



(LEMS 8049)

DOMENICO SCARLATTI
SONATAS
ELAINE THORNBURGH, HARPSICHORD

TWO DISCS

DOMENICO SCARLATTI - (1685-1757)

As the musically gifted son of Alessandro Scarlatti, the leading composer of Neapolitan opera of the day, Domenico Scarlatti must have seemed destined for fame. He had two operas produced in Naples before he was twenty and within a few years was enjoying success in Rome, first in the service of the exiled Queen Maria Casimira of Poland and later as maestro of the Cappella Giulia in the Vatican. In 1719, at the age of 34, he suddenly gave up his Roman career for a position as mestre de capela at the Portuguese court in Lisbon. Here, his duties included both the composition of sacred music and the musical instruction of the King's brother, Don Antonio, and daughter, the infanta Maria Barbara. When Maria Barbara was married to the Spanish infante in 1729, Scarlatti accompanied her to Spain where he remained as her music master (and probably spy for her father) for the rest of his life. No operas or large-scale sacred works can be traced from his thirty-eight years in Spain; instead he seems to have composed mainly chamber cantatas, perhaps often written for his esteemed colleague, the castrato Farinelli, and hundreds of keyboard sonatas, certainly written for his pupil. It is on the latter that his fame rests.

THE SONATAS

Most of Scarlatti's 555 surviving keyboard sonatas appear to date from his stay on the Iberian peninsula. Apparently only a handful remain from his days in Italy; perhaps including K.52 (Disk 1). Most of the sonatas survive in Scarlatti's only publication, the *Essercizi per Gravicembalo* of 1738, and two sets of 15 volumes each, dating from 1742, 1749 and from 1752 to 1757. There are no autographs and surprisingly few other contemporary sources. In his classic *Domenico Scarlatti* (Princeton, 1953), Ralph Kirkpatrick postulated that the earliest volumes here are a compendium of earlier works and that the later volumes, starting in 1752, contain mainly sonatas composed at the time of their copying. He also noted that while the sonatas are individually titled, they are mostly grouped in pairs by key. The pairing is generally consistent among the principal sources. Sometimes the pairing is clearly part of Scarlatti's design; for example the last note of K - 347 is the first note of K - 348 (Disk 1). In other cases it cannot be determined if the pairing stems from Scarlatti or his copyists.

It is possible to detect a development in Scarlatti's style over the span of these collections; and increasing economy of musical ideas, a slightly sparer texture and an increased keyboard range in the treble. However it seems improbable that the bulk of the surviving sonatas were composed between Scarlatti's sixty-seventh and seventy-second year. More likely both recent and older works were gathered from together in groups of thirty - the same number of sonatas as in the *Essercizi*- as a repertoire collection for the Queen. Within these later volumes are groups of sonatas which seem to share certain stylistic similarities - particular figurations, harmonies or development of music material - which suggest that they may have been intended as a set or composed at the same time. One such group is the last twelve sonatas copied out in 1757, eight of which are heard here on Disk 2. Of particular note are the similar odd harmonic sequences in K. 547, K. 550 and K. 554. All but one of these dozen sonatas appear to be in Scarlatti's most mature style. They were the last to be copied and perhaps the last he composed. They are also among his very best.

With very few exceptions, such as the great fuge K. 417 which concludes Disk 1, Scarlatti sonatas are built on a basic binary structure. Within this structure, the musical material is treated to every possible permutation. The apparently earlier works often have several contrasting basic musical ideas; later sonatas often have just one. These musical ideas are often minimal; a harmonic, melodic or rhythmic fragment, or an instrumental sonority which is developed in astonishing ways, particularly in the second half of the sonata. The obvious didactic intent of a sonata can often be noted; hand crossings, octave passages and rapid scales in both hands, arpeggios and repeated notes all make their appearances. But such moments are there for the musical effect more than mere technical challenge, and also for the sheer delight in their execution.

One of Scarlatti's greatest gifts was the ability to conjure musical imagery from beyond the confines of his instrument. Much has been made of the Iberian elements in Scarlatti's sonatas; they are full of imitations of the Spanish guitar and often literal use of folk music and dance with their distinctive rhythms phrygian harmonies and sudden shifts between major and minor. Indeed to modern ears this is often the most immediate attraction. Less obvious sources of inspiration

are operatic scenes and imitations of orchestral writing. But such strong local flavor is hardly enough to sustain interest as the often delightfully Iberian, but distinctly provincial works of his younger contemporaries Seixas, Albero and Soler will attest. The enigmatic nature of Scarlatti's genius is that his music preserves the visceral intensity of its provincial elements while raising them to the level of high art. The literal images are often fleeting; a single phrase is often all that is needed. It is the musical staging of the imagery which makes the sonatas so appealing; each sonata is in fact a miniature piece of musical theater in which Scarlatti introduces, develops and closes his material with all the instincts of a skilled musical dramatist. Here he can be seen as his father's son except that his stage was a keyboard and the da capo aria a sonata.

