Lucia Dlugoszewski’s life began in Detroit on 16 June 1925 and ended in New York City on 9 April 2000. She composed approximately one hundred pieces, invented around one hundred instruments, wrote poetry and prose, collaborated with filmmakers and the Living Theatre, and steered the musical direction of the Erick Hawkins Dance Company for nearly fifty years. Her compositions were praised by critics and championed by figures such as poet Frank O’Hara, writer Jamake Highwater, sculptor Isamu Noguchi, philosopher F. S. C. Northrop, and critics Alfred Frankenstein and Virgil Thomson, among others. The night she died, Dlugoszewski was missed at a dress rehearsal for a performance of her own choreographic piece based on the life of her friend, abstract expressionist painter Robert Motherwell.

After brief composition studies with John Cage and Edgard Varèse, Dlugoszewski followed her own creative path while confronting the musical issues of the time: expanded sonic resources; invented instruments and new ways of playing traditional instruments; alternative formal structures; interdisciplinary collaboration; the role of silence and “everyday sounds” in performance; and spiritual, psychological, and philosophical influences. Frequent concepts, influences, and key words running through Dlugoszewski’s work may bewilder researchers: Logos and Eros, tenderness, sensual realism, Eastern philosophy, suchness and thusness, haiku, koans and the pursuit of the ungraspable, radical empirical immediacy, quidditas, duende, and nageire. “I believe in the poetic immediacy of sound,” she explained.

Beyond the simplicity of her youthful Halloween Symphony (a work for solo piano, despite its title; 1938) and Song of Young Writers (1941),

Margins, Shadows, and Footnotes

An Introduction

To dangerously awaken the dangerous mind without fixing it.
Dlugoszewski’s works list reads like no other. Certain ideas appear frequently in her titles, including everyday sounds, left ear, radical, cicada, naked, abyss, flight, terrible, and amor, as seen in this sample list of compositions spanning most of her career:

- Moving Space Theater Piece for Everyday Sounds (1949)
- Transparencies 1–50 for Everyday Sounds (1951)
- openings of the (eye) (1951–52)
- Archaic Timbre Piano Music (1954)
- Music for Left Ear in a Small Room (1959–60)
- Balance Naked Flung (1966)
- Densities: Nova Corona Clear Core (1971)
- Tender Theater Flight Nageire (1971/78)
- Fire Fragile Flight (1973)
- Strange Tenderness of Naked Leaping (1977)
- Amor Elusive Empty August (1979)
- Amor Now Tilting Night (1979)
- Startle Transparent Terrible Freedom (1981)
- Duende Newfallen (1982–83)
- Duende Quidditas (1983)
- Quidditas Sorrow Terrible Freedom (1983)
- Radical, Strange, Quidditas, Dew Tear, Duende (1987)
- Disparate Stairway Radical Other (1995)
- Depth Duende Scarecrow Other (1996)
- Exacerbated Subtlety Concert (1997)

Dlugoszewski wrote over a dozen works for dances by choreographer Erick Hawkins, three experimental film scores, and three scores for productions by the Living Theatre. Many of the works were scored for her own percussion instruments or for “timbre piano,” her distinctive inside-the-piano technique. Other pieces call for more classical chamber ensembles or orchestra, sometimes with theatrical elements, like the lighting and blowing out of matches. Only a few works include voice; not a single work includes tape or electronics of any kind.

Neither melodic nor motive-driven in a traditional sense, Dlugoszewski’s compositional tendencies included the use of extended instrumental techniques, a focus on timbre, emphasis on abstract and philosophical/
metaphysical meaning, avoidance of fixed pitch through the use of sliding
tones, and a preference for extreme dynamic ranges. She valued surprise and
unpredictability—“the disparate element”—which she sometimes referred
to as “giving the audience a flower at the right time.”3 Many compositions
are listed in various sources as “work-in-progress”—Dlugoszewski reportedly
had trouble finishing pieces, especially later in her life, as mood swings and
psychological instability seemed to affect her with increasing frequency and
intensity.

