

DANCE & DRAMA

1.13 In Focus Season 1 Episode No. 13

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THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA

Franz Welser-Möst, *conductor*

EDVARD GRIEG (1843-1907)

From Holberg's Time: Suite in the Olden Style

1. Praeludium: Allegro vivace
2. Sarabande: Andante
3. Gavotte: Allegretto — Musette
4. Air: Andante religioso
5. Rigaudon: Allegro con brio

ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD (1897-1957)

Symphonic Serenade in B-flat major, Opus 39

1. Allegro moderato, semplice
2. Intermezzo: Allegro molto
3. Lento religioso
4. Finale: Allegro con fuoco

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CONCERT OVERVIEW

MUSIC FOR THEATER and film has strong historical roots, inspiring music of extraordinary character — vividly turning action into sound and creating moods of tenderness, romance, confrontation, and celebration.

This episode of *In Focus* begins with music by Edvard Grieg, an ardent champion of Norwegian music, art, and theater. Perhaps best known for his poignant score for the play *Peer Gynt*, here he pays homage to the humanist playwright Ludvig Holberg with a sparkling and lively suite based on 18th-century dance forms.

The program concludes with a rarely heard score by the Viennese-born Erich Korngold. Forced to flee Nazi Germany, Korngold found a new life in California, writing scores brimming with Romantic opulence and helping shape the musical sound of Hollywood's Golden Age.

This episode of In Focus is dedicated to the following donors in recognition for their extraordinary support of The Cleveland Orchestra:

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ABOUT THE MUSIC: GRIEG

FROM HOLBERG'S TIME: Suite in Olden Style, Opus 40
by **Edgvar Grieg** (1843-1907)

Composed: for piano solo in 1884

Scored for: string orchestra by the composer, 1885

Dedicated: in honor of playwright Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754)

Premiere: October 1885 in Bergen, Norway

Duration: about 20 minutes

GRIEG NEVER HAD a very high opinion of his Holberg Suite, a piece he wrote as part of a commission to commemorate the occasion of an anniversary in his hometown of Bergen, Norway. Nevertheless, after its first performance in 1885 and its publication in Germany, it quickly became popular and has always remained so.

The origin of the original version, a suite for piano titled *Fra Holbergs Tid* [*From Holberg's Time* and often simply called "The Holberg Suite"], dates to 1884 and planned celebrations for the bicentennial of the birth of Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), a Norwegian philosopher, historian, and playwright who, like Grieg, was born in Bergen. Holberg was sometimes known as the "Molière of the North" for his creative stageworks filled with wry commentary and observations about the contradictions inherent in humanity's desires and dreams.

Following the premiere, performed by the composer, Grieg arranged his suite for strings the following year to fill out a later concert, also in Bergen.

The main commemorative commission for Grieg in 1884 was actually a larger work, a cantata for male voices and orchestra. The solo piano suite, something of an afterthought, allowed Grieg to compose in an imagined Baroque style, with dance movements that conform to the standard suite movements of Bach's (and Holberg's) day. There was a modest craze for this type of suite in the late 19th century, indulged in by a number of French composers including Delibes and Saint-Saëns, somewhat prophetic of the neo-classicism of Hindemith and Stravinsky several decades later.

In his set of movements, Grieg correctly recreated the meters and forms of old dances, but also infused the music with a warmth and expressiveness that the Baroque generally lacked.

The *Praeludium* is in free form, much as Bach would do it, leading to a splendid climax with all the strings sharing the galloping rhythm of the opening.

The *Sarabande*, with its characteristic leaning on the second beat of a three-four bar, is stately and subdued, and both halves are repeated, as in all Baroque suites. Three solo cellos are featured at one point.

The *Gavotte*, another stately dance, alternates within the third movement with a *Musette*, whose obligatory feature is the drone bass heard throughout this

second dance's first half. Before the drones return, there is some beautifully wistful music passed up from the cellos to the violins.

The fourth movement, *Air*, is a more extended movement, full of expressive warmth, and even asking the cellos and basses to sometimes take the melodic lead.

For his finale, Grieg picked the French Rigaudon as his model, bright and brisk in character. Leading parts are given to solo violin and solo viola with string crossings that Vivaldi would have been proud of. A plaintive middle section moves to the minor and to a slower tempo, but the Rigaudon soon returns for an exhilarating close.

—program note by Hugh Macdonald © 2021

ABOUT THE MUSIC: KORNGOLD

SYMPHONIC SERENADE in B-flat major, Opus 39
by **Erich Wolfgang Korngold** (1897-1957)

Composed: 1947-48

Premiered: January 15, 1950, by the Vienna Philharmonic

Scored for: string orchestra

Duration: about 30 minutes

THE MANTEL OF child prodigy — and the expectations associated with it — weighed heavily on Erich Wolfgang Korngold growing up in an Austrian Jewish family in the opening decade of the 20th century. Recognized as the “next Mendelssohn,” his dazzlingly vibrant music was embraced by the leading composers, conductors, and critics even before he reached his teens.

