

Domenico SCARLATTI (1685 -1757)

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| 1. Sonata in E major, K.215 L.323 | 9'19 |
| 2. Sonata in G major, K.146 L.349 | 2'23 |
| 3. Sonata in G major, K 63 L.84 | 2'03 |
| 4. Sonata in C minor, K.11 L.352 | 3'01 |
| 5. Sonata in G minor, K.373 L.98 | 2'07 |
| 6. Sonata in C major, K.513 L.S-3. Pastorale. | 5'50 |
| 7. Sonata in A minor, K.149 L.93 | 3'08 |
| 8. Sonata in D major, K.33 L.424 | 3'32 |
| 9. Sonata in D minor, K.5 L.367 | 3'40 |
| 10. Sonata in D major, K.145 L.369 | 3'18 |
| 11. Sonata in D minor, K.9 L.413 | 3'40 |
| 12. Sonata in E minor, K.394 L.275 | 5'58 |
| 13. Sonata in C major, K.159 L.104 | 1'53 |
| 14. Sonata in C minor, K.37 L.406 | 3'29 |
| 15. Sonata in C major, K.49 L.301 | 5'45 |
| 16. Sonata in C major, K.420 L.S-2 | 4'02 |

Total time: 64'14

Irakly AVALIANI, piano

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DOMENICO SCARLATTI (1685-1787)

Domenico Scarlatti was born in Naples on 26 October 1685, in the same year as those two other towering figures of European music, Johann Sebastian Bach and Georg Friedrich Handel. For the love of Art, this remarkable coincidence is certainly noteworthy.

Early life and education of Domenico Scarlatti

By the age of 25, Scarlatti's father Alessandro was a well-known and popular composer. Before becoming Master of Music of the Chapel of the Viceroy of Naples, he had spent five years in the service of the former Queen Christina of Sweden at Rome, where she had lived since her abdication in 1654. This exceptional and highly cultivated princess, lover and patron of music, admired Alessandro's work from the moment she first heard one of his operas. So impressed was she that she introduced him to the select circle of singers, instrumentalists, poets and painters of her small Roman court, which included some of the leading figures of the day.

Domenico, the sixth child of Alessandro Scarlatti and Antonia Anzalone, grew up in a musical family. Virtually all his relatives on both maternal and paternal sides played an instrument, sang or composed. Like the sons of Bach, Scarlatti was early consecrated to music and predestined to be a musician: as it turned out, a most happy fatality.

His musical education was exceptionally complete, since he was at the same time singer (basso profundo), composer and instrumentalist, excelling both at the harpsichord and the organ. At sixteen the Chapel Royal appointed him organist and composer. Although his father Alessandro played a part in his education, he cannot have been alone, since he was frequently busy with productions of his sought-after operas at Rome or Naples. Other teachers there must have been, but we ignore their identity. His musical training, and indeed other aspects of his life, are largely unknown to us. He typifies the discrete, even secretive, creative artist, who never reveals himself to others. Only his work speaks to us, enigmatically...

Career considerations and the political situation in Naples led Alessandro Scarlatti to leave that city in order to find more reliable patrons for Domenico as well as for himself: the Viceroy paid badly or very irregularly and rival musicians made his life even harder. 1701 saw the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession opposing Hapsburgs and Bourbons over the inheritance of vast lands, including the Kingdom of Naples. Neither father nor son could have then imagined that the resolution of this conflict in favour of the Bourbons would play such a decisive role in Domenico's own life, and above all in the creation of his masterpieces, the sublime series of keyboard sonatas.

In 1702 Alessandro wrote to Ferdinando di Medici, a prominent patron of the arts: 'My son is an eaglet whose wings have grown. He must not remain idle in the nest'. With this flattering but premonitory metaphor, Alessandro was inviting the duke to offer employment to the son of whom he was so proud. In vain.

