

Eusebius Quartet<sup>a</sup> Alasdair Beatson<sup>b</sup>  
Beatrice Philips, Venetia Jollands *violin* *piano*  
Hannah Shaw *viola*, Hannah Sloane *cello*

**Piano Quintet in E major, Op.15<sup>ab</sup>** [24:20]

- |   |  |       |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | Mäßiges Zeitmaß, mit schwungvoll blühendem Ausdruck                | 12:32 |
| 2 | Adagio: Mit größter Ruhe, stets äußerst gebunden und ausdrucksvoll | 11:48 |
| 3 | Finale: Gemessen, beinahe pathetisch – Allegro giocoso             | 8:39  |

**Viel Lärmen um Nichts (Much Ado About Nothing), Op.11<sup>a</sup>** [10:11]

- |   |  |      |
|---|--|------|
| 4 | I. Mädchen im Brautgemach (Maiden in the Bridal Chamber)     | 3:16 |
| 5 | II. Holzapfel und Schlehwein (Dogberry and Verges)           | 2:37 |
| 6 | III. Gartenszene (Intermezzo) arr. Tom Poster <sup>ab*</sup> | 1:57 |
| 7 | IV. Mummenschanz (Masquerade)                                | 2:19 |

**String Quartet No.2 in E-flat major, Op.26<sup>a</sup>** [25:35]

- |    |                                      |      |
|----|--------------------------------------|------|
| 8  | I. Allegro                           | 7:33 |
| 9  | II. Intermezzo – Allegretto con moto | 3:59 |
| 10 | III. Larghetto – Lento               | 8:23 |
| 11 | IV. Waltz (Finale) – Tempo di valse  | 5:20 |

\*FIRST RECORDING

**Total duration: 68:30**

Recorded at The Menuhin Hall, Stoke d'Abernon, on November 14-15, 2020 [1-7];  
Wathen Hall, St Paul's School, London on December 19-20, 2018 [8-11]

Recording Producers: Siva Oke [1-7]; Eusebius Quartet [8-11]

Recording Engineers: Oscar Torres [1-7]; Eusebius Quartet [8-11]

Front cover: Photograph © Anna Patarinka

Design: Andrew Giles

Booklet Editor: Michael Quinn

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PIANO QUINTET  
STRING QUARTET NO.2  
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

EUSEBIUS QUARTET  
ALASDAIR BEATSON *piano*

## Chamber Music by **ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD**

The Austrian composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957) was, in the words of musicologist Nicolas Slonimsky “the very last breath of the romantic spirit of Vienna”. A miraculously gifted composing *wunderkind* admired by Mahler, Richard Strauss and Puccini, he grew up in the incredibly rich milieu of the final years of Imperial Vienna, developing into a major operatic and symphonic composer, second only to Strauss in the number of performances of his works. The rise of Nazism resulted in his exile to Los Angeles, where he became a pioneer of film scoring, winning two Academy Awards (for *Anthony Adverse* in 1936 and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* in 1938). A post-war return to Europe was unsuccessful and he died in Hollywood aged only 60, believing himself forgotten.

Korngold is perhaps most associated with large-scale forms – opera, major symphonic works and lavishly orchestrated film scores. Yet the relatively small body of chamber works he produced is no less impressive and actually offers a succinct distillation of his style and voice, often to considerably profound effect.

His mentors Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss (to whom he is often compared) wrote little chamber music. For Korngold, however, the smaller instrumental groups were important and offered a unique opportunity to retreat from the epic canvas of major compositions and create some of his most personal utterances, while at the same time, expand the form and

push the chamber medium to quasi-orchestral effects. As with his works for orchestra, every instrument is treated as a virtuoso and it is this which makes his music so demanding in performance.

The earliest work on this recording was originally scored for chamber orchestra. In 1918, as the Great War drew to a close, the 21-year-old Korngold was confined to barracks in Vienna as musical director of his regiment. His military service had already interrupted work on a major opera (*Die tote Stadt*) and, apart from some military marches and a grand, ceremonial, coronation *Hymn* for the Empress Zita (who briefly succeeded the Emperor Franz Josef before the eventual collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), he had written very little music for over two years.

It was at this point that Korngold received a commission to write an incidental score for a new stage production of Shakespeare’s witty comedy, *Much Ado About Nothing*, or, as it is known in German, ***Viel Lärmen um Nichts***.

