

Domenico
SCARLATTI

Complete Keyboard Sonatas Vol. 30

Rixiang Huang, Piano



Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757)

Complete Sonatas Vol. 30

Domenico Scarlatti redefined the possibilities of keyboard music, blending the grandeur of the Baroque with the emerging vitality of the Classical era. Born in Naples in 1685, he was the son of the esteemed composer Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725), whose profound influence instilled in Domenico an early appreciation for musical complexity and innovation. After establishing his reputation in Italy, the young Scarlatti found his artistic sanctuary at the royal court of Portugal, where he served his former student, and later loyal patron, Queen Maria Bárbara (1711–1758). This pivotal role gave Scarlatti the opportunity to explore his musical ideas, immersing him in the rich cultural tapestry of the Iberian Peninsula and inspiring a remarkable synthesis of Italian and Spanish musical traditions.

During his lifetime, Scarlatti actively oversaw only one published collection of his works. Released in London in 1739 and dedicated to King João V of Portugal (1689–1750), *Essercizi per gravicembalo* ('Exercises for Harpsichord') features 30 single-movement sonatas. In the preface, Scarlatti offers interpretative guidance for approaching his music:

Reader, whether you be Dilettante or Professor, in these compositions do not expect any profound learning, but rather an ingenious Jestings with Art, to accommodate you to the Mastery of the Harpsichord...

In the years that followed, Scarlatti cultivated his artistic confidence, producing over 500 keyboard sonatas. Divided into the Parma and Venice collections (from the cities to whose libraries these valuable manuscripts belong), the sonatas exhibit extraordinary variety in their treatment of basic binary form, while pushing the boundaries of tonal exploration. Featuring technical demands such as parallel thirds and sixths, rapid scales, arpeggios, leaps across the keyboard, complex fingering, and quick alternations between the hands, Scarlatti laid the groundwork for future developments in keyboard technique while showcasing the evolving capabilities of contemporary instruments.

Ornamentation in Scarlatti's sonatas transcends Baroque conventions, exploring new textures, rhythmic verve and dramatic tension. His penchant for the *acciaccatura* (from *acciaccare* — to bruise or batter), or 'crushed note', punctuates the narrative of many of his sonatas, creating percussive effects redolent of the quick strumming of guitar chords or the sound of castanets.

Interestingly, there is not a great deal of difference in actual speed between Scarlatti's use of *Andante*, *Allegro* and *Presto* tempi in his music. Modern performers increasingly favour refined interpretations that emphasise musical nuance over displays of sheer virtuosity through speed.

Due to the absence of a comprehensive cataloguing system while the composer was alive, deciphering a precise chronology for these sonatas presents myriad challenges. Posthumous publications and scattered manuscripts have fuelled ongoing debates about their dating. Ralph Kirkpatrick's mid-20th-century classification system remains the most widely accepted method, assigning sonatas K numbers based on their catalogued order rather than their composition dates. This system has facilitated discussions about Scarlatti's work, but has not definitively established a clear timeline.

Three centuries later, performers and enthusiasts are still enamoured by what musicologist Richard Taruskin describes as 'the most astonishing pieces of their time'. Rixiang Huang's thoughtfully curated microcosm of keyboard sonatas invites listeners into the effervescent musical world of 18th-century Spain and the court of Queen Maria Bárbara. Resplendent in rhythmic vigour and emotional depth, these works immerse us in the sophisticated artistry that defines this remarkable repertoire.

K.298 in D major (*Allegro*) opens with a measured exuberance that typifies the essence of Scarlatti's mischievous spirit. The striking interplay of crisp staccato figures, demanding rapid finger changes on single notes, lively broken chords, bold leaps, interesting syncopations, and unexpected accents, evokes the rhythmic energy and vivacity of Spanish folk music. The mood changes to one of wistfulness in K.304 in G major (*Andante cantabile*), as an unassuming opening melody unfolds over a temperate supporting bassline, establishing the tonality with an air of calm introspection. Harmonic shifts are executed with finesse while delicate phrasing provides suggestions of hesitation, culminating in an emotive fluidity that lends the piece a sense of spontaneity. Ornamented flourishes never detract from the elegance and poise that defines this sonata.

Returning to D major, the K.312 adopts a lively *Allegro* tempo characterised by right-hand trills, two-note slurs, repeated left-hand octaves, sixths and sevenths, scale runs in contrary motion, and rapid five-note semiquaver figures that interlace seamlessly across the registers. Adorned with witty mordent figures articulated by both hands, the aura of light-heartedness continues in the form of the engaging K.329 in C major (*Allegro*). Here, the introductory theme is repeated extensively and developed throughout, imbuing the piece with an air of joyful insistence, almost as if Scarlatti could not get this musical idea out of his head. A more complex rhythmic spectrum is explored in K.339 in C major (*Allegro*) through an arresting combination of ornamental devices and shifting note values, while cascading scales are tossed between the hands.

Scarlatti exhibits further advanced understanding of the capabilities of the developing instrument for which he was writing in K.356 in C major (*Con spirito andante*). The overall musical texture is quite dense, almost orchestral, as triplet rhythms intertwine with driving left-hand chords and octaves, allowing for a rich palette of dynamics and timbral variety. Spanish influences abound throughout the K.366 in F major. Repeated staccato notes in the left hand, broken octaves, and dotted rhythms create a robust foundation that reverberates throughout the piece.

