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Paths to the Podium

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Jeanice Brooks, *The Musical Work of Nadia Boulanger: Performing Past and Future between the Wars*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. xvi + 289 pp. ISBN 978 1 107 00914 1. Companion website at <www.cambridge.org/Boulanger>.

Understanding Nadia Boulanger

Nadia Boulanger has come to occupy an important position within the history of twentieth-century music. She has attracted more scholarly attention than nearly any other classical female musician. Her status as one of the century's most prominent composition teachers is well established. In addition to pedagogy, her substantial pursuits beyond the classroom extended to music criticism and a wide range of performance activities, embracing conducting and regular keyboard work as both pianist and organist. She is also frequently portrayed as a pioneer among female composers and conductors, although, as we shall see below, neither of these claims is entirely secure. The tangible extent of Boulanger's influence on the musicians around her, however, has always been somewhat elusive. As Jeanice Brooks comments in the introduction of her excellent new book, 'By the end of her life, she was the object of a formidable hagiography. […] Nearly a half-century later, Boulanger's name retains something of this talismanic quality' (p. 7). As she astutely further comments, 'how to account for that impact has not always been clear' (*ibid*.).

Boulanger enjoys a privileged position among female classical musicians. Only such well-known composers as Hildegard von Bingen and Clara Wieck-Schumann have attracted a comparable amount of both academic and popular interest. When compiling the first biography – *Nadia Boulanger: A Life in Music* (New York and London, 1982) – Léonie Rosenstiel enjoyed advantageous access to the woman herself and to her papers. Earlier studies, most of them written by former students (such as Alan Kendall's *The Tender Tyrant: Nadia Boulanger, a Life Devoted to Music* (London, 1976)), tend to reveal the awe in which those who studied with her were inclined to hold her. In 1987, Bruno Monsaingeon compiled a documentary film from interviews with Boulanger originally made for radio and television between 1973 and 1978: *Mademoiselle: Nadia Boulanger* (Paris, 1987).[1] More recent large-scale

[1] Material from the interviews has also appeared in print as Bruno Monsaingeon, *Entretiens avec Nadia Boulanger* (Paris, 1981); trans. Robyn Marsack as *Mademoiselle: Conversations with Nadia Boulanger* (Manchester, 1985).

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studies include Caroline Potter's *Nadia and Lili Boulanger* (Aldershot, 2006); *Nadia Boulanger et Lili Boulanger: Témoignages et études*, ed. Alexandra Laederich (Lyons, 2007); and Kimberly A. Francis's *Teaching Stravinsky: Nadia Boulanger and the Consecration of a Modernist Icon* (New York, 2015).[2]

Boulanger is often remembered as a composer, and her work is ironically more frequently performed and more easily available than that of many female composers who concentrated much more exclusively on composition and produced a lot more music. She actually gave up composition relatively early in her career, during the early 1920s. It is, however, true that she pursued composition seriously during her youth. Her (ultimately unsuccessful) struggles to win the Prix de Rome are well known.[3] It is probable, though, that as a composer she always felt in the shadow of her younger sister, Lili. As Potter has commented:

> Lili Boulanger's approach to her career was outwardly more 'professional' than that of her sister; she was confident in handling large-scale genres […] received many important commissions and signed a contract with a publisher. Nadia Boulanger on the other hand, focussed on the song and piano piece, genres which were traditionally associated with the lady amateur composer writing for domestic entertainment.[4]

As Brooks observes, 'No one could plausibly claim that Boulanger's own compositions justify the iconic status she enjoyed in twentieth-century musical culture' (p. 8). Her own new study concentrates on the formative stage of Boulanger's career during the inter-war years, when, alongside reviving her performance career, she turned her efforts away from composition and towards pedagogy. It is also the period in which, in the words of Brooks, 'the foundations of her mythic status were laid' (p. 24).