The commission came from a local theatre company, the Wiener Volksbühne, and the production was to be staged in the charming 18th-century Baroque Schlosstheater at Schönbrunn Palace. Korngold was enchanted by the whole idea and having read, while still in his early teens, almost all of Shakespeare’s major works in German translation in the renowned Schlegel-Tieck edition, he was already familiar with the play and enthusiastically set to work.

With the severe restrictions of wartime (the chance of securing a full orchestra was remote) plus the limited size of the pit at Schönbrunn, Korngold had already



Photograph: The Brendan G Carroll Collection

*Erich Wolfgang Korngold at home with his bust by Gustinus Ambrosi.*

decided, while also taking into account the intimate acoustic of the small, historic theatre, that the music would have to be scored for reduced forces.

The sold-out premiere took place on May 6, 1920 with Korngold himself conducting and was a great success. So successful in fact, that the run was extended even though the members of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra had to withdraw to honour previously booked engagements. Instead, the resourceful Korngold provided a reduced version of the full score for just two violins and piano, which he performed with his friends Rudolf Kolisch and Paul Breisach, and from this he prepared a four-movement Suite for

Violin and Piano which became immensely popular in the concert hall and later on gramophone records. Fritz Kreisler, Mischa Elman, Jascha Heifetz and Toscha Seidel were among the great virtuosi of that time who performed and recorded it. Lionel Tertis even transcribed it for viola!

Its success undoubtedly prompted Korngold to create other arrangements of the music, including one for solo piano. In 2012 a previously unknown version, an unpublished autograph manuscript of three movements arranged for string quartet in Korngold's hand, turned up at auction and was acquired by the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna. It received its world premiere performance by the Steude Quartet on May 8, 2012 in the Austrian capital's Musikverein. For some reason, the composer chose not to arrange the beautiful Intermezzo (or perhaps he did not get around to it at the time) and the arrangement presented on this recording was made by the British pianist Tom Poster at the request of Beatrice Philips (First Violinist of the Eusebius Quartet). This release marks its world-premiere recording.

The movements are as follows:

- I. *Mädchen im Brautgemach* (Maiden in the Bridal Chamber) in which Hero prepares for her wedding to Claudio with mixed feelings.
- II. *Holzapfel und Schlehwein* (Dogberry and Verges) – a grotesque march to accompany the two drunken night watchmen. Korngold here gives a nod to his childhood idol Gustav Mahler with the spiky rhythms and swagger of the music.

III. *Gartenscene* (Intermezzo) Beatrice and Benedick realise their growing love for one another in a glowing C major love scene.

IV. *Mummenschanz* (Masquerade) A terrific set piece (originally for two solo horns, it is called Hornpipe in some translations) that brings down the curtain on the play, commencing with Benedick's command "Strike up, pipers!"

That Korngold considered making a string quartet arrangement for his short suite is not surprising, given that the string section of his original orchestration was set for string quartet owing to the space limitations of the little theatre at Schönbrunn. The music was therefore easily adapted.

The **Piano Quintet in E major**, Op.15, was composed in 1921 (simultaneously with his First String Quartet, Op.16) shortly after Korngold had completed his most famous opera, *Die tote Stadt* (The Dead City), and its flamboyant, heroic melodic style owes much to the residual influence of that epic score. It is dedicated to the deaf-mute sculptor Gustinus Ambrosi (1893-1975), a close friend who had created a stunning portrait bust of Korngold in 1912, later smashed to pieces by the Nazis when they broke into his home in Vienna after Austria was annexed by Germany in 1938. The Quintet is an elaborate and substantial work which pushes the medium to its very limits.

The first movement begins immediately with one of Korngold's most expansive ideas – a theme that is bold, upward leaping, intensely romantic before being contrasted with a second subject of touching simplicity. Korngold's development of this material is masterly and the extremely

difficult string writing is complemented by the extravagantly virtuoso piano part. Korngold was an exceptional, one might almost say unique, pianist and in fact he took the solo part himself at the world premiere in Hamburg on February 16, 1923.

In the tradition of his illustrious predecessors Schubert, Beethoven, Brahms and especially Mahler, Korngold often drew on his own songs for use in other compositions and this is particularly true in the case of the Piano Quintet.

The slow movement, marked *Adagio*, is an ingenious set of nine variations on his song cycle *Lieder des Abschieds* (Songs of Farewell, Op.14) completed in 1920. In particular, the third song of this cycle – *Mond, so gehst du wieder auf* (Moon, you rise again) – is the main source of inspiration, but there are subtle quotations from other songs in the set.

