intangible classics

Domenico Scarlatti
Muzio Clementi
Keyboard Sonatas

John McCabe *piano*

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CD 1: **Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)**

1	Sonata in G major, K.105	5:23	7	Sonata in E major, K.28	3:39
2	Sonata in G minor, K.426	5:39	8	Sonata in E major, K.215	5:43
3	Sonata in D minor, K.517	2:54	9	Sonata in C major, K.133	5:14
4	Sonata in D major, K.490	6:22	10	Sonata in G major, K.259	5:08
5	Sonata in F minor, K.69	3:28	11	Sonata in G minor, K.43	3:02
6	Sonata in F major, K.518	4:37	12	Sonata in C major, K.460	6:45

Total duration CD1 **57:55**

CD2: **Muzio Clementi (1752-1832)**

Piano Sonata in G minor, Op. 50 No. 3 "Didone Abbandonata"				**20:39**
1	I	*Largo patetico e sostenuto – Allegro ma con espressione*	9:02	
2	II	*Adagio dolente –*	6:04	
3	III	*Allegro agitato e con disperazione*	5:32	
Piano Sonata in F major, Op. 33 No. 2				**11:50**
4	I	*Adagio – Allegro con fuoco*	7:59	
5	II	*Presto*	3:51	
Monferrine, Op. 49				**6:20**
6		No. 4 in C major	1:52	
7		No. 3 in E major	1:54	
8		No. 12 in C major	2:34	
Piano Sonata in D major, Op. 40 No. 3				**19:45**
9	I	*Adagio molto – Allegro*	10:40	
10	II	*Adagio con molto espressione –*	4:08	
11	III	*Allegro*	4:53	
Total duration CD2				**58:30**

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Scarlatti and Clementi Sonatas

Monica McCabe recalls the circumstances of these recordings

Early in 1981 my husband, John McCabe, was approached by Ted Perry on behalf of his Hyperion record label, which had been founded the previous year. It is generally known how Ted won many plaudits for his recording of works by Hildegard of Bingen, but that was not to be till 1985, another four years. After this unexpected financial triumph the future of Hyperion was assured, but in 1981 it was still a very new company, needing to build its catalogue. Ted suggested to John that he should record some Scarlatti sonatas. John, on the other hand, wanted to record sonatas by Clementi. The upshot of the discussion was that two LPs were recorded, one for each of the composers, and amazingly, this took place in the space of three days, April 20th, 21st and 22nd 1981, the middle day of which was John's 42nd birthday.

John was particularly keen to record Clementi, an unjustifiably neglected composer whose work he was championing at the time, with frequent recital performances. He was less sure about recording Scarlatti, not because he didn't like the music – indeed he often played Scarlatti at home, for enjoyment, and also as finger exercises (he hated playing scales). His Study No. 8, *Scrunch*, represents his 'take' on Scarlatti. Subtitled 'Omaggio a Domenico Scarlatti', the work came about when I happened to remark once, while John was playing through a sonata, that I loved 'those lovely, scrunchy chords'. Described by John as a 'jeu d'esprit', he refers to K175 and K490 in connection with *Scrunch*, though I think the scrunchy chords in question are probably those in K215. However, John felt that there were many fine pianists playing Scarlatti, and his heart was always in supporting neglected works by great composers, such as Haydn, Nielsen, and now Clementi, later to be joined by Hindemith, Bax and others.

The recording was set up to take place at the Artworkers' Guild in Queen Square, Bloomsbury, in central London. Ted was delighted to have found this hall, which for its position was amazingly quiet and insulated from the sort of noises which bedevil recording sessions. (John, in his time, suffered from a complete 2-hour peal of bells from a nearby church, a radio order of a pub's stock requirements, and a three-day wrecking ball demolition of a terrace of houses, as well as the more usual aircraft noise and sirens.) However, he was not altogether comfortable in the recording acoustic, for the wood-panelled hall was very 'boxy', and it was quite difficult for him to assess the sound he was making. Worse than this, though, for recording peace of mind, was the presence in Queen Square of multitudes of traffic wardens, who, like the hosts of Midian, constantly prowled and prowled around. It was necessary for us to move our cars every couple of hours, and while this was not too great a bother for John (I moved the car), it was not always easy for the record producer to leave his post, and he was distraught to receive some five parking fines, three on the same day. (And yes, cars were really a travel necessity for us all, even to reach central London.)

