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DOMENICO SCARLATTI

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By BARRY IFE

Introduction

When Sacheverell Sitwell wrote his biography of Scarlatti to celebrate the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary in 1935, he was moved to observe that 'in the life of Scarlatti all, or nearly all, is mystery'. Fifty years later that is still true. We have a few more bare facts, and some that are more accurate, but we still lack the essential tools of biography, the letters, anecdotes and incidental mentions in other people's diaries that help to colour in the outline and show that a life did not pass unnoticed or unappreciated. His music, too, presents problems. Many of the works known to have been written in Italy, particularly the operas, are lost, and his major achievement, a body of some 555 single-movement keyboard sonatas, is preserved for the most part in a form which makes their chronology virtually impossible to determine.

Bare facts, nevertheless, can be eloquent in their own way. The outline of Scarlatti's life shows two clear phases: the early years, up to the age of 34, spent in Italy travelling from one appointment to another in Naples, Venice and Rome; and the final 38 years spent wholly in the service of Maria Bárbara of Braganza in Portugal and Spain. The contrast between the restless early phase and the stability of his later life is interesting when seen against the shift in the balance of Scarlatti's output from relatively unsuccessful vocal music in Italy to keyboard music in Spain. Such domestic details as we have are also telling: two late marriages, one at the age of 42, the other in his mid fifties, nine children, and a household which the inventories made after his death suggest was comfortable yet modest. In all, a more complex picture of Scarlatti emerges than

the fiery extrovert popularly supposed to lie behind the keyboard sonatas: gifted, certainly, yet essentially self-effacing, lacking perhaps the assurance of his more famous father; a late developer who flourished in the conditions of security, privacy and independence to which his temperament was most suited.

One fact about Scarlatti's life, however, is worth a hundred anecdotes, the fact that he was a professional, working musician. More than almost anyone else, Scarlatti belies the Romantic image of the composer. To be a professional musician in the eighteenth century meant always to be in the service of others, rarely one's own master. The shape and character of Scarlatti's life was determined, as were the lives of so many other composers at that time, by the need to attract and retain the support of wealthy and influential patrons. He wrote and played the music they wanted to hear when they wanted to hear it. Careers were made and unmade by factors beyond an individual's control, fluctuations of taste and changes in the personal circumstances of employers who were themselves often subject to broader political pressures. As we shall see, a single political event, the Spanish War of Succession and its repercussions throughout Europe, can be said to have been a major determining factor in Scarlatti's career. That he managed first to survive and then to prosper in these circumstances was due not just to his talent but to his adaptability, his readiness to travel and turn his hand to anything that was required of him, and, not least perhaps, to the fortunate circumstance of his having been born an Italian in an age when things Italian were the rage in the courts of Europe.

Naples 1685 – 1705

Domenico Scarlatti was the sixth of ten children of Antonia Anzalone and Alessandro Scarlatti. Alessandro was born in Palermo in 1660 and rose to a position of considerable eminence in the musical life of Rome. In the early 1680s he held the post of *maestro di cappella* in the court of the exiled Queen Cristina of Sweden and made the acquaintance of a number of patrons, including the Spanish ambassador to the Vatican, later to be appointed viceroy of Naples. Naples was a Spanish possession at the time, though its political status was constantly in question in the years after 1700. In 1684 Alessandro moved with his family to Naples at the viceroy's invitation to become his director of music.

Domenico was born soon after their arrival, in 1685. The important role that Spain was to play in Domenico's later life was foreshadowed at his baptism. As was the custom, Domenico was sponsored at the ceremony by the head of the household, in this case the vicereine, a Spanish princess.

After his baptism nothing is known of Domenico Scarlatti's life until his appointment in 1701, at the age of sixteen, to the post of organist and composer in the viceregal chapel. In view of Alessandro's eminence as a composer and instrumentalist, and in view of his energetic and sometimes stifling interest in his son's affairs, it must be assumed that he supervised Domenico's musical training and secured him his first post. There is nothing unusual in this. Music was a major industry of the period and, as in many other trades and professions, it was often a family affair. Very few public ceremonies or private entertainments took place without music. Music was not just an enhancement but a requirement on such occasions, symbolising for many the harmonious enactment of human affairs within a rationally ordered society. It was also a highly expendable commodity, rarely performed more than once or twice: this, as much as carelessness, accounts for the loss of so much music of this period. The need to keep up the flow of new music for religious, ceremonial and domestic use therefore provided employment for large numbers of people and the skills, and sometimes the appointments, were handed down from one generation to another. The Scarlattis were a musical family in this sense: five of Alessandro's generation were musicians and four of Domenico's.

