

‘SCARLATTINO, THE WONDER OF HIS TIME’: DOMENICO SCARLATTI’S ABSENT PRESENCE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

Domenico Scarlatti played a consistently significant role in English musical life from 1738 to the end of the century, even though he never travelled to England. His ‘absent presence’ was mediated by the eighty-three Scarlatti sonatas available in print in the eighteenth century. Scarlatti’s ‘English’ sonatas – defined here as those pieces available in print or manuscript to an eighteenth-century English player – display common compositional traits, in particular the frequent use of virtuoso techniques that appeal to the eye as well as the ear, such as crossed-hand passagework and leaps. English professional keyboard players used these visually virtuoso sonatas to establish their credentials in a competitive market, and the performance of this repertory – the most difficult in print – remained a benchmark for skilful execution at the keyboard to the end of the century. The performance venues for Scarlatti sonatas are difficult to document outside of anecdotal evidence drawn from personal accounts such as those by Charles and Fanny Burney. I provide new documentary evidence for semi-public performances of Scarlatti sonatas by Charles Jr and Samuel Wesley in the 1770s and offer further evidence that Scarlatti’s music held its place during a period of profound change in musical style and taste. Even as his sonatas were published and played to the end of the century, Scarlatti was frequently invoked in writings on music and aesthetics. His shifting position as exemplar or bad example is demonstrated in texts by Charles Avison, William Crotch, Uvedale Price, Sir John Hawkins and Charles Burney. Much like Arcangelo Corelli, another Italian with a strong absent presence principally mediated by print, Domenico Scarlatti had a powerful and lasting impact in England. This article presents an eighteenth-century portrait in absentia of the ‘English’ Scarlatti, suggesting how this elusive figure might be moved out of courtly isolation and into the thick of the eighteenth-century musical marketplace.

The career of Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757) can be neatly framed in geographical terms – Neapolitan birth and training, and his first steps as a composer; a study trip to Venice (1705–1709); a decade composing church music and operas in Rome (1710–1719); a move to Portugal at age thirty-four initiating almost four decades in Iberian royal courts as keyboard music master to María Bárbara de Bragança. The last phase of this career has understandably attracted the most study. Scarlatti’s keyboard sonatas – a large body of music holding its place

Research for this article was conducted at the Library of Congress, the British Library and the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester and made possible by generous support from the Presser Music Foundation and the International Institute of the University of Michigan. An earlier version was presented at the inaugural meeting of the Society for Eighteenth-Century Music at Georgetown University in Washington, D. C., in May 2004. I want to thank Dean Sutcliffe, Karla Taylor and the Medieval and Early Modern Studies colloquium at the University of Michigan, Louise Stein, my anonymous readers for this journal, and especially Edward Parmentier for their advice and encouragement on this project.



in print and active performance from the mid-eighteenth century to the present – are closely connected to his long residence on the Iberian Peninsula. The scholarly quest for Spanish sources for Scarlatti's keyboard style and the effort to answer persistent questions about the intended instrument and chronology of his more than 550 keyboard sonatas have left relatively undiscussed the dissemination and reception of these sonatas across Europe during the eighteenth century.¹ Of particular note is the warm and lasting reception that a subset of the Scarlatti keyboard oeuvre received in England, a country the composer never visited.²

If the chronological order and original context of the sonatas remain in shadow, abundant historical light can be cast on the reception of Scarlatti's music in England in the eighteenth century. In fact, the English response to Scarlatti's keyboard music goes beyond the simple category of reception. The unique features of the sonatas known in England – about one fifth of Scarlatti's output – led to their becoming instant and enduring musical classics for amateur and professional keyboard players from 1738 to the end of the century. On the basis of the shared stylistic qualities of this group of 'English' sonatas, in particular their extroverted keyboard virtuosity, and evidence for audience reactions to their performance, I will argue that Scarlatti and his sonatas occupied a peculiar niche within eighteenth-century English musical culture. This niche – a private one that touched in tangential, but important, ways on the public careers of professional musicians – can be illuminated by assessing Scarlatti's prominent and enduring position in the print market, the uses to which players turned the sonatas in specific performance contexts for particular audiences, and the reactions of various authors to the musical values seen in this repertory and the performance culture it encouraged. This combination of wide print dissemination, targeted use in performance and strong critical reaction granted Domenico Scarlatti an 'absent presence' on the English musical scene. No other nation in the eighteenth century adopted and made a home for the Scarlatti sonata like England did, and the vibrant print and performance culture of the English music market allowed Scarlatti to take his place in the landscape of English musical life.

SCARLATTI'S PRESENCE IN PRINT

In 1910 Ricordi published the final volume of the first complete edition of Scarlatti's keyboard sonatas, edited by Alessandro Longo. From that time forward, any musician or scholar wanting to understand Domenico Scarlatti has been confronted by a veritable mountain of over 550 sonatas. It was easier for an eighteenth-century English keyboard player to get to know Scarlatti. By the end of the century one potentially had access to just over eighty sonatas published and reprinted between 1738 and the 1790s. If one had connections, another fifteen or so sonatas might have been accessible in manuscript or occasionally heard in performance. Table 1 summarizes this repertory.

The core of Scarlatti's 'English' catalogue – Group A – is the thirty sonatas published in London in 1738 under the title *Essercizi per Gravicembalo*. The outsized effect these sonatas would have was prefigured in the striking size and luxuriousness of the original edition. It was an elite publication from its first page, a custom-engraved frontispiece by internationally known Italian painter Jacopo Amigoni that appears to picture the *Essercizi* volume itself being placed as an offering on a pedestal, above which floats the Portuguese

1 A notable exception is Richard Newton, 'The English Cult of Domenico Scarlatti', *Music and Letters* 20/2 (1938), 138–156, a classic article to which the present study is indebted. The scholarly literature on Scarlatti is summarized and critically assessed in chapters one and two of W. Dean Sutcliffe, *The Keyboard Sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti and Eighteenth-Century Musical Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

2 There is a lingering question as to whether Domenico was in London for the performance of his opera *Narciso* in 1720. As with so many details of Scarlatti's biography, there is little more than speculation to go on, and confusion of Domenico with his uncle, Francesco Antonio Nicola Scarlatti, who was in London between 1719 and 1724, has clouded the issue. No conclusive evidence has been brought forth to demonstrate that Domenico ever visited London, and there has never been any suggestion that his reputation as a keyboard composer and player, the subject of this study, was based on anything other than printed and manuscript music in wide circulation in England from 1738 on.



Table 1 Sonatas appearing in print in England (and on the Continent) before 1791, plus sonatas found in the Worgan manuscript

<i>Number of sonatas</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Kirkpatrick Numbers</i>
30	A	<i>Essercizi per Gravicembalo</i> (London, 1738)	1–30
11	B	<i>42 Suites de pièces pour le clavecin</i> , ed. Roseingrave (London, 1739)	31–42
28	C	later English imprints (Johnson, 1752 and 1757; Owen, 1771)	43, 44, 46, 47, 53, 57, 99–101, 104–107, 112, 113, 115–120, 123, 140, 141, 246, 247, 298, 299
8	D1	continental imprints reprinted in England	49, 55, 125–127, 131, 179, 182
6	D2	continental imprints not reprinted in England	48, 66, 95–97, 180
83		Sonatas in print Worgan manuscript (‘Sybil’s leaves’) (British Library, Add. MS. 31553)	
13		sonatas in both Venice and Worgan manuscripts	50, 54, 56, 68, 98, 108–111, 114, 121, 122, 139
3		sonatas unique to the Worgan manuscript	142–144
99		Total sonatas in print + Worgan MS.	

Compiled from bibliographic data in Joel Sheveloff, ‘The Keyboard Music of Domenico Scarlatti: A Re-evaluation of the Present State of Knowledge in Light of the Sources’ (PhD dissertation, Brandeis, 1970)

royal coat of arms and the obligatory *putti* (see Figure 1 of Jane Clark’s ‘Farinelli as Queen of the Night’ in this issue). The title page followed, with the grand title *ESSERCIZI PER GRAVICEMBALO / di / Don Domenico Scarlatti / Cavaliere di S. GIACOMO e Maestro / dè / SERENISSIMI PRENCIPE e PRENCIPESSA / delle Asturie &c.* Emphasis on the composer’s recently granted noble status and abundance of royal patrons continued in a four-page dedicatory letter to João V, King of Portugal and father of Maria Bárbara de Bragança, Infanta of Portugal, Princess of Asturias, later Queen of Spain. The text of this letter was printed in large type and the upper half of each of these pages was left empty, increasing the effusiveness of the dedication by means of a layout that takes up twice as much space, and requires twice as much paper, as it would otherwise have needed. This opulence, expressed in empty stretches of high-quality paper, was one among many marks of the luxurious nature of the *Essercizi*. The most pronounced sign of ostentation was the sheer size of the imprint: the *Essercizi* is a big book. When lying open, the book measures eighty-two centimetres across, as wide as the five-octave keyboard needed to play the pieces inside. At 118 folio-sized pages, several standard volumes of music could have been published using the paper required to print just one copy of the *Essercizi*. The noteheads are three millimetres in diameter and all the page-turns conveniently occur at the halfway point of each binary-form piece, even if this meant leaving almost an entire page of blank staves before the page-turn. The beautiful, highly accurate engraving was the work of B. Fortier, who worked in London and is known to have engraved only six other volumes, all printed in England between 1736 and 1740. None approach the excessive, uncommercial layout of the *Essercizi*.

Just as the book was exaggerated in size, its Italian title conveyed a certain pretentiousness. The unknown forces behind the publication of the *Essercizi* struck a thoroughly Italian pose by replacing the conventional



terms for solo pieces – the utilitarian English ‘lesson’ or the elegant French ‘suite’ – with the slightly exotic ‘essercizi’, a word with both the denotation of lesson and the connotation of physically, mentally, even morally challenging daily discipline.³ As to the designation of instrument, calling a harpsichord a ‘gravicembalo’ was old-fashioned in 1738. The word appears in the 1607 published score of Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* and in the title of a 1630 collection of vocal music by Frescobaldi (*Secondo libro d’arie musicali per cantarsi nel gravicembalo e tiorba*, published in Florence), but is rare in the eighteenth century, except for two cases which are clearly imitations of Scarlatti’s highly successful edition.⁴

But the real impact of the *Essercizi* imprint lay in its contents, thirty difficult sonatas that combine to make it the most technically challenging collection of keyboard music published in eighteenth-century England. And while the original edition must have been very expensive, the sonatas inside were quickly judged to be marketable to players in any price range. Within a year, all thirty were re-engraved in a more sensible format edited by Thomas Roseingrave, an Irish-born organist who met Scarlatti in Italy in 1709 and was still keeping the faith thirty years later. Roseingrave rearranged them and interspersed eleven more sonatas by Domenico (Table 1, Group B), presumably pieces in his possession that originated from Scarlatti himself. This 1739 publication, including a lengthy subscription list of mainly professional musicians, was released in two volumes and entitled *42 Suites de pièces pour le clavecin*.⁵ It contained fully half of Scarlatti’s ‘English’ sonatas, a category used here to designate those works potentially available in print form to an English keyboard player. Roseingrave’s edition had surprising staying power. The plates were reprinted

3 The Latin root of ‘essercizi’ appears in the title of St Ignatius of Loyola’s *Exercitia spiritualia* (1548). Leonardo da Vinci used the word in this admonition: ‘mettre tenere in esercizio il corpo, la mente, la memoria; lo ’ngegno senza esercizio si guasta’ (keep in exercise the body, the mind and the memory; without exercise these will be laid waste). Nicola Zingarelli, *Lo Zingarelli: vocabolario della lingua italiana*, twelfth edition (Bologna: Zanichelli, 2001), 652.

