

Vienna on Tour: Der Rosenkavalier and Korngold's Sinfonietta

Monday, April 19, 2027 · 19:30 · Philharmonie Luxembourg

Lorenzo Viotti, conductor

	TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME	MIN
1	STRAUSS 1864–1949 <i>Der Rosenkavalier, Suite</i>	21'
2	KORNGOLD 1897–1957 <i>Sinfonietta in B major, Op. 5</i>	43'
	TOTAL MUSIC	64'

Richard Strauss

21 minutes

1864–1949

Der Rosenkavalier, Suite

THE COMPOSER

Richard Strauss was the heir to Wagner and Liszt, the composer who carried the late Romantic tradition into the twentieth century. Born in Munich in 1864, the son of the principal horn player of the Munich Court Orchestra, he received a conservative musical education before an encounter with Alexander Ritter, a violinist married to one of Wagner's nieces, converted him to the "music of the future."

Between 1889 and 1898, Strauss composed a series of tone poems that made him the most famous composer in Germany: *Don Juan*, *Death and Transfiguration*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Don Quixote*, and *Ein Heldenleben*. Each pushed the orchestra to new extremes of virtuosity and expression. Then he turned to opera, creating the scandalous *Salome* (1905), the shattering *Elektra* (1909), and the nostalgic masterpiece *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911).

Strauss lived long: through two world wars, the Nazi era, and the destruction of the German musical culture he had embodied. His late works, including the *Metamorphosen* for strings and the *Four Last Songs*, are elegies for a lost world. He died in 1949, shortly after completing those final songs.

ABOUT THE WORK

Der Rosenkavalier was the opera with which Richard Strauss followed *Salome* and *Elektra*, and it could hardly be less like them. He wrote it with the Viennese poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, finished the score in September 1910, and saw it staged in Dresden on 26 January 1911 under Ernst von Schuch. It was a triumph from the first night and became the most popular of his operas in his lifetime.

The story is set in Vienna in the 1740s. The Marschallin, the wife of a field marshal, has a lover half her age, the seventeen-year-old Count Octavian. Her boorish country cousin, Baron Ochs, is about to marry Sophie, the daughter of a newly rich army contractor, and needs a young nobleman to deliver the customary silver rose to his bride. The Marschallin proposes Octavian. He and Sophie fall in love at first sight, Ochs is tricked into disgrace, and the Marschallin, who has seen this coming, gives the young man up. The custom of the silver rose was Hofmannsthal's invention. So, in a sense, was the music's Vienna: the opera is full of waltzes, a dance that did not conquer the city until the following century. Strauss knew this and used them anyway, as a shorthand for a vanished elegance.

Music from the opera reached the concert hall almost immediately in arrangements of every kind. Strauss himself assembled two sequences of waltzes, and in the 1920s he adapted the score for a silent film. The suite played here is a later and more comprehensive selection. Its score names no arranger. It is generally attributed to the conductor Artur Rodziński, who led the first performance with the New York Philharmonic in October 1944. Strauss seems to have had no hand in making it, but he allowed it to be published in 1945, at a time when he badly needed the income.

The suite lasts between twenty and twenty-five minutes and is played without a break. It follows the order of the opera for most of its length, moves its biggest waltz to the end, and gives the voice parts to instruments, so that nothing essential in the tunes is lost. It asks for a large orchestra with triple woodwind, two harps and celesta.

For the Vienna Philharmonic this is home ground, and the tour is built around that idea. The concerts in Luxembourg on 19 April, at the Kölner Philharmonie on 20 April and at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris on 21 April pair the suite with the *Sinfonietta* of Erich Wolfgang Korngold, a Viennese prodigy whom Strauss admired, and whose piece this orchestra was the first to play.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening. The suite begins exactly as the opera does, with whooping horns answered by surging strings. The curtain has not yet risen: this is the night the Marschallin and Octavian have just spent together, and Strauss leaves little to the imagination. The music then relaxes into the tenderness of the morning after.

