

12. THE SACRED CHORAL MUSIC OF LILI BOULANGER

By Jason Allen Anderson

- 1) Brief Biography
 - a) Born Marie-Juliette Olga (Lili) Boulanger, in Paris on August 21, 1893
 - b) Contracted bronchial pneumonia in 1895, leaving her susceptible to illness, particularly intestinal tuberculosis; modern doctor's might diagnose this illness as Crohn's Disease
 - c) Musical training
 - i) Audited harmony classes of Auguste Chapuis at the Conservatoire National in 1898
 - ii) Organ classes with Louis Vierne in 1899
 - iii) Accompaniment classes with Paul Vidal in 1900
 - iv) Additional organ classes with Alexandre Guilmant in 1902, where she met and befriended fellow classmate Marcel Dupré
 - d) Devout Catholic: "Lili found solace in her deep religious belief, in the certainty Catholicism gave her that she would one day rejoin her father" (Rosenstiel 34)
 - e) Destroyed early works after more formal musical training; destroyed were:
 - i) *La Lettre de Mort* (1906) *secular*
 - ii) Psalm 131 and 137 (1907) *sacred*
 - iii) Psalm 1 and 119 (1909) *sacred*
 - iv) *Ave Maria* (1908) *sacred*
 - v) A setting of text from I Corinthians 1:13 for chorus and orchestra *sacred*
 - vi) *Cinq Études pour Piano*
 - vii) An incomplete work entitled *Apocalypse* *sacred*
 - viii) These works were not shown to her friends and were never performed (Rosenstiel 45)
 - f) She played violin, cello, harp, and piano
- 2) The Road to the Prix de Rome
 - a) At the youthful age of 16, Lili set out to win the Prix de Rome
 - i) This prize that had alluded her sister Nadia in 1908 (she took second place)
 - ii) Her father had won the prize in 1835
 - b) She began private studies in counterpoint with Georges Caussade in 1910, and by then had finished three musical notebooks; by March 1911, she had completed eight books
 - c) She passed the entrance exam for the Conservatoire National on January 9, 1912
 - d) She first attempted the Prix de Rome in May 1912; illness forced her to withdraw. This was of little concern as the committee awarded the prize to no one that year.
 - e) A second attempt came in May 1913
 - i) She advanced to the second round and completed *Faust et Hélène*
 - ii) On July 5th, she was awarded the Prix de Rome
 - f) The committee judging *Faust et Hélène* listed Lili's skills as:
 - i) Intelligence of subject
 - ii) Correctness of declamation
 - iii) Sensitivity and warmth

- iv) Poetic feeling
- v) Intelligent and colorful orchestration
- g) These same skills might describe her compositional style on the whole
- 3) The Prix de Rome
 - a) A two-round competition consisting of
 - i) *concours d'essai* (elimination round)
 - ii) *concours définitif* (final round)
 - b) *Concours d'essai*
 - i) Tested a competitor's understanding of music as a science
 - ii) Required composition of a fugue on a subject given to the contestant during the competition
 - iii) Required setting an assigned text to music for chorus and orchestra
 - iv) This part had to be completed over a period of five days in isolation
 - c) *Concours définitive*
 - i) Tested a competitor's understanding of music as an art form
 - ii) Required composition of an operatic scene, sometimes called a *cantate* or *scène lyrique*, for one or more voices and orchestra on an assigned text
 - iii) The contestants had one month to complete this work
 - d) Winners of the prize were awarded
 - i) A moderate stipend over a period of several years
 - ii) Support for the exhibition, performance or publication of their work
 - iii) Opportunities to travel
 - iv) Military deferments
 - v) Free admission to cultural venues in Paris (see Grove)
 - e) History of the competition
 - i) Held annually from 1803 to 1968, though it was suspended during the two world wars
 - ii) Student protests in the 1960s forced the government to end the contest permanently
 - f) Other prominent winners of the Prix de Rome include
 - i) Lili's father, Ernest Boulanger (1835)
 - ii) Charles Gounod (1839)
 - iii) Georges Bizet (1857)
 - iv) Jules Massenet (1863)
 - v) Claude Debussy (1884)
 - vi) Marcel Dupré (1914).
- 4) After the Prix de Rome
 - a) An overnight sensation; news spread to New York and Russia within days
 - b) Persistent illness plagued her for the balance of her life; she attempted to recoup at spas in France and Italy
 - c) Her final work, *Pie Jesu*, was dictated to Nadia from bed
 - d) Family fled the bombardment of Paris during World War I and headed for Mézy, France, just outside Paris, but far enough from the bombs
 - e) Died on March 15, 1918 in Mézy, France
- 5) Listing of published works
 - a) Early years (1906-1909) [see Labelle]

