of character is what we search for. Don't you agree?

**BERNSTEIN**

No question. I call it *discipline*.

**NADIA**

Discipline strong enough to withstand your unbelievable gift.  
And all I taught was discipline.  
Which *I* was taught by my mother.  
That's all. That's it. Discipline.... And courage.

**BERNSTEIN**

Of course. Courage. Courage to go beyond our comfort zone.  
I always remember what Beethoven went through, toward the end.  
When he lost his hearing.  
When I'm conducting: It's not *my* Ninth Symphony. It's Beethoven's.  
It's *Beethoven's* Ode to Joy.

Click: [Ode to Joy, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D minor.](#)

**NADIA**

When I saw you conduct the Ninth, I lost track of how you were conducting it.  
And I never found it so beautiful, realizing that it's not even *Beethoven's* Ninth.  
It's a symphony given to Beethoven to write, that no longer needs Beethoven.  
Nor an orchestra, nor soloists, nor a choir, nor a conductor to be a masterpiece.  
It needs nothing more, because it's from God.

**BERNSTEIN**

Not to disagree, Mademoiselle, but it's finding the talent, too. Inside.  
And you not only found it, you directed it, upward.  
Quincy Jones, for example.

**NADIA**

Quincy Jones.... I loved his smile.  
Until you mentioned him earlier, I hadn't thought of him for years.  
I told him: Your music can never be more or less than the man you are.  
Music has a separate greatness of its own.  
But it's no greater than the composer's soul.  
Unless you have life experience and something to say about,  
you have nothing to contribute to composition.

**BERNSTEIN**

You know what Quincy Jones says about you? Back in America?  
That he owes everything he is as a musician, to *your* teaching.  
To him, you are the most astounding woman he ever met in his life.

**NADIA**

America was such a dream for me ... when I was in my 30's.  
Back then, it seemed so far away. And the mere thought of it thrilled me.  
By some people's thinking I was already an "old lady." Imagine!  
And my dear Fauré. Master. Just died before I left on the ship for America....  
We shall meet again, Gabriel; and I shall thank you again, my great teacher.

**BERNSTEIN**

*You* are the great teacher, my Love.  
Nothing compares to you. Not even Fauré.

**NADIA drifts back to sleep.**

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ comes back  
over to BERNSTEIN. He stands.**

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

[*whisper*] It's time now.

**BERNSTEIN**

[*whisper*] Yes, I know.  
I understand.

**BERNSTEIN kisses NADIA, asleep.**

**BERNSTEIN**

Goodbye, Mademoiselle. I shall always love you.

**BERNSTEIN turns to leave, and  
ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ lowers the bed.  
Just as BERNSTEIN is about to exit –**

**NADIA**

Room, upon room, upon room.  
With doors. And someone watching. And ....  
And my poor *Soir d'hiver* I wrote when I was 27. It's coming back to me....  
Travel safely, Lenny Bernstein, my Love. You are with me.

**BERNSTEIN**

[*turns*] For you, Nadia. You, in my mind, we shall forever be one of each other.

**BERNSTEIN exits. Lights fade to  
darkness. In the darkness LILI softly  
translates Nadia's *Soir d'hiver*.**

### LILI (in the darkness)

Soir d'hiver.

Together alone on a winter's eve,  
a young mother soft cradles a babe in her arms.  
Faintly weeping she carols her bantling asleep,  
singing "Jesus is coming, my darling in blue.  
Christmas bells will be ringing, and church choirs singing,  
and bringing in gladness for you."

While he slumbers she wanders in thoughts of her Love:  
Where he is, at the Front, out of sight.  
Can he feel of the feelings that run through her heart?  
That she's here, still alive, and still cares?  
Does he know she is haunted by worry and fear?  
How she prays for him day into night?  
Is he sure he's the one she only awaits?  
How she searches this face for his own?

She closes her eyes to imagine the War.  
Imagines all hope that she can.  
In Justice she trusts, and holds fast to her breast,  
a son with the heart of a man.

Click: [Nadia Boulanger's 1915 \*Soir d'hiver\*](#) [a portion]



SCENE 2 – TEACHING

1977. Nadia’s apartment. NADIA (89, wearing a severe, black suit) and her STUDENT are seated, side-by-side, at the piano. On the rack is the score of Igor Stravinsky’s Piano Sonata (1924). ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ (80) is sitting nearby. LILI is sitting across the room.

**NADIA**

Everything counts. Without *everything*....  
Without paying attention to every detail, we gain nothing that is permanent.  
And dress and behavior count, too.  
We are properly dressed and behaved, at all times here. Is that perfectly clear?

**STUDENT**

Yes, Mademoiselle Boulanger.

**NADIA**

What kind of sight-reader are you?

**STUDENT**

Fairly decent.

**NADIA**

You don’t know? Answer me again: Are you a good, or a bad sight-reader?

**STUDENT**

[*gulp*] Good.

**NADIA**

Good. Here. Play this.

**NADIA motions to the score with her hand; and the STUDENT pauses to read.**

**NADIA**

Have you seen it before? It’s Stravinsky’s Piano Sonata.

**STUDENT**

No. I’m not familiar with it.... Shall I play it up to tempo?

**NADIA**

Naturally!

**The STUDENT commences playing.**

Click: [Stravinsky’s Piano Sonata \(1924\)](#) [a portion]

**NADIA**

[*shortly after the beginning of the Student's playing*] Up. Up to tempo.

**STUDENT**

Yes, Mademoiselle Boulanger.

**NADIA marks the tempo with her left hand, and the playing continues, until NADIA takes the Student's right hand with her left.**

**NADIA**

Stop. You failed to notice the clef change.

**STUDENT**

Yes, Mademoiselle Boulanger.

**NADIA**

Start here.

**Play resumes, where NADIA indicates. But in a short time NADIA rests her head on her arms, and play stops.**

**NADIA**

[*raising her head*] My Dear, I'm sure that you are very good in the United States. But *here*, this will not do!

**NADIA stands and exits.**

**STUDENT**

She's the most exacting teacher I've ever met. She's not human. She expects perfection. I don't know if I can stand it. I think I've made a mistake. Coming here. How can I ever possibly meet her standards?

**The STUDENT wipes a tear from her cheek.**

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Mademoiselle demands the most of students who are worth the most. So long as she's a taskmaster you can have hope. When she's nice, that's a bad sign. What I can tell you is this: You *are* good. Don't even think of giving up. A day will come when you will say to yourself: It was Mademoiselle Boulanger who taught me. I learned from the greatest, and I was brave enough to fight for it. And that will be a momentous day in your life.

**STUDENT**

Is she? Is she the greatest?

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Mademoiselle was a composer, in her youth. A very good one.

She studied with Gabriel Fauré.

At 20, she won second in the Prix de Rome.

But she gave it up.

Fauré told her not to, but she gave it up anyway.

Why? Because she *is* a genius.

And it takes a genius to see where genius is.

And where it isn't.

Her genius is recognizing it in others. That makes her the great teacher she is.

Like her sister, Lili. Mademoiselle taught her from when she was 13.

And knew from the beginning that Lili was a great composer. And *she* wasn't.

**STUDENT**

Oh.

I'm not familiar with the works of Lili Boulanger.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Lili Boulanger was a brilliant composer.

Her compositions are probably the best the world has yet to discover.

They've been shockingly neglected. But times will change. The world will change.

*You* will change.

Lili was only 19 when she won the Prix de Rome. The first woman to do it.

And then, she was gone. Age 24. In the final year of World War I.

**STUDENT**

Oh.... I'm sorry.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Mademoiselle's memory is prodigious. And her skills are just as great.

She has the most accurate musical ear in the world.

Her teaching of technique may be demanding, and painstaking,  
but her tolerance of expression is forever infinite.

And her price? She will tell you,

“Don't take up music for your life, unless you would rather die than not to do so.”

And more than that, Mademoiselle is an anchor.

**STUDENT**

An anchor? What do you mean by that?