An interesting story lies behind this intensely erotic music. It contains a secret code – a loving message from Korngold to his fiancée Luzi Sonnenthal (she married Korngold in April 1924) originally incorporated in the song and subsequently transferred to the *Adagio* of the Quintet. The need for this secret, musical message was because of parental opposition to their relationship, as Luzi recalled in her memoirs:

"One day my mother presented me with an ultimatum: either we got engaged or we stopped seeing one another. My objections were all to no avail. Things had gone too far, and I was, according to my family, 'already compromised'. Our 'Family Council' decided that an equitable way forward

was to impose a short-term separation lasting at least throughout the summer months. We both had to promise not to question the decision of the Council and agree not only to stop seeing one another, but to end all correspondence. We reluctantly complied.

“The time of separation grew ever closer and one day, Erich appeared with a new work, a song cycle called *Songs of Farewell*. One of the songs ends with a gesture, the significance of which was known only to the two of us. Erich imitated my speech intonation whenever I said, Erlauben Sie? ‘should I permit...?’. It was a message that, though unheard by the rest of the world, was directed at me. From this moment on, he managed to slip this tiny motive into all of his spontaneous improvisations – even in public concerts – as a special ‘greeting’ and sign of affection.”\*

Korngold’s luxuriant, highly original post-Straussian harmony and his extraordinary skill in variation make this one of his most satisfying slow movements. The music often assumes orchestral sonorities and there seems to be no limit to Korngold’s invention. Its haunting final bars, with a mysteriously repeated, unresolved ninth chord, like an unanswered question, are truly memorable.

The *Finale* opens with a strident, declamatory theme in C sharp minor, which is actually yet another, somewhat disguised, variation on the main theme of the *Adagio*. It quickly segues into one of Korngold’s merriest Rondo themes, in the tonic key of E major. Again, variations abound as the music moves from one

brilliant sequence to another before cleverly returning to the very opening theme of the entire work for the decisive final cadence.

The **Second String Quartet in E-flat major**, Op.26, was composed in the summer of 1933 (a significant year in Europe marked by Adolf Hitler’s rise to power in Germany) and was written mostly at Korngold’s country home, Schloss Höselberg, at Gmunden in Upper Austria. It offers a fund of melody. One can clearly feel the profound influence of the spectacular Austrian countryside on this music and it is one of the most intensely ‘Viennese’ works Korngold ever wrote.

The opening movement is a classically structured *Allegro* with two contrasting ideas, the slow, syncopated second subject providing effective contrast to the slight *agitato* of the first. The Intermezzo (in C major) comes next and it is one of the finest examples of humour in music that I know, a bubbling, jolly piece which brings an instant smile from its opening bars, and is so perfectly *gemütlich*, full of wit and charm – just like its composer.

The slow movement – an expansive *Larghetto* – is cast in the surprising key of C sharp major, although Korngold’s typically restless harmony soon gravitates to many distant and unrelated keys. It opens with a series of diffuse, mysterious chords played in harmonics, before an intensely nostalgic theme is heard in the cello, tinged with a wistful sadness. The movement is drenched in some extraordinarily rich harmony and throughout, the emphasis is on sonority as the long-breathed phrases unravel in a seemingly endless pattern.

In the *Finale*, Korngold returns to the tonic key of E flat major and sweeps aside the solemn mood with a spirited hymn to the waltz, that most Viennese of dance forms. The giddy, intoxicating waltz rhythms reflect Korngold's devotion to the music of the Strauss family from childhood. He had already successfully adapted a number of operettas by Johann Strauss the younger. Unlike Ravel, who believed the waltz was a decadent symbol of a dying civilisation, Korngold revelled in its heady rhythm and here treats his waltz theme to a dazzling series of variations with rapidly changing tempi building from one climax to another and ending with a breathless flourish.

The renowned Rosé Quartet gave the first performance of the Quartet on March 16, 1934 in Vienna and it was the first work by Korngold to be published in America rather than Germany, owing to the accession of Hitler in 1933 which led to music by Jewish composers being banned.

Brendan G Carroll © 2021

**Brendan G Carroll** is a musicologist and freelance journalist specialising in music of the early 20th century. His biography of Erich Wolfgang Korngold (*The Last Prodigy, Amadeus*, 1997; German edition: Böhlau Verlag, 2013) is considered definitive.

\*Translation of the excerpt from Luzi Korngold's memoir, *Erich Wolfgang Korngold – Ein Lebensbild (Österreichische Komponisten des XX. Jahrhunderts)*, Lafite Verlag, 1967 – by Dr Michael Haas, with thanks.



