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How Art Becomes Lonely
Contemporaneous Perspectives on Art Music:
Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Arnold Schoenberg, in California late 1930s.

By the mid 1930s, the cultural trans-Atlantic exchange between America and Europe which had been something of a rite of passage, became a one way exodus of New Music to the New World.¹ The flight to America of musicians proudly thought as Europe's "best and brightest" gathered pace over the next years until War was declared. New and old imperatives from the Old World and the American Great Depression gave musicians from both continents cause to re-evaluate their cultural assumptions.

Although film work had attracted interest from art music composers on both sides on the Atlantic before the 1910s, they, together with critics and musicologists, argued that the resulting functionality of music tainted its essential autonomy. However, for many émigrés and indigenous musicians the film industry provided creative simulation, a social milieu and a living.

When Erich Korngold and Arnold Schoenberg arrived in Hollywood, the ambivalence with which they separately contemplated their old art in terms of their new environment is symptomatic of prevailing conditions for twentieth-century Western composers.

Introduction

Korngold first arrived in America in 1934 at the invitation of the Austrian impresario Max Reinhardt. Their successful collaborations in classic operettas in Europe had led them to chase greater pickings in America. The Hollywood Bowl stage production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* resulted in the Award winning Warner Bros film adaptation. Korngold went home with two unsigned Warner Bros contracts in his top pocket, but optimistically planning to revive a flagging career in opera with *Katrin* in Vienna. However, faced with constant frustrations due to political machinations and his already failing art music reputation, he signed the contracts and returned to Hollywood within the year. Believing that he could resume his ambitions in Austria when political and cultural rationality eventually prevailed, he left his family in the care of their grandparents. Their last minute escape from Hitler's Austria in 1938 is another story.

In 1933, Schoenberg was summarily ousted from his position in Berlin Akademie which he felt appropriately recognised his important influence. He made an early and accurate prediction of political/cultural trends, wrote to his pupil Zillig from France that America was "not actually screaming for him", and to Berg of his fears of being "entirely

¹ Jezic Diane Peacock. *The Musical Migration and Ernst Toch*. Ames: Iowa State "University Press, 1989. 3.

without influence" there², he cancelled two concerts with Sir Adrian Boult in London, and made his first and only trans-Atlantic crossing, with wife and child, as a Jewish émigré, in 1934. His passage was assisted by advances from his publisher "Universal Edition" and the newly established Malkin Institute, and as a prerequisite for emigration, a contract for one year's employment in New York.

Approaches to appear as guest speaker from Juilliard, the avantgarde League of Composers and Princeton signalled important career possibilities. Schoenberg postponed a performance of the *Pelleas und Melisande* in favour of first speech on "Composition with 12 Tones".³ He assured Kolisch⁴ that recognition and appreciation would come to him in America "one day", and nurtured what became a false impression of his host country's acculturation. Convivial discussions with Hutcheson of Juilliard, during the summer retreat in Chautauqua did not lead to an appointment. A charity concert in Madison Garden New York was inexplicably cancelled. Neither pupils nor institutes lived up to Schoenberg's expectations.⁵ and East Coast climate played havoc with his health.

Luzi Korngold recounted their shared bemusement at the fawning reception in both New York and in Los Angeles. American newspaper reporters, clamoured for a scoop of "real" European culture on its way to Hollywood. Studio limousines chauffeured them to Hotels and trains. Korngold spoke to the "New York Times" vaguely of an opera he proposed to discuss with Gatti-Casaara⁶ while he was over that side of the Atlantic. In Hollywood, Warner Bros settled Korngold into his luxurious and well-equipped office. Korngold set about buying a house close by.

Meanwhile, the Philharmonic Orchestra filled their concert halls with the top ten composers: Beethoven, Wagner, Purcell, Bach, Handel, Brahms, Mozart, Rossini, Weber, Sibelius, and, as a matter of policy, at least one contemporary American composer one performance each season⁷

Within two years, Korngold and Schoenberg's projects in the name of greater art were frustrated. Korngold was a celebrated and wealthy film composer, sojourning in Hollywood and ambivalently entertaining thoughts of rekindling his reputation in art music. Schoenberg was an impoverished academic, teaching composition at the University of California, Los Angeles and giving occasional evening lectures on musical aesthetics with an increasing sense of being embattled.

² Stein. 1964. #156.184.

³, the orchestra was notified the day after their final rehearsal that the cancellation was due to his extreme ill health. Stuckenschmidt, 1976.379.

⁴ Letter to Hutcheson

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⁶ New York Times Interview. Wednesday, October 31 1934.14:5 (O31,14:5)
The article printed immediately below this report that some \$US135 million relief fund has been distributed in 47 States across America.

⁷ John Erskine. *The Philharmonic-Symphony Society of New York. Its First 100 Years*. New York: MacMillan, 1943.

Two elements of their new environment are presented here.