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Many years ago Mademoiselle had a 21-year-old student from Harvard. Arthur Mendel was his name. He came here for his lesson, but was told that Mademoiselle was unwell. Suffering a migraine so severe she couldn't get out of bed. Could he come back the following day? But he was leaving the next day, for Germany, and his fellowship was soon running out, so he couldn't postpone the trip. When Mademoiselle heard, she pulled herself out of bed to give him his lesson. At first her headache was so bad she began making mistakes. But in the course of a few minutes Mademoiselle became so absorbed in the music she forgot the pain.... She has enormous willpower. Like an anchor. And it enables her to withstand enormous pain.

**STUDENT**

I know Professor Mendel. He taught me at Princeton. Baroque choral music.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Do you know Philip Glass?

**STUDENT**

The composer.  
Of course.  
I mean, of course I know *of* him.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

When he came here, twelve years ago,  
Mademoiselle sat him down, right there. At that piano.  
While she read through the scores he had brought with him.  
Finally she pointed to *one bar*. One single bar.  
And said, "There. This is written by a real composer."  
And did he leave? No.  
But that was the first and last time she said anything nice to him.  
For two years.  
That's how she is....  
And one more thing. Being female, as you are,  
the ultimate approval Mademoiselle can give you is to address you, "Monsieur."  
Just so you know.  
I've only heard her twice do it.  
Go back. Play it again.

**The STUDENT returns to playing  
Stravinsky's Piano Sonata.**

**While she is playing, NADIA quietly reenters, and takes a seat next to ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ.**

**NADIA**

Well done, my Dear.  
For your first time. Playing Stravinsky's Piano Sonata. It can be demanding.

**STUDENT**

I'm a choral conductor.  
The piano keyboard's not my home.  
And, yes, it was demanding, for me.

**NADIA**

Why did you come here?

**STUDENT**

Because music expects more of me. I feel.  
More than the choral conducting I've been doing.  
And I wanted the freedom to discover what it was.  
And everyone I trusted told me you're the one to come to.

**NADIA**

Freedom begins with discipline. It must.  
You can't find it any other way.  
It's discipline that gives you the physical and mental independence you need.  
Or the whole world is nothing but spoiled children.

**STUDENT**

Discipline.  
Yes, Mademoiselle Boulanger.

**NADIA**

Discipline is the backbone of work. And of creative life.  
Maman had it. And taught it. And my sister had it.  
How to work. And it's work that brings a structure of order to the world.  
Without order there can be no inner satisfaction.  
Without inner satisfaction there can be no freedom.  
And without freedom there is no true joy. And no true music.  
Order is supreme.

**STUDENT**

I understand.  
Mademoiselle Boulanger.

**NADIA**

Discipline. Attentiveness. Desire. Memory. Accurate hearing.  
The cardinal virtues. While inertia is a musician's greatest enemy.

**NADIA moves to the piano and brings  
her hand down on a random number of  
keys ("bangs" the keyboard).**

**NADIA**

Hear that? That's cacophony.  
That's lack of discipline. Too many notes.  
That's what's God-awful in this world.  
The sound of hatred, and bitterness, and war.

You have to know the rules in order to break them....  
I fear I've discouraged more students than encouraged, my Dear, in my life.  
Annette knows that. But it's a principle of mine.  
I fight illusions and dreams, when that's all they are.  
It's one thing to be gifted.  
And quite another to be worthy of one's gift.  
That's why I'm here. To be a student first, myself.  
To fathom out what my students lack.  
And then, I have four tasks before me.  
First, to develop a student's consciousness of being an artist and a musician.  
Second, to train the student's memory.  
Third, to equip the student with technique.  
And fourth, to instill in the student a sense of quality.  
There you are.  
A teacher must be a tyrant, even if, once in a while, a tender one.  
Does that work for you?

**STUDENT**

Yes, Mademoiselle Boulanger, it does.

**NADIA**

Good. And I don't teach two students the same way.  
The teacher is but the humus in the soil. It's what grows that counts.  
And what counts is: Don't merely do the best you can. Do better than you can!  
Don't take up music for your life, unless you would rather die than not to do so.

**NADIA again bangs down on the  
keyboard.**

SCENE 3 – MADEMOISELLE ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ

1975. Nadia's apartment. NADIA (87) is sitting, reading music, with the help of a glass. LILI is sitting across the room. ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ (78) enters, carrying a parcel.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

It's just arrived. By post.

**NADIA**

What is it?

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

From Buenos Aires.

**NADIA**

Well, go ahead. Open it.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ opens the parcel. It contains two records, together with a letter.**

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

A couple of records, it looks like. By Ástor Piazzolla.

And a letter....

Remember him?

**NADIA**

I should *forget*?

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

The letter's addressed to you.

**NADIA**

And?

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Do you want to me to read it? Or do you?

**NADIA**

You go ahead.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ opens the envelop and takes out the letter. She sits down next to NADIA, and reads:**

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

[*reading*] “My dearest teacher, Mademoiselle Boulanger.  
I have not forgotten you. But it has been a long time. Has it not?  
I am very, very busy man, since you sent me back.  
I call what I am playing, Nuevo tango.  
Tango, with a touch of chamber music and a little jazz blended in.  
No singers.  
A musical revolution in my country.”

**NADIA**

[*beat*] Go on. Go on.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

It’s lengthy.  
[*reading*] “I’ve broken some sacred cows here, I’m afraid.  
Many are not happy with me.  
And all is not well in Argentina.  
The military has taken over.  
Who think I stand for a lack of respect for them and for tradition.  
When I don’t.  
Tango means the world to me.  
But the world changes. And the tango changes.  
I stand up, now, playing bandoneón.  
My right foot on a chair, the bellows across my thigh.  
Some say, avant-garde.  
But if you look at it, avant-garde means new eyes, opening in in your head.  
That’s what you did for me.  
In America and Europe, my reputation is growing much.  
I went back to New York.  
I told you, I used to live in New York when I was young.  
I have made recordings, and I have written a few things.  
Adiós Nonino. For my father, when he died. Of a bicycle accident.  
After that I returned to Buenos Aires.  
And in 1965 I made an album of tango music.  
I am sending a copy with this letter.  
I hope it plays well for you. I owe it to you. To the three of you.  
I had two great teachers: You, and Alberto Ginastera. And a third I found,  
in the cold room of pensións, cabarets, and cafés, and in the streets of Buenos of  
Aires. You three have taught me the secrets of the tango.”

**NADIA**

[*beat*] Go on. Go on.



## ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ

He's so long....

[reading] "When I came to you, in 1954, I brought kilos of symphonies with me, and chamber music, and sonatas I had written in Argentina. I thought I was a genius. And, I must admit, I was ashamed of playing the tango. I had come to think the tango was cheap, and that the bandoneón was ugly.

When I left you.

No. That very moment you said to me:

'You idiot! *That's* Piazzolla! Don't ever leave tango.'

That moment I took all the music I'd composed for ten years, and sent it to Hell in ten seconds.

How rare for you see something in me so quick I was too blind to see myself."

## NADIA

Stravinsky was rare.

He freed things in his music.

Lili's music was rare.

And, well, Fauré's.

Piazzolla? You can't fool the soul. We'll see....

Go on. Go on.

## ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ

He's a bit of a talker, isn't he?

## NADIA

It's been twenty-two years.

## ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ

[reading] "Once they told me I played tango like a gringo.

Now I play tango like the man I am.

I make tango for listening, rather than dancing.

Because of you, my Princess. You.

What I am. What Argentina is. The tango is the soul of us.

Sadly, three years ago, I suffered a heart attack. Nearly mortal.

After recovering, I moved to Italy.

But here I am, today, back in Buenos Aires playing a concert at Teatro Gran Rex.

And today, here I am, sending you something special.

My best. A rough recording. But keep it to yourself.

I won't release it until it's ready. It's secret, for now.

I call it Oblivion. Let me know what you think. Por favor. Gracias.

You are truly an angel. And my skies are filled with love and admiration for you, Ástor."

**NADIA**

Play it.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Which one?