It is likely that Alessandro's duties at Naples provided the framework of Domenico's musical education. Chief among these was the provision of cantatas and operas for both private and public performance. More than 40 operas and 65 cantatas survive from Alessandro's seventeen years at Naples, though the true figure could be considerably higher. Such a rate of output suggests a collaborative effort, particularly in the routine task of production: orchestrating, copying parts, rehearsing singers, improvising accompaniments and so on. It is in these areas, as much as in any individual tuition he may have received, that Domenico, as other professional musicians of the period, would have learned his trade. If we are to judge from his years in Italy, it seems clear that Domenico's career was intended to be closely modelled on that of his father.

Alessandro seems to have become disenchanted with Naples, however. He was clearly overworked and his pay was frequently in arrear, he gained no financial reward when his operas were staged elsewhere, and he did not share the Neapolitan taste for frivolity. Furthermore, the death of the last Hapsburg king of Spain, Carlos II, in 1700 put the whole basis of his employment in jeopardy. Carlos II died without producing an heir and nominated a Frenchman, Philippe, Duke of Anjou, grandson of Louis XIV, as his successor. The ensuing constitutional crisis shook Europe until 1714. The opposing claims of the Bourbons and the Hapsburgs were resolved only after prolonged bitter fighting and the protracted negotiations which produced the Treaty of Utrecht. The European powers exacted a high price for their recognition of the Duke as Felipe V of Spain, including the forfeiture of the Spanish possessions in Italy. The political unrest made itself felt in Naples soon after Carlos's death – the viceroy survived an assassination attempt in 1701 – and Alessandro Scarlatti no doubt felt that it was time to look for more secure employment elsewhere.

He had for some time hoped to obtain a permanent appointment with Prince Ferdinando de' Medici. The Prince had already staged a number of Alessandro's operas in the theatre at his villa at Pratolino, outside Florence, and Alessandro obtained leave for a four-month visit there in 1702 to supervise the production of a new opera. He took Domenico with him and the cantatas that the young Scarlatti wrote for Prince Ferdinando that year are his earliest extant compositions. It is possible that during this visit Domenico met Bartolomeo Cristofori who supervised the Prince's instruments and built the early prototype of the piano in 1709.

No offer of permanent employment was forthcoming from the Prince, who may have been reluctant to commit himself to the sponsorship of a composer whose work was becoming somewhat out of tune with the fashionable taste for more cheerful opera. The two men responded in different, and perhaps characteristic, ways. Domenico returned to his duties in Naples where his first operatic productions were staged in 1703 (*Ottavia* and *Giustino*) and 1704 (*Irene*). His father seems to have gone absent without leave, taking a number of minor posts in Rome. His post at Naples was declared vacant in consequence in 1704.

If Alessandro had hoped that his son might inherit the directorship in his absence, those hopes were also disappointed.

Alessandro evidently had a high opinion of Domenico's ability but fancied that his son lacked ambition and initiative. In 1705 he ordered Domenico to leave Naples for Venice and, in a covering letter to Prince Ferdinando, full of heavy hints, he wrote:

> I have forcibly removed him from Naples where, though there was scope for his talent, it was not the talent for such a place. I am also removing him from Rome, because Rome has no shelter for music, which lives here in beggary. This son of mine is an eagle whose wings are grown. He must not remain idle in the nest, and I must not hinder his flight.

Venice 1705 – 1709

Nothing certain is known about Domenico's years in Venice, what he did, how he earned his living, nor any contact he might have had with the many outstanding musicians working in Venice at that time, Vivaldi chief among them. But this period provides us with the only two reports we have of Scarlatti's virtuosity at the keyboard. Neither of them is entirely reliable for a number of reasons, but each one may contain a grain of truth. The first is given by the prolific eighteenth-century writer and traveller, Charles Burney, who recounts a meeting in Venice between Scarlatti and the young English composer Thomas Roseingrave. At a musical evening in the house of a nobleman Roseingrave is asked to show what he can do at the harpsichord. He obliges with a toccata and fancies that it is well received. Soon after,

> a grave young man dressed in black and in a black wig, who had stood in one corner of the room, very quiet and attentive while Roseingrave played, being asked to sit down to the harpsichord, when he began to play, Roseingrave said he thought ten hundred devils had been at the instrument; he never had heard such passages of execution and effect before. The performance so far surpassed his own, and every degree of perfection to which he thought it possible he should ever arrive, that, if he had been in sight of any instrument with which to have done the deed, he should have cut off his own fingers.

It must be remembered that Burney was writing long after the event, repeating what Roseingrave told him, and that Roseingrave went mad in later life. Burney also says that he liked Roseingrave for his 'entertaining conversation', and the implication that Scarlatti was possessed by devils is characteristic of legends about feats of musical dexterity. But the image of Scarlatti materialising unostentatiously from a corner, comprehensively to outplay the cocky Englishman, has a lingering quality. After this encounter the two men remained ever the best of friends.

