

**Zeitschrift:** The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK  
**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom  
**Band:** - (1927)  
**Heft:** 291  
  
**Artikel:** Honegger and his critics  
**Autor:** A.G.  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-688045>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 14.12.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## HONEGGER AND HIS CRITICS.

The Honegger Concert at the Albert Hall was a dismal failure—for the critics. From Arthur Honegger's point of view it was an unqualified success, but the failure of London journalism and pseudo-criticism was practically complete.

The only excuse for London musical writers was the Albert Hall. True, it is difficult to grasp subtleties of orchestration in this great building. Apparently it was impossible for the critics. But the very large audience, after being a little at sea in the earlier stages, gradually began to realise that the work was grand, impressive, thought provoking, and at many odd times when least expected, beautiful in the older fashioned sense of the word. In the face of an obvious popular enthusiasm, the critics went away and wrote notices that gave a very bad impression. This in itself is inexcusable, for popular enthusiasm is often misdirected. But surely it was flying in the face of Providence to condemn a work that had already won the approval of critics really capable of judging such matters!

Without entering into the question of criticism in such towns as New York or Rio, it will be sufficient to recall the effect which the work made at the Festival of the International Society for New Music, held in Zurich last June. As Mademoiselle Wyss pointed out in these columns at the time, "King David" was regarded as being by far the most impressive and significant work presented at the Festival. Many of the best musical brains in the world were present. Amongst the audience were such men as the Director of the "Editions Universels," Scherchen, Furtwangler, Denzler, Gieseke, and a host of really reliable critics from Germany. And their verdict was unanimously in favour of the work.

In opposition to the considered opinion of the experts gathered in Zurich, we have a London Press upon which it is not really necessary to comment. The acknowledged leader made the complaint that the beauty of the piece, such as it was, lay with the wind instruments rather than the string! "This," he said in effect, "is not in the least like Beethoven. How can I be expected to like it!" So much for the 'highbrow' point of view. The 'lowbrow' representative, the man who thought Grisi was an alto, said that he "would not miss this Swiss Miss," or some similar expression of that kind of mentality.

These opinions are scarcely worth mentioning, except in so far as they show that it is inadvisable to place too much reliance upon the views expressed in most of the leading London newspapers upon works of modern music. And if any of the Swiss Colony in London were dismayed to find that the work of this composer, who is of Swiss parentage and partly of Swiss musical education, was held of so little account in London, they can rest assured that this was not the opinion of the real authorities, nor the view of the world at large. *Vice Honegger!* A.G.

## THOMAS MASSNER OF COIRE, 1710.\*

While Europe was still in the throes of the second series of wars consequent upon the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, shortly before the signing of the peace of Utrecht, a citizen of the little mountain Canton of Grisons made a diversion which drew the excited attention of even the warring powers.

Thomas Massner had a private bank and forwarding agency in Coire. He was rich, highly respected and a member of the town council. Previous to the date when our story opens, this extraordinarily energetic man had established widespread relations of a business kind with various countries, relying entirely upon his own initiative, which in those days was the only road to success. In the year 1691 he dealt energetically with Count Hannibal von Hohenems of Vaduz. This personage had stolen the sum of 4,000 florins from Massner and sent it over the border to Vaduz, in the Vorarlberg (Austrian territory).

Shortly after this the Count, accompanied by two squads of Austrian outriders, for whom he had the right of way, rode into the town of Coire. Massner, as a member of the town council, ordered the gates to be closed and manned and refused to allow the Count to leave until he guaranteed the repayment of the stolen sum.

When the war of the Spanish succession began in Northern Italy in 1702, Massner was appointed by Austria, largely in the interests of the Grisons League, to watch over the smuggling, and was nicknamed "the Imperial Captain and Chief Commissary of Contraband."

In this capacity, in 1706 he surprised a French courier, Sonnery, on the Lake of Como, who, coming from Lombardy with messages, was on his way to France. He carried with him the official mail destined for Prince Eugen. This Massner confiscated, together with contraband goods to the value of 2,000 thalers, to recompense himself for goods of his own confiscated by the French in Germany at a profit of 1000 doubloons.