The Presentation of the Rose. The scene changes to the second act. Octavian arrives to hand Sophie the rose, and the rose itself is heard as a chain of glittering chords on flutes, solo violins, harps and celesta. The melody around them is one of the most rapt in the opera, and the hesitant conversation of the two young people follows.

Ochs and his waltz. A burst of agitated music marks the moment the Baron grasps what is going on. Then comes the best-known waltz in the score, the one to which he assures Sophie that with him no night will be too long.

Trio and duet. The suite now leaps to the end of the opera. In the trio the Marschallin, Octavian and Sophie each sing their own thoughts at the same moment as she gives him up; here the lines pass to the orchestra and build to the emotional summit of the piece. The quieter music that follows is the final duet of the two lovers.

The last waltz. Here the suite leaves the opera's order of events. The arranger reaches back for one more of the Baron's waltzes, the exuberant one in which he congratulates himself on his luck, and turns it into a full-orchestra finish.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold

1897–1957

Sinfonietta in B major, Op. 5

THE COMPOSER

Erich Wolfgang Korngold, born in Brünn (today Brno) in 1897, was the most spectacular child prodigy of his generation: a boy whose ballet *Der Schneemann*, written at eleven, became a sensation in Vienna, whom Mahler called a genius, and who by his early twenties had written the international operatic hit *Die tote Stadt* (1920). His was a late-Romantic idiom of opulent harmony and soaring melody, unfashionable in an age turning toward modernism. In 1934 Max Reinhardt invited him to Hollywood, and Korngold went on to become a founder of the symphonic film score, winning Oscars for An-

43 minutes

thony Adverse and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and bringing full Viennese Romanticism to the cinema. As a Jew, he found that the rise of the Nazis turned that move into exile, and it very likely saved his life. After the war he tried to return to concert composition with a violin concerto and a symphony, but felt out of step with musical fashion. He died in Los Angeles in 1957; the rehabilitation of his concert music came decades later.

ABOUT THE WORK

Erich Wolfgang Korngold was fourteen when he began the *Sinfonietta*, in the spring of 1912, and had just turned fifteen when the sketch was finished that August. Orchestrating it took another year, during which he also wrote a violin sonata and started his first opera. By then he was already a known quantity in Vienna: the son of a prominent music critic, and the composer of a ballet, *Der Schneemann*, written when he was eleven.

The first performance was given by the Vienna Philharmonic under Felix Weingartner on 30 November 1913. The score is dedicated to Weingartner, who had backed the boy from early on, and the orchestra that plays it in these concerts is the one that introduced it. Other conductors took it up quickly, and Richard Strauss, who had followed Korngold's progress for some years, was among its admirers.

"*Sinfonietta*" undersells it. The piece has four movements, lasts around 43 minutes and calls for a large orchestra that includes two harps, celesta and piano. In everything but name it is a symphony. The diminutive is usually read as a pointer to the music's sunny temper, and has nothing to do with its size.

The whole score grows from a motto of five rising notes built from stacked fourths. Korngold called it the "*Motiv des fröhlichen Herzens*", the motif of the cheerful heart. It is there at the start of the first movement, it shapes themes in the other three, and it has the last word. The idea stayed with him: commentators trace the same rising figure through the music he wrote over the following decades, into the years in Hollywood.

The key is B major, a bright one, and the richly chromatic harmony keeps slipping away from it, so that the home key has to be won back again and again. The orchestral sound owes a good deal to Strauss. The long, buoyant melodies, and the ease with which they arrive, were his own.

The piece was played widely in the years that followed its premiere and then fell out of the repertoire. Korngold, who was Jewish, spent the Nazi years in exile in the United States, and performances of the *Sinfonietta* are still uncommon.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Fließend, mit heiterem Schwunge (flowing, with cheerful swing). The motto rises at once and the first theme springs out of it, so the opening bars hold the material of the whole work. The second theme is slower and lilting, with a Viennese sway, and is built on the same fourths. A short development works up to a climax with brass fanfares; when the opening returns, the second theme is quieter than before, and the coda dwells on the five notes in a new harmonisation.

