

**A CONVERSATION WITH PASCALE HONEGGER
ON ARTHUR HONEGGER AND HIS FILM SCORE FOR "NAPOLÉON"**



*Adriano with Pascale Honegger
Photo by Hans-Toni Aschwanden*

In 1983, Adriano wrote and directed a TV documentary about his recording of Honegger's Napoléon Suite with the Junge Schweizer Philharmonie. This recording remains unpublished. Later, in 1978, Adriano, making his professional conducting début, would record the same music for Marco Polo, as a conductor of the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra. It is curious to note that the 1983 project was even mentioned in an article published by Variety, in which it was claimed that Honegger's score was performed by a "children's orchestra." In Adriano's subsequent letter to Variety, he amusingly imagines those children sitting on their potties whilst playing Honegger's not-at-all easy music... The following interview with Honegger's daughter has been transcribed and adapted from the film soundtrack. The interview conducted in French, took place in Biberstein, Switzerland, on April 9th, 1983.

ADRIANO: Do you have some personal recollections of Abel Gance's silent film Napoléon, or did your father tell you something about it, or its music?

PASCALE HONEGGER: Not much. At the time my father composed this score, I wasn't even born; but later on, when he was more deeply immersed in the film music business, he used to remember this early work of his and the difficult circumstances that had led to its creation. One must not forget that Honegger started to write film music in order to survive - in the early 1920s his reputation as a classical composer had yet to be affirmed. My father often talked about Abel Gance and his film since it was so special, not only because it was a great and innovative film, but also because there were so many difficulties and because it had gone well over-budget. The music had to be constantly re-edited. Even up to the very last minute, Gance kept editing; and it was scheduled for a grandiose presentation at the Paris Opéra in 1927!

ADRIANO: It seems that the original score for this film was a pastiche of works by different composers, containing music by not only Honegger (including those 7 pieces which are known today as the Napoléon Suite), but also by Beethoven, Haydn and others - but all arranged by Honegger. It also seems that Honegger was scheduled to conduct the première but that, at length, he could not cope with Gance's chaotic way of working, so conductors Szyfer and Chailley had to take over the job.

PASCALE HONEGGER: This, I have been told; and that it had been impossible for Honegger to write original music for a picture lasting some 4 hours or more. It seems that he even incorporated some of his own (or his complete?) earlier classical and chamber works, besides those pieces which were especially written for the film.

ADRIANO: It even seems that the orchestration of those so-called original pieces was different from that of the manuscript, which I edited for my recording. It had been conceived for an even larger ensemble to conform more to the grandiose style of the première presentation, or the original pieces later transcribed for a grand orchestra after they had been accepted for publication. Equally, the published version of the Napoléon score had many instrumental parts that could be used ad libitum for eventual chamber, drawing-room or even small cinema ensemble use.

PASCALE HONEGGER: Certainly, Honegger had edited these 7 pieces for commercial reasons so no wonder he thought about more flexible usage.

(Edited by Ian Lace)