



NAXOS



KORNGOLD
STRING QUARTETS NOS. 1-3



TIPPETT
QUARTET

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897–1957)

String Quartets Nos. 1–3

Together with Mozart, Mendelssohn, Busoni and Enescu, Erich Wolfgang Korngold stands among the most important composer prodigies. Born in Brünn (now Brno) on 29 May 1897, as second son of the music critic Julius Korngold, he impressed Mahler with his music when aged only nine, and he went on to consolidate this with a score for the ballet-pantomime *Schneemann*, given its premiere at the Vienna Court Opera in 1910. A sequence of orchestral, chamber and operatic works followed, culminating with the dual premiere, in Hamburg and Cologne, of his opera *Die tote Stadt*, which brought him international fame when only 23. The success of his subsequent opera *Das Wunder der Heliane* [Naxos 8.660410-12] was blighted, however, by the worsening political situation, while his last opera *Die Kathrin* was not even performed in Vienna on account of the *Anschluss*, with the annexation of Austria by Germany.

Originally invited by the director Max Reinhardt, Korngold had by now settled in Hollywood where a series of lavish film scores over the next decade – such as *Captain Blood* (1935), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) and *Kings Row* (1941) – brought his music to an audience of millions. After the Second World War, he returned to Europe and to the concert hall, but his effulgent late-Romantic style found relatively little favour in the cultural austerity of post-war Vienna while his death, in Los Angeles on 29 November 1957, attracted only passing attention. Recent decades, however, have seen a renewed interest in the extent of Korngold's output, with a host of performances and recordings to mark his centenary in 1997, then the fiftieth anniversary of his death in 2007 – a resurgence that continues to the present day.

Korngold wrote a select if significant body of chamber music (with and without piano) over some 35 years. Completed in his thirteenth year, the *Piano Trio* [Naxos 8.574008] was published as his *Op. 1* and demonstrates a resourceful amalgam of Brahmsian formal solidity with Straussian expressive warmth. This was further developed by the elaborate *Violin Sonata* [Marco Polo 8.223385] then brought to a culmination in the *String Sextet* [Naxos 8.574008], with its suffused melodic and harmonic richness. Following the First World War, such richness was harnessed to a greater tonal astringency – as is evident in the *Piano Quintet* [Naxos 8.574019], with its intensive motivic interplay between movements. Composition of this piece overlapped with that of the *First String Quartet*, completed in 1923 and dedicated to the Rosé Quartet, which gave the first hearing in Vienna on 8 January the next year. It was soon taken up by the newly formed Kolisch Quartet, whose account at the Venice ISCM (Incorporated Society of Contemporary Music) Festival during 1925 reinforced Korngold's standing as a major contemporary figure.

The opening *Allegro molto* launches right in with an impetuous theme presented as intensive four-way dialogue, subsiding into a suave and more relaxed second theme heard in especially enticing harmonies. The tension duly increases – going into a brief yet forceful development centred on the first theme, which is then largely absent from the reprise whereas its successor is expanded accordingly prior to a tersely decisive coda. Next comes an *Adagio* whose 'quasi Fantasia' marking indicates its relatively intuitive evolution from a restless initial idea toward one of rapt eloquence. Both these themes are subsequently elaborated with increasingly rich harmony, the second of them building to an impulsive climax, before winding down towards a serene close. The ensuing *Intermezzo* commences with a capering theme whose distinctive rhythmic profile also underpins a contrasting lyrical idea. This increasingly takes hold as the movement progresses, with the initial idea returning to have the last word. The *Finale* begins with an equable theme, whose long-breathed phrasing contributes to the relatively discursive character of this movement, with the humorously martial second theme providing requisite contrast. The central development quickly subsides to a questioning pause, its bittersweet harmonies audible over much of what is a modified reprise then coming to the fore at the start of a lengthy coda, which draws on elements of both themes on its way to an affirmative close.

A whole decade passed before Korngold penned its successor. During that period, his main project within the chamber medium was the *Suite* for two violins, cello and piano left hand [Naxos 8.574019], written, as was the earlier *Piano Concerto*, for the pianist Paul Wittgenstein. He also undertook the re-orchestration of numerous operettas – primarily by Johann Strauss II, but also Leo Fall and Jacques Offenbach – which had a demonstrable effect on his creative thinking, as is evident in the *Second String Quartet*, written over the summer of 1933 and premiered, also by the Rosé Quartet, in Vienna the following 16 March. Its publication in America instead of Germany was a result of the Nazi Party taking power the previous year, but little of this is reflected in the music's relative harmonic clarity or its melodic directness.

The initial *Allegro* begins with a vivacious theme whose rhythmic impetus is equally evident in the subsidiary motif, before the development largely subjects this opening idea to a brief yet methodical elaboration. There follows a modified reprise with slightly more emphasis on this latter idea, alighting on a questioning phrase from which the coda unfolds in unaffected repose. The ensuing *Intermezzo* features a playful main theme that draws all four instruments into animated dialogue, impetus increasing for what is an even more capricious trio, before returning to its earlier motion for an abbreviated reprise of the opening section. There follows a *Larghetto* whose ghostly opening gestures persist through the easeful melody initially heard on lower strings. These elements in tandem build toward an intense and not a little anguished climax, then the music continues its rapt if not untroubled course to a tranquil close. Marked 'Waltz', the *Finale* provides immediate contrast with its vigorous main theme, soon offset by the smoother expressive contours of its successor. Both themes are duly combined in spirited elaboration, before the initial vigour is resumed in a coda that brings about an energetic close.

