



Arthur HONEGGER

Symphony No. 2

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.

The **Symphony No. 2** for strings and trumpet by Arthur Honegger was commissioned in 1937 by Paul Sacher to mark the tenth anniversary of the chamber orchestra Basler Kammerorchester. Progress was slow, however, in part due to the interruption of the Second World War. The music is primarily for strings alone and is very turbulent and troubled until the trumpet soloist enters near the end of the music, giving this mostly tragic work a hopeful ending. The first performance was given by the Collegium Musicum of Zurich under Sacher on 18 May 1942. The work is in three movements: 1. *Molto moderato – Allegro*, 2. *Adagio mesto*, and 3. *Vivace non troppo*. The work is for string orchestra, except for the addition of a trumpet in the concluding chorale: "like pulling out an organ stop", according to the composer. The trumpet part is marked *ad libitum*, and although occasionally performed by strings alone, most performances include the trumpet. Numerous recordings have been made of the work, including performances conducted by Charles Munch, Serge Baudo, Ernest Ansermet, Herbert von Karajan, Mariss Jansons and Charles Dutoit.