

Korngold

Symphony in F sharp, Op.40
Much ado about nothing, Op.11

**Orchestre Philharmonique
de Strasbourg**

**Marc
Albrecht**

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897 – 1957)

Symphony in F sharp, Op. 40 (1951 – 1952)

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|---|-------------------------------|--------|
| 1 | Moderato, ma energico | 14. 59 |
| 2 | Scherzo: Allegro molto - Trio | 10. 04 |
| 3 | Adagio: Lento | 15. 27 |
| 4 | Finale: Allegro gaio | 10. 30 |

Viel Lärmen um Nichts, Op. 11 (1920)

(Much ado about nothing – Incidental Music)

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|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 5 | Nr. 1 Ouvertüre (Overture) | 5. 26 |
| 6 | Nr. 2 Das Mädchen im Brautgemach (Maiden in the Bridal Chamber) | 3. 40 |
| 7 | Nr. 3 Holzapfel und Schlehwein (Dogberry and Verges) | 2. 38 |
| 8 | Nr. 4 Intermezzo | 2. 13 |
| 9 | Nr. 5 Mummenschanz (Masquerade - Hornpipe) | 2. 27 |

Total playing-time: 67. 41

Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg conducted by: Marc Albrecht

Recording venue: Salle Erasme, Palais de Congrès, Strasbourg, France (3/2010)

Executive Producer: Job Maarse
Recording Producer: Wolfram Nehls
Balance Engineer: Philipp Knop
Digital Editing: Wolfram Nehls
Surround Mix: Wolfram Nehls & Philipp Knop

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Mein Sehnen, mein Wähnen, es träumt sich zurück (= my yearning, my imaginings, they dream back to the past): thus begins the nostalgic and melancholy aria of Fritz in the opera *Die tote Stadt* by Erich Wolfgang Korngold. How appropriate that this aria in particular is still so popular. For certainly at the end of his life, Korngold came to the painful realization that both he and his music had become a thing of the past.

Two years before his death, in spring 1955, the publicist Karl Schumann visited the composer in the United States. He describes this meeting as follows: "The few circulating photos gave a good impression of Korngold: small, rounded, and pale. His obligatory bowtie, old-fashioned courtesy, his broad Viennese accent all had an anachronistic effect. The time spent in the U.S.A. had apparently not rubbed off on him. When he spoke with one, he seemed to regress 30 years. He looked desperately tired, a man who has suffered through emigration and gone through the mills of the film studios. One could detect his illness of the heart, both the physical and the mental. In the end, he died not only due to the negative effects of decades of overwork, but from a broken heart that could not get over being cast out of Vienna, cut off from the good old days, the atmosphere of the fin de siècle, from art nouveau, symbolism, the cult of music, and the devotion to opera and coffee-houses."

A fighter; that is perhaps a fair definition of Erich Wolfgang Korngold. During his entire life, he fought for the right to go his own way, and to have his voice heard. As a child prodigy, he fought against the prejudices of the musical élite in Vienna. So young, and then already writing such mature music: was that really possible? Perhaps the young Erich was being "pushed" by his father in particular, the influential critic Julius Korngold? The joke that pianists Artur Schnabel and Moriz Rosenthal enjoyed making was typical of this: "Höre, Sie spielen die Sonate des kleinen Korngold. Ist sie dankbar?" - "Die Sonate nicht. Aber der Vater!" (= "Listen, you play young Korngold's Sonata. Do you find it rewarding?" - "The Sonata, no. But the father!") As a young adult, Korngold always had to fight his own shadow. How could he continue to develop, to remain interesting? After all, it was the child prodigy's "mature" style of composition that everyone had noticed. Had Richard Strauss not warned his father with the following words: "The first emotional reaction one feels is shock and fear, that such a precocious genius might also wish to experience the normal development that he so heartily deserves. The self-assured style, dominance of form and characteristic expression in his Piano Sonata, the harmonies – they are truly amazing."

And then followed his exile to Hollywood in 1938, where Korngold was worshipped as the most important composer of film-music. But this

was fame he did not seek. His heart remained in opera and the European symphonic traditions. And when he was finally able to return to Austria after the war, people had forgotten both him and his music: he was now considered a relic from bygone days, an era to which no-one had any desire to return. But Korngold felt exactly the opposite: his music belonged to pre-war Vienna. As Karl Schumann stated, it belonged to the *fin de siècle*, *Jugendstil*, symbolism, and all the culture surrounding music, when the opera and coffee-houses were still highly popular.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold was 10 years old when he was permitted to play his cantata *Gold* to no-one less than Gustav Mahler. Highly impressed by the prodigy, Mahler advised him to follow lessons with Alexander Zemlinsky, and it appeared that the foundations for an exceptional career had been laid. In 1910, his ballet *Der Schneemann* (= the snowman) was performed at the Hofoper in Vienna. One of the papers ran the following headline: "*Meister vom Himmel gefallen*" (= "master fallen from the heavens"). No-one less than Bruno Walter (at the piano) "christened" his Piano Trio, whereas Artur Schnabel gave the première of his Piano Sonata in E. His first orchestral work, the *Schauspiel* Overture, was performed in 1911 by the Gewandhaus Orchester under Arthur Nikisch, and the first performance of his *Sinfonietta* was given in 1913 by the Wiener Philharmoniker under Felix Weingartner. Soon all Vienna was buzzing with the latest on the prodigy "der kleine Korngold" (= young Korngold).