4 The unusual designation ‘Gravicembalo’ appeared on the title page of a volume of sonatas published in London shortly after the *Essercizi*. The composer of this volume, entitled *Sonate per Gravicembalo* (1739), was Giovanni Battista Pescetti, one of many Italians of Domenico’s generation seeking their fortunes in England. After several successful years composing operas in Venice, Pescetti came to London as a harpsichordist in 1736, and for a time took Porpora’s place directing the Opera of the Nobility. As his single volume of keyboard sonatas suggests, giving harpsichord lessons was also part of Pescetti’s professional work in London. The volume, measuring twenty-seven by thirty-eight centimetres, was slightly larger than most similar keyboard editions, but did not quite measure up to the oversized *Essercizi*. The title explicitly invoked Scarlatti’s recently released set, and the title page economically combined the key elements of the six introductory and dedicatory pages in the *Essercizi*. Like Scarlatti’s big book, Pescetti’s volume was conspicuously dedicated to his female student and her father, in this case Grace Boyle – her name charmingly Italianized as Grazia – the daughter of Richard Boyle, the last Viscount Shannon. The Shannon coat of arms, its dark and light halves curiously inverted, makes an appearance on the title page, just as the Portuguese royal coat of arms was prominent in the engraved frontispiece to the Scarlatti volume. See John Walter Hill, ‘Pescetti, Giovanni Battista’, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, second edition, ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2002), volume 19, 481.

A second volume with a Scarlattian title appeared on the English keyboard music market in 1754: a collection of *Sonate di Gravicembalo* composed in a Scarlattian idiom by Domenico Paradisi. The composer, called Paradies by the English, arrived in London in 1746, a time when he could hardly have remained ignorant of Scarlatti’s English reputation. Like Pescetti, Paradisi had limited success composing operas for London, and made his name as a harpsichord player and pedagogue. His 1754 collection – only the third London publication to use the term ‘gravicembalo’ – evoked the original *Essercizi* edition in its title, the dedication ‘a Sua Altezza Reale La Principessa Augusta’, who may have been Paradisi’s student, and the general Scarlattian character of the keyboard writing. See Giulia Giachin, ‘Contributo alla conoscenza di Paradisi’, *Nuova rivista musicale italiana* 9/3 (1975), 360.

5 The sonatas in the Roseingrave edition have virtually never gone out of print. They have been re-edited and reissued every generation from 1739 to the present, a remarkable, indeed unequalled, record that speaks to the quiet, persistent presence of Domenico Scarlatti for over two and a half centuries of Western European musical and cultural life. Scarlatti never required a ‘revival’ or ‘rediscovery’; he has always simply been there, a presence in print and on keyboard music desks for 260 years.



twice, by two different publishers, in 1754 and the 1790s respectively.⁶ These were affordable editions of a conventional shape and size, some on quite coarse paper. In the 1754 edition, published by John Johnson, the title page was anglicized: the 'Essercizi', having briefly been 'Suites', were naturalized into 'Lessons'. By the Preston and Sons reprint in the 1790s, the plates show blurring and other evidence of wear. Roseingrave's 1739 edition endured to the end of the century as the most consistently available edition of Scarlatti's music for sale in England. Even Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, owned a copy of the 1754 reprint and had it bound together with more recent music in 1788.⁷

Apparently two editions of the *Essercizi* sonatas were not enough, and in 1742 a second cheap edition made its bid for the new market in Scarlatti sonatas. This one, published by Witvogel of Amsterdam, a firm known for pirating popular editions, followed the text and order of the original, leaving out the dedicatory print, title page and letter, but reprinting the letter to the reader.⁸ Witvogel's aim seems to have been to get all thirty sonatas on to as few sheets of paper as possible. Fewer than half the sonatas require a page turn, with the majority squeezed on to two facing pages. Even the final fugue, K30, which takes up four full pages in the Fortier engraving, is crammed onto two pages in this edition, the engraver increasing the number of systems per page from seven to nine.⁹

Thus there were three very different editions of the same Scarlatti sonatas on sale within a four-year period. This was fashionable music that players wanted, and publishers obliged. If we add to these three keyboard editions the 1744 publication *Twelve Concerto's in Seven Parts . . . done from two Books of Lessons for the Harpsichord, Composed by Sig^r. Domenico Scarlatti*, transcribed by Charles Avison from the Roseingrave edition, then something of a Scarlatti-*Essercizi* craze begins to take shape in England during the half dozen years after 1738.

At least one London-based keyboard player and composer became more than a little obsessed with the *Essercizi* during this precise period. George Frideric Handel borrowed heavily from the set in October 1739, a busy month during which he composed and compiled his Op. 6 *concerti grossi*.¹⁰ The *Essercizi* evidently shared space on Handel's music desk with Gottlieb Muffat's *Componimenti Musicali* of 1739, from which Handel also borrowed extensively in his Op. 6.¹¹ Handel biographer Mainwaring recorded the lifelong admiration his subject felt for Scarlatti, writing that 'Handel often used to speak of [Scarlatti] with great

6 Paradisi's *Sonate di Gravicembalo* had a similar history of reprinting and re-engraving. The original plates were reprinted by Welcker and Preston in London, and the entire set was re-engraved by Le Clerc in Paris.

7 Queen Charlotte's copies are in a collection inscribed by the Queen on the flyleaf, one of at least seven such volumes. See British Library (hereafter Lbl), RM.16.a.11. Charlotte bound her Scarlatti volumes together with sonata collections by Samuel Arnold and John Burton. The Burton set in particular evokes the technical content of the Scarlatti sonatas, with prominent hand crossing in four of the ten works, similar use of the letters *D* and *M* to denote crossed-hand passages and a concluding 'Pastorale alla Napolitana'. See below for more on the techniques specific to Scarlatti's 'English' sonatas.

8 Albert Dunning, 'Witvogel, Gerhard Frederik', in *The New Grove*, second edition, volume 27, 456.

9 On a practical level this allowed Witvogel to print all thirty sonatas on twenty-two folio sheets plus a half-sheet for the title page. If the long final fugue had taken up four pages, instead of two, it would have necessitated a twenty-third folio-sized sheet and added to the cost of the imprint. The Roseingrave edition, with its added sonatas, easily filled two volumes. The excessiveness of the original *Essercizi* imprint is set in relief by these knockoff editions. Not only did the *Essercizi* contain enough music for almost two typical volumes of keyboard music, it also demanded an inordinate amount of expensive paper. Most subsequent eighteenth-century editions of Scarlatti contained six or twelve sonatas.

10 See Ellwood Derr, 'Handel's Use of Scarlatti's "Essercizi per Gravicembalo" in His Opus 6', *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* 3 (1987, published 1989), 170–187, and Alexander Silbiger, 'Scarlatti Borrowings in Handel's Grand Concertos', *The Musical Times* 125 (February 1984), 93–95.

11 Muffat's *Componimenti* provides an interesting parallel to the *Essercizi*. Like the Scarlatti imprint, Muffat's generously sized volume (twenty-six by thirty-five centimetres) was a large-scale collection of difficult pieces and a masterpiece of engraving. Both were brand new publications when Handel borrowed from them. One can imagine Handel shifting between these oversized volumes on the music desk of his harpsichord at Brook Street while composing his own monumental set, published in April 1740.



satisfaction'. In complementary fashion, Mainwaring registered Scarlatti's admiration for Handel, relying on the second-hand testimony of musicians who had met Scarlatti in Madrid. These witnesses reported that the Italian, 'as oft as he was admired for his great execution, would mention Handel and cross himself in token of veneration'.¹² Handel must have acquired a copy of the *Essercizi* when it appeared in London – he seems to have drawn on κ1–30 only – and learned the pieces and borrowed widely from them in a concentrated period. Devouring newly published instrumental collections whole may have been something of a habit for the composer. Hawkins tells of Handel acquiring a copy of Mattheson's *Pièces de clavecin* on its publication in 1714 and immediately sitting down and sight-reading through the entire volume for his friends in the St Paul's choir at their drinking haunt near the cathedral.¹³ It would have been a challenge even for Handel to sight-read the *Essercizi*, but his enthusiasm for the collection is evident in the breadth of his borrowing from it within a concentrated period of time.

Unusually for Handel, some of his borrowings from the *Essercizi* would have been audible to audience members who knew the originals. The final movement of Op. 6 No. 1 (dated 29 September 1739, and the first of the set to be completed in autograph) quotes the opening of κ2 quite literally in its own first bar. Both movements are in G major and the Handel piece is the first of only ten binary-form movements in the whole of Op. 6. After the recognizable opening, Handel goes on to borrow two other distinctive motives from κ2, both incorporated at the precise structural places where Scarlatti uses them in his sonata. The Handel is modelled almost point for point on the structure and melodic content of the Scarlatti.¹⁴ Anyone in the contemporary English audience who knew the keyboard original could have heard it embedded multiple times within Handel's concerto movement and, given the intensity of *Essercizi* publication activity, there could have been many such people in London at the time.¹⁵

After the explosive debut of the *Essercizi*, the remaining 'English' sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti entered the market at irregular intervals. The sonatas in Group C were published in three English imprints between 1752 and 1771.¹⁶ All but four of the twenty-eight sonatas in this group presumably arrived in England in the so-called Worgan manuscript. This undated eighteenth-century collection of forty-four sonatas, elaborately rendered in three colours of ink, is of Spanish provenance.¹⁷ Burney claimed that organist John Worgan carried on a correspondence with Scarlatti in Spain and thereby obtained a private stock of sonatas directly from the composer. Worgan allowed some of the sonatas to be published; others he chose to keep for his own use, presumably as a sort of private arsenal. Burney said Worgan kept these unpublished manuscript sonatas

12 John Mainwaring, *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederic Handel* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1760), 61. Mainwaring links Handel to Scarlatti in an appropriately flattering light, given the hagiographic character of his book. He offers the only existing narrative of the supposed Handel–Scarlatti keyboard duel at Cardinal Ottoboni's Roman palace during Handel's years in Italy. Published in 1760, three years after Domenico's death, Mainwaring's text described Scarlatti as 'now living in Spain, and author of the celebrated lessons' (59).

13 John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (New York: Dover, 1963; reprint of 1853 Novello edition), 852. Like Scarlatti, Mattheson was a friend from Handel's youth who published a volume of keyboard music Handel came to know in later years in London.