It was an extraordinary achievement to record so much clear, and frequently fast, note-filled music, in such a short space of time, requiring great concentration from John. However, it was his general feeling that, given freedom from interruptions, if you couldn't record a work, or movement thereof, in three takes, then probably you shouldn't be recording it. I contrast this with a recording which engineer Bob Auger made, with a very fine artist, during the time I was working for him (though I was not present on the sessions). Around midnight, and after, supposedly, some 200 takes of a piece, Bob said to the artist, 'Right, this is how you work the machine. I am going home'. John's recording method preserves, I believe, something of the spontaneity and freshness of a live performance, even if it is occasionally at the expense of a less-than-perfectly executed mordent, or smoothly articulated run. Perhaps not flawless, these recordings nevertheless stand as a testimony to John's constant desire to support other composers, whether past masters who through reasons of prejudice or fashion had fallen out of favour, or contemporary composers who had not yet found a secure following.

So this is John's selection of Scarlatti and Clementi sonatas, played on a Bösendorfer piano, his favourite make at the time, for its lighter touch and sound. I find his Scarlatti performances not at all precious, but virile, bursting with energy or sensitive as required, and dancing off the page. I hope listeners will forgive my partisanship and agree with me. Four of the sonatas are played without the second repeat, one of these also being without the first repeat. Three of these are among the longer sonatas. Presumably this decision was made with regard to the duration of an LP, though equally John must have decided that the works were well balanced without the second repeat. Likewise, in the Clementi sonatas in D and F, only the first movement first repeat is played, while the G minor sonata, *Didone abbandonata*, is played straight through without any repeats. Even so, it is 20 minutes long. Again I assume the length of an LP side was the limiting factor.

Generations of learners, stumbling through Clementi sonata movements have tended to lower this splendid composer to the status of student fodder, despite his fame across Europe in his time. His music mirrors a later epoch of thought and sensibility to that of Scarlatti. The G minor sonata is full of heightened and extreme emotion, emphasised by unusual pedal effects and markings such as 'con furia'. The final movement has somewhat the feeling of an operatic 'mad scene' for piano. The direction 'Continua il Ped' is shown in the Henle Urtext edition, from which John played. This edition is based on the careful London and Paris editions, which appeared shortly after the work was written. The autograph itself has been lost, but the London publishing house was Clementi's own. I am amused to note in the slow movement of this work the dramatic effect of spread descending chords over a tremolo left hand, much loved by piano accompanists to silent films, a century later.

Scarlatti

The 18th century has been perhaps the richest in families of musicians, or perhaps more precisely we may say that these established families bore their finest fruits at this time. Domenico Scarlatti was the sixth of ten children of Alessandro Scarlatti and his wife, Antonia, of whom only five survived to maturity. He was born in Naples in 1685, the same year as J.S. Bach and Handel. In 1705 Alessandro Scarlatti persuaded his gifted son to seek wider experience, sending him on his way with a letter of recommendation. Domenico went first to Venice, staying for four years, and thence to Rome. In 1719 he became Master of the Music to the Chapel Royal in Lisbon, where one of his tasks was to teach music to the Infanta Maria Barbara. When she married the Spanish Crown Prince Fernando and moved to Madrid in 1728, Domenico went too, and when Fernando succeeded to the throne he became chief musician of the Spanish court.

The record begins with a G major sonata, K105 – lively yet poised in its flowing triple-time semi-quavers over a staccato left hand. As is the rule in these one-movement pieces, the form is binary (ie two-part), with a 'second half' beginning in another key in order to return satisfyingly to the main key at the end. (In accordance with modern practice the sonatas are identified by using the Ralph Kirkpatrick 'K' numbers which attempt a chronological sequence for the 555 pieces.) The G minor sonata, K426, is a flowing *Andante* in 3/8 with a gentle canonic start and featuring one-bar-length pauses; the texture is comparatively rich. The D minor sonata, K517, is by contrast a flying *Prestissimo* in toccata style. The D major which follows, K490, is a remarkable piece; marked 'Cantabile' (with no tempo indication), it is not immediately Scarlattian while at the same time sounding like no other composer. It features a dotted-rhythm figure in the left hand as well as scales and each half ends with gently cascading right-hand sixths. The F minor sonata, K69, looks extraordinarily like a Chopin mazurka, at least at first glance, though it is less chromatic than the Polish composer might be. This introspective piece is legatissimo in style. K518 is wholly different in mood: a buoyant F major sonata with joyful arpeggio figures. An A major section over a drone bass immediately suggests the musette of some country dance.