**NADIA**

The one he calls Oblivion.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ stands, takes the Oblivion LP to the record player, and starts it. She pours herself a drink, and one for NADIA, and sits back down to listen.**

Click: [Ástor Piazzolla, Oblivion](#)

**NADIA**

It's a masterpiece.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

How do you know?

**NADIA**

When we can't guess what comes next. We don't know.  
But when we hear it, we know it's the one in a thousand.  
Just the few, right notes. Only the few. And the right ones.  
Leaving one to want to talk about every single one.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

You've not said that before.  
In sixty-five years I've never known you to talk like that.  
Except for Stravinsky, of course. And Lily, of course. And Fauré.

**NADIA**

*Sixty-five years?* Can it be that long we've been together?

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

My hair was long and blond.  
Remember? Down my back?

**NADIA**

A Conservatoire pupil.  
What? Twelve? Or thirteen?

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Thirteen.

[*taking a drink*] Four years before War changed our lives forever.  
You. Lili. Me. My fiancé.... Killed.

**NADIA**

There were nights we cried all night, I think.... I did.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

After that, well, you started trusting me some of your pupils.

**NADIA**

You were good. All along. Always good.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

[*in thought*] Yes.

**NADIA**

And good at composition, too. Excellent. Your piano miniatures.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

[*in thought*] Yes.

**NADIA**

Competition in the Prix de Rome.... What year?

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

1920.

**NADIA**

Ah, yes, seven years after Lili won it.

But ....

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Do you remember the Union des Femmes Professeurs back then?

**NADIA**

I remember your piano miniatures.

Performed in New Orleans, weren't they?

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

In 1922.

**NADIA**

Before Maman got so sick. And you did so very much for us, caring for her.  
Right up to the end.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Do you ever think things would have been different, if you were born a boy?

**NADIA**

We were all girls. Even the two Maman lost as babies.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

I mean, if you *were* a boy. A man, now.

**NADIA**

I never venture down lanes of thought like that.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

I was just wondering.

**NADIA**

Things would certainly be different between us. I admit to that.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

They certainly would. The way I feel with you. So much more a woman.  
Like, what *you said*, when they asked you how it felt,  
to be the first female conductor of the Boston Symphony.

**NADIA**

What I said? I simply told them I'd been a woman for more than 50 years,  
and had quite gotten over my original astonishment...  
Boston wasn't the only major symphony I was the first female conductor of.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

I know. I know. London. New York. Philadelphia.

**NADIA**

Why should it be so amazing to be a woman?  
As if being a woman is some kind of handicap.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Being a woman *is* some kind of handicap, for some, in a male world.  
Finding your particular feminine context.

**NADIA**

It helps, when you focus on truth and music.  
Men's lies don't seem so important then.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

You always talk about music, almost like it's the word of God.

**NADIA**

Music is like the word of God.  
Mysteriously.  
Because music obliterates time. Mysteriously.  
It takes us out of time.  
It restores memory in the present, the present to memory and to the past.  
It moves away boundaries in life.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

You don't pay much attention, do you, if it's not about music?

**NADIA**

Politics aren't my interest. Sorry. I don't even care if women vote.... Yes, that bad.  
Music brings us friends. Politics makes us enemies.  
Music makes sweeter the sweetness of our happiest hours. And prolongs them.  
And soothes the emotional soul.  
Everything is made clearer and more sweet.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

You never have let it bother you? the hurdles out there for woman?

**NADIA**

No. Why should I? Waste good time, when God has blessed me in so many ways?  
Maman. And Papa. And Lily. And you. I remind myself how fortunate I've been to  
have had the time together we had. There's something to be said for growing old,  
when you have someone like you to grow old with.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

No regrets?

**NADIA**

Teaching music has been life's greatest blessing for me.  
But two World Wars? My God! What they did to our nation's morale!  
And my fleeing the Nazi's to run to America.  
I dragged the shame of it around with me for a year. Or more.  
Like an open wound I despaired of ever healing.  
A sense of shame ... a depression I couldn't shed.  
I wrote Igor, "Leaving everyone, suffering the way they are.  
I don't know whether a tired old heart can stand the burden."  
My life was filled with dark shadows and heavy with sorrow....  
But then, there was you. Here in Paris, having mass said for Lili on March 15<sup>th</sup>.  
At Trinity Church. And making everything go normal, at rue Ballu....  
There never was a more loyal friend than you, Annette. And I do love that.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

We women stuck together. And we suffered our share of prejudice.

**NADIA**

What part does gender play in music? All a woman wants is to lead her own life.  
And find a way to her own fulfillment.

What *I* resent is pouring my heart into teaching a woman,  
only to see her, in a couple of years, go out and get married.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Are you saying, every woman is not to get married? Every talented woman?

**NADIA**

Not waste her talents. Choose music, *and stick to it, faithfully.*  
As I have done. And Lili did.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Did you ever regret not taking George Gershwin on as a student?

**NADIA**

Not at all. I told him the truth. That I could teach him nothing.  
Ravel would say the same thing.  
“Why become a second rate Ravel when you’re already a first rate Gershwin?”  
I told him. And he died famous for being a genuine Gershwin.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

I mean, don’t you ever think there was *something* you could have taught him?

**NADIA**

I teach music. A well-rounded understanding of it.  
But the music I teach is not for everybody. Each student has to find his own voice.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

His music just wasn’t to your taste?

**NADIA**

Taste is unimportant. Music’s an emotion, from which there’s born an idea.  
And to express the idea, the technique of a musician comes into operation.  
The key is making contact. *That’s* the key.  
From one person’s mind to another’s. From one heart to another.  
That’s what music does.... Good music.  
One really doesn’t learn to love.  
One learns to *understand* that which one does love. And music brings clarity.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Besides leaving France when the Germans invaded, anything else you regret?

**NADIA**

As you well know, I promised that I would promote and champion Lili's music. Ceaselessly. By all the force I had in me. And look where it is. Her genius, still on the vine, after all this time.... I had a dream the other night, Annette. About Lili. We were in Lausanne, when France surrendered to the Nazis. I rushed off, in my car, driving like a mad woman, to get back to Paris. Dodging refugees, along the road on the way. But I forgot Lili. I'd left her behind. And she couldn't find her way back. And fear woke me up. My fear. And my shame. And my regret.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

You did all you could for her, Mademoiselle. You programmed her works. Many, many times in France, England, and America. People talk about you spending your life teaching. Here. In America. In England. But don't forget the three thousand concerts you've given. And remember, when you were in New York, with Leonard Bernstein? Four concerts in four days. Full houses, for a 74-year old. And what did you direct? Fauré's Requiem. Solemn Music, by Virgil Thomson. And Lili's Psalms.... At the New York Philharmonic. And you created the Lili Boulanger Memorial Fund to keep the memory of her music alive. You worked with Igor Markevitch to record her choral works. All I'm trying to say is that it would have been different if hers was a man's music.

**NADIA**

If the world suffers from female blindness, let it. That's no excuse for me. Her music is that of the genius she was. Male or female. And it's my doing that the world is still mostly ignorant of it.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

It's not your doing if male conductors fail to follow your lead. And, face it, there are a lot of musicians who, quite simply, cannot hear like you can.

**NADIA**

But it is my doing if one thinks "Nadia Boulanger" and "Lili Boulanger" does not immediately come to mind. Remember that auditorium at Dartmouth College, in America? The one they wanted to put up, with my name on it? With over \$300,000? And why I stopped them?

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Because it would have assured your immortality, over Lili's.

**NADIA**

Correct.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Has that stuck in your mind?

**NADIA**

No....

[beat] But one thing that has stuck in my mind:

When I came back to France, after the War, you wouldn't stay with me.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

How could I? We were struggling just to stay alive. Us women. On our own.

I had to have my own place to teach my pupils.

There wasn't room enough for me to live at rue Ballu.

Don't you remember?

**NADIA**

I remember giving up living in Gargenville in the summers.

I remember having a student ... Ruth Robbin was her name ... from the States ... who helped out around the apartment. She lived in Lili's old room.