A shift in tonality brings us to the K.394 in E minor, which opens with an engaging *Allegro* that features a distinctive leaping gesture, establishing an aura filled with delight and impetus. The second section begins with a complete shift in mood and tonality as disruptive rolled bass chords underscore broken arpeggiated runs in the melodic line, before the yearning lyrical melody interjects as if nothing had happened. Scarlatti's whimsical nature and affinity for experimentation resurface in K.410 in B flat major (*Allegro*). The first section is bright and energetic with an almost roguish character, while the second section provides moments of melodic and harmonic expansion above the buoyant rhythmic drive of the sonata.

The *Presto* marking of K.423 in C major introduces a dizzying array of triplet runs that traverse the keyboard with remarkable agility. A three-voice musical exchange, including sixths, leaping octaves, and rapid scale passages, enhances the push-and-pull rhythmic sensation that propels the music forward. Remaining in triple metre, K.449 in G major expands the use of broken sixths and leaps beyond an octave in its infectious *Allegro* tempo. This dance-like quality continues on in the *Allegros* of K.457 in A major, in which Scarlatti's refined use of syncopation creates a sense of feisty unpredictability, and K.489 in B flat major, where the composer's ability to balance technical discretion with lyrical expression shines throughout.

A contrasting rhythmic landscape emerges in K.505 in F major and K.509 in D major as they explore the resonance of double octaves. Both marked *Allegro*, these sonatas epitomise the heart of the collection, marrying masterful execution with the thrill of musical exploration.

The concluding works in this album suggest that Scarlatti may have had the opportunity to play on more advanced keyboard instruments by the time of their respective composition. K.524 in F major dons a contemplative guise in the form of an *Andante*. Intricate ornaments and scale flurries highlight the expressive capabilities of the instrument, with

particular attention given to left-hand double octave quavers. The collection comes full circle to the opening tonality of D major in a spirited *K.535 (Allegro)* that casts a celebratory farewell. Scales and broken arpeggios are thrown across the registers creating a dazzling display of virtuosity that encapsulates Scarlatti's legacy as a trailblazer in keyboard music. This sonata not only reflects the composer's technical genius but also leaves the listener with a sense of joy and exuberance that resonates long after the final note.

Emer Nestor



Rixiang Huang

Critically acclaimed Steinway Artist, Rixiang Huang, has captivated audiences worldwide with his magnetic performances and impeccable artistry. Winner of top prizes at prestigious competitions, including the Chopin International Piano Competition, Los Angeles International Liszt Competition, Paloma O'Shea International Piano Competition and Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition, Huang has performed across four continents in renowned venues such as Carnegie Hall and Palau de la Música Catalana. As a soloist, he has appeared with major orchestras including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and China National Symphony Orchestra. His performances have been broadcast internationally, including on WQXR-FM, Classic FM and Corporación de Radio y Televisión Española. Founder of Empire Music Academy, and founder and artistic director of Pacific Stars International Piano Competition and Festival, Huang is also an active educator and competition adjudicator, inspiring the next generation of pianists. Dr Huang received his Doctoral of Musical Arts from the USC Thornton School of Music, and Master of Music in Piano Performance from The Juilliard School. He previously worked with Antonio Pompa-Baldi and Paul Schenly at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

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Domenico Scarlatti redefined the possibilities of keyboard music, blending the grandeur of the Baroque with the emerging vitality of the Classical era. He found his artistic sanctuary at the royal court of Portugal in the employ of Queen Maria Bárbara, a pivotal role that generated a remarkable synthesis of Italian and Spanish musical traditions. The works included in this collection thoroughly explore the capabilities of both instrument and player, with thrilling inventiveness, dazzling virtuosity and beautiful lyricism, which encapsulate Scarlatti's legacy as a trailblazer in this genre.

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|-----------|--|-------------|
| 1 | Sonata in D major, K.298/L.S6/P.194 | 5:29 |
| 2 | Sonata in G major, K.304/L.88/P.492 | 3:38 |
| 3 | Sonata in D major, K.312/L.264/P.334 | 4:16 |
| 4 | Sonata in C major, K.329/L.S5/P.337 | 6:03 |
| 5 | Sonata in C major, K.339/L.251/P.189 | 3:32 |
| 6 | Sonata in C major, K.356/L.443/P.488 | 6:27 |
| 7 | Sonata in F major, K.366/L.119/P.263 | 4:12 |
| 8 | Sonata in E minor, K.394/L.275/P.349 | 5:55 |
| 9 | Sonata in B flat major, K.410/L.S43/P.372 | 3:53 |
| 10 | Sonata in C major, K.423/L.102/P.455 | 4:01 |
| 11 | Sonata in G major, K.449/L.444/P.405 | 3:28 |
| 12 | Sonata in A major, K.457/L.292/P.442 | 4:07 |
| 13 | Sonata in B flat major, K.489/L.S41/P.522 | 3:39 |
| 14 | Sonata in F major, K.505/L.326/P.386 | 2:38 |
| 15 | Sonata in D major, K.509/L.311/P.387 | 3:53 |
| 16 | Sonata in F major, K.524/L.283/P.528 | 4:57 |
| 17 | Sonata in D major, K.535/L.262/P.531 | 3:32 |

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