The E major sonata, K28, began the second side of the original LP, an agile yet dancing Presto in 3/8, featuring crossed-hand arpeggios. The same key is used for the next sonata in this recital, K215, but this is altogether a more leisurely piece – an Andante in triple time, with flowing right-hand triplets over a sustained chordal accompaniment. The modulations in the second half briefly reach the remote region of A flat minor. The C major sonata, K133, is a bounding Allegro in 3/8 time. K259 in G major is slower-paced, and has a certain pastoral freshness. The G minor sonata, K43, is in a brisk 12/8 with rapid scales ascending, and slower ones coming down: occasionally the rhythm drops a beat or two into 9/8 or 6/8 in a metrical flexibility unusual for the period. This fairly short sonata is succeeded by a more substantial example, the big C major K460. The mood is a playful C major that rises to considerable vigour in places, and possesses a harmonic freedom that takes the music to C sharp minor at one point.

The above notes are a précis of the original album notes by the late composer and pianist, Christopher Headington, taken by kind permission of the Trustees of his Estate.

Clementi

Muzio Clementi was born in Rome in 1752. He was brought to England when he was 14, by the English aristocrat, Sir Peter Beckford, as a musical prodigy. Thereafter England was his home, and thus he may be regarded as an English composer, with more justification than this title is sometimes accorded to Handel. He died in 1832, at Evesham, and is buried in Westminster Abbey.

The G minor sonata, *Didone abbandonata*, from Clementi's final group of three piano sonatas, Op. 50, is probably the only one by which he is today widely known, doubtless because it bears a title. It is beautiful music, finely controlled. After a rather mournful introduction, the first movement is a lyrical expression of pathos. The slow movement is a six-eight lament, utilising thematic figures also to the fore in the slow movement of the D minor sonata from the same set. The dramatic urgency one might have expected breaks out in the finale, and is fierce, making use of a thematic figure which cropped up many times in his work, of an upbeat quaver (8^{th} note), crotchet (quarter-note), two quavers, crotchet, two quavers etc, with a strong accent on each of the two crotchets. The fierceness is shown straight away by a striking dissonance of A, B flat and C, with an alternating G in the bass, on the first of those crotchets. Canon, always expressive in Clementi's hands, is used to great effect in both the first and last movements.

The Op. 33 set of three sonatas was published in 1794, but almost certainly composed some years earlier. The F major sonata, Op. 33/2, which Trustcott regards as unique, begins with an *Adagio* introduction, the only thing approaching a slow movement in the work, the phrasing throughout almost an exactly regular series of two or four-bar phrases. There is one exception: what sounds like a natural four-bar phrase which stretches itself to five. The easy regularity of this music is there, it becomes clear, partly to off-set the huge irregularity of the following main movement. That this movement means business is brought home by the phrasing. The opening quaver figure runs for two three-bar phrases, and is followed abruptly by the figure of the first bar reduced to four rapid and laconic semiquavers, which appear in two successive bars, the upper notes rising from bar to bar, leading to a rapid semiquaver variation of the initial three-bar figure, occupying two bars and repeated to form a four-bar phrase. The whole process is startlingly vivid. The second group brings an adaptation of the opening quaver figure moving in two parts, and the whole movement expands on an oscillation of this material, making unexpected harmonic shifts and reaching to unforeseeable limits, working from the opening quaver figure.

The second movement is a complete contrast, yet it uses the same phrasing principle. It is a *Presto* of whirling three-crotchet bars, starting with an upbeat to four three-bar phrases, ending alternately on the dominant and the tonic. These are followed by what is possibly the most striking single passage in the work, for its placing in the movement, and for

what happens to it on successive appearance. Four four-bar phrases, each consisting of three crotchets, circle round the dominant, followed by a rapid swirl of descending quavers, again ending alternately on dominant and tonic, with a repeated crotchet tonic bass. Episodes (the movement is a rondo) exploit this material. The second episode is in F minor and re-adapts new material just heard.