We ate from her CARE packages from America. Chocolate and oatmeal.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

What?

**NADIA**

Robbin and I ate from CARE packages from America.

And we had to walk. Everywhere we went in the city.

She used to say she practically had to run. Walking with me.

And once, going into a concert I wanted to hear,

I remember her saying it was the first warm place she'd been in for ages.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

American.

**NADIA**

It wasn't until 1948 we had electricity Wednesday nights in the Clichy district.

My students had to use flashlights to see the music I gave them to play.

And I wouldn't have had a car, to use for anything,

if it weren't Robbin, who had the money to buy one. A little Peugeot.



**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Americans....  
They're not perfect, you know.

**NADIA**

I know that, Annette.  
My Robbin, for example.  
She'd get impatient with me, I'm sorry to say. *With me.*  
I remember an Easter holiday I took in Santiago de Compostela.  
A terribly beautiful city.  
And she came to pick me up, and bring me back.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

She had to have been a better driver than *you*.

**NADIA**

What are you saying?  
About that car crash we had the last time I drove? When I was 77?  
We weren't hurt. Were we? all that bad?

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

You don't forget things like that.  
Actually, a person doesn't forget anytime riding in a car with you at the wheel.

**NADIA**

Well, never mind that. That's all behind us.  
What I was saying was, when Robbin was driving me back to Paris from Spain,  
on the way I stopped off to visit Roger-Ducasse, for a night.  
I told Robbin to get me the next afternoon. Four o'clock, I figured.  
She thought one. I wasn't ready till six. But so what?  
He had such a lovely villa in Bordeaux to see. What else did she have to do?

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

What did you and Jean do.

**NADIA**

We talked, and talked, and talked. I think until dawn.  
And played music.  
His Pastorale for Organ, especially. O, especially that.  
He dedicated it to me, when he composed it. In 1909. When I was 22.

Click: [Jean Roger-Ducasse's Pastorale pour Orgue \(1909\)](#)  
[a portion]

**NADIA**

We had so much to talk about. And so much on my mind.  
And I couldn't understand Robbin's impatience.  
She said we were in a race against time. Why?  
I had a rehearsal in Paris the next morning, at eleven.  
But we had plenty of time.  
On the way I had her stop at the Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. So what?  
And I insisted on stopping to see the cathedral of Pau. She complained. Why?  
We were breaking our necks to get to Paris on time, she said.  
Oh, she was so impatient. And untrusting. I knew what I was doing.  
And there were a couple of other cathedral towns to stop in, on the way.  
Just a few minutes, sitting in the square, to take a look.  
In Tours, about three in the morning, a policeman stopped her for driving on  
streetcar tracks down the center of the town square.  
Imagine! The whole town asleep. I explained; and he let us go. See what I mean?  
We reached Chartres around five.  
They had just restored the Cathedral's stained-glass windows....  
Remember, they were buried in the countryside during the War.  
To keep them safe.  
And I dearly wanted to see them, in the morning light.  
We napped for an hour or so in the car; and then, with the sun rising,  
I went into the Cathedral. You couldn't see a thing at first, until, after a while,  
someone lit a candle down at the far end. Then more and more were lit.  
And the novices and priests and nuns began coming in.  
With the light streaming through those magnificent windows I couldn't leave.  
I stayed till nine. It was glorious. I wanted to keep it to myself as long as I could.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

So you were late for your rehearsal.

**NADIA**

Not at all.  
In fact, we still had enough time to get fresh milk from a farm outside Paris.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

You have lived with such insane intensity, you know!  
That's what made you always late.... I'm amazed your body didn't revolt.

**NADIA**

Life doesn't always give you the opportunities, if you don't take them.  
I simply do what I'm called to do. And, besides, Annette, my body *has rebelled*.  
You know that. These teeth. These hands. My fading eyes. All that.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Your hands. Arthritis. Yes.  
They're what some people talk about the most about you.  
I recall one journalist writing that he couldn't keep his eyes off them.  
Said they were the most eloquent hands since Bernhardt.  
Graceful as swans....  
But *your eyes*....  
People are still mesmerized by their warmth,  
and curiosity,  
and intensity,  
and constant alertness.  
Darting about like a bird's the way they do,  
people often can't even say what color they are.

**NADIA**

[*beat*] But, I'm not always late, am I? *Nothing's always*, is it?

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

No. But you've been late a whole lot in your life. Why do you do it?

**NADIA**

I have a lot on my mind.  
All the time.  
Thirty-six and a half things to do. It seems. All the time.  
It makes making decisions difficult.  
When I have so many places to go.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

Sometimes, I think, you do it intentionally.  
Working yourself and your mind ceaselessly.  
So you won't have a moment's rest, to think....  
To let grief catch up with you.  
That's why I think you keep yourself cloistered in work and thoughts all the time.  
The way you do. That's what *I* think.

**NADIA**

You're right, I suppose. If I ever stop, the pain might become unbearable.  
Even a few hours idleness I resist.  
Forever on the move. Always less time to brood.  
Always more time to surround myself with youth.  
Always less time to worry about a panther,  
that might be prowling around outside my room in Monaco.

**ANNETTE DIEUDONNÉ**

[*laughs*] That did give Princess Grace a fright, didn't it.  
More than you, who had no idea what was going on,  
absorbed in music like you were.

You *are* amazing!

I just wish you'd relax long enough to think about yourself,  
and your own compositions, for a while.

Stop being so intense.

Stop multiplying your endless activities.

What *you* composed was of genius, too.

Think about your 3 Pieces for cello and piano for example.

That was good. Think about that.

**The scene ends with Nadia Boulanger's 3  
Pieces for cello and piano, No. 3 in C#  
minor, as the two sit there quietly.**

Click: [Nadia Boulanger's 3 Pieces for cello and piano, No. 3  
in C# minor](#)

SCENE 4 – NADIA’S 70<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY PARTY

16 September 1957. Nadia’s apartment, now, nominally, a room in the Swiss home of Igor Markevitch. The room is gently lit. The moon is shining in through a window.

Outside the room (offstage) are the festive sounds of Nadia’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party. In the room MICHEL LEGRAND (25) is seated at the piano, playing.

Click: [The Summer Knows \(Summer of ‘42\)](#) [a portion]

NADIA (70) enters, tall, ramrod straight, white-haired, wearing glasses, a very long black evening gown and low-heeled shoes, on the arm of LEONARD BERNSTEIN (39), with IGOR MARKEVITCH (45) at their side. LILI enters, a few steps behind the group, and keeps to the side, apart from them.

**NADIA**

How beautiful, Michel. Yours?

**LEGRAND stands, to join them.**

**LEGRAND**

In my mind. It plays itself, over and over.

**NADIA**

Great melodies will.

**LEGRAND hugs NADIA.**

**MARKEVITCH**

Nadia! Nadia! Vive, vive our Nadia!

**NADIA**

A hundred thirty of my closest friends. How thoughtful of you, Igor. *All of you.* And a hundred thirty thousand thank-you’s.

**BERNSTEIN**

But maybe too many friends to reach consensus on our special gift for you. On your seventieth.

**LEGRAND**

Like ... what? An original Michel Legrand score?  
Would you like that? Avec ces yeux-là?  
Or some kisses? From La danse du baiser?  
With the dance itself thrown in.

**LEGRAND takes NADIA in his arms to dance. MARKEVITCH “rescues” her.**

**MARKEVITCH**

Don't listen to Michel.  
The Grand Fool.  
It's a fur coat for my love.  
Nothing less.

**LEGRAND**

Michel Legrand a Grand Fool?  
Not with melodies.  
I can write enough of them to fill the grandest birthday cake in the world.  
They come to me effortlessly.  
It's a gift I have.  
Enough to fill a cake, to the ceiling, with candles.  
And you, my dear, sweet Nadia, can take your pick.

**MARKEVITCH**

Tell you what, Michel.  
*I'll* make *you* a gift even better.  
A gift of prophecy:  
The more you live, the more you'll learn.  
And the more you'll learn, the more you'll realize the less you know.