14 Silbiger, 'Scarlatti Borrowings in Handel's Grand Concertos', 95.

15 Silbiger speculates that Avison may have got the idea for his string transcriptions from Handel's transparent borrowings in his Op. 6 concertos (Silbiger, 'Scarlatti Borrowings in Handel's Grand Concertos', 95).

16 All the Scarlatti sources are exhaustively described in Joel Sheveloff, 'The Keyboard Music of Domenico Scarlatti: A Re-evaluation of the Present State of Knowledge in the Light of the Sources' (PhD dissertation, Brandeis University, 1970). The three editions mentioned here are labelled by Sheveloff as Johnson-3 (c1754–1756), Johnson-4 (1752) and Owen (1771). In her continuing edition of the sonatas Emilia Fadini assigns the following abbreviations to these volumes: Ed. J. I, Ed. J. II, and Ed. O. See the preface to any volume of Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per clavicembalo*, ed. Emilia Fadini (Milan: Ricordi, 1978–).

17 See Sheveloff, 'The Keyboard Music of Domenico Scarlatti', 90–93, for a thorough discussion of the provenance of the Worgan manuscript.



'locked up as Sybil's leaves'.¹⁸ Referring to Scarlatti as a Sybil conjures up the image of a remote, even mythic, figure, living beyond the seas (in a Spanish cave?), from whom occasional prophetic missives washed ashore in distant Britain, providing evidence for the oracle's continued existence, at once renewing and sustaining the cult.

The final category of published sonatas in Scarlatti's 'English' oeuvre – Group D – contains sonatas first published in Continental imprints. The most significant such collection was the 1754 edition of six sonatas published by Haffner of Nuremberg. The volume contains K125, 126, 127, 131, 179 and 182. These six works were reprinted as a group in England around 1776–1777 by Welcker. How Haffner obtained the sonatas is not known, but clearly there were Scarlatti manuscripts in circulation on the continent, even if there was no Scarlatti cult as in England. The market logic of music-publishing piracy eventually made these six sonatas accessible to the English market, still hungry for more Scarlatti sonatas almost forty years after the arrival of the *Essercizi*.

Scarlatti's 'absent presence' in England rested on this combined group of eighty-three published sonatas. If we add the sixteen in the Worgan manuscript that never saw print, then an avid Scarlatti fan in late eighteenth-century London with the right connections could have played or heard a tidy ninety-nine sonatas, almost eighteen percent of Scarlatti's known output. This imagined repertory is brought together in a late eighteenth-century English source formerly in the collection of Alan Tyson and recently donated to the British Library.¹⁹ This manuscript collection belonged to Samuel Wesley (of whom more below) and includes eight Scarlatti sonatas and five other keyboard works, presumably by Wesley. According to Tyson's notes, watermarks date the paper to 1760–1770. Assembly of the manuscript after that time would have required access to copies of the Owen-1771 edition from Group C, a French imprint from Group D, the Haffner edition or the Welcker reprint, and the Worgan manuscript itself (which passed into the Wesley family's possession on Worgan's death in 1790). This late-century manuscript miscellany is one player's anthology of Scarlatti's 'English' sonatas that were not readily available in the ubiquitous Roseingrave edition, a copy of which was part of the Wesley family music library.²⁰

VISUAL VIRTUOSITY IN SCARLATTI'S 'ENGLISH' SONATAS

Scarlatti's mercurial style is notoriously difficult to define, but if his output is limited to the 'English' sonatas, certain characteristics begin to appear with regularity. The common traits among this subset of sonatas offer a curious view of Domenico and provide a crucial key to explaining his extraordinary and enduring success in England. Like the majority of Scarlatti's output, the 'English' sonatas call for an equality of technique between the hands. And while most of Scarlatti's sonatas are fast, the 'English' sonatas are particularly speedy; all but three are marked Allegro or faster. There are no andantes or cantabiles as in the Spanish sources.

The most striking quality of the 'English' sonatas is their overt physicality; Scarlatti's most visually virtuosic techniques are unusually prominent in these pieces. And while many of his unpublished sonatas use similar effects, in the 'English' works the technical challenges are both more pronounced and frequently extended to the point where they take on new meaning for player and listener. Considering the eighty-three 'English' sonatas statistically, thirty-five incorporate repeated large leaps, nineteen have extended passagework played with the hands crossed and nine include passages of parallel octaves in one hand.²¹ In the context

18 Charles Burney, *A General History of Music, from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period* (1789), ed. Frank Mercer (New York: Dover, 1957), 1009.

19 See UK-Lbl Tyson MS. 4.

20 The Wesley family copy of the Roseingrave edition (UK-Lbl, e.32.c) is inscribed 'Charles Wesley, June 6, 1769'.

21 Large leaps involve one hand, typically the left, negotiating jumps that are larger than one octave and do not involve crossing one hand over the other. The term 'crossed-hand passagework' encompasses passages where one hand is crossed over the other for a bar or more. Octaves played by one hand, unusual in the early eighteenth-century keyboard repertory, are distinguished here from broken octaves.



of early eighteenth-century keyboard style, these techniques are all visually striking. Many are arguably so visually oriented that they make their point only when the listener is also a watcher.

Crossed-hand passagework in particular relies almost completely on visual effect, as the notes sound essentially the same when played in the normal position. Comparison with crossed-hand passages by François Couperin and J. S. Bach is instructive. In Couperin's *pièces croisées*, the hands occupy the same octave and the player is instructed, of necessity, to use a different keyboard for each hand. Couperin's *croisée* technique does not have its roots in a specifically keyboard idiom, but is rather a matter of scoring – equal voices in the same range – which, Couperin advises, works equally well with any pair of instruments of equal pitch. The technique has a specifically aural intent.²² J. S. Bach directs the player to use a separate keyboard for each hand in the Goldberg Variations. The hands cross for lengthy passages in the Goldbergs as a by-product of Bach's rigorous contrapuntal logic. In contrast to both Couperin and Bach, Scarlatti never indicates the use of different keyboards in his crossed-hand passages. Scarlatti's 'English' sonatas regularly indulge in extended crossed-hand complexities that are sonically unnecessary and without contrapuntal rationale. The music sounds no different when played in normal position – the passages are just harder to play with hands crossed. These sections look harder to play as well, provided the player can be seen in the act. $\kappa 15$ takes this technique to an extreme: over half of the sonata – 59 of 112 bars – is played with the hands crossed for no apparent musical reason. Such extended crossed-hand passagework was among the first element of Scarlatti's virtuosity to be edited out. As early as 1791 editor Ambrose Pitman 'simplified' such passages by omitting Domenico's directions to cross the hands.²³ The simplifying trend continued across the nineteenth century and is generally the case in Longo's edition as well. However, this technical feat which Pitman and Longo considered superfluous was, in fact, essential to the impact of these sonatas in England.

Perhaps the most dramatic kind of visual virtuosity Scarlatti deploys is the hand-crossing leap, where one hand makes a series of rapid overhand leaps between single notes. The distance separating the notes the leaping hand travels between can change with each leap (see Example 1) or remain constant (see Example 2). This kind of visual-musical effect occurs in twenty-nine, or one out of three, Scarlatti sonatas published in England in the eighteenth century.²⁴ $\kappa 95$ offers a particularly concentrated example: the entire piece is built on repetitions of a single overhand gesture. No real attempt at musical development is intended, as the brevity of the first 'half' of the sonata – a mere four bars – suggests. This sonata shows off the player's ability to negotiate leaps, which, unusually for Scarlatti, are exclusively for the right hand. Given the source situation, the authenticity of $\kappa 95$ remains doubtful.²⁵ But even if it is not by Scarlatti, the work was published under his name and embodies the association of Scarlatti as composer and unheard player with such virtuoso tricks, even if it does so in an unimaginative manner.

Only eighteen of the eighty-three 'English' sonatas do not contain at least one of the four technical challenges described above; many contain more than one. Given the prominence of overt physical acts – lifting the hand so boldly off the keyboard is remarkably unusual in the contemporary repertory – the vast

22 Couperin describes his *croisée* technique in the preface to his *Troisième Livre de Pièces de Clavecin* (1722). Examples in Couperin's *Troisième Livre* include 'Le Dodo ou L'amour au Berceau' (fifteenth *ordre*) and 'Le Tic-Toc-Choc ou les Maillotins' (eighteenth *ordre*).

23 *The Beauties of Domenico Scarlatti Selected from his Suites de Lecons. For the Harpsichord or Piano Forte And Revised with a Variety of Improvements* (London, 1791).

24 In his statistical survey of all 555 sonatas Christophe Rousset numbers only fifty-six, or one out of ten, sonatas in his category 'croisements', which appears to combine crossed-hand passagework and crossed-hand leaps to a single note. Christophe Rousset, 'Approche statistique des sonates', in *Domenico Scarlatti: 13 recherches* (Nice: Cahiers de la Société de Musique Ancienne de Nice, 1985), 87.

25 $\kappa 95$ and $\kappa 97$ are the only two sonatas for which the primary source is the Boivin editions of the 1740s; these editions were almost exclusively limited to reprints of sonatas that had first appeared in England. All the sonatas from the *Essercizi* and Roseingrave volumes were re-engraved yet again in the Boivin editions (constituting a fourth engraving of $\kappa 1$ –30 in the ten years after their first appearance in print). Thus $\kappa 95$, with its banal hand crossings, probably reflects a Continental perception of Scarlatti as visual virtuoso based on English imprints that were less than a decade old.



majority of these pieces achieve maximum effect when they are both heard *and* seen. The challenge of correct execution moves to the fore when a player chooses to play one of Scarlatti's 'English' sonatas. In some instances, simply playing the correct notes can be understood as the rationale for the sonata, and just getting through it without serious incident (or total breakdown) is an accomplishment in itself. Ralph Kirkpatrick noted the extreme technical difficulties of these works and the ironies attendant on performing them. Having captured a note-perfect studio recording of $\kappa 120$, Kirkpatrick listened to the playback with dismay: 'I found on hearing it that all sense of difficulty had disappeared. It felt like going down a ski jump in an elevator.'²⁶ A specifically Scarlattian element was lacking in an otherwise 'perfect' performance: the player could not be seen and thus the audience could not correctly assess the level of risk required by the piece. It is difficult to imagine Kirkpatrick, or an audience, being disappointed with a flawless execution of $\kappa 120$ in the crucible of live performance.

