



# Arthur HONEGGER

## *Rugby*

**Arthur Honegger** (10 March 1892 – 27 November 1955) was a Swiss composer, who was born in France and lived a large part of his life in Paris. A member of Les Six, his best-known work is probably *Antigone*, composed between 1924 and 1927 to the French libretto by Jean Cocteau based on the tragedy *Antigone* by Sophocles. It premiered on 28 December 1927 at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie with sets designed by Pablo Picasso and costumes by Coco Chanel. However, his most frequently performed work is probably the orchestral work *Pacific 231*, which was inspired by the sound of a steam locomotive. Born Oscar-Arthur Honegger to Swiss parents in Le Havre, France, he initially studied harmony and violin in Le Havre. After studying for two years at the Zurich Conservatory he enrolled in the Paris Conservatoire from 1911 to 1918, studying with both Charles-Marie Widor and Vincent d'Indy. He made his Paris compositional debut in 1916 and in 1918 wrote the ballet *Le dit des jeux du monde*, generally considered to be his first characteristic work. In 1926 he married Andrée Vaurabourg, a pianist and fellow student at the Paris Conservatoire, on the condition that they live in separate apartments because he required solitude for composing. Andrée lived with her mother, and Honegger visited them for lunch every day. They lived apart for the duration of their marriage, with the exceptions of one year from 1935 to 1936 following Vaurabourg's injury in a car accident, and the last year of Honegger's life, when he was not well enough to live alone. They had one daughter, Pascale, born in 1932. Honegger also had a son, Jean-Claude (1926–2003), with the singer Claire Croiza. Honegger always remained in touch with Switzerland, his parents' country of origin, until the outbreak of the war and the invasion of the Nazis made it impossible for him to leave Paris. He joined the French Resistance and was generally unaffected by the Nazis themselves, who allowed him to continue his work without too much interference. He also taught composition at the École Normale de Musique de Paris, where his students included Yves Ramette. However, he was greatly depressed by the war. Between its outbreak and his death, he wrote his last four symphonies (numbers two to five) which are among the most powerful symphonic works of the 20th century. Of these, the second, for strings, featuring a solo trumpet which plays a chorale tune in the style of Bach in the final movement, and the third, subtitled *Symphonie Liturgique* with three movements that evoke the Requiem Mass (*Dies irae*, *De profundis clamavi* and *Dona nobis pacem*), are probably the best known. Written in 1946 just after the end of the war, it has parallels with Benjamin Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem* of 1940. In contrast with this work is the lyrical, nostalgic *Symphony No. 4*, subtitled "*Deliciae Basilienses*" ("*The Delights of Basel*"), written as a tribute to days of relaxation spent in that Swiss city during the war. Honegger was widely known as a train enthusiast, and once notably said: "I have always loved locomotives passionately. For me they are living creatures and I love them as others love women or horses." His "*mouvement symphonique*" *Pacific 231* (a depiction of a steam locomotive) gained him early notoriety in 1923.

**Rugby** is a symphonic movement (*Mouvement symphonique* no. 2) by Arthur Honegger for orchestra that describes the sensations during a rugby game. The work was composed from August to September 1928 and premiered on October 19, 1928 in Paris. The movement is called *Allegro* and the duration is 8-10 minutes, depending on the speed of the game. The piece focuses on a rugby game, but is not program music in the actual sense, but rather a processing of impressions of a match. Honegger himself wrote: "I love the football game very much [...] but I feel more uplifted by the wilder, more sudden, more desperate and less regulated rhythm of the rugby game. I don't want to try to reproduce any phase of the rugby match symphonically, and it would be wrong to look for program music in my piece. As a musician, I simply want to express game and counterplay, rhythm and color of a match in the Colombes stadium in my own language, and out of honesty I felt obliged to give my sources." For this purpose, Honegger based the piece on a rondo with variations as the basic form. After all, rugby becomes very compact because two parties in the orchestra each throw two different main themes, which vary somewhat over time, and thus (rhythmically speaking) different layers emerge. Overall, the impression is created of a struggle in the course of which each party tries to gain the upper hand, which is expressed through all musical means, such as sixteenth runs, staccato passages, rattling triplets, syncopation, the exclusive *forte* and, last but not least, the rapid tempo is brought. For some people this sometimes gives the impression of a chaotic piece.