

WEINBERG & KORNGOLD

HIDDEN LEGACIES

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CONSTANTINE ORBELIAN

KAUNAS CITY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



HIDDEN LEGACIES

In the shadows of history, the works of Mieczysław Weinberg and Erich Korngold emerge as profound testaments to the resilience of the human spirit. Both composers, deeply affected by the times they lived in, the tumultuous tides of the 20th century, faced the harrowing realities of persecution due to their Jewish heritage. Their music, rich in emotion and complexity, serves not only as a reflection of their personal trials but as an enduring legacy of hope and beauty amid despair.

This recording project aims to shed light on their extraordinary works for solo cello and orchestra, pieces that resonate with the echoes of their past while prompting reflection on our contemporary lives. Weinberg, who faced the unimaginable tragedy of losing his family to the Holocaust, and then faced further tragedy through the purges of Stalin, imbued his compositions with a raw yet ultimately hopeful essence. His music, though sometimes stark, reveals an enduring optimism that celebrates the triumph of the human spirit over adversity.

Conversely, Korngold chose to express his devastation by staying in that world which had been forever destroyed, to weave his experiences into a tapestry of beauty, to recreate the lush and vibrant traditions of pre-war Vienna, crafting melodies that invite us to revel in their richness. His cello concerto stands as a bridge between the past and the present, a reminder of the artistic brilliance that flourished before the darkness of war descended.

As we bring these extraordinary works to the forefront, we not only celebrate the genius of Weinberg and Korngold but also honor their legacies in a world where art continues to face its own challenges. This project is a call to remember, to appreciate, and to ensure that the voices of those who suffered are heard once more. Through their music, we find a shared humanity that transcends time, urging us to reflect on our own responsibilities to uphold the values of compassion and understanding in a turbulent and unpredictable world.

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MIECZYŚLAW WEINBERG

The period between 1948 and the post-Stalin “Thaw” was a challenging one – to put it mildly – for all serious-minded Soviet composers. The “anti-formalist” campaign of those years required that new music should be both comprehensible to and rooted in the experience of “the People”. “Which ‘People’?” a Soviet composer might reasonably have asked, had not such impertinence been an effective death sentence to their career. In practice, the implied recipe was tunefulness, folksiness, and resolute avoidance of any suspicion of Western-style modernist contamination. This is the context in which Weinberg composed his only two concertante works for cello and orchestra.

Weinberg was a Polish-born Jew, who had twice escaped Nazi invasions – from Warsaw to Minsk in September 1939, and from Minsk to Tashkent in June 1941. He had settled in Moscow from September 1943, enjoying the protective support of Shostakovich and producing a string of first-rate chamber-ensemble works. With that background, he might have expected more sympathetic treatment than condemnation. However, as one of the most talented representatives of

his generation, he had to endure his share of scrutiny. Moreover, his Jewish origins played against him. Almost simultaneously with “anti-formalism”, Stalin launched his “anti-cosmopolitan” campaign, targeting Jews especially in the arts and public life. With hindsight, this campaign had already kicked off with the assassination of Weinberg’s father-in-law, the prominent actor-activist Solomon Mikhoels, in January 1948. Under the banner of “guilt by association”, Weinberg himself was tailed for five years (with his full knowledge) by the secret police. Finally, he was arrested in February 1953 under trumped-up charges of “Jewish bourgeois nationalism” and incarcerated in the notorious Lubyanka and Butyrka prisons. Fortunately for him, Stalin died in March, and Weinberg was released, along with others. His health was scarred, but not completely broken.

The association that Weinberg enjoyed with some of the finest conductors and instrumental virtuosos in the Soviet Union was a source of vital moral support, both in these years and later in his life, when he did his best to keep his distance from all intrigues and in-fighting, and avoided the pedagogic or administrative

roles that gave many of his composer-colleagues a sense of social purpose and security. In August 1948, Weinberg composed a Concertino for Cello and Orchestra that remained unperformed in his lifetime, for reasons we can only speculate on – perhaps he felt, or had been warned, that it might do his cause more harm than good. At any rate, at some point in 1956, in the less hostile climate of the post-Stalin “Thaw”, he returned to the work and expanded it into a Concerto, upgrading its genial lyricism to something more serious and demanding, both for players and for audiences.