A sampling of the 'English' sonatas demonstrates the kinds of visual virtuosity Scarlatti was identified with in England. $\kappa 29$, the penultimate of the *Essercizi*, is representative of the gratuitous physical challenges characteristic of the set as a whole (see Figure 1). To express in notated form his sometimes absurd visual virtuosity, Scarlatti used letters to designate which hand played which notes, *M* indicating left and *D* indicating right. Almost the entire first page of $\kappa 29$ is played with hands crossed; not until the fourth system are the hands in their normal position. Of particular difficulty is the semiquaver passage at the end of the third system, where the player must execute a series of descending parallel thirds with the hands crossed. This sonata, the most outrageous of the set, was printed or reprinted a total of seven times in England and on the Continent between 1738 and the end of the century. Either the piece was widely played (or attempted) or the simple novelty (and beauty) of the work on the page motivated this remarkable number of reprints. Many of the sonatas in Group C push Scarlattian visual virtuosity to its outer limits. $\kappa 100$ offers examples of progressively larger crossed-hand leaps between single notes taken to extremes that would verge on the sadistic if the resulting music were not so utterly charming (see Example 1). As with $\kappa 29$, the overwhelming virtuosity of $\kappa 113$ must have been one of its selling points to eighteenth-century audiences (see Example 2). The piece offers a blizzard of crossed-hand leaps that proceed with inevitable, but subtly unpredictable, logic down the scale in a manner that communicates directly to even the casual listener (see bars 48–56). This manner – apparent in melodic, harmonic and visual parameters alike – makes $\kappa 113$ easy for an audience member to 'get'. There is no confusion as to the difficulty of the passage for the player; the leaping left hand tells its own story. At the same time, the sonic surface of the music evinces a harmonic and rhythmic regularity that projects a sense of order and control in the midst of fantastic energy. The accessible nature of $\kappa 113$ in performance and the spotlight that successful execution casts on the player was exploited strategically and repeatedly by Muzio Clementi. Originally published in 1757 – its English source being the Worgan manuscript – $\kappa 113$ was reprinted in 1784 beside fashionable music of the moment: a keyboard piece by Clementi and keyboard transcriptions of symphonic movements by Guglielmi, Vanhal, Dittersdorf and Haydn.²⁷ In a review of this edition the *Mercur de France* reported that the Scarlatti sonata was 'the one which M. Clementi played with such success after his own ones'.²⁸ Apparently $\kappa 113$ was a favourite encore for Clementi, a piece to top all others and give the audience more just when they thought they had heard (and seen) it all. $\kappa 143$, a final example of the virtuosity of the 'English' Scarlatti, is one of three sonatas transmitted solely in the Worgan manuscript and perhaps unknown to María Bárbara (see Example 3). The work

26 Ralph Kirkpatrick, *Domenico Scarlatti* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 162.

27 *QUATRE / OVERTURES / Composées / Par GUGLIELMI, WANHAL, / DITERS [sic] et HAYDN; / Arrangées / Pour le Clavecin ou Forte-Piano / et / DEUX SONATES / PAR / CLEMENTI, et SCARLATTI*. Published by Bailleux in Paris, RISM dates the collection c1785 based on the known date of the Clementi sonata. The only surviving copy is UK-Lbl, Hirsch iii, 450.

28 *Mercur de France*, 19 June 1784, quoted in Alan Tyson, *Thematic Catalogue of the Works of Muzio Clementi* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1967), 47. $\kappa 113$ was reprinted again the following year with the Dittersdorf and Haydn movements in a collection comprising three fast movements (*PIECES CHOISIES / DE DIVERS AUTEURS / Pour le Clavecin ou forte-Piano*, c1785, only surviving copy at UK-Lbl, F.770.c.3). The resilience of $\kappa 113$ beside works composed a half century later is striking.



Example 1 K100, bars 7–12 (*Domenico Scarlatti: Sonates*, volume 2, ed. Kenneth Gilbert (Paris: Heugel, 1979)). Used by permission

juxtaposes rapid octaves and dramatic leaps. It is tempting to conjecture that Scarlatti wrote this piece specifically for his long-distance correspondent John Worgan and tailored it to please the visual-effects-loving English audience.²⁹

‘CALLING-CARD’ SONATAS

Scarlatti’s sonatas were published and played in England to the end of the eighteenth century, putting them in elite company with Handel’s oratorios and Corelli’s concertos. William Weber has detailed how and why Handel and Corelli became musical ‘classics’ in late-century England.³⁰ Scarlatti’s music could not serve the same political and social agendas, nor could it easily function in the public settings where Handel’s and Corelli’s music bore ideological weight for mainly aristocratic audiences. The presence of Scarlatti as a musical ‘classic’ in his own right requires a different explanation of a more practical kind, grounded in the livelihoods of professional keyboard players. Scarlatti’s enduring popularity raises the question of use: what musical, social or personal functions did these works serve for both amateur and professional keyboard players in England? Any answer to this question must continually refer to the resilience of Scarlatti’s music in England, its lasting attraction for players and listeners even as musical style dramatically changed around it.

One function of these self-contained single-movement sonatas was pedagogical, as Scarlatti points out in the letter to the reader in the original edition of the *Essercizi*. He positions the pieces somewhat disingenuously as technique-builders, telling the player these sonatas will ‘accommodate you to the Mastery of the Harpsichord’. This considerable understatement is followed up with a promise, conditional perhaps on the player’s achieving the mastery Scarlatti speaks of so glibly: ‘Perhaps they will be agreeable to you; then all the more gladly will I obey other Commands to please you in an easier and more varied Style.’³¹ It can be assumed the pieces pleased María Bárbara, whose copy of the *Essercizi* was bound in the same red Moroccan

²⁹ In the lavish Worgan Manuscript the letters marking hand position are entered in red ink, contrasting strongly with the black noteheads and brown staff lines. Sonatas with multiple crossed-hand leaps can be immediately identified simply by glancing at the music, the red letters offering a quick visual index of difficulty.

³⁰ William Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England: A Study in Canon, Ritual, and Ideology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

³¹ Kirkpatrick, *Domenico Scarlatti*, 102–103.



leather as her fifteen volumes of sonatas in manuscript. Given the vast number of difficult sonatas belonging to María Bárbara, it can also be assumed that she mastered these pieces, and no doubt many English players endeavoured to perfect the smaller array of sonatas to which they had access. Burney, by profession a keyboard teacher, acknowledged the difficulty of the published sonatas stemming from the Worgan manuscript when he noted that 'few have the perseverance sufficient to vanquish their particular difficulties of execution'.³² He may have sat through many less than brilliant renditions of these sonatas by aristocratic students who never mustered the technique to conquer Scarlatti's 'particular difficulties'.

Two players who prevailed in this campaign were the Wesley brothers, Charles Jr (1757–1834) and Samuel (1766–1837). Their connection to Scarlatti was lifelong, and several Wesley family sources attest to their devotion to Scarlatti. In a narrative of his sons' musical education which was to see many reprints during the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, Charles Wesley, brother to Methodist reformer John Wesley, related how he and his friends discovered the intense musical passion of his younger son:

The first thing which drew our attention was the great delight he took in hearing his brother play. Whenever Mr. R— came to teach him, Sam constantly attended & accompanied Charles on the chair. Undaunted by Mr. R—'s frown, he went on; & even when his back was to the harpischord, he crossed his hands on the chair, as the other did on the instrument, without ever missing a time.

He was so passionately fond of Scarlatti that if Charles ever began playing him before Sam was called, he would cry & roar as if he had been beaten.³³

Samuel Wesley, around four at the time, was probably responding to the visual elements in the pieces his older brother played. Perhaps one sonata Wesley 'played' on the chair 'without ever missing a time' was K100 (Example 1), which is copied into a manuscript anthology belonging to Samuel.³⁴

Charles Jr's precocious accomplishments at the keyboard became something of a sensation in English circles. Joseph Kelway (1702–1782), a London organist listed by Burney as a well known Scarlatti player, even taught Charles Jr without payment. The lessons began in August 1769, and a month later the teacher was thoroughly entranced by his young scholar. Charles Sr kept a diary of Charles Jr's progress and quoted Kelway at length in what amounts to an almost embarrassing stream of effusive praise from the teacher:

Sept. 18 [“]Was you my own son I could not love you better.—Go on & mind none of the Musicians but Handel. You should not hear others. Come to me & I will instruct you the best I can.—You have a divine gift” —To me [Charles Sr] he said “There are not two Masters in town can play these 2 Adagios.—One cannot hear him play four bars without knowing him to be a Genius. He has the very spirit of Scarlatti.[”]³⁵

Time and again the Wesley brothers used the performance of Scarlatti sonatas to present their credentials in varied contexts in musical London. The palpable presence of a disembodied Scarlatti against whom English players matched themselves is captured in this anecdote recording the reaction of a Londoner who heard Charles Jr play at a dinner party in 1771. Charles Sr related the story in a letter to his wife:

When Cha^s played K[elway]'s last sonata, & one of Scarlatti's[, a guest] expressed the utmost astonishment; declared 'He excell'd all the Masters'—yet he traced K. in every Note & every

32 Burney, *A General History of Music*, 1009.

33 Rylands DDCW 8/2, 2–3 (second section), emphasis in the original. This narrative exists in several manuscript versions and was ultimately incorporated into an article by the Wesley family friend Daines Barrington. The article was first published in the 1781 *Philosophical Transactions* and reprinted in Methodist publications in 1836 and 1871. This is the first subsequent reprinting of the anecdote. I am grateful to Philip Olleson for directing me to the Charles Wesley manuscripts at the John Rylands University in Manchester. The Wesley sources quoted in this article are housed in the Methodist Archives and Research Centre at the John Rylands Library in Manchester (hereafter Rylands).

34 UK-Lbl Add. 35025, 12v–13r. Included beside K100 are pieces by Handel, Stanley, Arne and Galuppi, among others.

35 Rylands DDCW 8/2, 9 (first section).



Example 2 $\kappa 113$, bars 40–68 (*Domenico Scarlatti: Sonates*, volume 3, ed. Kenneth Gilbert (Paris: Heugel, 1978)). Used by permission



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SONATA
XXIX.

Tresto

Figure 1 K29, bars 1–22 (*Essercizi*, 1738)

Motion—Yet he c^d not bear to hear any but him and his Master play those Sonatas so hard & yet so excellent; Yet neither K. nor Scarlatti himself could play Scarlatti's lessons better . . . He made him play all Scarlatti's and several of Mr. K's lessons; & engaged us to dinner next Saturday that he may play upon his very fine harpsichord.³⁶

The dinner guest's reactions attest to a general knowledge of Scarlatti sonatas in performance and an acknowledgement that the music was difficult, but essential, repertory. The claim that 'neither K. nor Scarlatti himself could play Scarlatti's lessons better' and Kelway's proclamation that Charles Jr had 'the very spirit of Scarlatti' demonstrate a curious quality of Domenico Scarlatti's absent presence. Without a doubt, the sonatas were perceived to be expressive of a singular musical personality, that of the composer. This 'spirit' was imputed to the performer and was, paradoxically, made audible only in performances by English players. Scarlatti the player was not there to be imitated, only his ubiquitous scores, which frequently tied the player's body in knots, setting mind-body challenges that seem to have been closely connected to the concept of Scarlatti as a musical personality. In a circular fashion, Scarlatti's musical personality was defined by the players who played the sonatas and was used to define those very players as authentically Scarlattian in their interpretations, since they could execute the technical challenges the composer posed in the sonatas.