America's Knowledge of European Heritage. Schoenberg's Letter to Ernest Hutcheson,⁸

In 1934, Carl Engel, acting on Schoenberg's behalf, sent out some 55 letters to various academic institutes throughout North East America, but inexplicably, received not one positive response which met his minimum requirement of \$US6000. After his year with Malkin, Schoenberg knew on one level that the climate of New York and New England, traditionally predisposed to high European culture quite simply and literally threatened his health. Although Schoenberg recognized the limitations imposed upon his preferred artistic environment, he rallied against their consequences. In the process of accepting less favourable career options, Schoenberg revealed his priorities.

After negotiating over the year, Schoenberg wrote to Ernest Hutcheson in March 1935,⁹ proposing, and, prompted by a pre-emptive newspaper report¹⁰ without obvious expectations of rejection, a fair recognition of his reputation.

dass ich nur in den Monaten wahrscheinlich guten Wetters komme, etwa: September, Oktober bis Mitte Dezember und April, Mai eventuell bis Mitte Juni.

Das könnten vier bis fünf Monate sein und wenn die Schüler in der Zwischenzeit **beschäftigt** werden müssten, so würde ich einen **zweckdienlichen** Vorschlag machen.

that I come only during the months of potentially good weather, about September, October to mid December and April May and possibly until mid June.

That gives between four and five months and if the students should be **occupy themselves** in the meantime I could **appropriately** fulfil the contract.

Schoenberg presumed, that, as in Berlin, his requirements might have priority over that of the school and of his students. While American academic staff were seen to foster a democratic stance with their students, and recognised the need to be on campus during term time, Schoenberg anticipated his right to be remote. Covetous of his influence, composition students would be self motivated during the academic year and prepared to sacrifice their summer break and the School would rearrange its scheduled year. However, Schoenberg's ultimate requirement was perhaps the hardest to fulfil.

Ich war zwar auch in Europa damit fast durchaus sehr unzufrieden, fand

⁸ Stein's Selected Letter no 165;

Full text available at

http://www.schoenberg.at/database/search_show_letter.php?ID_Number=2501

⁹[accessed July 2003.] my translation.

¹⁰ New York Times, 1935 February 14.23:7. "Arnold Schoenberg to join Faculty of Graduate Dept of Juilliard School of Music".

aber meistens doch, dass wenigstens eine gewisse, ziemlich ausgebreitete Kenntnis der Meisterwerke zu finden war. Dieser unentbehrliche Unterrichtsbehelf scheint mir hier grösstenteils nicht vorhanden zu sein.

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Although even in Europe I was almost unfailingly very dissatisfied, I did usually find that there was at least a certain fairly extensive knowledge of the works of the masters. This indispensable basis for teaching appears to be in the main lacking here.

As he refused to teach his system, without deference to past masters, American students would come to him with a firm background in European traditions comparable to what in hind-sight, he expected from his Berlin master class. To achieve this, Schoenberg advised Hutcheson that a cultural investment,

a rudimentary little collection of something like 200 volumes that all but the very poorest had in Austria

costing approximately \$US2,000¹², would provide students with the prerequisites demanded by the graduate level at which he proposed to start teaching. German culture persisted as universal exemplar to the extent that European and American musicologists who aspired to meritocracy were effectively deaf to most other musics. Schoenberg and the Juilliard, equally protective of their prestigious status on the East Coast, held the keys to true art and to future musical development. Schoenberg's "Wirkungskreis" ("sphere of activity") would be as a mentor to whom the "brightest and best" students would turn with their "composition problems". Imperialistic self-belief of this order, implicitly understood by the Juilliard, Hutcheson and Schoenberg, and possibly a majority of their aspiring students, obviated any knowledge or even interest in a new breed of American "art music" emanating from an amalgam of Southern and Western harmonies.

Schoenberg's unrelenting frustration in his Germanic perspective reflected upon his ability to steer the next generation of composers in what he considered to be the proper direction, rather than his or their American teachers' abilities to work within their cultural context or with shaping new creative independence. It also indicates the level of adaptation maintaining a penultimate role could tolerate.

However, given that his desire to live overcame his desire to be a creative force for good on the East Coast, Schoenberg settled bitterly for the compromising employment environment of USC and UCLA in the idealistically healthy West Coast climate. The combined income from these posts¹³ supplemented with some private tutoring, evening lectures,

¹¹ http://www.schoenberg.at/database/search_show_letter.php?ID_Number=2501 [accessed July 2003] Erwin Stein's translation.

¹² In the days when a private music teacher put her school up for sale for \$US3,000, and \$US6,000 was not enough to survive on New York.

¹³ Juilliard's initial offer of \$3000 was for one year's contract. They subsequently offered \$5000 for only half a year of teaching. Schoenberg estimates that his combined wage from USC and UCLA matched that of Berlin is perhaps an

and some commissions of tonal works met his modest familial needs.

His early assessment of student's acculturation was perhaps even less favourable. He wrote to Berg in November 1934.