TRACKS AND TIMES:

DISC ONE

1. Sonata for keyboard in E minor, K. 263 (L. 321) - 3:38
2. Sonata for keyboard in E major, K. 264 (L. 466) - 4:56
3. Sonata for keyboard in B major, K. 261 (L. 148) - 3:43
4. Sonata for keyboard in B major, K. 262 (L. 446) - 4:31
5. Sonata for keyboard in F sharp major, K. 318 (L. 31) - 3:30
6. Sonata for keyboard in F sharp major, K. 319 (L. 35) - 3:44
7. Sonata for keyboard in A major, K. 211 (L. 133) - 3:36
8. Sonata for keyboard in A major, K. 212 (L. 135) - 3:44
9. Sonata for keyboard in D major, K. 490 (L. 206) - 5:14
10. Sonata for keyboard in D major, K. 491 (L. 164) - 4:03
11. Sonata for keyboard in D major, K. 492 (L. 14) - 4:03
12. Sonata for keyboard in G minor, K. 347 (L. 126) - 2:07
13. Sonata for keyboard in G major, K. 348 (L. 127) - 2:26
14. Sonata for keyboard in B flat major, K. 248 (L. S35) - 4:50
15. Sonata for keyboard in B flat major, K. 249 (L. 39) - 4:17
16. Sonata for keyboard in D minor, K. 52 (L. 267) - 5:49
17. Sonata for keyboard in D major, K. 416 (L. 149) - 3:19
18. Sonata for keyboard in D minor, K. 417 (L. 462) - 4:17

DISC TWO

19. Sonata for keyboard in A major, K. 456 (L. 491) - 3:27
20. Sonata for keyboard in A major, K. 457 (L. 292) - 3:05
21. Sonata for keyboard in C major, K. 485 (L. 153) - 4:56
22. Sonata for keyboard in C major, K. 487 (L. 205) - 4:23

23. Sonata for keyboard in G major, K. 259 (L. 103) - 5:29
24. Sonata for keyboard in G major, K. 260 (L. 124) - 5:40
25. Sonata for keyboard in E major, K. 206 (L. 257) - 4:30
26. Sonata for keyboard in E major, K. 207 (L. 371) - 3:27
27. Sonata for keyboard in D minor, K. 552 (L. 421) - 4:50
28. Sonata for keyboard in D minor, K. 553 (L. 425) - 4:03
29. Sonata for keyboard in G minor, K. 546 (L. 312) - 5:49
30. Sonata for keyboard in G major, K. 547 (L. S28) - 4:29
31. Sonata for keyboard in B flat major, K. 550 (L. S42) - 4:57
32. Sonata for keyboard in B flat major, K. 551 (L. 396) - 4:18
33. Sonata for keyboard in F major, K. 554 (L. S21) - 5:12
34. Sonata for keyboard in F minor, K. 555 (L. 477) - 3:47

Total Running Time Disc One 71:33 Total Running Time Disc Two 72:32

Harpsichords by John Phillips, Berkeley, 1988 (Disc 1) and 1998 (Disc 2) after 18th century Florentine originals

THE INSTRUMENTS

A tantalizingly incomplete inventory of the keyboard instruments left by Maria Barbara at her death in 1758, represents our best information about instruments available to Scarlatti at court, at least in his later years. The notary described the instruments in some detail noting the materials of the cast and key coverings, the number of registers and keys, occasionally the provenance, but omitting the number of manuals. Among the dozen instruments are three sixty-one note Spanish harpsichords and four Florentine pianos with forty-nine to fifty-six notes. Two of the pianos had been converted to harpsichords. Other instruments with walnut cases sound German or even English. One instrument with four registers may even have had a sixteen-foot stop and certainly at least two manual.

Presumably the Queen or her music master could have performed sonatas on any of these. About four hundred and fifty of Scarlatti's sonatas will fit within the fifty-six note (GG-d3) range common to several instruments in the inventory, including two of the pianos. The treble range increases in some sonatas copied out after 1754. Thirty or so require fifty-eight notes (GG-e3), with thirty more extending to f3. Twenty three sonatas require a high f#3 or g3, implying a sixty-one note range of GG-g3. To complicate matters and to illustrate the limits of this inventory, five sonatas require a low FF and one of these, K. 485 recorded here on Disk 2, has a range of FF-g3, sixty-three notes (sixty-two if without the unused FF#) or more notes than any of the Queen's instruments. Unfortunately we have no idea of what harpsichords Scarlatti owned himself.

