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## Arthur Honegger and his relation to Jean Cocteau and "Les Six"

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## Arthur Honegger and His Relation to Jean Cocteau and *Les Six*<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

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The purpose of this article is to present a broad spectrum of relations between Arthur Honegger—a composer, and Jean Cocteau—a poet and playwright. They are often associated with the group under the patronage of Cocteau called *Les Six*, to which Honegger undoubtedly belonged. The poet gathered young composers around himself and became the initiator of artistic meetings and concerts. Most of them took place between 1917 and 1921. Cocteau wanted to show the path French music should follow. In accordance to that, his aesthetic manifesto *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* was published in 1918.

In the first section, Honegger's and Cocteau's aesthetic views concerning music, its elements and expression are presented and confronted. Next, the composer's as well as poet's work is presented by the example of their cooperation.

The analysis of mutual relations leads to the conclusion that, despite many different views, Honegger and Cocteau respected each other and

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<sup>1</sup> The following article is edited and extended version of the first chapter of the MA thesis of the author, titled “*Antygoną*” *Arthura Honeggera i Jeana Cocteau jako XX-wieczne ujęcie tragedii antycznej*, written in 2014 under guidance of Professor Zbigniew Skowron at the Institute of Musicology of the University of Warsaw.

were very kind. The composer significantly departed from the ideals of Cocteau and developed his own individual style resulting from a wide range of musical inspirations. *Les Six* was a short-lived group and Cocteau himself was gradually moving away from his controversial and radical views.

## Keywords

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Arthur Honegger, Jean Cocteau, *Les Six*, Neoclassicism, 20th-century French music

The artistic Paris in the first half of the 20th century, and especially the interwar period, is characterized by the variety of styles, trends, schools. In this cultural mosaic, musical life was strictly connected with art, poetry and dance, creating the colourful and diverse landscape. Artists representing miscellaneous disciplines of art used to meet, discuss the aesthetic issues, cooperate with each other and organize common undertakings. One of the most significant circles, later named as *Les Six*, was created by French composers, including Arthur Honegger, around the persona of Jean Cocteau. Cocteau—a poet, playwright, drafter, versatile artist—became their guide, inventor, and initiator of various artistic events. Because of that, when we talk about the ideals of *Les Six*, we should take into consideration the ideals proclaimed by Cocteau himself, as he was the voice of a generation of young artists and the voice of their thoughts. Louis Durey, who belonged to *Les Six*, wrote that young musicians desired to renew their life, which withered during the war, “to face the pessimistic atmosphere”. This “state of numbness” was to be defeated by new art created by writers, painters and musicians.<sup>2</sup>

The term *Les Six* was proposed by the French critic Henri Collet and appeared in two articles from the journal “*Comœdia*” in 1920. In the first of them, the author compared *Les Six* with The Five

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<sup>2</sup> Transl. of a citation from: W. Rudziński, *Muzyka naszego stulecia*, Warszawa 1995, p. 61.

(also: The Mighty Handful).<sup>3</sup> Its representatives: Alexander Borodin, Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Modest Mussorgsky, are regarded as the authors of the modern Russian national school. Collet said that the similar situation can be seen in France: Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc and Germaine Tailleferre, under patronage of Jean Cocteau and Erik Satie, were a community which re-defined the French musical style. The name *Les Six* suggested certain unity and cohesion, common aims and defined programme. Meanwhile, musical values of its members were totally different. Milhaud declared openly that Collet treated the group of friends-composers arbitrarily and was too serious about their common ideological connections. Milhaud preferred, as he named it, “Mediterranean lyricism”. On the other hand, Honegger was influenced by music of German Romanticism. Only Auric and Poulenc tried to realize Cocteau’s ideas.<sup>4</sup> In his biography, Milhaud said that he refused the declarations of affiliations with any aesthetic doctrines, because he perceived them as unexcused limitations for the artist’s imagination, who needs to find a different, often contradictory means of expression for every new piece. According to him, the article of Collet provoked the world-wide excitation of *Les Six*, which member he became submissively.<sup>5</sup>

The similar opinion on the topic of the dictated musical aesthetics has Honegger. In his book *I am a composer*, he said: “[...] I cannot conceive of music fabricated by laws set up in advance. I am neither polytonalist, nor atonalist, nor a dodecaphonist.”<sup>6</sup>

Long before the phenomenon referred to as *Les Six* was noticed, there were several friendly relations between its composers and the Parisian artistic milieu. Honegger came to Paris in 1911 (at the age of 19) and began studying at the local conservatory. He studied violin under Lucien Capet, and counterpoint under André Gédalge. Then,

<sup>3</sup> H. Collet, *Un livre de Rimsky et un livre de Cocteau: les Cinq Russes, les Six Français et Erik Satie*, “Comœdia” 16.01.1920. The second article was published in the same journal on 23.01.1920 and was titled *Les “Six” Français*.

