

Antonio
SOLER

Keyboard Sonatas Nos. 99–111

Jaeden Izik-Dzurko, Piano



Antonio Soler (1729–1783) Keyboard Sonatas Nos. 99–111

What good does it do if a work is well written but stirs no feelings in the listener? Many people judge music on the basis of its notation and do not know how it sounds. Such people claim this right for themselves although they would do better not to practice it.

– Padre Antonio Soler, *Llave de la Modulación* (1762)

Antonio Francisco Javier José Soler Ramos, often described as *el diablo vestido de fraile* ('a devil dressed as a monk'), remains one of the most innovative, technically adventurous, yet often underappreciated composers of the 18th century, bridging the stylistic gap between the late Baroque and early Classical periods. Despite his monastic commitments, which included an exhaustive daily schedule of composing, teaching, and performing – often spanning up to 20 hours – Padre Soler left an extensive and diverse body of work. His output includes over 120 keyboard sonatas (though scholars debate the precise number due to inconsistencies in authorship, lost manuscripts, and differing cataloguing systems), as well as quintets for string quartet and organ, concertos for two organs, and a substantial collection of sacred compositions: Masses, requiems, psalms, Magnificats, Benedicamus Domino settings, motets, and *villancicos*. His intellectual curiosity also extended beyond music into mathematics, evidenced by his treatise *Notas sobre las variaciones de la moneda* ('Notes on the Variations of Currency'), and into music theory, with his *Llave de la modulación* ('Key to Modulation'), a dissertation that provoked both admiration and controversy.

Written in 1762, the *Llave de la modulación* proposed an advanced system of modulation that enabled movement between any of the 24 major and minor keys in the shortest possible number of bars. This bold theoretical approach drew praise from his contemporaries, including José de Nebra, who described it as 'the discovery of a secret as extraordinary as it is new.' Soler further defended his ideas in *Satisfacción a los reparos precisos* (1765), where he cited a range of authorities, including Morales, Palestrina, Gesualdo, Scarlatti, Martini and Nassare. His fascination with harmonic experimentation also found practical application in his *afinador* or *templante*, a tuning device designed to divide the 9:8 ratio into 20 equal parts, offering new possibilities for intonation.

Soler's contributions to keyboard technique, harmonic innovation, and Spanish musical identity place him at the crossroads of stylistic evolution. His *oeuvre* challenges the conventional narrative of 18th-century music, offering a glimpse into an alternative, Iberian-inflected path toward Classicism. His keyboard sonatas encapsulate the height of this synthesis, showcasing Soler's mastery of intricate modulations, rhythmic vitality, and a markedly Spanish musical voice that diverges from the dominant Italianate and Galante styles of the period.

Sonatas Nos. 99–111 exemplify Soler's innovative musical language, earning them a rightful place in both concert repertoire and scholarly discourse. Unexpected harmonic turns and dramatic contrasts foreshadow elements found in Haydn and early Beethoven. The infectious playfulness and unapologetic exuberance of many of these works, prompted Scarlatti scholar Ralph Kirkpatrick to remark that: 'anything gayer or more frivolous could hardly be imagined. One is accustomed to finding frolicking roseate cherubs, not to mention languorous saints, in 18th-century churches, but this for the Escorial [monastery in which Soler served as maestro] is almost as if the College of Cardinals were to break into a jig!'

The first movement (*Andantino*) of Soler's *Sonata No. 99 in C major* (1783) begins with a charming, lyrical character, while the following *Minuetto* introduces an upbeat and festive mood. A surprising trio section in the relative minor features a playful, staccato texture. The left-hand patterns in this section subtly distort the 3/4 metre, giving

the impression of a 6/8 rhythm throughout much of the movement. The subsequent *Rondo pastoril* is lively and folk-inspired, incorporating drone-like effects typical of the genre. Throughout this movement, the rondo theme is framed by episodes featuring rapid semiquaver patterns in both hands, including a striking passage in the tonic minor. The sonata concludes with a dynamic and virtuosic *Allegro vivo* finale, where varied figurations, including frequent thirds and staggered octaves, propel the music to a brilliant close.

Marked by a deliciously, delicate and introspective character, *No. 100 in C minor (Adagio-Largo)* unfolds through expressive, song-like themes imbued with rich ornamentation and poignant harmonic progressions. The melodic lines flow with an intimate, almost conversational feel, reflecting Soler's nuanced approach to keyboard texture and his ability to weave emotion into every phrase.