The second account concerns Scarlatti's alleged contest with Handel, whom he may have met in Venice or Rome or both. The contest almost certainly took place at neither, but Handel's biographer John Mainwaring, writing in 1760, sets it in Cardinal Ottoboni's weekly chamber music salon in Rome:

> As [Scarlatti] was an exquisite player the Cardinal was resolved to bring him and Handel together for a trial of skill. The issue of the trial on the harpsichord hath been differently reported. It has been said that some gave the preference to Scarlatti. However, when they came to the organ there was not the least pretence for doubting to which of them it belonged. Scarlatti himself declared the superiority of his antagonist . . . Though no two persons ever arrived at such a perfection on their respective instruments, yet it is remarkable that there was a total difference in their manner. The characteristic excellence of Scarlatti seems to have consisted in a certain elegance and delicacy of expression. Handel had an uncommon brilliancy and command of finger.

It is difficult to believe in a contest as such, and the story is quite clearly told mostly because it is to Handel's credit. No other writer mentions it. Nevertheless, whenever outstanding players are in the same place at the same time, people will make comparisons, and it is unlikely that a player will get a reputation for elegance and delicacy of expression (or for 'the sweetest temper and the genteelest behaviour' as Mainwaring also records) if he possessed none of these things.

Both reports are infuriatingly silent about what we would most like to know: not just how, but what did Scarlatti play? This is not idle curiosity. By 1709 Scarlatti was 24 and clearly an accomplished

harpsichordist. The foundations of his musical language, both as a player and composer, were already laid. We may be fairly certain that that language was based on the three main keyboard genres of the seventeenth century: the contrapuntal forms like the ricercar and canzona, the more brilliant toccatas and variations, and dance movements or settings of vocal music. Any player worth his salt was expected to improvise in each of these forms, to play works from the published repertoire, and to offer something of his own. Improvisation was the basis of keyboard performance throughout the Renaissance and Baroque, and players learned to improvise in the style of the great masters as well as playing works composed by them. This was true even of the strictest contrapuntal forms. Roseingrave himself obtained his post at St. George's, Hanover Square, on the strength of his extempore treatment of fugue subjects given by the judges, and Bach's *Musical Offering* has its origins in a similar though less earnest trial of skill. Scarlatti's estimation of the importance of keyboard counterpoint is stressed in his sole surviving letter, addressed to the Duke of Huéscar in 1752, and a significant proportion of the sonatas begin with a point of imitation, as if to confirm this view.

As for the composed repertoire, Scarlatti had a rich choice among the seventeenth-century Italian keyboard masters with Frescobaldi at their head. The dramatic harmonies and declamatory rhetoric of Frescobaldi's toccatas left a clear impact on Scarlatti's work. Naples itself had an important keyboard tradition of Spanish origin, represented by Valente, Trabaci and Strozzi. Of the later Italian composers Scarlatti may, according to Burney, have studied with Gasparini, whose keyboard tutor published in 1708 is a guide to contemporary treatment of two prominent features of Scarlatti's musical language, dissonance and the acciaccatura. Scarlatti could also have met Pasquini in Rome before his death in 1710. Some of Scarlatti's more *galant* textures are reminiscent of Pasquini's suites and dances. Alessandro Scarlatti himself may have written some music for his son, even though the keyboard works he wrote down, mostly toccatas in several movements, are generally thought to date from after 1715.

It is difficult to imagine, however, that Scarlatti did not have something of his own to play by the time he was in Venice. He had just left a post in Naples as composer, and keyboard performance was inseparable from composition. What is more, Roseingrave,

who went back to England around 1715 to start a Scarlatti cult which lasted throughout the eighteenth century, based on Scarlatti the composer, not the performer. Roseingrave is unlikely to have returned home without taking some tangible proof of Scarlatti's genius with him.

Rome 1709–1719

The ten years which Scarlatti spent in Rome are relatively speaking some of the best documented of his life. Once again he appears to have owed his position to a combination of politics and parental influence. Early in January 1709, Alessandro had decided to return to Naples. The political face of Europe had changed considerably during the Spanish War of Succession and this time it was the turn of the Austrian viceroy to issue the invitation. Alessandro's departure left a gap in the musical life of Rome and, in particular, a vacant post as *maestro di cappella* with the French-born Queen Maria Casimira of Poland. Domenico's move to Rome was evidently timed to enable him to take his father's place.

Maria Casimira had arrived in Rome in 1699, exiled from Poland by her son, who found it impossible to reign with her in attendance. She promptly proceeded to take over the role of royal patron of the arts which had been left unfilled since the death of Queen Cristina, Alessandro's first patron, in 1689. The tradition of urbanity and lavish hospitality had been continued in the meantime by Cardinal Ottoboni, who attracted a glittering array of talent to his weekly chamber music recitals, including the two Scarlattis, Handel, Pasquini and Corelli. Soon after her arrival in Rome, Maria Casimira leased the Palazzo Zuccari and set out to create an extravagant and ostentatious circle of her own.