Los Angeles is a *Tabula rasa* where my music is concerned (Hollywood is something of a Floridsdorf or Mödling of Los Angeles [a worker's district]) with the distinction that those wonderful films are produced there, whose extremely curious plots and wonderful sounds – as everyone knows – I love so well.¹⁴

And

Eggs are even cheaper here than opinions on art.¹⁵

However, the fee he could extract from his Los Angeles' private pupils

Only 1/3 to 2/5 of my New York price¹⁶

even his proudly promoted teaching skills which he were in less demand. He persisted, however with heightened sense of importance and surety in the greater quality of German thinking.

the material I get has had such an inadequate grounding that my work is as much a waste of time as if Einstein were having to teach mathematics at a secondary school.¹⁷

America's Knowledge of European heritage

Korngold's need to keep faith with the "old" masters

Korngold, on the other hand, while still in Vienna found the lack of what he considered basic knowledge among his tertiary students, sufficiently frustrating to make him perfunctorily withdraw from that career path. However, it is clear from his music that Korngold kept faith with the ways of the "old masters" of the Romantic Viennese tradition. In an interview with a title to catch the readers' interest,

"Composing for the Pictures by the Noted Austrian Master, Erich Korngold"

secured by Verna Arvey in late 1936, Korngold believed that the "old masters" would similarly provide the best, most reliable foundation for aspiring American film composers. Arvey wrote for the eclectic *Etude Music Magazine*,¹⁸ established in Pennsylvania at the turn of the century

indication of its relative spending power and the level at which he felt comfortable. He never believed that his talents was sufficiently, and had great difficulty putting a realistic price upon his endeavours. Before retirement Schoenberg received ????????? from UCLA.

¹⁴ *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence. Selected Letters*. Edited by Juliane Brand, Christopher Hailey and Donald Harris. New York: W.W. Norton, ??? 455. Gertrud would later disclose to a friend that they had not once gone to the movies in Los Angeles.

¹⁵ *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence. Selected Letters*. Edited by Juliane Brand, Christopher Hailey and Donald Harris. New York: W.W. Norton, ??? 456.

¹⁶ In New York Schoenberg could command \$US30.00 per session.

¹⁷ Stuckenschmidt, 1977. 414. Schoenberg in a letter to Webern 1934.

¹⁸ ". An Interview in *The Etude Music Magazine*. January, 1937.

expressly to cultivate musical Americans. By 1937, when the article was published, *Etude* boasted national circulation as a publishing platform supplying a burgeoning market for new amateur American composition. Although an East Coast production, it regularly featured popular American musicians and songwriters, Hollywood musical film stars, visits and tours by world-renowned European and American experts, New York art music concerts. It carried a central pull out section of new neoclassic music and promotional advertisements for schools and conservatories, instrument sales from grand pianos to piano accordions. Guides for private music teachers extolled the simple pleasures of music-making with the ethos that hard work promised the greatest rewards.

When Korngold spoke with Verna Avery in the comfort of his Burbank office, his perceptions of “modern” influences upon the “young composer” were less accommodating.

“For the young composer there are now many dangers. The young composer should first study the old masters – not to copy them, you understand, but for the background. Perhaps he should even go to Vienna for this. Then he should discover his own musical personality. He should not be disappointed, nor should he lose his energy and his ideals when he discovers how few opportunities there are now for sincere art. He must keep going; someday recognition and understanding will come. But the young composer should not write fox trots. He should close his eyes to the films and his ears to the radio. He should simply write serious music, as the masters did: a real, a difficult question today, for writing entertainment music is not composing. Men like Mahler, Bach and Bruch were giants. Lehar is gifted, but he has nothing to do with music, in that sense. And those films! They are dangerous too, for they need so many musicians! They hire every composer they can find, with the result that many of them lose their best inspirations in pictures that will be scrapped tomorrow”.

Korngold’s disjointed thinking highlights the difficulty he experienced in bringing his dilemma into the light of day.

On one hand the road to composing sincere music is paved with moral imperatives. Speaking for himself, Korngold belabours his distinction between low and high music. Writing in an environment that prospers only through mass production, degenerates the creative mind. Composing is a single-minded Romantic master craft possible only in complete isolation from modern influences, infiltrating the mass media airways. While association with mass media tainted serious intent, it was not true here that “serious” could inspire or purify the jaded musical palette.

In successive heated arguments with his father, Julius, and perhaps using his own re-orchestrations of classic operettas and operas for film as supportive evidence, Korngold claimed otherwise. His own brand of serious sincerity and craftsmanship served the greater good, enriching lesser works to, as some twentieth century critics and musicologists concurred, acculturate the masses to high art subliminally.