**LEGRAND**

Clever, Igor. Very clever.  
It sounds like something *I* might say.

**NADIA**

Gentlemen, please.  
It's my birthday.

**LEGRAND**

How about a signed copy of a new album of mine, when it comes out?  
Legrand Jazz, I'm going to call it.  
With Miles Davis, and John Coltrane, and Bill Evans, and Paul Chambers,  
and Ben Webster, and Hank Jones, and Herbie Mann, and Phil Woods,  
and Donald Byrd, and Art Farmer, and Shelton Powell, and Teo Macero,  
and Milt Hilton, and Jimmy Cleveland, and a dozen more.

**BERNSTEIN**

How did you pull that one out of your hat, Houdini?

**LEGRAND**

The people at Columbia Records owe me....  
[to NADIA] How about it, Mademoiselle Boulanger?

**NADIA**

You're too kind, Michel.

**LEGRAND**

Nonsense. If it weren't for you ....  
You know, I used to hate you, sometimes, at the Conservatoire.  
You were so Goddamned demanding.  
But there's no one who does what you do better than you.  
You're absolutely extraordinary. Beyond words.  
And you made me. I'll confess willingly to that. In front of all these men.

**NADIA**

You don't know what it means to stake your career ...  
your whole working life even, on being ruthless.  
It's better to weed out those who don't have a stomach for their talent.  
For the hard work it demands.  
It is nothing to succeed without taking great trouble to get there.  
But that's why it's essential for a teacher, first of all,  
to let the student play, or write, as he wishes. Then be ruthless.

**LEGRAND**

You were. With me.

**NADIA**

It's one thing to be gifted, Michel,  
and quite another thing to be worthy of your gift.  
And you are.  
You're proving that.

**MARKEVITCH**

Well then, Nadia, what shall your gift be?

**NADIA**

Don't insist so much of me, Igor.

**MARKEVITCH**

And why not?

**NADIA**

Because you ought not ask questions you don't want to hear an honest answer to.

**MARKEVITCH**

Trust me. I'm prepared to hear anything you have to say tonight.

**NADIA**

I'm old enough now, and have taught so many, and lost so many....  
Do you remember Ginette Neveu?

**MARKEVITCH**

I do. Of course.

**NADIA**

She was like a daughter to me.  
Only fifteen when I met her. With absolutely astounding talent. And dedication.  
She'd just won the Grand Prize,  
at the International Henri Wieniawski Violin Competition in Warsaw.  
Her intensity I can still feel.  
Her interpretive gifts. They enchant me today, remembering.

**MARKEVITCH**

I remember them as well. The same way.

**NADIA**

I watched her mature. And then, she was gone like a falling star.  
Over the Azores. With her brother, Jean-Paul.  
Her last concert was in Paris.  
Outside the concert hall, in Paris, they left the posters hanging.  
"Ginette Neveu : Final Concert" ...  
Before her flight to the United States, for a concert tour.  
How do you say Goodbye, when something like that comes at you? In a heartbeat.  
How do you grieve?  
I can't. I have never learned to mourn properly. I've just learned to be haunted.  
She would have been one of the greatest violinists of all time.  
She *was* one of the greatest violinists of all time.  
And when I hear music played brilliantly today, she comes to my mind.  
She was *that* great.  
Her grave's near Chopin's. In Père Lachaise Cemetery. In Paris....  
Last night I had a dream. *We* were catching a plane. At Orly.  
And I had a chill. Deep inside me. And left without taking the plane.  
And it crashed. With Lily on it. Because of me....  
Take that dream from me. For my birthday.

**MARKEVITCH**

[*beat*] I would if I could, my love.... But I can't.



**NADIA**

Then ... a diamond would be nice.

**MARKEVITCH**

And a diamond it shall be.

**Lights fade as a child (or two) enter and present NADIA with a perfect diamond solitaire pendant.**

**Offstage a singing of Francis Poulanc's *Vive Nadia*.**

Click: [Vive Nadia \(Francis Poulanc for her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday\)](#)

Click: [Barbra Streisand, \*I've Been Here\*](#).

**BREAK**

SCENE 5 – ÁSTOR PIAZZOLLA

1954. Nadia's apartment. ÁSTOR PIAZZOLLA (33), seated at the piano, is just completing *Habanera* from Bizet's *Carmen, suite no. 2*.

Click: [Bizet's Carmen \(on piano\)](#)

Resting on the floor next to him is an open leather briefcase, containing the sheet music he has brought and uses during the interview. NADIA (66) is seated in a chair next to him. LILI is also seated in the room, away from them.

**NADIA**

Enough Bizet.  
Play something else.

**PIAZZOLLA**

What?

**NADIA**

Play.

**PIAZZOLLA takes another sheet of music from his briefcase and plays.**

Click: [Bach's Goldberg Variations](#) [a portion]

**NADIA**

[after ~0:35] Stop. Stop. That's enough Bach.  
Play something else.

**PIAZZOLLA plays:**

Click: [Alberto Ginastera's Piano Sonata No. 1](#) [a portion]

**NADIA**

[after ~0:40] Play something else.

**PIAZZOLLA plays:**

Click: [Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring \(piano\)](#) [a portion]

**NADIA**

[after ~0:40] Not that. Not that.  
Something different.

**PIAZZOLLA plays:**

Click: [Ravel's Noctuelles](#) [a portion]

**NADIA**

[after ~0:35] Another.

**PIAZZOLLA plays:**

Click: [Piazzolla's own Contrabajeando \(piano\)](#) [a portion]

**After a minute or so NADIA dismisses  
with a flick of her wrist.**

**PIAZZOLLA**

What? What's the matter with it?

**NADIA**

Nothing. It's good.

But what I hear is Bach. Ginastera. Stravinsky. Ravel. All over again.

And Bartók. And Rachmaninoff.

But you know what happens? I can't find Piazzolla....

You came to Paris with your wife, n'est-ce pas?

**PIAZZOLLA**

Yes.

**NADIA**

And left your two children in Argentina? With your parents?

**PIAZZOLLA**

Yes.

**NADIA**

Why then?

Why play me what's all well written, but not *you*?

You're not giving me feeling.

I want to hear *Piazzolla*.

**PIAZZOLLA, agitated, gets up from the  
piano and walks around the room before  
again sitting down at the piano.**

**Pause, while he regains his composure.**

**NADIA**

What are you?  
The piano is not your favored instrument?

**PIAZZOLLA**

[*beat*] No.... I'm a bandoneón player.

**NADIA**

So?  
That's a perfectly lovely instrument for God's voice.

**PIAZZOLLA**

Its embarrasses me, to admit, in front of you.  
To confess, to God, I'm a tango player.  
In my heart.

**NADIA**

Then play from your heart.  
Play me what's in your head.  
And play it from the heart.  
Forget the time  
Forget the place.  
Forget *me*.  
Play me the real Piazzolla.

**After a pause PIAZZOLLA takes out and  
plays his Libertango.**

Click: [Piazzolla's Libertango](#)

**NADIA**

[*elated*] You idiot! *That's* Piazzolla!  
Don't ever leave it again. Never.  
It's the world's.

**PIAZZOLLA**

It's the world's?

**NADIA**

It belongs to the world.  
From God.

**PIAZZOLLA**

Are you talking about me? About *my* music?

**NADIA**

Listen to me. Better yet, listen to Cocteau:  
“True tears are not drawn from our eyes by a sad page,  
but by the miracle of a word in its proper place.”  
We’re talking about *the chosen word*, which no other can replace....  
*That* is the thrilling word. *That* is the thrilling note.  
“Gift.” He is “gifted.”  
And what I just heard is gifted.  
Nine hundred ninety-nine times out of a thousand people say what’s expected.  
Then comes one who says something unforgettable.  
I tell you, the unforgettable is within your reach.  
And it belongs to the world.  
It is something that is *given*. Given by God.  
And you, my dear man, are gifted.

**PIAZZOLLA**

[*incredulously*] Truly?

**NADIA**

[*standing*] Go.

