

PIANO SONATAS Volume 1

Sonata No.6 in D major, K284 · Fantasia No.3 in D minor, K397
Sonata No.17 in B-flat major, K570 · Sonata No.2 in F major, K280
PETER DONOHOE piano

SOMMCD 0191

Céleste Series

	Sonata No.6, Dürnitz, K284	[26:26]
1	I Allegro	7:24
2	II Rondeau en polonaise (Andante)	3:58
3	III Tema con variazioni	15:03
4	Fantasia No.3 in D minor, K397	5:20
	Sonata No.17, K570	[18:09]
5	I Allegro	6:13
6	II Adagio	8:43
7	III Allegretto	3:12
	Sonata No.2, K280	[18:54]
8	I Allegro assai	6:46
9	II Adagio	7:41
10	III Presto	4:26

Total duration: 69:05

Recorded at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire –
Sonatas Nos. 2 & 6, Fantasia No.3: February 2-3, 2018; Sonata No.17: July 9, 2018
Producer: Siva Oke **Recording Engineer:** Paul Arden-Taylor
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MOZART
Piano
Sonatas

Volume 1

Peter Donohoe
piano



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MOZART'S Piano sonatas

The 18 extant solo piano sonatas Mozart left us cover so much of his short life (there is a spurious 19th, K547a, cloned by an unknown hand from other works of the period, and not presented in this series). Revealingly, they reflect the influences of the many European centres in which he performed and where he had dealings with local musicians during his extensive tours as a child and into adulthood.

They cover a huge range of styles and genres, from quasi-concertos without orchestra to simple study pieces (though perhaps the 'easy' K545 C major Sonata is perhaps the most difficult of all to bring off). We have the percussive colourings of the *Turkish* Sonata (A major, K331) and the high drama of the C minor Sonata, K457. There are generic dance-movements, there are movements of exquisite contemplation, there are explorations of searching counterpoint, there are the most exquisite melodies, and there is the perfume of opera.

We also get the ineffable sense in all these works that Mozart himself is playing them to us spontaneously, in the moment, possibly improvising, writing them down only in later recollection. The whole context of keyboard music surrounding the composer – all absorbed, accommodated and transformed into something fresh and vital – is implied here: Domenico Scarlatti, Johann Christian Bach (Mozart's teacher during his lengthy sojourn in London as an infant in 1764-65), Haydn (who would become a close and mutually respected friend) – and a premonition of what would be later achieved by Beethoven, the

greatest disappointment of whose artistic life was that he never got to study with Mozart.

Performances today are given on a piano which in terms of mechanism is pretty standardised, whatever the make. Pianos in Mozart's day were still very much in their infancy, the fortepiano both harking back to the clavichord and harpsichord and anticipating the sustaining power of the incoming pianoforte itself.

Witnesses speak of Mozart's playing as variously displaying the silky legato of a clavichord touch, the crisp articulation of a harpsichord, the occasional recourse to the still-experimental sustaining pedal (an early version was operated by the performer's knee, which paints pictures of uncomfortable postures) and always with a lively range of dynamics.

With Mozart's own playing technique formed so early and completely, his thoughts on the subject are revealing. Writing to his sister Nannerl on June 7, 1783 he recommends quiet hands and flexible wrists, and deplores inaccurate speed: "Supposing that you do play sixths and octaves with the utmost velocity (which no-one can accomplish, not even Clementi) you only produce an atrocious chopping effect and nothing else whatever."

He also insisted upon precise attention to dynamics. And that in an *adagio* the left hand should maintain strict tempo while the right hand could be flexible with *tempo rubato* (Chopin loved that endorsement). His slow movements often demand the utmost musicality. "It is much easier to play a thing quickly than slowly", he wrote to his father Leopold on November 22 (incidentally, St Cecilia's,

the patron saint of music's, day) in 1777. "In difficult passages you can leave out a few notes without anyone noticing it. But is that beautiful music?"

The Piano Sonatas have been overshadowed by Mozart's operas, his piano concertos, his symphonies (though not all of them are worthy of carrying much weight) and some of his choral music. Yet so many of us have struggled to master them, to satisfy the stern technical demands of our teachers (and the scores themselves) but have still come to revel in their wonderful expressions of outward exhilaration and alluring poetic inwardness in the privacy of our own homes.

Written in Munich early in 1775, during preparations for the premiere of Mozart's opera *La finta giardiniera*, the **Piano Sonata in D major, K284**, was conceived as the last in a set of six sonatas which Mozart himself described as "difficult". This expansive work was composed for the musical dilettante Baron Thaddäus von Dürnitz, a Bavarian officer, landowner and bassoonist for whom Mozart also wrote the K292 Sonata for Bassoon and Bass (published as for Bassoon and Cello).

