

PIANO  
CLASSICS

# SCARLATTI SONATAS

WOLFRAM SCHMITT-LEONARDY

## DOMENICO SCARLATTI 1685-1757

### SONATAS

1. K1 in D minor - Allegro	2'31	10. K135 in E - Allegro	5'03
2. K32 in D minor - Aria	2'27	11. K162 in E - Andante-allegro	5'25
3. K33 in D	3'42	12. K208 in A -	
4. K87 in B minor	6'30	Adagio e cantabile	5'58
5. K29 in D - Presto	4'56	13. K39 in A - Presto	2'42
6. K27 in B minor - Allegro	3'48	14. K322 in A - Allegro	4'10
7. K427 in G - Presto quanto sia possibile	2'10	15. K455 in G - Allegro	3'22
8. K132 in C - Cantabile	8'36	16. K95 in C	3'24
9. K98 in E minor - Allegro	3'19	17. K466 in F minor - Andante moderato	9'28

Wolfram Schmitt-Leonardy *piano*

Scarlatti's sonatas are rightly associated with the rhythms and harmonies of Spanish folk music, which is hardly surprising given the time he spent in Lisbon, Seville and Madrid. However, he was also influenced by the folk music he heard during his early years in Naples, where he was born and spent much of his youth. He received his earliest musical education from his father, Alessandro, and like his father he began his career as an operatic composer. Having moved to Venice in 1705 and then Rome four years later, in 1720 Scarlatti became chapel master to the Portuguese Court in Lisbon, and music master to the Infanta Maria Barbara, who later became Queen of Spain.

This appointment proved to be the turning point of Scarlatti's career. The remainder of his life was spent in service to the Spanish court, in Seville from 1729 and then in Madrid once Maria Barbara became Queen. Scarlatti died there in July 1757, and only one of the most remarkable aspects of his reputation is that it is now founded almost solely on the 555 sonatas for harpsichord which appear very largely to date from only the last 20 years of his life. In the preface to his first published collection of sonatas, he made his intentions as a composer clear:

Reader, Whether you be Dilettante or Professor, in these Compositions do not expect any profound Learning, but rather an ingenious jesting with Art, to accommodate you to the Mastery of the Harpsichord. Neither Considerations of Interest, nor Visions of Ambition, but only Obedience moved me to publish them. Perhaps they will be agreeable to you; then all the more gladly will I obey other Commands to please you in an easier and more varied Style. Show yourself then more human than critical, and thereby increase your own Delight.

This elegant manifesto introduced a collection of 30 'Essercizi per gravicembalo' - now catalogued as Nos. 1-30 in the authoritative edition

of his sonatas by Ralph Kirkpatrick – which includes a dedication to his future masters in Spain. It was in April 1738 that Scarlatti was awarded the Portuguese title of Knight of the Order of Santiago, which is the title which features on the first page of the edition. It seems reasonable to suppose that the first edition of the Essercizi dates from the end of 1738 or early in 1739.

These sonatas were the only pieces whose publication was supervised by Scarlatti himself, but they should not be regarded as the composer's very first sonatas. The Kirkpatrick catalogue, by which the sonatas are identified, works in roughly chronological sequence, and there is no earlier source for his keyboard sonatas, but the sheer variety and mastery of the collection tells against counting it as the work of the composer's early years. Scarlatti runs the gamut of keyboard technique and exploits to the full startling effects such as hand-crossing, jumps of two octaves or more, repeated notes and virtuosic scale and arpeggio passages.

Both the composer and his royal pupil were apparently masters at 'jesting'. The technical difficulty of these sonatas implies that they were both harpsichordists of remarkable finesse. The historical sources also suggest that both the Queen and Scarlatti were adept improvisers. Manuscript research has turned up many alternative versions of the sonatas, indicating that the form in which they have come down to us was by no means fixed and final in the composer's mind, and that an element of recreative imagination is essential to their successful performance.

All the sonatas featured here are cast as single movements in binary form: two sections, each of which is repeated, inviting further embellishment. They frequently feature the melodic, rhythmic and harmonic mannerisms of Spanish music, and the sound of the guitar is often suggested by the use of strumming chords. The Essercizi in particular achieve a synthesis of classical,

Italian idioms and Spanish folksong and dance. It is Scarlatti's Italian heritage, however, which comes to the fore in the brilliant and propulsive toccata which opened the collection, and is now the Sonata Kk 1. By contrast, Kk 29 demonstrates how completely Scarlatti had absorbed the Andalusian idiom of his home-to-be.

