

Meridian

Sung-Suk  
**KANG**  
piano

**MOZART**

Sonata no.8 in A minor, K310

Sonata no.17 in in B flat, K570

Sonata no.18 in D, K576

'Fantasia' in D minor, K397





Almost every keyboard piece written by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) was intended to be played on a then relatively new invention, the fortepiano. Unlike one of its predecessors, the clavichord, this instrument was capable of producing wide levels of 'forte' and 'piano' but without altering pitch. With its 'cantabile' quality and considering Mozart's passion for the operatic, the piano became the ideal medium through which he could express both this side of his musical identity and his undoubted prowess as a pianist. The term 'sonata' had been widely used in the half century or so before two other giants of the 'Classical' era, C.P.E. Bach (1714-1788) and Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), helped to clearly define it in terms of form and content. For example, the six hundred-plus keyboard sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757) were nearly all one-movement pieces. Other works labelled 'sonata' of the early eighteenth century were often written for a combination of instruments. There was no set number of movements. It wasn't until the early 1770's that Haydn published a three-movement 'sonata for solo piano', following a format historians would later name 'sonata form'. This may explain why Mozart came to the piano sonata comparatively late in 1774, with his K279-284 set, having all ready composed in almost every other genre including, importantly, the 'Jeunehomme', K271 - generally recognised as his first truly great piano concerto. In any case, the young man seized upon this 'new' vehicle and eventually produced twenty-two piano sonatas; seventeen complete, one composite and four sadly lost. The existing sonatas are numbered 1-18, more or less in order of composition. They were almost all written for himself to perform, the benefit being two-fold: to showcase his ability both as a pianist and as a composer. Featured here are three that are generally considered important works - the first he composed in a minor key and the last two he composed. It is well known that Mozart toured extensively from a very

early age, accompanied by one or both of his parents. This would obviously promote awareness of the boy's ability in the hope of immediate gain but his shrewd father, Leopold (1719-1787) would have had one eye open for a future position of stable employment for his son. By 1777, no such position had presented itself so, feeling stifled by his home town of Salzburg, Mozart set off with his mother, Anna Maria, to Munich but here he would enjoy no luck. In Mannheim he met with similar disappointment but was reluctant to leave as he had fallen in love. It was only after a frantic exchange of letters between him and his father ('Off with you to Paris!') that he and his mother arrived in the french capital some months later in the following year. Failure was this time coupled with tragedy when Anna Maria became ill and died. It is most likely that the **Sonata no.8 in A minor, K310** was written around this time. It is one of only two composed in a minor key, the other being Sonata no.14 in C minor, K457. It is not known whether Mozart planned the work or if this seemingly sudden outpouring of drama was inspired by events of his stay in Paris. The former seems likely but whatever the case, this sonata heralds a very real departure from the usually care-free material presented in the piano sonatas thus far. Naturally, it isn't all doom and gloom. The nagging, percussive opening of the Allegro maestoso soon gives way to familiar, florid, Alberti bass-accompanied passage work. The second movement is a warm Andante cantabile. Despite its light texture, it is perhaps the Rondo that expresses the most angst, its nervousness heightened by an agitated, off-the-beat left hand accompaniment. In 1781, Mozart finally cast off the shackles of his oppressive employer, the Archbishop of Salzburg and also those of his dominating father by settling in Vienna as a freelance performer and composer. He married Constanze Weber the following year. The early to mid-1780's saw varying degrees of success but by 1789 his fortunes had receded greatly. Patrons were less able to sponsor

the arts due to Austria's war involvement. This year also saw a surprising lull (relatively speaking) in Mozart's phenomenal prolificacy. In February of this year, the **Sonata no.17 in B flat, K570** was entered in his catalogue of works. This particular piece may have been written for teaching purposes as it is certainly lighter in content than other sonatas up to this point. Mozart also may have wanted to keep it in reserve for a trip he was planning to Berlin in the Spring. Oddly, a few years after his death, the work was published with an additional violin part that was so superfluous that it could not possibly have come from Mozart's hand. The opening Allegro cleverly weaves material from its simple theme, the Adagio (a rondo) charms the listener and the Allegretto is as effervescent as any previous finale. Despite these seemingly unremarkable credentials, one receives, on reflection, the impression that Mozart has reached perfection in this form - that he no longer has anything to prove. (The same has been said of his last piano concerto, K595.) Respected musicologist, Alfred Einstein (1880-1952) described the work as the 'ideal' in Mozart piano sonatas. Be that as it may, the now mature composer had another ace up his sleeve. The history surrounding the **Sonata no.18 in D, K576** is a little more intriguing. In April 1789, Mozart embarked on another trip, the aim being to secure income. He may even have been seeking an official appointment. En route to Berlin with Prince Carl Lichnovsky, he performed successfully in Dresden and Leipzig but his main aim was to impress Frederick William II. It is known that he came away with a handsome gift but no money or engagements. However, in letters to both his wife and Michael Puchberg, his friend and benefactor, he states that he has been commissioned to write 'six easy piano sonatas for Princess Friederike and six quartets for the King'. It is just possible that he may have been attempting to pacify his wife and his friend (to whom he owed a considerable sum) by reassuring them that money was on the way but the fact remains that only three quartets and this sonata were

