Composed in 1781, this set of theme and variations was written on Mozart’s arrival to seek fortune in Vienna – the much acclaimed Clavier-land. Having ceased his employment in Salzburg with the Prince-Archbishop Hieronymus Colloredo, Mozart first sought to establish himself as a teacher to the young ladies of the aristocracy – a feat he was able to achieve on his name alone. Much to the appeal of Mozart and his students, he used his compositional prowess to provide them with pieces catering to their tastes and technical abilities. Mozart is more than likely to have used this set of Variations (K. 265) for several years in his teaching.

More recognised in English speaking countries today as the nursery rhyme, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, – a word setting to the poem of the same name written in 1806 by Suffolk poet, Jane Taylor – Ah ! Vous dirai-je Maman is a children’s song of French origin, of which the melody can be dated back to at least the 1760s. Contrary to the deceptively jaunty tune – and guise as a chanson enfant – the original French song delves into a childish parody of love and the loss of innocence. It is for this reason that that two versions of this song (and variants of text) exist; a parody of love, and a children’s rhyme.

Mozart wrote four variations of this type. This set, is comprised of a theme and twelve variations, all of which featuring the thematic material displaying various degrees of embellishment in home key of C major, with exception to Variation VIII, which features a fugue like introduction in the relative minor (A minor). The penultimate variation (XI), is markedly slower than the others featuring heavy embellishment in Mozart’s signature compositional style. The piece is completed (Variation XII) with an upbeat reimagining of Variation III, but reprised in three time, before an extended coda concludes the piece with an ascending arpeggiated run up the piano.

### Ah! Vous dirai-je Maman

Ce qui cause mon tourment?
Papa veut que je raisonne
Comme une grande personne,
Moi je dis que les bonbons
Valent mieux que la raison.

### Twinkle Twinkle Little Star

Oh! Shall I tell you, Mummy
What is tormenting me?
Daddy wants me to reason
Like a grown-up person,
Me, I say that sweets
Are worth more than reasoning

**Christopher, D., (2013) Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Twelve Variations, K. 265.**

[online] Available at: <http://dylanchristopher.com/programmenotes/twelve_variations_(k265).pdf>

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