Stokowski and Erich Wolfgang Korngold's Music

Troy O. Dixon February 2017, revised July 2018

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." 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'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 on several occasions, but he did so beginning 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."

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.

¹ 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." 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.

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."



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 audiences 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 of which 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 performed do not appear in the *Inquirer's* list.



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- 3. Jean Sibelius Concerto in D Minor, Op. 47For Violin and Orchestra
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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. Then they returned briefly to Philadelphia before a short tour south toward Washington DC.

The Philadelphia Orchestra's performance in Boston was a highly anticipated event for several reasons. The Orchestra was rumored as having advanced significantly since their last appearance there. It was also Stokowski's Boston debut as a conductor, and reports of his musicianship – labeled as "gifted" in the pre-

concert publicity story in the *Boston Globe* – had preceded him. Finally, not only would Korngold's *Schauspiel Overture* be receiving its Boston premiere, ⁸ it would also be the first orchestral music by Korngold ever performed in Boston. ⁹ The City's curiosity was justifiably aroused.

A large audience gathered in Symphony Hall for the Philadelphia Orchestra's matinee concert. The program announcement is reproduced on the next page. Reviews of the performance indicated the Orchestra had indeed made considerable progress since its last appearance, and noted that the audience heartily rewarded their playing with applause and ovation. All sourced reviews were also very positive about Stokowski, his command, his conducting skill, and musicianship. One review spoke of his "poetic taste in interpretation." The brief review in the periodical *The Music News* wrote "Mr. Leopold Stokowski conducts with vital authority and has extraordinary enthusiasm."



Advertisement, Boston Globe, 8 Feb 1914

Korngold's Overture received a mixture of reviews, ranging from generally positive on one end to generally dismissive on the other. Philip Hale recognizes in his *Boston Herald* review that "the instrumentation of the overture and the fluency of writing are extraordinary for a boy," but the rest of his rather well-known review carries an essentially dismissive tone. Less deprecatory, the *Boston Globe* review also acknowledges Korngold's phenomenal musical mind, but similarly suggests the piece is musically of little value. ¹²

These two perhaps unfair reviews are offset by the *Boston Journal* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. The portion of the *Journal*'s review devoted to the Overture reads in its entirety:

The concert introduced a novelty by Erich Wolfgang Korngold, the "new Mozart," a young Austrian, who was only 14 when he wrote the "Schauspiel Overture" included in yesterday's program. The work is fanciful, if not especially rich in melodic ideas, and it reveals the youthful prodigy's almost mature command of orchestral effects. Likewise it was remarkable for its juvenile boisterousness. The impression was rather brilliant, thanks to the spirited performance, and the audience responded with hearty applause. ¹³

⁸ The *Schauspiel Overture* had already been performed in New York and Chicago, in addition to Philadelphia. It was not performed on any of the tour dates except Boston.

⁹ Rudolph Ganz gave the Boston premiere of Korngold's second piano sonata on 11 April 1913.

¹⁰ Paradoxically, a sidebar quotation published with Biba's essay is from Philip Hale's 16 February 1914 *Boston Herald* review of that very Korngold premiere, conducted by Leopold Stokowski.

¹¹ "The Philadelphia Orchestra." *The Music News* (Chicago) V.6, n. 9, 27 Feb 1914: 20.

¹² "The Philadelphia Orchestra Plays." *Boston Globe*, Mon, 16 Feb 1914: 9.

¹³ "Brahms Symphony Finely Rendered." *Boston Journal*, Monday, 16 Feb 1914: 2.

A special report to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* contained only one sentence regarding Korngold's composition: "The orchestra under [Stokowski's] leadership also distinguished itself in Korngold's Schauspiel overture, which was performed for the first time in Boston." A single sentence, though implying the work was favorably and well performed.

The Philadelphia Orchestra Association (INCORPORATED 1903) MAINTAINING The Philadelphia 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 Un poco allegretto e grazioso Adagio, piu andante. Allegro moderato ma con brio INTERMISSION Erich Wolfgang Korngold Schauspiel Ouverture, Op. 4 (First Time in Boston) Camille Saint-Saens Concerto No. 3, in B Minor, Op. 61, for Violin and Orchestra Allegro non troppo Andantino quasi Allegretto Molto moderato e maestoso; Allegro non troppo MISCHA ELMAN Richard Wagner Overture and Venusberg Music from "Tannhäuser" (Paris Version) No encores will be permitted

Advertisement from the Philadelphia Orchestra Season 14 program collection

¹⁴ "Philadelphia Orchestra in Boston." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Mon, 16 Feb 1914: 8.