However for this ennobling process to succeed, individuality and sincerity “should” first be secured via a “background” in the European

“old masters”. While such educational ethos was available in Los Angeles with Arnold Schoenberg at UCLA, for example, Korngold advocates that an ideal course of study, should replicate his own, overseas, in Vienna. In apparent sympathy with Schoenberg’s perspective, Korngold dwells upon “sincere art’s” survival skills. Creative individuality, stamina and determination are essential to combat disillusionment from the inevitable lack of public appreciation. Korngold compares the towering legacy Mahler, Bach and Bruch, which overshadows Lehár’s “gift” for another sort of “music”. Curiously, Korngold avoids mentioning Puccini and R. Strauss, his most widely recognised influences. Using the New York Philharmonic programme as a bench-mark of conservative taste, Bach and R. Strauss feature regularly but Mahler less so in the 1930s. Bruch featured once in the 1920s. Unsurprisingly, neither Puccini nor Lehár appear in the Philharmonic programme to 1938. However, it seems unlikely that Lehár’s isolation here is for reasons of genre or craftsmanship. The reputation which took Korngold to Hollywood was founded not so much on *Die tote Stadt* but on the sort of public attention he received from his decade¹⁹ of “ lovingly mined and re-orchestrated”²⁰ operettas by J. Strauss (II), Leo Fall and Jacques Offenbach. Lehár could boast similar heritage and influences to Korngold in Puccini, J. Strauss, R. Strauss and Debussy. Korngold’s distaste for Lehár’s “music” could have arisen from Hitler’s unfortunate selection of *Die lustige Witwe* as his favourite operetta. *The Merry Widow* however remained popular in America and was most recently filmed in 1934.²¹ It does seem likely, that the fate of Lehár’s popularity was prophetic of Korngold’s fears for his own. Lehár’s melodies were, like Korngold’s, credited earlier as Straussian and “Puccini-esque”, were by 1937, stigmatised as “stereotypically melodious”, “pretentious” and sentimental²²

Korngold’s two year old career with Warner Bros. has been a mixed blessing. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* represented a stimulating departure into new convivial artistic and technical challenges and rewarded him creatively and financially. His next venture, a part score for *Rose at the Rancho* bit the dust; Korngold’s music for the successful film *Captain Blood* was all but drowned out the action noises; his arrangement of Verdi’s *Il Trovatore* and the mini opera “Romeo and Juliet” in *Give Us This Night* were critically credited but the film was pretentious²³ and a box office failure. The Oscar for his original score for the long and weak film, *Anthony Adverse*, was, according to Academy policy, presented to the musical director Leo Forbstein, rather Korngold, the composer. This keenly felt insult to Korngold’s integrity was followed by the mediocrity

¹⁹ As lucrative collaboration with Max Reinhardt 1923-33, and again in the 1940s

²⁰ Carroll, 1997.214.

²¹ Carroll, 1997.218.

²² Andrew Lamb. “Lehár, Franz” in *The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Ed. Stanley Sadie. London: MacMillan, 2000. 14.492-3.

²³ Joseph O’Sullivan. “Current of Song Moves Song in *Give Us This Night*: Korngold Shows How Operetta Can Be Done. Says O’Sullivan” in *Motion Picture Herald*, March 14, 1936.18.

of *Hearts Divided*, and *The Green Pastures*. By the end of 1937, Korngold's worst fears were borne out when neither projects *Another Dawn* and *The Prince and the Pauper* rated highly.

On one hand, during the Great Depression, when as Schoenberg wrote to Kolisch in 1934 that "all the publishers [of music] are bankrupt"²⁴ and as late as in 1940 *Etude* magazine advertised for sponsors for a proposed benefit fund for some 1,000 unemployed East Coast musicians, film scores represented an attractive employment opportunity for many composers and musicians. Korngold, the "Composer for the Pictures" and his less esteemed émigré colleagues worked alongside American musicians and composers who were also there simply to find work. Hollywood also offered a sense of fellowship in music-making within a large and uniquely creative society. The Hollywood orchestra musicians gathered out of hours, gave formal and informal performances, and were recognised in Los Angeles musical community for their technical skill and their readiness to try contemporary works by composers more "serious" than themselves.²⁵

On the other hand, Korngold, the "Noted Viennese Master", was not alone in condemning musical ignorance prevalent among Hollywood's hegemony. It is generally accepted that directors during Hollywood's "Golden Age" attributed little recognition to music's role in film and paid little respect to composers' craft. Hans Eisler, in New York, had attacked the Hollywood's degradation of creative integrity. Industry, by definition, absorbed individuality, and as Korngold intimates, frustrated the best while denying appropriate artistic stimulation to the mediocre. Contractual regimes of such "rank and file" employees as George Antheil²⁶ Max Steiner, Franz Waxman, Miklós Rózsa and Korngold's orchestrator, Hugo Friedhofer, were sufficient to stymie artistic inspiration. Though there was some cause for this perception, it prejudiced the concert hall reputations of those like Miklós Rózsa, who were seen to have dual allegiances. The impasse between elitist and mass entertainment was perpetuated by composers such as Hans Eisler, Arnold Schoenberg and Stravinsky and by eminent and popular critics such as Keller, Calvocoressi, and Lambert.²⁷ Meanwhile, "E.S. Oliphant Chuckerbutty", a shy orchestral musician and writer of an article in London's *Musical Times* in 1910s²⁸ made public a truth perhaps uncomfortable for some, but which remained true for the larger part of the century. Greater financial rewards than those won by a concert hall conductor, were to be gained moonlighting in the cinema orchestral pit.

²⁴ Erwin Stein. *Arnold Schoenberg Letters*. Translated by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser. London: Faber & Faber, 1964. #159. 188.