This insult inflicted on France, as well as the substantial services which Massner had rendered

to the Emperor in this war, could not go unavenged. The French ambassador du Luc at Solothurn invented a method with the aid of his secretary, Francois de Merveilleux.

In 1710 Massner's 16 year old son Thomas went to Geneva to learn the French language and boarded with a clergyman named Maurice. Secretary Merveilleux sent his young brother Samuel to the same place. Worming his way into young Massner's confidence he invited him with great friendliness to go for a walk to the village of Grange-Canal on the French frontier. Purposely the boundary line was crossed, and at once the two young men heard a loud dispute and found themselves in the hands of the French pickets. Merveilleux was set free, but young Massner was carried to the citadel of Lyons. This happened in April, 1710. In the meantime, as du Luc's representative, Secretary Merveilleux came to Coire, where Councillor Massner, discovering the trick played upon his son, went in company with a few armed men to his lodging in the morning of May 12th and made him prisoner, carrying him off to his own house, as had been agreed should be done by the corporation. Merveilleux himself declared at this time that he was well treated by Massner. Du Luc used all his influence with the town council in order to get his secretary away, even promising that within the space of three weeks young Massner should be released and allowed to return to Coire.

Massner therefore determined to see du Luc personally in Solothurn, and Merveilleux, having given his solemn word not to leave the town until his return, was given his liberty. A few days later Merveilleux broke his parole and escaped.

At Solothurn du Luc demanded from Massner for the freedom of his son that he should sign an ignoble declaration which would have debased him in his own esteem. This he promptly refused to do; but his father's heart urged him against even his own honour, and he returned to tell du Luc that he agreed, but was told that his sacrifice came too late as the letter had already been sent to the King.

At Massner's request the Confederates and the Allied Powers applied to France officially for the young man's release, but without any success. Massner was again thrown upon his own resources. He racked his brains for another forfeit by which he could force them to liberate his only child. Finally he bethought him of the treasurer of the French Embassy, the rich banker La Chapelle of Solothurn with whom he himself had transacted business. He therefore invited him to come to the much-frequented Autumn Fair at Zurich, and it was agreed that both should arrive there before it began. La Chapelle promised to come. Massner, accompanied by five of his specially chosen 'bravi,' floated on a raft down the Rhine. At the hour appointed for the meeting he hid his men among the bushes on the banks and awaited his business acquaintance. The latter arrived and they walked up and down for a while and then La Chapelle, who was probably growing suspicious, without any warning broke off the conversation and withdrew, which so upset Massner that he forgot to give his men the sign agreed upon. Thus the plot miscarried.

Massner returned in haste to Coire, but he was not the man to be thwarted in his purpose by obstacles. Soon after this he learned that His Highness the Duke of Vendôme, Grand Prior of the Order of the Knights of Malta, brother of the Marshal of Vendôme and cousin of Louis XIV, coming from Italy would pass through Coire.

On the 17th October, the day on which Vendôme was expected, Massner and his 'bravi,' together with a number of young men from Coire, waited in Sargans, near the Felsburger Bridge. As the Duke neared it, Massner rode out to meet him and declared that he and his suite were prisoners. At the same time numerous troops came to Massner's aid and the French gentlemen were obliged to yield to numbers. Massner explained to the Duke the cause of this hold-up and led him and his followers to a neighbouring inn, called the "White Winepress," where they were given good rooms, well served meals, and excellent accommodation for the night under the strict guard of Massner's men.

In the morning the French prisoners were taken up the Rhine on three rafts as far as Balzers, and there imprisoned in the country house of Vaduz in the Vorarlberg; here Massner gave the Duke and his followers his word of honour that as soon as his son was set at liberty, they would receive their freedom and be set on Swiss territory.

After waiting in vain for seven weeks for the boy to be set free, Massner proceeded to hand the Duke over to the Austrian military authorities. He was taken to Vienna, but gave Massner on this account so little trouble that in the following year, 1711, he was able to return to Paris determined to seek his boy's freedom even in that quarter.

And here diplomatic circles began to get excited. France demanded that the Duke be instantly set free, and that Massner be heavily punished. Austria and her Allies spoke in his favour, declaring that the national laws permitted reprisals and that his only mistake was in taking that law

into his own hands.

