

ARTHUR HONEGGER – MONOPARTITA

MONOPARTITA was commissioned by the Zurich Tonhalle Society to mark the 600th anniversary of Zurich's accession to the Swiss Confederation and has been praised by biographer Harry Halbreich as "one of the composer's most brilliantly focused pieces." It could almost have been a sixth symphony but, like Antigone, it imploded and eventually took on a one-movement form. Honegger called it Monopartita because of the several contrasting episodes that follow each other to form a single entity. The power of this energetic work (premiered June 12, 1951) was too much for some more conservative local critics and it must be said that it was not the kind of commission that was expected. It belongs to the same period as the fifth symphony. Here too, in the Monopartita, the composer shows his inventive qualities.

Throughout his life, Honegger was haunted by the vision of a nuclear apocalypse, although he always said he feared the bomb less than the appalling stupidity of man. This fear is palpable in both the Monopartita and his Fifth Symphony.

Monopartita features lyrical segments with tuneful melodies, supported by 'traditional' harmonies and contrasting agitated rhythms emphasized by dissonant harmonies.

The composition is structured in eight sections:

Introduction - Allegro - 'Recitativo' - Adagio - Allegro - Adagio - 'Recitativo' - Largo.

The introduction presents a robust orchestral tutti characterized by Honegger's favoured dotted rhythms, occasionally double dotted, in both iambic and trochaic patterns. This opening is reminiscent of his Fifth Symphony.

The 'Recitativos' serve as a kind of entr'acte. Quasi improvisatory. The Introduction and the final part Largo use the same motives, with the Largo sounding like a distant echo of the Introduction. The Allegro's are linked together, as are the two Adagios, motivic repetitions with sometimes further elaboration. The application of the canon technique is also striking.

In the two Adagios, which I interpret as lament sections, there are discernible references to the lyrical Larghetto of the Deliciae Basiliensis symphony (no. 4).

This Monopartita is of great beauty and eloquence. An underrated masterpiece by Arthur Honegger.

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