

EXILES IN HOLLYWOOD

John Mauceri, Music Director, Pittsburgh Opera
Principal Conductor, Hollywood Bowl Orchestra
Keynote Speaker, 2005 MOLA Conference

At the MOLA conference in Los Angeles this past February, John Mauceri gave a presentation focusing on the émigré composers who fled an increasingly hostile Europe for Hollywood prior to and during the Second World War. Stepping in for the originally scheduled John Waxman (son of film composer Franz Waxman, proprietor of the music rental firm Themes and Variations, and himself a noted expert in film music), Mr. Mauceri included in his talk recorded musical excerpts and personal anecdotes, doing his best to dispel stereotypes and making a place for men known primarily for their film music among the greatest composers of the 20th century. What follows is an edited version of his original talk.

There is nothing better than listening to John Waxman tell stories about his dad and about his life here in Los Angeles as he was growing up. John, as almost all of you know, is one of the most valuable sources for those of us who care about music written in this city—not just the music composed by his father. Like his father, he has an interest in all music. Franz Waxman was particularly unique in that in addition to composing over 150 film scores here in Los Angeles, he also created the Los Angeles Music Festival which lasted from the mid 1940s until Waxman's death nineteen years later. Franz Waxman was the one who actually premiered the latest music by Igor Stravinsky and brought Shostakovich to this country. Shostakovich only came to America twice, I believe, both times at the invitation of Franz Waxman. The first time he came by himself, the second time he arrived with the entire committee of Soviet composers which included Kabalevsky, Kalnikov and Khachaturian. These were hugely important cultural events, and they took place here in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles tends, for those of us on the East Coast, to be looked upon as the end of western civilization, and I, having been brought up in New York City, was always taught that Los Angeles was a place where there was no culture. Anything west of the Appalachians, with the possible exception of Chicago, was barely credited with existence. We knew that there was a city called Los Angeles, but the idea even that there was something called “Television City in Hollywood” was outrageous, because we knew that Lucy and Desi lived in New York City, after all! What was so important about the Los Angeles Music Festival was that first performances of all kinds of contemporary music took place there in Royce Hall. The Los Angeles Philharmonic, like so many orchestras, was not particularly interested in contemporary music at that time, and the history of the émigré composers that we are going to talk about this morning always includes their bitter resentment of the fact that their latest works were not being played by the major orchestra in their city. That, of course, has changed, and one shouldn't necessarily cast aspersions on the Los Angeles Philharmonic for not giving the first performances of *Agon* or *Canticum Sacrum* by Stravinsky, or of new works by Schoenberg because this music was, in fact, not really being performed anywhere.

[At this point, Mr. Mauceri played an audio clip of Schoenberg's *Fanfare on motifs from Gurre-Lieder*.]

This fanfare was composed in 1945 by Arnold Schoenberg at the behest of Leopold Stokowski, who was then the music director of the Hollywood Bowl. Schoenberg, who was living in Los Angeles in 1944, wrote this piece based on themes from his *Gurre-Lieder*, and there are many fascinating aspects in its one minute and 43 seconds. First of all, consider that Arnold Schoenberg, in the last decade of his life, returned for inspiration to a piece that he had written in the early part of the 20th century. Secondly, it apparently was never played until a 1991 recording session at MGM Studios, where the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra played and recorded it as the first track on their *Hollywood Dreams* album. The Hollywood Bowl orchestra was created (in some minds) as a pops orchestra, but the first piece on the first record we ever made was by Arnold Schoenberg. This work had never been played, and the last four bars had seemingly not been finely orchestrated for one reason or another, probably having to do with Schoenberg's eyesight at the time. I personally found it

astonishing that in 1991 we were responsible for what was certainly the first performance at the Bowl and probably the first recording and maybe the first performance ever of this piece. And that gets us into the whole issue of the émigré composers in Hollywood, who they were and how we have treated them.

[Here, Mr. Mauceri played an audio clip that John Waxman had recorded for the group.]