The knotty problem of his guilt was turned over to the electors for decision. On December 7th, 1710, this body met to classify the votes. This was no easy matter, for they did not agree. Party feeling ran high, some being for Austria, others for France, and the last named proved to be in the majority. Austria had lost much sympathy by her behaviour in matters of rights of way. As a result it was decided that Massner was to be punished. Secondly, it was arranged that if possible before the 23rd of January, 1711, Vendôme must be found, either where he was a prisoner, or placed upon Swiss territory. Thirdly, Massner must pay all costs. The question arose as to whether Massner's offence came under the heading of common law! Before the Court met a pamphlet was printed anonymously (but in reality printed by Merveilleux), asserting that Massner had repeatedly sent smuggled goods.

The accused man, replying to these insults, stated that they were a pack of wicked lies, and the English and Austrian representatives agreed in defending him.

There was a rapid volley of vituperative letters from the ambassadors, Grenth threatening to hold up the grain supply; du Luc demanding the immediate punishment of Massner, and Mannings, the English chargé d'affaires, making du Luc a laughing-stock and showing that Merveilleux was a man utterly devoid of honour. In fact, little by little the real character of Merveilleux was so clearly shown that du Luc was obliged to dismiss him from his service. "All this diplomatic interference only served to envenom the quarrel," writes Zchokke, "and it became a political affair from that time forth. The government of the Grisons made vain efforts to secure the release of both prisoners."

Meanwhile Mannings was assassinated at the baths of Pfeifers.

When the Senate met in January Massner had not as yet succeeded in securing the liberation of Vendôme, though he had even appealed to Vienna. Massner wrote to the Senate: "I am resolved to protect my rightful cause and to achieve success for my innocent boy as long as there remains a drop of Bundner and father-blood in my body as well as breath."

He was so wrought up in his defence before the Senate that he challenged one of his bitterest opponents, Rudolf von Salis, to fight a duel. The verdict was that Massner was to be given a respite till April 4th for the freeing of the Duke of Vendôme.

A special court of punishment was to meet at Ilanz on July 15th.

This court consisted of 24 members, mostly French partisans and Massner's avowed enemies, who had gathered all the most damning evidence imaginable against him. It asserted that in 1691 he had captured the French courier Sonnery, and had Merveilleux arrested by a band of masked men, who treated him so brutally that he nearly died. (Only afterwards did they learn that Merveilleux was the instigator of the whole evil plot.) Massner was also accused of the theft of merchandise to the value of 22,000 thalers and money from the Milanese treasure chests, which, with the help of three other men, who were named, he had replaced by stones of the same weight. For good measure they added false coining and poisonings, these last utterly groundless and the former stories of theft unprovable. False witnesses who had been bribed vouched for these sorry deeds. As he was not to be reached and no portrait of him could be found, a clever judge drew his face upon a piece of paper and this was publicly burnt by the executioner amid great rejoicing. Massner lost much of his fortune, though when an inventory was made he was still very well off. At the plea of his wife, his house was not demolished and it was still standing in 1892, according to Dr. P. C. Planta, from whose "Geschichte von Graubünden" most of this chronicle is taken.

The League of the Ten Jurisdictions had nominated Massner for bailiff of Mayenfeld; but the Swiss Cantons, on the contrary, declared him beyond the law and set a price on his head.

The Grisons finally proscribed the unfortunate man at the Court of Punishment held at Ilanz on the 17th August, 1711, his fortune was ordered confiscated, he himself was to be drawn and quartered, and a portion of his body exposed at the corners of the main thoroughfare of Coire, his house to be razed to the ground and on its site a column of shame to be erected upon which were to be inscribed his misdeeds; finally, as Massner had fled to the Vorarlberg, a reward of a thousand ducats was offered to whoever should capture him, dead or alive.

Meanwhile Massner had gone to Vienna to endeavour to put an end to this embroglio by securing the liberation of the Grand Prior which, after great difficulty, he succeeded in doing. The Duke of Vendôme agreed to the conditions imposed upon him, namely, that he would appeal in person to Louis XIV. for the release of the unhappy young Massner, and also see that no legal proceedings were instituted against the father; failing in this, he agreed to place himself again under arrest within three months.

(\*This delightful page of history is reprinted from the March number of the "Swiss Monthly.")