The power of Scarlatti to persuade audiences was not lost on the Wesleys, and when they began their series of semi-public subscription concerts in their own home, Scarlatti was high on the list of composers to be featured. A prospectus in Charles Sr's hand lists the following rationale for the programming:

36 Rylands DDWES 4/41, Charles Wesley to Sarah Wesley, 25 February 1771.



Example 3 κ143, bars 78–94 (*Domenico Scarlatti: Sonatas*, volume 3, ed. Kenneth Gilbert (Paris: Heugel, 1978)). Used by permission

Proposals

For an [*sic*] Subscription Concerts

By Mess^{rs} Wesley

At their own house in Chesterfield Street, Marybone; Where a convenient Room will be fitted up against the Next Season, to contain Four-score Persons. The Number of y^e Subscribers Threescore. No person admitted without a Ticket.

The Music—

1. That of Handel, Corelli, Scarlatti, & Geminiani
2. The most Excellent of a later date
3. Their own; consisting of Overtures, Concertos, Quartettos, Trio's, Duets (partic. for 2 Organs), Sonatas, Solo's Extempo. Lessons on y^e Harps. & Voluntaries on the Organ³⁷

Wesley's careful records of the programmes for these concerts provide documentation for the performance of Scarlatti sonatas in London in the late eighteenth century. The third concert of the first season, given on 11 February 1779, included a 'Lesson of Scarlatti' performed by 'C. W.' as the second item. The 16 March 1780 concert also included a Scarlatti sonata, at a similar point in the programme, as the first featured solo after the opening orchestral work.³⁸ The Wesley concerts continued for nine years, but Scarlatti's name does not appear on any subsequent programmes. As the size of the ensembles and audiences grew, the solo keyboard component of the concerts shifted to improvisations and the public genre of the organ concerto, most of the latter composed by the brothers themselves. Works by Handel also began to take a larger and larger portion of each evening's entertainment.

³⁷ Rylands DDCW 8/21, 25.

³⁸ Rylands DDCW 8/21, 8.



The Wesleys were not alone in using Scarlatti’s music for professional purposes, as Charles Burney noted in a comment about British keyboard players as a group in his *General History*:

Handel’s harpsichord lessons and organ concertos, and the two first books of Scarlatti’s lessons, were all the good Music for keyed-instruments at that time in the nation; and these were original, difficult, and in a style totally different from those of Alberti . . . Scarlatti’s were not only the pieces with which every young performer displayed his powers of execution, but were the wonder and delight of every hearer who had a spark of enthusiasm about him, and could feel new and bold effects intrepidly produced by the breach of almost all the old and established rules of composition.³⁹

Execution is a central issue here, especially with regard to young players establishing their keyboard ‘chops’. In his memoirs Burney related several instances where Scarlatti’s ‘bold and new effects’ were pressed into service as professional calling-cards, musical works the performance of which impressed audiences or specific individuals and helped the player further his or her career. In 1760 the Duke of York was ‘captivated by some of the most wild and difficult lessons of Scarlatti’ played by Esther Burney, all of ten years old at the time. As a result the Duke asked father Burney to arrange some Scarlatti sonatas for strings.⁴⁰ In 1749 a young girl named Fredericka – ‘a Child of five and a half years old’, if the publicity can be believed – performed several Scarlatti sonatas, along with other unnamed works, at the Haymarket Theatre.⁴¹ A third girl-child Scarlatti performer, this time in Vienna, was documented by Burney in his second volume of travels.⁴² Burney himself played a Scarlatti sonata by way of introducing himself to Pepusch in 1746 and recorded the encounter in his memoirs:

The first time I had the honour to play to him, I ventured to attempt a very difficult lesson of Scarlatti; and when I had done, he both flattered and frightened me extremely, by saying: ‘pray young man play me that *bagatelle* again.’ What a great man this must be, thought I, who calls a lesson that has cost me such immense labour to execute, a *bagatelle*! But it was neither a fugue nor a canon.⁴³

The contrast between learned compositions and bagatelles that ‘cost . . . immense labour to execute’ is a recurrent theme in the English reception of Scarlatti, as will be shown below.

Frances Burney recorded an instance where the right Scarlatti sonata played at the right time for the right listener made all the difference to her father’s career. Young Burney was in Jacob Kirkman’s harpsichord shop auditioning in a highly contrived situation for Fulke Greville, the patron who would introduce Burney to high society and open the way to the principal occupation of his professional life – teaching keyboard to aristocratic amateurs. Greville was wandering round the shop only pretending to listen; Burney was moving from instrument to instrument, playing various pieces and pretending not to be auditioning. But Burney was having trouble attracting Greville’s attention, until Scarlatti came to the rescue. Frances Burney tells what must have been an old family story:

But coming, at length, to [an instrument the] keys of which the touch, light and springing, invited his stay, [Burney] fired away in a sonata of Scarlatti’s, with an alternate excellence of execution and expression, so perfectly in accord with the fanciful flights of that wild but masterly composer, that

39 Burney, *A General History of Music*, 1008. The ‘first two books of Scarlatti’s lessons’ Burney refers to are the Roseingrave 1739 edition.

40 Slava Klima and others, *Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney 1726–1769* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 136.

41 Klima, *Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney*, 133.

42 Charles Burney, *An Eighteenth-Century Musical Tour in Central Europe and the Netherlands: Being Dr. Charles Burney’s Account of His Musical Experiences*, ed. Percy Scholes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 96.

43 Klima, *Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney*, 55–56.



Mr. Greville, satisfied no scheme was at work to surprise or win him; but on the contrary, that the energy of genius was let loose upon itself, and enjoying, without premeditation, its own lively sports and vagaries; softly drew a chair to the harpsichord, and listened, with unaffected earnestness, to every note. Nor were his ears alone curiously awakened; his eyes were equally occupied to mark the peculiar performance of intricate difficulties; for the young musician had invented a mode of adding neatness to brilliancy, by curving his fingers, and rounding the hand, in a manner that gave them a grace upon the keys quite new at the time, and entirely of his own devising.⁴⁴

In addition to the sound of the music, *seeing* Burney play Scarlatti was a key part of Greville's interest. Correctly executing the awkward physical postures Scarlatti often demanded was part of the attraction for both players and audiences, the latter of whom would likely have listened and watched, like Greville, at close range.⁴⁵ Greville's interest in Burney's technique points to one aspect of Scarlatti's music that interested English players and listeners: the mechanics of playing the music successfully. Burney reports that when her father had finished, Greville held his enthusiasm in check and said, 'You are fond, Sir, it seems, of Italian music?'.⁴⁶

Something of Burney's playing style is captured in his daughter's use of the phrase 'fire away', perhaps a surprising verbal phrase to find describing a harpsichordist's approach to the instrument.⁴⁷ A contrasting approach apparently marked the playing of Kelway, at least according to Burney's *General History*:

Mr. Kelway, a scholar of Geminiani, kept Scarlatti's best lessons in constant practice, and was at the head of the Scarlatti sect. He had, in his voluntaries on the organ, a masterly wildness, and long supported the character of a great player, in a style quite his own, bold, rapid, and fanciful. With his harpsichord playing I was not acquainted, but have often been assured, that he executed the most difficult lessons of Scarlatti, in a manner peculiarly neat and delicate.⁴⁸

This description of a refined Scarlatti performance style suggests that most English players were of the 'fire away' school, an approach that remains an option for any player confronting the technical difficulties of this repertory. Burney, evidently familiar with Kelway's public organ playing, relied on hearsay for his description of Kelway at the harpsichord, and specifically Kelway's Scarlatti playing, which is again framed as the crucial test of any player's skill at the harpsichord. Burney's confidence in using this second-hand information comes down to the fact that he has 'often been assured' that Kelway's playing was of a certain neatness and delicacy. The passage palpably suggests the existence of private venues where the Scarlatti sonata must have been a staple of the English musical scene. These private sites of informal keyboard performance have left few physical traces beyond the performances of the Wesleys documented

44 Klima, *Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney*, 66. After gaining Greville's attention with a 'fancy of Scarlatti', Burney sealed the deal by playing Handel's Coronation Anthem.

45 The successful performance of a Scarlatti sonata could also, apparently, win the player a spouse. A biography of Faustina Bordoni-Hasse from 1880 maintains that the soprano agreed to marry Johann Adolf Hasse only after hearing him play 'one of the most difficult sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti'. This perhaps apocryphal story may alternatively be taken as evidence that Scarlatti retained his reputation as 'difficult' into the late nineteenth century. A. Niggli, *Faustina Bordoni-Hasse* (Leipzig, 1880), quoted in Jane Clark, "'His Own Worst Enemy": Scarlatti: Some Unanswered Questions', *Early Music* 13/4 (1985), 544.

46 Klima, *Memoirs of Dr. Charles Burney*, 66.

47 Frances used the verb 'fired away' to describe her father at the keyboard elsewhere. Of a house concert in May 1775 she wrote 'He Fired away, with his usual successful velocity, to the amazement and delight of all present.' Perhaps Burney favoured Scarlatti because of the abundant opportunities offered by the 'English' sonatas to display 'successful velocity'. Letter from Frances Burney to Samuel Crisp in *Frances Burney, Journals and Letters*, ed. Peter Sabor and Lars E. Troide (London: Penguin, 2001), 57.

48 Burney, *A General History of Music*, 1009.



above.⁴⁹ But without such venues there would be no other place for the Scarlatti sonata to assume the importance it had on the London keyboard scene, the public face of which was dominated by organ concertos performed between the acts of oratorios in London theatres and between the symphonies and overtures at venues like Vauxhall Gardens.⁵⁰

In all the above instances, the consistent form of the Scarlatti sonatas contributed to their functionality in private or semi-public contexts where keyboard players showed their skill at the instrument. The formal compactness of Scarlatti's sonatas – autonomous, single-movement, binary-form pieces – made them eminently flexible as professional calling-cards. Their variable length – allowing the player to repeat one or both halves, or neither, as the occasion demanded – contributed to their utility. Indeed, the question of length proved important for critics of the sonatas. Given their visually stimulating technical challenges, Scarlatti's 'English' sonatas offered almost ideal means for a given player to demonstrate his or her 'alternate excellence of execution and expression', probably with stronger emphasis on execution. Important listeners, whether musically savvy or not, were sure quickly to get the message that this was difficult music to play. The added attraction for keyboard players was the chance to assume Domenico's idiosyncratic and unfailingly attractive musical personality, one of the most individual of eighteenth-century compositional voices, a voice that sustained its power across the century and that retains even today a directness of impact with virtually any audience.

SCARLATTI'S CAPRICIOUS PLACE IN WRITINGS ABOUT MUSIC

Scarlatti's absent presence, discussed above in terms of editions and known performances, can be revealed from a complementary angle by tracing his surprisingly regular appearance in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English writings on music. The following overview begins with a consideration of the earliest mention of Domenico Scarlatti in print in English. The subsequent recycling of this reference facilitates a comparison of Sir John Hawkins's and Charles Burney's markedly different treatments of Scarlatti in their respective *General Histories* and other writings. References to Domenico crop up frequently in aesthetic texts on both music and the visual arts. Important treatises that invoke Scarlatti include those by Charles Avison, Uvedale Price, William Crotch and, by association, Joshua Reynolds. In all these instances Scarlatti proves a slippery character. He appears as both exemplar and named (or unnamed) bad example. He is framed alternately as a figure of the past and as a quintessentially modern composer. The presence of Scarlatti in writings about music and the difficulty with which he was made to fit into aesthetic debates must be read in tandem with his enduring popularity among players and listeners demonstrated above. This very popularity – stemming from the extroverted nature of Scarlatti's style and perhaps chiefly his visual virtuosity – proved to be a central concern for most of the commentators who discussed the composer.

