



Arthur HONEGGER

Symphony No. 3 “*Liturgique*”

Arthur Honegger 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 (the first name was never used) to Swiss parents in Le Havre, France, he initially studied harmony with Robert-Charles Martin (to whom he dedicated his first published work) 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 exception 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. In the early 1920s, Honegger shot to fame with his "dramatic psalm" *Le Roi David* (King David), which is still in the choral repertoire. Between World War I and World War II, Honegger was very prolific. He composed the music for Abel Gance's epic 1927 film, *Napoléon*, which was preceded by *J'accuse* (1919) and *La Roue* ("The Wheel") (1923). He composed nine ballets and three vocal stage works, amongst other works. One of those stage works, *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher* (1935), a "dramatic oratorio" (to words by Paul Claudel), is thought of^[by whom?] as one of his finest works. In addition to his pieces written alone, he collaborated with Jacques Ibert on both an opera, *L'Aiglon* (1937), and an operetta. During this time period, he also wrote *Danse de la chèvre* (1921), which has become a staple in the flute repertoire. Dedicated to René Le Roy and written for solo flute, this piece is lively and charming but with the same directness of all Honegger's work. Honegger always remained in touch with Switzerland, his parent's 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.

Symphonie Liturgique is the third symphony by the Swiss composer Arthur Honegger. Composed in the aftermath of World War II, it is one of Honegger's best-known works. It is in three movements, each of which (following the symphony's subtitle) is named after a liturgical text. The first movement is named after the Dies irae from the Requiem Mass. It is marked *allegro marcato*, and has an aggressive, storm-like quality. The slow movement, named *De profundis clamavi* after Psalm 130, is in contrast meditative and lyrical. The finale, named after the Dona nobis pacem from the Mass, is more episodic, with an insistent, brutal marching rhythm building to a dissonant climax, before a long, lyrical coda concludes the work. A melody resembling the robin song from *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher*, can be heard towards the end of each movement. Honegger himself wrote an extensive commentary on the work, making explicit the music's connection with the horrors of the War, and the desire for peace. Written in 1945-46 on a commission from the Foundation *Pro Helvetia*, Honegger's Third was first performed in Zürich on 17 August 1946 with Charles Munch conducting the Suisse Romande Orchestra. Munch made a live recording of the work in Prague with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1956, which has been released by the Multisonic label. The symphony has been performed and recorded many times and was a specialty of Herbert von Karajan, who made a recording of it (with Honegger's Second Symphony) in 1969, which is still widely regarded as one of its finest interpretations. The *Symphonie Liturgique* has strong thematic similarities with Benjamin Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem* written in 1940, although it is in no sense imitative or a reworking of the earlier piece.