

Korngold and Schoenberg

and

The Neues Wiener Tagblatt Poll, Vienna, 1930.

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In the early years of the twentieth century Korngold and Schoenberg moved in the same Viennese music circles and captured attention from the same prominent people. Hanslick had named Schoenberg as the second Mozart in 1898. Before his death in 1904, when Korngold was 7 years old, Hanslick had had cause to reconsider that prophecy. Korngold was to be the second Mozart. Both Schoenberg and Korngold were admired by Mahler and taught by Zemlinsky. Where Schoenberg was unable to secure Richard Strauss's protection, Korngold succeeded, where Korngold might not to have approached Mahler for protection, Schoenberg did and was successful. Both had benefited from biographical monographs which promoted them as leaders of twentieth-century music¹.

Around 1930, Korngold was at the peak of his career in Vienna and Europe. His opera *Die tote Stadt* (1920), continued to be an enormous success throughout Europe, *Das Wunder der Heliane* (1927), though his first significant critical disappointment was a popular success. His arrangement of J Strauss' and Offenbach's operetta was making him headline news and a wealthy man. In 1930 Korngold was working with Bittner on J Strauss II's *Walzer Auf Wien* which opened in October at the Vienna Stadtheater, and the Austrian President awarded him the title of Professor *honoris causa*. At the same time Schoenberg was teaching at Berliner Hochschuler. *Von Heute auf Morgen* had opened in Frankfurt without being a public or a critical success, *Pelleas und Melisande* had been broadcast on the Berlin Radio, *Suite* op29 was performed in Paris, and *Gurrelieder* was performed in Leningrad. In 1930 Schoenberg's *Erwartung* closed after 4 performances and his *Die Glückliche Hand* closed after 3 performances. Given that these works had not been performed in Vienna, Schoenberg's public image there might have depended on his avant-garde notoriety.

¹ Egon Wellesz. *Schoenberg*, London, (Galliard, 1971), originally published by Dent in London, 1925. R.S. Hoffmann *Erich Wolfgang Korngold* Wien: Stephenson Moser, 1922.

In 1930, the widely read Vienna newspaper, *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, conducted a poll. The public were invited to cast their votes to establish the twelve most famous artists and the twelve most famous scientists among living Austrian citizens. Few countries would conduct such a poll, perhaps, but Austria's recent loss of political power following the end of the first world war placed even greater emphasis than before on her status as a centre of artistic and intellectual activity. In the issue of 15 August the results were published, described as

Austria's intellectual elite (...) created by the decision of the masses, winners by popular vote, while expert opinion from every relevant discipline has also confirmed the honours.²

Of some 230 nominated, several notable people were disqualified. Although "the greatest living operetta composer", Franz Léhar, and "the greatest living composer of dramatic and symphonic music", Richard Strauss, both worked in Vienna and received more nominations than anyone else, neither was an Austrian citizen.³ Though not specified in the initial conditions, performing artists were also excluded, perhaps because their work was not considered truly representative or sufficiently original to be officially acknowledged. The great theatre director, Max Reinhardt, although born in Vienna, was taken out of the list on the grounds that he was being reserved for another distinction.⁴

The final list of twelve artists, in order of significance, here with the composers highlighted, is as follows: ⁵

- 1st Schönherr, Dr Karl: playwright.
- 2nd Schnitzler, Dr Artur: playwright .
- 3rd Wildgans, Dr Anton: dramatist and poet, and twice director of Vienna Burgtheater – 1921-2 & 1930.
- 4th **Kienzl, Dr. Wilhelm**: dramatic composer and writer on music, and Wagner's biographer.

² "Der Elite des geistigen Oesterreich (...) geschöpft aus dem Empfinden der Masse, gefällt von der Volkstimme, aber es kann auch vor der Kritik der Sachverständigen auf jenem Gebiete, das hier in Frage kam, in Ehren bestehen" "Die berühmtesten Oesterreicher. Das Ergebnis unsres Preisausschreibens" *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*. 15 August 1930. Nr224. 4.