Kk 32 bears the designation of 'Aria', uniquely so among the 555 sonatas. It was first published in England in pirate edition of the Essercizi compiled by Thomas Roseingrave to which he added several more sonatas (plus one of his own!). Kk 87 is more carefully worked-out, in an intricate four-voice polyphonic texture, in which each voice moves forward in single alternate steps.

Kk 427 is marked to be played 'as quickly as possible'. Gusts of semiquavers are whipped along by four powerful chords on the same rhythmic pattern, like the incursion of trumpets and drums on a village square. The chords are disposed at the very opposite ends of the keyboard, which further accentuates the bizarre nature of the sonata in performance. Motives are either repeated more times than we might have expected, or else vanish abruptly, leaving bewildered listeners in their wake.

Kirkpatrick perceived the world of Aranjuez – home to a courtly palace outside Madrid where Scarlatti would have been served the royal court – in the grace and refinement of Kk 132. Scarlatti's increasingly free grasp of form leads him to introduce many new themes into the second half of the sonata, where the harmony ventures into dissonant regions and the expression likewise plumbs depths of pathos not commonly associated with the composer. Italian concerto figuration and Spanish strumming fuse to form the pacy yet elegant progress of Kk 98.

It seems that Scarlatti himself often performed Kk 135 – the middle panel of a triptych – and one readily understands why, as a showcase for both

technique and artistry, thanks to its rapid scales, hand crossings and crispy trills. It's also remarkable for its evocation of a courtly dance. From time to time, Scarlatti deployed unusual binary forms. Moving at a purposeful tread rather than the hectic gallop of many sonatas, Kk 162 has a structural base of contrasting tempi, alternating slow and fast sequences, while remaining within the tradition of binary form.

More than one pianist has chosen Kk 208 as the perfect Scarlatti sonata, even as another comparatively rare journey into melancholia. A magnificent melody sings, rich in ornamentation, above a regular, solemn series of soft notes in the left hand. Kk 455 moves with violent changes of mood: roaring outbursts contrasted with radiant interludes. Both mandolins and castanets are heard in a long development which is occasionally sustained by a central harmonic pedal point.

On a purely technical level, Kk 95 is a study for right-hand crossing over a non-stop triplet figuration played by the left hand. Its harmonic flavour is more German than the other sonatas featured here, and the score is preserved in none of the authenticated sources for Scarlatti's sonatas; it was instead published by Boivin in Paris in about 1747 as part of a volume of 'Pièces pour le clavecin'.

The Andante moderato of Kk 466 is another of those rare but special sonatas cast in a lyrical mode. Yet Scarlatti's chosen materials are audaciously minimal: The opening, rising-and-falling motif becomes the accompaniment for a good part of the sonata. A melodic fragment returns time and again in various permutations, so that the work meditates on a single fixed idea rather than moving from one point to another in the fashion of what we associate with the principles of 'sonata' form. But here, as so often, Scarlatti followed no fashion but his own.

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## WOLFRAM SCHMITT-LEONARDY

Wolfram Schmitt-Leonardy is one of today's most remarkable artists. His recordings with a broad repertoire by Schumann, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Chopin, Warenberg/Rachmaninoff Kabalevsky, Tchaikovsky and Gershwin received many prizes and rave reviews in the international press.

He won top prizes in International Piano Competitions such as the International Rachmaninoff Competition, the Walter Gieseking Competition and has been elected Upcoming Artist of the year by the German Magazine Fono Forum. The Pianists Encyclopedia Pianisten-Profil points out Schmitt-Leonardy's "artistic authority and singular musical consequence" and Knut Franke one of the most respected critics of our time compared Schmitt-Leonardy's "sovereign culture of sound" with Vladimir Horowitz. The Magazine Piano News praised his Chopin recordings and compared his playing with Krystian Zimerman and Grigory Sokolov. The German Magazine Fono Forum called his playing (Schumann album) "bursting with energy" and compared it to Sviatoslav Richter. Music critics e.g. Peter Cossé, Ingo Harden, Knut Franke, Jed Distler, Jeremy Siepmann, Ates Orga and established Magazines e.g. American Record Guide, Fono Forum, BBC Music Magazine, Diapason, Piano, Klassik heute, Piano News, PIANO (GB) and PIANO (F) describe Schmitt-Leonardy's interpretations as "astonishing, exquisite", "breathtaking", "electrifying", "dazzling brilliant, as well as grippingly independent". They praise his "interpretive sophistication and intelligence, depth and originality", "his intellectual power, virtuosity, combined with a Classicist's sense of proportion", "his multi-hued tonal palette and his propulsive rhythmic vocabulary".