The first mention of Scarlatti in print in English dates from a 1709 volume entitled *A Comparison Between the French and Italian Musick and Opera's, Translated from the French With some Remarks*. Sir John Hawkins

49 Ian Woodfield's recent work on domestic musical culture offers new documentation on the importance of private performance in the careers of professional players and the performance culture of amateur female keyboard players in the late eighteenth century. The latter group are counterparts in many ways to the professional male keyboard performers known to have played Scarlatti. Whether Woodfield's amateur female players – among them Susan Burney – would have attempted to play Scarlatti's difficult sonatas in the context of domestic musical soirées remains an open question. See Ian Woodfield, *Salomon and the Burneys: Private Patronage and a Public Career*, RMA Monographs 12 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), chapters 2 to 6, for extended excerpts from letters and diaries, and Woodfield, *Music of the Raj: A Social and Economic History of Music in Late Eighteenth-Century Anglo-Indian Society* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), chapter 3.

50 All the Scarlatti players mentioned by Burney were known principally as organists in theatre and pleasure-garden contexts. For a description of the public sphere of keyboard virtuosos in London see Zaide Pixley, 'The Keyboard Concerto in London Society, 1760–1790' (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1986).



borrowed and slightly revised the 1709 text mentioning Domenico in his *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1776) of almost seventy years later. The passages are given below in chronological order:

It won't be improper in this Place to give the Reader a List of the most remarkable Performers in Italy, together with the Singers, as we have done before of the Composers. After which some mention shall be made of our Band here in London: And first for the Performers. The most famous Masters for the Harpsichord are Bernardo Pasquini, and his Scholar Bernardo Graffi, and Scarlatti at Rome; at Venice, Pollaroli, with several others, among whom is Scarlatti's Son, call'd Scarlattino, the Prodigy of the Age.⁵¹

It is now necessary, in order to lay a foundation for an account of the introduction of the Italian opera into this kingdom, to recur to the beginning of the century, and, having mentioned Scarlatti, Gasparini, Bononcini, Conti, and some other composers in the theatric style, to take notice of some of the most eminent instrumental performers of the time, as also of a few of the most applauded singers of both sexes.

At this time there were many performers in Italy, who for their excellence on various instruments were celebrated throughout Europe; namely, for the harpsichord, Bernardo Pasquini, and his scholar Bernardo Graffi, as also Alessandro Scarlatti; these were settled at Rome. At Venice were Pollaroli, and a son of Scarlatti, called Scarlattino, the wonder of his time.⁵²

These two excerpts – the latter relying closely on the former – are an odd pair. The first is from a translation of Raguene't's *Parallèle des italiens et des françois, en ce qui regarde la musique e les opéras* (1702), but this particular passage is not in the French original.⁵³ The geographically sorted list of prominent Italian musicians is drawn from the *Remarks* mentioned in the English title, a series of extensive footnotes by Raguene't's anonymous translator, who apparently had very current information. Domenico Scarlatti was in Venice for several years (and for probably the only time in his life) just prior to 1709.⁵⁴ Perhaps news of his formidable prowess at the keyboard came to England via Roseingrave, whose 1739 expanded edition of the *Essercizi* sonatas was of course to prove central to the dissemination of Scarlatti's music in England. Sir John Hawkins incorporated the content of the passage into his *General History*, his main alteration being a subtle recasting of the earlier version's chatty, 'musical guidebook' tone. But Hawkins made a noteworthy change to the 1709 author's shorthand description of Domenico Scarlatti: 'Scarlattino' was changed from a 'Prodigy of the Age' in 1709 to a 'wonder of his time' in 1776.⁵⁵ In the eighteenth century, prodigy and wonder carried similar connotations of something outside the norm, something marvellous. In addition, the meaning of both words was not unmixed with the shadow of the alarming, the abnormal, the bizarre. Samuel Johnson defined 'wonder' and 'prodigy' in similar ways in the fourth edition of his dictionary (1773):

51 François Raguene't, *A Comparison Between the French and Italian Musick and Opera's*, with Introduction by Charles Cudworth (Farnborough: Gregg International, 1968), 50–51.

52 Hawkins, *General History*, 808.

53 I am indebted to Guido Olivieri for pointing out the connection between these two texts. Guido Olivieri, 'The "Fiery Genius": The Contribution of Neapolitan Virtuosi to the Spread of the String Sonata (1680–1736)' (PhD dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2004).

54 According to a letter written by his father, Domenico arrived in Venice in mid-1705. His time there was, in part, taken up by lessons with Francesco Gasparini, a family friend. According to John Mainwaring, Scarlatti met Handel at a Venetian masquerade in this same period. By late 1710 Scarlatti would have moved to Rome for the premiere of *Tolomeo et Alessandro* on 19 January 1711.

55 From where did Raguene't's anonymous translator get the affectionate diminutive Scarlattino? Mimo was a commonly used nickname for Domenico and appears with reference to Scarlatti in the writings of Burney, J. J. Quantz and Charles Wesley. But 'Scarlattino' appears only in the two texts under consideration here. Hawkins's use of it in lieu of Domenico's given name – an important detail in a family of musicians – suggests he presumed his late eighteenth-century English readers would know to whom the text was referring.



PRODIGY

1. Any thing out of the ordinary process of nature, from which omens are drawn; portent.
2. Monster.
3. Any thing astonishing for good or bad.

WONDER

1. Admiration; astonishment; amazement; surprise caused by something unusual or unexpected.
2. Cause of wonder; a strange thing; something more or greater than can be expected.⁵⁶

Whether the 1709 author had actually heard Domenico play or only heard stories of his prowess, by calling Scarlatti a 'Prodigy of the Age' he granted him a level of keyboard skill and invention that was, for good or ill, outside normal expectations. Lacking access to Scarlatti himself or the testimony of manuscript or printed scores, an English reader in 1709 would have had no way to test this remark. Domenico is invoked as a sort of wonder of the musical world, as unmeasurable from England as the lighthouse in Alexandria. Late in the century, when Hawkins was writing, the situation was completely different. With more than eighty sonatas in print, Domenico Scarlatti was a known quantity. Hawkins's change to the phrase must be read as a critical assessment of a cultural icon by the author of a polemical work of history. Within the often caustic play of language typical of eighteenth-century English discourse, the word 'wonder' was not without its satiric uses. For example, Alexander Pope described the scion of a Whig family who became a Jacobite, a Roman Catholic and a traitor as 'the Scorn and Wonder of our days'.⁵⁷ The subtext beneath Hawkins's use of 'wonder' is not so easy to gauge.

The borrowed, but altered, reference to 'Scarlattino, the wonder of his time' is virtually the only mention of Domenico in Hawkins's five-volume *General History*. The contrast with Charles Burney's coverage of Scarlatti in his *General History* of 1789 is dramatic, and was not lost on Burney himself. Burney's *General History* included a detailed account of Domenico, his published keyboard works and his English devotees. While visiting Farinelli in Bologna, Burney had closely questioned the retired castrato on Scarlatti and confirmed, among other details, that he was music master to the Spanish queen María Bárbara. On his later trip to Vienna Burney spoke with M. L'Augier, who had known Scarlatti in Spain and provided further gossip about him as composer and player. L'Augier even offered speculations about connections between Domenico's weight and the almost complete disappearance of hand-crossing passages in the later sonatas.⁵⁸ Hawkins never makes more than grudging reference to Domenico, noting in his section on Alessandro Scarlatti that from the time of Domenico's move to Portugal he 'has applied himself to the composition of lessons for the harpsichord, of which there are a great number in print'.⁵⁹ The tense of the sentence implies that Hawkins was unaware Scarlatti had been dead for nearly twenty years by the time his *General History* went to press.

In 1777, just one year after Hawkins's *General History* appeared, Burney penned a mock-epic courtroom satire entitled 'The Trial of King Midas the Second'. This biting critique of Hawkins and his *History* survives in autograph manuscript only.⁶⁰ Burney describes the courtroom of Apollo and calls forth a line of allegorical witnesses against Hawkins – Science, Taste, Wit, Candour – who indict the author on questions

56 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, on CD-Rom: first and fourth editions, ed. Anne McDermott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 'wonder' and 'prodigy'.

57 Alexander Pope, Epistle I, To Sir Richard Cobham (1732), in *Moral Essays, in Four Epistles* (Glasgow: R. Urie, 1754), 15.

58 Burney, *Musical Tour in Central Europe*, 86–87, 96–97.

59 Hawkins, *General History*, 678.

60 The autograph manuscript of Charles Burney, 'The Trial of King Midas the Second', is shelved under Eng. MS 648 at the John Rylands University Library. See William Wright Roberts, "'The Trial of King Midas the Second': An Account of Burney's Unpublished Satire on Hawkins's 'History of Music' in the John Rylands Library", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 17 (1933), 322–332.



of style, research methodology and the relevance of his narrative.⁶¹ Burney's final witness is Fame, 'not the Goddess who with Iron Lungs, With brazen Trumpet, & a Thousand Tongues' celebrates military heroes, but rather the 'melodious dame' that blows the 'silver tube of fair renown'.⁶² In the only sustained naming of names in the poem, Fame registers her dismay at the limited space Hawkins allotted a string of fashionable, foreign composers. Scarlatti, father and son, head the list.

But ah! His [Hawkins's] sole resource to make a Friend
Was to traduce the Good, the bad commend.
Of both Scarlatti's his Acc^{ts} are Scanty,
And [. . .] is Vinci, Graun, Durante,
Stamitz, Ferrari, Schobert, Mondonville
He ne'er had heard, or having c^d not feel.⁶³

Burney's critique – even granting his personal and professional interest in challenging the credentials of any one who would dare write another *General History of Music* – calls into question Hawkins's relation to Scarlatti and suggests that his characterization of Domenico as a 'wonder' was not unalloyed praise.

In 'King Midas' Burney invokes the foursome Corelli, Geminiani and both Scarlattis as together embodying the highest achievements of Italian music of the past.⁶⁴ But not all late eighteenth-century English authors grouped Domenico Scarlatti with his fellow Italians. In his *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794) Uvedale Price tossed off a reference to Scarlatti that paired him with a contemporary German counterpart – Joseph Haydn. Price's casual use of Scarlatti suggests an assumption that the general reader would have known the sonatas and understood something of their nature.

