



# Music's Modern Muse (Eastman Studies in Music)

*Sylvia Kahan*

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## **Music's Modern Muse (Eastman Studies in Music)** Sylvia Kahan

Superb new biography...The list of her achievements - music dedicated to her, works commissioned by her, artists supported by her - are all scrupulously recorded here...a dazzling and inspiring array...In Sylvia Kahan Winnaretta (Singer-Polignac) has a biographer able to explain her special mixture of arrogance, intelligence and bravery. --Margaret Reynolds, The Times Her book is magnificently readable. The reader's complaint might be that it stopped after 550 pages and has not yet been made into a movie. THE VILLAGER The American-born Winnaretta Singer (1865-1943) was a millionaire at the age of eighteen, due to her inheriting a substantial part of the Singer Sewing Machine fortune. Her 1893 marriage to Prince Edmond de Polignac, an amateur composer, brought her into contact with the most elite strata of French society. After Edmond's death in 1901, she used her fortune to benefit the arts, science, and letters. Her most significant contribution was in the musical domain: in addition to subsidizing individual artists (Boulanger, Haskil, Rubinstein, Horowitz) and organizations (the Ballets Russes, l'Opéra de Paris, l'Orchestre Symphonique de Paris), she made a lifelong project of commissioning new musical works from composers, many of them unknown and struggling, to be performed in her Paris salon. The list of works created as a result is long and extraordinary: Stravinsky's Renard, Satie's Socrate, Falla's El Retablo de Maese Pedro, and Poulenc's Two-Piano and Organ Concertos are among the best-known titles. In addition, her salon was a gathering place for luminaries of French culture such as Proust, Cocteau, Monet, Diaghilev, and Colette. Many of Proust's memorable evocations of salon culture were born during his attendance at concerts in the Polignac music room. Sylvia Kahan brings to life this eccentric and extravagant lover of the arts, whose influence on the 20th Century world of music and literature remains incalculable.

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