

# Marcel Delannoy, Arthur Honegger (1953)

Published by Pierre Horay in 1953, this, the sole book written by Marcel Delannoy (1898–1962) is devoted to a composer who had taken the author under his wing in the early 1920s and remained in contact with him throughout his career: Arthur Honegger (1892–1955).

Delannoy finished a preliminary version of the biography in 1947, towards the end of a period of isolation following the professional and legal measures aimed at him due to his compromises during the German occupation. These postwar years were difficult for Honegger too: while he was not personally affected by the purge of collaborators, his works disappeared from programmes for several months. For Delannoy as for Honegger, then, this biography fits into a context of efforts to reclaim legitimacy in the musical world.

[Prefaced by Honegger](#), the book is organised into six chapters that retrace, work by work, the high points of the composer's career to 1953. The first ("Premises") covers Honegger's youth, from his birth in Le Havre ("Roots in Zurich", pg. 14) to the group Les Six, a fortuitous encounter that amounted to only one step in the formation of his "composite identity" (pg. 50). The second chapter ("Under the Sign of Jupiter") centres on the major successes of the twenties, while the following ("Highs and Lows") portrays the maturation of a personal style but also difficulties in relating to the public during the late twenties and early thirties. In the third chapter ("Evasion and Contact"), Delannoy examines the period from the Second and Third Quartets (1934) to *L'Aiglon* (1937), giving space to the music for cinema and radio as well as the Front populaire productions. The fourth chapter ("Accomplishment") retraces the period from *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher* (1938) to the Fourth Symphony (1947), one of considerable renown, at least until the Liberation. Finally, the "Provisional Epilogues" relate Delannoy's visits to Honegger from 1947 to 1953 and offer a portrait of the composer and his work at the moment the biography was finalised.

Writing a vibrant and cadenced style, Delannoy adopts throughout this book, drawn up together with Honegger, the point of view of a benevolent onlooker and colleague. He does not shy away from regularly inserting himself into the story, as for example when recalling his first meeting with the composer (who initially gave him some lessons) by way of his journal of the period. The biography describes the works of Honegger in detail and often supplements commentary with short music examples. The book also contains a list of the works as well as a series of photographs (including a "recent portrait" of Honegger with Delannoy himself). As author-narrator and supporting character, Delannoy brings a personal testimony of the occupation years, and several passages betray a desire to publicly justify his own position. He describes for example these "singular years" as the "deep slumber of music into which the cries of the martyrs of a ruthless repression penetrated only very late" (pg. 193). The period after the Liberation, sometimes compared to the post-1918 years, is treated with a bitter irony, whether in reference to the "great purge of 1945" (pg. 75), the "excesses" of young musicians (pg. 54), or the inanity of the "snobs" who enjoyed "'serial music' with a knowing air" (pg. 63).

When the biography came out in print, Honegger wrote to Delannoy: "I am very pleased with this book for it is truly the work of one creative musician writing about another, which gives it a resonance that nothing written about me previously had ever attained" (letter to Delannoy, 10 June 1953, Bibliothèque nationale de France). Francis Poulenc shared the opinion: "In any case, when a musician writes about another musician, the result is always better than what a literary man can do" (letter to Delannoy, 17 July 1953, in Poulenc, *Correspondance, 1910-1963*, ed. Myriam Chimènes [Paris: Fayard, 1994], pg. 744). Reissued in 1986 by the Swiss publisher Slatkine, the book remains a frequently cited source in biographies of Honegger.

**Cécile QUESNEY**

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Trans. Tadhg Sauvey

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