

Guilty Pleasures and Waltzes From Vienna

Troy O. Dixon, June 2014

In October 1930, following a handful of prior successful operetta arrangements, Erich Wolfgang Korngold's *Walzer aus Wien* ("Waltzes from Vienna") premiered at the Vienna Stadttheater. Based on biographical details of Johann Strauss, *père* and *fils*, Ernst Marischka and Heinz Reichert created what would become one of the most successful Johann Strauss II pastiches ever staged. The completed work mixed fact and fiction, included a scheming woman to provide romantic conflict, and contained an abundance of Strauss melodies arranged and adapted by Korngold. Of the many Strauss compositions arranged by Korngold, this work would prove to be one of the composer's greatest stage successes.

The show was restaged the following year in London as *Waltzes from Vienna*, with arrangements by Clutsam and Griffiths. A French version entitled *Valses de Vienne*, with arrangements by Mouzey-Eon and Marietti, played simultaneously in Paris. The American version was produced in 1934 as *The Great Waltz* (script adapted by Moss Hart) just one year after the British cinema studio Gaumont-British made a film version, directed by none other than Alfred Hitchcock. Max Liebman adapted the American 1934 production for TV broadcast in late 1955. But while dozens of productions with various arrangements would be performed across the globe during the ensuing decades, recordings from the musical/operetta have been spotty at best. A sampling includes:

- The Columbia Graphophone Co., Ltd released two songs on a single 78-rpm, "Love and War," and "For We Love You Still," (Matrix CA-11957 & CA-11958), from the Griffiths arrangements for the British production.
- A recording of the American *The Great Waltz* production from 1934 was released in 1985 on the American Entertainment Industries label (book by Moss Hart, lyrics by Desmond Carter).
- The Los Angeles Civic Light Opera's production of *The Great Waltz*, with musical adaptations by Wright, Forrest and Korngold, was recorded and released on LP in 1965, and re-released on CD in 2006.
- *Valses de Vienne* was released as a double-LP set by the Connoisseur Society on EMI in 1976 (CS2-2106; subsequently re-released on EMI CD) from an earlier 1970s recording performed by Jean Doussard, the Orchestre du Théâtre National de l'Opéra-Comique, and the René Duclos Chorus, using an arrangement listed as by "Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Eugène Cools, and Julius Bittner."

All of these recordings, however, are from revisions and adaptations made subsequent to Korngold's original 1930 version.

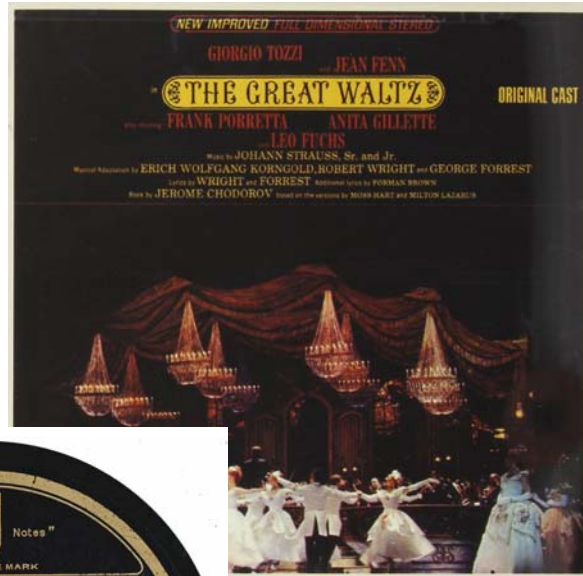
Renée Fleming's most recent album, "Guilty Pleasures," however, includes what may be the first ever recording of any song from Korngold's original, Strauss-adapted score. Fleming performed this melody,



“Frag’ mich oft” (“I Often Wonder”), in her debut concert with the Cincinnati Orchestra on 18 Sep 2012, under the direction of Sebastian Lang-Lessing, who also conducted the orchestra on her *Guilty Pleasures* CD.¹ From the liner notes: “[The song] ‘Frag’ mich oft’ presents a deeply soulful melody in an arrangement abounding in sheer sensuous appeal.”



The CD re-release of EMI's 1976 double-LP recording of Valses de Vienne.



The LA Civic Light Opera 1965 recording of The Great Waltz.



The B-side of the 78rpm recording of two songs from the 1931 British version of Waltzes From Vienna.

¹ Sebastian Lang-Lessing coincidentally was the conductor for Dallas Opera's recent staging of *Die tote Stadt* (Mar-Apr 2014).