Despite the initial 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 future years he would accompany a well-known soprano twice in a pair of Korngold's Lieder, and another soprano in the "Mariettaslied" aria from *Die tote Stadt*. But his performances of compositions by Korngold were few and spread across a wide span of time.



The Theatre Magazine, February 1922

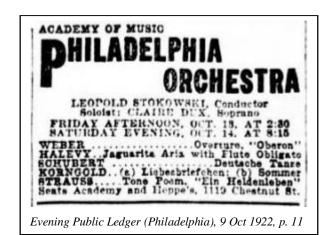
The internationally known soprano Claire Dux arrived in the US on 11 October 1921 to take up a position with the Chicago Grand Opera Company. A year later she made her first American concert tour, which opened in Philadelphia. That tour seems to have had two primary programs, depending on whether she was appearing with orchestral or just solo piano accompaniment. For orchestrally accompanied concerts she included on her 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 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:¹⁵

"...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."¹⁶

The concert was repeated on the following evening. It would be almost 25 years before any work by Korngold would appear again – and apparently for the last time – on a Stokowski concert program.



¹⁵ At present, this is the earliest reference the author has found to performances of these two songs in America.

¹⁶ "Richard Strauss' 'Ein Heldenleben' Feature of Varied Program." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Sat, 14 Oct 1922: p. 12.

Stokowski included no music by Korngold in any of his concerts again until twenty years after his 1926 correspondence with Julius Korngold. Then, at a single concert during the third week of the Hollywood Bowl Silver Jubliee in 1946, he conducted his own Hollywood Bowl Symphony in Korngold's most famous aria, "Mariettaslied" from Die tote Stadt. The concert featured California native, Nadine Conner, at that time a soprano with the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Nadine Conner (20 Feb 1907 – 1 Mar 2003) was born Evelyn Nadine Henderson¹⁷ in Compton, California, about half way between Los Angeles and Long Beach. As a teenager she was diagnosed with pulmonary disease, and her doctor suggested she try studying classical singing to strengthen her lungs. The result was the emergence of a tremendous voice and great singing talent. Her serious musical studies began after winning a scholarship at the University of Southern California. She made her radio debut in 1933 and rose to radio prominence singing with Nelson Eddy. Conner sang with the Los Angeles Opera from 1939 to 1941, and then with the Met from 1941 until her retirement in 1960. Compton natives were surely proud to attend her Hollywood Bowl debut on 28 July 1946.

The 7:30 PM concert that Sunday evening was broadcast at least in part, live on NBC radio's "The Standard Hour," a weekly, hour-long musical series sponsored by Standard Oil. Broadcast on the NBC Pacific radio network, the concert was



Nadine Conner (author's private collection)

heard from Los Angeles (KFI 640) to Seattle (KOMO 950) to Denver (KOA 850). 18 Isabel Morse Jones commented in her review the following day in the Los Angeles Times:

"[The townspeople of Compton] were deservedly proud of this young woman with a fine voice and the gentle bearing [who] sang arias from four operas and the sad "Summertime" of Gershwin with poise and a sure intention. ... Her voice is true and she has gained control since we heard her in opera. Her ability to hold a high note is phenomenal. When she arrives at the point where she thinks nothing of how she sings a phrase but everything of the music itself she will be a finer artist. There is every indication that that day is not far off."19

That 1946 concert seems to be the last time Stokowski conducted Korngold's music.

¹⁷ She married a classmate named Robert Gerald Conner on 1 June 1926. They divorced two years later, but she decided to retain her ex-husband's surname as her professional name.

¹⁸ The concert was recorded, including her performance of the famous Korngold aria. It is unclear if the aria was heard on-air, or if the concert was simply cut short at the end of the hour.

¹⁹ Morse Jones, Isabel. "Nadine Conner, Danilova Carry Honors." Los Angeles Times. Mon, 29 Jul 1946: II-2.