The reasons for Boulanger's shift in direction after the First World War are complex, but it is possible to suggest a number of likely reasons for it. The loss of her mentor Raoul Pugno in 1913 and her sister Lili in 1918 both affected Nadia deeply. The death of Pugno was a difficult blow, as he had advised her about her works and facilitated her early career by acting as a powerful sponsor. The influence of an established force within the contemporary musical

[2] In offering the above (brief) overview of the literature on Boulanger, I have concentrated on large-scale studies, and those in which she is the central focus. Other studies include Jeanice Brooks, 'Nadia Boulanger and the Salon of the Princesse de Polignac', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 46 (1993), 415–68; Brooks,'"Noble et grande servante de la musique": Telling the Story of Nadia Boulanger's Conducting Career', *Journal of Musicology*, 14 (1996), 92–116; Caroline Potter, 'Nadia and Lili Boulanger: Sister Composers', *Musical Quarterly*, 83 (1999), 536–56; and studies in which she is not the main focus, such as Annegret Fauser, '"La guerre en dentelles": Women and the "Prix de Rome" in French Cultural Politics', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 51 (1998), 83–129; Kimberly Francis, 'A Dialogue Begins: Nadia Boulanger, Igor Stravinsky, and the *Symphonie de psaumes*, 1930–1932', *Women and Music*, 14 (2010), 22–44; and Francis, 'A Most Unsuccessful Project: Nadia Boulanger, Igor Stravinsky, and the Symphony in C, 1939–45', *Musical Quarterly*, 94 (2011), 234–70.

[3] For an account of Nadia Boulanger's engagement with the Prix de Rome competition, see Fauser, '"La guerre en dentelles"'.

[4] Caroline Potter, *Nadia and Lili Boulanger* (Aldershot, 2006), xi.

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world who helped her to secure performance opportunities for her works ended with his demise.[5] The loss of Lili occasioned prolonged grief and the onset of survivor's guilt. Nadia had always believed that her sister possessed the greater talent for composition. Possibly inhibited by sentiments of inferiority, she was fiercely critical of her own musical efforts, and this relentless self-scrutiny acted as a further barrier to the production of new works.[6] There was also the pecuniary reality that in the early 1920s Boulanger found herself in the economic situation of having to support both herself and her elderly (and ailing) mother. She was practically forced to dedicate the majority of her time to teaching. Thus her compositional career, which had never achieved professional dimensions comparable to that of her sister, was cut short. Fortunately, she realized a true vocation for teaching, which replaced her earlier compositional aspirations.

At first glance, then, it would appear that Boulanger's near mythical posthumous reception – if it cannot lie on her own work as a composer – must rest largely on her extensive activities as a teacher of composition. Two objections to this quickly arise. First, Boulanger's reputation as a composition teacher has always been problematic. As Boulanger gave up composition during the early 1920s, and by that time had produced few large-scale works (generally considered to be the hallmark of serious composition), her status as a famous teacher of composition appears somewhat contradictory. Secondly, although many of the most renowned musical names of the twentieth century – including Lennox Berkeley, Leonard Bernstein, Elliott Carter, Aaron Copland, George Gershwin, Philip Glass, Thea Musgrave, Robert Sherlaw Johnson and Virgil Thomson – studied with her, she never attempted to impose a specific style on her composition students. Boulanger's approach to teaching composition was evidently flexible enough to facilitate the nurturing of widely divergent musical languages, as is readily apparent from even a cursory glance at the impressive roster of figures who worked with her listed above; her failure to propagate one particular compositional style undermines any claim that her influence on the development of twentieth-century music lies solely in her pedagogical activities.

As Brooks comments, 'both popular and scholarly writing on Boulanger's career […] has overwhelmingly concentrated on her role in promoting new music and fostering composers' development' (p. 8). In this book she proposes a refreshing new approach: a study of her 'musical work rather than her works of music' (p. 9). Thus Brooks takes as her topic Boulanger's work as a performer. The definition of 'performance' is deliberately broad, encompassing concerts, recordings, broadcasting, lecture-recitals and performances in teaching contexts. Her approach aims to provide a 'fresh view of Boulanger's work' and to 'illuminate why her audiences found her approach so compelling' (p. 10). Through a consideration of Boulanger's structural-analytical and formalist performance aesthetics, Brooks argues compellingly throughout the book that a large part of Boulanger's legacy lies on her promotion of the types of structural performance and listening which flourished after the Second World War and still persist to this day. Brooks's study is underpinned by painstaking archival work, draws usefully throughout on insights gleaned from Boulanger's own critical writing, and is illustrated by copious examples from Boulanger's annotated scores and concert programmes, a good number of which are

[5] See Léonie Rosenstiel, *Nadia Boulanger: A Life in Music* (New York and London, 1982), esp. Chapters IV–VII.