K284 begins with orchestral textures, a lean, cutting unison followed by a richly-building 'Mannheim crescendo', tension building as instruments are added over a pulsating bass note (who said it was Rossini who invented such a device?) and continues in an atmosphere of operatic bustle; we are, after all, in the same key as that of the Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro* (albeit written many years later). The development section has the visual spectacle of the left hand frequently crossing the right – an effect which even works in sound alone as there is a subtle difference in articulation, given the weight of the left-hand fingers as they come down on the treble keys over the busy right arm.

The middle-movement Rondeau en polonaise (A major) is an andante in the expressive French *galant* style, full of sudden dynamic contrast and melodic decoration, with turns, mordents, trills and crisp 'Scotch snaps'. For the finale, Mozart sets out a simple little melody (with some chromaticism in its continuation) which he then follows with 12 variations, a format he was to use only once again in his piano sonatas, in the famous *Turkish* Sonata (because of its percussive *alla turca* rondo finale). During their unfolding we hear increasing chromaticism, highly spectacular quasi-orchestral effects as in the first movement, and in the penultimate variation a highly elaborated, dynamically restless *adagio* treatment which simultaneously looks back to the introspections of CPE Bach and forward to the musings of Chopin. It is followed by a change to triple time, giving us the effect of an insouciant little minuet to conclude.

The **Fantasia in D minor, K397**, is a piece which so many of us have hacked at as children under the fearsome eye of our piano teacher. Hearing it from the hands of an accomplished performer we become aware that this is a highly personal, deeply-felt work, and a typical example of music written in a key Mozart turned to in order to express the most turbulent emotions: it is shared by the Overture to the great *opera seria* *Idomeneo*, the *Don Giovanni* Overture, the Piano Concerto No.20, K466, the String Quartet, K421 (apparently composed while Mozart's wife Constanze was in childbirth) and, of course, the Requiem.

Composed, possibly originally improvised, in Vienna in the spring and summer of 1782, the Fantasia is one of a series of works bursting from Mozart after his ear-opening introduction to the music of JS Bach and Handel by the diplomat and enthusiastic amateur musician and patron Baron Gottfried van Swieten. The

music is introspective, peppered with silences, muses in recitative, and cascades in clamour, eventually emerging into D major sunlight with a not entirely convincing innocent little D major melody. Exactly the same thing would happen in the finale of the D minor Piano Concerto (K466).

There is a school of thought that the last few bars of the Fantasia's sunny little coda were in fact added by August Eberhard Müller, a great Bach devotee, and the arranger of a piano version of *Idomeneo*. This all remains conjecture, and there is no reason to depart from the comparison with the conclusion to K466. The only alternative would have been for his Fantasia to move into an equally gloomy full-scale sonata, as in the linkage between the Fantasia in C minor (K475) and the subsequent sonata in the same key, K457 (Köchel catalogue numbers are not always chronologically determined).

Composed in February 1789, the **Piano Sonata in B-flat major, K570**, was designed to be an offering to Princess Friederike Charlotte, the eldest daughter of King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia during a visit by Mozart to the Court in Berlin. He was accompanied (indeed funded) by his admirer Karl Lichnowsky, later a great patron of Beethoven. The trip, planned in the hope of securing an appointment for Mozart at the Prussian Court, bore no fruit apart from artistic ones. Among these was Mozart's becoming acquainted with the cellist Jean-Pierre Duport, for whom he composed the *Prussian* String Quartets and a minuet theme of whose he purloined for his own *Duport* Piano Variations, K573.

Though simple looking on the page, the music is in fact alive with contrapuntal textures. The *Allegro* first movement begins innocently, its 10 introductory notes

merely outlining those of the tonic B-flat major chord, but the development section passes through a range of distantly related keys, beginning with D-flat major (an absolute rarity in Mozart, but what a gorgeously 'fat' sound it makes) before passing through a whole gamut of tonalities.

Like the opening movement, the *Adagio* begins with a simple outlining of the triadic notes of its tonic key, here E-flat major, but in this instance, unlike the stark unison statement in the first movement, harmonised with an almost hymn-like atmosphere. As the music unfolds we hear echoes of the slow movement of the C minor Piano Concerto, K491 (as well, perhaps, a foretaste of Sarastro's music in *Die Zauberflöte*) and throughout we bask in the richness of its texture.

However perkily the concluding *Allegretto* begins, it occasionally plunges the listener into a maelstrom of tonalities, equally taxing upon the muscle-memories of the pianist. It tries to end shyly, but three loud tonic chords slam shut the door.

The first printed edition of this sonata included a spurious violin accompaniment. How that could have been accommodated into the texture remains an artistic conundrum, but the fact of this edition's existence pays tribute to the ingenuity of the arrangers employed by the publishers, Artaria.