Soler's musical mischievousness reveals itself in the irresistibly upbeat *No. 101 in F major (Allegro)*. Dancing triplet figures parade the registers creating a light-hearted, almost playful character that drives the movement forward. Lively motifs and harmonic twists inject a sense of unpredictability, inviting the performer to navigate the spirited energy and expressive nuances that characterise this delightful sonata.

No. 102 in D minor (Andante) is notable for its sophisticated ornamentation, suggesting a direct dialogue with the Baroque aesthetic. Triplet patterns dominate throughout, creating a flowing, almost vocal quality to the melodic lines. This consistent triplet rhythm imparts a sense of continuity and grace. However, in each section, there are four bars where a three-voice texture is introduced, skilfully utilising suspensions to enhance the harmonic tension.

Drawing on Spanish folk music, the evocative and rhythmically colourful *No. 103 in C minor (Allegro presto)* emulates the guitar's resonance through arpeggios, broken chords and repeated chords in the left hand. Its quick tempo and dynamic drive make it one of the more extroverted works in the set.

Rich in Spanish idiomatic gestures, *No. 104 in D minor (Allegro)* is a sprightly, effervescent work, enhanced by occasional syncopations that create an interesting rhythmic interplay, giving the aural impression of 3/4 against 6/8 – a hallmark of the traditional Spanish *zapateado*. Rapid hand crossings and bold harmonic shifts contribute to the animated and somewhat improvisatory nature of the piece.

Beginning with an air of deceptive simplicity, *No. 105 in E flat major (Adagio)* explores distant modulations and irregular phrase structures, while engaging the listener with its subtle tension and release. Notably, its first section cadences in the relative minor rather than the dominant, an unusual deviation that enriches its expressive depth.

Soler expertly balances chromatic richness with bright dance rhythms throughout *No. 106 in E minor (Allegro)*. This synthesis of contrapuntal and folkloric traditions continues on to *No. 107 in F major (Allegretto)*. Characterised by lively dance rhythms and distinctly Spanish melodic elements, the sonata employs short, repeated phrases, creating a sense of motion and engagement, while sudden shifts between major and minor tonalities introduce unexpected contrasts, adding to the work's expressive depth.

In answer to Rameau's *La Poule*, *No. 108 in C major (Allegro)*, also known as '*Del Gallo*' ('The Cock's Crowing'), is rich in humour, its character shaped by lively dotted rhythms and the frequent use of *acciaccaturas* which mimic the sounds of a rooster's call. Following the double bar, a passage evocative of a cuckoo's call briefly interjects, adding to the work's whimsical charm. Arpeggiated flourishes and arresting dynamic contrasts captivate throughout.

The musical language of *No. 109 in F major (Allegretto)* exhibits Mozartian elegance featuring a rhythmically jaunty rondo with occasional unexpected excursions into the Phrygian mode. Its charm lies in its rhythmic zest and harmonic surprises.

Soler's ability to craft deeply expressive melodies within a single-movement structure shines through *No. 110 in*

D flat major (Largo cantabile). The piece unfolds with a tender songfulness, seamlessly blending moments of exquisite contemplation with sudden bursts of energy. Soler's nuanced use of dynamic contrasts and subtle ornamentation enhances the sonata's emotional depth, inviting the listener into a richly expressive soundscape.

Sonata No. 111 in D major (Allegro) brings the collection to a resplendent close, with its driving rhythm and vibrant tonal shifts embodying a sense of ultimate culmination. The guitar-like repeated chords pay homage to Spanish folk traditions, imbuing the work with a decidedly Iberian flavour. Soler's penchant for adventurous modulations also shines through, as he navigates unexpected harmonic territories, enriching the sonata's expressive palette.

In this way, Antonio Soler's *Sonatas Nos. 99–111* stand as both a testament to his harmonic ingenuity and a challenge to the traditional narratives of 18th-century keyboard music. By embracing rhythmic verve, bold modulations, and an unmistakably Spanish musical aesthetic, Soler transcends mere imitation of Scarlatti, establishing himself as a pivotal figure in the transition to Classicism. These works, often overshadowed by their contemporaries, merit recognition not only for their technical brilliance but also for their significant role in shaping the broader trajectory of keyboard music.