While striving to nurture her identity as a free-spirited artist, Dlugoszewski
also struggled to balance her ongoing roles as daughter, muse, wife, and
caregiver, roles that both inspired and oppressed her. (Dlugoszewski never
had children, but felt the pressures of eldercare; after her mother’s death in
1988 she wrote in her diary: “In search of myself again.”) This is the story of
a composer, but it is also the story of a woman who, in the words of Ruth
Solie, shared “the restlessness of all women against patriarchy.”4 Dlugoszewski
deserves an intervention of her own—both a recuperation of her life story
through “fundamental fact-finding,” as well as a critique of the gender issues
that affected her compositional work and her career.5

Women artists are currently being rescued, metaphorically, though not par-
ticularly rapidly, from the margins, shadows, and footnotes of history. Shadow-
omy metaphors abound in mentions of forgotten females, as in musicologist
Judith Tick’s description of my 2015 book on composer Johanna Magdalena
Beyer: “Beal . . . allows us to appreciate the musical rewards in bringing
someone in from the cold margins of conventional history.”6 Similarly, a 2017
description of an exhibit of the work of artist Sonja Sekula, who committed
suicide at the age of forty-five in 1963, caused me to notice another woman
lurking in another decentralized place: “This fascinating, welcome survey
aims to rescue [Sekula] from the footnotes of the avant-garde.”7 A recent
article on English composer Ethel Smyth similarly lamented the fact that
she had “for too long . . . been relegated to footnote status.”8 Linda Dahl,
writing decades ago about the women left out of jazz histories, drew on the
same metaphor: “Often they were buried in footnotes. . . . Under-recorded or,
sadly, not recorded at all. Their slim oeuvre out of print. A blanket of silence.”9

Margins and footnotes are where we put things that we allow to be over-
looked, secondary to the main story. They are not unlike shadows, where
things can hide, or be hidden. With this in mind, I could not overlook critic and composer Kyle Gann’s peculiar praise, and then damning banishment, of Dlugoszewski: “Possibly the leading direct inheritor of Varèse’s aesthetic, she lived a life of relative obscurity and died in 2000, having achieved little more than a shadowy reputation.” Gann’s grim assessment of the (un)worthiness of Dlugoszewski’s life not only caught my attention, it also perplexed me. (His dismissal of Dlugoszewski echoes Françoise Tillard’s similar dismissal of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, who, according to Tillard, “did not really tackle life head on, did not complete her life’s work, and never reached her full potential.”) Johanna Beyer received a similar assessment along with character descriptions such as antisocial, friend- and family-less, alcoholic, dark, unfriendly, lonely, and so on, none of which have been substantiated. Likewise, Gann condemned Dlugoszewski, in a single sentence, to both obscurity—literally, darkness—and to the shadows. I imagine that such a description would have baffled this outgoing, prolific woman who loved passionately, and once wrote a graphic poem called “The Sun!” Extensive biographical and compositional evidence prove that she achieved much more than “a shadowy reputation.” Once her “dangerous mind” had awoken, her creativity proved to be relentless.

In the early 1970s, during a critical junction in her career, Dlugoszewski made some of her most explicit statements about her views on the status of women in music, and how that status had affected her own work. Speaking to a reporter from her hometown of Detroit, Dlugoszewski asserted: “It isn’t true that women can’t compose great music. They can and do but they have been terribly put down in the past. Music is a very conservative field but there are some brilliant women composers coming along now who will, I think, change things.” In response to the question “Do women have stamina and single-mindedness?” Dlugoszewski reflected further: “I have never missed a performance or a deadline, even if it means working for 56 hours at a stretch. . . . I have missed having a family and I regret that, but it has been a necessary part of the sacrifice and struggle. I hope future generations of women composers will get more recognition and monetary rewards so they can enjoy both a career and a family.” The reporter Dlugoszewski spoke to on this occasion was all too happy to embrace a trope of neglect: “Until recently,” the reporter wrote, “[Dlugoszewski] has worked in the kind of obscurity (and near starvation) which surrounds most serious composers, especially if they are women.”
During the winter of 1950–51, shortly after Dlugoszewski moved to New York City, writer Anaïs Nin described a public talk given there by Australian-born composer and *New-York Herald Tribune* critic Peggy Glanville-Hicks. Nin took note of Glanville-Hicks’s explicit acknowledgment of the double standards women composers encountered while trying to build a professional reputation: “[Glanville-Hicks] mocks the composers and critics who interfere with the development of a woman composer. She is asked to recommend, to bless, to support lesser composers, to introduce them, help them on their way. But this help is not returned. It was the first time I heard a brilliant, effective woman demonstrate the obstacles which impaired her professional achievement because she was a woman.”16 Indeed, the social milieu Dlugoszewski entered into at the start of her career was not free of sexism, and women artists were taking note, at least in their own private journals, where they sometimes allowed their outrage to be aired. Just a year after Nin’s writing about Glanville-Hicks, actress and Living *Theater* director Judith Malina wrote in her own diary: “Paul [Goodman] says there are no women artists because a woman is too much concerned with her own body. I get angry.”17