- b) Years of Apprenticeship (1910-1913)
 - i) Secular
 - (1) *Sous bois* (1911), chorus and orchestra
 - (a) Only available in chorus and piano version
 - (b) The orchestral version has been lost or destroyed
 - (2) *Les Sirènes* (1911), mezzo, chorus, and piano
 - (3) *Renouveau* (1912), vocal quartet and piano
 - (4) *Soir sur la plaine*, soprano, tenor, chorus, and orchestra
 - (5) *La Source* (1912), mixed chorus and piano
 - (a) Also available in orchestral version for piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets in A, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 timpani, triangle and cymbals, 2 harps, strings
 - (6) *Pendant la tempête* (1912), TBB chorus and piano
 - (7) *Hymne au soleil* (1912), mixed chorus and piano
 - (8) *Pour les funérailles d'un soldat* (1912-1913)
 - c) Years of Mastery (1914-1918)
 - i) Sacred
 - (1) Psaume 129 *Ils m'ont assez opprimé* (1910-1916), dramatic work; baritone, male chorus, orchestra
 - (2) Psaume 130 *Du fond de l'abîme* (1914-1917)
 - (a) Scored for alto and tenor soloists, chorus, organ, and orchestra
 - (b) "Longest, most complex composition" (Labelle 796)
 - (3) Psaume 24 *La terre appartient à l'Éternel* (1915-1916), tenor, chorus, organ, brass, timpani, harp
 - (4) *Pie Jesu* (1909; 1913-1918), voice, organ, string quartet, and harp
 - ii) Secular
 - (1) *Vieille prière bouddhique* (1914-1917)
 - (a) Scored for tenor soloist, chorus, and orchestra
 - (b) Meditation on universal love
- 6) A Selected Work Examined: Psaume 24
 - a) Brilliant fanfare heralding the triumphant entry of God into heaven
 - b) Rosenstiel calls this intentionally archaic and regal (189-190)
 - c) Orchestra is comprised of trumpets, trombones, horns, tuba, timpani, harp, and organ; there are no strings or woodwinds
 - d) Women's voices are used to highlight the text "Lift up your heads, O you gates"
 - e) The work ends with a declamatory "Ah!" a syllable found in her more visceral works as well as her final three vocal compositions

