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# *Marguerite Long*

*A Life in French Music,*

1874—1966

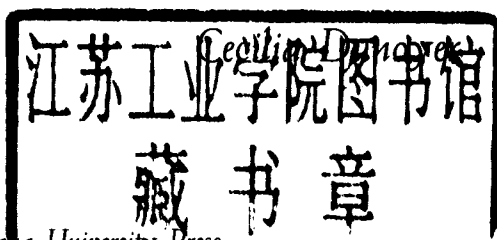
*By Cecilia Dunoyer*

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# Marguerite Long

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1874–1966



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*Frontis: Marguerite Long in the 1930s.*  
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To my  
three beloved boys,  
the big one,  
the little one, and  
the newest one,  
who had a race with this book  
and won.

## *Preface*

It is perhaps a form of nostalgia for the Old World that inspired me, after having lived in the United States for ten years, to undertake a biography of Marguerite Long. Immersing myself in the life of this exceptional artist was also a journey through one of the most fascinating artistic periods of history: Paris from the end of the last century to the 1960s.

Marguerite Long (1874–1966), the most important French woman pianist of our century, marked a whole epoch of musical life in Paris with the indelible stamp of her personality, artistry, and achievement. Part I of this biography focuses on her blossoming career and her collaboration with composers up to 1939; Part II concentrates on her eminence as a pedagogue and an ambassador of French music from 1939 to her death.

Early on, Long's career was guided and inspired by her inexhaustible desire to discover French contemporary music. The circumstances of her life, notably her marriage to the eminent musicologist Joseph de Marliave, only strengthened her collaborations and friendships with the composers of her time. Among them, Fauré, Debussy, and Ravel occupied a central place in her personal, musical, and artistic development. She associated Fauré with the blossoming of her career, her youth, and her blissful marriage to Marliave, during which Fauré and the young couple shared an intimate friendship. World War I brought the tragic loss of her husband; but during this same period, her collaboration with Debussy earned her the reputation of being the one whose playing most closely expressed the composer's aesthetic ideals. Her career reached a climax in the 1930s, when, with Ravel himself, Long played the première performance of the G major Concerto, which was written for and dedicated to her. She and Ravel subsequently toured throughout Europe with the new work.

Appointed Professor at the Paris Conservatoire in 1906, Long was the first woman to teach a Classe Supérieure at that institution; she taught there until 1940. World War II marked a turning point in her formidable pedagogical activity. In 1943, determined to boost young careers, she founded, with

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the collaboration of Jacques Thibaud, the competition which bears both their names. During the two decades following the war, her weekly master classes became the *rendez-vous* of pianists from all over the world; these artists sought her guidance for international contests as well as for their first important engagements. Her role as ambassador of French music was repeatedly recognized and celebrated by the innumerable titles and honors she received from both French and foreign governments.

The circumstances surrounding this biographical study were somewhat unusual and thus deserve a few words of explanation. Marguerite Long left no heirs. Married in 1906 and widowed in 1914, she had no children and never remarried. Whatever wealth she possessed she invested in the foundation established in 1962 to ensure the long-term support of the competition she created during World War II, the Concours Marguerite Long-Jacques Thibaud. According to her wish, all her belongings of any monetary value were to be auctioned, after her death, to raise more funds for the foundation. The sale, executed by Maître Ader, took place at the Hôtel des Ventes Salle Drouot, the largest auction house in Paris. Unfortunately for future historians, more than her jewelry and furs were sold. Numerous autograph letters were auctioned, and her correspondence with Fauré, Debussy, Ravel, and other composers was dispersed among collectors, making it virtually impossible to trace, as these much-coveted items frequently change hands.

Nevertheless, there remained a substantial quantity of personal papers, concert programs and reviews, newspaper clippings, photographs, autograph letters, official documents conferring national honors and decorations, Long's own music scores with their composers' autograph dedications and sometimes annotations, notebooks of lectures, classes and speeches, and "Le Livre d'or" (see chapter 12), all of which provide ample documentation on the life of the "Grande Dame." Autograph letters from composers, friends, pupils, and collaborators give us particularly valuable details of or insight into the events of Long's life.