[6] Potter, *Nadia and Lili Boulanger*, xi.

beautifully reproduced in the text. The companion website provides helpful sound clips which illustrate Boulanger's musical approach. This study presents a new, valuable and fruitful approach to considering Nadia Boulanger. It will contribute tremendously to understanding her near mythical reception and revising the foundations on which her legacy lies.

Boulanger as performer

Brooks's new study is divided into two parts. The first addresses Boulanger's attitude towards and activities in the field of performance; the second considers her approach to constructing concert programmes.

The work in performance

In her first chapter, Brooks traces Boulanger's career between the wars. She situates Boulanger's activities within the new teaching opportunities which developed after the First World War, the continuing salon culture which her Wednesday classes at the rue Ballu apartment can be considered as extending, the (brief) revival of her keyboard career in the 1920s, and the re-emergence of her career as a conductor in the 1930s. Brooks has already demonstrated in her earlier published work on Boulanger's conducting career that although Boulanger later situated the origins of her interests in conducting in her pedagogical work (directing a vocal ensemble at her Wednesday analysis classes at the rue Ballu apartment which became very good), the performances arranged by Pugno during her early career in 1912 and 1913 at which she appeared on the podium suggest a rather different, and much more ambitious, story.[7] As Brooks comments in her new monograph, Boulanger's pre-First World War teaching was restricted to the Conservatoire Femina-Musica and private work. After the war, she was able to benefit from the 'creation of new institutions' (p. 24). In 1919, Alfred Cortot appointed her as the only female composition teacher (alongside Georges Caussade, Charles Koechlin, Jean Roger-Ducasse and Florent Schmitt) at the newly opened École Normale de Musique; in 1921, she became a founder member of the teaching staff at the Conservatoire Américain at Fontainebleau. There is a wider context of female pedagogues' increased access to prestigious teaching appointments in the period immediately following the First World War, which is not directly touched on here, however. Boulanger joined the faculty of the École Normale in the company of Jane Barthori, Wanda Landowska, Marguerite Long and Blanche Selva. Even the Paris Conservatoire, with its reputation for institutionalized misogyny, in 1920 appointed Marguerite Canal (1890–1978) to direct one of the advanced piano classes. Prior to the First World War, classes at the Paris Conservatoire had been segregated according to gender. During the conflict, and owing to wartime conditions, all classes became mixed. They remained co-educational permanently after the war. Thus Long became not only the first woman to teach an advanced performance class at the Paris Conservatoire, but also the first to

[7] See Brooks, '"Noble et grande servante de la musique"'.

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accept male students into her class.[8] Boulanger's flourishing private music establishment, run from her rue Ballu apartment, is also mirrored by other thriving private music schools run by enterprising top female performers. Long's École Marguerite Long, situated at 18 rue Fourcroy, was in high demand,[9] and Landowska provided specialized early-music tuition at her École de Musique Ancienne, which she established at her villa at Saint-Leu-la-Forêt in 1925.

In her second chapter, Brooks considers Boulanger's musical work. She argues convincingly, within a contemporary French Catholic framework, for Boulanger's formalist approach to music. Discussion of Boulanger's architectural approach to form and her promotion of what she referred to as 'la grande ligne' ('the "pure, true line" that arises from the integration of content and form'; p. 45) is well supported by reference to her analytically annotated scores. Drawing inspiration from Richard Taruskin's comparison of Igor and Soulima Stravinsky's 1938 recording of Mozart's Fugue in C minor for two pianos (K.426) and Béla Bartók and Ditta Pásztory Bartók's 1939 radio broadcast of Mozart's Sonata in D major for two pianos (K.448),[10] Brooks in her third chapter provides an overview of the defining features of Boulanger's performing style by comparing the Bartóks' performance with a previously unknown 1936 off-air recording of the same Mozart sonata by Boulanger and Clifford Curzon. Building on her discussion of Boulanger's architectural approach to form, Brooks comments on Boulanger's 'tendency to think in distinct formal blocks' (p. 98). This tendency famously extended to her interpretations of early music.