In his revision, Weinberg substantially enlarged the first movement, redirecting and intensifying its lyrical mood. Similarly, he elaborated the latter half of the second movement into something more dramatically focused, with more demanding cello writing, and the entire second half of the scherzo third movement was newly composed and upscaled. The following cadenza was rewritten so as to lead more seamlessly into the finale. The finale itself had originally been little more than an echo of the first movement; now it was completely refashioned, with its reminiscence of the opening movement saved for the coda.

The original had been scored for strings only. In elaborating the accompaniment for full orchestra, Weinberg carefully rebalanced his forces by omitting oboes and bassoons and adding a bass clarinet.

The premiere of the Cello Concerto was given on 9 January 1957 by Mstislav Rostropovich, with the Symphony Orchestra of the Moscow Philharmonia under the baton of Samuil Samosud. Later, Weinberg was to devote much attention to the cello, largely owing to the interest displayed by Rostropovich, in a series of four sonatas for the instrument solo. Already in this Concerto, however, he was clearly fully conversant with its potential qualities. This applies above all its instrument’s *cantabile* properties, which are immediately showcased in the beautifully sustained Adagio first movement, along with Jewish colourings that had already surfaced in Weinberg’s Sinfonietta No. 1, Op. 41. His confident handling of the solo line also applies to the instrument’s more lively character: first in the Moderato second movement, with its ghost of a Spanish habañera alternating with pungent klezmer, then in the virtuosity of the scherzo third movement. The finale balances its contrasting moods in an

undemonstrative rondo, at the end of which the opening theme of the work returns to close the formal arc and reassert the primacy of introverted lyricism.

Alongside the 26 symphonies, 17 string quartets and seven operas that form the backbone of his output, Weinberg composed some 26 sonatas and ten concertante works. For several of the latter he had particular soloists in mind, but whether that is the case with the *Fantasia for Cello and Orchestra*, Op. 52 (composed 1951 – 53), is not known. The 18-minute work took him two years to complete, which is extremely unusual for a composer of his fluency and prodigality, but which could also be taken as a sign of the careful calculation needed to produce a large-scale piece that would pass muster with the watchful authorities.

The *Fantasia* was not presented to the public until 23 November 1953, when Daniil Shafran and his wife Nina Musinyan played a version for cello and piano, prepared by the composer and printed in 1954. Shafran also gave the premiere of the orchestral version on 25 February 1966, with Rudolf Barshai conducting, in the Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory.

Shafran was an obvious choice for this music, given his shared Jewish origins. He and Rostropovich (four years his junior) had been vying for the position of No. 1 cellist in the Soviet Union (they were awarded joint-first prize at two competitions). Rostropovich gradually emerged as the bigger personality, with the starrier international career, and it was to him that Weinberg would dedicate his *Cello Concerto* and the first of his four solo sonatas. However, Shafran, for his part, was especially renowned for his lyrical playing, and a greater emphasis on confessional lyricism is one thing that sets Weinberg apart from his great friend and mentor, Shostakovich. At any rate, the *Cello Fantasia* plays to precisely this strength.

Left to his own devices, Weinberg was always inclined to speak, musically, in intimate tones – sometimes intensified to the point of tragic protest – expressed in a language of extended, elusive tonality. It was this inclination that helped him to meet the official demands for a relatively relaxed, tuneful style halfway. It was a compromise, perhaps, but not a sell-out.

The *Fantasia* is in one continuous movement, with an overall arc-shaped structure: *Adagio*, *Andantino leggiero*, *Allegro con fuoco*,



[cadenza], Andantino leggero, Adagio. It contains an abundance of wonderful melodies, any or all of which could well be of folk origin, though none has so far been identified as such. Unlike some of Weinberg's weaker opuses composed during the anti-formalist campaign – and there are undoubtedly some such among his various rhapsodies, concertinos, overtures and dance medleys at this time – all the ideas in the Cello Fantasia bear the generous amount of repetition lavished on them.