<sup>4</sup> D. Milhaud, *Notes Without Music*, transl. by D. Evans, New York 1953, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> A. Honegger, *I am a composer*, transl. by W.O. Clough, A.A. Willman, London 1966, p. 83.

he studied the composition and instrumentation under guidance of Charles-Marie Widor, and conducting with Vincent d'Indy. In this environment, the first, extremely important for Honegger, friendships were made. The greatest influence on his development had Milhaud, whom he met before others, and with whom he attended counterpoint classes. In addition to many constructive conversations about music and mutual inspirations,<sup>7</sup> Milhaud introduced Honegger to the artistic world of Paris, introducing him to many people from the circle of art, including poets such as Paul Valéry, Max Jacob, Paul Claudel and Cocteau.<sup>8</sup> During the studies, Honegger also became friends with Tailleferre (in 1912) and, a bit later, with Poulenc (in 1915).<sup>9</sup> At this moment, we should also mention one more friend from student times, Jacques Ibert. Together with him, more than twenty years later, Honegger wrote the opera *L'Aiglon*.

The first meeting of young adepts of composition, Milhaud and Honegger, with the poet Cocteau (the same as earlier of Cocteau with Satie) took place in the salon of the painter Valentine Gross (later Hugo) in 1915.<sup>10</sup> In his flat in the time of war crisis (caused, among others, by closing theatres and other institutions of culture), she organised the kind of artistic club, in which many artists participated, e.g. Pablo Picasso, André Gide, Paul Morand, Satie and Cocteau.<sup>11</sup>

The second important initiator of the cultural events in Paris was Jane Barthori, an opera singer. Like Gross, she organized meetings of young poets and composers in her apartment.<sup>12</sup> In particular, she became involved in popularizing the work of the composers of *Les Six* and enabled her members to present their achievements on the stage of Théâtre du

<sup>7</sup> H. Halbreich, *Arthur Honegger*, transl. by R. Nichols, Portland 1999, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> G.K. Spratt, *The Music of Arthur Honegger*, Cork 1987, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> J. Bauman-Szulakowska, *Sérénité—humor—fantazja. Poetyka muzyki instrumentalnej Francisca Poulenca*, Poznań 2000, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> See: H. Halbreich, *op. cit.*, p. 32. On the other hand, Honegger in *I am a composer* mentions that he met Cocteau in Parisian Café de Flore, “which had become an existentialist hangout”. See: A. Honegger, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>11</sup> Valentine Gross (Hugo) co-created decorations and costumes to, among others, *Les Mariés de la tour Eiffel* (1921), she also collaborated in building scenography for the ballet performances of Vaslav Nijinsky and Sergei Diaghilev.

<sup>12</sup> G.K. Spratt, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

Vieux-Colombier, where she was a director since 1917. Honegger was also introduced by Milhaud to this circle of familiarity. At one of the meetings, the composer met a musician, writer and stage designer Fernando Ochsé—a friend who did more for his career than many teachers.<sup>13</sup>

From these initially disobliging friendships the common initiatives began to arise. The extraordinarily important event that gave the aesthetic direction to *Les Six* was the staging of the ballet *Parade* in May 1917, composed for the Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. The composition was the effect of a collaboration between Satie as a composer and Cocteau who wrote the screenplay. The ballet was complemented by the costumes of Picasso (in the cubic style) and choreography by Léonide Massine. Due to its surrealistic character, the premiere was a scandal. Cocteau desired to shock the audience, showing different everyday tragedies that are often overlooked through the grotesque and humor.<sup>14</sup> The play was regarded as the insult for the French taste, and Satie was called by critics as “nonharmonic, crazy composer for the typewriter and rattle”.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, it was the “scandalous success” of *Parade* that brought together young adepts of art. Shortly thereafter, in summer of 1917, Blaise Cendrars, encouraged by Satie, gathered around himself a group of artists who adopted the name *Les Nouveaux Jeunes* (*New Youth*). It comprised: composers—Durey, Auric, Tailleferre, Honegger; poets—Cocteau, Guillaume Apollinaire, Pierre Bertin; painters, scenographers—Picasso, Guy-Pierre Fauconnet. In the following years, the next joined them: e.g. Milhaud (who was on a diplomatic mission in Brazil until 1919) and Alexis Roland-Manuel. Their artistic activity was mainly about organizing joint concerts, presenting new compositional achievements, reciting poetry combined with vernissages. The place of these events was most often the above-mentioned Théâtre

<sup>13</sup> A. Honegger, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>14</sup> N. Oxenhandler, *Jean Cocteau: Theatre As Parade*, “Yale French Studies” 14 (1954), (*Motley: Today's French Theatre*), p. 72.

