

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) Sonata in c minor, K. 457 (1784)

I — Allegro molto

II — Adagio

III — Allegro assai

This sonata was composed in Vienna, shortly after Mozart removed himself from the patronage of the Archbishop of Salzburg, in 1781. Mozart's piano sonatas were generally written—or even improvised—for private performances, while Mozart's serious composing efforts were focused on operas, and symphonies. Although designed for an intimate setting, the sonata is filled with the same tragedy and superb craftsmanship as in any of his great operas.

This sonata is commonly paired with the Fantasia in c minor K. 457, as they were published together. The fantasia is more episodic in mood and exploratory in harmony, but the two pieces share many similar features and remain a popular pair.

The first movement is in Mozart's symphonic style and presents the tragedy immediately, a strong statement in octaves immediately paired with a contemplative answer. The second subject is in the relative key of E-flat major and is supported by an Alberti bass figuration. The first movement's brief development is followed by a recapitulation and a coda restating the opening theme in imitation between the two hands.

The second movement shows Mozart's skill of recreating an operatic style for the piano. In the key of E-flat major, the tragedy of the first movement is forgotten and long cantabile melodies contrast with playful interjections. The broad middle section, in A-flat major, could have been the inspiration for Beethoven's ever-popular middle movement of the Sonata in c minor Op. 13 (*Pathétique*).

The third movement again presents a tragic mood and contains more contrasting material than any of the preceding movements. Opening with a melody marked by breathless sounding syncopation and followed by a declamatory fanfare-like tutti, the sonata uses typical techniques to work with the themes. In the last moments of the sonata, Mozart writes for the full range of the then smaller keyboards, in a display of hand crossings.

This sonata is dedicated to Therese von Trattner, one of Mozart's aristocratic piano students, wife of the forty-year-old businessman, Johann Thomas von Trattner. This dedication shows that Mozart had intended this sonata to have some pedagogical purpose, as also shown in his other sonatas, many of which are dedicated to his other piano students