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ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD

The Cello Concerto in C major, Op. 37, by Erich Wolfgang Korngold began life as an integral part of his final film score for Warner Brothers in 1946. The film, called *Deception*, is a melodramatic tale with noirish overtones, set in contemporary New York in the world of classical music about a concert pianist (played by Bette Davis) trying to prevent her cellist-lover (played by Paul Henreid) recently returned from Europe where he was interned in a concentration camp, from discovering that, believing him dead, she has been the mistress of the world famous egomaniac composer Alexander Hollenius (played by Claude Rains) – hence the film’s title. Hollenius’ new cello concerto provides a crucial plot device, as he uses it as a tool to exact psychological revenge, after his mistress marries her cellist boyfriend. At the film’s climax, just before the concerto’s premiere, she murders the composer!

With the end of the war in Europe the previous year, Korngold had decided to stop writing film music and return to Vienna as soon as possible, not only to reclaim his property that had been confiscated by the Nazis, but also to try to resume his career as one of Austria’s leading composers.

Unlike his immensely popular Violin Concerto composed the year before, Korngold’s Cello Concerto has been somewhat neglected. To date there are only 10 recordings in the current catalogue and relatively few performances, whereas more than 80 recordings have been made of the Violin Concerto, which is in the repertoire of many leading violinists with hundreds of performances worldwide every year.

One of the reasons for its neglect may be its relatively short duration of approximately 13 minutes, yet requiring a large orchestra. In fact, its brevity is not a problem nowadays. Korngold may have been ahead of his time. In the twenty-first century, young contemporary composers often write single movement works of similar length and for even larger forces.

Constructed as a single movement with three distinct sections, Korngold’s Cello Concerto contains musical material that is nevertheless immensely rich and extremely condensed. It is scored for two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba, a large battery of percussion including marimba, xylophone,

vibraphone, bells, chimes, a full set of timpani, harp, celeste, piano and a full complement of strings. For the version of the concerto heard in the film, Korngold used an even larger orchestra with an expanded string section, extra woodwind and brass and a second harp!

The solo cello part is extremely demanding. Korngold originally intended that his friend, the Russian virtuoso Gregor Piatigorsky would play the concerto on the film soundtrack, but cost-conscious Warner Brothers refused to pay him his fee of \$100k. It was the principal cellist of the studio orchestra, Eleanor Aller (mother of conductor Leonard Slatkin) who eventually performed it.

Although the key of C major is indicated, the music is often harmonically ambiguous. The work begins with a dramatic crash of the gong and a chain of sombre seventh chords announcing the main musical argument (the term concerto is derived from the verb *concertare* which means strife, and Korngold perfectly reflects the true meaning of the word here). Note the melody notes of these opening chords which are important as they reappear throughout, linking the various sections of the concerto.

The marking is Allegro moderato ma con fuoco – moderately fast, but with fire. The main theme heard immediately in the solo cello is first played broadly before the orchestra takes it up in rhythmic, vigorous semiquavers. This theme offers a curious mix of C major and minor and will be subject to much variation. As with all of Korngold's major works, subtle thematic interrelationships abound. All of the themes of this concerto are closely linked to each other.

After the orchestral agitato treatment of this main theme, the solo cello uses the chordal melody notes as a delicious bridge to the rapturous, intensely romantic second subject, one of Korngold's most beautiful ideas.

After a brief cadenza, the music calms down for the central Adagio, marked first grave and then lento in the mournful key of A minor (which is the relative of C major). Its opening phrase (based on Korngold's favourite intervals of two rising fourths) is closely related to the romantic second subject. This deeply felt mini slow movement is interrupted by hauntingly chromatic, solo flute arabesques that are eventually repeated by the cello as the music subsides gradually into ominous silence.

