

## Acknowledgements

There are many people whose support has been integral to the growth of this project; I would like to thank Fatima Chajia for coaching me on the French pronunciation; Daniel Epstein and Evan Bennett for musical coaching and analysis; Meredith for going through this process with me and telling me I could do it, (you did it too!); Nick Elliott for offering his Directorial insights; T'aiya Shiner for taking on yet another lighting project; Derek Campbell; Gladden Schrock; Janis Young, Alan Del Vecchio; Michael Giannitti; Tony Carruthers for three years of guidance; Isabelle Kaplan; Suzanne Jones; Irina Petrova for her spirited enthusiasm and desire to help; Diana Ditmore; Keri Towne; Magdalena Abramson; The voice class; Paul Omer; Frank Baker for introducing me to my instrument; Joe Bloom for his joy of playing; Jim for teaching me to love music the way you do; Jennifer and Dana for knowing my strengths and showing them to me; Thanks to all my dancing, laughing, late-night-game playing friends whose presence kept me going even through the toughest parts of these past four years; a warm thanks to my family who have been wonderful support throughout my life. You made me feel like I could accomplish anything and I love you for it. And a very special thanks to Ida Faiella for two years of guiding me in discovering the power of my voice while teaching me some pretty useful lessons about life.

*This project was made possible in part through the generous support of Judith Rosenberg Hoffberger '54 and the Henry and Ruth Blaustein Rosenberg Foundation, by a grant from The Woolley Fund of Bennington College and the Music Faculty Fund.*

BENNINGTON COLLEGE PRESENTS:

LA VOIX HUMAINE



MONDAY & TUESDAY, MAY 27 & 28, AT 8:00 PM



# La Voix Humaine

MUSIC by  
Francis Poulenc

TEXT by  
Jean Cocteau

*Jessica Peck*, soprano  
*Meredith Hinkley*, piano

LIGHTING DESIGN  
T'aiya Shiner

LIGHT BOARD OPERATOR  
Magdalena Abramson

HOUSE MANAGERS  
Diana Ditmore, Irina Petrova

POSTER AND PROGRAM LAYOUT POSTER AND PROGRAM DESIGN  
Irina Petrova Jessica Peck

## Background Notes

### La Voix Humaine

Jean Cocteau's *La Voix humaine* was first performed in 1932 by Berthe Bovy at the Comédie-Français. The one-act play is a long monologue by a woman whose lover has left her and whom she telephones for the last time for three quarters of an hour. The play is most definitely a dramatic tour de force and the task of setting it to music and creating a 'lyrical tragedy' would seem impossible. The task was made all the more difficult by the fact that Poulenc and Cocteau had been friends for 40 years. Poulenc's only work based on his friend's poems was the *Cocardes* (1919) and he himself explained that he needed a great deal of experience, particularly in song, to be able to set the play to music. It was Hervé Dugardin, director of Ricordi Paris, who suggested using *La Voix humaine* as the basis for an opera. Poulenc described himself as 'A man of song in all its forms' and he became committed to putting the long telephone monologue into verse. He was so successful that Cocteau told him he had created the definitive way of delivering his text. In a previously unpublished letter to singer Pierre Bernac he sets out clearly the main compositional elements which make up the stages and the motifs of his work; 'My source is *La Voix humaine*. Cocteau is in complete agreement with my idea, which shapes the text into "Stages (the difficult stage, the lying stage, the aggravating stage.) I found a great deal. Two scandalous themes, among others, for 'those men'; one loving and the other erotic. I instinctively found the rhythm for the replies. I am not worried about the (average) volume of the orchestra. The ensemble is terrible. 'She' tells of her annoyance in a sad waltz rhythm reminiscent of Sibelius.' *La Voix humaine* was first played at the Piccola Scala, Milan, then in New York and Edinburgh. The French première was on February 6, 1959 with Denise Duval, Georges Prêtre leading the orchestra of the Opéra-Comique and with a set and production by Jean Cocteau. The success of the work both among critics and among the public has never wanted. Denise Duval described the deep emotion which emanates from *La Voix humaine* by saying, 'We will always love, always suffer, always cry, always take our own lives and this is what gives *La Voix humaine* a form of timelessness [...] Pain is universal.'

Translated by Byword