<sup>15</sup> G. Auric, *Przedmowa do „Koguta i arlekina”*, [in:] J. Cocteau, *Kogut i arlekin. Zapiski wokół muzyki*, transl. into Polish by A. Socha, Kraków 1995, p. 13. Actually, all “everyday instruments” causing noise, such as a typewriter, glass bottles, shouting gun and electric bells were added to the score thanks to Cocteau. See: *ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

du Vieux-Colombier and Salle des Agriculteurs.<sup>16</sup> Equally frequently, concerts were held in other places, such as galleries.<sup>17</sup>

The ideological establishment of *Les Six* took place in 1918. Then, Cocteau published his artistic manifesto *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* and dedicated it to Georges Auric. In a few dozens of short phrases, the poet contained the essence of his musical views. The title referred to the ambiguous nature of considerations. On the one hand, it comprised everything what is unwanted in music (identified with the harlequin, who wears the masque capturing a half of his face and colourful costume)<sup>18</sup>. On the other, there were indications of “proper” music, symbolized by the cock (a cock as a Galic symbol is associated with the French nationality;<sup>19</sup> it is also a kind of a wordplay used by the poet—a cock, French *coq*, is also a Cocteau).

The main idea of the manifesto was to return to simplicity and the primacy of a distinctive melody. The music should be light, pleasant, carry the element of joy and fun. These characteristics were to become the determinant of a new, pure, truly “French” style. Cocteau rejected entirely on the one hand the impressionistic aesthetics of Debussy, on the other—Wagner’s musical drama. In the manifesto he wrote: “We must, together with Saint-Saëns, shout: «Away with Wagner!» This is true courage.”<sup>20</sup> In another place, he praised the musical with American dances, which in his eyes “was beating Impressionist music.”<sup>21</sup> He commented on the Impressionist’s work in a critical voice: “Debussy strayed because he fell into Russian trap from the German trap.”<sup>22</sup> However, it should be added that Cocteau did not deny German or Russian music, but the fact that French composers were easily influenced by foreign artists, without developing their own original and unique style. This attitude—imitative, sometimes

<sup>16</sup> G.K. Spratt, *op. cit.*, p. 35. Salle des Agriculteurs in 1919 became the part of L'École Normale de Musique de Paris.

<sup>17</sup> See: D. Milhaud, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>18</sup> J. Cocteau, *Kogut i arlekin...*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>19</sup> H. Pinoteau, *Coq gaulois*, [in:] *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, [online] <http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/coq-gaulois> [accessed: 10.06.2017].

<sup>20</sup> J. Cocteau, *Kogut i arlekin...*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

epigone—was represented by a harlequin. “I demand French music from France”, the poet replied.<sup>23</sup>

As it can be easily noticed, in the views of Cocteau, later assigned to the whole *Les Six*, three attitudes dominate: the reluctance toward Wagner, negating of the Debussy’s aesthetics and admiration for Stravinsky.<sup>24</sup> However, Honegger managed to keep his own individual style, which resulted from a wide range of his musical inspirations. As he claimed, he “never shouted «away with Wagner»”.<sup>25</sup> He also showed a great admiration for Debussy (despite significant criticism of the solutions in prosody of *Pelléas et Mélisande*), as it is evidenced by both his statements and examples from his works. Honegger said openly that “his [Debussy’s—M.M.] works have such characteristic features that without any doubts they indicated great talent and revolutionized the entire musical world.”<sup>26</sup> Under the influence of Debussy, the most impressionistic work of the composer, *Pastorale d’été* (1920) was created—“the extension of *The Afternoon of a Faun*”, as one of the biographers Willy Tappolet described it.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, Cocteau himself expressed the composition in flattering words: “you can listen to this music with your eyes closed.”<sup>28</sup> It shows what respect the poet and composer had to each other, as well as how free group *Les Six* was and how freely the proclaimed postulates were treated. In fact, the most important were the meetings in the group and the exchange of views associated with them, joint discussions and concerts, while the pressure of dogmas was a secondary matter.