Scarlatti remained in Maria Casimira's service until she left Rome in 1714. During this time he was mainly occupied in collaborating with the librettist Capeci and the designer Juvarra in the production of melodramatic operas for the private theatre she had had built at the Palazzo in 1708. Seven of Scarlatti's operas were performed there between 1710 and 1714. Of these, only one, *Tetide in Sciro* (1712) survives virtually complete in its original form. The first act of *Orlando* (1711) also survives in full score, together with a revised version of *Amor d' un' ombra* (1714) produced and published in London by Roseingrave in 1720 under

the title of *Narciso*. Other operatic music may also lie unidentified within Scarlatti's 17 orchestral sinfonias, which are known to contain reworkings of the overtures of *Tetide, Narciso* and *Tolomeo e Alessandro* (1711). Since full scores of the three extant operas have only recently come to light it is possible that others may eventually be recovered. Some of Juvarra's set designs for these operas also survive. They suggest a remarkably ambitious level of production for what must have been a very small domestic theatre. Scarlatti also produced at least one oratorio while in Maria Casimira's service, and a cantata written in 1712 to celebrate the anniversary of the liberation of Vienna from the Turks in 1683. Both are lost.

By 1714 Maria Casimira's funds were running low and she left Rome for her native land, France, where she died the following year. Her departure would have put Scarlatti out of work had he not already been careful to minimise the risk by taking advantage of his contacts and his father's reputation at the Vatican. In 1713 he was nominated assistant *maestro di cappella* at the Cappella Giulia at St. Peter's. In 1714 he produced a Christmas Eve cantata, as his father had done in previous years, and by February 1715 Domenico was on the payroll, having succeeded to the post of *maestro* on the death of the previous incumbent. More than a century earlier Frescobaldi had held the same post. Of Scarlatti's liturgical music from this period four pieces survive in a style that is conservative, even severe: a setting of the hymn *Iste Confessor;* two *Misereres;* and a ten-part *Stabat Mater* of real quality.

As was normal at the time, prudence demanded that Scarlatti cultivate more than one patron, and he was quick to find a source of secular patronage to replace Maria Casimira. The same year, 1714, he entered the service of the Portuguese ambassador, the Marques de Fontes, and composed a cantata, now lost, to celebrate the birth of the Portuguese crown prince in June. It is through this contact that Scarlatti later secured his post in the court of João V of Portugal. A Christmas cantata for that year is also lost, though one aria from *Ambleto* (1715) does survive. This opera, whose superficiality and happy ending make it barely recognisable as the plot of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, was the first which Scarlatti wrote for public rather than private performance. Our knowledge of this and all Scarlatti's lost operas comes from printed copies of the libretti, purchased by the audience for perusal during the performance.

These often survive long after the manuscript score and orchestral parts have disappeared. In a copy of the libretto of *Ambleto* mention of the scheduled intermezzo, *La Dirindina*, has been crossed out by hand. It was replaced in the performance by another interlude, the *Intermedi Pastorali*, now lost. Though we do not know the reasons for this last-minute change of plan, made too late to be incorporated in the programme, it gives a brief glimpse of the pressures under which musicians often had to work in the theatre. *La Dirindina* is a satire on opera singers, and it may have been withdrawn because it ruffled a few theatrical feathers, but since the piece was performed later in the year, it is possible that it was simply not ready in time.

After *Ambleto* Scarlatti only ventured once more into the public theatre with *Berenice*, a collaborative effort with Nicola Porpora in 1718. In the same year, in the same theatre, Alessandro Scarlatti staged his 65th opera. The parallels between the careers of Alessandro and Domenico are obvious. Both spent their lives in pursuit of financial and professional security and both were principally engaged in the production of opera and other vocal works for domestic and religious use. Both were outstanding keyboard players. Alessandro's service with Queen Cristina and Domenico's with Maria Casimira provides the best example of history repeating itself, or attempting to do so. But Domenico's music matched his father's neither in quantity nor quality. His output up to 1719 is meagre by Alessandro's standards, even if the lost works are taken into account, and Burney's view of the 'sobriety and almost dullness of his songs' has never met with dissent. Moreover, Domenico evidently lacked his father's energetic personality. He constantly needed pushing and can hardly have felt comfortable in the flouncing and gesturing world of opera. Nor can he have been very enthusiastic at the prospect of a life spent celebrating in music the births of princes or the liberation of cities, not even Vienna. Domenico needed to shake off his father's overbearing presence and, above all, he needed to succeed at something which his father had not already shown he could do better. The first object had been achieved, in theory at least, in 1717, when, at the age of 32, Domenico had been legally emancipated from his father's protection; the second was yet to come. In 1719 Domenico resigned his posts in Rome to make a new life in Portugal and Spain.