³ "Die zahlreichen Stimmen, die für den grössten lebenden Komponisten dramatischer und symphonischer Musik Richard Strauss, der in München, und die für den grössten lebenden Operettenkomponisten Franz Lehar, der in Romorn geboren ist". *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*. 15 August 1930. Nr224 (4.2)

⁴ "Max Reinhardt, der zwar in Oesterreich (Baden bei Wien) geboren (...) ist, wird wiederholt unter besonderem Hinweis auf seine schöpferische Regietätigkeit für das neue Ehrenzeichen vorgeschlagen". *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*. 15 August 1930. Nr224 (4.2)

⁵ Though females were included in the poll returns, the top twelve artists (and incidentally the top twelve scientists) were all male.

5th Hofman, Josef: architect in art and crafts movement.
 6th Hanak, Professor Anton: a sculptor who worked with Josef Hofman.
7th Korngold, Professor Erich Wolfgang
 8th Bahr, Hermann: dramatist, novelist critic.
 9th **Bittner, Julius**: composer of operas, choruses and songs.
 10th Ginskey, Karl Franz: poet.
 11th Holzmeister, Professor Dr. Klemens: architect who designed the Salzburg Festival Theatre, Government Buildings in Ankara, Turkey, and the Dollfuss Memorial in Vienna.
12th Schönberg, Professor Arnold Franz Walter.

Bearing in mind that Léhar, Strauss and Reinhardt were all excluded and would, it seems, have been placed as the top three, the results are worthy of some analysis. Playwrights and other writers ranked 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 8th and 10th. Architects and visual artists ranked 5th, 6th and 11th. Composers ranked 4th, 7th, 9th and 12th: this group included the oldest, Kienzl, then 73, and the youngest, Korngold, then 33. Schoenberg was 56, the median age.

Any great significance of the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* poll seems to have evaporated over time. Luzi Korngold remembered 1930 for Erich's brief professorial posting, the success of *Walzer aus Vienna* and his discussions with Max Reinhardt about *Schöne Helena*.⁶ There is no obvious mention of the poll in Duchen's 1996 biography of Korngold, nor in the Schoenberg archives⁷ or in Brand's⁸ or Stein's⁹ selections and collections of Schoenberg's letters. Perhaps the only mention of the poll in the Schoenberg literature is in Joan Smith's *Schoenberg and his Circle: a Viennese Portrait*, which is addressed below. Given Schoenberg's archival bent, the omission is interesting. It is probable that Schoenberg heard of the poll from his former Viennese pupils. Moldenhauer¹⁰ quotes Anton Webern's anger at Korngold's early performance successes, revealing that some professional jealousy existed from that quarter. Given Schoenberg's contemporary disdain for the Viennese audience's reaction to his music, news of his placing might not have been welcomed. The poll seems not to have been mentioned in R. Strauss' or Reinhardt's memoirs, both great admirers of Korngold's music.

⁶ Luzi Korngold. *Erich Wolfgang Korngold. Ein Lebensbild. Österreichischen Komponisten des 20. Jahrhunderts.* Vienna. Elizabeth Lafite. 1967. 53.

⁷ Schoenberg archives in Vienna. Personal e-mail between Eike Feß, archives librarian and the author, 26 Sept 2002.

⁸ Juliane Brand, Christopher Hailey & Donald Harris, Editors. *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence. Selected Letters.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1987.

⁹ *Arnold Schoenberg Letters.* Selected and Edited by Erwin Stein. Tr by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser. London: Faber & Faber, 1958.

¹⁰ Hans Moldenhauer. *Anton Webern – A Chronicle of his Life and Works* London: Gollanz, 1978. 140.

