

## EHNES PLAYS MOZART

7.30PM, Thursday 14 May  
Auckland Town Hall

# Programme Notes

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### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Symphony No.35 'Haffner' (1782)

- I. *Allegro con spirito*
- II. *Andante*
- III. *Menuetto*
- IV. *Presto*

DURATION: c.19'

When Mozart received a letter from his father Leopold, urgently requesting a new orchestral work to celebrate the elevation to the nobility of their friend Sigmund Haffner, he was already swamped with work. Mozart reluctantly agreed, but his frustration is evident from the letter he wrote in reply. When Leopold returned the score several months later Mozart was astonished because he couldn't remember writing a note of it.

The original work had been in the form of a serenade, but Mozart needed a new symphony. Removing its introductory march and a second minuet, he added flutes and clarinets to the outer movements to beef up the texture. The resulting symphony is a turbulent and dynamic work. The opening movement is characterised by the bold octave leaps of its main theme and rushing scales. The *Andante* that follows is graceful and refined, the *Menuetto* suitably noble. Mozart instructed that the *Presto* finale should be played 'as fast as possible.' Despite the circumstances of its creation, the 'Haffner' Symphony proved to be an instant and enduring success.

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### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Violin Concerto No.4 (1775)

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Andante cantabile*
- III. *Rondeau: Andante grazioso – Allegro ma non troppo*

DURATION: c.26'

In the concerto genre we tend to associate Mozart more with the piano than the violin. Mozart was in fact an accomplished violinist in his youth, following in the footsteps of his father Leopold, whose *Treatise on the Fundamentals of Violin Playing* was published in the year of his son's birth. Violin Concerto No.4 is the third of four violin concertos Mozart composed in Salzburg during the second half of 1775, at the age of nineteen.

There is a striking contrast between the way the opening theme of the first movement is presented by the orchestra and the more noble character it assumes when stated by the solo violin two octaves higher and with a subdued accompaniment. The second theme is introduced by the solo violin in its lowest register.

The *Andante cantabile* is reminiscent of an operatic aria. Mozart's most important commission during the first half of 1775 was the opera *Il re pastore*, and the Third Violin Concerto had already recycled a theme from that work. The *Rondeau* finale alternates

**Conductor** Samy Rachid  
**Violin** James Ehnés

two main dance-like themes – the first elegant and dignified, the second more lively and energetic. A third dance-tune is introduced in the middle section, with the solo violin sustaining a drone on its lowest string in imitation of a folk instrument.

## INTERVAL

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### Ernest Chausson (1855-1899)

Symphony in B-flat (1890)

- I. *Lent – Allegro vivo*
- II. *Très lent*
- III. *Animé*

DURATION: c.30'

Brought up in a wealthy family, Ernest Chausson studied law to please his father, but his real passions were for literature, painting and music. Following a trip to Munich to hear Wagner's operas he opted to concentrate on music, attending classes given by César Franck. Chausson was a slow, meticulous composer and consequently his output was relatively modest – predominantly songs and other vocal works. An opera about King Arthur, for which he wrote his own libretto, matured over a period of ten years. It was during this period that he was persuaded by his brother-in-law, the painter Henry Lerolle, to compose his only symphony.

After a portentous slow introduction, the first movement bursts forth with a lively and optimistic theme. A contrasting second theme introduces elements anticipating Debussy, particularly in its harmonic subtlety and the delicacy of Chausson's woodwind writing. The exuberant material gradually increases in momentum towards the end of the movement.

The slow movement opens in a mood of despair echoing the Act Three Prelude from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. A slightly faster middle section becomes increasingly ardent, but the movement ends in a mood of consolation, the grief-stricken rising minor third with which it opened blossoming into a radiant major third in its final bars.

The opening of the finale is stormy and dramatic, but the turbulence is soon mollified by a chorale-like second theme. A modified version of the first movement's main theme sneaks into the texture, but after a massive climax the coda begins with a noble brass chorale based on the slow introduction to the first movement.

Throughout the symphony Chausson employs elements of the 'cyclic form' favoured by Franck, achieving unity through transformation of related material across all three movements. The finished work has proven to be a masterpiece of its kind – tightly structured, brilliantly orchestrated and filled with passionate expression.

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