



Erich KORNGOLD

Violin Concerto, Op. 35

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (May 29, 1897 – November 29, 1957) was an Austrian composer, conductor, and notable child prodigy. Like another Austrian prodigy, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Korngold's father was named Leopold. That is not where the resemblance between the two ends, however. At the age of 11, he composed a ballet, *Der Schneemann* (*The Snowman*), which was performed at the Vienna Court Opera, including a requested performance by Emperor Franz Josef. To further add to his early acclaim, his *Piano Sonata No. 2 in E major* was played throughout Europe by another Austrian legend, Artur Schnabel. After developing his orchestral writing skills and producing two operas by the age of 17, he became increasingly active in theatres throughout Europe. Korngold gained the attention of famed theatre and film director, Max Reinhardt, through his resurrections of lost works by Johann Strauss II. This recognition became a pivotal moment in Korngold's life, as Reinhardt invited Erich to Los Angeles to adapt the Felix Mendelssohn score of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for his upcoming film. This project garnered considerable praise from critics, and – combined with the rise of the Nazi regime – encouraged Korngold to stay in the United States to continue scoring for film. He would find much success in the US, winning 2 Academy Awards for Best Original Score for his work on *Anthony Adverse* (1936) and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), and receiving nominations for *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939) and *The Sea Hawk* (1940). Korngold would become a naturalized American citizen in 1943, but his relationship with Hollywood soured. His father – who never approved of his son's decision to work exclusively on films – was unhappy in Los Angeles and died in 1945. After this, Erich became increasingly disillusioned with Hollywood and returned to writing music for theatres and concert halls.

After vowing to only compose music for films until Hitler was defeated, Korngold's *Violin Concerto, Op. 35*, was the first piece he composed upon his return to the concert hall. Determined to prove critics wrong (many of which believed that Korngold lost his musical integrity to Hollywood), he sought to write a piece demonstrating "vitality and superb craftsmanship". The concerto premiered – with acclaimed violinist Jascha Heifetz as soloist – in 1947 at the St. Louis Concert Hall to the biggest ovation in St. Louis concert history. The piece rose to fame and eclipsed his previous and future works made for the concert hall. Interestingly, his legacy of bringing a sophisticated classical idiom to film scoring had an unexpected, reverse effect: he incorporated themes from 4 of his film scores into this classical work.

The first movement (*Moderato nobile*) begins with a lyrical theme borrowed from *Another Dawn* (1937). This section swells and is taken over by the orchestra, as a lush string section takes over the theme. The soloist explodes into a rapid virtuosic section while the orchestra adopts a pizzicato accompaniment. The next melodic section borrows the theme from *Juarez* (1939), with the orchestra providing full, homophonic textures with numerous countermelodies in the woodwinds snaking underneath. The brass re-introduces the principal theme, which is then handed over to the strings. The orchestra takes a brief pause while the soloist blasts through a series of difficult, dissonant double stops. The first theme is further developed by the orchestra, while the soloist brilliantly accelerates into the first movement's end.

The second movement's (*Romanze*) principal theme is introduced by a solo, which is quoted from *Anthony Adverse* (1936). The influences of cinematic orchestration are evident throughout the movement, as the harmonies consistently suspend and enrapture the soloist's arching melodies, while the structure is laden with recurring leitmotifs.

The final movement's (*Allegro assai vivace*) technical prowess is immediately evident, with the soloist racing through a staccato jig, which leads to a second theme based on the main motif from the comedy, *The Prince and the Pauper* (1937). A more relaxed and lyrical central episode gives the listener a brief rest from the jovial, energetic action. The piece ends in a technical flurry, closing out a work that has become standard repertoire for any violinist wishing to flex their virtuosic and musical muscles.