



Acts of Homage

Ian Holtham, piano



Commemorates the 100th anniversary of the death of Brahms and the 200th anniversary of the birth of Schubert



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Franz Schubert:

FOUR IMPROMPTUS, Op.90 (D.899)

- 1** No.1 in C minor - allegro molto moderato 7'32"
- 2** No.2 in E flat major - allegro 4'02"
- 3** No.3 in G flat major - andante mosso 5'45"
- 4** No.4 in A flat major - allegretto 5'57"

Johannes Brahms:

5 VARIATIONS AND FUGUE on a THEME by HANDEL, Op.24 24'25"

Leopold Godowsky:

SIX TRANSCRIPTIONS OF SONGS BY SCHUBERT

- 6** Morgengröß 2'51"
- 7** Die Forelle 2'16"
- 8** Das Wandern 2'49"
- 9** Wiegenlied 3'02"
- 10** Heidenröslein, arr. Holtham 0'57"
- 11** Litanei 4'58"

Johannes Brahms:

FOUR PIANO PIECES, Op.119

- 12** Intermezzo in B minor: adagio 2'35"
- 13** Intermezzo in E minor:
andantino un poco agitato 4'02"
- 14** Intermezzo in C major: grazioso e giocoso 1'34"
- 15** Rhapsodie in E flat major: allegro risoluto 4'08"

Franz Schubert:
FOUR IMPROMPTUS, Op.90
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- 3** No.3 in G flat major - andante mosso
- 4** No.4 in A flat major - allegretto

Schubert's piano writing is often wondrously lyrical in style, with beautiful melodies, and colourful harmony and modulations. Rather than thematic or motivic development we see melodic variation processes, and a tonal fantasy elucidating the themes in ever new colours and shadings. The two sets of impromptus, Opp.90 and 142, which have all these qualities, carry this new fantasy and colour even further. They are late works, dating from the penultimate year of his life, and each set can be viewed as a loosely structured 'sonata' in four movements.

Op.90 No.1 in C minor is a remarkable creation. Almost entirely based on one theme, it demonstrates Schubert's melodic variation processes through a wide series of key changes and textural idioms. The E flat Impromptu is more formally based on two ideas, one in running movement, the other providing

a strong contrast with a startling juxtaposition of keys. The well known and much loved Impromptu in G flat is a song without words, the melody and harmony of which demonstrate Schubert's magical colours. The final work in A flat major contrasts the shimmering outer section with the brooding and lyrical middle part to startlingly original effect.

Johannes Brahms:
5 VARIATIONS AND FUGUE on a
THEME by HANDEL, Op.24

After his early piano sonatas, Brahms abandoned sonata form as a structure for solo piano music, preferring the variation as a technique of development; in five sets of variations for solo pianoforte he established a new direction for these works, in which the variations became independent character pieces, moving further away from the melody and harmony of the original theme than even Beethoven in his Diabelli set.

The Handel Variations, written in 1861, show Brahms at the height of his creative pianistic powers. Built on a distinctive theme from the first suite in B flat from Handel's Clavier Suites, the twenty-five variations become

independent character studies, such as a canon, a Hungarian rhapsody, and a siciliana. The overall structure of the work is strengthened by the linking of some groups of variations, thus creating variations on variations. Several variations are linked like this, including for example the last three variations in a brilliant conclusion. The mammoth fugue that concludes this tremendous work is a pianistic tour de force.

Leopold Godowsky:
6–11 SIX TRANSCRIPTIONS OF
SONGS BY SCHUBERT

The Polish-American pianist, Leopold Godowsky had a tremendous gift for transforming the music of others into arrangements of startling pianistic originality. Godowsky had an abiding love of Schubert's massive song output and made fascinating arrangements of many of them. Godowsky takes these songs as a point of departure for his own individually creative approach to a myriad of pianistic textures and a huge array of technical problems. In the songs presented here the strophic structure of the songs is explored with extraordinary musical variety, yet each transcription achieves a remarkable level of musical

cohesion and faithfulness to the spirit of the original song. These delightful compositions are themselves a homage to Schubert, and present the listener with a series of intriguing perspectives on the original songs.

Johannes Brahms:

FOUR PIANO PIECES, Op.119

12 Intermezzo in B minor: adagio

13 Intermezzo in E minor:
andantino un poco agitato

14 Intermezzo in C major:
grazioso e giocoso

15 Rhapsodie in E flat major:
allegro risoluto

Late in his life Brahms wrote several sets of short, intimate character pieces that reflect the influence of Schumann and the taste for miniatures of the late nineteenth century. The Four Piano Pieces, Op.119 date from 1892 and are the last pieces Brahms composed for solo piano. They are some of the most beautiful vignettes in the piano repertory and make a complete contrast with the large-scale forms which characterise so much of Brahms' compositional career. The intimacy and lyricism of the first three pieces give way finally to the more extended and heroic canvas of the Rhapsody.

IAN HOLTHAM

Ian Holtham had specialist musical training from an early age and travelled to Europe on scholarship in his teens where he was based for over a decade. He is a student of Géza Anda, Geoffrey Parsons, Enrique Barenboim and Peter Feuchtwanger whose assistant he was for nearly five years in London. He also studied composition and conducting at the Guildhall School of Music. He made his South Bank and Wigmore Hall débuts before he was twenty and has performed throughout Australia, England, Ireland, Switzerland, Italy, France, Austria, Hungary, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand and Korea.

Ian Holtham has broadcast regularly with the ABC since the late seventies, and is a constant performer here and overseas, returning frequently to Europe and Asia for concert and masterclass tours. He has a vast and varied repertoire which, excluding works for solo piano, contains well over forty piano concertos. He holds honours degrees in Music from Durham University, and in Arts from Melbourne University where he also gained his PhD, and has an extensive array of international performance qualifications.

As well as his busy schedule of performing and teaching, he is on the

Council of Directors of the Australian Music Examinations Board in Victoria, is the Federal Chair of the Piano Specialist Panel and has adjudicated innumerable awards in Australia and abroad. Ian Holtham has published a book on piano technique and has released a number of solo CDs, including the complete Chopin Etudes, to considerable critical acclaim. He is currently Lecturer in Piano at the Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne, and has been appointed Senior Lecturer from 1998.

Tracks 5, 12, 13, 14 and 15 recorded live on 3 April 1997. Other tracks recorded during April 1997. All tracks recorded at Melba Hall, University of Melbourne.

Recording: Martin Wright

Technical production: Vaughan McAlley

Background painting: "Der Morgen"

(Valentin F. Ruths)

Program notes: © Ian Holtham, Donald Thorton and Alan Watkinson

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