During the 1970s Dlugoszewski would write to a number of women composers, including Betsy Jolas and Miriam Gideon, expressing her admiration for their music and her appreciation of their presence in the world as role models for her own compositional career, though the bulk of her correspondence with other composers more frequently sought out prominent men like Virgil Thomson and Aaron Copland who had the potential to advance her career in ways that composers like Jolas and Gideon could not.18

In her introduction to an interview with Dlugoszewski published in 1993, Cole Gagne speculated about why Dlugoszewski’s “long and distinguished career has received scant documentation from the press and the recording industry,” suspecting that the composer’s affiliation with the Erick Hawkins Dance Company had been “a double-edged sword,” one that hindered her reception and “made her a difficult subject to research.”19 As it turns out, Dlugoszewski is no longer a difficult subject to research, thanks to a vast paper trail now available for study. With the help of those materials, I conceive of this book—admittedly focused more emphatically on her life than her work—as a first step toward reestablishing Dlugoszewski into the history of
which she was a part. In this context, historian Gerda Lerner’s words, from the introduction to her milestone 1979 book about discovering, resurrecting, newly interpreting, and “placing” women in history, ring true: “Women are made to fit into the empty spaces of traditional history.”

Margins, shadows, footnotes . . . empty spaces. (Dahl’s “blanket of silence.”) Virginia Woolf scholar Ellen Bayuk Rosenman echoed these metaphors, pointing out Woolf’s challenges to claims of accidental absence instead of exclusion, while invoking a related image—the blank spaces “on library bookshelves where women’s books should be.” Rosenman writes:

It is the “books that were not there” that tell the tale of women’s literary history. Woolf implies here a politics of absence, continuing the spatial imagery of her title [A Room of One’s Own] as well as the imagery of vision, by defining these empty spaces as having been created by gender inequities. Although there is nothing there, that “nothing” still has meaning, just as rests have meaning in a system of musical notation. This is another version of re- vision: to see blank space as its own kind of historical record.

For some reason, which I hope to uncover in the process of describing Dlugoszewski’s life and the times in which that life was lived, she has not been awarded what strikes me as an obvious seat at the table of not only the history of the New York School—the 1950s network of composers, musicians, dancers, artists, writers, actors, and directors—but also in the broader history of eccentric American composers whose creativity drives them to idiosyncratic music and ways of describing their aesthetics. Men like Harry Partch (1901–74) and Ornette Coleman (1930–2015)—to choose just two—have been celebrated for their autodidactic training and their refusal to follow an established path, as well as for their quirky and pugnacious characters (as in the case of Partch’s legendary irascibility), or for their impenetrable theory (as in the case of Coleman’s confusing Harmolodics). To be sure, Dlugoszewski was quirky, eccentric, and enthusiastic, and described her own music in such odd and opaque ways that she could give composer Anthony Braxton’s Tri-Axium Writings a run for its money, but she was also productive, imaginative, and inventive. (She might have agreed with Revolutionary-era composer William Billings’s proclamation, on the rules of composition, that “nature is the best dictator.”) Lucia Dlugoszewski was a rugged individualist in the truest American sense. Why does she (still) dwell in the shadows?
Soon after the 2015 publication of my book on Johanna Beyer, Paul Tai, artistic director of New World Records, wrote to me with an off-the-cuff yet serious suggestion: “Speaking of women composers, how about Lucia Dlugoszewski?” To which I replied: “I don’t know much about her.” It wasn’t the first time he had mentioned her to me, and the name started to stick in my mind. Only minimally curious at the start, I made my first trip to examine Dlugoszewski’s papers at the Library of Congress in September 2015. At that time, I was only able to access three boxes of her materials, embedded within the Erick Hawkins Papers. On my next visit, in December 2018, I was presented with several boxes of Dlugoszewski’s New York letters to her parents written in 1950 and 1951, and an enormous, overstuffed scrapbook that documented her childhood in Detroit. In January 2019, the Library of Congress acquired over forty new boxes of her papers, materials that had been confiscated from her apartment by the State of New York when she died intestate and without heirs in 2000. This overwhelming amount of new primary sources became the focus of another trip to Washington in September 2019—one that yielded a significant amount of new information on Dlugoszewski’s life and work. Other primary source materials—private letters, sketches of scores, unpublished essays, graphic poems and other art work—are scattered like Easter eggs around the country in other archival collections. By the time the COVID-19 global pandemic crisis exploded in early March 2020, I had more than enough material for an intense, shelter-in-place book project. (New primary source material surfaced at the Library of Congress during the final stages of preparing this book’s manuscript, but could not be consulted in time for inclusion.)