Listening:
Psaume 24

Additional listening:
Hymne au soleil, Psaume 130

Catalog of Selected Choral Works

Year	Title (Text source)	Reference No.
1911	<i>Renouveau</i> (Armand Silvestre [1837-1901])	G. Schirmer HL 50321930
Secular work for mixed (SATT) chorus and piano or orchestra; E-flat major.		
Mesdames et Messieurs, c'est moi: moi le Printemps!		<i>Ladies and Gentlemen, it is I! I am Spring!</i>
Moi le Printemps, dont le sourire clair charme les plus moroses.		<i>I am Spring, whose clear smile charms even the most morose.</i>
Qui mets des rayons d'or dans les lys éclatants Et cache des baisers sous les lèvres des roses.		<i>I give golden gleam to the lilies of the field And hide kisses under the soft petals of roses.</i>
J'arrive de l'azur et ne suis pas farouche, Eveillant sur mes pas les sons et les couleurs. Je revêts de beauté tout ce que ma main touche Et ma bouche s'empourpre au calice des fleurs.		<i>I come out of the blue, but not in sudden bursts, I awaken sound and colors with my secret power. Beauty blossoms anew wherever my hand touches; My lips become purple in the chalice of flowers.</i>
Je peuple les jardins et je tisse les nids, J'apprends des airs nouveaux aus pinsons comme aux merles Et dans les ruisseaux bleus qu'Octobre avait ternis, J'égrène des colliers de saphirs et de perles.		<i>I make the gardens bloom and I weave the nests, I teach new songs to the blackbirds and goldfinches And in the blue brooks that October had tarnished, I place necklaces of sapphire and pearl.</i>
J'ouvre les coeurs sur terre et dans le ciel, les ailes Au velours des iris, sur le bord des étangs, Je promène le vol des vertes demoiselles.		<i>I rouse the hearts of nature and the birds to flight. With the velvet of the irises, on the pond's edge, I dance about decked with young green ladies.</i>
1911	<i>Les Sirènes</i> (Charles Grandmougin [1850-1930])	G. Schirmer HL50321920
Secular work for mezzo-soprano, SAT chorus, and piano; F# major.		
Nous sommes la beauté qui charme les plus forts, Les fleurs tremblantes de l'écume Et de la brume, Nos baisers fugitifs sont le rêve des morts!		<i>We are the beauty which charms the strongest, Like the trembling flowers of the foam And the fog, Our fugitive kisses are the dream of the dead!</i>
Parmi nos chevelures blondes L'eau miroite en larmes d'argent. Nos regards à l'éclat changeant Sont verts et bleus comme les ondes.		<i>Among our fair tresses Water gleams like silvery tears. Our glances with ever-changing glares Seem like the green and blue waves.</i>
Avec un bruit pareil Aux délicats frissons Des moissons Nous voltigeons Sans avoir d'ailes.		<i>With a similar noise With delicate trembling Of the harvests We fly around Without having wings.</i>
Nous cherchons de tendres vainqueurs. Nous sommes les souers immortelles Offertes aux désirs de vos terrestres coeurs.		<i>We seek out the tender brave. We are immortal mermaids Destined to fulfill the earthly desires of your heart.</i>

1911 *Sous Bois* (Philippe Gille [1831-1901])

M1552.B68 S65 2000

Secular work for mixed (SATB) chorus and orchestra; posthumously published in 2000; D-flat major.

Marchons devant nous, bien douce est la pente,
Le rossignol chante
Dans l'ombre des bois,
Nos cœurs sont d'accord et la nuit est belle,
Elle nous appelle,
Écoutons sa voix!

*Let us go in front of us, quite gentle is the slope,
The nightingale sings
In the shaded woods,
Our hearts concur that the night is beautiful,
It calls us,
Hear its voice!*

Pourquoi faut-il que tout s'efface,
Que ces rameaux sur nous penchés
À d'autres demain aient fait place
Par le temps flétris et séchés!

*Why it is necessary that everything is erased,
That these branches bending over us
Will soon be, at another time and place,
Faded and dried by time!*

Ces bois verront une autre aurore
Et d'autres nuits et d'autres jours,
Des oiseaux y viendront encore
Pour y chanter de nouvelles amours!

*These trees will see another dawn
And other nights and other days,
Birds will still come there
To sing new love songs!*

Et ce doux sentier qui nous charme,
En l'absence d'un cœur glacé,
Recevra peut-être une larme
Où tant de bonheur a passé!

*And this soft path which charms us,
In the absence of a frozen heart,
Perhaps elicits a tear
Where such happiness passed!*

1912 *Hymne au Soleil* (Casimir Delavigne [1793-1843])

M1552.B68 H9 1994

Secular/sacred work (see notes) for contralto, mixed (SATB) chorus, and piano (three hands); E minor.

Du soleil qui renaît bénissons la puissance.
Avec tout l'univers célébrons son retour.
Couronné de splendeur, il se lève, il s'élançe.
Le réveil de la terre est un hymne d'amour.
Sept coursiers qu'en partant le Dieu contient à
peine,
Enflamment l'horizon de leur brûlante haleine.

*Let us bless the rebirth of the sun and its power.
Let us celebrate now as our eyes look above.
Like a glorious crown let its radiance tower!
The awakening of nature is a hymn of our love.
Seven steeds ride across the sky
in fiery splendor,
Inflaming the sky with every breath they render.*

O soleil fécond, tu parais!
Avec ses champs en fleurs, ses monts, ses bois
épais,
La vaste mer de tes feux embrasée,
L'univers plus jeune et plus frais,
Des vapeurs de matin sont brillants de rosée.

