PROGRAM

DOMENICO SCARLATTI
(b. Naples, Italy 1685 – d. Madrid, Spain 1757)

Sonata in D, K.145
Sonata in G, K.454
Sonata in G minor, K.88
Sonata in G, K.455
Sonata in C, K.423
Sonata in B-flat, K.439
Sonata in F, K.82
Sonata in A, K.404
Sonata in F minor, K.19
Sonata in C, K.225
Sonata in C minor, K.56
Sonata in D, K.119

INTERVAL

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(b. Vienna, Austria 1797 – d. Vienna, Austria 1828)

Impromptu in A-flat, Op.90, No.4, D.899

Piano Sonata No.19 in C minor, D.958
  Allegro
  Adagio
  Menuetto (Allegro) – Trio
  Allegro

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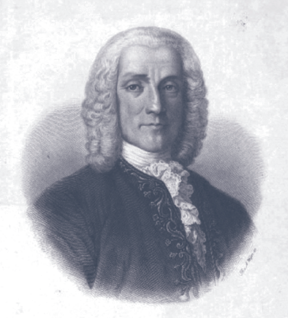

DOMENICO SCARLATTI

Domenico Scarlatti – 12 Keyboard Sonatas

Australian Laurence Godfrey Smith, who studied under Leschetizky in Vienna at the beginning of the 20th century, was not the only pianist to admit in old age to a mania, during certain years, for playing nothing but Scarlatti sonatas.

A new one each day would keep him going for more than a year: there are 550 surviving sonatas! The quality, and the variety, are amazing and inexhaustible. Most of these pieces were intended for the harpsichord, but they are so 'keyboardy' that even in these days of authenticity, pianists cannot leave them alone – rightly so.

Scarlatti's composing showed a kind of mania, too: in the later part of his life he composed virtually nothing except these sonatas, the great majority of them after his 50th year. All were intended for the same performer, the Portuguese princess who became Scarlatti's pupil in 1729 when he entered the service of the court of Portugal in Lisbon. Of course he could play the music himself; as a young man in Italy he competed on harpsichord with the visiting German Handel. The contest was deemed a tie. About the same time, an Englishman in Italy was startled when 'a grave young man dressed in black' seated himself at the harpsichord. Suddenly there seemed to be 'ten hundred devils' at the instrument.

When Scarlatti is mentioned, three things come to mind: his first name, Domenico, the harpsichord, and Spain. Spain because when his royal pupil Maria Barbara married into the Spanish royal family, she took her music master with her, and he remained in Spain for the rest of his life. He cast off his Italian roots, and hispanized himself, by marriage, and in his music, which to varying degrees reflects that of his adopted country. There he invented music that places him in the very first rank among composers.

Some of the sonatas in this selection of 12 hint at the plucking and strumming of the guitar (first obvious in the second, K.454). All display how Scarlatti revels in keyboard challenges (what Germans call *Spielfreude* – sheer joy in playing). When 30 Scarlatti sonatas were published in 1738 (only 73 were published in the composer's lifetime), the title given them, 'Essercizi' ('Exercises') is thought to be an Italian equivalent of the name given to such pieces in English, 'Lessons'. But what lessons! Scarlatti's royal pupil was no mean player. Plain in appearance, and corpulent, Queen Maria Barbara of Spain (as she became) was extravagantly fond of dancing and music.

These sonatas have made Domenico the most famous bearer of the name Scarlatti. Removing himself from Italy, he finally got out from under his famous father, the Sicilian-born musician based in Rome and Naples, Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725). As long as he stayed in Italy, Domenico, brilliant keyboard player though he was, mainly emulated his father in composing operas, cantatas and oratorios. His emancipation from this father's control required resorting to lawyers, but respect and influence remained between father and son.

