

Stokowski and Erich Wolfgang Korngold's Music

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In his essay "Julius and Erich Wolfgang Korngold: The Father and His Wunderkind," Otto Biba, Austrian musicologist and archival director of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, discusses correspondence between Leopold Stokowski and Julius Korngold in 1926. The famous conductor had written the elder Korngold asking, "...who he thought was the most talented young Austrian composer with a view to including a work by him in the repertoire of the Philadelphia Orchestra."¹ Biba's essay quotes Julius's response in which he replies to Stokowski that the question put him in an awkward position: given his son Erich's talent, could Stokowski honestly expect him to suggest anyone else? Biba concludes his brief examination of this correspondence with the personal observation that, "it would be interesting to find out whether Stokowski ultimately performed any works by Erich Wolfgang Korngold." Stokowski did, in fact, conduct Korngold's music, though it was more than a decade before this 1926 correspondence.²

During the years around the turn of the century and up until the outbreak of World War I, conductors in America frequently traveled to Europe during the summer months for vacation and to seek out new music as novelties for audiences in the New World. The summer of 1913 was no different for Leopold Stokowski. He sailed from America on 19 April 1913 for his villa in Herzog Park, Munich for a rest and then to begin preparing the programs for the Philadelphia Orchestra's next season. While in Europe that summer, he attended the annual celebration at the home of the pianist Ignace Paderewski, on the shores of Lake Geneva in Switzerland, along with a host of other notable musicians.

The 31st of July is the day of Paderewski's patron saint, St. Ignace, and was always a day of celebration in his house. A big luncheon, a special dinner in the evening, and festivities throughout the day were attended by people from different countries and of various nationalities. This particular year a special musical party was given. According to the *New York Times*, one notable event "...was a 'Cubist Symphony' under the joint conductorship of Felix Weingartner, former conductor of the Vienna Royal Orchestra, and Leopold Stokowski, leader of the Philadelphia Orchestra."³

By 1913 Stokowski almost certainly would have been aware of the wunderkind Korngold, whether he was familiar with any of his music or not. Weingartner was an ardent champion of the music of young

¹ Biba, Otto. "Julius and Erich Wolfgang Korngold: The Father and His Wunderkind." *Die Korngolds: Klischee, Kritik, und Komposition*, edited by Michaela Feurstein-Prasser and Michael Haas, Jewish Museum Vienna, 2007: pp. 57-64.

² There is also an extant letter from the Chairman of the [Philadelphia] Orchestra Board to Stokowski from around 1925-6, in which he informs Stokowski that he wrote to Erich Wolfgang Korngold, asking him to recommend contemporary works for performance. Korngold's reply to the Chairman was originally attached, but it has since gone missing. (Personal correspondence from Brendan G. Carroll to the author, 24 Feb 2017.)

³ "Ragtime For Paderewski." *New York Times*. Sun, 3 Aug 1913: p. I-9.

Korngold, "...and he conducted Korngold's first orchestral works in 1912 and 1913."⁴ While we expect there is no record of what they might have said to each other, both attending the same party leads to the intriguing notion of whether Weingartner may have encouraged Stokowski to examine and to bring Korngold's music back to Philadelphia. In any case, an early press release in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on 31 August 1913 announced that Korngold's *Schauspiel Overture* would be a novelty in the coming season – and also that Paderewski would be performing with the Philadelphia Orchestra on 1 April 1914.⁵ By the end of September, Korngold's *Overture* had been scheduled for the concerts in February 1914.⁶

Stokowski returned to the US aboard the ship *George Washington* out of Cherbourg, France, arriving in New York on 29 September. With him he brought thirteen novelties for the Philadelphia Orchestra to present during their 1913-14 season. He returned to Philadelphia on 6 October. The following day the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported the conductor's return and wrote about the new pieces of music that he brought back from Europe:

*Asked what he considered the best of the thirteen novelties which he had discovered while abroad, Mr. Stokowski said: "Without doubt the 'Schauspiel Overture' of Erich Korngold. This work is marvelous. I have never heard anything of the kind to equal it. The composer is a boy only 15 years old, but his treatment of this number is magnificent. He is the son of a musical critic in Vienna and has a wonderful future ahead of him."*⁷



Advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sunday, 1 Feb 1914.

Korngold's *Overture* was programmed for a pair of concerts in February 1914. It received its Philadelphia premiere on Friday afternoon, 6 February, and was repeated the next evening (a concert announcement is reproduced on the next page). How the piece was received by the Philadelphia audience is presently unknown: the only review sourced thus far simply mentions that Korngold's work was played – the bulk of the review covers Beethoven's *Symphony #7*

and Sibelius's *Violin Concerto*, the latter also a Philadelphia premiere.