The work in history

Throughout the four chapters of her second part, Brooks examines Boulanger's approach to constructing concert programmes. She concludes that, 'For Boulanger, choice and order were just as crucial to a concert's success as the performance of individual works' (p. 127). Her programmes represented distinctive combinations of old and new repertoire. Boulanger's approach to concerts was grounded in pedagogy. Her re-emergence as a conductor in the 1930s coincided with a concentration upon teaching history at the École Normale and structural listening at her Wednesday analysis class at the rue Ballu apartment. As Brooks comments, 'Boulanger's juxtapositions relied on the ability of listeners to hear not only relationships *within* musical works, but also those *between* works of radically different origins' (p. 182; Brooks's emphases). She draws an illuminating comparison between Boulanger's programme construction and contemporary collection museums: private collections of wealthy patrons, often within domestic settings, which were open to the public.[11] Unlike more conventional

[8] Louise Farrenc had been the first woman to teach piano at the Paris Conservatoire during the nineteenth century; however, during her years there the distinction between 'preparatory' and 'advanced' classes had not existed, and her teaching duties had been confined to female students. See Bea Friedland, 'Louise Farrenc (1804–1875): Composer, Performer, Scholar', *Musical Quarterly*, 9 (1974), 157–74.

[9] For an account of Long's career, see Cecilia Dunoyer, *Marguerite Long: A Life in French Music* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN, 1993).

[10] Richard Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past', *Authenticity and Early Music: A Symposium*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford, 1988), 137–207 (p. 131).

[11] Brooks adapts the term 'collection museum' from Anne Higonnet; see Higonnet, *A Museum of One's Own: Private Collecting, Public Gift* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2009), xiii–xiv.

art galleries, collection museums often exhibited in conjunction works from widely divergent periods. By juxtaposing works from different periods on her concert programmes, Boulanger hoped that new relationships between them would become apparent. Boulanger herself drew upon 'the image of a museum gallery to explain that although performance is needed to bring musical works into light, even the best performance is powerless to fully illuminate unless the work is sympathetically placed' (p. 217). Brooks posits that for Boulanger programme construction in itself became a form of composition. She ends her monograph with a consideration of Boulanger's input into Stravinsky's *Dumbarton Oaks*.

A golden age of women on the podium

Boulanger has frequently been construed as a pioneering woman on the podium. Kendall has described conducting as 'a role which, until her advent, had been an exclusively male prerogative'.[12] Without going this far, Brooks refers to 'the rare spectacle of a woman on the podium' (p. 143). Whilst it is true that Boulanger was one of the most successful woman conductors of the early twentieth century, and remains one of the most famous, she was far from being the only one. Her activities as a conductor need to be placed within the much broader context of the women conductors and orchestras that flourished during the inter-war years, none of which is touched upon or acknowledged in Brooks's study. Women had, in fact, been appearing on the conductor's podium regularly since the later nineteenth century. Josephine Weinlich founded the Wiener Damenorchester (probably the first European all-woman orchestra) in 1867, and the first such ensemble active in the US, the Los Angeles Women's Orchestra, was founded in 1893. Throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century, all-women orchestras, generally led and directed by female conductors, flourished all over Europe and North America. These included both classical orchestras, such as the British Women's Symphony Orchestra and the New York Women's Symphony,[13] and a proliferation of all-women jazz and swing orchestras. What distinguished Boulanger's conducting career was the fact that, whilst the majority of later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century female conductors worked mainly with all-women orchestras, she worked with both mixed-gender and predominantly male ensembles.[14]

The majority of the women conductors and orchestras of the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth century were based in North America and the German-speaking regions of central Europe. A number of important precedents were active in France before Boulanger re-established her conducting career in the early 1930s, however. These may well have helped to ease Boulanger's path back to the podium by normalizing to French audiences the sight of a woman conducting. Probably the first time that a woman conducted a symphony orchestra in

[12] Alan Kendall, *The Tender Tyrant: Nadia Boulanger, a Life Devoted to Music* (London, 1976), 105.

[13] For information on the all-women orchestras which flourished in the US in the first half of the twentieth century, see Carol Neuls-Bates, 'Women Orchestras in the United States, 1925–45', *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana and Chicago, IL, 1986), 349–69.

