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**CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF FORT WORTH PRESENTS**

**“So Much More Than Tinseltown”**

**Saturday, September 11, 2021 - Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth**

**Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2021**

**Suite from the Incidental Music to *Much Ado About Nothing*, Op.11 (1918-19)  
Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957)**

Remember those swashbuckling and romantic Errol Flynn movies from the 1930s and 1940s — *The Sea Hawk*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *Captain Blood*, *Anthony Adverse* and *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*? A substantial part of their aura was the sweeping, lush scores of Erich Wolfgang Korngold, one of the greatest film composers in Hollywood history.

The same Erich Wolfgang Korngold was one of the great child composition prodigies of the last century. As an adolescent, he produced scores that drew both admiration and awe from such prominent composers as Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler. He published a piano trio at age 12; by the time he was 16, both Artur Nikisch and Felix Weingartner had conducted his orchestral compositions in Vienna. Two short operas were produced in Munich before his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, and the opera for which he is best known, *Die tote Stadt* [The Dead City] received simultaneous premières in Cologne and Hamburg in 1920, when Korngold was just 23. His meteoric career expanded to cinema in 1929, when he began working with the Austrian director Max Reinhardt. Inevitably, involvement in the film industry took him across the Atlantic to Hollywood.

Because of the rise of Nazism, Korngold eventually settled permanently in Southern California, changing his citizenship in 1943. He was an unquestioned star among Hollywood composers, with a dozen important scores to his credit in addition to those for the Flynn films.

Toward the end of World War I, the Vienna Volksbühne commissioned Korngold to compose incidental music for a production of Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*. Korngold jumped on the project, despite the restrictions of writing for a small ensemble. He was enchanted by the subject matter, in large part because he was courting Luise [Luzi] von Sonnenthal, a Viennese beauty whom he subsequently married. Fueled by the passion and excitement of youthful love, Korngold completed fourteen short movements of his sparkling score by the end of 1918, and orchestrated the following summer.

He subsequently compiled five movements into an orchestral suite of delightful intimacy. In the orchestral version, individual instrumental colors capture the spice and tartness of Beatrice and Benedick’s verbal sparring. We hear the Suite in Korngold’s arrangement for violin and piano, which was in the repertoire of Fritz Kreisler, Mischa Elman, and Jascha Heifetz. The feisty relationship between Shakespeare’s characters is the driving force in the sonata-form overture; its lyrical second theme reveals their mutual attraction.

The Suite's other movements are snapshots of individual scenes within the comedy. "Bridal Morning" explores Hero's uneasiness on her wedding day, with lovely chamber writing. "Dogberry and Verges" is a satirical march of the night guards, who are a bit the worse for drink. A violin solo in "Intermezzo" accompanies Beatrice's realization that she loves Benedick. The Suite concludes with "Masquerade," a lively hornpipe. At the play's happy ending, everyone celebrates with this dance.

## **Piano Quintet (1919)**

### **Frank Martin (1890-1974)**

Frank Martin is widely regarded as the most important Swiss composer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He studied piano, harmony, and composition with Joseph Lauber, a conservative traditionalist who shielded young Martin from any acquaintance with the radical changes taking place in music in the early years of the last century. Martin's parents encouraged his study of mathematics and physics, one of several factors that postponed his development as a composer. Following the First World War, he returned to Geneva after having lived in both Rome and Paris, where he developed an interest in rhythmic problems and his first acquaintance with new music. For two years he worked with Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, the inventor of the Dalcroze eurhythmics method of teaching rhythm through physical movement. The association with Dalcroze was a major influence on Martin's evolution as a musician.

During the 1930s Martin started to write twelve-tone music. Through a long association with the eminent Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet, he continued to expand his musical horizons. Martin's best known work is *Petite Symphonie Concertante* (1945), which Ansermet introduced to American audiences on tour in 1947. Martin has remained little known in this country, but his keyboard music is standard fare for Swiss piano students and his name is a household word among Swiss *literati*.

The Piano Quintet, composed in 1919 and published in 1922, precedes the twelve-tone music by a decade. Martin was still writing tonal music. (It bears a key signature of one flat, implying D minor.) The first movement opens with upper strings pulsating in steady triple meter – rather like a heartbeat – supporting an emotionally charged melody in the cello. A flowing piano part thickens the texture, and though the pulsing strings return toward the end, the movement closes in decisive, tragic D minor.