Immediately following these two performances, Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra went on a brief concert tour of southern New England. They played at the Park Theatre in Bridgeport, CT (9 Feb), Poli's Theatre in Meriden, CT (10 Feb), Westover School in Middlebury and Buckingham Hall in Waterbury,

⁴ Carroll, Brendan G. *The Last Prodigy*. Portland, OR: Amaedeus Press, 1997: p. 69. Korngold was completing composition of the *Sinfonietta*, op. 5 when the 1913 party for Paderewski took place, so the only orchestral pieces Weingartner would have been familiar with were *Der Schneemann* and the *Schauspiel Overture*, op. 4, the latter being the very piece that Stokowski would perform in Philadelphia during the immediately following season.

⁵ "Philadelphia Orchestra's Next Season Program." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Sun, 31 Aug 1913: p. II-6.

⁶ "In World of Harmony With the Sunday Critic." *Baltimore Sun*. Sun, 28 Sep 1913: p. III-6.

⁷ "Stokowski Back With Novelties." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Tue, 7 Oct 1913: p. 3. The specific novelties may have changed: the article actually lists eighteen novelties; not all of the eighteen appear to be listed in the 1913-14 concert season programs; and a few novelties actually listed as played do not appear in the *Inquirer's* list.

Next Week's Program

The Philadelphia Orchestra

SIXTEENTH PAIR OF SYMPHONY CONCERTS

Friday Afternoon at 3.00 Saturday Evening at 8.15
February 6 and 7, 1914

Soloist: THADDEUS RICH, Violinist
(Concertmeister, The Philadelphia Orchestra)

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1. Antonio Vivaldi *Concerto for String Orchestra in A Minor*
(First Time at These Concerts)

 2. Ludwig van Beethoven *Symphony No. 7, in A Major, Op. 92*

 3. Jean Sibelius *Concerto in D Minor, Op. 47*
(First Time at These Concerts) *For Violin and Orchestra*
THADDEUS RICH

 4. Erich Korngold *Schauspiel Overture*
(First Time at These Concerts)

The decorations on the stage are through the courtesy of J. J. Habermehl's Sons through whose kindness the stage has been decorated with plants and greenery, from time to time, during the last two seasons.

SPECIAL NOTICE.—In order that patrons of the Orchestra may be kept in touch with all important announcements, the favor of prompt notification of any change of address is asked. Please address Manager, 1314 Pennsylvania Building, Philadelphia, Pa.

Ticket Office for all Philadelphia Orchestra Concerts in Philadelphia at Heppe's, 1119 Chestnut Street. Reserved seats, \$2.00, \$1.50, \$1.00, 75 cents and 50 cents, according to location. Tickets to Amphitheatre, 25 cents, sold at the Academy only on the Afternoons and Evenings of Concerts. The Management reserves the right to increase prices of single tickets for special occasions.

Advertisement from the Philadelphia Orchestra Season 14 program collection

CT (11 Feb), the Empire Theatre in North Adams, MA (12 Feb), and the Slater Memorial Hall in Norwich, CT (13 Feb). They finished their week-long tour on Sunday afternoon, 15 February, with their first appearance in Boston in ten years. Their matinee concert that day in Symphony Hall included the Boston premiere of Korngold's *Schauspiel Overture*.⁸ (The program is reproduced on the next page.) Paradoxically, a sidebar quotation published with Biba's essay is from Philip Hale's 16 February 1914 *Boston Herald* review of that very premiere – a performance conducted by Leopold Stokowski.

⁸ The *Schauspiel Overture* was not performed on any of the tour dates except Boston.

The Philadelphia Orchestra Association

(INCORPORATED 1908)

MAINTAINING

The Philadelphia Orchestra

(FOUNDED 1900)

LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI, Conductor

Sunday Afternoon, February 15, 1914, at 3.30

Soloist: MISCHA ELMAN, Violinist

Program

1. Johannes Brahms *Symphony No. 1, in C Minor, Op. 68*

- I. Un poco sostenuto. Allegro
- II. Andante sostenuto
- III. Un poco allegretto e grazioso
- IV. Adagio, più andante. Allegro moderato ma con brio

INTERMISSION

2. Erich Wolfgang Korngold *Schauspiel Overture, Op. 4*

(First Time in Boston)

