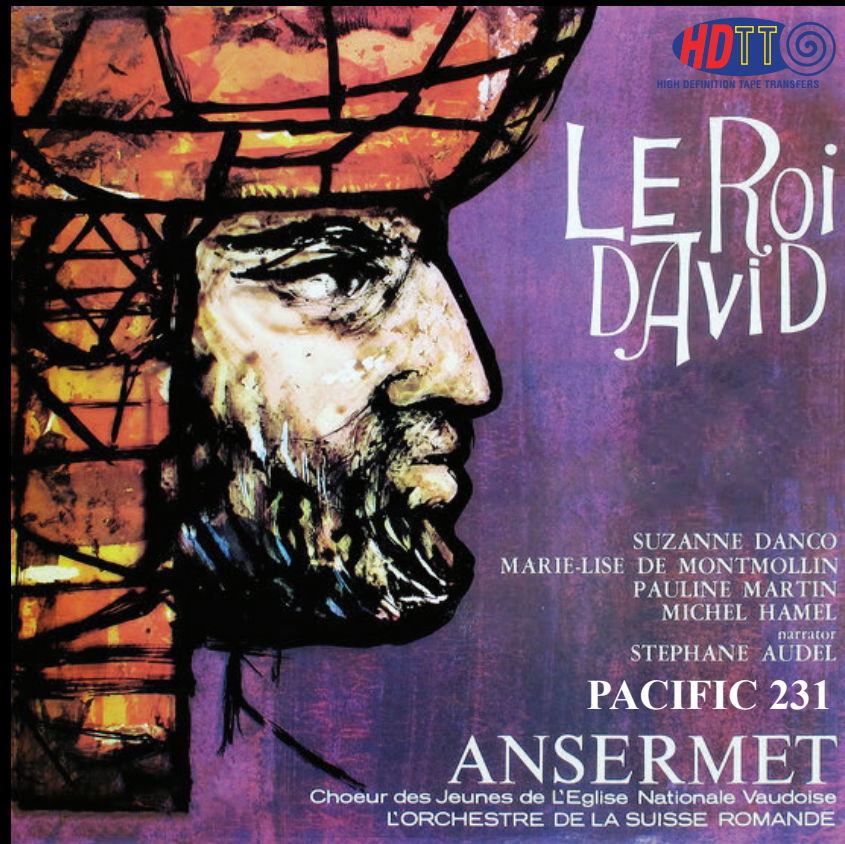


The Swiss conductor, Ernest Ansermet, came from a musical family; he successively studied the clarinet, violin and brass instruments, which he used in fanfares; later he wrote military marches for the Swiss army which he did not consider important. Besides Music, he studied Mathematics in Lausanne and graduated with a Diploma in 1903; until 1906 he taught at the Lausanne Grammar School, then he decided to continue his studies at the Sorbonne and, at the same time, to attend courses at the Paris Conservatory. After his return to Lausanne, he taught Mathematics for one more year before devoting himself entirely to music.



Ansermet was a particular advocate of the Swiss composers Arthur Honegger and Frank Martin. He conducted the first performances of the following works of A. Honegger: *Horace victorieux* (1921), *Chant de joie* (1923), *Rugby* (1928) and *Pacific 231* (1923), which was dedicated to him, and of the following works of Frank Martin: *Symphonie* (1938), *In terra pax* (1945), *Der Sturm* (1956), *Le mystère de la Nativité* (1959), *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1963) and *Les Quatre Éléments*, which were dedicated to him. Also important were the first performances of Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946) and *Cantata misericordium* (1963).



Le Roi David

In 1921, on the recommendation of the Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet, poet Rene Morax commissioned Honegger to compose incidental music to a stage piece on the Biblical king. Unfortunately, the deadline was next-to-impossible. Honegger nevertheless accepted and delivered the goods on time. Moreover, the music won such acclaim and popular acceptance that Honegger rescored the work from pit band to full orchestra. Asked how he managed, Honegger gave the following account. He started off with the idea of writing in the style of the Bach Passions but, after a number or two, realized that the style was too complex to allow him to meet the deadline. He then moved to a post-Rite of Spring "barbarism" but came up against the same problem. Asked by reporters "What did you do?" Honegger replied, "Oh, I just fell back on Massenet."

Honegger's joke at his own expense points out the extreme eclecticism of the work. All these composers – and Ravel besides – lurk in the pages of *Le Roi David*. Still, Honegger pulls off a success: lyrical, colorful, lovely, exciting, grotesque, and even grand when called for. When Honegger's music fell into neglect after World War II, this work kept his name before the public, enjoying performances both from professionals and from enthusiastic amateurs. The work divides into three parts: the first tells of David's choosing by Samuel and of his battles against the Philistines and ends with the lamentations over Gilboa; the second concerns the crowning of David; the third part deals with his kingship, the coveting of Bathsheba and his atonement, the death of Absalom, David's death, and Solomon's coronation.

Like Handel's *Messiah*, there is little musical deadwood. Almost every

number tells. Musical highpoints include Honegger's psalm-settings, the ethereal alleluias ending parts two and three, the extended lament for Saul and Jonathan, and the dramatic scene of Saul and the witch at Endor. The last makes one regret that Honegger did not write a full-length opera. Tender or rousing, above all, the music blazes like sunlight on bronze. With all its debts and borrowings, this is still the work of a master.

Pacific 231

This work caused a sensation at its May 8, 1924, Paris premiere, ushering in a trend toward mechanistic works, a trend that influenced even giants like Prokofiev, in his *Symphony No. 2*, and the then Paris-based lesser light American composer George Antheil in his riotous *Ballet mécanique*. But *Pacific 231* (this is really the subtitle and *Mouvement symphonique No. 1* the actual title), never caught on like other sensational Paris premieres, such as Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Still, it is hardly a neglected piece today, and how many twentieth century works can approach the popularity of Stravinsky's masterpiece? *Pacific 231* depicts the mechanical movements of a train, the *Pacific 231*. It starts off chugging, gradually gaining momentum, a momentum the listener soon senses will turn brutal and crushing. The music gains in energy, never losing its motoric poise, its austere determination taking on the role of an unleashed force of nature, blindly wreaking its savagery to all things in its path. The music grows in intensity, melody not significant to its expressive manner here, only rhythm and headlong drive. After a powerful climax, the work ends with the locomotive elements slowing but not surrendering their all-conquering grip.

Honegger Le Roi David Pacific 231

Ernest Ansermet
L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

Le Roi David

1. Première Partie 28:12
 2. Deuxième Partie 12:50
 3. Troisième Partie 26:42
- Total Time: 1:07:44
4. Pacific 231 6:09

Chorus - Chœur Des Jeunes De L'Église National Vaudoise
Mezzo-soprano Vocals - Marie-Lise De Montmollin*
Narrator - Stéphane Audel
Soprano Vocals - Suzanne Danco
Tenor Vocals - Michel Hamel
Vocals [the witch] - Pauline Martin

All tracks recorded by Decca Records

Le Roi David: - Producer: James Walker Engineer: Roy Wallace & James Brown
Recorded in October 1956 at Victoria Hall, Geneva

Pacific 231 - Producer: Michael Bremner Engineer: Roy Wallace
Recorded in April 1963 at Victoria Hall, Geneva



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