The Italian Years

The period from roughly 1702 to 1720 can be spoken of as Domenico's Italian years, since he lived only in Italy where he, like his father, composed operas and religious works, genres which he had as yet no inclination to abandon. His first operas were written at Naples: *l'Ottavia restituita*, *Irene*, and then *Il Guistino* in which Tommaso, an uncle, sang the title role. After a period in Florence he went to Venice, where it would appear that he had some significant encounters, among whom Francesco Gasparini, an operatic composer close to his father. It seems that under the guidance of this musician, who had composed upwards of sixty operas, Domenico perfected his techniques of operatic and liturgical writing. Here he also met George Frederick Handel; but it was somewhat later, at Rome and in the presence of Cardinal Ottoboni, a cultivated patron of the arts, that the two were subjected to a sort of contest: who would best play the organ ? the harpsichord ? Although Handel prevailed at the organ, Scarlatti triumphed at the harpsichord. He would come to be considered the best harpsichordist in Europe, in view of his later works a sign of things to come. At Venice he also met the Irish composer, organist and harpsichordist Thomas Roseingrave, whom Scarlatti much admired. The young men cemented a fast friendship, reaffirmed years later, when

Roseingrave, back in Great Britain, did much to perform and publicize the harpsichord works of his old friend.

At Rome his patron was a queen, Maria Casimira, a French aristocrat and Queen of Poland. She had fallen madly in love with, and married, Jean Sobieski, the King of Poland, who in 1683 had defeated the Turks before Vienna. After the death of her heroic husband, his widow had retired to the Eternal City, where she assumed the mantle of Christina of Sweden, forming in her turn a *salon* of artists and wits. Under her patronage Scarlatti composed seven operas, including *Alessandro*, *Orlando*, *Ifigenia in Aulide I* and *Ifigenia in Tauri*. Although these works show Scarlatti's compositional skill, they reveal no trace of originality or of innovation, remaining firmly within the conventions of the time. His musical genius was to emerge much later - mystery of timing and creation. *'To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven'* (Ecclesiastes 3.1)

For financial reasons Marie Casimire decided to return to France and lived at Blois. Domenico was obliged to seek another patron. He was appointed Master of Music of the Chapel of the Marquis de Fontes, Portuguese Ambassador to the Holy See, thus indirectly in the service of the House of Braganza, with then unsuspected and yet huge consequences on his life and art.

Maria Barbara, Fernando and Domenico

In 1721 Domenico was thirty-six years old. He was, according to Dante's expression, *nel mezzo del cammin*, in the midst of life's way, since at 36 he had precisely as many more years to live. Although his immense talent as a harpsichordist, musical director and composer was already well known, the profound originality which flowers in his keyboard sonatas had yet to emerge.

He had been appointed by King John of Portugal to the position of *Mestre* of the Patriarchal Chapel in Lisbon. The king was an extravagant personage, given to extreme religious devotions, in which he combined a flamboyant taste for opulent liturgical pomp with a no lesser passion for music, especially church music. For King John Scarlatti composed a Te Deum and a Gloria as well as secular music. He was at the head of a choir of not less than forty voices and of an orchestra of an equivalent number of desks. He also had pedagogical duties, since the king desired that his younger brother Antonio and his daughter of 12, the Infanta Maria Barbara, both of them gifted music lovers, should receive the best possible musical education. They share both great talent and a real passion for music.

Henceforth a sort of Guardian Angel watched over Scarlatti, no less than the Infanta of Portugal, Maria Barbara Braganza, who, initially his exceptionally gifted pupil, was to become an admiring and faithful friend and, later, his sovereign patron.

'When we examine with care many of the scenes of our past', wrote Schopenhauer, 'everything there seems as skilfully planned as in a novel'. This incident of a 'skilfully planned novel', the decisive meeting between Maria Barbara and Domenico, had such profound consequences on both their subsequent lives, that it seems the ineluctable working out of a favourable Destiny.