Portugal 1719 – 1729

Scarlatti's presence in Portugal is not documented until the last day of 1721. A day-book in the Vatican library records that Scarlatti left Italy in September 1719 for England. It is not impossible that Scarlatti visited London for the performance of *Narciso* on 30th May 1720, but there is no record of the composer having been present, or having been anywhere near the British Isles. In September of 1720 a Serenade by Scarlatti – the *Contesa delle stagione*, of which the first part survives – was performed in Lisbon to celebrate the birthday of the Portuguese queen. This suggests that by that time Scarlatti had taken up his new post as chapel master to the Portuguese royal family. Apart from the usual duties directing the music for church and court, Scarlatti took charge of the tuition of the king's brother and, in particular, of his daughter, Maria Bárbara, who was then only ten years old but already an accomplished keyboard player. Scarlatti continued to serve as her music-master for the remaining 38 years of his life.

Colonial treasure had made the Portuguese court one of the richest and most lavish of Europe. Like his predecessors, João V invested heavily in the latest cultural fashions. He imported large numbers of Italian artists and musicians whom he charged with the task of turning Lisbon into a second Rome. Scarlatti was one such acquisition, as were most of the seventy or so singers and instrumentalists under his direction. The glory of Lisbon was destroyed in the disastrous earthquake of 1755 and little remains of this glittering monument to Italian taste, or of Scarlatti's contribution to it. Scarlatti would have found the Portuguese ecclesiastical style somewhat conservative, and it is unlikely that he found much to learn from their keyboard players. Like the distinguished Spanish tradition with which it shared its origins, Portuguese keyboard music had become somewhat introverted in the seventeenth century. An exception was the gifted player Carlos de Seixas who arrived in Lisbon the same year as Scarlatti, to take up the post of organist in the royal chapel at the age of 16. A tradition has it that when Seixas went to Scarlatti for lessons, Scarlatti, ever modest, ever self-deprecating, said it was Seixas who should be giving the lessons. (This story, too, is a commonplace of musical historiography: Ravel is alleged to have made the same remark to George Gershwin.) There is an interesting affinity

between the work of Seixas and Scarlatti. Both were experimenting with the same problem – the direction keyboard music would take after the toccata – and although their approaches were different on the whole, Seixas clearly showed considerable interest in the possibilities of the one-movement asymmetrical binary form which Scarlatti was developing.

Scarlatti returned to Italy twice during his period of service in Portugal. In 1724 he visited Rome and went to Naples to see his father who died in October of the following year. In Italy he met a number of musicians, including Quantz who later described him, somewhat backhandedly, as 'an elegant keyboard player in the style of that time'. Burney quotes Alessandro Scarlatti's pupil Hasse as having praised Domenico's 'wonderful hand as well as fecundity of invention'. This judgment must have been formed on the basis of a meeting during the 1724-25 visit. In 1728 Scarlatti returned to Rome, this time to get married. He was now 42. His wife, Maria Catalina Gentili, was 16. She died eleven years later, in May 1739, having borne five children.

In January 1729 Scarlatti's pupil Maria Bárbara was also married, to the Spanish crown prince Fernando. Their marriage was the outcome of a long process of negotiation between Spain and Portugal. Relations had never been good since the Portuguese declaration of independence in 1640, and Portugal had made matters worse by siding with the alliance against the Bourbons during the War of Succession. The marriage of Maria Bárbara and Fernando, together with the reciprocal marriage between their respective brother and sister, was part of the rapprochement between the two crowns. The marriages were announced in 1725, when Maria Bárbara was 13 and Fernando 11, and contracts were exchanged by ambassadors in January 1728. A year later the parties met, for the first time, in a specially constructed pavilion spanning the river which formed the Spanish/Portuguese border. The ceremony more closely resembled an exchange of hostages than a wedding. The British ambassador reported that 'I could not but observe that the princess's figure, notwithstanding a profusion of gold and diamonds, really shocked the prince. He looked as if he thought he had been imposed upon. Her large mouth, thick lips, high cheekbones and small eyes, afforded him no agreeable prospect.' But the marriage worked. By all accounts Maria Bárbara was extemely good-natured and forbearing and shared her love of music with Fernando. It was doubtless these personal qualities which attracted and retained Scarlatti's loyal devotion.

Directly after her marriage Maria Bárbara, now Princess of the Asturias, moved to Spain and Scarlatti went with her. In principle the move made little difference to Scarlatti's life and pattern of work, and, except geographically, he might hardly have noticed the difference. He moved in effect from one well-insulated pocket of international culture to another, from a Portuguese court modelled on Rome to a Spanish court dominated first by French and then by Italian taste. The Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset remarked that the eighteenth century was the least Spanish in its history. The king, Felipe V, was a Frenchman, as was his son, Fernando (his French mother had died in 1714). Felipe's second wife, Isabel Farnese, was Italian. One of Felipe's first priorities on succeeding to the throne was to build a hunting lodge near Segovia to remind him of Versailles, and when the old Hapsburg palace in Madrid burned down in 1734 he summoned the Italian, Juvarra, to design what eventually became the present Palacio de Oriente. On finding his old colleague from Rome turning up in Madrid Scarlatti cannot have felt far from home.

