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I A N
HOLTHAM

WOLFGANG AMADEUS
MOZART

VARIATIONS

RONDO IN D MAJOR

RONDO IN A MINOR

SONATA IN D MAJOR

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Variations

- 1** Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman, K 265
- 2** La belle Françoise, K 353

3 Rondo in D Major, K 485

4 Rondo in A minor, K 511

5 Sonata in D Major, K 311

5 Allegro con spirito

6 Andante con espressione

7 Rondo Allegro

8 Sonata in A minor, K 310

8 Allegro maestoso

9 Andante cantabile con espressione

10 Presto

Piano: Holtham Steinway D 550537

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Program notes: Linda Kouvaras

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Four of the works on this disc — the two sets of Variations and the two Sonatas — were written between 1777-1778, during Mozart's early mature period, a turbulent time for the young composer. These are forms with which Mozart had played since his earliest years, improvising in both genres as a young child. **1** Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman K 265 (Paris, 1778), the set of variations on the well-known French nursery tune, is intentionally humorous, in a childlike manner. Both this set of variations and those on **2** La belle Françoise K 353 (300f) (also written in Paris, 1778) belie the turbulence of Mozart's life at this time, both professionally and personally.

During his last compositional period, represented by the following two works on this disc, Mozart's aim was the welding of innovation and tradition, the galant and the "learned"; he strove to afford the galant style greater profundity through his effortless contrapuntal mastery. **3** The Rondo in D Major, K 485 (written in Vienna, 1786, just five years before the end of his short life), a light-spirited essay in symmetry and elegance, contains a quotation from JC Bach's Quintet in D, op. 11 no. 6. Of JC Bach, Mozart

wrote in a letter in 1778: "I love him (as you know) and respect him with all my heart". **4** The A Minor Rondo K 511 (also written in Vienna, 1787) is antithetical in mood compared with its companion here. Alfred Einstein believes that the key of A Minor — and sometimes A major, too — is, for Mozart, "the key of despair". The A Minor Rondo's melody is a yearning, chromatically ascending crescendo, described by Wolfgang Hildesheimer as Mozart's "Valse Tristesse".

Returning to Mozart's early mature period for the last two works on this disc, the **5-7** Sonata in D Major K 311 (284c) was written in Mannheim, November 1777 while Mozart was enjoying his new, well-paying post at, in his father Leopold's words, "that famous court, whose rays, like those of the sun, illuminate the whole of Germany". But, following altercations over Mozart's latest romantic exploits, not to mention his supposed "deleteriousness, fiscal irresponsibility and familial disloyalty", his father ordered the then twenty-one-year-old to Paris where, in the following Summer (1778), he wrote the **8-10** Sonata in A Minor K 310 (300d). Paris was not a happy time for the young Mozart. He despised

French music, turned down the offer of a position as organist at Versailles, he suspected "malicious intrigue" and was not paid for a flute and harp concerto (K 299) that he had written in April for the Court of Guines. Finally and most tragically, his mother died during this time.

This period was a watershed time for Mozart, marking his transition into early adulthood. His output bears the hallmarks of his early mature style, and contains many innovations, mastery of design, virtuosity and elements of surprise. In the first movement of the Sonata in D Major K 311, the repetition of the first subject group is avoided in the recapitulation and appears only as a surprise in the coda (a ploy first tried out in the Divertimento K 247 of 1776). Mozart handles the middle register of the instrument in a new way: the left hand is no longer mere accompaniment, but contributes in a real way to the melodic proceedings. This is a showcase sonata which Mozart classified as being among his more difficult piano sonatas (along with the other "Mannheim" Sonata, that in C, K 309).

Much of the music he wrote while in Paris and Mannheim also displays local stylistic traits — perhaps to appeal to

the populace or through absorption of new influences. In the Sonata in D Major K 311, Mannheim influences are evident in the marked dynamic contrasts in the first two movements and in the affectation of the Andante con espressione (a childlike, innocent movement which has been taken to be a portrait of the young Rose Cannabich).

Parisian attributes are manifest in the fiery A Minor Sonata K 310, developed by Schobert and others (although the tripartite Andante cantabile, with its agitated outburst at the centre of the movement, has no expressive precedent). Beneath the fieriness, one recalls Einstein's appellation of A Minor as Mozart's "key of despair". Composed in that tragic summer of 1778, its mood, dark, dramatic, tragic, obtains no relief, even in the C Major section at the end of the exposition of the first movement. The slow movement is taken over by the uncanny agitation that appears just before the recapitulation, and the musette melody interpolated in the Presto does not abate the overall shadowiness of the movement. Its reception in 1782 in Paris — "city of criticism" — was silent and without comment.

Ian Holtham has been Head of Performance, Head of Practical Music and Head of Keyboard Studies at the Faculty of Music in the University of Melbourne since 1998. In 1999 he was additionally appointed Head of Studies at the Australian National Academy of Music, Australia's leading institution for the performance training of the country's most elite young musicians.

During his early musical training, Ian Holtham was based in Europe 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. Ian Holtham holds an impressive array of academic and musical qualifications: Bachelor of Music with Honours from the University of Durham; Fellow of Trinity College of Music; Associate of the Royal College of Music; Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music; Licentiate of the Guildhall School of Music; and a Diploma in Education. He also holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Melbourne in which he gained First Class Honours and First Place in English Literature and French. He was awarded the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Melbourne in 1990.

One of Australia's most exciting pianists, he has performed throughout Australia, England, Ireland, Switzerland, Italy, France, Austria, Hungary, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand and Korea. He has broadcast regularly for the ABC since the late seventies, and is a constant performer within Australia and overseas, returning frequently to Europe and Asia for concert and masterclass tours. He has published an important work on piano technique and contributed to various significant music publications, including the Oxford Companion to Australian Music. Ian Holtham has released seven solo piano compact discs over the last seven years to considerable critical acclaim. Dr Holtham is the Federal Chair of the Piano Specialist Panel of the Australian Music Examinations Board in Victoria and he has adjudicated innumerable musical awards and scholarships in Australia and abroad. Ian Holtham is a Steinway Artist.

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