The solemn chordal theme now returns, this time in the lower strings, leading to a fugato where the main agitato from the opening section is thoroughly worked out by the solo cello, with the different sections of the orchestra answering in fugal style, even deftly incorporating parts of the second subject as well. As the climax is reached, Korngold brings his big tune back again, this time played emphatically by the soloist, punctuated by fortissimo chords in the orchestra before the cellist launches into the short, virtuosic cadenza. In the film, this cadenza was actually even more difficult, as Korngold required the soloist to play a passage that is impossible to perform on the cello – a sequence of rapid, consecutive tenths, achieved by double tracking the cello part.

After the cadenza, the concerto rushes onwards to its triumphant, resolute conclusion and after a final return of the opening chordal idea, a brilliant virtuosic flourish from the cello of an ascending, highly chromatic sequence of twelve notes brings the work to its bravura conclusion. Given that in the film, Hollenius is supposed to be a leading “modern” composer, this 12 note phrase might be seen as Korngold’s witty reference to Schoenberg’s beloved note rows.

The film *Deception* premiered on October 18, 1946. Korngold’s unique contract with Warner Brothers allowed him to retain ownership of the music he composed for the studio and he made plans to publish the concerto. It received its world concert premiere at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles on December 29, 1946 and Eleanor Aller once again played the solo part, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Henry Svedrofsky.

Mrs Aller was heavily pregnant at the time and, as the applause ended, Korngold’s son George asked him what he thought of the performance. Korngold smiled and said “Allegro con embrio”.

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KRISTINA REIKO COOPER

The internationally heralded cellist Kristina Reiko Cooper stands out among her peers not only for her polished virtuosity but for her fierce intelligence and imaginative programming. She has performed internationally with a wide range of ensembles in both standard and contemporary repertoire.

As soloist, Cooper has performed with the Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Dresdner Philharmonie, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Prague Chamber Orchestra, Israel Chamber Orchestra, Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, Osaka Symphony, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra, Shanghai Symphony, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Los Angeles Master Chorale, Mexico City Philharmonic, and New York City Opera Orchestra, among others.

An avid champion of new works, she has world premiered and commissioned composers such as Lera Auerbach, Josef Bardanashvili, Kenji Bunch, Mario Davidovsky, Avner Dorman, Tan Dun, Philip Glass, Tania León, Roberto Sierra, and Benjamin Yusupov, and is Co-Director of the contemporary music ensemble Continuum, based in New York City.

Driven by a passion for meaningful projects, Cooper created a consortium of Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem, and the American Society of Yad Vashem to commission composer Lera Auerbach to write Symphony No. 6 “Vessels of Light”, scored for cello, chorus, and orchestra. This project, which has been performed internationally to great critical acclaim, received its world premiere in 2022 in Kaunas, Lithuania, conducted by Constantine Orbelian, with Cooper as soloist. The work commemorates the heroic deeds of Japanese consul Chiune Sugihara who, during World War II in Kaunas, Lithuania, issued between 2,100 and 3,500 life-saving transit visas to Jews. Owing to his courage by defying Japan’s regulations and risking his own life, generations of visa recipient families are alive today, including Cooper’s father-in-law Irving Rosen, her husband and three children.

Cooper has appeared at prestigious festivals such as the Lincoln Center Festival, Musicians from Marlboro, Bang on a Can All-Stars and the Stresa International Festival. Her performances have graced venues like Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, Disney Hall, Rudolfinum

in Prague, Suntory Hall, and Henry Crown Hall in Jerusalem.

Cooper was born and raised in New York City into a family of musicians. Her father, Dr. Rex Cooper, is a pianist and former professor at the University of the Pacific, and her mother, Mutsuko Tatman, is a violinist who served as concertmaster of the American Symphony Orchestra. Her grandfather, Tomojirō Ikenouchi, was a Japanese composer, and her great-grandfather, Kyoshi Takahama, was a haiku poet. Cooper holds bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from The Juilliard School, where she studied with Joel Krosnick. She is a recipient of the Walter M. Naumburg Chamber Music Award.