3. Camille Saint-Saens *Concerto No. 3, in B Minor, Op. 61,*
for Violin and Orchestra

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Andantino quasi Allegretto
- III. Molto moderato e maestoso; Allegro non troppo

MISCHA ELMAN

4. Richard Wagner *Overture and Venusberg Music from*
"Tannhäuser" (Paris Version)

No encores will be permitted

Advertisement from the Philadelphia Orchestra Season 14 program collection

Despite the enthusiasm he expressed for Korngold's *Schauspiel Overture* immediately upon returning from Europe in October 1913, Stokowski appears never to have conducted the work again. In fact, despite twice accompanying a well-known soprano in a pair of Korngold's Lieder several years later, Stokowski may not have performed any of Korngold's music again.

The internationally known soprano Claire Dux arrived in the US on 11 October 1921 to take up a position with the Chicago Grand Opera Company. A year later she made her first American concert tour, which opened in Philadelphia. That tour seems to have had two primary programs, depending on whether she

was appearing with orchestral or just solo piano accompaniment. For orchestrally accompanied concerts she included on the program the two Korngold songs *Liebesbriefchen* (“Little Love Letter”) and *Sommer* (“Summer”). Both of these songs were originally composed for voice and piano in 1913 and published in



The Theatre Magazine, February 1922

1916 as part of Korngold’s *Sechs Einfache Lieder*, op. 9. Korngold orchestrated all six songs the following year, and in January 1918 *Liebesbriefchen* and *Sommer* received their Vienna orchestral premiere.

Claire Dux opened her concert tour with Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra on Friday, 13 October 1922. The reviewer in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* the next day complimented Mme. Dux on a fine performance of all her numbers, including the two Korngold songs:⁹

*“...a charming young singer, the beauty of whose light soprano voice and the excellence of whose vocalizations were admirably and most agreeably displaced in a florid but melodious air. ...[She] is an excellent artist with a voice whose quality is singularly clear, fine and sympathetic, who made an extremely favorable impression and whom it will be a distinct pleasure to hear again. She was much and deservedly applauded.”*¹⁰

The concert was repeated the evening of 14 October.

So in response to Mr. Biba’s personal query, Stokowski did in fact perform works by Erich Wolfgang Korngold. Aside from the *Overture* and two Lieder at these four concerts, however, no other works by Korngold seem to have appeared on any of Leopold Stokowski’s programs. Knowing that Stokowski wrote to Julius many years *after* performing some of Korngold’s compositions, Biba’s question takes on added dimensions.

Though Leopold Stokowski apparently never conducted Korngold’s music again, his association with Korngold continued years later. In 1937 Stokowski actually presented the Academy Award to Leo Forbstein for the score to *Anthony Adverse* (1936), despite Korngold having composed the entire score.

ACADEMY OF MUSIC
PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA

LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI, Conductor
 Solist: CLAIR DUX, Soprano

FRIDAY AFTERNOON, OCT. 13, AT 2:30
 SATURDAY EVENING, OCT. 14, AT 8:15

WEBER..... Overture, “Oberon”
 HALEVY...Jaguarita Aria with Flute Obligato
 SCHUBERT.....Deutsche Tänze
 KORNGOLD..(a) Liebesbriefchen; (b) Sommer
 STRAUSS.... Tone Poem, “Ein Heldenleben”
 Seats Academy and Heppes, 1119 Chestnut St.

Evening Public Ledger (Philadelphia), Mon, 9 Oct 1922, p. 11

⁹ At present, this is the earliest reference the author has found to performances of these two songs in America.

¹⁰ “Richard Strauss’ ‘Ein Heldenleben’ Feature of Varied Program.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Sat, 14 Oct 1922: p. 12.

This event is covered in detail in Brendan Carroll's biography of Korngold, *The Last Prodigy*, and is not repeated here.

Finally, Stokowski was very friendly with Salka Viertel through his relationship with Greta Garbo. As Korngold was also often a guest at Viertel's legendary Hollywood salon, it is quite likely Stokowski and Korngold met frequently.¹¹

Uncited References

"Philadelphia Orchestra Subscriptions." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sun, 27 Apr 1913: p. IV-6.

"Philadelphia Orchestra – Elman." *Cambridge Chronicle* [Cambridge, MA] 14 Feb 1914: p. 7.

Paderewski, Ignace Jan and Mary Lawton. *The Paderewski Memoirs*. Charles Scribner's Sons [New York, NY] 1939.

¹¹ Personal correspondence to the author from Brendan Carroll, 24 February 2017.