Curiously enough, none of what was left, to which I refer as the Long Archives, was entrusted to a library or an archivist. Instead, these original sources were packed in a dozen or so cardboard boxes and stored at the office of her competition, the Concours Long-Thibaud, which by then had gained international status. When the office was moved in the early 1980s from a modest corner in the building of the Salle Gaveau to a sunny and roomy three-room apartment at 32 Avenue Matignon (a mere three blocks from the Champs-Élysées), so were the boxes containing Long's Archives.

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When I knocked on the door of the office of the Concours Marguerite Long-Jacques Thibaud, I was warmly greeted by the executive director, Chantal Bernard, and her helpful and friendly assistant, Sylvie Crabos. Rather surprised by my request, they showed me to the "gold mine": the sought-after boxes of documents were piled up in the bathtub and balanced atop the bidet of the unused *salle-de-bain* of the apartment. Reacting to the bewildered expression on my face, they explained that they needed every closet and file space available for documents pertaining to the competition, and that Long memorabilia ended up by default in the only unusable room of the apartment. They assured me that no one had ever looked through the materials, and neither they nor anyone else had any idea what was there. My work was cut out for me. Bernard and Crabos very kindly gave me a table and a chair, and made room for me to spread out my papers.

I spent weeks in Paris, thanks to a grant from the French Embassy in the United States, leafing through the boxes containing the Long Archives and reconstructing the pianist's life. Unfortunately, as her papers were randomly gathered and never organized, there was no systematic way to refer to the various documents. Although I separated materials by categories (letters, photographs, newspapers, etc.), the only way to find a specific document was to leaf through the whole thing again. Finally, because of my research and persistent interest in the cause, an agreement was made in 1991 between the Concours Long-Thibaud and the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustave Mahler (BMGM) in Paris to appraise and professionally archive these abundant materials. The Long Archives will therefore be conveniently available to anyone for reference in the near future. Since this book relies for a large part on these materials, which are not yet catalogued, sources from this collection are simply identified as "Long Archives, BMGM, Paris."

Two other important sources are behind this research project: the Institut National de l'Audio-Visuel (I.N.A.) Archives, and numerous personal interviews.

Long gave a series of weekly half-hour interviews, or rather radio talks, between October 12, 1954 and February 22, 1955. Entitled "Mes maîtres, mes amis, mes élèves," these programs were conceived and implemented by four journalists: Claude Rostand, Bratislow Horowitz, Christian Mégret, and Gérard Michel. Throughout the twenty broadcasts, Long delightfully reminisced about her life, keeping to a predetermined subject during each session. Through these talks I was able to hear first-hand not only about her collaborations with Fauré, Debussy, and Ravel but also her opinions on

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subjects ranging from teaching to competitions, from contemporary music to her childhood memories. The tapes of these broadcasts are stored with the French Radio Archives in Paris, at the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel. I refer to this source as "I.N.A. Archives, Paris."

Finally, I conducted many interviews with Long's friends, former pupils, and collaborators, including her physician, who provided a nonmusician's viewpoint. These interviews were extremely valuable in constructing a portrait of Marguerite Long that would be as objective as possible, since not all those associated with her had only fond memories. Conversing over several months with a wide range of individuals between the ages of 45 and over 90, I began to grow into the personage and appreciate her in all of her facets, above and beyond tangible and historical facts.

The abundance of detail in the resources available to me made it possible to portray the rich character of Long's multifarious activities. All the sources were originally in French; the English translations are mine, including quotations from books originally published in French. Quotations from published English translations of French authors are identified.

## Acknowledgments

Many strands from my life in the “old” and “new” worlds came together in my work about Marguerite Long. I would like to thank all those who made this project not only possible but enjoyable every step of the way, especially Chantal Bernard, Executive Director of the Concours Marguerite Long–Jacques Thibaud, who gave me free access to the entire Long Archives before they were entrusted to the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler. The atmosphere in her office was always cheerful, thanks to her great sense of humor. I am indebted to all who candidly shared with me their personal recollections of Marguerite Long, in particular Daniel Wayenberg and the late Pierre Barbizet for being so honest, colorful, and romantic in their portrayal of their mentor. My sincere thanks to the I.N.A. Archives for making all of Long’s 1954–55 radio interviews available to me, and to Marie-Gabrielle Soret at the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler for assisting me in selecting and reproducing valuable photographs. I am grateful for a grant from the French Embassy’s Cultural Services which supported months of research in Paris. Monique and Etienne Dalemont deserve my most heartfelt thanks for hosting me in their home during weeks of research in Paris, for providing numerous dinners, and for listening to my stories.