A small number of Domenico's sonatas became widely admired when they were published while he was still alive. The bulk of the 550, however, have only come down to us thanks to Scarlatti's colleague at the Spanish court, the most famous singer of his time – perhaps of all time – the castrato Farinelli. When the death of King Philip V relieved him of his sole task – singing over and over the same handful of arias to relieve the king's depression, Farinelli returned to Italy in 1759 carrying the only two manuscript sets of the collected sonatas of the recently deceased Domenico Scarlatti. Not one of the sonatas has ever been found written in the composer's own hand. He may have placed an embargo on copying them, and even – a more far-fetched theory – allowed copies to be made to pay debts incurred by gambling, for which he is known to have had a weakness.

The first complete edition, by Italian pianist and composer Alessandro Longo was published in 1906-08. Longo's numbering was superseded by the system of American harpsichordist and scholar Ralph Kirkpatrick, in his 1953 biography of Domenico Scarlatti. Kirkpatrick proved that Longo had failed to notice how Scarlatti grouped many of the sonatas in pairs (Longo grouped them by key). It is far from certain that the composer intended the pairs to be played consecutively (many are paired differently in different sources), and Nikolai Demidenko, like many executants, choses to break up even the one pair he has chosen. Kirkpatrick's contention that his numbering reflects order of composition is widely contested, and it is very hard to date the sonatas on stylistic criteria.

Scarlatti's own title for these pieces was 'Sonata'. But these are not forerunners of Classical sonata form: instead they are binary, most often in two sections, both repeated. The first section modulates from the home key to a related key, and the second returns to the tonic, often modulating more widely as it does so, and introducing new material, but ending in a way that recalls the very beginning. The clearest departures from the pattern, in this selection of sonatas, are K.88, which has two movements, the second being a minuet (and whose figured bass suggests it may have been originally for a solo instrument and continuo), and K.82, headed 'Fuga', which is a toccata-textured fugue (there are another six fugues among the sonatas, including the legendary 'Cat's fugue', K.30 – one of the 1738 publication).

Well might any keyboard player find satisfaction living with these amazingly varied, ingenious, challenging, delightful, and moving compositions (maybe not to the exclusion of all else!). Czerny (Leschetizky's teacher) edited Scarlatti sonatas, Brahms owned manuscript copies, and virtually every keyboard artist plays them. Scarlatti, in his letter to the music's reader, disavowed 'any profound intention'. His was 'an ingenious jesting with art, by which you may attain freedom in harpsichord playing'. And, we may add, delight the listener.

Schubert and the Piano

Schubert's presence at his friends' gatherings was vital for their cheerfulness, and when they danced he improvised at the piano. Piano duets – sociable music – also spread Schubert's fame. But only his Impromptus and Moments Musicaux became part of standard piano repertoire: `character' pieces such as the Romantic era took readily to its heart. Amateur pianists have complained that Schubert does not lie easily under the hands, and is difficult to bring off. His piano sonatas were long neglected. The vast scale of the piano sonatas composed in the last year of Schubert's life was a stumbling block. But no one complains about Schubert's piano writing in his Impromptus, in his chamber music, and above all in the accompaniments of his songs.

Impromptu in A-flat, Op.90, No.4, D.899

Schubert composed his first and second sets of Impromptus in the same year, 1827. `Impromptu', suggesting improvisation, even casualness, and brevity, was a title given not by Schubert but by the publisher Haslinger, when he brought out, as Op.90, the only Schubert Impromptus issued in his lifetime, the first two of the four pieces D.899. The businessman was hoping to cash in on the fashion for pieces of this kind, such as the six Impromptus of Voríšek (1822), probably the first to use this title. Schubert accepted the title `Impromptus', and numbered his second set 5-8, clearly intending them as a sequel. Schubert's Impromptus are varied in character and form. He was the first great master of the Romantic character piece for piano, more concerned with sentiment than with an argument. For many these pieces are a gateway to Schubert, popular without compromise.