Emer Nestor

Maria Canals International Music Competition

The Maria Canals International Music Competition of Barcelona (www.mariacanal.cat) is the principal music competition in Spain and one of the leading events in the world following its recognition by the World Federation of International Music Competitions in 1958. It was founded in 1954 by the leading pianist and pedagogue Maria Canals, and her husband Rossend Llates. With Her Majesty Queen Sofia as President of Honour, since 1954 the competition association has organised over 120 competitions in the branches of piano, singing, violin, cello, guitar, flute, percussion and chamber music. During

these years more than 8,000 entrants have taken part from a hundred countries from the five continents, and there have been more than 200 jurors from around the world. The competition holds its auditions in the Palau de la Música Catalana in Barcelona, and offers the prize-winners important financial rewards, a tour of recitals and concerts with orchestra around the world and a recording for the Naxos label. Its winners have developed important professional careers in both performance and teaching in leading centres throughout the world.

Concurso Internacional de Música Maria Canals

El Concurso Internacional de Música Maria Canals de Barcelona (www.mariacanal.cat) es el decano de los concursos de música en España y uno de los primeros del mundo en ser aceptados por la Federación Mundial de Concursos Internacionales de Música en 1958. Fue fundado en 1954 por la prestigiosa pianista y pedagoga Maria Canals y su marido Rossend Llates. Con S.M. la Reina Sofia como Presidenta de Honor, desde 1954 la asociación del concurso ha organizado más de 120 concursos de las ramas de piano, canto, violín, violonchelo, guitarra, flauta, percusión y música de cámara. Durante estos años han participado en el mismo

más de 8.000 concursantes de un centenar de países de los 5 continentes, y más de 200 jurados procedentes de todo el mundo. El Concurso celebra sus pruebas en el Palau de la Música Catalana de Barcelona, y ofrece a los premiados importantes premios económicos, una gira de recitales y conciertos con orquesta por todo el mundo y una grabación para el sello discográfico Naxos. Sus ganadores han desarrollado importantes carreras profesionales tanto en el ámbito de la interpretación como de la docencia en los centros más importantes de todo el mundo.



Jaeden Izik-Dzurko

Winner of the 2024 Leeds International Piano Competition, Canadian pianist Jaeden Izik-Dzurko has been celebrated by audiences, critics and composers alike for his communicative power, refined technical command and artistic maturity. A few months before his triumph in Leeds, Izik-Dzurko became the first Canadian Grand Prize Laureate in an instrumental edition of the 2024 Concours musical international de Montréal. An experienced recitalist, Izik-Dzurko has made prominent debuts at the Auditorio Nacional de Música in Madrid, Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Salle Cortot and Sociedad Filarmónica de Bilbao. He has performed alongside ensembles including the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Orchestre symphonique de Montréal and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. October 2024 marked the release of Izik-Dzurko's debut EP on Warner Classics featuring a selection of his performances from the Leeds Competition.

www.jaedenizikdzurko.com

Photo © Waldy Martens

Antonio Soler enjoyed high prestige at Spain's royal palace, the Escorial, where his contributions to keyboard technique, harmonic innovation and his Spanish musical identity served to bridge the stylistic gap between the late Baroque and early Classicism. Soler's innovations have often been overlooked but the intricate modulations and rhythmic vitality found in his sonatas offer compelling evidence of their importance. Sonatas Nos. 99–111 offer a wealth of entrancing features, which include sophisticated ornamentation, a synthesis of contrapuntal and Iberian folkloric traditions, and humorous cadences.



**Antonio
SOLER**
(1729–1783)



Keyboard Sonatas Nos. 99–111

Sonata No. 99 in C major, Op. 8, No. 3 (1783)		17:58	9 Sonata No. 104 in D minor	2:16
1 I. Andantino	5:38	10 Sonata No. 105 in E flat major	6:43	
2 II. Minuetto I–II	2:58	11 Sonata No. 106 in E minor	3:26	
3 III. Rondo pastoril: Allegretto	3:12	12 Sonata No. 107 in F major	5:45	
4 IV. Allegro vivo	6:08	13 Sonata No. 108 in C major	2:36	
5 Sonata No. 100 in C minor	4:48	‘Del Gallo’		
6 Sonata No. 101 in F major	3:59	14 Sonata No. 109 in F major	4:34	
7 Sonata No. 102 in D minor	5:00	15 Sonata No. 110 in D flat major	4:26	
8 Sonata No. 103 in C minor	2:57	16 Sonata No. 111 in D major	5:57	

Jaeden Izik-Dzurko, Piano
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