Residing on the West Coast of America from 1935, Korngold focussed almost exclusively on music for films – writing some 15 scores in this period. Only at the end of the Second World War did he return to abstract composition, completing a *Violin Concerto* [Naxos 8.553579], which he had previously drafted in the late 1930s, besides writing his *Third String Quartet*, which was dedicated to the conductor Bruno Walter and premiered by the Roth Quartet in Los Angeles in 1946. It is a sign of his eclipse that its European premiere in Vienna went almost unnoticed six years later.

Appreciably more relaxed than that in either of its predecessors, the initial *Allegro moderato* starts with a questioning theme that finds pertinent contrast in its lyrical successor. It comes to rest on a gently modal phrase, whereon the development casts the initial theme in altogether more forceful terms – the accrued impetus continuing through a subtly modified reprise then into a calm if resigned coda. The ensuing *Scherzo* evinces a strutting motion and appealingly astringent humour, both pointedly offset by the trio with its soulful melody and its beguiling harmonies. This proves short-lived, as the initial idea soon resumes its lively course toward a tonally ambiguous close. The *Sostenuto* that follows centres on a melody marked 'Like a Folk Tune', with its unexpected if enticing mixture of the archaic and the modern, notably a certain spectral quality which, growing more impassioned as the movement reaches its apex, speaks of past uncertainties not entirely quelled even as the music heads towards its subdued close shot through with tangible regret. It only remains for the *Finale* to restore a measure of optimism, the forceful opening gesture rapidly heading into a rhythmically clear-cut theme whose assertiveness is maintained during its successor's more genial demeanour. There is a no-nonsense development, centred largely on the first theme, then a modified reprise which briefly touches on the previous movement's equivocation, before the accumulated impetus carries this work through to the most joyful conclusion found in any of these three quartets.

Richard Whitehouse

Tippett Quartet

John Mills, Violin I • Jeremy Isaac, Violin II • Lydia Lowndes-Northcott, Viola • Bozidar Vukotic, Cello



Photo: School Farm Studios

The Tippett Quartet have performed and broadcast throughout the UK, Europe, Canada and Mexico, and their broad and diverse repertoire highlights the ensemble's unique versatility. They have an impressive catalogue of recordings and have given numerous world and UK premieres. They released a recording of the Penderecki *Quartets* (Naxos 8.574288) which was described as 'life-enhancing' by *The Times*, and they were awarded *Gramophone* magazine's Recording of the Month for their recording of Górecki's *String Quartet No. 3* (Naxos 8.574110). They have collaborated with composer/soundscape artist Matthew Herbert on a reimagining of Beethoven's *Op. 135* and have performed with the Royal Ballet. In 2011 the quartet celebrated the anniversary of the iconic film composer Bernard Herrmann with a series of concerts and radio broadcasts, and can be heard as featured artists on the films *Knives Out* and *Glass Onion*. They are delighted to be celebrating their 25th Anniversary with the release of the complete Korngold *Quartets* for Naxos recorded at School Farm Studios.

www.tippettquartet.co.uk

Erich Wolfgang Korngold wrote a significant body of chamber music (the *Piano Trio* and *String Sextet* are on Naxos 8.574008). His three *String Quartets* reflect differing periods of composition. The *First* marries impetuosity with enticing harmonies and rapt eloquence. The *Second*, which dates from 1933, is notable for its clarity, rhythmic impetus and melodic directness. The post-war *Third* is more relaxed, unexpectedly juxtaposing the archaic and modern with a joyful conclusion.

Erich Wolfgang
KORNGOLD
(1897–1957)

String Quartet No. 1 in A major, Op. 16 (1922–23) 31:04

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|---|---|------|
| 1 | I. Allegro molto | 7:28 |
| 2 | II. Adagio quasi Fantasia: Langsam, mit großem Ausdruck | 8:47 |
| 3 | III. Intermezzo: Ziemlich lebhaft, mit Grazie | 4:52 |
| 4 | IV. Finale: Allegretto amabile e comodo | 9:57 |

String Quartet No. 2 in E flat major, Op. 26 (1933) 22:03

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| 5 | I. Allegro | 5:12 |
| 6 | II. Intermezzo: Allegretto con moto – Molto più mosso | 3:33 |
| 7 | III. Larghetto: Lento – Con moto sentimento | 7:56 |
| 8 | IV. Waltz (Finale): Tempo di Valse – Meno mosso – Poco più mosso – Poco meno mosso | 5:22 |

String Quartet No. 3 in D major, Op. 34 (1945) 23:40

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| 9 | I. Allegro moderato – Tranquillo – Subito agitato – Tempo I – Poco meno | 6:16 |
| 10 | II. Scherzo: Allegro molto – Trio: L'istesso tempo – Meno mosso – Più mosso – Scherzo D.C. al Fine | 4:17 |
| 11 | III. Sostenuto: Like a Folk Tune – Poco più mosso – Appassionato – Molto meno. Dolce – Tempo I | 7:40 |
| 12 | IV. Finale: Allegro – Allegro con fuoco – Più mosso | 5:27 |

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John Mills, Violin I • Jeremy Isaac, Violin II
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