

Domenico  
**SCARLATTI**

**Complete Keyboard Sonatas Vol. 28**

**Sang Woo Kang, Piano**



## **Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757)**

### **Complete Sonatas Vol. 29**

It would take over two days of constant playing to accommodate a complete performance of Domenico Scarlatti's 555 keyboard sonatas. One hopes that Scarlatti's patron (and, it might reasonably be assumed by an objective observer, his muse) Princess Maria Barbara of Portugal, for whom it is likely the entire collection was written, was suitably appreciative of this extraordinary gift from her teacher and friend.

Domenico Scarlatti was born in Naples in 1685, the same year as both Bach and Handel (what a time to be alive!), and indeed Scarlatti and Handel were well acquainted with each other's work. It is reported that, whenever speaking of his German colleague, Scarlatti would cast his gaze aloft and cross himself in veneration. Whether he knew the music of the much less widely travelled Bach is considerably more doubtful.

Scarlatti was born into a musical family headed by his father, Alessandro, who is now perhaps best known for his cantatas and operas. Domenico enjoyed periods living and working in Naples, Venice, Rome and at the Vatican. In 1719, he moved to the court of John V of Portugal where he would meet Princess Maria, whom he followed to Madrid on her marriage into the Spanish royal family in 1733. Much of the detail of his life, and indeed of the sonatas in particular, is frustratingly lacking; only one letter in his own hand survives, and not a single one of the sonatas exists in manuscript form.

This dearth of source material means that one of many open questions is the exact instrument for which Scarlatti wrote the sonatas. Maria Barbara's extensive collection included harpsichords of all descriptions (including those with extra registers controlled by an elaborate sequence of pedals) as well as early fortepianos. Whether written for plucked instruments (of however many registers and keyboards) or hammered instruments or a combination of both, scholars may never agree. What is surely beyond doubt is that these extraordinarily colourful pieces travel with great success to the modern pianoforte used for this album, which presents some of the lesser-known sonatas from the collection.

The sonatas are typically in binary form – two related (and usually similar length) sections, each repeated, with a first half ending in a related tonality and a second half that works its way back to the home key. Despite this almost entirely uniform approach to structure, Scarlatti's skill in evoking different moods, characters, musical styles and even different instruments is hugely inventive. As Harriet Smith puts it 'by turn the music struts, it cajoles, it sings, it giggles, it implores, it dances. And all this is achieved by a pair of hands at a keyboard.'

Only the first 30 sonatas (as numbered by the catalogue constructed by American harpsichordist and musicologist Ralph Kirkpatrick) were published during Scarlatti's lifetime, ostensibly as technical exercises. The remainder of the 555 sonatas have been passed down to us thanks to the famous castrato and friend of the composer, Farinelli, who transported copies back to Italy from Spain. The next 70 or so sonatas in the collection are rooted in the Italian style of keyboard writing, whether in the guise of the effervescent broken chord patterns and energetic contrapuntal sequences of the *Sonata in B flat major, K.57* or the blustering semiquaver scalic figurations of the *Sonata in F major, K.85*.

Of particular interest among the Italian-style examples from the collection are those (such as the *Sonata in C minor, K.73*) which contain some passages annotated with a figured bass; this suggests that these works were originally conceived for solo instrument with basso continuo. The C minor sonata is also noteworthy in that it includes a significant addition to the structural norms mentioned above; the usual binary form sonata is followed by two short minuets.

Towards the end of the Italian-inspired part of the collection is *Sonata in G major*; K.103. With its eyebrow-raising harmonic invention, including sudden lurches between major and minor tonalities, as well as its brisk (*Allegriissimo*) compound metre, this sonata is clearly written in the tarantella style associated with southern regions of Italy. This provides an elegant transition into the next tranche of sonatas which owe much of their style to the influence of the Spanish folk music with which Scarlatti would have been surrounded in Madrid.

Frequent trills and grace notes are a common feature of these sonatas, and indeed the *Sonata in C major*; K.166 and *Sonata in C minor*; K.303 can seem almost impenetrably embellished! Scarlatti was heavily influenced by the famous flamenco style of guitar playing during his time in Spain, and the *Sonata in D major*; K.137, with its spicily dissonant *rasgueado*-style chords is a particularly evocative example of this.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this enormous collection of sonatas is that, despite writing so very many of them, each and every one has something of note, some feature of interest; whether it be an aspect of the melody, the harmony, structure or texture, Scarlatti finds a way of exploring so many possibilities within each of these fundamental elements of music. Some of the sonatas stand out through their particularly characterful approach to melody and rhythm, whether it be the light, droplet-like octave figures and echo effects in *Sonata in F major*; K.150, the frothy intricacy and exotic appoggiaturas of the *Sonata in A minor*; K.188, or the gentle, rocking syncopation of the *Sonata in F major*; K.275.

