

A dialogue begins: Nadia Boulanger, Igor Stravinsky, and the *Symphonie de psaumes*.

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

A Dialogue Begins

Nadia Boulanger, Igor Stravinsky, and the *Symphonie de psaumes*

Kimberly Francis (bio)

In the final weeks of September 1929 Nadia Boulanger retreated to her summer home in Gargenville, France, to afford herself a few moments of peace. She had spent the summer, as she had every summer since 1921, teaching at the Conservatoire américain at Fontainebleau, and the following academic year would be exceptionally busy because Boulanger had agreed to take over the late Paul Dukas' music history courses at the École normale de musique in Paris. Boulanger therefore seized the opportunity to sequester herself at Gargenville and permit herself some time to prepare her courses, entertain friends, and provide lessons to those students invited by her to loiter during the intersessional period. In the middle of this activity, on September 26, 1929, a letter from Igor Stravinsky arrived, stating that the composer was looking for Boulanger.¹

Stravinsky had recently returned to Paris after a summer vacationing with his family in Culoz. There he had composed portions of his latest work, the pseudo-piano concerto *Capriccio*, and commiserated with Sergei Prokofiev, Ernest Ansermet, and Pytor Souvtchinsky. The **[End Page 22]** vacation ended with the sudden news that Stravinsky's impresario for twenty years, the mercurial Sergei Diaghilev, had died on July 19. After returning with his family to their home in Nice, Stravinsky departed for Paris, perhaps to seek comfort in the arms of his lover, Vera Sudeinkina. In addition, it seems that Stravinsky felt the need to impose some sense of order on his personal life, and so he requested an audience with Boulanger concerning his son Soulima.²

Stravinsky's message precipitated a house call at Gargenville, during which time the composer asked Boulanger to assume the musical education of his middle child. Boulanger accepted, and within two weeks the eighteen-year-old Soulima Stravinsky had been packed off to Paris, far from the watchful eyes of his parents.³ Over the course of the 1929–30 academic year Boulanger grew close to Soulima, serving as a sort of surrogate parent for him. This brought her into closer contact with Stravinsky's immediate family and, eventually, into the creative circle of the composer himself.⁴ The resulting familiarity between Boulanger and Stravinsky led these two musicians to engage in their first project

together: the editorial revision and analysis of the *Symphonie de psaumes*.

The details of this project had never been published, remaining hidden until I recently discovered them in documents at the *fonds* Boulanger archive of the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Stravinsky *Sammlung* of the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel, Switzerland.⁵ Bringing these materials together, I enter the musical conversation between Boulanger and Stravinsky in the early 1930s. First, I reconstruct the particulars of Boulanger's and Stravinsky's editorial work on the *Symphonie de psaumes* from August through October 1931, which resulted in the publication of the composition's "miniature score." Second, I examine the analytical materials Boulanger and Stravinsky exchanged in June 1932 in order to consider how they reflect the inner workings of the *Symphonie de psaumes* and Boulanger's most famous teaching concept, the *grande ligne*. In so doing I redraw the connections between Boulanger's and Stravinsky's professional activities between 1930 and 1932.

Executing this rehabilitation comes with its own difficulties, however. It has been all too easy for me when exploring the relationship between these two icons to struggle between serving two masters. Especially seductive has been the pull to give value to Boulanger's musical activities only because of what they tell us about Stravinsky and not necessarily because of what they tell us about her. In lieu of succumbing to either of these pitfalls, I have chosen to center this article on Boulanger in order to reinterpret, in Suzanne Cusick's words, "woman's work and the culturally feminine so that they cease to be marginalized and devalued, but might be re-interpreted as important elements of musical culture."⁶ Thus, my efforts follow in the same vein [End Page 23] as that of feminist musicologists Marcia Citron, Annegret Fauser, Ellie Hisama, and Judith Tick, who have recently begun...

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Portions of this chapter were read as a paper at the 2008 meeting of the American Musicological Society in Nashville, Tennessee. I would like to thank Kevin Burig, Tim Carter, Annetta Fausst, Tamara Levitz, Severine Neff, Joseph Straus, and the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their many helpful suggestions. I would also like to acknowledge the generous support provided for this research by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Graduate School of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the American Musicological Society, and the American Association of University Women.

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1. Igor Stravinsky to Nadia Boulanger, September 26, 1929, NIA 208 (113), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (hereafter BN).



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