²⁵ Oscar Levant, *A Smattering of Ignorance* Otto Friedrich *City of Nets*. Christolieb.52 years as a second chair bassoonist ????????????

²⁶ . **Antheil, George**, "Hollywood Composer" in *Atlantic Monthly*. Vol 165. No 2. February 1940. 160-7.

²⁷ Constant Lambert. *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline*. London: Penguin, 1934. Part Four: "The Mechanical Stimulus". 168-95.

²⁸ "E.S. Oliphant Chuckerbutty", ??????????????

Film music: people's views of it.
Schoenberg. S169

Biographies of Schoenberg refer to his American experience as one of being “**Homeless and Speechless**”²⁹ and **In the Wilderness**.³⁰ Cultural isolation was compensated for in part by solidarity among the Los Angeles' émigré society at the financial mercies of an indigenous elite who, at least from Schoenberg's perspective, lacked sufficient acculturation to approach his reputation. Unfortunately for Schoenberg, he needed the sort of money only available from that society, to free him from the “chore” of enlightening students and adults in the complexities of his aesthetic and writing tonal commissions for school orchestras, so that he devote his greater energies to the completion of his “important” projects, notably, *Moses und Aron*, and *Jakobsleiter*.³¹

In January 1936, Schoenberg concluded his letter to his patroness, Alma Werfel-Mahler, by reviving a perhaps perennial discussion.

Es würde mich interessieren zu hören, ob du noch so gut von Amerika denkst, wie früher. Ich habe den Vorzug nicht zu sehrenttäuscht zu sein, **wodurch ich es leichter ertrage[endure]**.³²

I would be interested to hear if you still think as well of America as you did earlier. I have the advantage to be not so very disappointed **so I have been able to make light of it.**

Claims to lowered expectations belie the cynicism and frustrations contributing to his following report of his sortie with Thalberg of MGM.

Uns zeigen sich hier fortwährend goldene Berge, die sich schliesslich als saure Trauben herausstellen: wenigstens sind wir immer wieder genötigt, sie als solche anzusehn. Eine zeitlang sah es so aus, als ob ich an beiden Universitäten unterrichten sollte, was mir beiläufig meine Berliner Gage eingebracht hätte. Dann hätte ich beinahe eingewilligt, eine Musik zu einem Film zu schreiben, habe aber glücklicherweise \$50.000 verlangt, was, ebenfalls glücklicherweise, zu viel war, denn ich wäre darüber zugrunde gegangen; und nur, wenn ich es doch überlebt hätte, würden wir--bescheiden allerdings--immerhin eine Reihe von Jahren davon haben leben können, was bedeutet haben würde, dass ich endlich wenigstens meine angefangenen kompositorischen und theoretischen Werke hätte bei Lebzeiten vollenden können, wenn auch, nichts Neues mehr anfangen. Aber dafür hätte ich gerne mein Leben und sogar meinen Ruf geopfert, obwohl ich weiss, dass andere, die weniger streng auf den ihren gesehen haben als ich auf den meinen, die Gelegenheit mich verachten zu dürfen nicht ungenützt

²⁹ Stückenschmidt.

³⁰ MacDonald.

³¹ A book and other compositions were started during this same time frame.

³² Omitted Material in Stein's printing #S169

gelassen hätten.³³

Here we are constantly being offered the earth which then in the end brings forth sour grapes: at least we are ever and again under the necessity of so regarding them. For a time it looked as though I would be teaching at both universities,³⁴ which would have brought me in pretty much my Berlin salary. Then I almost agreed to write music for a film, but fortunately asked \$50,000, which likewise fortunately, was much too much, for it would have been the end of me; and the only thing is that if I had somehow survived it we should have been able to live on it – even modestly – for a number of years, which would have meant at last being able to finish in my lifetime at least those compositions and theoretical works that I have already begun, even if not beginning any more new things. And for that I should gladly have sacrificed my life and even my reputation, although I know that others, who have held their own in less strict regard than I mine, would not have failed to seize the chance of despising me for it³⁵

Schoenberg admitted to Berg that one of the highlights of living in Los Angeles was his proximity to Hollywood films, which he “admired and loved”. Stuckenschmidt, rising to defend such “naivety”, asserts that the close proximity brought Schoenberg “to despise” the products of “dream factories”. Thalberg, Stuckenschmidt continues, was “one of the most powerful tycoons in Hollywood,” and an industry magnate, who after listening to what represented Schoenberg’s popular success, *Verklärte Nacht* “would not [have] let such a famous man escape (...) so easily”³⁶. MGM and Warner Bros. were keen to acquire the universal prestige of European reputations.

While still in Berlin, Schoenberg had contemplated film as a creative outlet,³⁷ composing one short score perhaps in the hope that a director would find it interesting. In Los Angeles he skirted around a film collaboration with Charlotte Dieterle³⁸ and another with Else Lasker-Schüler, which interested him enough to begin a sketch³⁹. Perhaps the factor dominating his thinking was financially based.