[14] In the field of jazz, Josephine Bradley, who established her own Ballroom Orchestra in 1935, provides a rare example of a woman leading a male dance band.

public in France was when the composer Armande de Polignac (1876–1962) directed her own opera *La petite sirène* (based upon Hans Christian Anderson's fairy-tale *The Little Mermaid*) at the Nice Opéra in 1907. Although not well known today, Polignac was a remarkably prolific composer during the *fin de siècle* period, completing almost 150 works in nearly every musical genre, from small-scale *mélodies* and instrumental works to large-scale ballets and operas.[15] Polignac was an aristocratic, upper-class composer; she was the niece of the powerful arts patroness the Princesse Edmond de Polignac, and wife of the amateur musician and music-lover Comte Alfred de Chabannes-La Palice. Polignac undertook studies in conducting with Vincent d'Indy when she was a student at the Schola Cantorum, specifically so that she would be able to conduct public performances of her own works in later life.[16] Following the success of her conducting début in 1907, Polignac took to the podium again in May 1914 to conduct a performance of her ballet *Les milles et une nuits* at the Théâtre du Châtelet by Loïe Fuller's dance troupe and the Orchestre Colonne.[17] I have commented elsewhere that although critical reactions to both of Polignac's appearances as a conductor were warm, critics also commented on her gender, and presented her decision to conduct her compositions in public as unusual.[18] It is worth noting that Polignac only ever conducted her own works in public; she never presented works by other composers. By restricting herself to her own compositions, she could always defend her decision to direct a symphony orchestra with the widely held contemporary belief that the ultimate authority over any musical work lies with its composer. In addition, Polignac also benefited from the support of an extremely powerful patron, the Princesse Edmond de Polignac. As Sylvia Kahan has commented, 'Through her patronage of her niece's work, Winnaretta [the Princesse Edmond de Polignac] helped to erode two barriers facing women musicians: their exclusion as composers in the public arena, and their even more firmly entrenched absence from the conductor's podium.'[19] It was the same influential patron who would later ease Boulanger's re-entry onto the podium in the 1930s. Boulanger, however, was not the first female conductor to profit from the princess's powerful backing in this context.

During the First World War, Polignac was followed onto the podium by her fellow composer Canal, who conducted wartime concerts in 1917 and 1918. From February to May 1917, Canal directed the orchestra of the feminist organization the Union des Femmes Professeurs et Compositeurs de Musique (the Union of Women Music Teachers and Composers) at a series of concerts at the Trocadéro intended to raise funds for France's war effort and to uphold public morale. The Union des Femmes Professeurs et Compositeurs de Musique was an organization of women musicians (encompassing teachers, performers and composers) which had been founded in Paris in 1904 to defend the interests of women musicians and to support

[15] For information on Armande de Polignac, see Florence Launay, *Les compositrices en France au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 2006); Launay, 'Armande de Polignac', *Compositrices au XXème siècle*, ed. Association Femmes et Musique (Paris, 2007), 177–89; and Laura Hamer, 'Armande de Polignac: An Aristocratic *compositrice* in *fin-de-siècle* Paris', *Women in the Arts in the Belle Époque: Essay on Influential Artists, Writers and Performers*, ed. Paul Fryer (Jefferson, NC, and London, 2012), 165–85.

[16] The conducting class at the Schola Cantorum did not officially exist until 1922, though d'Indy had instructed private students for several decades before this.

[17] For a discussion of this performance, see Sylvia Kahan, *Music's Modern Muse: A Life of Winnaretta Singer, Princesse de Polignac* (Rochester, NY, 2003), 189.

[18] Hamer, 'Armande de Polignac', 177–8.