Clementi's three sonatas Op. 40 were published in1802, but could have been written any time during the previous five or six years. Both the B minor and the D major have been linked with Beethoven as a result of influence from that composer, but the date of composition precludes this. The D major sonata opens with a short D minor introduction, which gives the work almost the sound of a symphony being played on the piano. The beginning of the *Allegro* brings the supposed Beethoven connection, but this is a coincidence, and Clementi's first movement is one of his best. The middle movement, in D minor, is a finely controlled and restrained lament. It leads to the crown of the work, the rondo finale showing Clementi at his most impish. The middle episode, in D minor, is one of his most devastating canons, all its depth of thought obtained from the vigour and accuracy with which this device, profoundly expressive in this instance, is pursued.

The Monferrina is a dance originating in Piedmont, which seems to have been popular in England in the early 19th century. Clementi wrote 18 pieces with this title. Most follow the same plan: a six-eight fairly fast (in some cases very fast) piece with a main 24-bar section, a middle part of 24 bars, and a repetition of the first section. No. 3, in E major, is as beautiful and deeply felt as any of the late Beethoven Bagatelles. No. 4, in A minor, is also deeply felt, in a different way, and both are gems. No. 12, in C major, is nearer the general run of the lighter pieces, but is raised above them by the jerky rhythm that runs almost throughout the whole piece, deepening, in the C minor middle part, to a passage closely related in style to parts of some of his later sonatas.

The above notes are a précis, taken by kind permission of Hilary Truscott, from Harold Truscott's lengthy and erudite notes for the original Hyperion LP. A composer himself, Truscott clearly appreciated the compositional skills displayed here by Clementi, as indeed did John McCabe.

McCabe

The distinguished career that John McCabe (1939-2015) established during his lifetime established him as one of Britain's leading classical musicians. His set of the complete Haydn Piano Sonatas, recorded in the 1970s, still stands as a landmark. Widely praised at the time, the set, now on 12 CDs, has never been unavailable, and continues to sell across the world after 40 years. McCabe's love for the music of Nielsen was also deep, and his two LPs of what was regarded at the time as the complete Nielsen solo piano music were recorded around the same time as the Haydn. In April 2015 they were re-released as a 2-CD album by Somm, as a tribute to McCabe and in honour of Nielsen's 150th anniversary of birth.

McCabe's devotion to music, and especially to unjustly neglected music of great value, led him to explore and perform the music of composers of many different kinds – Bax, Grieg, Rawsthorne, Hindemith, Howells, Copland, Satie, Ireland and Joubert are amongst the many whose work he recorded. He was deeply interested in contemporary music also, performing and promoting with great generosity the work of his fellow composers, and in due course, that of younger composers. He also made outstanding recordings of his own piano music.

As a composer, McCabe also enjoyed international stature, with seven symphonies, the ballet *Edward II* (Stuttgart 1995), and the two full-evening ballet, *Arthur Pendragon* (Birmingham Royal Ballet 1999/2001), *The Chagall Windows* and *Notturni Ed Alba* among his leading works, together with much chamber, keyboard, and vocal music. *Cloudcatcher Fells* is considered to be a classic of the brass band repertoire.
Among his recent works were *Symphony On A Pavane* (London Philharmonic Orchestra), Symphony No. 7, *Labyrinth*, (Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra), and his Cello Concerto, *Songlines,* written for Truls Mørk and the Halle Orchestra.

Showing great courage, three works were composed by John McCabe while suffering from the brain tumour which ended his life. *Joybox*, was written for the Proms 2012 (BBC Philharmonic Orchestra), a Sonata on William Byrd's *Haec Dies* for the Deal Festival 2014 (Simon Desbruslais trumpet/ Clare Hammond piano), and most recently *Christ's Nativity* for double choir/organ premiered by the Halle Choir/Jonathan Scott (December 2014).

John McCabe was appointed CBE for services to British music in 1985, and in 2006 the Incorporated Society of Musicians honoured him with their Distinguished Musician Award. In May 2014 he was the recipient of the British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors IVOR Award for Classical Music, while the Iles Medal was awarded to him in September 2014, for services to the brass band movement.

THANKS

It has been a dear wish of mine for some years to reissue these two recordings, and my deepest gratitude is due to those who have made it possible. Firstly I would like to thank Simon Perry of Hyperion Records, for so generously giving the copyright in these LPs back to me, as well as copies of the Scarlatti LP. All praise to Paul Arden-Taylor of Dinmore Records, for his wonderful re-mastering and remedial work in transferring the LPs to CD, the original tapes having sadly been lost. I would scarcely have dared to undertake the project without being able to refer to the profound musical judgement and expertise of Andrew Keener, who produced many of John's orchestral and chamber records. My thanks must also go to Guy Rickards, for so kindly supervising my writings and preventing my doing too much violence to the original notes by Harold Truscott and Christopher Headington, in my précis thereof. Finally, and not least, I would like to thank Stephen Sutton of Divine Art, not only for accepting the project, but for many delightful transatlantic email conversations along the way.