While Schoenberg commanded higher wages than most, immigrant academics’ salaries were low in deference to the employment needs of their American peers.⁴⁰ Offers from the Juilliard School of between

³³ http://www.schoenberg.at/database/search_show_letter.php?ID_Number=2803

³⁴ Steins’ footnote. “For a short time Schoenberg taught at the University of South Carolina (USC); from 1936 to 1944 he was Professor of Music at the much larger University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)”.

³⁵ the translation is Stein’s.

³⁶ Stuckenschmidt, 1977.412.

³⁷ Po 34 “Accompaniment Music or a Film” (1929-30)

³⁸ It is not known if Schoenberg ever spoke to William Dieterle, film producer and Charlotte’s husband, about his proposal

³⁹ Stuckenschmidt, 1977.424.

⁴⁰ And with regard to the bargaining power of political refugees.

\$3,000 and \$5,000 for a one year contract were rejected, albeit not solely because they were insufficient to meet familial needs in New York.⁴¹ His UCLA income before retirement (1947) was \$US5,400 compared to Ernest Toch's salary of \$US1,500 as Chair at USC in 1943.⁴² However, compared to the \$US24,000 Korngold had secured for a year's work in the mid 1930s, and his income from *Die tote Stadt* and the operettas, which afforded him a small country estate, \$US50,000 might not have been "zu viel" for the sort of reputation Schoenberg aspired to maintain. Also, it should not be forgotten that Schoenberg's price was possibly also calculated for the sort of rejection he aspired to maintain. However, that Schoenberg's decision was not easy one, demonstrates that a "high-brow" reputation did have its price. A Faustian contract with MGM staked the material concerns of his home and hearth against expected rewards of immaterial objectives, his posterity in high art.

While his simple dictum in 1945

If it is art it is not for the masses.

And if it is for the masses it is not art.⁴³

excludes him from material reward, his immaterial "important" works remain incomplete statements.⁴⁴

Film music: people's views of it Korngold

"The public is against great art. It wants something cheaper. Film and radio suffice to entertain it, since opera and the symphony orchestra are not sources of joy to it

"A musical difference in Europe and America? I am sorry to say that such a thing no longer exists. The days when people felt that all the world's culture dwelt on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean have long since passed.

⁴¹ Letter EH –AS 1935.??????????????

⁴² Jezic, 1989.10.

⁴³ Stuckenschmidt, 1977.472.

⁴⁴ A quick summary of the commissioned and non-commissioned works begun after this letter suggests that some obstacle other than finances prevented the completion of the 'Great' works to seal his posterity as a composer beyond the fame won with *Verklärte Nacht*.

“Perhaps that is the difference between the music of today and that of yesterday. The modern composer writes his music for the masses of people, not wealthy patrons. Beethoven, on the other hand, wrote his quartets for approximately four hundred people, most of whom were aristocrats. Today, hundreds of thousands of people hear the quartets. Beethoven had no conception of what would happen when his music was played over the radio. Doubtless, his surprise would be great. Could he have foreseen such an event, perhaps he would have written differently, perhaps not. Who can tell? However it is for the hundreds of thousands of listeners that the modern composer writes. That is why the results of his efforts are different. But, when one analyses things, art itself has not changed in a hundred years. It is the mode of expression that has changed.

When Avrey perhaps naively asked, Korngold in 1936, to consider the differences between America and Europe, his spontaneously reaction to what is still a huge question, is to defend his heritage.

Differences between the two continents, old securities and new opportunities have, however, caused Korngold considerable loss of equinamity. On one hand, in Hollywood, his initial Viennese reputation, as the new Mozart, remained intact. As a “Noted Austrian Master” he represented a tradition and lineage which was showing signs of rejecting him. On the other hand as a Hollywood “Composer for the Pictures” perpetuating the nineteenth-century program idiom he was brought up to believe the penultimate musical expression, he has rejected his reputation and aspirations in “modern” opera. He somewhat bleakly hopes the future of his career is still of his own making, yet recent opportunities have not equalled the success of *Die tote Stadt*. His tonally estranged philosophical opera, *Das Wunder Der Heliane*, and the soaring tonal hope of *Sursum Corda* have fallen on all but deaf ears. Completion of his fifth opera *Katrin* has been stalled by political and logistical difficulties. Successes subsequent to *Die tote Stadt* have been with re-arrangements of great operettas by Johann Strauss and Offenbach and in Hollywood, where by 1936 he lost his

best inspirations in pictures that will be scrapped tomorrow. Korngold’s initial excitement in new processes and their creative potential for *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, is here frustrated by the sense of personal and artistic isolation. He struggles ambiguously to maintain his faith in his high European heritage, while, adopting an American perspective, his experience has led him to believe, there is also culture, albeit of another order, on this side of the Atlantic.

California hosted as many European émigrés as New York and was fast becoming another sort of cultural melting pot. Value hierarchies of European culture were eroded on the West Coast more in the first thirty years of the Twentieth Century than in the years after the Railway Tracks cut through the Great Divide. More generally speaking, as a result of pressure from its indigenous composers, the New World was beginning to attribute value to its own creativity. But, while the artistic ambience of pre World War Two Hollywood and Vienna as centres of entertainment kitsch and avantgarde experiment might not have been dissimilar, they

still lay at the other extreme to German and Northern East Coast American predilection for high rationality and introspection. Hollywood films and Viennese operetta had become object lessons for those needing to make evaluative judgements.