The output that was imagined by Cocteau was to aim at defined results that would cause that music would be easier to listen to it. Firstly, it was about the commonly understood simplicity—of a melody, rhythm, harmony. In relation to this, the manifesto admired the popular music, musical, song, “everyday music.”<sup>29</sup> Cocteau directly

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>24</sup> J. Bauman-Szulakowska, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>25</sup> A. Honegger, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>27</sup> W. Tappolet, *Arthur Honegger*, Zürich 1954; transl. of a citation from: Z. Kościów, *Artur Honegger*, Wołomin 2007, p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> Transl. of a citation from: Z. Kościów, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> J. Cocteau, *Kogut i arlekin...*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.



followed the Satie's slogan *musique d'ameublement*, meaning writing non-engaging music of a background, music accompanying ordinary, everyday routine.<sup>30</sup> "Musical, circus, American Negro's orchestras, everything fertilizes an artist"—the poet said.<sup>31</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, there were Honegger's views concerning melody and its shape. As the composer wrote:

Criticism has denied the melodic gift at one time to another to Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Wagner, Gounod, Debussy. The grand word, when confronting a new work, is to say, "It has no melody!" Figures like Pougin, Oscar Commettant, Fétis, Scudo, Hanslick, and a host of others, have admitted nothing as melody except motifs under formulas as simple and banal as possible: arpeggios [...] or waltz rhythms [...]. As soon as these motifs are discovered to be accompanied by further melodies, that is, polyphonically accompanied, they lose quality and the right to the name in the eyes of these narrow-minded censors.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, he strongly opposed the simplicity of melodic, arbitrarily limitations of motifs or the use of simple and trivial sound structures.

On the subject of Satie's work, Honegger had a rather critical opinion. He thought that some of his compositions were moving towards a musical decline. As he wrote, Satie, when returning to the primitive musical language, lacked the harmonic richness and counterpoint richness.<sup>33</sup> Both harmony and counterpoint were extremely important to Honegger. "I do not, like certain anti-impressionists musicians [in other words, Satie—M.M.], seek a return to harmonic simplicity";<sup>34</sup> he told Paul Landormy. The counterpoint and "polyphonic complexity" were close to him—he was inspired by Johann Sebastian Bach. He also expressed a negative opinion about *musique d'ameublement*, music that would not need listeners, and compared it to the wallpaper.<sup>35</sup> In this statement, general criticism of the ubiquity and universality of music

<sup>30</sup> M.E. Davis, *Erik Satie*, London 2007, p. 128.

<sup>31</sup> J. Cocteau, *Kogut i arlekin...*, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>32</sup> A. Honegger, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

in everyday life is seen, music which excess—instead of stimulating—causes weariness, discouragement, indifference and loss of sensitivity. The symphonic poem *Radio-Panoramique* (1935) became a sound expression of these emotions. Honegger put there a whole range of diverse music: Protestant chant with choir and organ, jazz motifs, cabaret song, waltz, fragment of a string quartet, oriental music and virtuoso, piano cadenza. This was to illustrate a chaotic journey on the scale of a radio receiver made by a modern man whose only effect is tiring noise.<sup>36</sup>

About the rebellion against the Impressionists or Wagner, which became the domain of the young artists from *Les Six*, and about the stylistic-aesthetic confusion they caused, Honegger spoke in the following way:

It is true that around 1920 Cocteau gave the signal for music in the trenchant style—its champion was Satie and some of my colleagues of the group called *Les Six*. But well before that date, a Strauss, a Stravinsky, a Schoenberg, had rebelled against Debussyism. What Debussy had predicted for Wagner had happened to himself: “Wagner is a sunset which is mistaken for a dawn.”<sup>37</sup>

Actually, Honegger did not see the basic assumptions resulting from the sentence of *The Cock and the Harlequin* as revolutionist, but only as said in different circumstances and in different voice.

