

# Ernest Ansermet

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which was rejected by a majority of 63,8%.

This matter was one of great controversy. The fundamental values between Citizen and Commune, Commune and Army were up for discussion. Once again it was confirmed that the majority of the population was in favour of general military service. This was already clear in December 1977 when the electorate rejected the

«Muenchenstein» Initiative with a majority of 62,4%. On the 26th February 1984, only two Cantons approved, Geneva with 51,3% and Baselstadt with 53,1%.

Thus military service will remain compulsory for all citizens. The changes proposed by the Initiative committee were too onesided and fundamental; the proposal would have given the citizen free choice between military service

and renunciation of military service. This would have been a first and decisive step towards a professional army. In this Initiative, the commitment to a civil service would have become a matter of minor importance, and there would no longer have been any question of the people concerned making any contribution whatever towards the security of national independence.

SSA/Franzoni

## Ernest Ansermet

### Biographical Sketch

Ernest Ansermet was born in Vevey on 11th November 1883. His father was a geometer and his mother a teacher, and he was brought up in an actively musical family circle. Music played a particularly important part in the household of his maternal grandfather, a farmer in Mont-la-Ville, where he spent his childhood holidays and learned to play the clarinet and some brass instruments. As well as pursuing his school and later university studies, he took music lessons in his native town with such a degree of success, that his first piano composition *Conte d'Avril* was published a full three years before he was awarded his degree in science and mathematics from the University of Lausanne in 1903. He then went on to teach in the Ecole normale in Lausanne.

1905, the year of the composition of Debussy's *La Mer*, found Ansermet in Paris, where he attended the **Sorbonne** to study mathematics and the **conservatoire national** to study music. On returning to Switzerland, he married Marguerite Jaccottet, a friend of C.F. Ramuz, in 1906. 1909 saw him on the way yet again, this time to Munich and Berlin, where he attended rehearsals and concerts given by Weingartner, Richard Strauss, Mottl and Ni-

kisch. He played in the percussion section of the Blüthner Orchester. On his return to Lausanne, he earned his living by teaching and by writing pieces of music criticism. In 1910 he met Debussy in Paris after the first performance of the *Rondes de Printemps*, and in 1911, Ansermet conducted his first symphony concert in Lausanne. The programme consisted of: Debussy (*Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune*), Jacques-Dalcroze and Beethoven (*4th Symphony*). It was a resounding success.

In 1912 Ansermet was called upon to succeed Lacerda as conductor of the Kursaal orchestra of Montreux. The years up to 1914 were to be marked by intense activity, the programmes considering the time and milieu would be broadly based and the encounters of this period decisive for the history of music. At Clarens, Ansermet's neighbours were Stravinsky, whose *Rite of Spring* was first performed in 1913, and Ravel. It was due to An-

sermet's hospitality that Ramuz, Budry, the Cingrias and Aubersonois were able to meet these musicians, and thus were laid the foundations for the **Cahiers vaudois...**

In 1914 on the declaration of war, the Kursaal orchestra was disbanded, and Ansermet assumed the leadership of the **Association symphonique romande** in Lausanne, an enterprise which, because of the enormous difficulties involved, lasted only three months. In Geneva however Stavenhagen died, and at the beginning of 1915, Ansermet was called to take over as director of the subscription concerts. At the same time, Pierre Monteux having been called up for military service, Diaghilev found himself without a conductor and, on the recommendation of Stravinsky, asked Ansermet to conduct the orchestra of the **Ballets russes**. Ansermet was to carry out both commitments simultaneously during the course of several hectic years. As an example, the

#### Dates and Places for the Ernest Ansermet Exhibition

7th June – 24th June 1984:

12th July – 15th August 1984:

September 1984:

12th October – 27 October 1984:

3th November – 1st December 1984:

12th December '84 – 11th January 1985:

March 1985:

September 1985:

Boston: Boston University

Buenos Aires: Teatro Colon

New York: Public Library

Strasbourg: Bibliothèque Nationale

London Barbican Center

Brussels: Bibliothèque royale Albert 1<sup>er</sup>

Paris: Centre Poussepin

Budapest: Théâtre Erkel

**Ballets russes** tour of the United States in 1916 included 105 performances in 105 days in 18 different towns. In 1918 he took part in the première of Stravinsky's *Histoire du Soldat* in Lausanne, and that same year marked the birth of the **Orchestre de la Suisse romande** with Ansermet as its principal conductor during the course of 50 years. In 1922 he conducted the first German performance of the *Rite of Spring* in Berlin, and from 1924 he was called upon to conduct a cycle of symphony concerts in Buenos Aires, a task which he fulfilled up until the year 1933. It was there that he came into contact with Victoria Ocampo, the founder of the review **Sur**.