As a native-born American, one of the things I find so moving is hearing from the son of a composer who was born in upper Silesia, who studied in Dresden and Berlin, loved American jazz, and got straight A's in the conservatory, but who couldn't quite make a living as a jazz musician, so he worked in a bank while orchestrating *The Blue Angel* in 1931, which starred Marlene Dietrich. Franz Waxman was brutally beaten up in the streets of Berlin because he was Jewish, he escaped to Paris with Billy Wilder, came to Hollywood, wrote 150 film scores, won a couple of Academy Awards, continued to write music, and had a child who does not speak with a German accent and is named John not *Johannes*. When you speak to Larry Schoenberg or Katie Korngold, you realize the tremendous loss to Europe and the unbelievable gain of this country—we can talk to people who are the children of some of the greatest composers of the 20th century, men who would have been killed had they stayed in Europe. This is a very inconvenient subject. It raises a lot of emotions, and some people ask me, “Why do you care so much about this?” And I don't know the answer to that. Perhaps it has something to do with having been born in September of 1945 and wanting to better understand the music of my time. While I was in Germany this past January every television station in the country was airing a different documentary or panel discussion about the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In this country the occasion got a few minutes on CNN, but in Germany it was wall to wall coverage. I happened to be conducting the Gewandhaus Orchestra in a program that included *Siegfried's Funeral March* from *Götterdämmerung*. When the program was created the year before, I had not realized that the concert date would coincide with the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, and of course I never would have played *Siegfried's Funeral March* on the following day because of Hitler's Anschluss. After the dress rehearsal on the day of the concert, I called the Gewandhaus House people and I said “Is this all right? I'm very uncomfortable about this and I know it is 60 years later but we're playing Korngold and Wagner together.” The Gewandhaus felt it was a good thing, and the Korngold family was thrilled that the first half of the program was Korngold and Wagner. And the composers themselves, who had to flee Hitler's Germany, continued the same tradition of composition that was epitomized by the chief influence of Wagner. This was especially true in the film community, where Wagner's technique of telling a story in music using leitmotifs and musical symbols to represent characters transferred naturally to movie scores. The first 15 years of sound film composed in this city from 1928 or 1929 until the late 1940s, was based on Wagner's principles. So the composers themselves would have been unlikely to share my initial discomfort with having their music paired with Wagner's. At the end of the day the concert went on as planned, and Wagner's music was there with *Robin Hood* on one side and *Kings Row* on the other. What we must remember is that while this is an emotional subject in this country, it is even more so in Europe, where people must directly confront what their parents or grandparents might have done during World War II—in countries that value music as their fundamental achievement—and what would have happened to these composers had they not managed to come to America. One of the reasons, I believe, that so much of the music written during that period is still not played, not addressed, is, as the director of the Konzerthaus in Vienna said to me, “It's inconvenient music, John.”

When I went to Yale and studied music theory and composition, the names of the émigré composers were rarely mentioned. Today, if you want to know about the history of music in Los Angeles, you would have to find five or six “ghetto-ized books” on movie music or music for cinema. You would then have to parse the information together, and you couldn't find a book that would include the relationship of these composers to other composers or to music history in general. You would have to draw your own conclusions because in whatever books on 20th century music you will find, the émigrés as well as the film composers are listed as separate and not as part of a continuum. We do not treat Beethoven that way. Beethoven went from Bonn to Vienna, which is a

pretty big trip, and we don't talk so much about how his roots changed, and we don't look at Handel and think, "Well, there is the music he wrote in Germany and there is all that music he wrote in London." We don't talk about those internal European migrations because we see Europe as a single entity, even though anybody who has lived there as often as I have knows that each area has different traditions. When we think about *Parsifal* having been written in Venice, does anybody talk about how the colors and the smells of Italy infuse the second act of *Parsifal*? No. But when we start talking about Schoenberg's Hollywood music, which is frequently tonal, it is implied that he composed simple music because he couldn't get a job and anyway, Americans weren't bright enough to understand the music the way Europeans did. Maybe it's just possible that Schoenberg wanted to write in G major whether he had been living in Beijing or Buenos Aires. You also will read words that are used to push buttons. Hollywood composers didn't actually "compose" music. They had to "come up with" a score. Verbs change and with them the whole perception of what these men achieved. And there are also many stories about how they suffered. I made the recording *Schoenberg in Hollywood*, which contains only tonal music written when Schoenberg was living on Rockingham Avenue in Brentwood, and a critic in *The Guardian* said, "In general, going to America was a bad idea for Arnold Schoenberg." Then there was the music writer who said, "It's a pity that Erich Korngold [he actually wrote this] didn't [they found some euphemism for the word "die"] after he wrote "Die Tote Stadt" because we wouldn't have to confront all of this Hollywood music." Can you imagine writing that about a composer at any other time—that it might have been better if he had died so he wouldn't have had to write anything other than "serious" music?