FRANZ SCHUBERT

The fourth Impromptu is notable for beginning in the minor, which will alternate throughout with the major heard in the cello-like idea in the left hand, following an opening in ethereal pearly cascades of groups of little notes in the right hand. A breathtaking modulation leads back from the middle section in C-sharp minor, where a panting accompaniment heightens the passion of the melody.

Piano Sonata No.19 in C minor, D.958

Among the three last sonatas of Schubert, this one is the least often played. Perhaps that is because it seems the least characteristic of Schubert the lyrical harmonic visionary. Yet it is striking in its minor key and sombre tone, and there are intriguing echoes of Beethoven. Unlike Beethoven, and quite distinctive, is Schubert's magical, unpredictable invention, seeming to well up out of the unconscious: what led pianist Alfred Brendel to call the Schubert of these sonatas a `sleepwalker'. And Schubert's darkness and sternness are also quite unlike Beethoven's.

In 1828, the year after Beethoven's death, Schubert saw himself as appointed to continue that composer's legacy. Of the three piano sonatas which turned out to be Schubert's last, the one in C minor seems most like Beethoven. Its declamatory opening strongly recalls the theme of Beethoven's 32 Variations in the same key, C minor. But Schubert extends his theme, exploding into a downward-rushing scale, with a freedom very different from Beethoven. Beethoven's themes have capacity for strict variation or development, whereas Schubert's themes are more lyrical and chromatic. The lyricism here lies in the extensions and repetitions of the themes, and in the more meditative second theme in the relative major key. The chromaticism, the colouring of the music by shifting harmonies, and semitone intervals, appears especially in the middle of the movement, where there is a mysterious theme, under unceasing semiquavers, entering like a new character in the drama. This pattern of free associations, wandering into distant harmonic realms, climaxes in chromatic runs, pianissimo at first, in the upper reaches of the keyboard. Under these, the characteristic rhythm of the declamatory idea is heard once again, presaging the recapitulation. The chromatic theme, and the atmosphere of mystery it brings, have the last word.

The second movement begins with a theme like a hymn or a prayer, but the second idea is more fraught, almost a lament. This soon leads to outbursts, semiquaver rhythms giving unity to this part of a rondo structure. After an elaborated return of the opening, and a magical modulation, the music rises to intense climaxes, and animated motion invades all the musical material, before the relative calm returns.

In spite of the title Minuet, the third movement has the character of a scherzo, from its subtly varied phrase lengths, the continuing dark, C minor colour, and the telling pauses. The trio (in A-flat major, key of the Impromptu chosen by Nikolai Demidenko to precede the sonata) is a Ländler of wistful tone, but with a Viennese lilt.

The finale is the longest movement in Schubert's sonatas, measured by bar numbers, not by duration. The pace is a not-too-fast Allegro, to allow the harmonic adventures to register, and the excursions into remote keys. The ostensible model is the finale of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op.31 No.3, but the real affinity is with the finale of Schubert's own D minor String Quartet, `Death and the Maiden' (D.810), in which some find a dance of death. A `haunted and breathless gallop', this finale confirms the view that the three last sonatas are associated in Schubert's mind with ideas of death. But the ride is exhilarating, and makes us grateful that Beethoven had so original a successor.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

NIKOLAI DEMIDENKO

At six years of age Nikolai went to the Gnessin School of Music where he studied with Anna Kantor. He also completed studies at the Moscow Conservatory with Dmitri Bashkirov and was a finalist at the 1976 Montreal and 1978 Tchaikovsky Competitions. He has worked with many of the major orchestras of the world including the London Philharmonic, the London Symphony, the Royal Philharmonic and the St Petersburg Philharmonic with conductors Sir Roger Norrington, Vladimir Fedoseyev, Yuri Temirkanov and Sir Andrew Davis.

Nikolai Demidenko's passionate pianism is in demand worldwide. Frequent London recitals have included a series at the Barbican, the International Piano Series at Southbank Centre and recently the London Pianoforte Series at Wigmore Hall – a Chopin recital which was featured as the only live performance in BBC Radio 3's *Chopin Experience*, a weekend celebration of his complete works.