Though there appears to be a discernable development in Scarlatti's style of composition, his use of the resources of the instrument is quite consistent. The basic tessitura is rather high compared to Bach or Handel. The alto and tenor registers are rarely used for the

main melodic interest, but rather for accompaniment- often with repeated - of the treble. Contrasting with this are colorful and sudden forays into the deep bass and high treble. There is virtually no indication for the use of more than one manual, other than in three sonatas designated specifically for organ. Only K. 256 (not recorded here) has cryptic indications of what must be harpsichord manual or registration changes. In K. 554 (Disk 2) certain passages could be more conveniently performed on two keyboards. However, in this case as in others, the interference of the two hands serves to underscore the building harmonic tension of the passage; it would simply sound too easy as a piece croisee. In terms of the Queen's inventory, the extended treble range of this sonata means it could only have been performed on one of the sixty-one note two register harpsichords which had presumably only one keyboard. The description of these instruments in the inventory and in an account by Charles Burney, who saw two of them years later, indicate that they are of the Italian model, a cedar and cypress instrument placed in a second case. This can hardly be surprising. The robust tone, quick speech and distinct vocal registers of Italian harpsichords are perfect for Scarlatti's colorful writing. He was after all an Italian musician and had been playing Italian or Italian-type harpsichords and pianos all his life.

Good substitutes for these lost Spanish instruments may be found in the harpsichords produced by the pupils and followers of Bartolomeo Christofori who probably also provided Maria Barbara's pianos. A number of instruments from this tradition with dated examples from as late as 1793. Most are anonymous and appear to be from the middle decades of the eighteenth century. In appearance and details of construction they are very similar to the surviving Iberian cousins. They are large but graceful instruments, often over eight long with usually a single painted poplar case, which is veneered with cypress on the inner surfaces. There is no illusion of the two-case construction sometimes found in earlier Italian instruments. Virtually all have two eight-foot registers with entirely brass stringing. The playing examples have a somewhat drier and less complex sound than earlier Italian instruments. They feature the desired distinct vocal registers along with a surprisingly bright high treble and quick and powerful bass. Though the lost Spanish harpsichords may have differed in specific detail, they surely had similar musical characteristics.

The two instruments used here are not strict copies of any particular surviving Florentine harpsichords, rather their designs incorporate the basic features of the style. The keyboard range of the instrument used for Disk 1 is fifty-six notes, GG-d3, but is otherwise similar. The instrument used for Disk 2 has the extended range of sixty-three notes, FF-g3, but is otherwise similar. An obvious difference between the two instruments is their pitch. The smaller instrument used for Disk 1 is pitched at $a^1=415$ hz while the larger instrument used for Disk 2 at $a^1=440$. This reflects differences in scaling observed among original Florentine harpsichords.

-- John Phillips, 2000

ELAINE THORNBURGH

Elaine Thornburgh performs on harpsichord throughout the United States as both soloist and in chamber ensemble. A native of Key West, Florida, she was raised in San Francisco and began her study of the harpsichord with Alan Curtis while a student at the University of California at Berkeley. She has studied harpsichord with Gustav Leonhardt and fortepiano with Malcolm Bilson. A graduate of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, she was a cash-prize winner at the Sixth Bruges Endowment for the Arts Solo Recitalist Award and has been a California Arts Council Touring Artist since 1984.

Ms. Thornburgh teaches harpsichord at Stanford University and privately in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is also on the faculty for the adult extension and college preparatory departments at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. In April 2000, as the first American harpsichord to tour several cities in Poland, she performed seven recitals and five master classes, primarily focused around the music of J.S. Bach. She is invited back to teach and perform in Poland for fall 2001. She has been honored to give recitals and present lecture/recitals on historic instruments from the nation's most prestigious collections, including instruments at the Smithsonian Institution, Colonial Williamsburg, the Huntington Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Elaine Thornburgh has recorded for Koch International Classics performances of Sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti and of Grounds and Variations by William Byrd and, accompanying soprano Judith Nelson of the fortepiano, Haydn's English Love Songs. Her Scarlatti CD (now disc one of this Lyrichord edition) was voted Critic's Choice in 1991 by Gramophone.

Elaine Thornburgh founded HUMANITIES WEST in 1983. Under her eleven year direction, HUMANITIES WEST developed a national reputation for its presentation of interdisciplinary programs on topics such as "Handel's London", "The Golden Age of Venice" and "Jefferson: Architect of the American Vision". As founding Chair of the Western Early Keyboard Association (WEKA), Ms. Thornburgh encourages an active keyboard community since 1997 through newsletters, regional gatherings and an annual conference.

CREDITS

Harpsichords by John Phillips, Berkeley, 1988 (Disc 1) and 1993 (Disc 2) after 18th century Florentine originals.

Disc One recorded at Lucasfilm sound studios at Skywalker Ranch, Marin

County, CA
Engineered by Jack Vad
Digitally mastered by Soundmirror, Boston.
(formerly available as KOCH 3-7014-2 H1)
Produced by Elaine Thornburgh, John Phillips & Jack Vad

Disc Two recorded at St.Stephen's Episcopal Church in Belvedere, CA
Produced by John Phillips and Elaine Thornburgh
Engineered by Robin Landseadel
Edited by David Bowles of Swineshead Productions
Booklet design: G.S. Cram-Drach
Photography: Norbert Brein-Kozakewycz



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