[19] Kahan, *Music's Modern Muse*, 189.

and facilitate their activities.[20] Out of their membership, they formed the first all-woman orchestra active in France. As Rosenstiel has commented, many French feminist organizations 'threw themselves into the French war effort with great fervor'.[21] Thus the participation of the orchestra of the Union des Femmes Professeurs et Compositeurs de Musique in fund-raising concerts intended to uphold public morale may be understood as fitting within a marked wider trend of feminists who seized the wartime opportunity simultaneously to fulfil their patriotic duties and to prove that they could hold their own within professional life. Owing to wartime conditions, the French newspapers which managed to remain in production were dominated by coverage of the conflict, and although listings of forthcoming concerts continued to be produced, reviews rarely appeared. An announcement of a forthcoming concert by the orchestra of the Union des Femmes Professeurs et Compositeurs de Musique which appeared in *Le Figaro* in March 1917, however, described the ensemble as an 'excellent women's orchestra'.[22] This epithet offers a tantalizing glimpse of the esteem in which the women performers who dominated Parisian concert life during the First World War were held, and also indicates the normality by 1917 of seeing women doing what were previously regarded as men's jobs. In the autumn of 1917 and into 1918, Canal developed her conducting career by directing a series of Matinées Françaises at the Palais de Glace in aid of the wounded. The programmes of these concerts included works by Bach, Bizet, Boccherini, Duparc, Mendelssohn and Saint-Saëns.[23] It is unclear whether these concerts also included the orchestra of the Union des Femmes Professeurs et Compositeurs de Musique, as surviving concert listings specify only 'concert with orchestra under the direction of Mlle Marguerite Canal',[24] although they also featured a number of female singers from the Opéra-Comique, such as Colette Chabry.

The First World War allowed women to undertake many jobs and professions which had previously been largely the sole terrain of men, and orchestral conducting was no exception. Although little evidence in the form of reviews has survived with regard to the contemporary critical reception of Canal's conducting, it seems likely that the wartime context would have allowed her to take on a 'male' role without too much resistance: by 1917 people were used to seeing women doing 'men's' jobs. That she was conducting within the context of supporting France's war effort and to help raise money for the wounded added an extra, patriotic, justification to her choice, and would have made it difficult for people to criticize her. It is possible that Canal herself saw her conducting experience purely as her contribution to the war effort, rather than as a musical activity which she wanted desperately to pursue, as she rarely conducted in public again after the war ended. It should be noted in opposition to this, however, that Canal became the second woman ever to win the Prix de Rome in musical composition in 1920, and left Paris for her period of funded residency in Rome.[25] This

[20] Statutes of the Union des Femmes Professeurs et Compositeurs de Musique, Fonds Union des Femmes Professeurs et Compositeurs de Musique, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris.

[21] Rosenstiel, *Nadia Boulanger*, 127.

[22] Anon. ('Courrier musical'), *Le Figaro*, 29 March 1917, p. 4.

[23] Anon. ('Courrier musical'), *Le Figaro*, 28 December 1917, p. 4; 30 December 1917, p. 4; and 9 January 1918, p. 4.

[24] Anon. ('Courrier musical'), 'Concert avec orchestre sous la direction de Mlle Marguerite Canal', *Le Figaro*, 9 January 1918, p. 4.

[25] See Laura Hamer, 'Negating Gender Politics and Challenging the Establishment: Women and the Prix de Rome, 1919–1939', *Women's History*, 70 (2012), 4–12.

blossoming of her compositional career after the First World War may at least partially account for her largely turning away from conducting and towards composition after the war – an interesting reversal of Boulanger's position.

Polignac and Canal played important roles in clearing the path to the podium for the women conductors active in France who followed them during the inter-war period. Perhaps an even more important precedent for Boulanger and the type of repertoire she promoted, however, was the violinist and conductor Jane Evrard (1893–1984). In 1930 – a number of years before Boulanger's professional conducting début in the Princesse Edmond de Polignac's salon in 1933 – Evrard formed France's second all-woman orchestra, the Orchestre Féminin de Paris. Her ensemble was active in Paris throughout the 1930s and into the Second World War, and was very well received by contemporary critics. A number of the most eminent composers of the inter-war years, including Schmitt and Albert Roussel, wrote works specifically for them, and they gave première performances of such works as Arthur Honegger's Second Symphony, Maurice Ravel's *Trois chansons pour cordes* and Joaquin Rodrigo's *Sarabande lointaine*. Many virtuoso artists, including Maurice Duruflé, Landowska and Ginette Neveu, regularly appeared with them as guest soloists.[26] Like Boulanger's, Evrard's programming also brought together early and new works, including many premières. I have discussed elsewhere Evrard's commitment to promoting both early and contemporary music.[27] Unlike Boulanger, however, Evrard was interested in historically informed performance. In addition to Landowska, the Orchestre Féminin de Paris also regularly worked with the concert harpsichordist Marguerite Roesgen-Champion, who wrote many works for the ensemble. Boulanger, on the other hand, 'rejected anything resembling historical performance practice' (Brooks, p. 118). In addition to the important precedents set by Canal, Evrard and Polignac, recent research by Jean-Christophe Branger has revealed that at least two international female conductors directed symphony orchestras in Paris during the inter-war period. In 1926 the Russian conductor Eva Brunelli directed the Orchestre Pasdeloup; and the Austrian conductor Gertrud Herdliczka directed the Orchestre Symphonique de Paris several times during the 1930s.[28] That Paris even welcomed guest international female conductors to direct its top symphony orchestras provides further evidence to suggest that the French capital was actually open to women on the podium. It also further highlights that, as a woman conductor, Boulanger was far from being a curiosity.

