

TONKÜNSTLER ORCHESTER

Niederösterreich

Theme: Recording Description Korngold/Sinfonietta

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Erich Wolfgang Korngold was just 14 years old and regarded as a child prodigy in Vienna when he gave his four-movement opus 5 the modest title «Sinfonietta» – and provided it with a lavish orchestral arrangement. Despite the label the work received on its completion in 1913, the Sinfonietta is certainly on a par with a full-scale symphony in terms of form, instrumentation and structure. Max Reger's Sinfonietta, composed a few years earlier, is occasionally cited in this context as a possible inspiration, but other composers from the late Romantic period onwards also composed works in this genre, among them Korngold's teacher, Hermann Graedener. The piece, which lasts around 45 minutes, is characterised by a joyful and optimistic outlook, a light-heartedness that perhaps only a young person of genius could capture in music.

Korngold – one of the most popular composers of the interwar years – was almost completely forgotten in Austria after 1945. Well into the 1980s, his achievements in the field of symphonic music were completely misjudged, and he was often dismissively labelled a «film composer». It was only later, after the beginning of a Renaissance of the works of artists suppressed under Nazism, that his work gradually became «respectable» again. Today it is an indispensable part of the global repertoire. It was during this process that the Sinfonietta in B major Op. 5 was performed in Austria in 1996 for the first time since the Second World War.

It was recorded by the Tonkünstler Orchestra and Fabien Gabel in April 2019 as part of their venerable tradition of subscription concerts at the Musikverein Wien. This very first collaboration was followed by a number of further performances together, culminating in Gabel's appointment as the orchestra's Music Director. The live recording of the «Sinfonietta», produced by Radio Österreich 1, was released on the orchestra's own label. This was founded in 2016 and has since represented the versatile artistic profile of the ensemble in numerous CD, DVD and streaming productions.

As a Viennese orchestra with a musical tradition dating back over a century, the Tonkünstler Orchestra, like the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, play Viennese instruments. The focus of their artistic work is the orchestral repertoire from the classical era to music of the 20th century. For more than 75 years, the Tonkünstler have been giving the Sunday afternoon concerts at the Musikverein Wien, their most tradition-steeped and popular concert series. They are the orchestra in residence at the Grafenegg Festival, one of Europe's leading open-air festivals which features the world's finest orchestras.

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With a total of five residencies in Vienna and Lower Austria, they are one of Austria's biggest and most important musical ambassadors. Recent tours have taken the orchestra to Britain, Germany, Japan and the Czech Republic. Yutaka Sado from Japan was appointed the orchestra's first Honorary Conductor in 2025, having led it for the previous ten years.

Since the 25–26 season, the Tonkünstler Orchestra's Music Director has been Fabien Gabel. Coming from a family of Parisian musicians, he started off as a trumpeter. His international career has taken him to top orchestras all over the world, including the London Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and the Cleveland Orchestra. In Paris he recorded music for the silent film epic «Napoléon» with the Orchestre National de France and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. The French government appointed him Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres. In the autumn of 2025 he made his debut at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

In his concert programmes with the Tonkünstler Orchestra, Fabien Gabel not only covers the core repertoire of Classicism and Romanticism but also places a significant focus on the Second Viennese School around Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern and Alban Berg. He and the Tonkünstler Orchestra also devote special attention to the music of composers such as Franz Schreker, Alexander Zemlinsky and Joseph Marx, who worked on the frontier between late Romanticism and Modernism and whose work is closely connected with Vienna.

The works of Erich Wolfgang Korngold are also an integral part of the Tonkünstler's current repertoire: It was as recently as August 2026 that the orchestra and distinguished guests delighted audiences with a concertante performance of the opera «Die tote Stadt» at the Grafenegg Festival. In previous years, the Tonkünstler had performed not only the «Sinfonietta for Large Orchestra» but also the «Baby Serenade», the song medley «Straussiana», the «Theme and Variations» and the Violin Concerto – as well as «Tales of Strauss» op. 21, a piano fantasia on waltz and polka themes by the Strausses, which was recorded at the premiere of its orchestral version in the Musikverein Wien and released in the spring of 2026 on the major streaming portals. In March 2027 – again under the baton of Music Director Fabien Gabel – Korngold's suite from the classic film «The Sea Hawk» features on the programme of the symphonic subscription concerts.

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Season 26–27 © Tonkünstler Orchestra