Eugene Helm gave me the confidence needed to start such a project; it was his idea that I write a book! His unflagging support and warm encouragement have been invaluable all along. Thomas Schumacher is also at the root of this work. When, early on, I shared my thoughts with him, his immediate and enthusiastic response propelled me into action. In addition, I was fortunate to benefit from the interest and friendship of many members of the faculty at the University of Maryland. I also cherish my long conversations with Charles Timbrell, during which we commiserated on the trials and tribulations of getting our books ready for publication. His advice and suggestions have always been extremely helpful.

My deepest appreciation goes to my parents, who read every word of the manuscript, offered editorial advice, and shared with me their keen interest in the subject matter. Most important, they have always showed unabated faith

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in me and thus have given me the strength to overcome hurdles and moments of doubt in my life. I owe my father a huge debt of gratitude for taking on with such passion the French translation of this book, which is about to be published in Paris.

Last but not least, the patient and loving presence of my husband, Taylor Greer, is behind every page of this work. He has weathered the ups and downs of all my undertakings unscathed, and my gratitude toward him grows every day. As with every task I complete, I have included him, consulted with him, and asked his advice. Finally, no matter how great the challenges, I am filled with wonder at *petit François* for beginning every day with the most radiant and affectionate smile, and for being such an infinite source of inspiration.

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# PART ONE



## *The Artist*

*Le soleil de Nîmes, couvert ou radieux, selon le déroulement des années a toujours, malgré tout, rayonné sur ma vie. Au terme d'une existence aussi remplie que la mienne, les souvenirs d'enfance reviennent impérieux, et c'est avec une grande émotion que j'évoque ceux qui se rattachent à ma chère et noble cité, au parfum des grands pins de sa tour Magne, au bruit obsédant des cigales ainsi qu'à mes études musicales et autres dont la récompense était pour moi le drame sonore des corridas.*

—Marguerite Long

Throughout the passing of years, the sun of Nîmes, radiant or overcast, has always shone over my life. At the end of a life as filled as mine, my childhood memories come back, very powerful, and it is with great emotion that I evoke those that are connected to my dear and noble city, to the fragrance of the tall pine trees surrounding the Tour Magne, to the obsessive noise of crickets, as well as to my musical and other studies, for which my reward was the sonorous drama of the bullfights.



*Marguerite Long's hands. Bibliothèque Musicale  
Gustav Mahler, Paris, Marguerite Long  
Archives.*

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# Marguerite Long's Youth

## *Childhood in Nîmes: 1874–1886*

Marguerite Long's earliest childhood memories are inseparable from the sunny skies, the fragrance, and the beauty of her native Nîmes, an old Roman town in the south of France, where she spent the first thirteen years of her life. She was born on November 13, 1874 at 14 Grande Rue, but shortly thereafter her family moved to Rue Pavée, where her father, who had a passion for flowers, cultivated a beautiful garden. Throughout her life, she could close her eyes and conjure up the intoxicating perfume of honeysuckle, jasmine, and clematis, which were particularly pungent after her father's evening watering. As a toddler, nothing could stop her from crawling down the few steps to inhale voluptuously the fragrance of the earth. To watch the *belles de nuit* close at night was for her a great mystery. This is where her lifelong passion for flowers was born, and where her imagination began its rapid development. When her father would scold her because she was walking around at night with her face up in the air, she would answer that she was looking at the stars. In fact she was trying to count them.

Marguerite's parents were not musicians. Her father, Pierre, originally from the Drôme region, somewhat north of Nîmes, worked for the railroad. But her mother, Anne Marie Antoinette, who was a native of the Ardèche region, also north of Nîmes, had a good musical instinct, and little Marguerite was not allowed to play wrong notes.

If her father had given her a love for flowers, it was her sister, Claire, eight years older, who planted the seed of musical passion. Claire Long was a splendid pianist; at age seventeen she was appointed Professor of Piano at the