Maria Barbara also had, like Domenico, 'music in her blood' and music tuned their twin souls to harmony. Maria Barbara's paternal ancestor, John IV, had assembled a sumptuous library entirely given over to music and her maternal ancestor, Leopold of Habsburg, had been, between military campaigns, a creditable composer. Maria Barbara, faithful to this heritage, possessed rare gifts at the keyboard and in musical composition, which the presence of Domenico nurtured and brought to fruition. Between these two there circulated what it is tempting to call a current of 'reciprocal initiation'. Her high regard for him as an artist and musician spurred him to surpass himself both as teacher and as composer: she is at once '*his exigency and his resource*' (1), and one can wonder with Ralph Kirkpatrick, remarkable biographer of Scarlatti, if Domenico, writing only for a faceless public in the absence of Maria Barbara, could have given to the world those masterpieces, the *555 Essercizi per clavicembalo*, his harpsichord sonatas.

In January 1729 Maria Barbara married Fernando, Prince of Asturias, heir to the Spanish throne and, naturally, Domenico Scarlatti was in the numerous train that accompanied the Princess into what would henceforth be her adoptive realm: she could not be without him and he would never henceforth leave her.

In Spain Domenico found a land which he adopted without reservation and which he loved to the point of making it a source of inspiration for his future work: flamenco, jota, seguidilla, zapateado and other forms are a strong presence in his sonatas.

Doubtless at the wish of Maria Barbara, Scarlatti became the harpsichord teacher of her husband, Prince Fernando. He had none of his spouse's gifts, was extremely diffident, doubting his own abilities, and like his father, the reigning King Philip V, suffered from chronic melancholy or 'depression', as we might put it today. But he was enamoured of his lively, intelligent wife (she was mistress of six languages) and, above all, he loved music, unlike his father, who one day regardless would owe to it his recovery from debilitating mental illness.

The Prince of Asturias would often give concerts, which Scarlatti organised, and Fernando would accompany his wife's voice on the harpsichord. Music was a support, a consolation and a balm to the royal couple. Scarlatti would go with them everywhere on their travels from palace to legendary palace with names redolent of the history of Spain: La Granja, Aranjuez and, of course, the gloomy Escorial.

Although heirs to the throne, in the thirteen years before they mounted it Fernando and Maria Barbara lived a relatively secluded life in the austere and rather stifling atmosphere of the Spanish court, with its elaborate etiquette. This atmosphere was worsened, made even more heavy, pernicious even, by state of health of King Philip, grandson of Louis XIV, apathetic and dominated by his authoritarian and vindictive second wife, Elizabeth Farnese. She barely disguised her hostility to Fernando and Marie Barbara, whose precedence in the succession to the throne over her own children she resented.

Farinelli, the voice that heals

Once again, music was to play a major role in that desolate court. This time Scarlatti would be a well-placed observer of, rather than an actor in, extraordinary events which, indirectly, affected him. The king was in such a lamentable state, so prostrated, that the queen in desperation sent to Madrid for the castrato Paul Broschi, famed throughout Europe under the stage name of Farinelli. His magical voice was credited with the powers of Orpheus' lute, so profound was its effect on the mental state of those who heard it.

A concert was organised in a room adjacent to that where the king lay, downcast. Farinelli sang, and produced what seemed a miracle to those present. At the sound of that matchless voice, the king, however he might hate music, was able to rise, shave, dress normally and attend the concert. In that moment Philip returned to life, thanks to Farinelli, who became henceforth indispensable to him, and to whom the king remained attached until his own death. Every evening for ten years Farinelli sang the same four airs to the king and in so doing relieved the old monarch, though never completely cured him, of his profound dejection.

Farinelli and Scarlatti thus subjected – and with admirable results – the King of Spain and the Prince of Asturia to what today would be termed 'music therapy'.

Philip showered Farinelli with honours and with gold. He became powerful and influential, without however abusing his favoured position, being content in his capacity of musician, serving his art and producing Italian operas, an activity with which, curiously, Scarlatti was not associated. Farinelli also charmed Maria Barbara and Fernando: little by little Scarlatti was relegated to a second place, albeit still a prestigious one, at court. An initiative of Maria Barbara confirms this. Irritated that, whilst Farinelli was loaded with honours, the merits of Domenico were insufficiently recognized, she asked her own father, the king of Portugal, to award her dear *mestre* the title of Knight of the venerable Order of Saint John. The investiture took place in 1738 at the Convent of Antonio del Prado in Madrid. This was the peak of Scarlatti's social ascension.