Honegger was inspired by many compositional patterns and was never inclined to choose the radical solutions. He thought that music should be created in the way that it has strong connotations with the tradition and tried to keep balance between what is classical and what is new, being inspired by many sources. “Debussy and Fauré made a very useful counterbalance, in my aesthetics and in my feeling, to the classics and Wagner.”<sup>38</sup> He also mentioned the significant influence of Stravinsky,<sup>39</sup> Schönberg and Milhaud. Despite the fact that, according to Honegger, Milhaud became an adherent of Erik Satie, the friendship

<sup>36</sup> See: Z. Kościów, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>37</sup> A. Honegger, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>39</sup> It is worth mentioning that it was Stravinsky who recommended Honegger to René Morax as for collaboration in creating of *King David*.

of members of *Les Six* let them remain their complete independence.<sup>40</sup> Milhaud also highly valued friendship with Honegger. As he said, their work was repeatedly compared and contrasted, but their friendship and mutual admiration proved to be strong enough to effectively counter these brutal attacks.<sup>41</sup> Milhaud also mentioned that the director of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées at that time, Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht, from the composers of *Les Six*, appreciated only the work of Honegger, and it was difficult for himself to ask for performance of any work in the theatre. It is worth noting that Milhaud recognized the most atonal and avant-garde pieces of Honegger as his best masterpieces, namely *Horace victorieux* (*Horace the Winner*)—a “somber” and “difficult to perceive” work—and *Antigone*—“a magnificent flowering of his personality”.<sup>42</sup>

Honegger’s cooperation with the composers of *Les Six* and Cocteau was twofold: on the one hand, it included individual music projects, on the other—it combined all the artists during joint concerts and together created music pieces. Honegger and Cocteau’s friendship did not bring as many joint works as in the case of other composers of *Les Six*. To some extent, it was related to a fairly large discord between the views of these two artists on music—the path chosen by the composer was significantly different from the one the poet imagined in his *The Cock and the Harlequin*. The effects of the closest cooperation between the composer and Cocteau include only a few pieces: *Sarabande* from the *Album des Six*, one part of the ballet *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, song cycle *Six Poésies de Jean Cocteau*, music for *Antigone*—the theatrical play of Cocteau—and the opera of the same title, based on the text of this drama. In the case of *Sarabande*, the role of Cocteau was only to collect and release of six piano pieces under the common title *Album des Six* in 1920.<sup>43</sup> In fact, each of them was created independently (e.g. *Mazurka* by Milhaud already in 1914), while for Cocteau they were the works that best reflected the ideas of the new French music. *Sarabande* is, referring to

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<sup>40</sup> A. Honegger, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>41</sup> D. Milhaud, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162. Milhaud mistakenly writes that *Antigone* was performed previously in Essen and then in Brussels (actually, it was in reverse).

<sup>43</sup> The titles of following pieces and their composers: *Prélude* (Auric), *Romance sans paroles* (Durey), *Sarabande* (Honegger), *Mazurka* (Milhaud), *Valse* (Poulenc), *Pastorale, Enjoué* (Tailleferre).

the traditional dance form, a piece of the ABA form, but because of the dissonant harmony and romantic expression evidently moves away from the “classic” ideals of *Les Six*, clearly contrasting with the other works.

The crucial undertaking picturing the new music of *Les Six* was a surrealistic ballet *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*.<sup>44</sup> The piece was staged on the 18th of June 1921 in the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and it echoed widely in the contemporary world. It was the result of cooperation of many artists: five composers of *Les Six* (without Durey), Cocteau (screenplay and choreography), Jean Borolin (choreography) and Jean-Victor Hugo (scenography).<sup>45</sup> Honegger’s contribution was a composition entitled *Marche funèbre sur la mort du général* (*Funeral March for the General’s Death*). Also in this case, we can perceive how Honegger differed from the created image of *Les Six*. This may be confirmed by the reaction of one of the critics during the premiere of the ballet. Hearing the *Funeral March*, he was supposed to have said: “In the end there is also real music!”<sup>46</sup> Milhaud adds that Honegger treated his participation very seriously, but by placing the motifs of the waltz from the opera *Faust* by Gounod in the bass line, he introduced *de facto* his own element of satire to *The Wedding on the Eiffel Tower*. How much the opinion of *Les Six* was popular that their music is light and easy to listen to can be confirmed by the memory of Paul Collier in *La musique moderne*. This author wrote that he was asked if the Honegger’s *Antigone* would be humorous and funny.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, it was still thought that the group is avant-garde. Honegger spoke about it with undisguised irony: “A collaborator with Cocteau and Picasso can only be an avant-garde musician—says the fashionable concert-going public.”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> It consisted of the following parts: *Ouverture* (Auric), *Marche nuptiale* (Milhaud), *Discours du général* (Poulenc), *La baigneuse de Trouville* (Poulenc), *Fugue du massacre* (Milhaud), *Valse des dépêches* (Tailleferre), *Marche funèbre sur la mort du général* (Honegger), *Quadrille* (Tailleferre), *Ritournelles* (Auric), *Sortie de la noce* (Milhaud).