completed, the latter being far from 'easy' and certainly never reaching any dedicatee. As with K570, it was published after his death. Controversy aside, it is surely no coincidence that this sonata emerged in the wake of Mozart's recent visit to Leipzig where he had immersed himself in the works of J.S. Bach. Regarding the piano sonatas, this piece displays an unprecedented preoccupation with 'counterpoint'. That this does not detract from its 'Classical' spirit shows the work of a master. Many of Mozart's later works demonstrate this combination which Einstein described as the 'galant' with the 'learned'. The virile first Allegro contains much imitation and invention. The horn call theme has led the piece to be often referred to as the 'Hunt'. Subtle chromaticism haunts the luminous Adagio melody and in the Allegretto finale, simplicity is expertly decorated with brilliant passage work (or 'bravura') and again, contrapuntal invention. This work is justly recognised by both theorists and pianists as a concise example of one area of Mozart's 'late' style. Many of Mozart's performances were improvised and therefore consigned to history although there is no reason to doubt that ideas from these performances could have made their way to sonatas and other works. On the other hand, examples of his improvisatory skills were sometimes committed to paper elsewhere. Terms such as 'Capriccio' and 'Fantasia' were adopted to indicate pieces that did not adhere to any form and were also intended to be played in a free style. Notable examples are the 'Kleine Phantasie' (or 'Capriccio') in C, K395 (here one can imagine Mozart 'trying out' a piano), the 'Fantasia' in C minor, K475 (often coupled with the aforementioned sonata in the same key) and the **'Fantasia' in D minor, K397**. Written in 1782, it has been suggested that Mozart may have had a specific intention for this piece, such as an introduction to a sonata. Whatever the case, he did not complete the work and it is not definitely known who filled in the last few measures although we can almost definitely say that a conclusion by Mozart would



surely not have seemed so staid. Nonetheless, the piece remains one of his more popular one-movement works. The writing is free of any form, its fragmented thematic material interrupted by three short cadenzas. As in the finale of his D minor piano concerto, K466 the drama is halted by a change from D minor to the sunnier D major to conclude the piece. In the Fantasia, the theme introduced at this point is new. 'Don Giovanni' meets 'Figaro'.

*Simon Conning.*

**Sung-Suk Kang** was born in Seoul, South Korea and began her formal training at the age of five. Her talent was swiftly recognised and this resulted in her enrolment at the Seoul Institute of the Arts. After a period of study in Singapore as a teenager she travelled to the UK to continue her studies at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester with Derrick Wyndham. After graduating, she acted as assistant to renowned pianist and scholar Paul Badura-Skoda in his class at the Vienna Musikhochschule. This rewarding experience was swiftly followed by another when she was hand-picked to attend the Performer's Course at Banff Center for the Arts in Canada in 1990. These invaluable experiences paid professional and artistic dividends when she returned to Europe and took first prize in the Schumann competition in Italy resulting in a string of engagements in that country. After a final period of study in Paris, Sung-Suk settled in Vienna. Motherhood (she has two sons) meant her pianistic activities were put on hold for a few years but, thankfully, her love for music-making led her back to the concert platform in a series of highly-acclaimed performances and recordings, particularly of Mozart. Her activities in recitals, concertos and chamber music have taken her across eastern and western Europe, to North and South America, the and the Far East. Her many broadcasts around the globe have showcased her varied repertoire which ranges from Bach to Berg. In more recent years, Sung-Suk was invited to record for Meridian and her discs of Chopin, Schumann and now Mozart are a valuable contribution to the company's catalogue. She still resides in Vienna where she successfully balances a life of professor (at the Conservatoire), performing and recording artist, and mother.



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# MOZART

## Sonata in A minor, K310

- |                                       |       |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| [1] Allegro maestoso                  | 6:09  |
| [2] Andante cantabile con espressione | 10:39 |
| [3] Presto                            | 3:29  |

## Fantasia D minor, K397

- |                                   |      |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| [4] Andante - Adagio - Allegretto | 6:06 |
|-----------------------------------|------|

## Sonata B flat major, K570

- |                |      |
|----------------|------|
| [5] Allegro    | 6:02 |
| [6] Adagio     | 7:48 |
| [7] Allegretto | 3:29 |

## Sonata D major, 576

- |                 |      |
|-----------------|------|
| [8] Allegro     | 5:18 |
| [9] Adagio      | 5:51 |
| [10] Allegretto | 4:12 |

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