Harmonic invention is also a particularly noteworthy trait, with the overt chromaticism of the *Sonata in E minor*; K.263 clear to hear, or the characterful use of the classic ‘Neapolitan’ harmony (that is, using the major chord based on the flattened second note of the scale) towards the end of the *Sonata in C major*; K.117. Also of interest in this latter sonata are the wide leaps in the left hand, showing the extent of the compass of the instruments for which Scarlatti must have been writing.

A common feature of Scarlatti’s approach to structure is the habit of including a short opening idea which is then not developed further, when one might expect otherwise. For instance, the *Sonatas in E flat major* K.192, *D major*; K.223 and *E minor*; K.263 all start with a single theme copied by the other hand in a manner which suggests (but does not end up resulting in!) the opening of a fugue. While many of the sonatas employ a relatively simple ‘melody plus accompaniment’ texture, in this latter sonata (along with the *Sonata in D major*; K.236), the thematic material is shared equally between the hands in constant (and often virtuosic) back-and-forth dialogue. In the *Sonata in B flat major*; K.249, the light two- or three-part texture associated with many of the sonatas is interrupted by arrestingly thick, eight-note chords.

In a contemporary musical diet, Scarlatti sonatas are usually most likely to appear in a small group perhaps to start a recital programme or act as something of a musical ‘sorbet’ between more substantial pieces. Harpsichordist and passionate Scarlatti advocate Mahan Esfahani estimates that as many as 90 per cent of the sonatas remain largely unknown to all but the most avid of Scarlatti enthusiasts. To write such original, imaginative and colourful music is a work of a genius in its own right; to do so over more than five hundred examples is little short of miraculous. Perhaps Scarlatti’s most important message to us with this life-enhancing music is delivered at the end of his preface to those first 30 published works, where he writes, simply, *Vivi felice* (‘Live happily’)!

**Peter Siepmann**





## **Emanuil Ivanov**

Emanuil Ivanov (b. 1998, Pazardzhik, Bulgaria) attracted international attention after receiving First Prize at the 2019 Ferruccio Busoni International Piano Competition. This achievement was followed by concert engagements in some of the world's most prestigious venues, including the Teatro alla Scala in Milan and the Herkulesaal, Munich. Ivanov began piano lessons with Galina Daskalova, and later studied with Atanas Kurtev. He continued his education on a full scholarship at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire under the tutelage of Pascal Nemirovski and Anthony Hewitt, and is currently studying at London's Royal Academy of Music as a recipient of the Bicentenary Scholarship. In February 2021, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, Ivanov performed a solo recital at the Teatro alla Scala, which was live-streamed online. In 2022, he received the honorary Silver Medal of The Musicians' Company, London and later in the same year became a recipient of the Carnwath Piano Scholarship. Ivanov has given critically acclaimed international performances and tours, and has played with leading orchestras in South Africa, Bulgaria and Italy. He has been featured on BBC Radio 3, Italy's Rai Radio 3 and Japan's NHK Radio. In 2024, he performed Busoni's piano concerto in Bulgaria and Birmingham, and made his debut at Wigmore Hall and the Konzerthaus Dortmund. He is also a composer.

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*Photo © Bill Knight*

Domenico Scarlatti's 555 keyboard sonatas were most probably written for his patron Princess Maria Barbara of Portugal. Her love of music leads us to assume that she was suitably appreciative of these extraordinary gifts from her teacher and friend. The earlier sonatas are rooted in the Italian style, with the *Sonata in G major, K.103* notable for its eyebrow-raising lurches between major and minor tonalities. The influence of Spanish flamenco guitar can be heard in exotic embellishments and spicy harmonies in sonatas such as *K.137* and *K.303*. Scarlatti's astonishing originality can be found throughout this entire collection.

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|----|-------------------------------------------|------|
| 1  | Sonata in C minor, K.73/L.217/P.80        | 6:02 |
| 2  | Sonata in C major, K.166/L.51/P.190       | 3:33 |
| 3  | Sonata in E flat major, K.192/L.216/P.322 | 4:24 |
| 4  | Sonata in A minor, K.188/L.239/P.213      | 5:41 |
| 5  | Sonata in F major, K.275/L.328/P.430      | 4:19 |
| 6  | Sonata in G major, K.103/L.233/P.233      | 3:31 |
| 7  | Sonata in C minor, K.303/L.9/P.212        | 4:14 |
| 8  | Sonata in F major, K.85/L.166/P.24        | 1:41 |
| 9  | Sonata in D major, K.223/L.214/P.188      | 3:23 |
| 10 | Sonata in C major, K.117/L.244/P.181      | 6:27 |
| 11 | Sonata in B flat major, K.57/L.S38/P.108  | 6:09 |
| 12 | Sonata in D major, K.137/L.315/P.231      | 4:01 |
| 13 | Sonata in F major, K.150/L.117/P.205      | 3:30 |
| 14 | Sonata in D major, K.236/L.161/P.201      | 3:20 |
| 15 | Sonata in E minor, K.263/L.321/P.283      | 7:10 |
| 16 | Sonata in B flat major, K.249/L.39/P.424  | 4:36 |

**Emanuil Ivanov, Piano**

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