Monica McCabe 2019

John McCabe (1980s)

John McCabe

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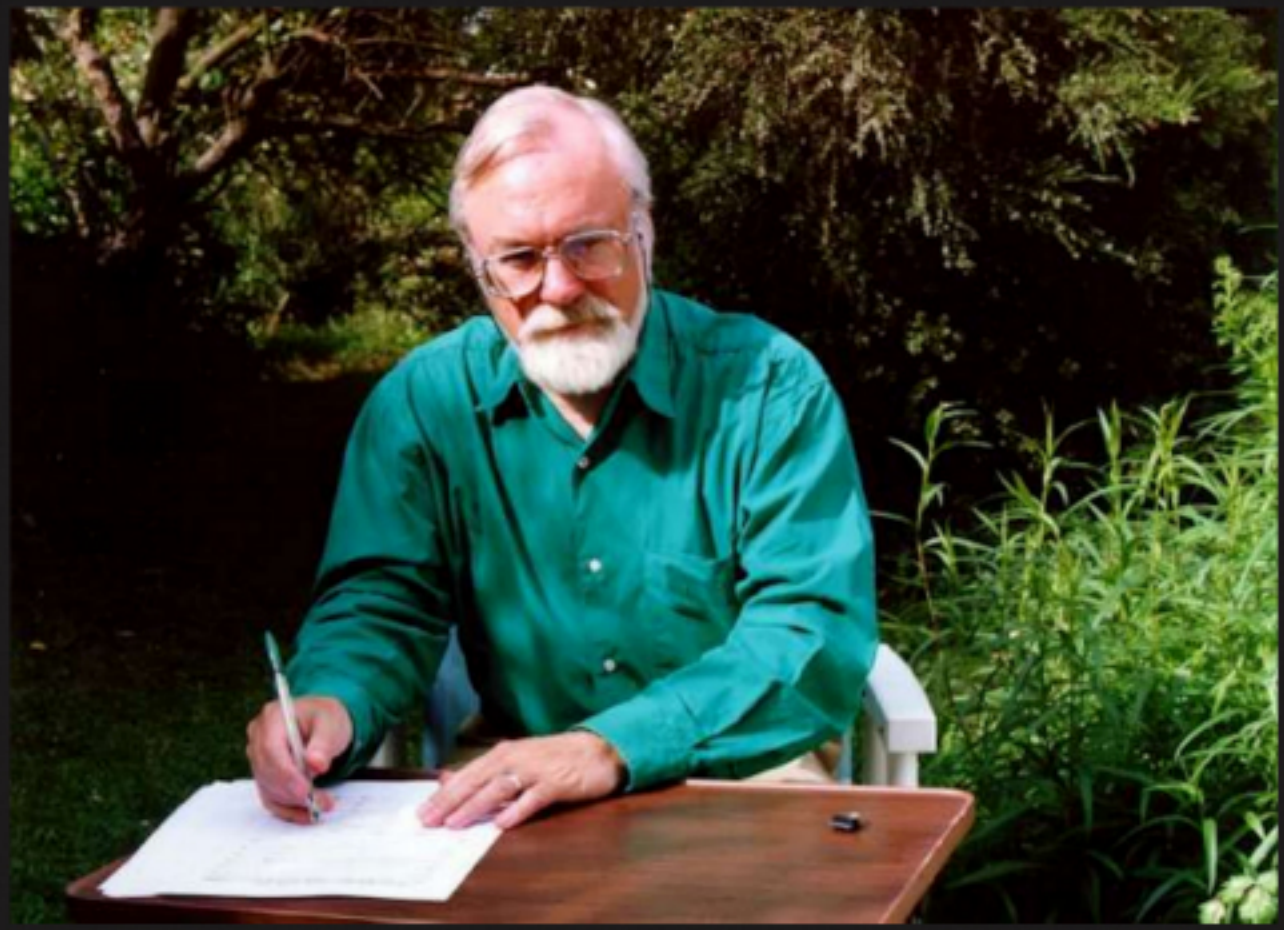

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