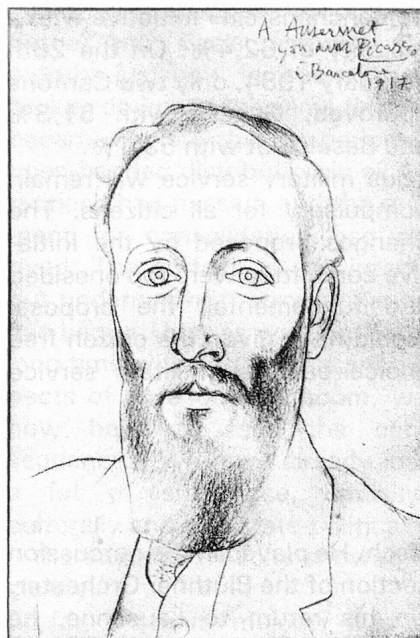
From 1925 Ansermet regularly conducted the principal orchestras of Europe, Russia and the New York World, as well as maintaining his commitment to the **Orchestre de la Suisse romande**. In 1930 furthermore, he was appointed joint director along with Alfred Cortot of the **Orchestre symphonique of Paris**, and from 1930–1932 he took part in the formation of the **National Orchestra of Mexico**.

In 1938, along with Toscanini, Ansermet was one of the founders of the **International Music Festival of Lucerne**.

Of course it should not be forgotten that all those years were characterised by innumerable first performances and premières of works by such composers as Honegger, Hindemith, Bartók, Stravinsky, Martinu, Frank Martin...

After the death of his first wife, Ansermet married Juliette Salvisberg in 1942.

From the end of the war, Ansermet's career and his work with the **Orchestre de la Suisse romande** began to assume a more international character; from 1947 onwards he began to work on a regular basis with a major English recording company. It



Ansermet from Picasso

was not be long before the greatest honours were conferred and with them came further invitations for the orchestra to perform abroad: Edinburgh, Poland, Montreal, Greece, California, Japan... Ansermet for his part conducted the orchestra in 31 concerts in 1932 in New York, Philadelphia and Boston, and in 22 concerts in 1955 in Munich, Berlin and London...

But he also had another major preoccupation besides: this being, the evolution of music. From 1945 he had been laying the foundations of his book *The fundamentals of music in the human consciousness*. In 1946 he took part in the **Rencontres internationales de Genève** along with the philosopher Karl Jaspers; in 1955 he delivered a lecture at Harvard University and on many other occasions he traced for audiences of the most varying kinds the broad lines along which music has evolved, depicting tonality as the element, which brings out the wealth and truth of music and warning of the risk which is run when music diverges from this path.

It is indeed an extraordinary paradox, that Ansermet, who at the outset of his career became the advocate of the new music of Debussy, Honegger or Bartók, was towards the end of his life to take up arms against the contemporary intellectualised musical production, which was in his opinion devoid of any sort of meaning...

It was in 1961, at the time when Ansermet was conducting the German version of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in Hamburg, that his work *The fundamentals of music* appeared.

In 1962 Ansermet not only conducted de Falla's *Atlantide* to mark the opening of the Lincoln Center in New York, but also *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Metropolitan Opera to commemorate the centenary of Debussy's birth. His last years up to his death were divided between his work as a conductor and his struggle to propagandise his ideas and views on music through his writings and lectures.

In 1968, at the age of 85, Ernest Ansermet handed over his baton to Paul Klecki. In the same year, he took part in the orchestra's tour of Japan, and on the 18th December, he conducted his last concert. Even then the programme still included a first performance in French Switzerland, namely Bartók's *Cantata Profana*, which took its place along with Bach's *4th Suite*, Debussy's *Épigraphes antiques* in Ansermet's own orchestrated version and Honegger's *Cantate de Noël*. This programme could serve to symbolise the amazing harmony of Ansermet's life, portraying the permanence of the classics, which are our point of reference and overture to the world of today. Ernest Ansermet died on the 20th February 1969.

Jean-Jacques Rapin