

Two *Tombeaux* for the Lady Scarlatti

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In 1738 Domenico Scarlatti published his *Essercizi* in London. Four years later a manuscript continuation – the first, longest and most fascinating of the court copyist's series – was dated 1742. The digits "742" look considerably weaker than the "1", so it might be questioned whether they were added at the end of the job rather than at the beginning. I offer speculation here that tends to come down on the side of the latter possibility.

The work began with 15 recent sonatas, but then the book, later bound for Queen María Bárbara and now known as Venice 1742 or XIV, became a hodgepodge of the composer's earliest works (including some chamber music)* and more recent sonatas that came to the court copyist's hands intermittently. Among the latter are two of the composer's profoundest utterances, K69 and K87. They are in two keys as far removed from each other as they can be (F minor and B minor).** Both are traditionally associated with melancholy and grief, an *Affekt* found in these pieces to a degree unmatched in the corpus of Scarlatti's sonatas.

The text of K87 in Venice 1742 is so corrupt that Kenneth Gilbert's edition chooses the version found in Parma II (1752), presumably corrected by the composer when he went back to the 1742 archive and selected a mere 14 out of its 60 works for inclusion in the new set.

In 1728 Scarlatti married the 16-year-old María Catalina Gentili in Rome. She bore him five children. An important family chronicle of 1912 states that this was his second marriage. No record has been found of a first, but the famous "emancipation" of Domenico from Alessandro's parental authority at age 32, enforced by law in 1717, is surely related to what must have been a short-lived and childless union. The same chronicle states that marriage came "á disgusto de su padre" – to Alessandro's disgust.

Scarlatti's "lovely wife", as a contemporary document describes María Catalina, died in Madrid in 1739. Her mother continued to live with the composer and helped bring up the children of his third marriage to Anastasia Ximenes of Cádiz.

There can be little doubt that the loss of a wife of 11 years, still young and the mother of five children, cast deep gloom over the middle-aged widower. K 69 and K 87 are strikingly inserted among works from Scarlatti's youth and physical prime. I wonder if there is a personal significance to the stylistic break at Venice 1724 no. 15 (a recent work) and no. 16 (the first of the early group). Did Scarlatti stop composing on the death of the Lady Scarlatti (her courtesy title as the wife of a knight), and go back to review his portfolio of old productions? Besides the first 15 sonatas, 69 and K 87, the Venice 1742 manuscript contains only two other sonatas which look close to its date. K84 has the quality of someone taking arms against a sea of troubles.

The other is a third sonata in close proximity to K69 and K87 in terms of style and manuscript location. K92, in funereal D-minor,*** has the same dense, idiomatic non-fugal polyphony as the other two, but the atmosphere is completely different. Here we have, instead of intimate grief, the monumental textures and dotted rhythms of a *pompe funèbre*. Dare I pile speculation upon speculation and say that this was Scarlatti's more public farewell to María Catalina? Is it too farfetched to suggest that the autograph, from which the corrupt 1742 copy of K87 was prepared, was written in a state of despair?

A group of three sonatas in triple time might bear interpretation as Trinitarian symbolism, and the key relationships as a metaphor for separation. Be all this as it may, these three sonatas form a niche all their own in Mimo's production, unsurpassed for inner rhetorical power and eschewing all the glitter of his more popular sonatas.

* The musical poverty of some of these *Jugendsünde* is such that their very inclusion in the queen's archive indicates an obsessive desire on the composer's part to preserve absolutely every toccata, minuet, capriccio or sonata he ever wrote. Anything not found in the double 15-volume series or the *Essercizi* must therefore be regarded with the greatest suspicion. At the moment I can accept only one escapee: K141. The autograph may have fallen into the hands of the composer (Albero?, Nebra?) of K142-4, never to be returned. If that is not the case, one of the many imitators of Scarlatti's style celebrated their most successful forgery in K141.

** Bach's *Clavier Übung II* takes the same keynotes, but intensifies the opposition between Italian and French styles by putting the "Italian Concerto" in the major mode, and the "French Overture" in the minor.

*** Charpentier, *Règles de composition* (1690): "Grave et Devot".