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## Daniel Hope

His latest CD, 'Escape to Paradise,' pays  
tribute to violinists who fled European fascists



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# In the Shadow of Giants

Daniel Hope explores the Golden Age of Hollywood strings

By Laurence Vittes

**V**iolinist Daniel Hope affirms the high quality and prestige of Erich Wolfgang Korngold's Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35, with his Technicolor performance on his most recent CD, *Escape to Paradise*, paying tribute to the great emigré composers during Hollywood's Golden Age, including those that fled the Nazi regime.

In a sense, Hope is doing for Korngold what the transplanted Austrian composer once did for Errol Flynn, giving substance to what was once considered mere style. And just as Technicolor caught the chemistry between Flynn and Olivia de Havilland's Maid Marian in *The Adventures of Robin*

*Hood*, which earned Korngold a 1938 Oscar for the film score that included his Violin Concerto, so does this sumptuous new recording and performance with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic catch the film music's chemistry.

There's much more on his new CD than the concerto, as he mixes the celebrated with the relatively unknown, including excerpts from Miklós Rózsa's scores for *Ben-Hur* and *El Cid*, and Eric Zeisl's unfinished opera *Job*, plus bits from such modern classics as *Schindler's List*, *American Beauty*, and *Cinema Paradiso*. Hope is joined by pop star Sting on Hanns Eisler's "The Secret Marriage," and 1920s retro-king Max Raabe on Kurt Weill's "Speak Low."



To close the recital, Hope plays a dusky, solo violin take on “As Time Goes By,” the tune that breaks Bogie’s heart in 1942’s *Casablanca*. Amidst the wide variety and high quality of these film scores, Korngold’s Violin Concerto dominates the CD. It was the first major work Korngold composed after the Second World War ended. It was dedicated to Alma Mahler, the widow of Korngold’s childhood mentor Gustav Mahler, and it was premiered by violin great Jascha Heifetz, who the composer praised as having the qualities of both Caruso (romantic, lyrical) and Paganini (fiendish, virtuoso). In a parallel universe it might have been the

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Beethoven or Brahms Concerto of its time. It’s no wonder there are more than 30 recordings of the Korngold.

I spoke to Hope from Bloemfontein, South Africa.

*How does Escape to Paradise fit into your ongoing body of work?*

It’s quite a natural fit. I spent the last 15 years researching and documenting the music of the composers at Theresienstadt and by other composers murdered by the Nazis. I thought it was time to examine those who did escape, and their legacy. I met the Schoenberg family; the composer Walter Arlen, who had escaped Vienna in 1939; and Andre Previn, who spent his earliest years in Berlin before moving to Hollywood and growing up in the studio world. I was fascinated by what their feelings of dislocation must have felt like. For some, it was paradise, for some it was hell.

*How did the survivors feel about escaping the Holocaust?*

They had mixed feelings. They felt extremely lucky, but they also felt profound guilt because members of their families did not survive. Many did not enjoy their reputation as exiles.

*What about their compositional styles?*

They were very different composers and yet

they were put under the same umbrella. The Hollywood sound was an amalgamation of European tradition with all the glamour that Hollywood entails and it did not always fit easily with the melancholy many of these composers felt—Eric Zeisl never managed to find a footing in Hollywood. And Korngold, ironically, never found a footing with the classical-music establishment after he left Europe for Hollywood.

*What of Korngold’s music should we be hearing more often besides the Violin Concerto?*

The Piano Quintet, Op. 15, is an absolute masterpiece. I played it in New York a few months ago. It’s incredibly complex, and it took us weeks to get even close to what he was thinking of. Also, the early Violin Sonata, Op. 6, and the *Much Ado About Nothing Suite*, Op. 11. Keep in mind that Mahler and Richard Strauss fell to their knees prophesying Korngold as the next great Mozart.

*What kind of a violinist did Korngold have in mind for the Violin Concerto?*

He originally wrote it for Bronislaw Huberman and the story goes they couldn’t quite agree on content, especially the technical content. Heifetz heard about this and swept Korngold off his feet. When Korngold said it’s too difficult, Heifetz said it’s not difficult

enough. Then he seduced the composer in his own concerto with the amazing Heifetz brilliance and sound. It became Heifetz's piece, and he was instrumental in its construction and technical aspects. Heifetz's live performance (on YouTube) is absolutely stunning, with its energy, power, and passion. Actually, the concerto remains very difficult for me, particularly the third movement, which pushes technical boundaries to the very limit—if you follow Korngold's tempo marking, it's absolutely fiendish. It was an amalgam of his Hollywood experience.

*How deeply does he personally relate to Korngold?*

I find his music extremely emotional, very sensual, and yet quite melancholy. What I gathered from speaking to the Schoenberg and Zeisl families was a sense of bereavement, a pining for Europe. Korngold [an American composer of Austro-Hungarian birth] was constantly worrying about his relatives, saying he would only write film music until Hitler was dead. It took 20 years for me to approach the Concerto.

*You've worked with guest artists like Sting and Max Raabe on your recent Vivaldi and Escape recordings. Have they returned the favor?*

I have done quite a lot with Sting already, including his record *If on a Winter's Night*. I've known him since I was seven or eight when we were kids together.

Later he bought the house that belonged to Yehudi Menuhin—the house in which I grew up and spent the first years of my life. [Editor's note: Hope's mother worked for Menuhin]

*You've written three books. How important to you is writing about music?*

Writing for me is an extremely important, inspiring way of sharing my thoughts and feelings about music. I have written three books, and still write two magazine columns in Germany every month. My first book was a family history for which we've finally managed to secure an English publisher. It will come out in a year or two.

*What about your next CD?*

I'm still mulling it over. It takes an enormously long time until I give a project that final push. ■

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