

## **Domenico Scarlatti, Harpsichord sonatas, Volume I**

Paper ms, 1752, cc. I-III, 62, IV-VI, mm. 258X370

Venice, National Library of St. Mark's, ms It. IV, 201 (=9772)

## **Don Domenico's "Sonatas". From the Spanish Court to Venice**

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The manuscript catalogue/inventory of Italian codices at the National Library of St. Mark's, class IV, comprises works of mathematics, drawing arts and music.

Immediately after Benedetto Marcello's famous *Treatise on harmonic consonance*, acquired by the Library in 1831, under catalogue number 9768, it is stated:

*Sebastiano (de) Albero. Sonatas para Clavicordio (Col soldo istesso. an. 1835)*

*Il presente codice con tutti gli altri di questa classe sino al n. CCLXVI appartengono alla Nobile familia Contarini di San Benedetto di Venezia, dagli eredi della quale furono acquistati nell'anno 1835.*

*(The present codex, along with all the other of this class until n. CCLXVI, belongs to the noble family Contarini of San Benedetto of Venice, from which heirs was purchased in the year 1835)*

This simple compiler note ascertains the origin of a precious series of codices still preserved in the National Library of St. Mark's.

Under the following numbers 9770-9784 of the same inventory are listed fifteen manuscripts containing a large part of the sonatas composed by the brilliant Neapolitan master.

It deals with the 496 sonatas of the famous codices formerly belonged to Queen Maria Barbara of Braganza, daughter of King John V of Portugal and wife of King Ferdinand VI of Spain.

The history previous to the entry to the Library is still surrounded by an aura of mystery but the combination of the Spanish and Portuguese coats of arms, tooled in gold on the binding of these codices has induced scholars Kirkpatrick and Pagano to believe that these were the volumes which actually belonged to Domenico Scarlatti's (Neaples 1685-Madrid, 1757) royal pupil.

Invited to the court by the King of Portugal in Lisbon in 1719, when Maria Barbara was eight-years-old, the composer had to leave the direction of Cappella Giulia at St. Peter, to direct the royal cappella and nurture the musical talent of the Infante of King John V.

With the fall of the Venetian Republic in 1797, the ancient Library of St. Mark's had to move

from its original quarters designed by Sansovino close to the Campanile, to transfer to the Doge's Palace, sadly bereft of many of its most precious treasures.

Gained the status of National Library, which would later prove to be prophetic, the Marcian continued to enrich its collection, to compensate the ruthless spoliations suffered during the French and Austrian dominations.

Within the bequests and acquisitions followed to the Napoleonic suppression of monasteries and convents, and to the events that reduced Venice from the Serenissima Republic to a simple town, it is included also the acquisition, concluded in 1835 by the Marcian librarian, Abbot Pietro Bettio, of a series of prestigious codices, mostly of music, from the San Benedetto branch of the noble family Contarini.

Many of the numerous compositions of distinguished authors which increased the Marcian collections with that acquisition, are listed in the inventory made in 1782 by Carlo Broschi, known as Farinelli.

Among these, there are also Scarlatti's who – as already mentioned – served for long time as master of the royal chapel and keyboard teacher of the Imperial majesties, at the court of Spain and Portugal.

The descriptions of codices 199-200, listed under numbers 9770-9771 according to the Marcian inventory, and the following ones, referring to codices 201-213, listed under numbers 9772-9784, bear the following indications:

Domenico Scarlatti. *Sonate per cembalo*, volumes II, years 1742, and 1749; and from year 1752 to year 1757. Volumes XIII.

The first two volumes, not numbered inside, copied in 1742 and 1749 each in different hand (the second one lavishly illuminated with gold, for the titles, the agogic, the tempo marks and hands indication) have been numbered by Kirkpatrick and Pagano as XIV and XV; the others, numbered from I to XIII, have been identified as the ones copied by a single copyist for the use of the queen, from 1752 to 1757.

## **The bequest of Carlo Broschi, Farinelli**

Finely decorated with red and blue inks, the Venetian manuscripts feature fair handwriting, with text in Spanish, and were probably brought to Italy by Farinelli.

He himself devised that the huge artistic patrimony inherited by the queen, who had rewarded him with musical instruments, jewels, portraits, scores and librettos, had to be made available to posterity, in a sort of foundation, as it would be said in our times.

