



That Korngold Sound

The Tippett Quartet celebrate their 25th Anniversary with the release of the complete Korngold quartets for Naxos.

They bring their unique recording experience and expertise to capture the essence of Korngold's string writing in these three quartets that straddle his Hollywood film career

'The Tippett Quartet's performances are little short of astonishing'
The Times

'I cannot recommend this recording highly enough, and have run out of superlatives'
Gramophone (Górecki Complete String Quartets recording)



Echoes of fin-de-siècle Vienna, nostalgia for a lost world and Hollywood's Golden Age sound in Erich Wolfgang Korngold's three string quartets, scores abundantly rich in melodic invention, wit and charm. The Tippett Quartet's latest album, set for release by Naxos on 10 March 2023 to coincide with the ensemble's twenty-fifth anniversary, presents bold interpretations of each work, distinguished by exquisite playing and vivid sound. The quartet will launch the recording with a special concert at Conway Hall on 12 March. In addition to marking a significant milestone in the Tippett Quartet's history, the album also stands as a reminder of the expertise, enterprise and versatility of the best of British musicians.

Since its formation in 1998, the Tippett Quartet has built a broad discography, attracting critical acclaim for recordings of everything from the quartets of Górecki, Penderecki, William Alwyn, Stephen Dodgson and Andrzej Panufnik to the music of Mendelssohn, Miklós Rózsa and Bernard Herrmann. Their recording of the latter's *Psycho Suite*, made to mark Herrmann's centenary in 2011, led the group towards Korngold's technically demanding, stylistically diverse quartets and a decade of getting to know their complexities in rehearsal and performance.

"We have always explored the full range of string quartet repertoire and aim to bring our own voice as a group to it," notes Tippett Quartet second violinist Jeremy Isaac. "We were delighted when Naxos agreed to our proposal to record Korngold's three quartets and to support our decision to take the works into a recording studio rather than the church setting we generally use for recordings." The choice of venue was conditioned by the group's desire to emulate the close-recorded sound that Korngold would have known during his later years as a Hollywood composer.

The Tippett Quartet's personnel has not changed since the group added Korngold to its repertoire in 2012. Cellist Bozidar Vukotic has been a member since its creation; first violin John Mills and Jeremy Isaac joined eighteen years ago; while Lydia Lowndes-Northcott has been its viola player for the past decade. When not playing chamber music together, their busy freelance careers include dates performing and recording film scores for Isobel Griffiths Ltd. They are also regulars with John Wilson's Sinfonia of London and previously John Wilson Orchestra. The ensemble's collective feeling for the ideal recorded sound for Korngold's quartets was also shaped by their involvement in drummer and producer Matt Skelton's 2013 project to recreate Frank Sinatra's 1956 recording *Close to You*, the original of which featured Nelson Riddle's arrangements for the Hollywood String Quartet.

"We felt our schooling in all aspects of music from Hollywood's Golden Age was the perfect fit for Korngold," observes Jeremy Isaac. "We've been immersed in the Hollywood sound with our studio experience and we've regularly programmed Korngold's quartets over the past ten years. With the experience of the various projects we have done since 2011 and the trust of Naxos behind us, we decided the time was right to record the complete

Korngold quartets. We made the album at School Farm Studios in north Essex, where we had many more microphones available and much greater control over the sound than would be the case if we were recording in a church. It had just the right level of acoustic warmth to make us feel comfortable but allowed us to play in a way to achieve the best sound for Korngold. The speed and focus of the bow, for instance, and the focus of the left hand – are very different from how you might play when you're using the acoustics of a church as part of the sound."

Korngold, although only twenty-three at the time, was already a seasoned composer when he started work on his First String Quartet in 1920. The piece, first performed in Vienna by the Rosé Quartet in 1924 and introduced by them to London the following year, has been described by Korngold scholar Brendan G. Carroll as an "exceptional work" and "extremely demanding to play". Its late-Romantic language contains traces of Schoenberg's expressionist harmonies and a strong flavour of the music of Richard Strauss. The Second String Quartet, drafted during the summer of 1933 at the composer's country home in Upper Austria, is imbued with an old-fashioned *gemütlich* charm; it ends with a waltz that might easily have originated a century earlier in the ballrooms of Vienna.

Korngold travelled to Los Angeles in 1934 and became a permanent resident after the Nazi *Anschluss* in Austria four years later. He made his name in Hollywood (and bagged two Academy Awards) with a series of symphonic soundtrack scores, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *The Sea Hawk* among them. His third String Quartet, composed in 1944-45, offered an escape from the demands of tailoring his music to fit onscreen action. Korngold recycles melodies from his film scores in the quartet, with the tender love theme from *The Sea Hawk* quoted in the second movement and a melody from *Devotion* serving as the second subject of the work's lively finale.

Beyond understanding the Golden Age Hollywood sound, the Tippett Quartet can also boast a presence on today's big screen. Its members appeared as themselves in *Knives Out*, director Rian Johnson's 2019 mystery film; they can be seen again in the movie's sequel, *Glass Onion*, scheduled for theatrical release on 23 November 2022. The group's name stands in the *Knives Out* credits in company with Daniel Craig, Jamie Lee Curtis, Don Johnson, Christopher Plummer and other Hollywood A-listers. "Not many films feature a string quartet onscreen," says Jeremy Isaac. "Our experience of taking part in that Hollywood world, albeit of today, made us even more determined to record Korngold. We wanted to do his phenomenal quartets in a way that draws from our experience and is therefore completely true to who we are as a group."

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Tippett Quartet: Korngold String Quartets Nos.1-3 (release date 10 March 2023 on Naxos)

Korngold String Quartet No.1, Op.16
Korngold String Quartet No.2, Op.26
Korngold String Quartet No.3, Op.34

Sunday 12 March 2023, 6.30pm

Conway Hall, London

Event page

Haydn Quartet No.4 in B flat 'Sunrise', Op.76/4
Korngold Quartet No.2 in E flat, Op.26
Mendelssohn Quartet No.2 in A minor, Op.13