

Remarks for the Opening of *Operas without Singing*, September 7, 2007
By Catherine Quinlan, Dean of the USC Libraries

Welcome, everyone, to the opening of *Operas without Singing*, a tribute to the film music of Erich Wolfgang Korngold.

I'm Catherine Quinlan, and it is a terrific honor for me, as dean of the USC Libraries, to welcome you here for the first time.

We are privileged to have with us tonight several members of the Korngold family. Erich Korngold's granddaughter, Kathrin Korngold Hubbard, and her mother Helen are here; as are Erich's grandson Gary and his wife Honnie along with their family.

I'm also very pleased to welcome Bernhard Faustenhammer, deputy director of the Austrian Consulate General of Los Angeles. The Consulate General has been very supportive in mounting and promoting this exhibition, and we are sincerely grateful.

And Professor Jon Burlingame joins us from the USC Thornton School of Music. He has offered tremendous assistance during the development of the entire slate of upcoming programs related to the work of Mr. Korngold.

I offer a heartfelt thanks to all of our special guests for making this a truly memorable occasion.

I am thrilled that the first USC Libraries exhibition I have the pleasure of opening takes music as its inspiration. I come from a family that loves music. We all play an instrument—with the exception of my father, who, early on, assumed the role of critic.

While some parents want to have enough children to form a football team, my mother wanted 14 children to populate her own chamber orchestra. She had to settle for six, but she made up for it by requiring each of us to learn two instruments.

My first degree is in music. I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to study and perform in Canada, the United States, and Europe. Certainly, being able to officiate at this opening allows me to combine my past and present passions.

Having arrived officially on August 1, my present passion, of course, is the success of the USC Libraries. One of the pleasures of being a new dean is the license to ask many questions, to explore the foundations of everything we do so that we might better plot our course for the future.

Such an investigative spirit might lead one to ask a very basic question about why we are all here tonight—what does film music have to do with an academic research library?

I'll answer that in a few moments, but I'd like to arrive at the answer by way of an even more fundamental question—why music, period? Why is it so meaningful, so compelling to us, that we gather here on a beautiful Friday evening to view an exhibition and listen to a performance?

To be sure, the idea that music is a unique aspect of human expression and experience is a notion we take for granted—but it is much more than a popular sentiment. Everywhere we look, we find evidence that we afford music a privileged position in our society and in our personal lives. It is nearly inescapable:

Film directors play with our expectations and build suspense with the careful timing and sly application of properly moody music. Advertisers use music to sell us refrigerators and hybrid cars. A mere phrase of a song wields the power to evoke memories and stir emotions.

Many eminent authorities—accomplished scholars and popular entertainers alike—have tried to help us understand why music is such a potent influencer of human emotions and behavior.

Claude Lévi-Strauss—an anthropologist and theorist, a master of the patterns of our common mythologies—tells us that music is “the supreme mystery of the science of man...the only language with the contradictory attributes of being at once intelligible and untranslatable.”

And then we have popular composer Leonard Bernstein, who exalted music as the one art that “of all the arts, stands in a special region, unlit by any star but its own.”

We respect those voices. However, we are a library at a great research university—with an accomplished faculty and the brightest young scholars. And great minds don’t accept such things simply because we’ve always assumed that they’re true, or because we’re told that we should believe them. Great minds ask why.

And great libraries help them find the answers. We build collections and create innovative new services to support the achievements of our exceptional society of users at USC.

We support the psychologist who might tell us that music is special because it communicates emotion most directly, because it is abstract and free of the burden of interpretation.

We support the philosopher who might then ask, how does music achieve this? We say music is emotion, but why then can we appreciate the beauty of a melancholy melody without feeling sad ourselves?

We support the doctor who explains that music is special to us because of the way our auditory receptors process the notes and transmit them to our brains.

And of course, we support the wise ones among us who know that the real reason music is special is because it transcends all those boundaries.

And that is what music has to do with an academic research library.

We collect books and manuscripts and historical documents not for the sake of collecting, but so that the scholars of today and tomorrow can study those fundamental questions.

We hold thousands of rare and valuable objects, but their worth rests as much in the intellectual investigation they inspire as it does in the objects themselves. The historical value of a rare book may be great, but its potential for inspiration is infinite.

That, in turn, is why we invite you into this beautiful library for exhibitions and performances—so that you can see how our treasures preserve, illuminate, and inspire exploration of great lives and stories like that of Erich Wolfgang Korngold.

Mr. Korngold began composing as a child, impressing both Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss with his youthful genius. By the time he arrived in the United States in 1934, his operas already had earned him much acclaim in Europe.

His relationship with Hollywood began with his work scoring a 1935 Warner Brothers production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In fact, most of the pieces you see in the present exhibition are from USC's Warner Brothers archive.

Mr. Korngold remained active in European opera after his early successes in Hollywood. He was conducting in Austria when, in 1938, Warner Brothers executives convinced him to return to Los Angeles. They hoped he would compose the score for an expensive adventure film starring Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland.

This, of course, was *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. *Robin Hood* was nominated for an Academy Award that year, and Mr. Korngold's music won the Oscar for best original score.

Most significantly, he credited the film with saving his life—as the Anschluss, the Nazi annexation of Austria, took place while he was working on *Robin Hood* in the

United States.

The Warner Brothers archive is rich with objects that fill in the details of Mr. Korngold's work in film. For example, the correspondence preserved in the collection reveals that he was skeptical at first about whether his late-romantic style could be adapted to a swashbuckling adventure movie like *Robin Hood*.

Allowing an even deeper look into the works themselves, the collection includes several handwritten scores—multiple versions of the same pieces of music—that chart the evolution of his artistic vision.

So however you approach this exhibition—as a fan, as a historian, as a musician—I hope you will take some time for personal discovery among the scores, lobby cards, and other objects on display.

At 7:30, students from the USC Thornton School of Music will perform selections from Mr. Korngold's film music in Newman Hall, just across Childs Way. My thanks to them for sharing their talent and hard work with us. I hope you enjoy what is sure to be an inspiring performance.

Tonight also marks the beginning of our new season of exhibitions and events, including several that explore the life and work of Mr. Korngold. Next week, we also will begin celebrating the 75th anniversary of this great library with a lecture by USC Professor Kevin Starr. I hope to see many of you at these and other events in the future.

I'd like to take a moment to thank Ned Comstock, Sandra Joy Lee, Tyson Gaskill, Andrew Wulf, and Patty Johnson for the curatorial and logistical work that made this evening possible.

And finally, I'd like to offer a particularly warm thanks to Catherine Cooper, former music specialist in our music library and current doctoral candidate in music.

Welcome back for the evening, Catherine, and thank you for introducing the performance later tonight.

And thanks again to all of you for coming. I know many of you are great supporters of the USC Libraries, and I'm grateful that you're spending your Friday evening with us.