Scherzo: Molto agitato, rasch und feurig (fast and fiery). Brass and timpani launch it, with heavy accents and a restless main idea, and this is where the debt to Strauss is plainest. The middle section could hardly be more different: a slow, warm melody that drifts through one key after another. Listeners who know Korngold's film scores will recognise the manner. An abbreviated return of the scherzo ends the movement with hammered chords.

Molto andante (dreamy). The shortest movement. A cor anglais sings a wistful melody over hushed chords coloured by celesta and harps. The strings then take up the motto, slowed down and richly harmonised, the music rises to a single climax, and it sinks back to where it began.

Finale: Patetico, Allegro giocoso. The start is the darkest music in the piece: a stern gesture, then a slow, uneasy climb from the lower strings. The mood does not last. The same idea turns up in the Allegro giocoso as a cheerful main theme, and a broad, songlike second melody follows it. The movement grows from one climax to the next with the motto threaded through it, and the five rising notes close the work in triumph.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **The Life of Richard Strauss**

Bryan Gilliam, Cambridge University Press 1999

A short, reliable life of Strauss that explains how *Der Rosenkavalier* came out of the partnership with Hofmannsthal and why it became his greatest popular success.

ACCESSIBLE **The Last Prodigy: A Biography of Erich Wolfgang Korngold**

Brendan G. Carroll, Amadeus Press 1997

The standard life of Korngold in English, detailed on the Vienna years in which the teenage composer wrote the *Sinfonietta* and heard this orchestra play it first.

DEEPER **The Cambridge Companion to Richard Strauss**

Charles Youmans (ed.), Cambridge University Press 2010

Essays by Strauss scholars on the operas, the orchestral works and the composer's place in his time, including the world of *Der Rosenkavalier* and the Vienna it imagines.

SOURCES

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3. Concert in Paris, 21 April 2027, Wiener Philharmoniker. <https://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/en/konzerte/concert-in-paris/10928/>
4. Wiener Philharmoniker, Lorenzo Viotti: Le Chevalier à la rose, 19 April 2027, Philharmonie Luxembourg. <https://www.philharmonie.lu/en/programme/2026-27/wiener-philharmoniker-000000e9001bb319>
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6. Wiener Philharmoniker, 21 April 2027, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. <https://www.theatre-champselysees.fr/saison-2026-27/orchestre/wiener-philharmoniker-17>
7. Suite from *Der Rosenkavalier*, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/suite-from-der-rosenkavalier>
8. *Der Rosenkavalier* Suite, Hollywood Bowl (Los Angeles Philharmonic). <https://www.hollywoodbowl.com/musicdb/pieces/1529/der-rosenkavalier-suite>
9. *Der Rosenkavalier*, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der_Rosenkavalier
10. Concentrating the Wonder: Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier* Suite, Interlude. <https://interlude.hk/concentrating-the-wonder-strauss-der-rosenkavalier-suite/>
11. *Sinfonietta* (Korngold), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinfonietta_\(Korngold\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinfonietta_(Korngold))
12. Korngold: *Sursum Corda*, *Sinfonietta* (booklet notes), Chandos Records. <https://www.chandos.net/chanimages/Booklets/CH10432.pdf>
13. Korngold: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Sinfonietta* (booklet notes), Ondine. <https://eclassical.textalk.se/shop/17115/art93/4965593-1d9255-761195119129.pdf>
14. Erich Wolfgang Korngold, EBSCO Research Starters. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/erich-wolfgang-korngold>
15. *The Life of Richard Strauss*, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521570190>
16. *The Last Prodigy: A Biography of Erich Wolfgang Korngold*, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781574670295>
17. *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Strauss*, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521728157>



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