At a personal level, Korngold's expatriated cultural identity had at once found new footing but was subsequently threatened by the flexibility needed to interpret and maybe use the music of different ethnicities⁴⁵ and to meet the acoustic requirements of imperfect technological advances.

Contemporary opinion perhaps expressed here, that radio performances represented a less than perfect musical experience, might have been a realistic consideration of the acoustic distortions abundant in the new technology. Any acoustic faith between the recording and the original could be lost in the transmission. Therefore, adapting composition technique might have been a consideration of pragmatics rather than a cry for an altered perspective on art. Given that Korngold does not appear to have changed his orchestrations to suit technology he would appear to conclude that Beethoven would have stuck to his guns.

In Beethoven's day, music of value was recognised by the privileged setting in which it was heard and as a consequence the taste of the privileged determined what was valuable in art. In 1930 Los Angeles, music synonymous elsewhere with privilege, circulates imperfectly and freely on the air-waves, accompanying daily life and movies. Art music is not afforded any special deference and worse possibly not even listened to. Though it is tempting for Korngold to acquiesce to the generally held view among music's elite that the mass media trivialises real art, he could be seen to be reaping material benefit from that lack of respect. Perhaps, he rationalises, the autonomy in truly "great" music ensures that it will rise above its present station. After all, Beethoven's music remains Beethoven's music no matter how and where it is heard.

The only distinction then, between the modern and the traditional master is that the former has the practical option to "write" for the masses or to "compose" for the elite. Pragmatic considerations make "writing" down a viable option. Art distinguishes itself by surviving on its own merits through the centuries, whereas, as far as Korngold can see, and with endorsement from contemporary experience, mass culture does not possess the same enduring properties. If the defining integrity within the processes and thus the creativity endures the transposition imposed by presentation media, then great art will continue to survive.

However pragmatic problems and artistic prejudice remained a fact of life. Korngold's extraordinary reputation in Hollywood did not preclude mediocre offers while Schoenberg, perhaps knowing better than to entertain any compromise remained culturally embittered, creatively frustrated and financially straitened.

⁴⁵ For example, Korngold announced that he need not adapt his music to the Mexican style for *Juarez* for he had investigated their style and found, to his delight, that they used a distinctly Viennese idiom. (!)

3. Film music: artistic control

Schoenberg. Film into music: S172:-:to Charlotte Dieterle.30 July, 1936.

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I hoped to be of use to you in the matter of the Beethoven film: in so far as my capacities and circumstances permit. For I'm afraid: in this case I am somewhat hampered.

My position is musical life would compel me to maintain a certain attitude even if I did not myself feel that way. Nobody could help understanding if I were, say to form a poetic version of Beethoven's life out of my own imagination and my own feelings about him, and make a film of it. For the conception would from the very beginning be a musical one, and what I would then do with Beethoven's music would not be a mere use of it but a 'fantasy', a symphonic-dramatic fantasy that would necessarily have the same artistic justification as if I were to write variations on a theme of Beethoven's. But if I were to 'serve' by adapting Beethoven's music to a 'libretto', no matter how good (and I do not doubt that yours is good), written by someone else, it would not be in keeping with what people are entitled to demand of me, namely that I should create *out of my own being*. (Schoenberg's italics).

(...)

I would gladly be prepared to advise (...) on problems of style and composition, in which I, for my part, may doubtless be considered a specialist.

Schoenberg's rejection of Charlotte's proposal is based on his need to preserve his "man-alone" reputation. He serves a fragile relationship between the rigid demands of his followers and his patrons, which control his endeavours, and the other projects he considers worthy of his attention. The inference is that serving Charlotte's project is beneath his proper expectations of his role in American culture. Those more respectful of his reputation and aware of his usual sphere of activity than Charlotte, might have known better than to approach him. Someone like his arch antagonist, Klemperer, would serve the purpose admirably. Other than indulging in his own flights of fancy, Schoenberg does not give her approach any consideration here.

Schoenberg's spontaneous reaction re-establishes a European perspective that music remains the supreme force in any collaborative venture. However, where Korngold spoke in general terms, Schoenberg is characteristically iconoclastic. Schoenberg's reputation as a leader is threatened by Charlotte's assumption that any other artist has equal powers, or even that he could communicate "his being" to a colleague of the order she proposes. Charlotte's "libretto" is brushed aside in favour of his own extemporizations with an arrogance he hoped his audience might realise was justifiable.

Schoenberg's brand of integrity demands a sincere, autonomous and uniquely personal expression, his audience can look up to. If his

⁴⁶ Erwin Stein. *Arnold Schoenberg Letters*. Selected and Edited. Translated by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser. London: Faber and Faber, 1964. No. 172. 198-9.

efforts coalesced with another's, his audience would be justified in losing faith with him. Schoenberg's "poetic version", perhaps akin to *Die Jakobsleiter* or *Erwartung*, would perhaps be designed to serve Schoenberg rather than Beethoven. However attractive recreating himself through the grand master's name might have become, given that film necessarily denies his conditions for artistic integrity, serving the industry is unconscionable. It is also clear that his reputation within his preferred "sphere of activity" is in fragile abeyance among an audience beyond his control.