Like K284, the earlier **Piano Sonata in F major, K280**, was composed in Munich in 1775 during preparations for the premiere of *La finta giardiniera*, and laid at the hands of Baron Thaddäus von Dürnitz, it bids farewell to the template of Johann Christian Bach, a cherished mentor of Mozart's in both London and Milan (a strict sonata-form opening movement, its first subject assertive, its second subject

more yielding, a gracious middle movement, a lively finale) and seeks to break the bounds of his allegiances to the past while forging new territory of his own.

Yet there is something about these textures that evoke disparate keyboard instruments... harpsichord, clavichord, fortepiano? There is a lot of technical (but not impossible) display in the *Allegro assai* first movement, where the left hand is allowed its chance to shine; it's easy to imagine the sound of a whole range of instruments conveying the music, such as the arresting opening of the first movement combining the solidity of warm horns and the sweetness of fluid woodwinds, and dancing violins flecked with now perky woodwinds in the concluding Presto.

There are harmonic explorations in the opening movement, as well as the cross-hand work which is a feature of these Dürnitz sonatas. The *Adagio* slow movement of this F major sonata is a siciliano (dotted-rhythm 6/8 time) in the tonic minor, mollified by a move into a soothing A-flat major.

Vestiges of the dotted rhythm crop up in the Presto country-dance finale, one-in-a-bar, and fleet in delivery. Towards the end the left hand explores all the registers of the keyboard before returning to its rightful place as a humble accompanist.

Christopher Morley © 2019



PETER DONOHOE

"I cannot imagine a living pianist capable of improving on Donohoe's outstanding artistry"

Robert Matthew-Walker, *Musical Opinion*

PETER DONOHOE was born in Manchester, England in 1953. He studied at Chetham's School of Music, graduated from Leeds University and went on to study at the Royal Northern College of Music with Derek Wyndham and in Paris with Olivier Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod. He is acclaimed as one of the foremost pianists of our time for his musicianship, stylistic versatility and commanding technique.

As soloist he has appeared with most major orchestras in almost every country: UK, Germany, USA, Canada, Scandinavia, Russia, Japan, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Australia and South America; for example London Symphony, Berlin Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Dresden Staatskapelle and Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony, Czech Philharmonic, Concertgebouw, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland, NHK Symphony, Orquesta Sinfónica Simón Bolívar, Buenos Aires Philharmonic, New Zealand Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Russian National and St Petersburg Philharmonia.

In demand as a jury member for international piano competitions, he has adjudicated at the International Tchaikovsky (Moscow, 2011 and 2015), Busoni International (Bolzano, Italy, 2012), the Queen Elisabeth (Brussels, 2016), Georges Enescu (Bucharest, 2016), Hong Kong International Piano (2016), Harbin (2017), Artur Rubinstein Piano Master (2017), Lev Vlassenko Piano (2017) and Ricardo Viñes International, Spain, along with many national competitions in the UK and abroad.

Recent discs include Stravinsky's Music for Solo Piano and Piano and Orchestra (Hong Kong Philharmonic) and the complete Sonatas of Scriabin for SOMM Recordings; Shostakovich's Piano Concertos and Sonatas (Orchestra of the Swan) and 24 Preludes and Fugues for Signum Records.

Also for SOMM are the complete Sonatas of Prokofiev in three volumes.

For Dutton Vocalion he recorded Cyril Scott's Piano Concerto (BBC Concert Orchestra) and Malcolm Arnold's *Fantasy on a Theme of John Field* (Royal Scottish National Orchestra), both conducted by Martin Yates.

He played with the Berliner Philharmoniker in Simon Rattle's opening concerts as Music Director. He made his twenty-second appearance at the BBC Proms in 2012 and has appeared at many festivals, including six consecutive visits to the Edinburgh Festival and the Ruhr and Schleswig-Holstein Festivals in Germany.

Peter Donohoe performs numerous recitals internationally and has established long-standing relationships with several chamber groups and two-piano partners.

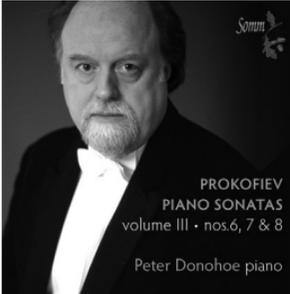
He has worked with many of the world's greatest conductors: Christoph Eschenbach, Neeme Järvi, Lorin Maazel, Kurt Masur, Andrew Davis and Yevgeny Svetlanov. More recently he has appeared with many of the next generation of excellent conductors: for example, Gustavo Dudamel, Robin Ticciati and Daniel Harding.

An honorary doctor of music at seven UK universities, he was awarded a CBE for services to classical music in 2010.



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