Conclusion: the exceptional case of Nadia Boulanger

This review article has attempted to demonstrate that Boulanger as a female conductor did not appear out of a vacuum. A number of women conductors and orchestras had been active

[26] For a detailed consideration of Jane Evrard and the Orchestre Féminin de Paris, see Laura Hamer, 'On the Conductor's Podium: Jane Evrard and the Orchestre Féminin de Paris', *Musical Times*, 152 (2011), 81–100.

[27] *Ibid*., 85–9.

[28] Jean-Christophe Branger's research was first presented as a conference paper, '"La jupe et la baguette": Quand Paris s'enthousiasmait pour des femmes chefs d'orchestre dans l'entre-deux guerres', at the City of Light: Paris 1900–1950 International Conference (27–29 May 2015), Institut Français du Royaume-Uni, London, organized by Caroline Rae and Caroline Potter.

long before she directed her first full-length programme at the Princesse Edmond de Polignac's salon in June 1933. It remains undeniably true, however, that she has become the most famous woman conductor to have worked in France in the first half of the twentieth century, and it is worth briefly examining why this might be. As in the case of her undeniable status as one of the twentieth century's leading pedagogues, how to account for her privileged position amongst women conductors is not immediately apparent. As Brooks observes:

> Boulanger's road to the conductor's podium was very different from that of most of her male contemporaries. Launched from the salon and the classroom, her conducting career did not really begin until she was nearly 50, and depended more heavily on her reputation as an inspirational pedagogue and spokesperson for modern music than on admiration for her performing skill (p. 39).

As she further notes, 'Boulanger was not formally trained as a conductor and never had the gestural polish to match many of her male counterparts' (p. 40). Brooks accounts Boulanger's success as a conductor to 'her ability to provide compelling and illuminating explanations of the musical works that fascinated the singers and players who worked with her' (*ibid.*).

Alongside this, another key reason for her special status among specifically women conductors may be that Boulanger, unlike many contemporary female conductors, avoided association with a specific all-woman orchestra. Both the orchestra of the Union des Femmes Professeurs et Compositeurs de Musique and the Orchestre Féminin de Paris may be seen as fitting within a much wider later nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century trend of all-women orchestras. The majority of these all-women orchestras were conducted by aspiring women conductors, such as Ethel Leginska of the Chicago Women's Symphony Orchestra and Frédérique Petrides of the Orchestrette Classique of New York.[29] Canal's activities with the orchestra of the Union des Femmes Professeurs et Compositeurs de Musique and Evrard's with the Orchestre Féminin de Paris may also be seen as fitting within this wider trend of women conductors emerging at the heads of all-women orchestras. Boulanger, in contrast, avoided working with all-women orchestras, choosing instead to concentrate on forging a truly international career as an independent conductor, and becoming the first woman to conduct the Royal Philharmonic Society, the National Symphony and the orchestras of Boston and Philadelphia. Whatever the exact reasons for Boulanger's privileged status among female conductors, it is undeniable that this, too, has become an established part of her 'formidable hagiography'.

[29] For a consideration of Leginska and Petrides, see J. Michele Edwards, 'Pioneers on the Podium', *The Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, ed. José Bowen (Cambridge, 2003), 22–5.