

Delannoy, Marcel (1898-1962): Overview of his Writings

The writings of Marcel Delannoy form a relatively large body of work that includes more than two hundred newspaper articles published between 1927 and 1944 and [a biography of Arthur Honegger](#) (1953). He also signed at least nine articles in various periodicals, including texts on musical life, presentations of his works, and homages to other composers. In addition to these published writings, a collection of Delannoy's unpublished material is held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (VM FONDS 60 DLN). In addition to an important volume of correspondence (from which only [the composer's exchanges with Charles Koechlin](#) have been published), the composer left behind a number of personal notes and a diary, autobiographical notes, articles and lectures on composers and on musical life, presentations of his music, and justifications destined for the committees of the postwar legal purge (*épuration*).

In 1927, a few months after the premiere of his first opera, *Le Poirier de Misère*, Delannoy made his debut as a critic writing for *Notre Temps*, a tribune of the young post-war generation directed by Jean Luchaire, then a political follower of Aristide Briand. Delannoy would sign around fifty articles for *Notre Temps* between 1927 and 1934. It was only six years later that he returned to regular work as a critic, working for the collaborationist daily paper, *Les Nouveaux Temps*, again directed by Luchaire, writing 163 weekly columns over the four years of the Occupation.

As a musician who learned his craft outside the major institutions and who had trouble making a living from his music alone, music criticism offered Delannoy a important source of income. It also responded to his need for recognition, his desire to defend his ideas, and a certain taste for controversy. In his lively, alert style, Delannoy took position on artistic and cultural questions and also, though more rarely, on social and political issues.

Although the events of Parisian musical life most often dictated the content of his articles, it also often offered Delannoy the occasion to speak on his two favorite themes (which were also sometimes treated in more developed articles): the necessity to promote "young" French music (a category in which he included himself until the Liberation) and the renewal of French contemporary opera.

Like his colleague Honegger, Delannoy regularly observed that opera houses and orchestras always programmed the same repertoire, neglecting music written by living composers and particularly by the young. Delannoy's columns were a means for him to draw attention to this situation and to music by composers of his generation. At ease in the double role of composer and critic, Delannoy never hesitated to give his opinion as an artist and to showcase his music when the opportunity arose, in particular by citing his own works. In late 1933, his promotion of young French composers was coupled with particularly virulent xenophobic and anti-Semitic discourse in which Delannoy accused the Jewish musicians fleeing Nazi Germany of taking the place of the French in Paris. Delannoy also explicitly associated himself with the unfortunately famous "Vive Hitler" shouted by Florent Schmitt during the performance of a work by Kurt Weill at the Salle Pleyel on 26 November 1933, an incident in which he participated and which he sought to justify in the columns of *Notre Temps*. These anti-Semitic and xenophobic positions were absent from Delannoy's articles written during the Occupation. It must be said that Delannoy was then enjoying a growing recognition and that programming policies, then focused on German and French music, had excluded a number of his earlier competitors. Still, Delannoy wrote favorably about the musical projects of the Reich and Franco-German collaboration in his columns for *Les Nouveaux Temps*.

An artistic platform, music criticism allowed Delannoy to publicly express his desires for the renewal of operatic theater. According to him, the *drame lyrique* had led to an

impasse and no longer corresponded to the needs of modern musical and theatrical spectacle. The renovation proposed by Delannoy often drew on the number operas of the *opéra-comique* and Italian opera buffa (Cimarosa in particular), the freely admitted models for his opera *Ginevra* (1938–1942). As a critic he was also an advocate for his own research as a composer, advocating an opera “*de demi-caractère*” (with the inclusion of spoken word), but also a refusal of complexity, and the search for an eclectic and melodic style drawing its inspiration from popular sources. Delannoy also took regular interest in the new media of record, radio, and cinema, but often expressed his disappointment with the musical achievements of sound film and radio.

Already condemned in 1942 by musicians in the Resistance, Delannoy’s articles of the Occupation constituted evidence for his prosecution during his *épuration* trials. At the Liberation, Delannoy’s involvement in collaboration resulted in legal measures and professional interdictions that dealt an almost permanent blow to his career. Published in 1953 (and republished in 1986) his biography of Honegger, in which he also mentions his own journey as a musician, is the only published volume of Delannoy’s writings.

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Further reading :

Quesney, Cécile, *Le compositeur, Vichy et la collaboration. Le cas de Marcel Delannoy*, Paris, Vrin, to be published.

Charles Koechlin, Marcel Delannoy : correspondance, présentée et annotée par Cécile Quesney, Les Amis de la musique française, série « Correspondance », Périgueux, 2010, 64 p.

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