

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Sonata in D major, K. 576

*Allegro*

*Adagio*

*Allegretto*

Born: January 27, 1756, in Salzburg

Died: December 5, 1791, in Vienna

Work composed: 1789

Following an unsuccessful trip to Potsdam, Berlin and Leipzig while in search of much-needed commissions Mozart composed the Sonata in D major, K. 576, his final work in that genre. The opening *Allegro* begins with a rising arpeggio theme played in unison by both hands. The engaging tune clearly evokes the melodic shape of a “hunting” theme that in an orchestral work would undoubtedly be played by a horn. The more lyrical second subject makes a delayed appearance well into the exposition, and occupies a relatively modest role in the movement. The prevailing *modus operandi* derives from Mozart’s mature and inventive contrapuntal style, especially in the development section where the music takes a circuitous route through a number of remote keys — a clear forecast of Romantic era harmonic journeys.

The central *Adagio* begins gently and lyrically in A major, though a melancholy sensibility darkens the mood by chromatic twists and turns as well as a shift into F-sharp minor mid-movement. (That particular key is one seldom encountered in Mozart’s music other than as the tonal center of the *Adagio* of his Piano Concerto in A major, K. 488 and somewhat briefly in his *drama giocoso, Don Giovanni*). Even in the coda, where the A-major opening is reprised, fleeting references to F-sharp minor keeps the gloom in mind. Slowly rising scalar passages and tense diminished chords add further unease.

A playful *Allegretto* born of a simple melody sets the music in motion. Once Mozart presents the tune he immediately adds a contrapuntal second theme constructed from rapid 16th-note triplets. This new motive appears in inverted form above the main theme, creating an example of expert double counterpoint, a nod to Baroque era polyphony. The composer had clearly absorbed old Bach’s rich fugal style that Mozart first fully explored in 1782 when Baron von Swieten, Imperial Viennese Court librarian, had lent the composer scores from his collection of music by the Cantor of Leipzig. (The notable similarly obliged Beethoven.)