The son of prominent music critic Julius Korngold, young Erich met and exceeded these high expectations with a string of successes that would delight a composer of any age. At 11, his ballet-pantomime *Der Schneemann* [*The Snowman*] was a hit at the Vienna Court Opera; at 12 his Piano Sonata No. 2 was performed across Europe by legendary pianist Artur Schnabel; and by 19, his first two operas, *Der Ring des Polykrates* and *Violanta*, debuted in Munich under the baton of Bruno Walter to wildly enthusiastic crowds. This was all a preface to his operatic masterpiece, *Die Tote Stadt* [*The Dead City*], which was a sensation in opera houses across the globe and elevated Korngold, at 23, to one of the premier composers in Europe.

By the mid-1930s, Korngold joined the stream of famous composers moving to California to try their hands at creating music for Hollywood. His second American film score, in which he provided a suitably suave and swashbuckling soundtrack for *Captain Blood* (1935), made both the composer and the film's star, Errol Flynn, overnight sensations. Korngold followed up with *Anthony Adverse* (1936), a period

drama starring Olivia de Havilland that won him his first of three Academy Awards for best score.

After these early successes in Los Angeles, Korngold returned to Austria to work on his opera *Die Kathrin*. In the midst of those efforts, he received an offer to score the new Errol Flynn vehicle titled *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. He initially declined, but political events intervened and forced him to reconsider. Hitler strong-armed the Austrian government to capitulate to Nazi Party demands, and Korngold quickly arranged to return to L.A. A month later, Germany annexed Austria during the Anschluss, effectively severing Korngold's ties to his native country.

The Adventures of Robin Hood won Korngold a second Academy Award, helped create the mold for what a Hollywood score should sound like, and earned him both financial and commercial success. Yet he yearned to return to the symphonic stage and the critical praise that he enjoyed in his youth.

By the end of World War II, Korngold was exclusively composing music for the concert hall, though, in doing so, his film scores weren't left entirely behind. Both his Cello Concerto (premiered in 1946 by Eleanor Aller Slatkin with the Los Angeles Philharmonic) and the Violin Concerto (premiered in 1947 by Jascha Heifetz with the St. Louis Symphony) borrowed extensively from the music he had originally composed for films. This fact fueled the argument that his work had become too commercial, while critics and European tastemakers decried his neo-Romantic style as old fashioned.

Korngold began to write his *Symphonic Serenade* in 1947 — the same year that the Violin Concerto debuted and after he had suffered a heart attack. This confrontation with mortality may be evident in his heartfelt dedication for the new score: "to Luzi, my beloved wife, my best friend."

According to biographer Brendan Carroll, Korngold shrewdly reached out to the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler with a mutually convenient proposal: Furtwängler and the Vienna Philharmonic would provide Korngold with a grand premiere of his new work, while Furtwängler, who stayed in Germany during the war and continued to perform despite his disapproval of the Nazi Party, could further distance himself from his past associations with the Third Reich by presenting a work by a Jewish composer.

By all accounts, the *Symphonic Serenade* received a warmer reception at its premiere than Korngold's other late works, perhaps owing to Furtwängler's performance and the plush Vienna Philharmonic string section.

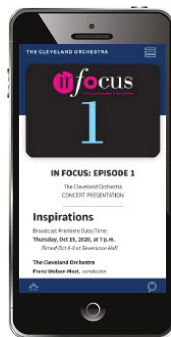
Throughout the work, Korngold masterfully shows off the range of a string orchestra, drawing out textures across the spectrum, from lyrical to percussive, eerie to playful. The piece begins with a late-Romantic theme that wouldn't be out of place in one of Korngold's soaring film scores. The melody dissolves and fragments, however, before reasserting itself. The furiously paced second movement calls for the deft execution of a variety of string techniques, while also exploring a wide array of sonorities. Most obvious are the lengthy plucked pizzicato sections, augmented by ethereal sounds created with bowings close to the bridge or above the fingerboard.

As with his Violin and Cello concertos, the third and fourth movements of the Serenade borrow directly from Korngold's film scores: *Anthony Adverse* and *Cap-*

tain Blood, respectively. Mahlerian in scope, the dignified third movement finds aching beauty and an emotional depth often interpreted as Korngold's yearning for the thriving elegance of pre-war Vienna that had been lost. The final movement starts with a furious rumbling in the bass section, which rises fugue-like through the strings, and then builds both in intensity and complexity to a rousing ending.

—*program note by Amanda Angel* © *The Cleveland Orchestra*

In addition to the concert performance, each episode of our In Focus broadcasts this season includes behind-the-scenes features about the music and musicmaking. Learn more by going to www.Adella.live or by downloading the Adella app. Each In Focus broadcast presentation is generally available for viewing for three months from its premiere.



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CONDUCTOR: FRANZ WELSER-MÖST

Music Director

Kelvin Smith Family Endowed Chair

The Cleveland Orchestra

Franz Welser-Möst is among today's most distinguished conductors. The 2020-21 season marks his nineteenth year as music director of The Cleveland Orchestra, with the future of their acclaimed partnership extended to 2027, making him the longest-serving musical leader in the ensemble's history. The *New York Times* has declared Cleveland under Welser-Möst's direction to be "America's most brilliant orchestra," praising its virtuosity, elegance of sound, variety of color, and chamber-like musical cohesion.