A founding musical director of the Israel Chamber Music Society, she serves as Vice President of the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, and as a board member of the Charney Forum for New Diplomacy. Cooper, a visiting professor at the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music at Tel Aviv University, performs on a 1743 Guadagnini cello, known as the "Ex-Havermeyer", and lives in Tel Aviv with her family.

CONSTANTINE ORBELIAN



Four-time Grammy® nominated conductor Constantine Orbelian has been called “the singer’s dream collaborator” by *Opera News*, which hailed him for conducting vocal repertoire “with the sensitivity of a lieder pianist”. In 2021, Orbelian was appointed Music Director and Principal Conductor of the New York City Opera. He has been the Principal Conductor and Music Director of the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra (Lithuania) since 2013.

Orbelian has toured and recorded with some of the world’s greatest singers, such as American stars Renée Fleming, Sondra Radvanovsky,

Lawrence Brownlee and Stephen Costello, and with the great Dmitri Hvorostovsky and other renowned Russian singers in European, North American, Russian and Asian music centers. Born in San Francisco to Russian and Armenian emigré parents, Orbelian made his performing debut as a piano prodigy with the San Francisco Symphony at the age of 11. After graduating from The Juilliard School in New York, he embarked on a career as a piano virtuoso that included appearances with major symphony orchestras throughout the U.S., U.K., Europe and Russia. Recent collaborations have been with Daniil Trifonov in Mexico City, Isabel Leonard at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Elīna Garanca at the Teatro Bellas Artes in Madrid, and Kristina Reiko Cooper performing the European and American premiere (at Carnegie Hall) of Lera Auerbach’s Symphony No. 6 “Vessels of Light” dedicated to Chiune Sugihara. Orbelian’s Grammy® nominated albums with Lawrence Brownlee (Rossini arias), Dmitri Hvorostovsky (Verdi’s *Rigoletto* and Georgy Sviridov’s *Cast off Russia*), and Stephen Costello (*A te, o cara*) were received with critical acclaim.

Orbelian was awarded the Medal of Friendship by the President of Armenia, Serzh Sarkissian, in 2015.

KAUNAS CITY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



Grammy® nominated Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1988. It plays an integral part in the cultural life of Lithuania and the entire Baltic region. Outside its home country, the orchestra has performed in Estonia, Norway, Italy, Croatia, Germany, Finland, and Switzerland, among others.

The orchestra has played with renowned conductors, singers and soloists, including Mirga Gražinyte-Tyla, Giedre Šlekyte, Adrijana Cepaitė, Juozas Domarkas, David Giménez, Rune Bergmann, Dmitri Hvorostovsky,

Lawrence Brownlee, Stephen Costello, John Osborn, José Carreras, Asmik Grigorian, Elīna Garanča, Alexander Markov, Domenico Nordio, Philippe Graffin, Laurens Weinhold, Alexander Kniazev, David Geringas, Aydar Gaynullin, and Romain Leleu.

Alongside classical repertoire, the orchestra performs pop, rock and jazz music. It has had the privilege to play with famed artists such as Scorpions, Electric Light Orchestra, Smokie, Sarah Brightman, Bonnie Tyler, Gregory Porter, Chris Norman, Robert Wells and Maggie Reilly.



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to this recording project!*



HIDDEN LEGACIES

Kristina Reiko Cooper
cello

Constantine Orbelian
conductor

**Kaunas City Symphony
Orchestra**

MIECZYŚLAW WEINBERG (1919 – 1996)

Cello Concerto in C minor, Op. 43

- | | | |
|----|------------------|------|
| 1. | Adagio | 8:03 |
| 2. | Moderato | 5:18 |
| 3. | Allegro; Cadenza | 9:59 |
| 4. | Allegro | 9:26 |

Fantasia for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 52

- | | | |
|----|--------------------|------|
| 5. | Adagio | 7:01 |
| 6. | Allegro con fuoco | 7:18 |
| 7. | Andantino leggiero | 2:26 |

ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD (1897 – 1957)

- | | | |
|----|--|-------|
| 8. | Cello Concerto in C major, Op. 37 | 11:53 |
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Total Running Time

61:28