Photograph: Anna Patarinka

Praised as “excellent” by *The Sunday Times*, the **EUSEBIUS QUARTET** was formed in 2016 out of a passion for the extraordinary music written for this formation. The members of the quartet first met as teenagers and then again later at IMS Prussia Cove, reuniting as a quartet after completing their respective studies. They have gained a reputation for imaginative performances possessing “clarity and unity of thought”.

The quartet has toured throughout Europe and to Santa Fe, USA, alongside more recent performances closer to home including appearances at Kings Place, Conway Hall and Glyndebourne. In 2018 they were finalists in the Royal Over-Seas League Music Competition, and continue to frequently perform live on BBC Radio 3. They are regular guests at numerous chamber music festivals including the Lewes Chamber Music Festival, of which first violinist Beatrice Philips is the Artistic Director and founder. The quartet were awarded a residency at Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme at Snape Maltings in 2019, where they worked with one of their mentors, Hungarian pedagogue and pianist Rita Wagner, studying and performing quartets by Schumann and Bartók. The residency culminated in performances as part of the Aldeburgh Festival

The Eusebius Quartet has collaborated with many wonderful musicians including pianists Alasdair Beatson and Bengt Forsberg; clarinetists Matt Hunt and Michael Collins; and tenor Nicky Spence. Between them they bring influences from their rich and diverse musical backgrounds, having each studied at leading international conservatoires, namely the Juilliard School, New York, the Sibelius Academy, Helsinki, Royal Academy of Music and Guildhall School of Music, London and the Paris Conservatoire.

The quartet takes its name from one of the two fictional characters invented by Robert Schumann for his musical journal writings. These characters became symbolic of Schumann's opposing moods: the fiery and impassioned Florestan contrasted the philosophical and dreamy Eusebius. The quartet are

delighted to have released their debut CD with SOMM Recordings in these difficult times, and to celebrate a longstanding musical relationship with friend and colleague Alasdair Beatson.

[eusebiusquartet.com](http://eusebiusquartet.com)

 [@EusebiusQuartet](https://twitter.com/EusebiusQuartet)

## **INSTRUMENTS**

### **Beatrice Philips**

Violin by Stradivari c.1720, generously loaned by Beare Violins Ltd.

### **Venetia Jollands**

Violin by Francesco Gobetti, c.1710 (on private loan)

### **Hannah Shaw**

Viola by Stefan-Peter Greiner, 2005 (on loan from the Greiner family)

### **Hannah Sloane**

Cello by Luigi Piattellini, c.1780 (on loan from the Stark family)

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

The Fidelio Charitable Trust, The Nicholas Boas Charitable Trust

### **With thanks to:**

Tom Poster, the Korngold Estate, Anna Patarinka,  
Nat and Rebecca Sloane, and Eusebius Quartet Friends.



Photograph: Kaupo Kikkas

Scottish pianist **ALASDAIR BEATSON** works prolifically as soloist and chamber musician. Performances during 2021/22 include numerous appearances at Wigmore Hall; as concerto soloist with Royal Northern Sinfonia; in chamber music alongside such colleagues as Alina Ibragimova, Steven Isserlis, Viktoria Mullova, Pieter Wispelwey, and as a member of the Nash Ensemble.

Alasdair is renowned as a sincere musician and intrepid programmer. He champions a wide repertoire with particular areas of interest: Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Schubert and Schumann; the solo and chamber music of Gabriel Fauré, Bartók and Janáček; concertos of Bach, Bartók, Britten, Fauré, Hindemith, Messiaen and Mozart; and contemporary works, including the Piano Quintet of Thomas Adès, George Benjamin's *Shadowlines* and Harrison Birtwistle's *Harrison's Clocks*. Future plans include the first performances of a new piano concerto, written for him by Helena Winkelman.

Two new recordings were released in Spring 2021 to critical acclaim: a solo piano recital, *Aus Wien*, on Pentatone, featuring music of Schumann, Schoenberg, Ravel, Korngold and Schubert, and three Beethoven Sonatas for Violin and Fortepiano with Viktoria Mullova on Onyx. These join a discography of solo and chamber recordings on BIS, Champs Hill, Claves, Evil Penguin, Pentatone and SOMM Recordings.

Alasdair teaches solo piano at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, and regularly mentors for the London-based Chamber Studio. From 2012 to 2018, Alasdair was founder and artistic director of Musique à Marsac, and since 2019 is co-artistic director of the Swiss chamber music festival at Ernen.

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