*O most gracious sun, now appear!
With all its fields in bloom, its woods and
mountains green,
And the wide ocean reflecting irradiance,
All the world is young once again.
The rebirth of the sun is a marvelous power.
—Jane May*

1912 *Pour les Funérailles d'un Soldat* (Alfred de Musset [1810-1857]) M 784.3 B66f
Secular work for baritone solo, chorus, and orchestra; B-flat minor. There is an English version using text by Frederick H. Martens. A more literal translation appears below.

Qu'on voile les tambours que le prêtre s'avance,
A genoux, compagnons, tête nue, et silence!
Qu'on dise devant nous la prière des morts.
Nous voulons au tombeau porter le capitaine.
Il est mort en soldat sur la terre chrétienne.
L'âme appartient à Dieu,
L'armée aura le corps.

*Let beating drums guide the advancing priest,
On your knees, bare your heads in silence!
Let us hear him chant prayers for the dead.
We place in a tomb the body of our captain
Who went to his death fighting Christian battle.
Give his brave soul to God,
Give his body to us.*

Si en rideaux de pourpre, et en couvres nuages
Que chasse dans l'éther le souffle des orages,
Sont des guerriers couchés dans leurs armures d'or,

*All in their shrouds of purple and ethereal cover
Chasing the threatening storms from the sky,,
The warriors find their rest in golden armor.*

Penche-toi, noble coeur, sur ces vertes collines,
Et vois tes compagnons briser leurs javelines
Sur cette froide terre où ton corps est resté!

*Note well, noble heart, where the hill is greenest,
And see your comrades break their swords,
For under that very hill your body shall rest! Ah!*

1912 *La source* (Leconte de Lisle [1818-1894]) M1552.B68 S64 2000
Secular work for mixed (SATB) chorus and orchestra; posthumously published in 2000;
B major.

Une eau vive étincelle en la forêt muette,
Dérobée aux ardeurs du jour ;
Et le roseau s'y ploie, et fleurissent autour
L'hyacinthe et la violette.

*A spark, water running, in the silent forest,
Concealed by the warmth of the day;
And the reeds and flowers surrounding:
The hyacinth and the violet.*

Ni les chèvres paissant les cytises amers
Aux pentes des proches collines,
Ni les pasteurs chantant sur les flûtes divines,
N'ont troublé la source aux flots clairs.

*Neither the goats feeding on bitter branches
With the nearby sloping hills,
Nor the shepherds playing their heavenly pipes,
Disturb the source of the clear waters.*

Les noirs chênes, aimés des abeilles fidèles,
En ce beau lieu versent la paix,
Et les ramiers, blottis dans le feuillage épais,
Ont ployé leur col sous leurs ailes.

*The black oaks, liked busy bees,
Pour peace into this beautiful place,
And woodpigeons, dancing in the dense foliage,
Curl their heads under their wings.*

Les grands cerfs indolents,
par les halliers mousseux,
Hument les tardives rosées ;
Sous le dais lumineux des feuilles reposées
Dorment les Sylvains paresseux.

*Large, lazy deer,
by the sparkling fount,
Taste the late dew;
Under the luminous platform of serene canopy,
Sleep the lazy Sylvans.*

1913 *Soir sur la Plaine* (Albert Victor Samain [1858-1900]) M1552.B68 S6 1994
Secular work for soprano, tenor, and baritone solos, mixed (SATB) chorus, and piano;
originally scored for orchestra?

Vers l'Occident, là-bas, le ciel est tout en or!
Le long des prés déserts où le sentier dévale
La pénétrante odeur des foins coupés s'exhale.
Et c'est l'heure émouvante, où la terre s'endort.

*Toward the West, over there, the sky is golden!
Along the barren fields where the path descends
The penetrating odor of new-cut hay permeates.
It is twilight, when earth falls asleep.*

La faux des moissonneurs a passé sur les terres
Et le repos succède aux travaux des longs jours.
Parfois une charme oubliée aux labours
Sort comme un bras levé, des sillons solitaires.