The greed of one of his nephews, who took advantage of the legal institutes imposed by the French revolution, thwarted his noble project.

As the only survivor of an exceptional musical period, after the death of Ferdinand VI driven to complete lunacy in 1759, one year later the death of Queen Maria Barbara, Farinelli decided to leave Spain.

The ship which carried in Italy his baggage wrecked, but the manuscripts containing Scarlatti's sonatas were rescued and brought to the town of Bologna, the last residence of the famous castrato.

### **The Essercizi or Scherzi ingegnosi**

Along with the codices containing the sonatas, in the same lot of manuscripts, came to the Marcian Library also a copy of the sonatas or "Essercizi per gravicembalo / di / Don Domenico Scarlatti / Cavaliero di S. Giacomo e Maestro / de / Serenissimi Principe e Principessa / delle Asturie &c".

Or, as it is written in the copy preserved in the Marcian Library:

*dedicati alla Sacra Real Maestà Giovani V. il Giusto re di Portogallo, d'Algarve, del Brasile...*

*(dedicated to the Holy Royal Majesty John V the Just king of Portugal, Algarve and Brazil...)*

*from*

*l'umilissimo suo servo domenico scarlatti ...*

*(his most humble servant domenico scarlatti)*

Lavishly ornamented with gold, and preserved in the library under the pressmark Mus. 119, it contains 30 of the sonatas or scherzos as, with a good amount of British understatement, Domenico Scarlatti defines them in the preface to the first printed edition, published in London by the composer himself at the end of 1738:

*Reader*

*Don't expect, whether you are an amateur or a professor, to find in these compositions the profound Learning, but rather an ingenious Jesting with Art, to accommodate you to the Mastery of the Harpsichord*

It also probably belonged to queen Maria Barbara since, as well as the 15 Marcian manuscripts, it bears the combined "arms of alliance" tooled in gold on the red Moroccan leather binding of the volume, right at the centre of the cover.

### **Joint venture, Marcian Library - Sony Classical Italia**

The manuscript cod. it. IV, 201, starting a factual agreement of cooperation agreement within the "Italian keyboard" project, implemented with main aims of conservation and valorization of cultural testimonies considered unique for the history of music, comprises thirty harpsichord sonatas, which, in order of sequence, correspond to the following numbers of Kirkpatrick's thematic catalogue: K148-175, K129, K176.

All of these sonatas find concordance with the coeval manuscript marked Psi. I. 48/1, preserved in the Palatine Library of Parma; the sonata K129 can also be found in the Marcian manuscript It. IV, 200 (=9771), dated to 1749.

The Marcian set, as is known, is not the only extant one; the Palatine Library of Parma, where it came from Bologna due to an acquisition on the antiquarian market in 1908, preserves the other one, of equal importance, copied for Scarlatti himself and composed of 15 manuscript volumes more simply bound in plain leather. The sonatas set of the Palatine Library, parallel to the Venetian one, dated from 1752 to 1757, largely in the same hand as the Venetian manuscripts, perhaps padre Antonio Soler's, contains 463 sonatas corresponding to volumes I-XIII (It. IV, 201-213), a selection of compositions taken from manuscripts dated 1742 and 1749 (It. IV, 199-200), and the sonatas not included in the Venetian sources.

The Venetian manuscripts are bound in red Moroccan leather, lavishly decorated with golden ornaments and beautiful flowers, in horizontal format quarto size, similarly to the one of de Albero, organist to the Spanish royal chapel, already mentioned.

There are no extant autograph manuscripts of Scarlatti; therefore, despite the efforts of many scholars, the mysteries on the immense patrimony represented by Scarlatti's sonatas, or *lessons*, or exercises, as they would have been called in the Nineteenth century, still remain somewhat impenetrable. Also the exact chronology of the works has not been clearly established yet, having them been dated mostly on the basis of stylistic elements.

Beyond the many still unanswered questions, thanks to these testimonies, royal or not, never forgotten through the centuries, no keyboard performer can nowadays afford to ignore Domenico Scarlatti; or, no one can be denied the privilege of yielding to the unbridled sense of joy and freshness emanating from his sonatas, which seem to participate to the nature of laugh and to the pleasure of senses.