<sup>45</sup> W. Tappolet, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>46</sup> D. Milhaud, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

<sup>47</sup> Compare: P. Collaer, *La musique moderne*, Paris–Bruxelles 1963; cit. from: V. Rašín, *Les Six et Jean Cocteau*, “Music & Letters” 38 (1957), No. 2, p. 166.

<sup>48</sup> A. Honegger, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Another result of the composer's collaboration with the poet was a cycle of six songs entitled *Six Poésies de Jean Cocteau*.<sup>49</sup> The collection created in the years 1920–1923 apparently follows the musical path developed by the stylistics and ideas of *Les Six*. It is understandable that the composer wanted to preserve aesthetic consistency with the poet's texts. The songs are short—Honegger himself described them as “trifles”.<sup>50</sup> The performer of the first three, created in 1920, was Rose Féart, she was also dedicatee of the entire collection. The first performance of the whole took place on the 17th of November 1924 in the Pleyel Hall in Paris. A soprano Claire Croiza was accompanied by the composer himself at the piano. What we can see in these songs are the influences of Bach, Poulenc, Debussy, Fauré, Chabrier, as well as jazz music. One of the most interesting is *Une danseuse*, where Cocteau compared a ballet dancer to a crab. This opposition was pictured by Honegger in music: atonal and chromatic motifs in the right hand part accompanying the waltz, tonal motifs in the part of the left hand. The composer wrote: “For the crab, dry, rhythmic music, in opposition to that for the dancer, which is gentle and singing”.<sup>51</sup>

It is assumed that *Les Six* ended its intensive activity in 1921–1922,<sup>52</sup> when the number of concerts and joint artistic initiatives gradually decreased. Perhaps the most comprehensive summary of this turbulent period was made by Eveline Hurard-Viltard, who wrote: “In 1921, *Les Six* ceased to exist. But its mission is fulfilled. *Les Six* released music, and each of the composers can go their own way.”<sup>53</sup> Of the “Six”, Honegger deserved the most favourable opinion—“the most talented”, “always very much in earnest”.<sup>54</sup> Cocteau associated *Les Six* primarily

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<sup>49</sup> Titles of the following songs: *Le nègre*, *Loucutions*, *Souvenirs d'enfance*, *Ex voto*, *Une danseuse*, *Madame*.

<sup>50</sup> H. Halbreich, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>52</sup> Year 1922 is indicated by Satie. See: E. Satie, *Chronique musicale. Parlons à voix basse*, “Les Feuilles Libres” 33 (1923), pp. 183–186; J. Bauman-Szulakowska, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> E. Hurard-Viltard, *Le Groupe des Six ou le matin d'un jour de fête*, Paris 1988; cit. from: J. Bauman-Szulakowska, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> C. Gray, *A Survey of Contemporary Music*, London 1927; cit. from: H.E. Headley, *The Choral Works of Arthur Honegger*, Newport 1998, pp. 47–48.

with the “family atmosphere”,<sup>55</sup> and summarized the mutual relations of its members in his collection *Plain-Chant* from 1923:

Auric, Milhaud, Poulenc, Tailleferre, Honegger,  
I put your bucket in the same water of one vase  
And I plaited it carefully from the beginning.  
Now you are free to choose your way. [...] <sup>56</sup>

It would be the best to talk about them as a group of friends gathered around joint artistic initiatives, in which Cocteau was a “spiritual father” and Satie was a constant inspiration.<sup>57</sup> It should be emphasized that throughout the whole period of their activity, everyone—in their own way—approached the aesthetic attitudes of *The Cock and the Harlequin*, seeking the solutions valuable for the development of their own musical language.

For Honegger, belonging to *Les Six* was primarily associated with the opportunity to be among the most outstanding artists of Paris, exchange of experiences, ideas, views and presenting his own compositions, as well as with what is trivial, that is an ordinary entertainment.<sup>58</sup> Ideological reasons, identifying with a single programme, were not so important to him and did not cause pressure or embarrassment. He remained faithful to his views, being at the same time open to all sources of inspiration—both traditional and contemporary. Independence combined with the outstanding ability to cooperate and work out artistic compromises became the hallmark of the creator of *Jeanne d’Arc au bûcher*.