Before the court returned to Madrid, however, it spent four years based in Seville, and travelled extensively around Andalusia. Spanish popular culture made a considerable impact on Scarlatti and this is reflected in a number of the sonatas which he may reasonably be supposed to have written at this time. In this respect Scarlatti anticipated by some considerable time the fashion for popular culture – *flamenquería* – which overtook Madrid society under Carlos IV. Burney wrote that Scarlatti 'imitated the melody of tunes sung by carriers, muleteers and common people'. If he did so – particularly if we add the words 'harmony' and 'rhythm' to 'melody' in Burney's remark – then this is most likely to have been during his early years in Spain between 1729 and 1733. Not only do first impressions frequently have the deepest and most telling effects, but Scarlatti would never again find himself liberated for so long from the protective atmosphere and professional demands of Madrid, nor so openly exposed to a new source of musical ideas.

Life in Madrid meant in fact an annual cycle of movement between the four 'royal sites' in an attempt to combat the rigours of the Castilian climate. Spring was spent in Aranjuez to the south, summer in the cool of the mountains at La Granja near Segovia,

autumn in the austerity of El Escorial and winter at the Retiro and Pardo palaces nearer the centre of Madrid. The court spent little time in Madrid itself, which was then nothing like the city Carlos III would build after 1759, but court servants like Scarlatti often set up residences and installed their families there.

Virtually nothing is known of Scarlatti's musical activities in Spain. He appears to have had little to do with church music beyond his contact with the two Spanish composers who also cultivated Scarlatti's format of the keyboard sonata: Sebastián Albero, organist in the royal chapel, and Antonio Soler who was based at El Escorial. Only two religious vocal works by Scarlatti, a *Salve regina* for soprano and strings, and a 14-part Mass, survive from his years in Spain. What is more surprising is that Scarlatti was not involved in the opera craze which swept Madrid in the years after the arrival of the brilliant Italian castrato, Farinelli (Carlo Broschi), in 1737.

Farinelli had been engaged by Isabel Farnese to sing for her husband at La Granja in a last-ditch attempt to save him from the deep depression from which he suffered. Contemporary, somewhat colourful, reports suggest that the king compensated for his melancholy with bouts of strenuous over-indulgence in food and sex, by taking to his bed for weeks at a time, by exhausting his court with a timetable which ignored the realities of night and day, and by a notorious disregard of personal hygiene. Felipe liked Farinelli's singing, however, and the Queen in desperate gratitude bought Farinelli's services for life. Farinelli's presence in Madrid gave opera an enormous impetus and for 20 years the Madrid opera was unrivalled in Europe. The finest Italian composers, librettists and musicians were imported and the theatre at the Buen Retiro was rebuilt to permit extravagant and ambitious staging. In all of this Scarlatti took no part. He wrote none of the operas presented and did not so much as enter the pit to play continuo.

We may suspect the presence of human malevolence in all this, not on the part of Scarlatti and Farinelli, but on that of Isabel Farnese. Isabel was a formidable and domineering personality, and being a second wife made her ambitious for her own children and jealous of her husband's. (Fernando exacted a nice revenge by expelling her from the court when he succeeded to the throne.) Farinelli's was a crown appointment, Scarlatti was the personal servant of Maria Bárbara and Fernando. Farinelli received all the

attention and all the honours, while Scarlatti got on with his teaching and composing. His reward came not from the Spanish side, but from the Portuguese. In 1738, no doubt at Maria Bárbara's instigation, João V awarded Scarlatti a knighthood. Carlos Seixas was also knighted that year.

Such an honour required a gesture of gratitude, and Scarlatti collected together thirty of his sonatas and had them published under the title of *Essercizi*. The collection was Scarlatti's first published work and the only one in whose preparation Scarlatti is known to have been involved. The edition was handsomely produced in London with an elaborate frontispiece after Jacopo Amiconi, the Venetian artist who later designed sets for the Madrid opera and painted portraits for the Spanish court. The fulsome dedication to João V contains a mixture of flattery and proper pride. It pays tribute to João's generous patronage and reflects with satisfaction on Maria Bárbara's talents and Scarlatti's part in their development. The preface to the pieces is commendably modest: we are to expect no great learning, merely an 'ingenious jesting with art, to accommodate you to the mastery of the harpsichord'. The pedagogical note is taken up in the title, *Essercizi*, and reminds us that one of the functions of a music-master was not just to teach but to provide music for the pupil to play. Printed music in the eighteenth century was difficult to obtain and more expensive than it is today. No keyboard music was printed in Spain between 1626 and 1762: everything, even Scarlatti's *Essercizi*, had to be imported.