Nikolai is renowned for his authoritative performances of the Russian concerto repertoire such as Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky. He has a flourishing relationship with the St Petersburg Philharmonic and Yuri Temirkanov, with whom he performs regularly. He also enjoys a fruitful collaboration with several Russian artists who have made their homes in London; a cello and piano duo with Leonid Gorokhov; piano quartets with the exciting new Hermitage String Trio; and a two-piano partnership with Dmitri Alexeev, who likewise studied at the Moscow Conservatoire under Dmitri Bashkirov.

Nikolai's repertoire is wide-ranging, including Bach, Clementi, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Mussorgsky and Scarlatti. However he does have a special affinity with the works of Chopin and travels frequently to Poland, most recently to Warsaw to perform at the 'Chopin and His Europe Festival'.

Concerto engagements in recent and upcoming seasons include appearances with the Adelaide Symphony, Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona i Nacional de Catalunya, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Budapest Festival, Danish National Symphony, Melbourne Symphony, Orchestra National de France, Philharmonia, Queensland Symphony, Singapore Symphony, Orquesta Nacional de España, St Petersburg Philharmonic, Sinfonieorchester St Gallen, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony, Ulster and Hallé Orchestras and tours in the U.K. and Ireland with the Prague Symphony Orchestra and in Spain with Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine.

Demidenko is prolific in the recording studio. He values recordings and has said, 'Recordings are an essential part of my life, which I use partly as a reference. The way we play is a reflection of our life, and we can't play like pianists in the 1930s because it's a different life… You take encouragement from previous ages, but then you have to make your own decisions.' For Hyperion Records Nikolai Demidenko has recorded albums of Bach–Busoni, Chopin, Clementi, Liszt, Medtner, Mussorgsky, Prokofiev, Rachmaninoff, Schubert and Schumann and concertos by Chopin, Medtner (which won a Gramophone Award), Scriabin, Tchaikovsky and Weber as well as the complete Prokofiev Concertos with the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Alexander Lazarev. For the Munich-based AGPL label he has recorded Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata, a collection of Scarlatti sonatas and a Chopin CD which won the Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik. Autumn 2008 saw the release of a new Chopin CD, including his first recording of the 24 Preludes, for Onyx Classics. This CD won the MIDEM 2010 Special Chopin Award for a new recording.

Hyperion has also released a two-disc set of Demidenko's live Wigmore Hall performances from the adventurous and interesting 1993 Piano Masterworks series. A disc of Busoni transcriptions of Bach recorded in 1991 was a critical success, and a second volume followed in 2001. These show Demidenko at his best, his obvious love and respect for these works being communicated in studied and committed performances. In the later recording Demidenko uses a Fazioli piano from which he draws huge, golden sonorities. Demidenko has a high opinion of Busoni as a pianist: 'Casting back over the years of recordings I would say that the best pianist I've ever heard in my life is Ferruccio Busoni. I've all his recordings ever released, and everything is magical. You can't imagine it is possible from the way the piano sounds – from the simplest phrase up to the entire complexity.'

In 2014 Nikolai was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Surrey in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the field of Music and the University.

This performance marks Nikolai Demidenko's third appearance in the Centre's Great Performers series and includes a concert at Mildura Arts Centre on 31 May 2017.

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MELBOURNE

Foundations

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ENCORE BEQUEST PROGRAM

Providing sustained support for all aspects of the Centre's artistic program through its Public Fund.

Anonymous (3)
The Late Betty Amsden AO
Jenny Anderson
Barbara Blackman
Jennifer Brukner

Ken Bullen
Jim Cousins AO & Libby Cousins
Dr Garry Joslin
Elizabeth O'Keeffe
Janette McLellan

The Estate of Beverley Shelton &
Martin Schönthal
Mary Vallentine AO