In 1918, he received a commission from the Wiener Volksbühne (= Viennese folk theatre) to write stage music for Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. The score, which was originally written for a small ensemble, consisted of 14 different pieces. However, before the première, the composer arranged it as a five-part orchestral suite, which was an immediate success in the concert halls. The production turned out to be a lot more expensive and massive than originally planned, and had to be taken over by the Schloßtheater in Schönbrunn. There, Korngold had at his disposal an ensemble consisting of members of the Wiener Philharmoniker. For later performances, the composer arranged the music for smaller ensembles, including violin and piano: various performers, including Fritz Kreisler and Mischa Elman, incorporated this version into their repertoire.

Korngold was attracted to the theatre. He was in his element when able to write music to enhance the dramatic narrative. Thus, it is not surprising that he scored highest in the field of opera – both in his own country and internationally – with works such as *Der Ring des Polykrates* (= Polykrates' ring) and *Violanta* (1916), and most especially with *Die tote Stadt* (= the dead city, 1920) and *Das Wunder der Heliane* (= the miracle of Heliane, 1927).

There was major competition between the various opera-houses to be the first to programme his operas; and when the "Neue Wiener Tageblatt" (= Viennese newspaper) conducted a survey in 1928 to discover the most popular composers of the day, Korngold and Schoenberg headed the list. However, the ascent of the National Socialists and growing anti-Semitism in Austria made life increasingly difficult for Korngold. At first, his activities as professor and conductor were reduced, and when his publisher Schott also began to gradually withdraw from the Jewish composer, Korngold realized that his future no longer lay in Austria.

Finally, it was director Max Reinhardt who gave him a helping hand. He had produced a new version of Johann Strauss' *Die Fledermaus* with Reinhardt in 1929, and in 1934 the latter invited him to Hollywood to re-orchestrate Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for a new film of that title (whose stars included Mickey Rooney, James Cagney, Dick Powell and the young Olivia de Havilland). Just for six to eight weeks: the project would need no longer, according to Reinhardt. Due to all kinds of setbacks, this finally turned into almost six months, after which Korngold hastily returned to Vienna to finalize his opera *Die Kathrin*. The success of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* brought Korngold new contracts with Paramount and Warner Bros., and in 1935, during a second sojourn in Hollywood, he composed the soundtrack to *Captain Blood*, the film that was to launch Errol Flynn's career. One year later, Korngold won his first Oscar with *Anthony Adverse*.

Now the composer was caught between two worlds. On the one hand, he had rapidly become Hollywood's favourite film composer; on the other, he still retained his career as opera composer in Europe. At the time, the film industry was definitely not considered a serious genre, and Korngold was also somewhat ashamed of his work for the Hollywood studios. However, he was not forced to choose between the two genres: no, the choice was made for him, when the Nazis took power in Austria in 1938. Together with his family, Korngold fled to the United States, where he commenced upon – as he said himself – a "third career". After "der kleine Korngold" (= young Korngold) and the celebrated opera composer, he was now known as Korngold the film composer. He swore that he would not write any more orchestral music or opera, as long as Hitler was in power.

However, his first film score written in exile, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, immediately won him a second Oscar. Thanks to his knowledge of music theatre, Korngold recreated the function of music in film. Henceforth, music would no longer simply provide a discreet background, but – analogous to its role in opera – create its own level of significance, which could lead the thoughts and feelings of the viewer in a certain direction. For Korngold, the step from opera to film was not

so great; and thus he often talked of his film scores as "operas without song". Proof that this was not just bluff is supplied by his frequent use in his film music of Wagnerian *leitmotifs* and the large, late-Romantic symphony orchestra, with a preference for the sparkling sounds of celesta, piano and harp. Even in Hollywood, Korngold remained a child of the Viennese *fin de siècle*. Never yet had film music sounded so colourful, dazzling and sensual.

In a certain sense, as a composer of film music, Korngold put to use everything he had already learned as a composer of symphonic and operatic music. Yet he was not happy and after the war he once again felt he was standing at a crossroads. Korngold wrote as follows: "I look back over my life, and I see three phases: first, the child prodigy; second, the opera composer in Europe; and now third, composer of film music. I believe I must make a decision right now, if I do not want to remain a Hollywood musician for the rest of my life." He said his goodbyes to Hollywood with his String Quartet No. 3, which dates from 1946. From now onwards, he wanted to concentrate again on "serious" music: a constant flow of works for the concert hall was the result, the climax being his Violin Concerto (the première of which was given by Jascha Heifetz in 1947).