Hindemith had just died when I arrived at Yale, so I sang in the Requiem Mass for Paul Hindemith, but when was the last time any of you, as librarians, were asked to get the score to the *Symphonia Serena*, or the symphony *Harmonie der Welt*, or the E-flat Symphony? Even the *Concerto for Orchestra* of Bartók, when viewed on European terms, is a kind of compromise. Bartók was again writing an appropriate piece for the dumb Americans, and, incidentally, it is performed less in Europe than it is here.

So let's talk about some of these musicians and how they might have impacted each other. It would be a mistake for us to look at all the émigré composers as a group. They are only a group when viewed from our outside perspective. The conductors—Klemperer, Reiner, Szell—were competing for the same jobs in Germany and then they were competing for the jobs in America. We probably do note that Hindemith didn't particularly like Kurt Weill, and Weill lived in New York while Hindemith lived in New Haven. Schoenberg was living in Brentwood. Korngold was living in Toluca Lake. They didn't all have tea together and it is well known that although Stravinsky and Schoenberg lived perhaps two miles from each other in Los Angeles, they apparently never saw each other. There was one concert at which both were present, but they sat on opposite sides of the auditorium. What an interesting conversation that would have been! Miklos Rózsa was Hungarian, and although he studied in Leipzig, he was not part of the Austrian or German group. The Germans, like Franz Waxman, were separate from the Austrians. Significantly, as I said earlier, it was Waxman who brought Shostakovich to America. And Waxman was the first American citizen to conduct all the Soviet orchestras in the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War.

Among the émigrés there seem to have been two kinds of composers. The ones who wrote serious classical music all had to become teachers in this country, since they couldn't survive writing symphonies or operas. And then there were those who worked in the film industry. I would say in general that every one of these composers wanted to work in film, but film, which is the ultimate collaborative art form, can be particularly difficult depending on the composer's personality. If, as a composer, you are under the false impression that you are the solitary genius creating works of art, then you can't work in the film industry. We like to make fun of Sam Goldwyn or Louis Meyer, and say they were ignorant rug salesmen who didn't know a major key from a minor key. But they had a sense of what the public wanted because Hollywood tries to be completely in touch with its audience. Irving Berlin once said "I always write for the mob, and as far as I'm concerned, the mob is always right."

The émigrés came to California for all kinds of reasons: the film industry, the weather, but mostly they came because others were there. The first one to arrive was not a refugee of World War II, but a refugee of World War I. His name was Max Steiner, and you are not going to find him in the history of 20th century music either. You are going to find him, perhaps, in the history of filmmaking. A violin prodigy from a musical family, he studied with Mahler before immigrating to New York City where he worked with Florenz Ziegfeld. It's Max Steiner who is generally credited with bringing the underscoring of a dramatic picture to the cinema. It is quite normal if you are European to have music under a scene or play; after all, what is *A Midsummer Night's Dream* but underscoring for a play by Shakespeare? With movies you can actually synchronize music and image, record it, and keep it the same forever. Steiner wrote over 300 film scores including *King Kong*, *Casablanca*, and *A Summer Place*.

[Here Mr. Mauceri played a cue from *Gone with the Wind*.]

Now mind you, this is 1939. Steiner takes the melody of "Dixie" and applies to it the same transformational process that one would to any melody. When we listen to *Petrushka* or *The Rite of Spring*, we don't know those folk tunes, so we just think of it all as being Stravinsky. When we program a Copland piece that makes use of a cowboy tune, we think that Copland wrote it, but actually he also has a great history of using other people's tunes. It becomes more surprising to us when "Dixie" is given the Mahler-Strauss treatment.