Shortly afterwards, in token of his gratitude, Scarlatti dedicated his *Essercizi per gravicenbalo*, to the king of Portugal. They are otherwise known as the 'Sonatas for Harpsichord of Scarlatti, Knight of Saint John'

Of the 555 sonatas he composed, these, the first thirty, were the only ones to be published during his lifetime, probably under his supervision. He was then aged fifty-three. 'Born in the sign of the tardy' (*Né sous le signe du tardif*) as Bachelard remarked, jokingly, of himself, it was in his maturity that Scarlatti found his authentic creative voice.

Charles Burney, the eighteenth century musicologist, drew a striking parallel between Domenico Scarlatti and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: both sons of composers revered as models of perfection by their contemporaries, they had the courage to explore new avenues which

incontestably distinguish their music from that of their gifted and overpowering fathers, Alessandro Scarlatti and Johann Sebastian Bach.

In 1746 Fernando and Maria Barbara became King and Queen of Spain. As some historians like to affirm with a touch of exaggeration, 'their reign was dominated by musicians and singers'... While Farinelli remained lavishly centre stage, Scarlatti, discretely in the wings, continued his *magnum opus*, producing one sonata after another, which he copied or had copied for his Queen. In the end there were thirteen volumes each containing thirty sonatas. To his last breath he continues to compose. But, aside from this intense creative life, he was consumed by a passion for gambling, incurring debts that the Queen or Farinelli, who both admired his genius, paid off as best they could. In his last years Scarlatti became so overweight that he could hardly sit at his keyboard. On 23 July 1757 'il senor Domingo Scarlatti' returned to his Maker. The Queen, his pupil and his friend, followed him one year later.

She had made provision in her will attributing the manuscripts of his sonatas to Farinelli. After the death of both sovereigns, the Court gave Farinelli to understand that his presence there was no longer required. He retired to Bologna, where he built a luxurious palace and continued tirelessly to bring the work and name of Domenico Scarlatti before the public, a fine example of friendship and fidelity to a *maestro* whose genius he had been able to recognize.

Scarlatti revolutionised the language of the keyboard; his formal innovations and the audacity of his harmonies won the admiration of Frédéric Chopin, Johannes Brahms and Béla Bartók, to name but those three redoubtable innovators.

In the impressive master work which he consecrated to Scarlatti, Ralph Kirkpatrick affirms that his almost daily commerce with the sonatas, which he has scrutinised, analysed and then performed, has revealed their essential character to him: far from being the brilliant, spectacular, purely virtuoso showpieces which certain renderings would have one suppose, they are masterpieces full of grace, finesse and subtlety. They bear witness to the inventive and original genius of Domenico Scarlatti.

Irakly Avaliani's performance of these sonatas is intense and profound. It reveals them in their full complexity and brings to mind Leibnitz's sublime phrase: '*Music is the arithmetical secret of the soul*'. Further, at each hearing, we feel '*one of the essential qualities of music: its power to evoke joy*' (Santiago Spinoza).

Vassili Karist

Translated by A. & G. Gledhill

(1) '*Mon exigence est ma ressource.*' Paul Valery

Irakly Avaliani was born in Tbilissi, Georgia. He began his musical studies at the Tbilissi High School of Music, then went on to Moscow Tchaikowsky conservatory. After winning the highest awards there, he continued his studies with Ethery Djakeli who introduced him to the work of Marie Jaëll and, over a period of five years, completely reconstructed his piano technique. Today he is one of the few pianists to have explored this path, as did also Albert Schweitzer, Dinu Lipatti and Eduardo Del Pueyo. Irakly Avaliani has lived in Paris since 1989. Irakly Avaliani's recording career, consistently lauded by the music press, has been patroned by Mecenat Group BALAS since 2000.