

NAXOS

Domenico
SCARLATTI

Complete Keyboard Sonatas Vol. 9

Francesco Nicolosi, Piano



Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757) Complete Sonatas Vol. 9

Domenico Scarlatti was born in Naples in 1685, sixth of the ten children of the composer Alessandro Scarlatti, Sicilian by birth and chiefly responsible for the early development of Neapolitan opera. The Scarlatti family had extensive involvement in music both in Rome and in Naples, where Alessandro Scarlatti became *maestro di cappella* to the Spanish viceroy in 1684. Domenico Scarlatti started his public career in 1701 under his father's aegis as organist and composer in the vice-regal chapel. The following year father and son took leave of absence to explore the possibilities of employment in Florence, and Alessandro was later to exercise paternal authority by sending his son to Venice, where he remained for some four years. In 1709 Domenico entered the service of the exiled Queen of Poland, Maria Casimira, in Rome, there meeting and playing against Handel in a keyboard contest, in which the latter was declared the better organist and Scarlatti the better harpsichordist. It has been suggested that he spent a period from 1719 in Palermo, but his earlier connection with the Portuguese embassy in Rome led him before long to Lisbon, where he became music-master to the children of the royal family. This employment took him in 1728 to Madrid, when his pupil the Infanta Maria Barbara married the heir to the Spanish throne. Scarlatti apparently remained there for the rest of his life, his most considerable achievement the composition of some hundreds of single-movement sonatas or exercises, designed largely for the use of the Infanta, who became Queen of Spain in 1746.

The keyboard sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti survive in part in a number of eighteenth century manuscripts, some clearly from the collection of Queen Maria Barbara, possibly bequeathed to the great Italian castrato Farinelli, who was employed at the Spanish court, and now in Venice. Various sets of sonatas were published during the composer's lifetime, including a set of thirty issued in Venice or, perhaps, in London in 1738, and 42 published in London by Thomas Roseingrave in 1739, including the

thirty already available from the earlier publication. In more recent times the sonatas were edited by Alessandro Longo, who provided the numerical listing under L, and in 1953 the American harpsichordist Ralph Kirkpatrick offered a new listing, distinguished by the letter K. Stylistic grounds have suggested a further changed listing by Giorgio Pestelli, under the letter P, and proposing a new chronology.

① The *Sonata in D minor, K.52 / L.267 / P.41* is found in the fourteenth of the Venice albums of 1742. It is among the earlier of the slow movements among the sonatas. In quadruple metre, the sonata is unusual in its fuller textures and harmonies, leading to suggestions that it might have had a particular appeal to Brahms, who held Scarlatti in considerable respect.

② The *Sonata in D minor, K.77 / L.168 / P.10*, found in the same Venice collection, is in triple metre. An accompanied melody, marked *Moderato e cantabile*, leads to a *Minuet*. In both parts it offers a right-hand melody, with accompaniment

③ The *Sonata in G major, K.79 / L.80 / P.204*, from the same album, is in the form of a rapid toccata. It is in 3/8, with melodic interest again in the upper part.

④ The *Sonata in G minor, K.111 / L.130 / P.99*, from the fifteenth Venice volume of 1749, is in 12/8, and has an opening descending arpeggio figure. It makes unusual recurrent use of two off-beat right-hand chords.

⑤ In duple metre, the *Sonata in C minor, K.139 / L.6 / P.126*, is found among a group of twelve sonatas copied by Dr John Worgan from a Spanish manuscript that had belonged to an organist of the Chapel Royal in Madrid. A number of such manuscripts were circulated during Scarlatti's lifetime and Worgan's admiration for Scarlatti is recorded in Charles Burney's *A General History of Music*. Burney there remarks, of the sonatas, that 'few have now perseverance sufficient to vanquish their peculiar difficulties of execution'. Elsewhere Burney writes, in a letter, of his admiration for 'the original Fancy, boldness,

delicacy & Fire of Domenico Scarlatti, so different from all lessons before & since!'. Worgan was a pupil of Thomas Roseingrave, from whom, no doubt, he acquired his reverence for Scarlatti. He was organist at St Mary Axe with St Andrew Undershaft in London, and then at Vauxhall, and enjoyed considerable contemporary popularity as a performer. The group of twelve sonatas acquired by Worgan was published in England in 1752. Calling for a certain brilliance in performance and replete with hand-crossing, the *Sonata in C minor* is in duple metre.