His concerts led him to prestigious concert halls and international festivals



e.g. Berlin Philharmonic Hall, St. Petersburg Philharmonic Hall, Festival White Nights (Russia), Berliner Festwochen, International Piano Festival Miami, Amiata Piano Festival, Munich Residenz, Teatro Olimpico Vicenza, Forbidden City Concert Hall Beijing, Alte Oper Frankfurt, Kilburn Concert Series Canada, Miami International Piano Festival Academy, Opera Houses of Hanoi and Alexandria, International Piano Festival Malaysia, Philharmonic Halls of Ljubljana, Perm (GUS), Timisoara, Brasov, Cluj and Sibiu (RO), Poznan and Waldenburg (PL), Philharmonia Bangkok, Adrienne Arsht Center of the Arts (USA), International Music Festival in Kemiö (FI), Rittersaal Mannheim, Festival Musical Durtal (F), Festival International Ribadesella (Spain), Grand Canal Lang Lang International Piano Festival. As soloist he played with the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, Berliner Symphoniker, Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia Hungarica, RTV Orchestra Slovenia, Philharmonia of the Nations and many others. Chamber music partners are among others the Philharmonia Quartet Berlin, the Melos Quartet, the Amati Quartet, the Rodin Quartet, the Gürzenich Quartett.

As one of the most sought-after pedagogues of our times he regularly gives Masterclasses in Austria (Konzertverein Wien), Poland (Chopin Institute Warsaw), Russia (Philharmonia Perm), France (Festival International de Musique Dinard, Festival Musical Durtal), Canada (University of Alberta), China (Conservatory Beijing, Lang Lang Art World Hangzhou, Zhejiang Conservatory Hangzhou), Spain (Barcelona), Finland (International Music Festival Mänttä), Thailand (Mahidol University), Germany (Tonkünstlerverband Bayern, Philharmonia Munich, University of Music Hamburg, Euro Music Festival Halle, Meisterpianisten Berlin), Italy (Amiata Piano Festival, Talent Music Courses Brescia, Conservatory Vicenza), Philippines (Camerata dell Arte Foundation Manila, Opusfest), Malaysia

(International Piano Festival Malaysia), Romania (Mozart Festival Cluj), South-Africa (Arts Capital Cape-Town and Stellenbosch) and founded an educational and mentoring program for extraordinary talented piano students the WSL-Masterclass. His theoretical work "Artistic Piano Technique" has been published in China.

Prof. Wolfram Schmitt-Leonardy's positions as pedagogue: 2010 he was offered a full-time professorship at the University of Music and Performing Arts Munich where he worked for 7 years, in 2016 he was offered a full-time professorship at the University of Music Hanns Eisler Berlin and in 2017 he was offered a full-time professorship at the University of Music and Performing Arts Mannheim where he works since then. Besides his work at German Universities he is also Visiting Professor in France at the prestigious École Normale de Musique de Paris Alfred Cortot, in Italy at the International Piano Academy Talent Music Courses Brescia and since 2020 he is Vice Educational Director at Lang Lang Art World in Hangzhou (China).

Prof. Wolfram Schmitt-Leonardy's musical roots are broadly diversified: His musical education involves the most important traditions and schools of the 19th and 20th century. His first teacher Prof. Alexander Sellier was a student of Walter Giesekeing and Edwin Fischer. Schmitt-Leonardy also worked with Prof. Vitalij Margulis who was one of the most important representative of the Russian piano school. Another important teacher of Mr. Schmitt-Leonardy was Prof. Adrian Aeschbacher, a student of Arthur Schnabel. Schmitt-Leonardy's teacher and close friend Michael Ponti studied with Gilmour McDonald who was the assistant of Leopold Godowsky and with Erich Flinsch who studied with Franz Liszt's student Emil von Sauer. All these important musical personalities influenced Wolfram Schmitt-Leonardy on his way.

He serves as jury member in many important International Piano Competitions such as the IGPA (Chairman of the International German Piano Award since 2011), International Piano Competition Epinal (F), Grand Canal International Lang Lang Piano Competition. He works for HENLE writing fingerings for their Chopin and Schumann editions. In the past years his students have won more than 40 awards and prizes in International Piano Competitions in Europe, Asia and the USA.

Wolfram Schmitt-Leonardy is a “Steinway Artist” and Patron of “Weltklassik”.