A letter in Korngold's estate indicates Stokowski would have conducted Korngold's music one year prior, in the summer of 1945. The Hollywood Bowl Association announced in January that Leopold Stokowski had been engaged as musical director for the Symphonies Under the Stars. For his inaugural season at the Hollywood Bowl, Stokowski invited two dozen composers resident in the greater Los Angeles area to write fanfares for brass and percussion. These short preludes were intended for the Tuesday night concerts and were to be played from backstage before the musicians took the stage and the concerts began. The first concert on July 10th included ones composed by George Antheil, Walter Scharff and Alexander Steinert, but Stokowski's experiment apparently did not work as well as planned. Isabel Morse Jones wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* the following day that, "[the fanfares] were supposed to precede the entrance of Stokowski and the Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra he has assembled; to act as attention condensers and, perhaps, to lure the Bowl audience to an early arrival. But these three highly desirable effects did not quite come off the first night." The second concert on July 17th included only one fanfare – by the Hungarian composer Eugene Zador, and played on the stage this time – and reviews of the remaining concerts that summer make no mention of them again. The second concert of the stage this time – and reviews of the remaining concerts that summer make no mention of them again.

Korngold was also one of the composers from whom Stokowski requested a new fanfare. Unfortunately, Korngold ultimately did not complete such a work for Stokowski – but he may have sketched one and left it incomplete. There is an extant manuscript – a single page containing seven measures of music – which his son Ernst described as "unidentified sketch for a fanfare" when cataloging his father's music for archiving. Korngold himself did not date or identify the sketch.²²

The eminent conductor's association with Korngold was more than just through his music, though. The 1937 Academy Award for "Music (Scoring)" was given to the Warner Bros. Studio Music Department – not the composer – for the score to *Anthony Adverse* (1936). Stokowski presented the award at the ceremony and Leo Forbstein accepted it on behalf of the Department, despite Korngold having composed the entire score. This event is detailed in Brendan Carroll's biography of Korngold, *The Last Prodigy*.

Additionally, 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.²³

So Stokowski ultimately did perform works by Erich Wolfgang Korngold, but beginning well before the 1926 correspondence between Stokowski and Julius Korngold that Otto Biba examines. Aside from the *Schauspiel Overture*, two Lieder, and one opera aria spread across six concerts and thirty-two years, however, no other works by Korngold seem to have appeared on any of Leopold Stokowski's programs. Knowing that he performed three Korngold pieces prior to 1926, Mr. Biba's original question takes on added dimensions.

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²⁰ Morse Jones, Isabel. "Fanfares Hail Summer Series of Symphonies." Los Angeles Times, Wed, 11 Jul 1945: 13.

²¹ Some of the other composers receiving Stokowski's request for fanfares included Arnold Schoenberg, Eric Zeisl, and Johnny Green.

²² Brendan Carroll believes the unidentified fanfare may have been for either the Flynn film *The Adventures of Don Juan* or *The Adventures of Casanova* – neither of which Korngold ultimately scored – and not for Stokowski. (Personal correspondence to the author from Brendan Carroll, 6 September 2018.)

²³ Personal correspondence to the author from Brendan Carroll, 24 February 2017.

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Dear Mr. Korngold:

During July and August I am conducting eight symphony concerts on Tuesday evenings in Hollywood Bowl. As a prelude to these concerts we are going to play short fanfares of about one minute duration, composed for three trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, four horns, are tympani and three percussion. Would you be willing to compose a fanfare as a contribution to our ideals of giving music lovers in Hollywood Bowl the best examples of every kind of music? You might like to dedicate your fanfare to the Army, Navy, Air Force, one of the United Nations or some other patriotic idea.

Of course, the fanfare would remain your property. We would merely have the privilege of playing it. If this musical project interests you would you mind sending your fanfare to me at Hollywood Bowl?

LS:pe

 $Letter\ from\ Leopold\ Stokowski\ to\ Erich\ Wolfgang\ Korngold,\ 26\ June\ 1946.$

(Courtesy of the Korngold Archive, Hamburg. Reproduced with permission of the Korngold Estate.)

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Acknowledgements

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