⑥ The *Sonata in C major*, K.170 / L.303 / P.164, with an *alla breve Andante* leading to an *Allegro* in 3/8, the first offering an accompanied melody and the second some unusual shifts of key, is preserved in the first Venice collection of 1752.

⑦ The *Sonata in D minor*, K.176 / L.163 / P.163, with a duple metre *Cantabile andante* leading to a 3/8 major key *Allegro*, comes at the end of the first Venice collection of 1752. The first part offers an accompanied melody, with the second element in distinct contrast.

⑧ The *Sonata in D major*, K.277 / L.183 / P.275, marked *Cantabile andantino*, is found in the fifth Venice collection of 1753. It has a characteristically lyrical accompanied

melody, starting with a descending triplet. The sonata is in duple metre.

⑨ The *Sonata in A major*, K.344 / L.295 / P.221, has its primary source in the seventh Venice volume of 1754. It is in 3/8 and features an opening descending arpeggio, with wide leaps and shifts from major to minor.

⑩ From the same Venice volume, the *Sonata in C major*, K.340 / L.105 / P.420, an *Allegro* in 3/8, starts with a descending figure characterized by its wide leaps.

⑪ A *Presto* in duple metre, the *Sonata in D major*, K.388 / L.414 / P.370, starts the ninth Venice volume of 1754. It includes characteristic chains of thirds and makes use of fuller textures.

⑫ The *Sonata in C major*, K.398 / L.218 / P.493, marked *Andante* and in 6/8, opens with a figure that brings the note C, descending over four octaves, a procedure continued after the double bar with the note G. It is included in the ninth Venice volume, dated 1754.

⑬ The lively *Sonata in A major*, K.456 / L.491 / P.377, a duple metre *Allegro*, starts with five notes that form its thematic basis. Its primary source is the eleventh of the Venice albums, dated 1756. It brings keyboard-writing of great brilliance.

Keith Anderson

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Francesco Nicolosi

Born in Catania, Francesco Nicolosi is one of the most distinguished pianists of the Italian tradition. He won third prize at the 1980 International Santander Piano Competition and in the same year second prize (first prize not awarded) at the Concours International d'Exécution Musical in Geneva, becoming one of the world's foremost pianists of his generation. He has played in recitals and as a soloist with prestigious orchestras, in some of the most famous concert halls of Europe, has toured in the United States, Argentina, Russia, Japan and China, and is a regular guest in the most exclusive festivals of the world. His recordings of Thalberg and Liszt Bellini paraphrases received the 1994 Bellini Golden Prize, and as president of the Sigismund Thalberg International Study Centre he has developed for years an intense body of work devoted to the research and reevaluation of the music of the legendary Austrian pianist, of whom he is today the only recognised interpreter in the world.



Photo of Francesco Nicolosi by Michele Mari

The son of Alessandro Scarlatti, who created a new school of opera in Naples, Domenico Scarlatti is particularly distinguished for his remarkable keyboard sonatas, of which some 555 are known. This significant addition to early 18th century keyboard repertoire was written for performance on the various keyboard instruments of the Spanish court, where he was employed for many years, and in all their variety have long provided a valuable repertoire for pianists.

**Domenico
SCARLATTI**
(1685–1757)

Complete Keyboard Sonatas Vol. 9

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|-----------|---|-------------|
| 1 | Sonata in D minor, K.52 / L.267 / P.41 | 7:34 |
| 2 | Sonata in D minor, K.77 / L.168 / P.10 | 5:12 |
| 3 | Sonata in G major, K.79 / L.80 / P.204 | 3:22 |
| 4 | Sonata in G minor, K.111 / L.130 / P.99 | 3:15 |
| 5 | Sonata in C minor, K.139 / L.6 / P.126 | 4:04 |
| 6 | Sonata in C major, K.170 / L.303 / P.164 | 6:42 |
| 7 | Sonata in D minor, K.176 / L.163 / P.163 | 7:30 |
| 8 | Sonata in D major, K.277 / L.183 / P.275 | 4:29 |
| 9 | Sonata in A major, K.344 / L.295 / P.221 | 3:03 |
| 10 | Sonata in C major, K.340 / L.105 / P.420 | 3:58 |
| 11 | Sonata in D major, K.388 / L.414 / P.370 | 3:40 |
| 12 | Sonata in C major, K.398 / L.218 / P.493 | 5:21 |
| 13 | Sonata in A major, K.456 / L.491 / P.377 | 2:31 |



Francesco Nicolosi, Piano

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