*The reaper's scythe lies on the ground
And rest follows a long day's work.
Sometimes beauty is forgotten in labor
Leaving, with raised arms, solitary furrows.*

La nuit à l'Orient verse sa cendre fine.
Seule au couchant s'attarde un barré de feu.
Et dans l'obscurité qui s'accroît peu à peu
La blancheur de la route à peine se devine.

*The night in the East pours its fine ash.
Only with setting one barred of fire is delayed.
And in the darkness increasing little by little
The whiteness of the road is barely visible.*

Puis tout sombre et s'enfonce en la grande unité.
Le ciel enténébré rejoint la plaine immense.
Ah! Ecoute! Un grand soupir traverse le silence,
Et voici que le coeur de jour s'est arrêté.

*The sun sinks beneath the horizon.
The immense plain meets the darkening sky.
Ah! Listen! A great sigh breaks the silence,
And the heart's voice stops for the day.*

1916 *La Terre appartient à l'Éternel* (Psalm 24)
Sacred work for chorus, organ, and orchestra; also available in an edition for voice and
piano; E minor.

La terre appartient à l'Éternel et tout ce qui s'y
trouve, la terre habitable et ceux qui l'habitent.
Car il l'a fondé sur les mers, et l'a établi sur les
fleuves.

*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it; the
world and that dwell therein. For it is he who
founded it upon the seas and made it firm upon
the rivers of the deep.*

Qui est-ce qui montera à la montagne de
l'Éternel, et qui est-ce qui demeurera au lieu de
sa sainteté? Ce sera l'homme qui a les mains
pures et le cœur net, don't l'âme n'est point
portée à la fausseté et qui ne jure point pour
tromper.

*Who can ascend the hill of the Lord and who can
stand in his holy place? "Those who have clean
hands and a pure heart, who have not pledged
themselves to falsehood, nor sworn by what is a
fraud."*

Il recevra la bénédiction de l'Éternel et la justice
de Dieu son sauveur. Telle est la génération de
ceux qui le cherchent, qui cherchent ta face en
Jacob.

*"They shall receive a blessing from the Lord and
a just reward from the God of their salvation."
Such is the generation of those who seek him, of
those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.*

Portes, élevez vos têtes, portes éternelles,
hauseez-vous, et la Roi de gloire entrera. Qui est
ce Roi de gloire? C'est l'Éternel fort et puissant
dans les combats.

*Lift up your heads, O gates; lift them high, O
everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall
come in. "Who is this King of glory?" "The
Lord, strong and mighty in battle."*

Portes, élevez vos têtes, élevez-vous aussi, portes
éternelles. Et le Roi de gloire entrera. Qui est ce
roi de gloire? C'est l'Éternel des armées, c'est lui
qui est le Roi de gloire. Éternel! Ah!

*Lift up your heads, O gates; lift them high, O
everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall
come in. "Who is he, this King of glory?" "The
Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory." Lord! Ah!*

1917 *Du fond de l'Abîme* (Psalm 130)

Large-scale sacred work for soloist, chorus, and organ. More research into this work is needed.

Du fond de l'abîme je t'invoque, Iahvé. Ecoute ma prière. Que tes oreilles soient attentives aux accents de ma prière: du fond de l'abîme je crie vers toi, Adonaï, écoute ma voix.

Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice: let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication. Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord, Lord hear my voice.

Si tu prends garde aux péchés, qui donc pourra tenir en présence de Iahvé? Du fond le l'abîme, je t'invoque.

If you, Lord, were to note what is done amiss, O Lord, who could stand? Out of the depths have I called to you.

Maix la clémence est en toi, afin que l'on te révère. Mon âme espère en Iahvé; je compte sur sa parole plus que les guetteurs de la nuit n'aspirent au matin.

For there is forgiveness with you; therefore you shall be feared. My soul waits for the Lord; in his word is my hope. My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning.

J'espère en toi, j'espère en a parole. Car en Iahvé est la miséricorde et l'abondance de la délivrance. C'est lui qui délivrera Israël de toutes ses iniquités: Israël espère en la clémence de Iahvé.