On the other hand, **Korngold**, in 1940 perhaps forgetting his dejection of 1936, reminisces excitedly to an anonymous interviewer from the magazine *Music and Dance in California* on the artistic control he exerted during the creation of his first Hollywood enterprise, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Korngold's reputation, successful built up over twenty years of a collaborative but integral role was being rewarded by a powerful commissioning body. The project had been his and Reinhardt's initiative. Accordingly, in 1934, the "Noted Viennese Master," was served with the licence, conditions and staff to realise his creative inspirations. Music, his speciality, afforded him an advisory role in final processes. This initial experience succumbed under contract to a limited range of projects from which to "pick and choose". His role, though still commendable and challenging, began with an edited film, where his idiomatic devices of suite, theme and variation might enliven the cold visual image, employing methods developed from opera. However without the right to adjust plot development as he had done with his opera libretti, where the music was the primary force, in film his music served to embellish and ennoble the action and therefore stood or fell on the abilities of others beyond Korngold's control.

1. How my work is received.
 - a. **S**: suppressing my music.
 - i. Popularity endangers supremacy, purity,
 - ii. Film threatens music's value.
 - b. **K**: popularity essential and desirable.
 - i. Film parallel development with art.
 - ii. yet feels ambivalent.

According to editorial policy, and without perceived complication, Verna Arvey's interview is titled "Erich Korngold. Composing for the Pictures by the Noted Austrian Master" recognises Korngold's European and American reputations, but journalist leads with the Korngold's dichotomy. He wrestles with his cultural estrangement and his depersonalised ambivalence towards his new audience and his preferred self-perception.

"Art is lonely today," declares Erich Wolfgang Korngold, the Viennese composer who was once termed the most amazing musical prodigy of the twentieth century. "The public is against great art. It wants something cheaper. Film and radio suffice to entertain it, since opera and the

symphony orchestra are not sources of joy to it". Social and consumer importance given to the availability of easy and perhaps flippant entertainment threatens the survival of art in modern America. In this atmosphere, and assuming that the "young composer" would or should ascribe to a dwindling market, the demands upon artistic stamina and the creative "difficulties" which define Korngold's "art",

- 5 Differences in who I'm writing for:
- a. S. small elite market
 - b. K mass audience

Students' Knowledge of European heritage.

S165

Letter to Ernest Hutcheson 28 March 1935, in response to the latter's invitation to join the staff at the Juilliard School of Music (162. 3. October, 1934.)⁴⁷

Regarding my sphere of activity, perhaps I may let my general and my specifically American experience speak. It is concerned first and foremost with the student's grounding. Although even in Europe I was almost unfailingly very dissatisfied, I did usually find that there was at least a certain fairly extensive knowledge of the works of the masters. This indispensable basis for teaching appears to be in the main lacking here. I attribute this to two circumstances: above all to the high price of printed music, which for most students makes it impossible to own the rudimentary little collection of something like 200 volumes that all but the very poorest had in Austria; and secondly to the excessively high price of tickets for concerts and opera, and the social style in which they are got up. It is not in my power to do anything about this (but a benefit fund might effect something)

K need to study the "old" masters

Film music: people's views of it.

c. S169

Letter to Alma Mahler-Werfel, 23 January 1936.

Dear lady, dear Friend,

Many thanks for your letter and the cutting about our poor friend⁴⁸ Almost the only information about him I have had so far has been

⁴⁷ *Arnold Schoenberg Letters*. Selected and edited by Erwin Stein, translated from the original German by Eithne Wilkins and Ernest Kaiser. London: Faber & Faber, 1958.

⁴⁸ Alban Berg, who had died of blood poisoning, the consequence of an abscess on

from
newspapers. Everyone in Vienna writes in extreme horror, but without
giving details. And I so much want to know something.
(...)

Here we are constantly being offered the earth, which then in the
end brings forth sour grapes: at least we are ever and again under the
necessity of so regarding them. For a time it looked as though I would be
teaching at both universities⁴⁹ which would have brought me in pretty
much my Berlin salary. Then I almost agreed to write music for a film,
but fortunately asked \$50,000, which likewise fortunately, was much too
much, for it would have been the end of me; and the only thing is that if I
had somehow survived it we should have been able to live on it – even if
modestly – for a number of years, which would have meant at last being
able to finish in my lifetime at least those compositions and theoretical
works that I have already begun, even if not beginning any more new
things. And for that I should gladly have sacrificed my life and even my
reputation, although I know that others, who have held their own in less
strict regard than I mine, would not have failed to seize the chance of
despising me for it.

d. K popular

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⁴⁹ For a short time Schoenberg taught at the University of South Carolina (USC):
from 1936 to 1944 he was Professor of Music at the much larger University of
California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

52 years as a second chair bassoonist

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