After the Second World War, however, the poll became the epitome of the hopes held for Korngold's success and of his mistreatment at the hands of music's connoisseurs. The first appearance in the literature of the poll's results appears in Erich's father's 1945 memoirs. Julius Korngold wrote:

A large widely-read newspaper "Neues Wiener Tagblatt" sent out a questionnaire to name the most important living artists creatively active, the two musicians selected by the poll as the most remarkable were Arnold Schoenberg and Erich Wolfgang Korngold.¹¹

Julius is well documented for his staunch belief in the natural orders of tonality and for his at times belligerent guardianship of his son. Julius' report of the poll is more than a little misleading. The qualification of Austrian citizenship is ignored and Kienzl and Bittner are omitted possibly courtesy of Julius' tightened criteria of qualification. Kienzl, having written no significant works since 1926, was possibly remembered for his national anthem *Deutschösterreich, du herrliches Land*¹². Bittner's last major work was composed in 1926, and his state honour, Kunstpreis der Stadt Wien, dated back to 1925. Bittner was also in his final illness¹³. So with a degree of free interpretation, the poll's official result, that Korngold and Schoenberg were two of the four greatest living Austrian-citizen composers, has become "the two most remarkable living musicians creatively active."

In 1945 the elderly Julius, Erich Korngold and Schoenberg were all living in the Hollywood area, and Schoenberg's reputation as "the great twentieth-century composer" was already in place. But Korngold's successes in film music had effectively written him out of the histories of music¹⁴. Julius Korngold's revision of the poll results places Erich on a par with Schoenberg, whom he either recognised as a competitor or as a leader in modern music. Apparently believing that promotion of this kind was necessary to restore Erich's reputation in high music, Julius appears to

¹¹ Julius Korngold. *Child Prodigy: Erich Wolfgang's Years of Childhood*. (Preliminary Printing from the Work of Memoirs "Postludes in Major and Minor"). New York: Willard, 1945. 79.

¹² Wilhelm Kienzl. Wikipedia. . "1920 komponierte er die Melodie zu einem von Dr. Karl Renner geschriebenen Gedicht *Deutschösterreich, du herrliches Land*, welches bis 1929 als Nationalhymne der Ersten Österreichischen Republik galt" http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_Kienzl (accessed 5 October, 2006)

¹³ Julius Bittner, 1874-1939 http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Bittner (accessed 5 October 2006)

¹⁴ Most of the more notable dictionaries of music and texts by recognised musicology writers believed that Korngold's talent diminished when he became a film music writer. Marian Poole *Placing Korngold: Erich Wolfgang Korngold's Place in the Twentieth Century and in the Great Tradition*. MA Thesis. University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, 2004. Ch 4 "Musicologists' Descriptions of Korngold's Music" Ch5 "Critics' Descriptions of Korngold's Music".

retract his stated objections to Schoenberg's music while elevating Schoenberg's actual returns in the poll. It is possible the parity served Julius' contemporary if superficial wish to sweep old enmities aside. It is also possible that he wished to impress Erich's American colleagues, some of who took compositions lessons from Schoenberg. Suppositions aside, after Julius started attending recording sessions, Korngold's "elevated" status seems to have become common knowledge in the studios. It is, therefore, Julius' interpretation of the poll which has become the definitive version. While not mentioned in every biographical reference, it appears in one form or another in influential and widely read sources.

Frederick Othman, writing for the *Hollywood Citizen News* in 1939, presents the information for apparently the first time in American literature, as part of studio gossip.

If you don't know, Korngold (...) [is] acknowledged generally as one of the world's greatest musicians.¹⁵

If this eulogy did not come from Julius, it certainly reveals the fertile ground in which Julius' interpretation could take root, as Thomas' qualified report of the poll in 1962 would confirm.

It was often said in Vienna that the two most remarkable composers in Europe were Arnold Schoenberg and Erich Wolfgang Korngold.¹⁶

However by 1980, Carroll in Korngold's Grove entry and with access to Julius' 1945 translation puts the wrong date on the poll and, not having found the original document, can only repeat Julius' version.

In 1928 the *Neue* (sic) *Wiener Tagblatt* conducted a poll whose returns named Korngold and Schoenberg as the two greatest living composers.¹⁷

Carroll does not include the poll in his 1980 review of *Violanta*, where he does make use of laudatory quotes from Schoenberg and Berg.¹⁸ Joan Allen Smith, however, in the biographical notes on composers mentioned in her 1986 book on Schoenberg's Viennese circle, repeats Carroll's 1980 dating, but, unaccountably, shows little interest in exploring or expanding upon the information.