After the publication of the *Essercizi*, Scarlatti's reputation abroad prospered rather better than his fortunes at home. Other printed collections, probably not initiated or authorised by Scarlatti, appeared in London, Amsterdam and Paris in the 1740s. There was no shortage of material on which to draw: two manuscripts dated 1742 and 1749 from Maria Bárbara's library contain over a hundred sonatas between them. Scarlatti's first wife died in 1739 and at that point he might easily have decided to pursue a greater celebrity and fortune in England or France. But his dedication to Maria Bárbara was unswerving and he seems to have become attached to Spain. When he remarried at some time during the early 1740s and in his own mid to late fifties he chose as his second wife a Spaniard, Anastasia Maxarti Giménez, a native of Cadiz. She bore him four children between 1743 and 1749.

By 1749 Scarlatti was 65 and by eighteenth-century standards quite an old-man. He made his will that year and by 1752 we know he was housebound. What is more, he had been well and truly eclipsed by Farinelli. By the time Fernando succeeded to the throne in 1746 he had grown as manic a depressive as his father, Maria Bárbara had grown very fat and both had succumbed to the lure of the opera. A report by the French ambassador dated 1746 makes it clear that Farinelli was very firmly Maria Bárbara's favourite. This fact is reflected in the somewhat unequal division of favours in Maria Bárbara's will. To Scarlatti, 'my music-master who has followed me with great diligence and devotion' she left 2,000 doubloons and a ring. To Farinelli, the younger man and so perhaps the more appropriate beneficiary, she left her entire collection of keyboard instruments (twelve according to the inventory made after her death) and all her music. Scarlatti did not live long enough to collect his inheritance. He died in 1757; Maria Bárbara died in August 1758; and Fernando, totally unhinged by his wife's death, followed her exactly a year later. When the new king, Carlos III, made it clear he was no subscriber to the opera cult, Farinelli retired gracefully to Italy where Dr. Burney interviewed him in 1770. Among the Queen's music he took with him were the 15 MS volumes containing 496 of Scarlatti's sonatas now in the Marciana library in Venice.

Thirteen of these volumes were copied out by a professional hand between 1752 and 1757. It has been argued that most of these 390 sonatas, plus 12 which appear uniquely in a parallel set of copies in Parma, represent the late flowering of Scarlatti's genius in the last five years of his life. This is unlikely. Scarlatti had been teaching Maria Bárbara since she was 10 and playing the harpsichord since long before that. If he wrote two thirds of his output after the age of 67 one is entitled to ask what he had been doing for the rest of the time. Furthermore, there is a sense of completeness about these manuscripts – the time and manner of their compilation, their immaculate presentation – which points to a rather different psychological reality. It may be fanciful, but no less true, to suppose that Scarlatti spent his final years setting his musical estate in order, revising his work and presenting it in neat lots, 30 sonatas at a time, just like the *Essercizi*, as a tribute to his royal pupil, and a reminder, perhaps, that there are more things in life than opera.

When Scarlatti selected and arranged the *Essercizi* he thought of

each piece as a separate unit. The two Venice MSS dated 1742 and 1749 also treat the sonatas singly. In the manuscripts compiled after 1752 the sonatas tend to come in pairs and sometimes in threes. This seems to have been dictated by fashion, by the French liking for suites and the Italian precedent of the multi-movement toccata. Four of the sonatas appear in a Portuguese manuscript under the title Toccata; Roseingrave arranged 42 of them as suites; and Charles Avison orchestrated 29 sonatas as his *12 Concertos* of 1744. All these factors no doubt prompted Scarlatti to provide for the requirements of extended performance. If, as seems likely, the pair-wise arrangement is the work of Scarlatti the editor rather than Scarlatti the composer then he himself has probably made the problem of chronology virtually insoluble.

Interesting though it would be to have a clearer idea of which sonatas were written where and when, their most striking aspect is not difficult to discern. As we have them, in an almost undifferentiated totality, they are a monument to a life's work and to a single compositional principle, that of variety within unity. Scarlatti's great achievement is that he evolved for himself a single basic form which was flexible enough to accommodate a range of musical inspiration, Italian and Spanish, popular and learned, vocal and instrumental. To some extent the stylistic diversity of the sonatas is a product of chronology; Scarlatti lived and worked in a number of important musical centres during his long life. His work spans a range of keyboard styles from the capriciousness of Frescobaldi to the classicism of Mozart, from polyphony to *galanterie*, but it is never derivative. He had an openness of spirit and catholicity of taste which enabled him to work from within the established genres to produce something new.

The relative conservatism of his musical training in Italy is often the key to his originality. Burney described Scarlatti's effects as 'intrepidly produced by the breach of almost all the old and established rules of composition' and records that Scarlatti himself 'was sensible he had broke through all the rules of composition in his lessons'. None of this would have been possible unless those rules had been properly learned and practised in the first place. Many of Scarlatti's most daring harmonic effects are based on simple procedures like the superimposition of tonic and dominant harmonies or delayed or disguised resolutions in standard harmonic progressions. Burney also reports Scarlatti as having asked one of

his patrons if his deviations from the rules offended the ear, saying that he thought 'there was scarce any other rule, worth the attention of a man of genius, than that of not displeasing the only sense of which music is the object'.