**PIAZZOLLA stands, and begins putting things back into his briefcase.**

**NADIA**

Go. Go to your wife. She is waiting for you.  
Play that. Play it all night. For her.  
I shall see you in the morning.  
We have work to begin, Monsieur Piazzolla.... But not before ten.

**PIAZZOLLA**

Tomorrow then....

**NADIA waves her hand, and PIAZZOLLA lets himself out, carrying his leather briefcase with him.**

**NADIA and LILI stare at each other for a moment, and then NADIA sits at the piano and plays Piazzolla’s *Libertango* in its entirety, from memory.**

Click: [Piazzolla’s Libertango again](#)

SCENE 6 – NADIA, THE PRINCESS OF MUSIC

Spring of 1928. NADIA (40) is seated at the piano. Sitting in a chair next to her is SIMONE RATEL, interviewing NADIA for *Minerva* magazine. LILI is sitting nearby.

**RATEL**

You, Mademoiselle Boulanger ...  
recognized as one of our time's great female musicians ...  
have been elected by our readers as the 1928 Princess of Music.  
What do you think of that?

**NADIA**

I wouldn't expect it to be a popularity contest.  
Living for those a person loves.  
Living to do what one loves to do.  
Which, for me, is music.

**RATEL**

And you're the best in the world at it... The best *woman* in the world at it.

**NADIA**

To me it's not an issue of gender. It's personal interactions with my Creator.  
And I think that's hardly enough to make me an object of interest.

**RATEL**

When I look at you, I picture a tall, erect form,  
wearing a long, black dress, walking with long, virile steps,  
your dress fluttering at your ankles like a priest's cassock.

**NADIA**

I suppose one might say I resemble a priest, at times, in a way.

**RATEL**

Ahh, and judging by your sweetness one might also say  
that you're likewise detached from today's feminine movement.  
Voting, and things.  
N'est-ce pas?

**NADIA**

You could say that. I've never personally cared much about voting.

**RATEL**

That you're an apostle of music.  
A dutiful daughter. Modest to a fault.

**NADIA**

We *were* dutiful daughters, my sister, Lili, and I,  
having the great good fortune to be brought up by a remarkable woman.  
Maybe not all that musical, but remarkably intelligent.  
A Russian princess who knew how to raise a child.  
Maman adored me. Called me a miracle.  
Papa was seventy-two the day I was born. On his birthday. My birthday.  
They'd lost a child before me. Of a fall.  
And Maman was always deathly afraid I might fall. Or Lili.  
She loved us, but enough to be dispassionate.  
One thing she could not tolerate was lack of attention. From either of us.  
I grew up with absolute attention. So did Lili.

**RATEL**

But, *you're* the elected Princess of Music here.  
And I want to ask you: What is *your opinion* of the future of music?

**NADIA**

I believe in God. And I believe in music. And neither one's going away.  
Because music is from God.  
Like Paul Valéry says:  
"God kindly offers us a beginning verse.  
It's up to us to write the next ones which will be worthy."

**RATEL**

Music is from God?

**NADIA**

God created us, and found us alone.  
And helped us create music for our loneliness.  
Not always a masterpiece. But music, and *sometimes* a masterpiece.  
It comes down to faith.  
To write good music you have to have the faith you can do it.  
Lili brought me faith, and three things with it:  
A vision of what a person's soul calls on them to do.  
An understanding of the discipline, pain, and work demanded of a composer.  
And a glimpse of how to share it with the world.  
As I accept God, I accept beauty.  
As I accept beauty, I accept emotion.  
As I accept emotion, I accept love.  
As I accept love, I accept music.  
As I accept music, I accept the duty to offer it to the world. Good music, that is.

**RATEL**

Virgil Thomson, one of your early American students, has said of you: [reads] “In 1921, at age 34, Nadia Boulanger was teaching harmony at the Conservatoire, and organ-playing and counterpoint at the École Normale de Musique. Her real power as a teacher came from her extraordinarily acute critical sense. A tall, soft-haired brunette, she had already resigned womanly fulfillment, vowing her life to the memory of her sister, to the care of her widowed mother, and to musically bringing up the young.”  
Is that accurate?

**NADIA**

Yes. I *am* devoted to seeing Lili’s music receive the recognition it deserves.

**RATEL**

Thomson also said that what endeared you most to your American students, in addition to your maternal warmth, was your conviction that America’s the place where music is next evolving, like Russia, eighty years ago.

**NADIA**

Music is always evolving. Little by little, perpetually.  
Today it’s music born of jazz. Born of New York. Born of American soil.  
It’s in the music being born of the sun, and the desert, and the mountains.  
It’s in the music of Virgil Thomson; and Aaron Copland; and Roy Harris.

**RATEL**

Aren’t there clearly defined differences in the styles of music, period to period?

**NADIA**

No. Music evolves every day. There are no walls around periods. There is no absolute change or barrier between yesterday’s, today’s, and tomorrow’s.

**RATEL**

Then what is your role in the evolution of the new music? As you see it.

**NADIA**

To arouse curiosity in it. And to teach responsibility to music over career.

**RATEL**

Do you believe future masterpieces will come from the United States?

**NADIA**

There are already well-made pieces coming from America.  
But what makes a well-made piece into a masterpiece, that I cannot predict.  
All I *can say* is, that in all masterpieces order is supreme.



**RATEL**

Any examples?

**NADIA**

Stravinsky.

His music satisfies the mind, and at the same time moves the heart.  
That's the touchstone of great music. It's God's gift of melody.

**NADIA plays:**

Click: [the Berceuse from Stravinsky's Firebird](#) [a portion]

**NADIA**

Hear that? That's genius.

That's what musical satisfaction is all about.

It's Stravinsky's Firebird.

Can't you hear it?

In the melody?

The firebird.

Her lullaby bewitching the deathless Russian demon....

[beat] Dear Lord, I just now had a sudden chill.

I was driving, and talking to you about music; and Lili was in the car with us,  
and we went off the road. In my mind.

And were flying, like a fat metal bird, through the tree tops.

And we crashed.

And Lili was killed. Because of me. In the crash, in my mind.

On the way to Monaco.

It doesn't make sense. It doesn't mean a thing.

Sorry. Forget it. A demon crossed my mind.

Like a demon, me, is behind the wheel.

Thinking of nothing while I drive except music.

Where was I?

**RATEL**

Stravinsky.

You were talking about his genius. And God's gift of melody.

**NADIA**

Yes. Yes. Stravinsky.

He's a believer. A true believer that melodies come from God's inspiration.

Maybe you're not aware of it, but in his art you can sense his faith.

Which determines that, whatever he does, he does it with all his energy.

In everything he does, there is something serious. Something of genius.

**RATEL**

Which means what, specifically? What *is* his genius?

**NADIA**

His genius is the genius of music.

**RATEL**

Which is?

**NADIA**

The phenomenon of music is a gift to us, to establish order to life.  
To afford us the opportunity to open true connections of compassion.  
And good conscience. And generosity. To communicate feelings as strongly for  
the poor of the streets as for the most vital matters of the day.

**RATEL**

And how does that define *Stravinsky's* genius?

**NADIA**

You simply *can't* define it.  
"My nose is." He'll tell you. "My technique is." He'll say at another time.  
The crux of it is: always just be yourself. That's the one clear mark of genius.  
A second is attention.  
With too many people the one quality they lack is attention.  
Which, essentially, is a form of a character flaw.  
With the force of attention, everything becomes important.  
Without it, things drift off and away, and are forgotten. There's no order to them.

**RATEL**

Do you attribute any of Stravinsky's ambitions as a composer to religious faith?

**NADIA**

I certainly do. And I only have to go as far as Psalm 150 in my mind,  
from a symphony Stravinsky's working on now.

Click: [Stravinsky's Symphony of Psalms, Third Movement](#)  
[a portion]

**RATEL**

And what about you?  
Are you still the fiercely ambitious composer you once were?

**NADIA**

I'm a teacher. Not a composer. Not anymore.

**RATEL**

Why?  
Why not?

