

October 22, 2020 – Erich Wolfgang Korngold's *Die Tote Stadt*

Die Tote Stadt (*The Dead City*) is the only opera of Erich Wolfgang Korngold that continues to be regularly performed. Korngold, who was born in 1897 in Brno, a city in what is now the Czech Republic, is remembered for his neo-Romantic scores for many Hollywood films such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *The Sea Hawk*, and *Captain Blood*. Based on the short novel *Bruges-la-Morte* by the Belgian Symbolist writer Georges Rodenbach, *Die Tote Stadt* was an instant success when it was premiered in Hamburg on December 4th, 1920—until it was banned by the Nazis. The title refers to the sickly charm of Bruges, a Belgian city renowned for its bridges and canals. It's the story of a man obsessed with the memory of his dead wife, and its best-known aria is undoubtedly "Glück, das mir verblieb."

Brigitta (mezzo-soprano **Rose Wagemann**), housekeeper to Paul (tenor **René Kollo**), tells Frank (baritone **Benjamin Luxon**) how Paul suddenly came out of his lethargy after the death of his wife Marie (soprano **Carol Neblett**). Paul has met a woman who he is convinced is his dead wife returned to life. Frank counsels Paul to leave the dead in peace. At Paul's invitation, the dancer Marietta (**Neblett**) pays him a visit. She dances and sees the portrait of Marie before leaving for a rehearsal. Paul converses with the dead Marie and assures her he has remained faithful to her. She, in turn, shows him a vision of Marietta.

Paul has a vision in which Brigitta has left his service because of his sinful infatuation with Marietta. Frank is also having an affair with her, and he and Paul have a falling out. Marietta's friends and dance colleagues visit. They introduce Count Albert, who is paying for their supper. Paul is horrified to find Marietta dancing in the street. He curses her and tells her he never cared for her—only for Marie. Marietta seduces Paul and makes him take back his words.

Still in the vision, Marietta taunts the portrait of Marie. Paul is angry with her for entering Marie's room. Together they watch a religious procession pass by. Marietta taunts Paul about Marie and he strangles her with the braid of Marie's hair that Marietta has stolen. Paul's vision ends and he realizes he cannot allow mourning to consume his life.

Erich Leinsdorf conducts the Munich Radio Orchestra and the Bavarian Radio Chorus in this 1975 RCA Victor recording.

From a 1978 recording with the New Philharmonia Orchestra led by **Nello Santi**, **Leontyne Price** sings "Glück, das mir verblieb": <https://youtu.be/k90RQ1sbdz4>.

As a bonus, **Anne Sophie von Otter** sings three Korngold songs for voice and piano, and **Barbara Hendricks** sings four of his *Six Simple Songs*.

Next Thursday, October 29th, be sure to join me and my colleague **Rob Kennedy** for our Fall Pledge Drive. We'll play favorite arias, ensembles and choruses from the

station's collection, along with highlights from our thank-you gifts: Massenet's *Cendrillon* DVD, with **Danielle de Niese**, and **Olga Mykytenko's** *I Vespri Verdiani* CD.

The Thursday Night Opera House is heard at 7:00 p.m. Eastern on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're also streamed online, and you can listen as well on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

Bob Chapman

W. Robert Chapman, Host of the Thursday Night Opera House