The greatest desire of the composer was to return to Europe, the cradle of civilization and musical culture. However, a heart attack put a stop to this, and Korngold did not set foot in Austria again until 1949. Nevertheless, a great disappointment awaited him there: the world had changed; Austria had changed; and the taste of the audiences and critics had changed. They no longer yearned for the well-rounded, late-Romantic sound of the pre-war period. Not to mention the bourgeois genre of opera: this had completely fallen from grace. Korngold's music was labelled old-fashioned, shoved aside, and ignored. Not even someone with the clout of Wilhelm Furtwängler (who gave the première of Korngold's *Symphonische Serenade* in 1950 with the Wiener Philharmoniker) could change the situation.

A year previously, Korngold had begun working on his first symphony in Vienna. He completed the composition in 1952. This music summarized his entire life. A life that had been lived between two worlds: between opera and film – and between Europe and the United States. It was simultaneously intended as a tribute to his "refuge," America; and indeed, he dedicated the work to the memory of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the president whom he had greatly admired. It is remarkable that Korngold chose the symphonic genre for his major new work. For many people, the works of Gustav Mahler had heralded the end of the symphony, and not many new symphonies were written during the first years that followed the Second World War. People thought that the genre

was old-fashioned and had outlived its purpose. Basically, anything that could be said in the symphonic form had already been said. Thus, this symphony stood alone in the post-war musical landscape of Europe, like a despairing cry for help: the cry of a person who has ended up in the wrong era. Musicologist Alexander Kuhlo, who researched the symphony closely in 1955, stated that Korngold the film-composer had left his traces in this symphony, just as he had done in many of his other post-war symphonic works. Thus he discovered themes from Juarez in the second movement; from *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*, *Captain Blood* and *Anthony Adverse* in the Adagio; and in the finale, he discovered a theme from *Kings Row*. It is likewise remarkable that the work does not rely on the contrast between the various themes, which subsequently form the basis for all developments. Rather, various episodes stand side by side in this symphony, and earlier themes are re-used, as is also the custom in film music. Whereas in the past his film music had been based on opera, now the roles had now apparently been reversed.

In order to gain publicity for the work, Korngold made an acetate recording in a transcription for piano. Unfortunately, a favourable reaction was not forthcoming. The symphony was dismissed as sounding "Mahlerian" and "atonal": two terms that made it clear how strongly this was associated with pre-war music. Nevertheless, a première was given in Vienna. On October 17, 1954, Harold Byrns conducted the Wiener Symphoniker in the first performance of the Symphony. In his description of this performance, Korngold wrote as follows: "The Viennese première of my new symphony made a huge impression on the audience. To be sure, the performance, which was distinguished less by *élan* than by spirited mistakes, took place under unfavourable circumstance: inadequate rehearsal time with an exhausted and overworked orchestra. Nevertheless, there was an honest and enthusiastic reaction from those who delighted in the melodies and were progressively-minded!"

The symphony was not destined to lead a long life. After a technically far better performance in Graz, it disappeared into a desk drawer. In the United States, the great conductor Dmitri Mitropoulos was impressed by the work: "During my whole long life, I have searched for the ideal modern work. I have found it in this symphony. I shall conduct it during the next season." However, his death in 1960 prevented this performance from taking place, and that is a shame. Perhaps Mitropoulos' commitment to the symphony would have been able to change the destiny of this special work.

Korngold himself returned to the United State in 1955, a completely disillusioned man. Shortly afterwards, he suffered a stroke and became partially paralysed. He died in 1957, forgotten yet not beaten down by the world of music. His legacy included the sketches for a second sym-

phony, as well as a new opera. He continued to fight for a style of music that no longer fit in with the times; his own music. "Mein Sehnen, mein Wähnen, es träumt sich zurück" (= my yearning, my imaginings, they dream back to the past):



Marc Albrecht

Acclaimed for his interpretations of Wagner and Strauss, as well as for his commitment to contemporary music, Marc Albrecht is a regular guest at Europe's most prestigious opera houses and orchestras. In the early years of his conducting career, Albrecht spent several seasons at the opera houses of Hamburg and Dresden, and also was appointed personal assistant to Claudio Abbado at the Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra in Vienna. In 1995 he embarked on a highly successful 6 year tenure as Music Director of the Staatstheater Darmstadt, and since 2006, he has held the position of Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg. In March 2009, following the tremendous acclaim for his performances of Strauss' *Die Frau Ohne Schatten* which opened the season at the Netherlands Opera in September 2008, Marc Albrecht was appointed Chief Conductor Designate of both the Netherlands Opera and Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, positions he will take up in September 2011.

Marc Albrecht has appeared with many key orchestras in Europe including the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Staatskapelle Dresden, Munich Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony and the Orchestre National de Lyon. In 2006 he made his BBC Proms debut in London with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

