

Programme notes by Chris Darwin, use freely for non-profit activities

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Sonata in C min Op 13 'Grande Sonate Pathétique' (1798) (arr Robin O'Neill)

Grave – Allegro di molto e con brio

Adagio cantabile

Rondo: Allegro

1798 was a prolific year for Beethoven: three string trios Op 9, three piano sonatas Op 10, three violin sonatas Op 12 and then the '*Grande Sonate Pathétique*' Op 13. Its tragic key of C minor had been used in the third of the Op 9 trios and the first of the Op 10 sonatas, preparation for the unprecedented power of the *Pathétique*. It was a runaway success and was soon transcribed for a variety of different ensembles, spreading Beethoven's distinctive voice to a wide audience of players and listeners. For some, its extreme contrasts and violent energy were too much: six years later the young pianist Ignaz Moscheles was warned to stay away from such eccentric music.

There are similarities between the C-minor 'Pathétique' Sonata and Mozart's earlier C-minor Sonata K.457. For example, their first movements share the tragic intensity that Beethoven particularly associates with C minor and the beautiful opening theme of Beethoven's *Adagio cantabile* slow movement is clearly related to the theme at bar 24 of Mozart's *Adagio* (illustrated). The association of moods with particular keys may strike us as oddly arbitrary given today's almost universal use of equal temperament. But at the end of the 18th century it was common for keyboards to have a variety of tunings, including Bach's 'well' tempered, that still gave different keys different feels through the slight mistuning of different intervals. Beethoven went on to use C minor in the Erioca Symphony's Funeral March, the Fifth Symphony and his last piano sonata.

The image displays two musical excerpts side-by-side for comparison. The top excerpt is titled 'Adagio cantabile' and is from Beethoven's Sonata in C minor, Op. 13, No. 2. It shows the first two measures of the piece in C minor, 2/4 time, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bottom excerpt is titled 'Adagio (Mozart K.457)' and shows measures 24-25 of Mozart's Sonata in C minor, K. 457. It is in C minor, 3/4 time. Both excerpts feature a similar melodic contour in the right hand, consisting of a descending eighth-note scale followed by a half-note chord, illustrating the thematic similarity mentioned in the text.