In 1928 a poll by the *Neue* (sic) *Wiener Tagblatt* named Korngold and Schoenberg as the two greatest living composers.¹⁹

In his 1985 biography and in the *New Grove Dictionary of American Music* (1986), Carroll changes the date and the order of his wording but is

¹⁵ Frederick Othman. "His Music Painful to Korngold" in *Hollywood Citizen-News*. 9th May 1939. [accessed through *Online Magazine of Motion Picture and Television Music Appreciation*. <http://www.filmscoremonthly.com> 2 March, 2002]

¹⁶ Anthony Thomas. "Music by Erich Wolfgang Korngold". Album review in *Films in Review*. March 1962, 177.

¹⁷ Brendan Carroll, "Korngold, Erich Wolfgang" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. ed Stanley Sadie. London: MacMillan, 1980. Vol 10 210.

¹⁸ Brendan Carroll. "Korngold's 'Violanta' in *The Musical Times*. Vol 121. November 1980. 695-9.

¹⁹ Joan Allen Smith. *Schoenberg and his Circle: A Viennese Portrait*. New York: Schirmer, 1986. 278.

still unable to verify the information.

(In 1985)

A poll conducted by the *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, in 1932, named Korngold and Schoenberg as the two greatest living composers.²⁰

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Thomas, in 1991, significantly redefines the poll, augmenting the importance of what he had perhaps heard around the studios. Carroll's revised dating is repeated, suggesting that Thomas has read the 1985 and 1986 publications.

In 1932, a Viennese newspaper, *Neue* (sic) *Wiener Tageblatt* (sic), conducted a poll among the European musical cognoscenti to determine which of the contemporary composers were considered the most important and the most influential. The two composers who headed the list were Schoenberg and Korngold. Ironically, both men would end their lives in California.²²

While the ignominy of avant-garde and conservative composers living side-by-side in what musicologists generally perceived as a cultural desert, has not escaped Thomas, Julius' version of the results is extended into making an even greater and more inaccurate claim.

In 1996, Keith Anderson's liner notes to Swedish recording of *Die tote Stadt*²³ mention a

popular poll in Vienna in 1926 (...) [where] the two [Schoenberg and Korngold] were described as the greatest composers then living there.

While the dating still denies the possibility of citing the original document and its popularity might ambivalently suggest that the poll was a recurring event, the geographical location more accurately defines its importance.

In 1997, Carroll, having now sighted the original article, acknowledges that the poll results have been "rather exaggerated". He gives the correct results only for Korngold and Schoenberg, includes R. Strauss' highest though disqualified rating but relegates the bulk of his information to a footnote concerning Strauss' nationality. He omits Kienzl's and Bittner's significant placing²⁴ and thus perpetuates Julius'

²⁰ Brendan Carroll, *Erich Wolfgang Korngold, 1897-1957: His Life and Works*. Paisley Scotland: Wilfion Books, 1985. 10.

²¹ Brendan Carroll. "Korngold, Erich Wolfgang" in *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*. Edited by Stanley Sadie. New York: MacMillan, 1986. Vol II, 652.

²² Tony/R Thomas. *Film Score: the Art and Craft of Movie Music. The Career and Views of 25 Eminent Composers*. Rev ed of "Film Score: The View from the Podium" (1979). San Diego. Tony Thomas, 1989. Also published by Burbank. CA Riverwood Press, 1991. 80.

²³ Erich Wolfgang Korngold. *Die tote Stadt, Op 12*. Recorded at the Royal Swedish Opera House, Stockholm, 31st August- September, 1996. Swedish Broadcasting Corp. Naxos LC5537. Liner Notes 5-6.

²⁴ Brendan Carroll, *The Last Prodigy: A Biography of Erich Wolfgang Korngold*. Portland: Amadeus Press, 1997. 211-2.

misinformation.

