

UNCSA's Production of
Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*
29 March – 7 April 2012

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Korngold's incidental music to Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* has delighted audiences since its inception nearly a century ago. However, following the ban in 1933 on what was labeled "degenerate music" by the Nazis, today's public is familiar with the work only through its various "suite" permutations (the five-movement orchestral suite, the four-movement violin and piano suite, and the three-movement solo piano suite).¹ As a result, we perhaps have lost to one degree or another, a sense of the music's association with the action of the play. Even following the apparently well-received American premiere of the orchestral suite in 1921, the *New York Tribune* music critic Henry E. Krehbiel admitted a sense of some confusion:

"...Exactly one year ago, to a day, Mr. [Fritz] Kreisler played a transcription of the suite made by Korngold for violin and pianoforte. We were puzzled then as to the relationship between the music and Shakespeare's comedy, and the fact that we have now heard it as written, instead of in a transcription, has brought no elucidation..."

But thanks to Chancellor John Mauceri, joined by the drama and music departments at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts (UNCSA), any ambiguities concerning the relationship of Korngold's music to Shakespeare's play have been eliminated.

Commissioned in 1918 to compose incidental music for a new production of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, Korngold set to work immediately, completing composition in 1918, and orchestration in 1919.² The premiere took place on 06 May 1920 at the Schloßtheater in Schönbrunn Palace, and owing to its popularity, it was transferred to the Vienna Burgtheater in the autumn of the same year. The music became one of Korngold's most popular works.³ The Nazis, however, as part of their posturing against the Jews, prohibited performance of the music beginning in 1933. The result was a silencing for the next 80 years of the complete, integrated incidental music.

Yet Krehbiel is technically incorrect, as even the Orchestral Suite is a transcription of sorts. Korngold's music "as written" – to use Krehbiel's words – was actually for a more chamber-sized ensemble, not the large, late-Romantic orchestras of Strauss and Mahler common in Korngold's world. Thus, as a welcome result of UNCSA's production,

Incidental Music to Staged Plays

In a recent radio interview connected with the UNCSA production, Maestro Mauceri noted that this kind of theater – a stage play presented with live orchestral accompaniment – is no longer available in the world, but from the 18th century through to the Depression years, this was quite normal in European theaters. Haydn, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Grieg, Sibelius and many other great composers all worked in this genre.

See our website for more detailed background and links to the original radio broadcasts.

¹ A recently discovered manuscript of a string quartet version is to have its world premiere in May 2012.

² Due to effects from the war, and perhaps also to limitations imposed by the venue's orchestra pit, the orchestration was for a reduced number of players, only 18 or 19 in the final count.

³ The Suite was reportedly in the repertoire of over 100 orchestras in the 1920s.

Maestro Mauceri and his musicians have prepared a new edition of the score, paring it back to the original, smaller ensemble.

Work on the new performing edition began with copies of the original printed parts and conductor's score obtained from the Austrian National Archives. Written markings in the scores – corrections, emendations, etc. – were studied and evaluated for incorporation into the new edition, sometimes requiring comparison with recordings, sometimes by noting how they worked in conjunction with the staging. The result is a score that perfectly displays the theatrical possibilities of underscored music that Korngold would later use to such success and innovation in his film scores 15 years later.

The production itself was completely entertaining. Performed in the Agnes de Mille Theater on the UNCSA campus, which seats not quite 200 people and with a small orchestra pit, the audience was given an impression of how the very first performance might have been experienced at the Schloßtheater in Schönbrunn Palace.

What made the production even more interesting to this attendee was the subtle integration of elements that referenced not only Shakespeare but also Korngold's world of the 1920s. The stage design and sets reflected just what one might expect in a Shakespearean play, but the costuming was more akin to the styles of the era in which Korngold composed this score; the women's dresses and accoutrements, the men's suits and shoes, Benedick's bathing wear, and the soldiers' uniforms – which resembled the Nazi uniforms – were reminiscent of the pre-Depression era. This visual homage to the time of the original 1920's Vienna production of *Much Ado* was especially pleasing and quite appropriate.

Filmed during the April 5 performance, and with editing slated to occur over the next few months, the play will eventually be broadcast on local television. Prospects of a public offering (DVD) are still uncertain, but both a video recording of the play, and an audio CD of the music are possible future releases.



(Right) A view of the orchestra pit at the Agnes de Mille Theatre, UNC School of the Arts.

(Below) Interior of the Agnes de Mille Theatre.