Piano opens the second movement opens with a brisk minuet in G minor. The mood is *scherzando*: lighthearted and a bit capricious. Martin uses hemiola [shifting rhythmic emphasis between duple and triple meter] in his second theme group. As in the first movement, there are extended passages for strings alone. When Martin employs the full ensemble, he uses imitative entrances and superimposition of his theme groups, providing narrative flow. The rhythmic layers are complex and engaging.

At nearly nine minutes, the Adagio ma non troppo is both the longest movement and the emotional heart of this quintet. This time the piano provides the steady 'heartbeat,' as the strings weave sinuous triplets in dense, chromatic harmony. A luscious E-major interlude for string

quartet constitutes the middle section. The third and final section returns to the slower pace, but now the piano has chordal commentary beneath flowing, tonally shifting lines among the strings. The coda is chromatic and tonally ambiguous, ultimately resolving to D minor.

Martin concludes his Quintet with a frisky Presto in D major that starts as a duo for the violins, presently inviting viola and cello into the conversation. The piano is silent until a couple of minutes into the movement, but soon assumes its role as sparring partner with the strings. The first violin incorporates a popular melody from Savoy, heightening the dance-like character of the finale – which ends with a surprise.

### **Suite for Piano left hand, Two Violins, and Cello, Op.23 (1930)** **Erich Wolfgang Korngold**

Despite his success in Hollywood, Korngold never completely abandoned abstract musical composition. The Suite that concludes today's program is unusual in that the piano part is for left hand only. It is one of many fine works commissioned by the Austrian pianist Paul Wittgenstein, who lost his right arm during the First World War. Remarkably, he sustained a successful career as a left-hand pianist. The list of composers who wrote for him includes many of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most distinguished musicians: Maurice Ravel, Richard Strauss, Benjamin Britten, Sergei Prokofiev, and Paul Hindemith. Korngold composed a piano concerto for Wittgenstein in 1923, a substantial single-movement about 35 minutes long. Wittgenstein clearly liked the piece, for five years later he returned to Korngold with the commission for this Suite.

Korngold was immersed in composing two operettas, *Das Wunder der Heliane* (1927) and *Die Kathrin*, which took longer and was eventually produced in 1939. He frequently turned to chamber music as a change of pace from larger dramatic pieces. Upon completion of *Das Wunder der Heliane*, he sandwiched in work on some smaller compositions, including a piano sonata, a second string quartet, a song cycle, and the suite for Wittgenstein.

By any measure, the Suite is an enormous work. From the muscular piano cadenza that opens the *Präludium und Fuge* [Prelude and Fugue], Korngold makes it clear that the pianist is the star. For the better part of two minutes, the piano thunders forth, establishing its hegemony. A forceful unison statement introduces the strings, and the prelude dissipates to a piano trill. Cello inaugurates the fugue, a forbidding and stately subject that is as far from movie music as anything Korngold wrote. The music is stark and heavily chromatic, presently relieved by a sunlit episode in C major that features both violins. Eventually the fugue brings back some material from the piano cadenza, resolving in D major, the tonality of the second movement Waltz.

Korngold's Viennese roots are evident in the waltz, which dips its toes into the world of café music and *Schlagobers*. While the harmonic language is less severe than in the opening movement, it still shows the composer flirting with modernism and stretching conventional tonality, even as he embraces popular tradition. *Grotesque* functions as a large-scale scherzo; at almost ten minutes, it is the longest movement in the suite. Korngold plays metric games, shifting between duple and triple meter. The melodic material is sometimes reminiscent of

Ravel, elsewhere calling forth violinistic showpieces like Bazzini's *Dance of the Goblins*. The contrasting trio section opens with an extended piano solo that takes us to a different world. Following the repeat of the scherzo, Korngold appends a coda.

The slow movement *Lied* is an instrumental setting of "Was du mir bist?," one of the songs in Korngold's Op.22 cycle. Korngold's biographer Brendan Carroll calls it the emotional heart of the Suite.

After a brief piano introduction to the finale, the cello states the initial theme. Although Korngold labels this movement a Rondo, it is really a series of free variations on that theme, interwoven with references to the fourth movement.

Korngold completed the Suite in spring 1930. Wittgenstein and members of the Rosé Quartet (which was founded in 1883 by Gustav Mahler's future brother-in-law, Arnold Rosé) played the premiere in Vienna on 21 October, 1930. Wittgenstein was also the pianist at the American premiere, in Colorado Springs, on 22 November, 1934.