Of all the discussed works made in collaboration with Cocteau, the musical tragedy *Antigone* was definitely the most significant for the composer. Its origin should be discussed in close connection with the play of the same title. In December 1922, Cocteau exhibited his *Antigone*, adapting the myth to contemporary times: he significantly reduced and simplified the text of Sophocles (especially by reducing the choir parts)

<sup>55</sup> J. Bauman-Szulakowska, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> J. Cocteau, *Oeuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. M. Décaudin, Paris 1999, p. 170.

<sup>57</sup> H. Halbreich, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>58</sup> E.g. there is an evidence that Honegger, Auric, Poulenc and Claire Croiza played together poker every week. See: H. Hell, *Francis Poulenc*, Paris 1978; H. Halbreich, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

and used the language of prose, full of colloquialisms and anachronisms. Music was composed by Honegger. In a letter to the composer, the poet provided clues about the sound sphere of the drama. He said to use one instrument, as if a shepherd played on it, thanks to which the picture would become more unusual and poignant.<sup>59</sup> Conciseness of communication, modesty, functioning on the principle of decoration, not illustrativeness—these were the pre-requisites for music to *Antigone*.<sup>60</sup> Honegger followed these advices and created five short songs for oboe (or English horn) and a harp. These “musical insertions”—as Cocteau defined them—were a kind of interlude between the very vivid events. Just before the premiere, the poet wrote in another letter that he hopes his adaptation will inspire Honegger to create music similar to Strauss’ *Salomé*. “It would have a crazy effect”, summarized Cocteau.<sup>61</sup> The composer, nearly 30 years after the premiere, admitted that “this rapid and violent text incited [him] to compose [his] musical tragedy.”<sup>62</sup>

The work on the opera lasted nearly four years and was followed by the premiere of the work on the 28th of December 1927 at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels. This work was supposed to be similar in expression to the play written by Cocteau. Thus, the whole setting of the piece was modest, limited to the necessary minimum: it was made up of simple blocks, historical costumes, motifs from Greek vases. In contrast, there was constant music, operating with a huge amount of musicians, what critics perceived as some inconsistency of the work. Eventually, it was not well received. Honegger mentions that the critics were divided.<sup>63</sup> Those who expected an avant-garde opera breaking with tradition were as disappointed as those who counted on the next musical incarnation of *Le roi David* (*King David*). In terms of music, the opera did not at all adhere to the ideals proclaimed a decade earlier

<sup>59</sup> G. Lieber, “*Antigone*” Cocteau: *un concentré de tragédie*, “Bulletin de l’Association Arthur Honegger”, No. 4 (1997), p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> J. Cocteau, *En marge d’„Antigone”*, [in:] *ibid.*, *Théâtre complet*, ed. M. Décaudin, Paris 2003, p. 328.

<sup>61</sup> A letter from Jean Cocteau to Arthur Honegger, 13.10.1922; transl. of a citation from: G. Lieber, “*Antigone*” Cocteau: *un concentré de tragédie*, “Bulletin de l’Association Arthur Honegger”, No. 4 (1997), p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> A. Honegger, *op. cit.*, p 104.

<sup>63</sup> H. Halbreich, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

by Cocteau. An unequivocally expressionistic masterpiece emerged, referring to the works of Wagner and Strauss, made from *leitmotifs*. The *Spiritus movens* of the opera was a libretto, arranged in the original way, taking the prosody of French language into account. In the introduction to the score, the composer explained that he was looking for melodies created by the word itself, its flexibility, which would restore the naturalness of the French chant.<sup>64</sup> He attributed the central role in this process to the consonants, which he referred to as “locomotives” pulling the words.<sup>65</sup> Their proper accentuation together with the appropriate shape of the melodic-rhythmical vocal layer became a specific means of expression. In this context, Honegger gave the following example:

At that instance, Creon violently interrupts the choir, crying out: “Assez de sottises, vieill<sup>l</sup>esse!” Try to project this phrase in anger, with this rhythm: the aggressive effect is immediately blunted. Respecting the dramatic situation and Creon’s anger, I made it: “Assez de sottises vieill<sup>l</sup>esse!” leaning on the roots of the words.<sup>66</sup>



Ex. 1: *Antigone*, scene 3, bb. 225–226.

Jean Cocteau recognized the opera as the masterpiece, what may seem quite surprising in the context of above-mentioned views presented in *The Cock and the Harlequin*. However, it should be explained here that already at the beginning of the 1920s the playwright definitely changed his earlier attitude of radical revolutionist and the representa-

<sup>64</sup> Transl. of a citation from: J. Chomiński, K. Wilkowska-Chomińska, *Formy muzyczne*, vol. 4, *Opera i dramat*, Kraków 1976, p. 352.