We no more scruple to call one of Handel's choruses sublime than Corelli's pastorale beautiful. But should any person, simply and without qualifying expressions, call a capricious movement of Domenico Scarlatti or Haydn, picturesque, he would with great reason be laughed at; for it is not a term applied to sounds: yet such a movement, from its sudden, unexpected and abrupt transitions, from a certain playful wildness of character and an appearance of irregularity, is no less analogous to similar scenery in nature.⁶⁵

Scarlatti is in eminent company here. Beyond the notable pairing of Scarlatti and Haydn, the latter of whom was the composer of the moment in London *circa* 1794, Price's placement of Domenico beside Handel and Corelli further emphasizes Scarlatti's continued relevance to English culture to the end of the century. And while the establishment figures of Handel and Corelli, idols of the advocates for 'antient' music, are used as musical analogues for established aesthetic categories, Scarlatti represents the progressive in art, together with Haydn modelling a new kind of beauty, the picturesque. This is another instance of the resilience of Scarlatti's 'English' sonatas, their ability to remain fresh for succeeding generations of listeners and their surprising stylistic forwardness, even as they were among the oldest works in the active repertory.

For the connoisseur of art, Price's use of 'capricious' would have resonated with categories laid out by Sir Joshua Reynolds in his tremendously influential *Discourses on Art*. In his 1771 address to the Royal Academy

61 In footnotes to the poem Burney copied out extended passages from Hawkins that were intended to support his specific criticisms.

62 Burney, 'King Midas', 21.

63 The list continues: 'Jomelli's bold, elaborate, polish'd page, / Unknown, escap'd his dire Fanatic rage; / But chief he lifts his Club, and awkward Arm / Against my sons who now all Europe charm / And execrates the Labours, one and all / Of Boccherini, Haydn, and Vanhal, / In which the Pow'rs of Fancy & of Art / No less delight the Head, than charm the Heart. / Sure none like Midas is an evil wisher / To such as Abel, Bach, Giardini, Fischer'. Burney, *King Midas*, 23. The ellipsis points in the fourth line of the verse given in the main text indicate illegibility.

64 Burney, 'King Midas', 29.

65 Quoted in *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Peter LeHuray and James Day (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 431.



Reynolds used the term ‘capricious’ several times in reference to a class of painters who ‘departed from the great purposes of painting, and [were] catching at applause by inferior qualities’.⁶⁶ Reynolds’s description of their second-class works is similar to Price’s description of the effects of Scarlatti’s and Haydn’s music, but Reynolds’s intention is very different:

The language of Painting must indeed be allowed these masters; but even in that, they have shewn more copiousness than choice, and more luxuriandy than judgement. If we consider the uninteresting subjects of their invention, or at least the uninteresting manner in which they are treated; if we attend to their capricious composition, their violent and affected contrasts . . . without the least attempt to interest the passions, their boasted art will appear a mere struggle without effect.⁶⁷

While Price invoked capriciousness as a positive category in defense of the picturesque, Reynolds, writing twenty years earlier with the goal of elevating painting to the realm of the liberal arts, underlines the dangers inherent in ‘capricious composition’.⁶⁸

Both Price and Reynolds served as touchstones for William Crotch, whose *Substance of Several Courses of Lectures on Music* – published in 1831, but based on lectures given at Oxford between 1800 and 1804 – acknowledged the continuing presence of Domenico Scarlatti in the active repertory and ranked him beside other composers past and present. Crotch adapted Price’s threefold schema for visual art and borrowed Reynolds’s category of the ornamental to create his own triad of aesthetic levels, listed in descending order: the sublime, the beautiful and the ornamental. Crotch summarized the ornamental style as ‘the result of roughness, playful intricacy, and abrupt variations . . . In music, eccentric and difficult melody; rapid, broken, and varied rhythm; wild and unexpected modulation’.⁶⁹

After defining his categories, Crotch proceeded to assign a long list of composers to each:

Bird [*sic*], Palestrina, Gibbons, and Bach, were more sublime. Purcell was more extraordinary and pathetic. Pergolesi and Hasse were more beautiful. Dominico [*sic*] Scarlatti, and all modern composers, are more ornamental. But if that composer is to be declared the greatest, who, like Raffaele in the sister art, was great in all styles, not, however, suffering the beautiful or the ornamental to predominate, about six candidates only present themselves: Purcell, Leo, Pergolesi, Graun, Hasse, and Handel. If the last-mentioned is the greatest of these, we know the result.⁷⁰

For Crotch, Domenico was unambiguously grouped with the moderns.

Taken together, Crotch’s comments on Domenico suggest anxiety about the influence this ‘more ornamental’ composer had on the subsequent development of keyboard music. After discussing the supposedly ornamental style of Alessandro Scarlatti – described as the originator of the style in vocal music – Domenico is framed in extreme terms as ‘carrying the same style to the greatest possible excess in his harpsichord lessons’.⁷¹ Further on, Crotch describes typical audience reactions to the sonatas in performance, noting that, mercifully, the effects they have on the listener do not last long. Crotch even posits a

66 Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 63.

67 Reynolds, *Discourses*, 64.

68 Reynolds, *Discourses*, 170–171. Reynolds uses ‘capricious’ and ‘caprice’ with reference to novel effects stemming from idleness on the part of the artist (84), casual approaches to art (123), notions foreign to ‘nature, or universal opinion’ (124) and the picturesque, an aesthetic category Reynolds left untheorized (187). The accusation of ‘capriciousness’ remained part of British art criticism and was levelled against J. W. M. Turner, like Scarlatti an inventive artist who is difficult to fit into his time. One early nineteenth-century critic wrote, ‘Turner is perpetually aiming to be extraordinary, but rather produces works that are capricious and singular than great’. Quoted in Andrew Graham-Dixon, *A History of British Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 149.

69 William Crotch, *Substance of Several Courses of Lectures on Music* (1831), facsimile edition, with Introduction by Bernarr Rainbow (Clarabricken, Ireland: Boethius, 1986), 35, 36.

70 Crotch, *Lectures on Music*, 121.

71 Crotch, *Lectures on Music*, 96.



psychological explanation for Domenico's extreme style, arguing that his choice of compositional voice stemmed from a traumatic musical experience. Relying on Mainwaring's description of Scarlatti's keyboard duel with Handel – supposedly Handel was victorious at the organ and the two men tied on the harpsichord – Crotch imagines that an inability to compete with Handel led Scarlatti to seek attention by breaking the rules and playing the wit and the clown. This led in turn to his overwhelmingly ornamental style and consigned him and his influential compositions to the lowest aesthetic level. But at least, Crotch notes, they have the virtue of brevity:

Dominico [*sic*], the son of Alessandro Scarlatti, finding it impossible to supersede the productions for the harpsichord of his rival Handel, struck out in that more ornamental, humorous, or witty style, which gave birth to most of the eccentricities and novelties of modern piano-forte music. To insure originality he set the rules of composition (which he never violated in his vocal productions) at defiance. In his works we accordingly find but little sublimity and less beauty, but all is calculated to amuse and surprise, to create a smile if not a laugh; they are free, however, from one great fault of the modern school, they are not too long.⁷²

As early as 1807 Crotch published a volume of *Specimens of various styles of music referred to in a course of lectures, read at Oxford and London, and adapted to keyed instruments*. This historical anthology of musical examples was intended to supplement Crotch's lectures and provided illustrations of his three aesthetic categories. Annette Richards discusses Scarlatti's place in the *Specimens*:

Crotch summarised the ornamental style in the Preface to his *Specimens* as 'playfulness of melody, broken and varied measure, intricacy of harmony and modulation, and perpetual endeavour to excite surprise in the mind of the auditor'. . . . Crotch's example of this style, the Sonata in D (K. 21, published in the *Essercizi* of 1738) by Domenico Scarlatti, is hardly representative of modern instrumental music of the 1790s, but its inclusion here is consonant with the particular popularity of Scarlatti in English music criticism of the second half of the eighteenth century. The piece is, though, playful and surprising, and while it does not exactly explore unconventional modulation, it has its share of piquant chromaticism and modal mixture; above all, it is a flamboyant exercise in keyboard virtuosity, with its perverse leaps and difficult, and totally arbitrary, handcrossings.⁷³

For the contemporary English keyboard player or audience member, the name Scarlatti was synonymous with just such 'flamboyant', 'perverse' and 'arbitrary' visual effects at the keyboard. In Crotch's anthology K21 would have been heard and seen as representative of a larger body of work that shared in the qualities Crotch identified as ornamental. While the harmonic and formal qualities of Scarlatti's sonatas could perhaps be incorporated under the rubric of the ornamental – the 'English' sonatas are notably conservative in this regard relative to the sonatas that remained unpublished in the eighteenth century – it is the visual effects to which Richards points here and to which Crotch and early nineteenth-century players and listeners were responding that put Scarlatti firmly into the ornamental category.

Crotch's lectures and anthology continued the emergent eighteenth-century tradition of aesthetics as an educational enterprise aimed at raising the level of English musical and moral culture, a project that can be traced to the originary text of British musical aesthetics – Charles Avison's *An Essay on Musical Expression* of 1752. And here again, Domenico Scarlatti proves a central, if suspiciously absent, figure. Avison knew Domenico Scarlatti's music intimately. His third published work, from 1744, was the set of twelve *concerti grossi* 'after sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti' mentioned above. In Avison's *Essay* Scarlatti is discussed only obliquely, but there is subtextual evidence that Avison was greatly concerned with Domenico and his influence on harpsichord players and instrumental music.

⁷² Crotch, *Lectures on Music*, 129–130.

⁷³ Annette Richards, *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 112–113.



Avison's only direct mention of Domenico occurs in a footnote to a passing mention of Alessandro Scarlatti:

Domenico Scarlatti, Author of some excellent *Lessons* for the *Harpsichord*, and Son to the Scarlatti here mentioned, may justly be ranked among the great Masters of this Age. The Invention of his Subjects or Airs, and the beautiful Chain of Modulation in all these Pieces, are peculiarly his own: And though in many Places, the finest Passages are greatly disguised with capricious Divisions, yet, upon the whole, they are original and masterly.⁷⁴

Surprisingly, Avison makes no mention of his own string versions of these 'excellent lessons,' transcriptions which were so well known that Lawrence Sterne made an uncharacteristically specific reference to them in *Tristram Shandy* in 1760. Sterne's reference reads: 'then the devil and all had broke loose – the whole piece, Madam, must have been played like the sixth of Avison Scarlatti – *con furia*, – like mad'. The movement marked *con furia* in Avison's sixth concerto is a transcription of $\kappa 29$. (Scarlatti marked the piece Presto; see Figure 1.) Within the vast corpus of eighteenth-century English literature, this is among the very few references to a specific movement of instrumental music. That it is Scarlatti, and a piece already more than twenty years old, makes the reference even more telling.⁷⁵

While Avison praises Scarlatti as a 'Master of the Age', granted in a parenthetical text, he takes exception to Domenico's 'capricious Divisions'. Avison's critique of Scarlatti's 'capriciousness' dates back to a 1743 prospectus that laid out his plan to publish a set of twelve concertos built around transcriptions of the *Essercizi*. In his Preface to that edition Avison noted that Scarlatti's lessons were 'extremely difficult, and many delightful Passages [are] entirely disguised, either with capricious Divisions, or an unnecessary Repetition in many places'.⁷⁶ In his transcriptions Avison promised to 'take off the Mask which concealed their natural Beauty and Excellency'. Given his ambivalence about Scarlatti's style, one wonders why Avison chose to transcribe the sonatas in the first place. Perhaps it was a case of business sense trumping aesthetic sensibilities, with Avison simply tapping into the *Essercizi* fad of the early 1740s. For an old-fashioned composer like Avison, who idolized Corelli, studied with Geminiani and continued to publish *concerti grossi* into the late 1760s, the task of turning the *Essercizi* into movements with 'natural Beauty and Excellency' required a work of revision tantamount to recomposition.⁷⁷

Many passages in Avison's *Essay* suggest he felt no little anxiety about Scarlatti, the composer, after all, upon whose music Avison had launched his own career. In his chapter on composition Avison is highly critical of unnamed composers who indulge in a 'Deluge of unbounded Extravaganzi [and] tedious

74 Charles Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression: A Facsimile of the 1753 London Edition* (New York: Broude Brothers, 1967), 52.