By immigrating to America, not only were the lives of these composers saved, but it is likely that, through this new medium of sound pictures, more people heard their music than ever would have been possible had they stayed in Europe. Had Max Steiner written symphonies, perhaps we would be performing his Symphony No. 12 in the concert hall. Instead, untold millions of people throughout the world have heard his music, crafted in a mold that is fundamentally that of Wagner, Strauss, and Mahler, in the movie theater. And I believe that it's no accident that Mahler's symphonies suddenly became popular around 1960. (Remember that 1960 was the moment when there was no melody permissible in classical music, and everything of value was totally serialized.) Concertgoers in the 1960s were kids in 1939 and 1940, and they knew the music of Steiner from film. They came to Mahler through one of Mahler's students. Now, when I suggested this rather wild theory to Leonard Bernstein he said to me, "Well, why do you think I conduct Mahler?" And I said, "Well, I would propose to you, Lenny, that we do a concert with the first half as Mahler Four and the second half as *Gone With The Wind*." He said, "I would love to conduct that concert." The concert never happened but how revolutionary and enlightening it would have been!

Fifteen years ago, the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra restored the main title of *Gone With The Wind*, and for a long time I listened to that opening fanfare and I thought, "What is it about that fanfare?" The fanfare takes an element of "Dixie," it goes by in a flash, and subliminally, even though this is Viennese music, Max Steiner has told you that you are in the South. There is a drum roll, and you hear "wish I were in Dixie." And the world accepts this music as simply *music* because it accompanies a Hollywood film and all the world knows *Gone With The Wind*. When I've conducted it, no matter where I go in the world, whether at the New York Philharmonic, or in São Paulo, Brazil or Torino, Italy, everybody knows it, everyone smiles at the moment of recognition.

The other Viennese is, of course, Erich Korngold, a composer familiar to all of us. But when I conducted NDR Orchestra in Hamburg as recently as fifteen years ago, there was not a single member of the orchestra who had ever heard of Erich Korngold. But Korngold's *Fanfare for Kings Row*, written in 1940, was the piece that became the crux of film music and was the model for *Star Wars* and what you might call "the new heroic style" that developed in 1975.

When Korngold was a child, he played his compositions for Puccini and Strauss. Puccini said that the music was so great that it actually scared him. Sibelius called him the new "giant eagle." Mahler screamed, "Genius, genius, genius!" Korngold, born the year that Brahms died, came to America in the 1930's and died in 1957 at the age of sixty. He ruefully referred to his life as "from genius to talent" because of film music, and as a result, critics started to denigrate his achievements. In 1981, Ernst Korngold, the elder of Erich Korngold's two sons, donated all of his writings and manuscripts to the Library of Congress.

Korngold's F-sharp major Symphony remained mostly unplayed during the composer's lifetime. He went back to Vienna and he thought that he was going to be welcomed back. Instead he read in the newspaper the next day that the critics had made a terrible mistake in the past and now they wrote that in fact he had never been any good. The F-sharp major Symphony has become a symbol for me for all the symphonies we might be playing. I conducted it with the Boston Symphony. In an entire program made up of works of the refugees (the Prelude to the Hindemith *Requiem*, *Seven Deadly Sins* by Weill, and then the Korngold Symphony), not a single note of that program had ever been played by the Boston Symphony. The principal second violinist said to me, "You know, this symphony just makes you think of all the symphonies we might have had," a very touching comment about this extraordinary work.

One more great Viennese composer who made his home in Los Angeles was Arnold Schoenberg. During the time he was here, from 1934 until his death in 1951, he continued to write strictly twelve-tone music. At the same time, he was writing the *Suite for Strings* (composed for the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1934). [Mr. Mauceri here played a recording of the *Suite for Strings*, contrasted with a twelve-tone piece.] Now this *Suite* in the old style, in G major, was written for Otto Klemperer, and those of you who are string players have probably figured out that this is fiendishly difficult music. Conductors like to do music that sounds hard but really is easy, but it's really terrible when it sounds easy and is really hard, and this is one of those pieces. Schoenberg wrote on the manuscript that "these spots are the sweat of Otto Klemperer" and I do believe that is true. The piece had its première at the Los Angeles Philharmonic and I don't believe it has been played since then. Was Schoenberg writing this music because he wanted to, or was he being forced to? In 1948, in an article originally in French entitled "We Always Go Back," he wrote that he always had in him the desire to write tonal music and in fact style was not relevant to him. *Style* was not relevant but *idea* was.