Pöllmann, in 1998, analyses Korngold's music and reception and cites a very prescribed poll conducted in 1928.

Auf die Frage nach den beiden wichtigsten, lebenden Komponisten wurden Korngold und Schönberg genannt.²⁵

Pöllmann is the first to make an interpretation of these results with some accuracy, as the "purest expression" of the divide between taste publics. Both the artists and public were thus equally "entangled" in the polarities between entertainment and serious art.²⁶ But without access to the newspaper article, Pöllmann is unable to see that Schoenberg is the extraordinary avant-garde in the line up.

In 2000, Born and Hesmondhalgh citing Carroll (1997) and Moldenhauer (1978), report:

Neues Wiener Tagblatt ran a 1930 poll of its readers on how they ranked prominent Austrians in various walks of life. Of the composers cited, Richard Strauss (who was in fact a Bavarian) came first, Korngold second, and Schoenberg third.²⁷

As recently as 2002, Tim Ashley writing in the *Oxford Companion to Music*, cites Carroll's 1997 biography in his article, but adopts Carroll's dating from 1980, Thomas' spelling from 1991, Anderson's geographical boundaries and Carroll's incomplete analysis to perpetuate Julius' version and the superior ranking of Erich that Julius might have preferred.

In 1928 a poll taken from among the readers of the *Wiener Tageblatt* (sic) revealed that Korngold was considered one of the two greatest contemporary Austrian composers, Schoenberg being the other.²⁸

Essentially, the poll tells us only that in 1930 Schoenberg's and Korngold's names were high in the public's mind rather than anything significant about the quality or relative quality of their work. The poll's results as communicated through the literature on Korngold can be seen as "spin". However, most people who repeated this incomplete information did not detect or wish to detect any larger falsity in the claim. Only one writer was sufficiently intrigued to put it through some historiographic analysis. While perhaps a New World deference to things European and an Old World deference to hierarchy and authority played some part in the

²⁵ Helmut Pöllmann. *Erich Wolfgang Korngold: Aspekte seines Schaffens*. Mainz: Schott, 1998. 23.

²⁶ "Nicht nur der Künstler, auch das Publikum ist in der Polarität zwischen dem spielerisch zu Erlangenden und dem mit aller Anstrengung sich Anzueignenden verfangen. In der Rezeption von Korngold und Schoenberg hat diese Polarität ihre jeweils reinste Ausprägung erfahren." Helmut Pöllmann. *Erich Wolfgang Korngold: Aspekte seines Schaffens*. Mainz: Schott, 1998. 23.

²⁷ Georgina Born, & David Hesmondhalgh. *Western Music and Others*.

Berkeley: California Press, 2000. "Korngold's Pleasure, and Deception". 154.

²⁸ Tim Ashley. "Korngold. Erich Wolfgang" in *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Ed. Alison Latham. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 459.

change Korngold's status if not his fortunes underwent after 1930, it must be admitted that otherwise sentient, learned reviewers, music writers and critics continued to hear something in Korngold's music which was not only attractive, but more importantly here, did maintain Korngold's position parallel to that of Schoenberg's as a not too far-fetched notion.

This catalogue does reveal a perhaps more uncomfortable truth. None of the otherwise creditable writers listed here bothered to either locate or accurately report the original poll. Had they done this, the validity of placing Schoenberg and Korngold, the revolutionary and the conservative in terms of their musical idioms, as parallel influences might have been properly addressed, and a disservice to both composers avoided. Instead, writers seem willing to endorse an assessment which fits into established ideology, perhaps similarly based on "spin" - that the revolutionary idiom of Schoenberg was the epitome of twentieth-century music. The fact that dissonance and consonance, expressionism and romanticism, elitist and popular idioms existed side by side without acknowledging each other's joint role within European societies is largely forgotten.

Korngold's dilemma, being a writer of consonant lyric music in the twentieth century, remains entangled in the preconceptions and polemics concerning twentieth-century European art music as opposed to European art music in the twentieth century.

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