**NADIA**

Because I teach music. That's the simplest way to put it. I *teach*.  
And I perform, from time to time. That's the way my mind's structured.

**RATEL**

But that would hardly stop you from composing it. Would it?

**NADIA**

No. I suppose not.  
But I am incapable of writing anything good enough.  
Not good enough to be beautiful. Not bad enough to be amusing.  
Lili showed me that.

**RATEL**

How?

**NADIA**

By the quality of what she wrote.  
In nine years. Sixteen to 24.  
Won the Prix de Rome at 19. And richly deserved it.  
First ever, by a woman.  
Fragile. Delicate. And devoted herself, non-stop, to her work. To the day she died.  
To express the music that welled up inside her.  
I mean, you hear a voice like Lili's and you know inspiration.  
I mean, my sister was the first important woman composer in history.  
Little short of miraculous....

**RATEL**

[*beat*] You *really* stopped composing because of her?

**NADIA**

There's no .... I can't say just "no" to you on that.  
The day Papa told me, "You have a little sister,"  
I went with him to stand in front of the cradle.  
I was six; and I felt I had been entrusted with the protection of this little one....  
It's in my heart....  
What do you say, in your heart, when you lose someone?  
Especially someone with so much talent.  
What *I* say is sacred. A sacred silence to me. My silent sorrow....

**RATEL**

But you've already written pieces that have been acclaimed.

**NADIA**

My purpose is to teach. And to help the world discover greatness.

**RATEL**

What? In your American friends?...

Aaron Copland, by the way, said of you,  
that you possess an almost old-fashioned womanliness,  
which seems quite unaware of its own charm.

**NADIA**

Oh, yes.

In addition to Lili's music, my purpose is to tell the world of Copland's music, too.  
We are entering a new era.  
And he will be a part of it.

**RATEL**

What are you?

Some Statue of Liberty for American composers?

**NADIA**

I suppose you might say.

**The scene ends with Aaron Copland's  
*Fanfare for the Common Man.***

Click: [Aaron Copland's Fanfare for the Common Man](#)

SCENE 7 – LILI

15 March 1919. NADIA (31) is sitting, reading. LILI is sitting nearby.

**NADIA**

[*to herself*] She was blind and deaf, Lili. Why her poem? For your song?

**NADIA looks at LILI, who shows no sign of it.**

Click: [Lili Boulanger's Dans l'immense tristesse](#)

**NADIA**

[*as the music plays*] In a graveyard. Alone. In immense sadness.  
Was hers *your sadness* you felt?

**Looks at LILI now and then, who shows no sign of it.**

It's mine now. Now that you're gone. Dans l'immense tristesse.  
Our immense sadness, which we Boulangers stoically hide from the world.  
A mark of our breeding.  
But I shall not hide my tears on the birthday of your death.  
Not this year, or ever. Not this March, or any to come.  
I shall never heal. I shall never betray you that way.

[*reads*] Dans l'immense tristesse et dans le lourd silence,  
Un pas sé fait entendre, une forme s'avance, et vers une humble tombe.

Through immense sadness. Through blinding stillness. A footstep is heard.  
A form approaches. Toward a humble grave. To bend down.  
O Woman, why are you searching in this place of the dead?

[*reads*] As-tu donc un trésor caché sous quelque pierre?  
Ou viens-tu mendier, à l'ombre des tombeaux,  
Pauvre vivante, aux morts, un peu de leur repos?

Do you have some treasure hidden here? Beneath a stone?  
Or are you begging of the dead for a piece of their repose? Nothing like that?

[*reads*] Ce que cette femme vient chercher, c'est un frêle et gracieux enfant.

The woman is looking for her child, who sleeps in the ground,  
and dreams of her. He dreams of how his mother last looked at him,  
fading from his sight, and imagines, naïvely, that she is merely hiding.  
A game they are playing in the dark. And will soon reappear.

**NADIA**

[reads] Lorsque le blond enfant sent s'alourdir sa tête,  
Et que petite âme est lasse de gémir,  
Que sa mère revient chanter pour l'endormir.

Each night his mother returns for his blond head to nod and his eyelids to flutter,  
as she sings him back to sleep.

I can't comprehend how a blind and deaf woman could have written such a poem.  
Or why you made it a part of us. The way you did.  
Other than to tell us, through your guarded stillness,  
Dans l'immense tristesse. The immense sadness that was yours....  
And Bertha Galéron's. Your blind friend.

**Reflective pause, looking at LILI.**

What does a blind and deaf person do?...  
This one wrote.  
And what did *you* do?  
At 22, knowing you had two years left to live?  
You kept it to yourself.  
A secret from us.

**Pause, looking down.**

*I* have talent.  
Not like yours, of course.  
My talent is to recognize talent in others.  
And give it ground to grow in.  
And I knew I could recognize genius, because I recognized it in you.

**Pause.**

Nothing's better than music when it takes us out of time.  
Doing more for us than we have the right to hope for.  
It's God's gift. His unexpected kindness.  
In music everything is prolonged. Everything is made clear.  
Everything lives again.

Dear God, let the sound of music calm the storms of sorrow in me.

**NADIA again speaks directly to LILI;  
and LILI continues to show no sign of it.**

## NADIA

Before you get sick again.  
Before you get sick and nearly die again.  
There's something I need to say.  
When we're alone.  
Just the two of us.  
Not the three and four of us.  
Just these words I want to hear.  
Just these words I want to hear you hear me say.  
Just these words.  
Je t'aime, Lili.  
Je t'adore.

### **Pause.**

We cannot avoid it.  
We can't avoid the truth that life is love and music.  
We can't avoid the truth that life is tied to death.  
Life is tears and terror.  
Life is death and poetry.  
Life is a Bertha Galéron poem....  
  
Just simply hear me say it: Je t'aime.

## SCENE 8 – LILI’S DEATH

15 March 1918. LILI is now lying motionless on the bed, dead. A crucifix gleams at her throat. NADIA (30) stands by her side, strokes her face, and then takes hold of her hand.

Click: [Lili Boulanger’s Pour les Funerailles d’un Soldat](#) [a portion]

### NADIA

I need time alone with you, Lili.  
To ask you.  
What am I to say?  
About you.  
When everything I feel is totally pain.  
And nothing is else.  
That somehow death and I have an understanding?  
When I don’t understand a thing.  
About your death.  
Or why my sister had to suffer so.

### Pause.

What am I meant to say?  
at la Trinité?  
To remember you.  
That you were the better part of my life?....  
You were.  
My younger sister.  
My closest companion....  
That you were the life I couldn’t have as a composer?  
That we got caught in a war. In a curfew in a bomb-scarred city.  
And now your promise is gone.  
A war we fought the only way we knew how.

### Pause.

What can I possibly say, Lili?  
That I’d prefer to remember you winning the Prix de Rome, at 19?  
That I’d prefer to remember you in the safety of Rome?  
At the Villa Medici, with Maman, a carriage-ride away,  
twice a day coming from her hotel to you, to bully dangers away?  
That I’d prefer to remember you in Nice and Gargenville in the summer?



**NADIA**

In 1914, before the War, I remember.  
I remember when the future shone like a bright new day.  
When chorus rehearsals were scheduled to begin for my opera.  
For La Ville morte, at Opéra-Comique.  
When three of my cello and piano pieces were just published.  
When you were on furlough from your battle against intestinal pain.  
When you seemed so destined to outshine every star that shone on me.  
Before the War. Before the Villa Medici became off-limits to you.  
Before my opera died on the vine.

**NADIA walks to the window.**

Click: [Lili Boulanger's Vieille Prière Bouddhique](#) [a portion]

**NADIA returns to Lili's bedside.**

**NADIA**

What on Earth is there to say? About you?  
In this sad corner of civilization without you?  
Should I say that we were caught in a war that ended dreams?  
A War which stole dreams from the people of France forever?  
A War which drove children to the streets, homeless?  
Should I recall how the Opéra-Comique and the Comédie-Française  
opened their doors to them?  
When you were beginning your personal war to care for wounded soldiers.  
To provide food and clothing and money for starving families.  
The way you did. Untiringly. Sacrificing yourself. And your time.  
And sending all the letters you could. News from home, to the men at the Front.  
To boost morale. The way you did. The volume was enormous.  
Putting more physical and emotional strain on you.  
And finally taking its toll on your health. Your body giving way to pain.  
Before this now utter silence I hear.  
Oh, dear God, this horrible silence of your genius!  
At age 24.