I was brought up to believe that if I liked Gershwin I shouldn't like Schoenberg, and if I liked Schoenberg I certainly shouldn't love Gershwin. Then I learned that Schoenberg and Gershwin admired each other's music and I thought, "Well, if those guys were such good friends, why I can't I love their music and why can't I express this as a continuity as opposed to 'this is a pops composer' and this one is a 'serious composer?'" One of the things we never talk about, although we know that Schoenberg wrote this amount of music and Stravinsky lived here and he wrote that amount of music, is the larger influence of these two men—not to mention Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Toch and all the others who were out here teaching—had on a medium which has the largest audience of music listeners in the history of music. Alfred Newman, who was the head of music at 20th Century Fox, studied with Arnold Schoenberg. So did David Raksin. We generally learn that the students of Schoenberg were Alban Berg and Anton Webern. And that there is a direct line from *Pierrot Lunaire* to the end of 20th century story. The general public was left behind as we entered a new century. But are our audiences really afraid of atonal music? If you were listening to CBS radio on June 5, 1949, a normal Sunday night on national radio, you would have heard Opus 38 (the Second Chamber Symphony) of Arnold Schoenberg conducted by Bernard Hermann, who had, by that time, composed the music of *Citizen Kane*, and would become the most famous composer for the films of Alfred Hitchcock. Now, how does that change our mind about history? Who knew what? Who respected whom? For example, the long-term influence of Schoenberg and Stravinsky is perfectly embodied in the score to *Psycho*. *Psycho* does not sound like Schoenberg but it is totally written as if in the post-Webernian era of 1960 when every color, possibility, and envelope, as we used to say when we were composers in the 1960s, is observed within the framework of writing for string orchestra. The opening chords are a reference to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, and the cellular approach to composition is very Stravinskian, but the actual color idea, the *Klangfarben* idea, is completely from Schoenberg and his students.

Once, I was in Detroit conducting the Michigan Opera Theatre, and the Detroit Symphony had two series of concerts that week. One was "Pops Goes Hollywood," conducted by Jerry Goldsmith and the other was a classical music series with Maestro Järvi conducting a program featuring *The Pines of Rome*. [Here Mr. Mauceri played an excerpt from Jerry Goldsmith's music for *Planet of the Apes*.]

Now, if Jerry Goldsmith had conducted this on his concert, then the only atonal music that week in Detroit would have been part of the Pops concert! The main title to *Planet of the Apes* (1968) was heard on the soundtrack by millions of people. If you programmed this and called it *Panels for Orchestra, Opus 12*, half of your audience would stampede and the ones coming late would meet the ones leaving early. But if you call it *Planet of the Apes*, it's a pops piece and you are meant to perform it on one rehearsal.

Now the other issue is whether or not we view this music as American. Are the émigré composers American composers? We all say, "No," even though the front of our brain says, "Well of course they are American. They were American citizens, some of them for more than forty years." But they were born somewhere else. They spoke accented English. Are they, therefore, Viennese or German? And the Germans will say, "Well, maybe." Here is a perfect example. Franz Waxman loved jazz, he studied in Berlin, he played in the Weintraub Syncopaters. He came to America because he would have been killed had he stayed in Germany, and he wrote music for films that starred actors like Elizabeth Taylor and Grace Kelly. He wrote melodies that are American. When you see *Philadelphia Story* and you see Katherine Hepburn, it's American. And yet, if you take away the visual image, is it American? In 1951 Waxman won the Academy Award for *A Place in the Sun*. The music accompanying the scene in which Elizabeth Taylor enters a room where she and Montgomery Clift see each other for the first time is the historic moment when the *Adagietto* of the Mahler Fifth Symphony meets jazz. It's as if you're encountering Gustav Mahler in a cocktail bar. I leave you with the question of whether this is American music or whether it is German music. Whether it is pops or whether it is classical, or whether it is appropriate in a concert hall or only accompanying a movie. I hope someday you can help me find the answers.