

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).

HONEGGER - SYMPHONY NO. 2  
HONEGGER - PACIFIC 231  
RAVEL - LE TOMBEAU DE COUPERIN  
PAVANE POUR UNE INFANTE DÉFUNTE

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Honegger's Symphony No. 2 was begun in 1937 as a commission from Paul Sacher of the Basel Chamber Orchestra. But the rising international tensions in the late 1930s and finally the start of the war in 1939 interrupted its progress and the "Symphonie pour cordes" was not completed until 1941 and was premiered by Sacher in 1942. As much as Vaughan Williams' Fourth or Shostakovich's Seventh, Honegger's Second is a war symphony. Cast as all Honegger's symphonies are -- in three movements -- the work charts the same course as Beethoven's Fifth, the course from darkness to light. The Second opens with a weighty *Molto moderato* wrenched into a bludgeoning *Allegro*; moves through a "somber, not to say, at times, positively hopeless" *Adagio mesto*; and ends in a climactic *Vivace non troppo* -- *Presto*. In the closing pages, Honegger calls for a solo trumpeter *ad lib* who "calls forth a golden sun on the horizon. Joy conquers at last, but only at the very last moment." Honegger's language is astringent, but still tonal, his rhythms abrasive and propulsive, his forms lithe but monumental, his intentions noble, and his success complete.

Pacific 231 the popular interpretation of the piece is that it depicts a steam locomotive, an interpretation that is supported by the title of the piece. Honegger, however, insisted that he wrote it as an exercise in building momentum while the tempo of the piece slows. He originally titled it *Mouvement Symphonique*, only giving it the name Pacific 231, a class of steam locomotive designated in Whyte notation as a 4-6-2, with four pilot wheels, six driving wheels, and two trailing wheels (the French, who count axles rather than wheels when describing locomotives, call this arrangement 2-3-1) after it was finished.

Orchestration

Pacific 231 is the first in Honegger's series of three symphonic movements. The other two are *Rugby* and *Mouvement Symphonique No. 3*. Honegger lamented that his "poor Symphonic Movement No. 3 paid dearly for its barren title." Critics generally ignored it, while *Pacific 231* and *Rugby*, with more evocative titles, have been written about in depth.

A 1949 French award-winning film, *Pacific 231*, directed by Jean Mitry, used the orchestral work as the sound track for a tribute to the steam locomotive, and included close-up footage of driving wheels, running gear and railroad operations, mostly taken at speed, and cut/choreographed to the music.

Le Tombeau de Couperin is a suite for solo piano by Maurice Ravel, composed between 1914 and 1917, in six movements based on those of a traditional Baroque suite. Each movement is dedicated to the memory of a friend of the composer (or in one case, two brothers) who had died fighting in World War I. Ravel also produced an orchestral version of the work in 1919, although this omitted two of the original movements.

Tombeau in the title is a musical term popular from the 17th century meaning "a piece written as a memorial". The specific Couperin, among a family noted as musicians for about two centuries, that Ravel intended to evoke is thought to be François Couperin "the Great" (1668-1733). Ravel stated that his intention was to pay homage more generally to the sensibilities of the Baroque French keyboard suite not necessarily to imitate or pay tribute to Couperin himself in particular. This is reflected in the structure which imitates a Baroque dance suite.

As a preparatory exercise, Ravel had transcribed a *forlane* (an Italian folk dance) from the fourth suite of Couperin's *Concerts royaux*, and this piece invokes Ravel's *Forlane* structurally. The other movements are similarly based on Baroque forms, with the *Toccata* taking the form of a *perpetuum mobile* reminiscent of Alessandro Scarlatti. Ravel also revives Baroque practices through his distinctive use of ornamentation and modal harmony. neoclassicism also shines through with Ravel's pointedly twentieth-century chromatic melody and piquant harmonies, particularly in the dissonant *Forlane*.

Written after the death of Ravel's mother in 1917 and of friends in the First World War, *Le Tombeau de Couperin* is a light-hearted, and sometimes reflective work rather than a sombre one which Ravel explained in response to criticism saying: "The dead are sad enough, in their eternal silence."

The first performance of the original piano version was given on 11 April 1919 by Marguerite Long, Joseph de Marliave's widow, in the *Salle Gaveau* in Paris. Ravel's *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (*Pavane for a Dead Princess*), composed in 1899, was the second of the composer's piano works to see publication. Despite Ravel's half-hearted efforts to later disown the piece -- he felt it to be too clearly oriented around the musical language of Chabrier, an early hero of his -- it is not at all difficult to understand why the *Pavane* instantly and irrevocably caught the attention of European concert-goers and why, along with *Boléro* (1928), it remains the composer's best-known music. It is a work of great but subtle charm, infused with the lightness of touch that emerged as one of Ravel's compositional hallmarks.

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