With Welser-Möst, The Cleveland Orchestra has been praised for its inventive programming, its ongoing support for new musical works, and for its innovative work in presenting semi-staged and staged operas. An imaginative approach to juxtaposing newer and older works has opened new dialogue and fresh insights for musicians and audiences alike. The Orchestra has also been hugely successful in building up a new and, notably, a young audience. To date, the Orchestra and Welser-Möst have been showcased around the world in nineteen international tours together. In 2020, they launched the ensemble's own recording label and a brand-new digital streaming platform to continue and extend sharing their artistry globally; the 2020-21 season is also inaugurating an original digital concert series titled *In Focus*, for viewing worldwide.

As a guest conductor, Mr. Welser-Möst enjoys a particularly close and productive relationship with the Vienna Philharmonic. He has twice appeared on the podium for their celebrated New Year's Concert, and regularly conducts the orchestra in subscription concerts in Vienna, as well as on tours in Asia, Australia, and the United States. Highlights of guest conducting appearances in recent seasons include performances of Strauss's *Die Aegyptische Helena* at Teatro alla Scala and *Elektra* at the Vienna State Opera, and concerts with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. He is a regular guest at the Salzburg Festival, where his work leading a series of opera performances has been widely acclaimed. These have included *Rusalka*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Fidelio*, *Die Liebe der Danae*, and Strauss's *Salome* and *Elektra*. The success of both *Salome* and *Rosenkavalier* led the Festival to schedule encore performances in subsequent years.

From 2010 to 2014, Franz Welser-Möst served as general music director of the Vienna State Opera. His partnership with the company included a wide-ranging repertoire, including a series of critically-praised new productions. Mr. Welser-Möst had earlier led the Zurich Opera across a decade-long tenure, conducting more than forty new productions.

During the 2020 Salzburg Festival, Mr. Welser-Möst was awarded the festival ruby pin and the Salzburg Badge of Honor. In 2019, he was awarded the Gold Medal in the Arts by the Kennedy Center International Committee on the Arts in recognition of his long-lasting impact on the international arts community. Other honors include the Vienna Philharmonic's "Ring of Honor" for his longstanding personal and artistic relationship with the ensemble, recognition from the Western Law Center for Disability Rights, honorary membership in the Vienna Singverein, and the Kilenyi Medal from the Bruckner Society of America.

THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA

ONE OF THE FEW major American orchestras founded by a woman, The Cleveland Orchestra's inaugural concert took place in December 1918, at a time of renewed optimism and progressive community ideas. By the middle of the century, with its own concert hall, the decades of growth and sustained effort had turned the ensemble into one of the most-admired around the world. Under the leadership of Franz Welser-Möst since 2002, The Cleveland Orchestra has extended its artistry and musical abilities and remains one of the most sought-after performing ensembles in the world — year after year setting standards of extraordinary artistic excellence, creative programming, and community engagement. In recent years, the *New York Times* has called it “the best in America” for its virtuosity, elegance of sound, variety of color, and chamber-like musical cohesion, “virtually flawless,” and “one of the finest ensembles in the country (if not the world).”

The partnership with Franz Welser-Möst, begun in 2002 and entering its 19th year with the 2020-21 season, has earned The Cleveland Orchestra unprecedented residencies in the U.S. and around the world, including one at the Musikverein in Vienna, the first of its kind by an American orchestra. It also performs regularly at important European summer festivals. The Orchestra's 100th season in 2017-18 featured two international tours, concluding with the presentation on three continents of Welser-Möst's *Prometheus Project* featuring Beethoven Symphonies and overtures; these Beethoven concerts were presented in May and June 2018, at home in Cleveland, in Vienna's Musikverein, and in Tokyo's Suntory Hall.

The Cleveland Orchestra has a long and distinguished recording and broadcast history. A series of DVDs (available through Clasart Classics) and CD recordings under the direction of Mr. Welser-Möst continues to add to an extensive and widely praised catalog of audio recordings made during the tenures of the ensemble's earlier music directors. In addition, Cleveland Orchestra concerts are heard in syndication each season on radio stations throughout North America and Europe.

From 2020 forward, a number of new digital media initiatives are being launched to share and extend the ensemble's artistry globally. These include debut releases on the Orchestra's own recording label, an ongoing series of podcasts titled “On A Personal Note,” a new digital streaming platform named Adella (after the Orchestra's founder Adella Prentiss Hughes), and a series of premium concert broadcasts created from the 2020-21 season titled *In Focus*.

For more information, visit: www.clevelandorchestra.com.

The Cleveland Orchestra is grateful to these organizations for their ongoing generous support of The Cleveland Orchestra:

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The Cleveland Orchestra is proud of its long-term partnership with Kent State University, made possible in part through generous funding from the State of Ohio.

The Cleveland Orchestra is proud to have its home, Severance Hall, located on the campus of Case Western Reserve University, with whom it has a long history of collaboration and partnership.