**Pause.**

What a story of my sister, that I have such lack of words to tell.  
The nearly constant pain she endured.  
Why such genius chose to manifest itself in the frail body of a child.  
Who would not surrender until death took her.  
How do I tell all that?

## NADIA

You kept it quiet. From us. From Maman and me.  
That you were dying.  
That the doctors told you, you were dying.  
And you never told us.  
The grand silence of your illness.  
Oh, we saw your pain. We saw that. And the opium you needed for it.  
But not that there was so little time left.

### Pause.

Now Heaven is God's peace for you.  
But in us, Lili, you will live forever.  
As the composer of masterpieces.  
As a winner of the Prix de Rome.  
I may never have told you enough how much I loved your Faust et Hélène.  
More than I can tell you now.  
One of the most lovely cantatas I've ever heard.  
Unsettling, in beauty and pause.  
Music came to a height in you. And now that world is broken.  
Not your music. The world. And the rest of us.  
Your music will live on in me, and in the hearts of others, to posterity.  
I promise you that....

What else am I to say?  
That you wrote to the very end, trying desperately to finish everything?  
That you insisted on working through a pain that even opium couldn't calm?  
Lying in bed, composing to the end.  
To the ultimate end of time God allotted you.  
Even when I wanted to tell you, more than anything, how much you mean to me.

Poor Maeterlinck.  
He swore you could not die.  
Not before you finished your opera of his Princess Maleine. But you did.  
The one thing you did not finish.  
You completed a song cycle that moved Miki to tears.  
I carried you to improvise at the piano, grimacing in pain....  
How can I ever live so long as to forget how you wouldn't give up?  
Dictating music to me. On your deathbed.  
Your Pie Jesu.  
Your Pie Jesu that will play at your funeral. As you wanted.  
At la Trinité....

**As LILI is removed from the room her  
Pie Jesu plays, uninterrupted.**

Click: [Lili Boulanger's Pie Jesu](#)

**NADIA**

I shall never understand.  
How you could go on, and on, and never give up.  
You were dying; and your strength overwhelmed me.  
All your charm. That was always yours. You overwhelmed me.  
Your grace in living and dying overwhelmed me.

Goodbye, Lili.  
Whatever I do, I give my heart to you. I dedicate it to you. Forever.  
I promise you that.  
That I may never live so long to forget my farewell pledge to you.  
And to your fierce determination.

Goodbye, Lili.  
May your sufferings make a space in me deep enough to appreciate the joy of you.  
And may the world live long enough to appreciate the you as I do.

**Pause.**

I remember. You had perfect pitch. Even as a two-year-old.  
Even Fauré, himself, would come to our home, to read his songs with you.  
And Massenet.  
And Camille Saint-Saëns.  
And Debussy....

Goodbye, Lili.  
You tried. And nobly tried.  
And we shall miss you like no words of mine can ever say.

**LILI (from offstage)**

It's unfair.  
How much, some days, I felt discouraged.  
Knowing I could never fulfill what I longed and was meant to accomplish.  
Knowing every day would bring me more pain. And soon I'd be alone.  
Why? Why was I given so much pain? for so long?  
It's not fair.  
It's not pleasant.

SCENE 9 – PSAUME 130

LILI (painfully thin and wearing a simple yet elegant white dress) conducts from onstage her Psaume 130, De profundis (heard from offstage). LILI is completely composed. Almost serene. Her gestures are spare. So much so there seems to be an air of unreality to the whole scene.

Click: [Lili Boulanger's Psaume 130](#) [final ~9:30]

**The final ~9:30 of Lili Boulanger's Psaume 130, followed by enthusiastic applause.**

**During the music the stage is "lit" with pictures of Nadia, Lili, their parents, and their lives.**

**NADIA comes up to LILI, and places the Premier Grand Prix de Rome around her neck.**

**From offstage tolls a deep-throated bell.**

**END**

## BOOKS, FILMS, AND ONLINE SOURCES

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- Burton-Hill, Clemency, *The greatest music teacher who ever lived*, online (BBC > culture, April 19, 2017).
- Davidson, Justin, *It's Time We All Heard the Music of Lili Boulanger* (New York Magazine, January 6, 2020).
- Eales, Andrew, *Piazzolla: finding his unique voice*, online at pianodao.com (May 28, 2016).
- Gorin, Natalio, **Astor Piazzolla A Memoir** (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1990), translated, annotated, and expanded by Fernando Gonzalez, 2001.
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Rosenstiel, Léonie, **Nadia Boulanger, A Life in Music** (New York • London: W W Norton & Company, 1982).

Simons, Harriet, *Nadia and Me* from **Wisdom, Wit, and Will: Women Choral Conductors on Their Art**, compiled and edited by Joan Catoni Conlon (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2009).

Spycket, Jérôme, **Nadia Boulanger** (Lausanne, Switzerland: Editions Payot, 1987), translated by M. M. Shriver, 1992.

Stravinsky, Igor, **Selected Correspondence, Vol. 1** (New York: Knopf, 1982), edited by Robert Craft..

**MUSIC**  
(in order of appearance)

**A Simple Song** from the **Bernstein Mass**, ~1:12.

**Sennets and Tuckets** from **Bernstein's Divertimento for Orchestra**, ~1:25.

First ~0:30 of **Piazzolla's Adiós Nonino**.

From ~0:14 to ~0:39 of **Quincy Jones's "Beat It" (Fall Out Boy version)**.

First ~1:00 of **Philip Glass's Music with Changing Parts**.

First ~0:25 of **I Will Wait for You (from The Umbrellas of Cherbourg)**  
**composed by Michel Legrand**.

First ~0:30 of **Donald Byrd's Black Byrd**.

First ~0:19 of the **Mission Impossible** theme composed by **Lalo Schifrin**.

**Bach BWV 244-3, Herzliebster Jesu** (~1:14).

The **Ode to Joy**, as it enters **Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125**.

A portion of **Nadia Boulanger's 1915 Soir d'hiver**.

**Stravinsky's Piano Sonata (1924)**.

**Ástor Piazzolla's Oblivion**.

From ~6:50 to ~9:00 of **Jean Roger-Ducasse's Pastorale pour Orgue (1909)**.

**Nadia Boulanger's 3 Pieces for cello and piano, No. 3 in C# minor**.

**Michel Legrand's The Summer Knows** (piano), a portion.

**Francis Poulanc's Vive Nadia**.

**I've Been Here** (Charles Dumont, Earl Shuman, Michel Vaucaire).

**Habanera** (from **Bizet's Carmen, suite no. 2**), last ~0:26.

**Bach's Goldberg Variations (BWV 988)**, first ~0:35.

**Alberto Ginastera's Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 22**, first ~0:40.

**Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring**, transcribed for solo piano, first ~0:40.

**Ravel's Noctuelles**, first ~0:35.

**Ástor Piazzolla's Contrabajeando for Piano**, first ~1:00.

**Ástor Piazzolla's Libertango**.

A portion of the **Berceuse from Stravinsky's Firebird**.

A portion of **Stravinsky's Symphony of Psalms, Third Movement**.

**Aaron Copland's Fanfare for the Common Man**.

**Lili Boulanger's Dans l'immense tristesse**.

The first ~4:00 of **Lili Boulanger's Pour les Funerailles d'un Soldat**.

The first ~3:20 of **Lili Boulanger's Vieille Prière Bouddhique**.

**Lili Boulanger's Pie Jesu**.

The final ~9:30 of **Lili Boulanger's Psaume 130, De profundis**.





Photo from [Wikimedia](#)

**Lili Boulanger**