That last remark probably owes more to Burney than to Scarlatti, but the interplay of rigour and invention is one of the factors that make Scarlatti's sonatas such a representative cross-section of the musical experience of his age. The central, synthesizing, role of the keyboard is another. The keyboard is, by its very nature, capable of absorbing music from almost any other instrumental idiom. The melody and harmony of orchestral and vocal music can be reproduced at the keyboard, while keyboard music can itself often be distributed among any number of different instrumental combinations. The influence of Italian orchestral music, and the concertos of Corelli and Vivaldi in particular, is clearly discernible, therefore, not just in Scarlatti's orchestral Sinfonias, which themselves contain reworkings of operatic material, but in the keyboard sonatas too. By the same token, Handel drew on material from the *Essercizi*, as well as some of Muffat's keyboard music, in his orchestral *Grand Concertos*, op. 6. Avison's orchestral arrangements of Scarlatti sonatas also illustrate the way in which musical ideas flowed across a fluid but unified spectrum of instrumental forms.

But at the same time the keyboard suggested its own kind of variety. Scarlatti evidently had a very large number of instruments at his disposal in Spain. Maria Bárbara's collection is known to have included Florentine fortepianos, Italian, Flemish and Spanish single-manual harpsichords, and probably some German or English instruments. She appears in one portrait seated at a French double-manual harpsichord. The Iberian organ, – manuals only, with divided registers, – was commonly available. All these instruments were scattered around the 'royal sites'; each had a different tone-quality and touch, each a different compass. What is more, each suggested a different musical tradition. Scarlatti inevitably composed in the light of the instruments at hand, adapting the texture, range and style of a piece to the sound, compass and generic associations of a particular instrument. He used the organ, fortepiano and harpsichord to recreate a whole range of orchestral and instrumental sonorities from ceremonial brass to Spanish guitar, and some sonatas even appear complete with figured bass

for performance as chamber music. Scarlatti's mastery of the appoggiatura owes much to his experience of vocal as well as instrumental effects.

Variety also arose naturally from the need to cater for technical demands at several different levels. Scarlatti saw his most famous pupil through the whole of her playing career from relative beginner to virtuoso in her own right. But he wrote for other, less gifted, pupils and patrons, and his compositions must also reflect his own playing style. Those characteristic modulating passages based on repeated rhythmic figures, often at the start of the second half of a sonata, surely bear the mark of Scarlatti's personal improvisatory style. The evidence of the sonatas suggests that his own technique must have been outstanding, but as a composer his employment of even the most daring keyboard effects is always kept within the bounds of good taste; in this respect, too, Scarlatti is clearly in tune with his age. He is elegant at least as often as he is flamboyant, and he is frequently both in the same piece. Several traditions have it that Scarlatti stopped writing sonatas for crossed hands when he, or Maria Bárbara, or another of his acquaintances grew too fat to play them. But Scarlatti was too much of an artist not to realise that such gimmicks are most effective when used sparingly.

As a collection, Scarlatti's sonatas have an encyclopaedic quality which is not inappropriate to the century which saw so many attempts to codify the totality of human knowledge and experience. As Bach did so often in collections of his works, Scarlatti produced in the Sonatas a summation of music as he knew it. For a man who left so few traces and so consistently failed to draw attention to himself, the Sonatas must remain the only true biography.

LIST OF SCARLATTI'S PRINCIPAL WORKS

(an asterisk denotes a work wholly or substantially lost)

Operas and Intermezzi

Ottavia ristituita al trono (1703)
Giustino (1703, with Legrenzi)
Irene (1704)
*Silvia (1710)
Tolomeo e Alessandro (1711)
*Orlando (1711)
Tetide in Sciro (1712)
*Ifigenia in Aulide (1713)
*Ifigenia in Tauri (1713)
Amor d'un'ombra e gelosia d'un'aura (1714, revised as Narciso, 1720)
*Ambleto (1715)
*La Dirindina (intermezzzo for Ambleto, 1715)
*Intermedi pastorali (intermezzo for Ambleto, 1715)
*Berenice (1718, with Porpora)

Oratorios, Cantatas and Ceremonial Works

*La Conversione di Clodoveo (1709)
*Applauso devoto al nome di Maria Santissima (1712)
*Applauso Genetliaco (1714)
Contesa delle Stagioni (1720)
*Cantata pastorale (1720)
*Serenata (1722)
*Serenata (1722)
*Festeggio armonico (1728)

Sacred Vocal

Two 4-part Masses, a Te Deum, a Motet for All Saints' Day; two settings each of Miserere and Salve Regina; one setting each of Iste Confessor, Magnificat, Stabat Mater, Nisi Quia Dominus, Memento Domine David; *Christmas Cantata (1714).

Chamber Cantatas and Arias

61 miscellaneous works attributed, not all authenticated.

Orchestral

17 Sinfonias

Keyboard

555 Sonatas of which 8 may have been intended for performance by a solo instrument and continuo.

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