My soul waits for the Lord. O Israel, wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy; with him there is plenteous redemption, and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

1917 *Vieille Prière bouddhique*

Sacred (Buddhist) work for tenor, mixed chorus, and orchestra. More exploration of this work is needed.

1918 *Pie Jesu* (from Requiem Mass texts)

M1613.3.B74 P5 (organ reduction)
M2103.3.B68 P5 1922 (parts)

Sacred work for solo (high) voice, string quartet, harp, and organ; also arranged for solo voice and organ. This setting utilizes the standard text.

1912 *Pendant la tempête* (Théophile Gautier [1811-1872])

M1560.B68 P4 2000

Sacred work for male (TBB) chorus and piano; originally thought to have been lost, this work was published posthumously in 2000.

La barque est petite et la mer immense ;
La vague nous jette au ciel en courroux,
Le ciel nous renvoie au flot en démente :
Près du mât rompu prions à genoux !

*The boat is small and the sea immense;
The wave throws us to the heavens in anger,
The heavens return us to the flood in insanity:
Next to the broken mast, let us bow the knees!*

De nous à la tombe, il n'est qu'une planche.
Peut-être ce soir, dans un lit amer,
Sous un froid linceul fait d'écume blanche,
Irons-nous dormir, veillés par l'éclair !

*Us with the tomb, it is only one board.
Perhaps this evening, in a bitter bed,
Under a cold shroud made of white foam,
We will sleep, taken care of in a flash!*

Fleur du paradis, sainte Notre-Dame,
Si bonne aux marins en péril de mort,
Apaie le vent, fais taire la lame,
Et pousse du doigt notre esquif au port.

*Flower of paradise, our Holy Lady,
If sympathetic to sailors in danger of death,
Calm the wind, sheathe the sword,
And guide our vessel back to port.*

Nous te donnerons, si tu nous délivres,
Une belle robe en papier d'argent,
Un cierge à festons pesant quatre livres,
Et, pour ton Jésus, un petit saint Jean.

*If you save us, we will give you
A beautiful silver dress,
A candle with festoons weighing four books,
And, for your Jesus, a small St. Jean.*

Discography

Clairières dans le ciel. New London Chamber Choir, James Wood, conductor. London: Hyperion, 1994. [Compact disc CD 2395]

Contains Les Sirènes, Renouveau, Hymne au soleil, Pour les Funérailles d'un soldat, and Soir sur la plaine.

Lili Boulanger: Faust et Hélène. BBC Philharmonic, Yan Pascal Tortelier, conductor; City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus. Essex, England: Chandos Records Ltd., 1999. [Personal library]

Contains Faust et Hélène, Psalm 24, and Psalm 130.

Works of Lili Boulanger. Orchestre Lamoureux and the Elisabeth Brasseur Chorale, Igor Markévitch, conductor. Everest, 1960. [Phonodisc 18 L 21]

Contains Psalm 130, Psalm 24, Psalm 129, and Vieille prière bouddhique.

Bibliography

Brooks, Jeanice. "The Fonds Boulanger at the Bibliothèque Nationale." *Notes*, 51, no. 4 (June 1995), 1227-1237.

Dopp, Bonnie Jo. "Numerology and Cryptography in the Music of Lili Boulanger: The Hidden Program in 'Clairières dans le ciel.'" *The Musical Quarterly*, 78, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 556-583.

Fausser, Annegret and Robert Orledge. "Boulanger, (Marie-Juliette Olga) Lili." *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed March 14, 2005), <<http://www.grovemusic.com/>>.

Gilbert, David. "Prix de Rome." *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed March 14, 2005), <<http://www.grovemusic.com/>>.

Landormy, Paul and Frederick H. Martens. "Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)." *The Musical Quarterly*, 16, no. 4 (October 1930): 510-515.

Palmer, Christopher. "Lili Boulanger 1893-1918." *The Musical Times*, 109, no. 1501 (March 1968): 227-228.

Rosenstiel, Léonie. *The Life and Works of Lili Boulanger*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1978.