



In January 1999, I wrote an essay about Vernon Duke for The New York Times, under the headline "A Neglected Master's Haunting Consolations." Soprano Dawn Upshaw had just released an all-Vernon Duke album (produced by - and the brainchild of - Duke aficionado Tommy Krasker) that reminded me how much I loved the exquisitely wrought, eloquently moving songs this "neglected master" had written. I said as much in my story: "Vernon Duke wrote music for grownups. His songs sang most majestically about ambivalence, not the uplift that Tin Pan Alley consumers overwhelmingly preferred. His probing melodies brought out wonderfully melancholic resonances in lyricists who were by nature, if only on the page, rather jolly - Ira Gershwin, Ogden Nash and even Yip Harburg. As a result, these songs perhaps speak more directly to our own self-doubts and longings than they did in a 1930s culture that looked to its songwriters for escape."

Right after the piece ran, I got an approving phone call from Duke's widow, Kay Duke Ingalls, who told me I had captured her late husband "as if I'd known him." This led to our meeting for tea the next time Kay visited New York, and, finally, to Kay sharing with me "The French Score." a very expansive pile of songs Duke had written for an unproduced musical in Paris in 1949. Kay loved this



music deeply, and desperately wanted to see something "done with it." She also had an idea for what that something could be. Duke's score had been composed for a French libretto entitled Miloral l'Arsouille ("Lord Rogue," about the eccentric, early-19th-century British nobleman Lord Henry Seymour), with lyrics in French by Francis Claude. Over the years, efforts had been made to translate the work into English, but they had all failed. Kay now proposed tossing everything out but the music and creating an entirely new show based on the life of Misia Sert, the celebrated muse of fin de siècle Parris. The roll call of painters, writers and composers Misia had inspired, championed and, in some cases, discovered, was a who's-who of modernist geniuses, from Toulouse-Lautrec to Picasso, Proust to Cocteau, Debussy to Stravinsky.

Over the next year, I immersed myself in Vernon Duke's score and in books about Misia and her circle. I finished a first draft in December 2001, but the task of getting Misia on the stage proved arduous. A semi-staged reading at the Ravinia Festival in 2004 was followed by a staged reading in New York in 2005, through which I learned a lot about the intricacies of my story, and about Misia as a stage character. I spent the following four years

rewriting Misia and doing other things, like raising my two daughters; Kay, too, immersed herself in other matters, including bringing more of Vladimir Dukelsky's extraordinary classical catalogue back to the public ear in recordings and concerts. I ultimately asked Kay for more goodies from the trunk, and she obliged by making all of Duke's unheard catalogue available to me. She also sent me the exceptional Scott Dunn, the pianist, conductor and Duke archivist and scholar, who had aided her immeasurably in her Vladimir Dukelsky resuscitations. Scott and I met whenever he hit New York from his home in Los Angeles, adding songs, deleting songs, trimming, cutting, pasting and in every way improving the ever-majestic Vernon Duke score.

Cut to 2014, when Tommy Krasker, still a Duke admirer and now co-founder of the PS Classics label, signed Misia up for a studio recording. He enlisted a cast of Broadway all-stars (headed by the glorious Marin Mazzie) to fill the leading roles and, if that wasn't enough, approached the legendary Jonathan Tunick about orchestrating. The two days of recording in March of 2015 were as musically gratifying as anything I have ever experienced. What sounds! Scott conducted the orchestra. I just sat there, with Kay at my side, and Vernon very close by.