<sup>65</sup> A. Honegger, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*



tive of avant-garde.<sup>67</sup> He became more conservative and religious, he turned to the Antiquity. It was presented in the collection of his essays, published in 1926, titled, what is characteristic, *Le Rappel à l'ordre*. The poet tells us about the return to the tradition of “living Classicism”, in which the artist can express himself being completely free and original at the same time.<sup>68</sup> He also touched the issue of uncompromising judgments in *The Cock and the Harlequin*, and especially explaining his attacks on Debussy. This radicalism—in the light of the Cocteau’s opinion—was provoked by the conviction that, in order to create a new soul of French music, we should totally revalue the present aesthetics, distinguish old from new, and accepted form of a manifesto required both certain simplifications and exaggerated opinions. In his opinion, the deadlock in music was mainly caused by imitators, epigones, who only fixed the existing state of music. Due to this—as he explained in *Le Rappel à l'ordre*—the attack on Debussy was, in fact, a criticism towards his imitators. Without doubt, both Cocteau and the remaining composers of *Les Six* had a huge respect for the Debussy’s compositions, even at the time of “joint” aesthetic defiance.<sup>69</sup>

Generally, *Antigone* ended the stage of the strict professional collaboration between Honegger and Cocteau. Nevertheless, they remained close friends, although their contact was not as intensive as at the time of the activity of *Les Six*. At the later time, the poet was especially engaged with the staging of *Antigone* in the occupied Paris in 1943.<sup>70</sup> Honegger positively looked at Cocteau and perceived him

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<sup>67</sup> In a somehow vague way, Georges Auric also mentions this in the preface to *The Cock and the Harlequin*: “[...] I will not try to follow my friend Jean Cocteau who, five years after the appearance of *The Cock*, tries to convince himself and us that «in the circus and in the music-hall, he did not seek—as it was maintained—the charm of clowns or black people, but the lesson of balance.» No, I will not.” See: G. Auric, *op. cit.*, pp. 20–21.

<sup>68</sup> *Jean Cocteau unique et multiple*, [online] <http://cocteau.biu-montpellier.fr/index.php?id=50> [accessed: 10.06.2017].

<sup>69</sup> S. Jarociński, *Grupa „Sześciu” a Debussy*, “Muzyka” 1979, No. 4, p. 44.

<sup>70</sup> See: M. Hanie, *Lettres inédites de Jean Cocteau à Arthur Honegger*, [in:] *Arthur Honegger: Werk und Rezeption/L'Œuvre et sa réception*, ed. P. Jost, Bern 2009, pp. 68–69.

as a person who “played an important role in the post-war musical world”.<sup>71</sup> He also admitted that “without being genuinely a musician, Cocteau served as a guide to many young artists. He stood for general sense of a reaction against the pre-war aesthetics.”<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, it is impossible to ignore the difference between the views presented by them. It is enough to mention, that sometimes it was visible in mutual criticism of the output. It was in the case of the success of *Le Roi David* in 1921. Cocteau was supposed to say that “Honegger takes part in the piece without perspectives, doomed to death.”<sup>73</sup> It was supported by Milhaud, who perceived the composition as treacherous and contradictory to the proclaimed ideals.<sup>74</sup> It must be admitted, however, that the whole criticism was in spirit of the mutual respect and kindness. During the funeral services of Honegger in 1955, Cocteau said the crucial phrases in which he summarized the close relation with the composer as well as his whole heritage:

You were a wonderful friend, Arthur. Today, for the first time, you make us sad. [...] You managed to gain respect of this contemptuous epoch. You conjoined the technique of the architect from the Middle Ages and the modest builder of a cathedral. Your dust is still burning and will never stop, even if the Earth will not exist, because music does not belong only to this world—and its reign will last forever.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> A. Honegger, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> H. Jourdan-Morhange, *Mes amis musiciens*, Paris 1955; cit. from: Z. Kościów, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>74</sup> J.F. Fulcher, *French Identity in Flux: The Triumph of Honegger's "Antigone"*, “The Journal of Interdisciplinary History”, vol. 36 (2006), No. 4 (*Opera and Society: Part II*), p. 657.

<sup>75</sup> The speech of Jean Cocteau on the funeral of Arthur Honegger; transl. of a citation from: M. Hanie, *op. cit.*, pp. 69–70.

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