

Preface and Acknowledgments

The life of the composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897–1957) is often described as having unfolded in two distinct, even melodramatic acts. The first stars a wunderkind whose prodigious and unusually mature works brought him, in nearly equal measure, international acclaim and disdain, the latter on account of the outsized reputation and overbearing nature of his father Julius, then widely regarded as Vienna’s most powerful music critic. This first act came to an abrupt end with the Anschluss of 1938, which prompted the permanent resettlement of the extended Korngold family in California, where the second act is said to have commenced. In fact, it had already begun there a few years earlier: a one-time experiment with writing music for a Hollywood film in 1935 had laid the groundwork to score other films, most notably the blockbuster *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), which brought the composer back to the States in January of the fateful year. The composer’s parents, eldest son, and in-laws would join him, his wife Luzi, and their younger son in Hollywood shortly thereafter.

Looking back, one can clearly see the many links that bind the two acts. In the 1920s and 1930s, momentous changes were taking place in both the European and the American markets for classical music. In Vienna and Berlin, as in New York and Los Angeles, American popular music, and the sounds of jazz in particular, were on the rise in concert halls and on operatic stages. Ernst Krenek’s *Jonny spielt auf* (1927) is perhaps the most famous example, but Korngold himself brought echoes of the dance hall into the reorchestrations of operettas by Johann Strauss that he prepared for the Vienna theater in the 1920s. These same years also saw an explosion of interest in cinema on both sides of the Atlantic, as the production of soundtracks mixing classical and popular idioms brought both to center stage together.

Korngold’s career in film was anything but typical. While the vanguard of music composition in today’s media-rich environment resides in music written for film, television, video games, and other formats, only a handful of well-known composers in the early twentieth century—Prokofiev, Saint-Saëns, and Vaughan Williams, among others—had ventured into

the new technology of film. Korngold thus arrived in Hollywood as a double anomaly: not only was he a wunderkind, but his continued success—long outlasting the novelty of his precocious youth—made him the only film composer in Hollywood who could be considered both a legitimate talent by music critics and also popular enough to be familiar to mainstream audiences.

From 1938 until the end of his life, Korngold lived in Hollywood, but he held out hope that he and his family might someday return to Europe, where he dreamed of reconnecting with his earlier life as a composer for the stage and concert hall. The Korngolds did in fact return, but the composer's dream eluded him. Simply put, too much had changed while they were away. Audiences and critics had moved on from the style of his concert music, which had remained largely unchanged since the 1920s. And his success in Hollywood had tarred him for many as a commercial composer, and therefore not one to be taken seriously. His early death, just a few months after his sixtieth birthday, was an all-too-apt end to the disillusionment that had come to shadow his life.

Over the next half-century, Korngold's works largely disappeared from the concert repertoire, and his film scores, while critically lauded, were only heard during the occasional revival of the films themselves. It was not until 1972 that a rise of interest in classic Hollywood film scores led to what would turn out to be the momentous issue of an LP, *The Classic Film Scores of Erich Wolfgang Korngold*, conducted by Charles Gerhardt and produced by Korngold's younger son, George, who had followed his father into the film industry as a music editor. The success of that recording, along with the contemporaneous rise of the instrumentally fecund, “neo-classical” style of film scoring epitomized by John Williams's work in *Jaws* (1975), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), and *Star Wars* (1977), focused new light on Korngold's music. Soon, an authorized biography was underway, compiled by Brendan G. Carroll with cooperation from the Korngold family. Korngold's works gradually began to reappear on concert programs and opera stages. Old recordings were remastered and reissued. New recording projects were underway.

And yet, as all of us who have contributed to this book hope emphatically to show, there is still a tremendous amount that we do not understand or appreciate about Korngold's story, and just as much that his story can still teach us about the times he lived in and the spaces he knew. It is only now, more than twenty years after the publication of Carroll's biography, that musicians and scholars are returning broadly to the mass of documents in the composer's estate, most of which are held at the Library of Congress in Washington. Many of these remain largely unexamined, and

the questions we are accustomed to asking about the music we perform and the composers we admire have changed as well. Studies of migration, diaspora, and refugee experience now shape our thinking about wartime culture, and we have amassed a bookshelf full of publications on émigré musicians and artists in Los Angeles. Jewish studies has emerged as a central concern of musicology; prewar Vienna is now widely appreciated as a deeply contested, multicultural space; and studying film music has become not only respectable but mainstream. As we approach the 125th anniversary of Korngold's birth, the time feels right for a reassessment of his experience and his contributions. The essays, translations, and archival documents in this book are presented with this goal in mind.

We find some expected themes that emerge throughout the essays in *Korngold and His World*. Not only does the old vs. new world narrative play a central role, but the fine line between artistic endeavor and popular pleasures also surfaces, especially when considering how often his work straddled the impossibly wavy line between high and low art. The first three essays address the struggle Korngold faced with critics, the public, and his family—especially his father—as he tried to establish himself as a composer, just as the musical terrain around him was undergoing seismic shifts of taste and technique. His travels between Vienna and Hollywood in 1934–38 and the rising threat of war only added to the instability in Korngold's life, and yet his output remained constant, even as he began work in the new (to him) field of film music. Korngold's more atypical qualities as a composer for film tend to be overlooked in favor of the romantic, adrenalin-infused scenes of sword and storm that dominated the films with which he made his name in Hollywood: *Captain Blood*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, and *The Sea Hawk*. Two essays look at different elements of Korngold's compositional palette that made his scores innovative both in the 1940s and today, while another addresses some of the ways in which Korngold's Jewish parentage shaped his identity as a composer. The coda brings all of these themes together, assessing Korngold's experience and contributions against the broader social and cultural currents through which he lived and traveled.

These essays are complemented by a selection of documents that provide glimpses of Korngold's experiences and views as recorded by family or the composer himself over the course of his life. Some of these appear here for the first time in English translation, and one has never before been published. Others are brought together from the now obscure and hard-to-find journals and books in which they first appeared. From Korngold himself we learn about his studies with his teacher Alexander von Zemlinsky around 1910, and his thoughts, probably recorded around

1930, about the music of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and other contemporary composers. We also include two of his statements about composing music for films made just after he settled in California, as well as his last published words, on music and faith, penned shortly before his death. From a selection of letters Julius sent his son from Vienna just before and after the Anschluss, we may begin to fathom the trauma and uncertainty the family experienced on both sides of the Atlantic in the terrible year. Finally, selections from the memoirs of Erich's wife Luzi remind us of the strength of the bonds that tied the family together through the experience of displacement and emigration.

All books come together only with the help of a significant cast of characters, and collaborations like this one depend even more strongly on the efforts of many. The editors would like to thank the authors who contributed essays and introductions to this book, and also Elisabeth Staak for her translations of documents originally in German. Paul De Angelis provided expert guidance through the process of compiling and editing the volume. The research assistance of James Aldridge was indispensable, as was the help of many libraries, librarians, archivists, and scholars: Jessica Duchen, Kate Rivers at the Library of Congress, Brett Service at the Warner Bros. Archives, and Warren Sherk at the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Katy Korngold Hubbard provided invaluable information and assistance at just the right moments. And, as always, working with the Bard Music Festival crew—Byron Adams, Leon Botstein, Christopher Gibbs, and Irene Zedlacher—was a dream. Thank you.

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