

### **Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)**

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918) was born to a family of musicians in Paris. Her mother, a Russian singer, married her teacher at the Paris Conservatoire — the *Prix de Rome*-winning composer and conductor Ernest Boulanger. They had two musically gifted daughters. Boulanger's older and very talented sister — Nadia — also aspired to win the *Prix de Rome*. While Nadia fell short of this achievement she was by all accounts a tireless supporter of her talented and determined sister. Recognized for her musical gift at an early age, Lili Boulanger began attending classes at the Conservatoire and played piano, violin, cello and harp as a child, though she was to primarily become a pianist and composer.

Lili entered the Paris Conservatoire in 1909 and studied under Paul Vidal. She competed in the *Prix de Rome*, the highest musical award in France that had been awarded to Debussy, Berlioz, and Bizet. In 1912, she collapsed and did not complete her audition, but returned the next year, and won the composition prize for her performance of her cantata, *Faust et Helene*.

After moving to Italy, she completed several works and began working on an opera, *Princesse Maleine*. It was while she was in Rome living at the Villa Médici that WWI broke out. She began to correspond with fellow musicians to create a support network for musicians serving in the War. Nadia and Lili together formed the *Comité Franco-Américain du Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation*.

Lili's chronic ill health as a result of childhood pneumonia forced her to return home to France.

She worked furiously for the next few years, and by the time of her death at age 24, Lili Boulanger had completed dozens of pieces for piano, quartet, opera and choir and left many more unfinished. Despite her celebrity during her short life, Boulanger's work remained largely unknown for most of the twentieth century, and it is only recently that her music has begun to be performed again.