In addition to this archival digging, I tried to gain a sense of Dlugoszewski’s reputation among her contemporaries. I began by asking composers (and a few musicians and musicologists) what they knew about her. One composer appreciated her “because of her passionate temperament and what it produced musically.” Another remarked that among musicians, “she had a wacky reputation.” Another New York composer recalled: “I didn’t personally know Lucia but I loved her work. . . . It empowered me to go ahead with my own feeble attempts at unusual instrumentation.” A New York–based musician called her a ‘mysterious character’; another said she had “a ‘downtown’ temperament in an ‘uptown’ body.” Another found her music disappointing,
adding: “[My] impression was of a composer who didn’t think very rigorously about her composing.” Another composer admitted: “Sad to say, I know very little about her,” while a musicologist who has written authoritative books and articles on American experimental music told me: “I have not heard of Dlugoszewski.” Another expert on the same subject repeated this refrain: “I am one of those people who had never heard of Lucia Dlugoszewski.” Another composer active since the 1970s apologized as well: “I’m sorry to say that I had not heard of Lucia Dlugoszewski.”

A composer who lived on the West Coast during the 1970s recalled acquiring one of Dlugoszewski’s few recordings at the time, an eight-minute brass ensemble piece called *Angels of the Inmost Heaven* (released on Folkways in 1975): “When I heard the recording,” he wrote, “I just assumed she was well known and I was the only one who had never heard of her.” Another composer who knew Dlugoszewski in the early 1950s remembered her as “kind of wild, and thinking the music [was] sometimes good, if somewhat all over the place.” Another admitted: “In my ignorance, I regarded her pieces as being passé and uptown.” Finally, a festival director who expressed skepticism about the quality of her music offered a challenge: “I do hope you prove me wrong.”26

I intend to. I must admit though, that, like writer Delmore Schwartz’s biographer James Atlas, who “fretted about Delmore’s obscurity,” I too have fretted over Dlugoszewski’s lack of presence in histories of twentieth-century music, questioning both her worthiness and my ability to make a case for it in a piece of my own nonfiction storytelling.27 But over time, I have become convinced of her right to be included in the history of the second half of the twentieth century. This is neither a tale of disappointed hopes nor the biography a tragic figure. Dlugoszewski was a skilled and inventive composer, a tortured creative whirlwind. Her life’s work matters, and it deserves to be known. The following pages aim to tell the story of her life, and to document her creative work as accurately as possible: to shed light on Lucia.

**A NOTE ON NAMES**

The subject of this biography was born Lucille Ruth Dlugoszewski. At some point in her mid-twenties she started using the name Lucia (pronounced LOO-sha), and this is the name she used on her compositions, publications, and other creative works. At various times in her life she referred to herself
in writing as “Lucy” (also “Lucie” and “Luci”), and people close to her called her this as well. In this book I refer to her as “Lucille” only in the first chapter, which documents her childhood in Detroit. In all subsequent chapters I refer to her by her family name, following the standard convention for composer biographies when the confusion of shared marital names is not a factor.