75 Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, ed. Graham Petrie (London: Penguin, 1982), 175.

76 Quoted in Sheveloff, 'The Keyboard Music of Domenico Scarlatti', 123.

77 I will not treat the musical details of Avison's transcriptions here. Dean Sutcliffe offers a detailed example of Avison's recompositional priorities and apparent inability to understand Scarlatti's subtle use of phrase length and proportion as evidenced in his transcription of $\kappa 26$. Sutcliffe prefaces his close reading with this comment: 'Many musicians . . . cannot see past [Scarlatti's] untidiness, often directly or subliminally accounted for as being primitive or negligent.' Ironically, one detail in the text of $\kappa 26$ – a pertinent detail to which Sutcliffe draws attention – was itself altered by Kenneth Gilbert, editor of the *Le Pupitre* complete edition reproduced by Sutcliffe. Without critical comment, Gilbert regularized the topmost line in bar 28. All three eighteenth-century editions of $\kappa 26$ (*Essercizi*, Roseingrave and Witvogel) and all subsequent editions (excepting those by Longo and a mid-nineteenth-century collection published by Breitkopf & Härtel) give the soprano voice as d^2 – e^2 , a quirky, cramped and surprising turn that leads unexpectedly to a $d\sharp^2$ on the next beat. Gilbert recomposed the initial d^2 as $f\sharp^2$, creating a descending filled-in third to match five previous such gestures in the preceding bars. Gilbert similarly altered the parallel passage in the second half. Difficulties with Scarlatti's 'capriciousness', first voiced by Avison and other eighteenth-century critics, remains an issue for editors. See Sutcliffe, *The Keyboard Sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti*, 168–171, and Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonates*, ed. Kenneth Gilbert (Paris: Heugel, 1971), volume 1.



repetition', then at the end of a piece '[drop] into a dull Close'.⁷⁸ Again in this passage Avison modifies the word repetition with a negative qualifier: the similarity between 'tedious repetition' and Avison's repeated use of the phrase 'capricious repetition' to describe Scarlatti's music suggests Domenico may be the unnamed subject of this passage. The indictment that such composers end by 'dropping into a dull close' could easily point to the closing passages of many of Scarlatti's 'English' sonatas, which characteristically end with a single note in each hand or trail off with what Avison might have regarded as further capricious and/or tedious repetitions (see the closes of $\kappa 3$ and 27 in particular). Avison also addresses the openings of pieces, warning against 'that low Idea of Composition, wherein the Subject, or Air, is no sooner led off, than it is immediately deserted, for the sake of some strange unexpected Flights, which have neither Connection with each other, nor the least Tendency to any Design whatever'.⁷⁹ Again, these formal charges could be taken to describe Scarlatti's approach to composition throughout the 'English' sonatas. Domenico rarely expands upon his initial, typically contrapuntally presented, melodic ideas and opts instead for a very free approach to melodic material.

Having discussed the structural problems in these unnamed compositions, Avison argues that such pieces have a negative impact in performance. They may be 'calculated to display the Performer's *Dexterity* . . . [and] may, indeed, amuse the *Understanding*, and amaze the *Eye*, but [they] can never touch the *Heart*, or delight the *Ear*'.⁸⁰ Avison's use of the verb 'amuse' in a pejorative sense finds an echo in Crotch's similar indictment of the Scarlatti sonatas as compositions where 'all is calculated to amuse and surprise'. Avison and Crotch agreed that music that only amuses or amazes is ultimately of a lower order, and is perhaps dangerous for the aesthetic health of the nation.

Later in his *Essay* Avison gives advice to keyboard players: 'For the Elegance of Taste, in the Performance of the Solo, consists not in those agile Motions, or Shiftings of the Hand which strike with Surprise the common Ear, but in the tender and delicate Touches'.⁸¹ The visual virtuosity inherent in so many of Scarlatti's 'English' sonatas seems to be addressed by this passage. Avison gets close to the core of his objection to the Scarlatti performance aesthetic in a passage about the responsibility of composers to lead performers away from excessive, undignified display:

But surely it ought chiefly to be the Composer's Care, not to give the Performer any Opportunities whatever of disparaging his Art: And the more he avoids such low Buffoonery, the more will this Taste be discouraged.⁸²

These complaints can be read as in part directed towards Scarlatti's 'English' sonatas, works with gratuitous physical effects that might uncharitably be seen as 'low Buffoonery'. Avison, of course, knew these pieces well from having exhaustively rewritten many of them.

One of Avison's goals was to draw clear lines between acceptable 'musical expression' and less than dignified composition and performance. Joshua Reynolds echoed this line of argument relative to artists and paintings that he saw as either ennobling or degrading the status of the visual arts. Crotch likewise hoped to draw his readers to the higher aesthetic categories, while recognizing and accepting the lasting presence of ornamental music, and specifically Domenico Scarlatti, in English musical culture. But Avison, Reynolds and Crotch are not the only voices. A lengthy letter in response to Avison's *Essay*, published with a riposte from Avison in an appendix to the 1753 reprint, affords a glimpse of an aesthetics of musical expression more attuned to the English commercial music scene. The anonymous letter writer takes a pragmatic view of mid-century musical culture, pointing out music's power to soothe the many ills of human life and refusing to praise or damn his own time as 'censorious . . . sinful . . . learned . . . golden . . . or leaden'. Instead, he

⁷⁸ Avison, *Essay*, 31–32.

⁷⁹ Avison, *Essay*, 37.

⁸⁰ Avison, *Essay*, 44–45.

⁸¹ Avison, *Essay*, 138–139.

⁸² Avison, *Essay*, 110.



answers Avison’s petulance with a word that harkens back to Pepusch’s dismissal of the Scarlatti sonata Burney played for him:

Many things we must expect to meet with, which it would be hard to bear, if a compensation were not to be found in honest endeavours to do well, in virtuous affections, and connections, and in harmless and reasonable amusements. And why should not a man amuse himself sometimes? *Vive la Bagatelle!*⁸³

Scarlatti’s ‘English’ sonatas – ‘harmless and reasonable amusements’, ubiquitous in print and performance, grouped with Corelli and Geminiani by Burney, and with Haydn by Price – were perhaps the ultimate musical bagatelles.⁸⁴ No amount of aesthetic uplift was going to dislodge them from their place in the repertoire. For dissenters, there was the consolation, as noted by Crotch, that the Scarlatti sonatas were short.

SCARLATTI AND CORELLI IN ABSENT COMPANY

To English ears, Domenico Scarlatti was a thoroughly Italian composer. As has been shown, he was frequently identified with the other major Italian (or Italian-style) composers of the time. The Wesleys had a shorthand for this group, ‘H, C, G & S’ sometimes serving as an abbreviation for the family’s ‘four classical authors’ – Handel, Corelli, Geminiani and Scarlatti.⁸⁵ This foursome splits easily into two pairs: Handel and Geminiani, longtime English residents; Corelli and Scarlatti, who never crossed the Channel. As a final argument for Scarlatti’s ‘absent presence’, I briefly consider the many analogies between the ‘English’ Scarlatti and the ‘English’ Corelli. Both were important Italian composers of instrumental music who never travelled to England and who spent most of their creative lives writing instrumental music for a single patron. Corelli’s English reputation, like Scarlatti’s, was entirely mediated by imprints, reprints, manuscripts and transcriptions. Both had expensive and affordable editions of the same pieces on the market simultaneously. In both cases English players, whether amateur or professional, learned to play their instruments by playing their music; both had performing proxies, professional players who made their work known to audiences, though in Scarlatti’s case these players were English and not Italian émigrés.⁸⁶ Both Corelli’s and Scarlatti’s circumscribed, but not small, corpus of works remained in print to the end of the century. As Price’s 1794 essay demonstrates, Corelli and Scarlatti endured as touchstones for specific aesthetic categories: Corelli the ‘beautiful’, Scarlatti the ‘picturesque’. And in subsequent historical studies both have been the subject of musicological articles describing their eighteenth-century English following and prominently employing the term ‘cult’ in their titles.⁸⁷ Corelli’s sonatas and concertos embody a widely accepted ‘norm’ of eighteenth-century musical style; Scarlatti’s sonatas remain a troubling body of work, difficult to integrate into the standard narratives of the century.⁸⁸ This brief comparison of the canonic Corelli with the slippery Scarlatti suggests how reconstructing an ‘English’ Scarlatti helps us to rethink Domenico and his place in eighteenth-century music history.

83 Avison, *Essay*, 24–25.

84 Crotch put C. P. E. Bach beside Scarlatti and Haydn as exemplars of the ornamental. See Richards, *Free Fantasia*, 35 and 117–118, for discussions of Scarlatti relative to Bach in the writings of Crotch and German critic Georg Joseph Vogler.

85 Rylands DDCW 8/21, 26. This foursome is also prominent on a tiny card from 1774, on which Charles Sr memorialized his elder son’s musical repertory for that year (Rylands DDCW 9/8).

86 The difference between native keyboard players and foreign violinists in English professional circles is significant here.

87 Richard Newton, ‘The English Cult of Domenico Scarlatti’, and Denis Arnold, ‘The Corellian Cult in England’, in *Nuovi studi corelliani: Atti del secondo congresso internazionale, Fusignano, 1974*, ed. Giulia Giachin, *Quaderni della Rivista italiana di musicologia* 4 (Florence: Olschki, 1974), 81–88.

88 See Sutcliffe, *The Keyboard Sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti*, the first monograph on the composer in a generation, which begins with the sentence ‘Domenico Scarlatti does not belong’ (1).



CONCLUSION

Were Domenico Scarlatti and his royal scholar María Bárbara at all aware of the impact the *Essercizi* and other sonatas were having in England during their lifetimes? The English commercial music scene described above was completely unconnected to the main task of Scarlatti's professional life: meeting María Bárbara's demand for sonatas. Scarlatti's absent presence in England was the ironic result of María Bárbara's lifelong interest in being a great player, even though presumably no one ever heard her, or her teacher, play these pieces in any remotely public context. The Spanish Queen's penchant for private music yielded saleable commodities for the English market, attractive products exploited by publishers, purchased by amateurs and professionals, used for career advancement by musicians as diverse as Burney and Avison. The style Scarlatti created for María Bárbara – Italianate virtuoso keyboard music with a strong visual component – proved extremely useful in this English context and remarkably resilient across decades of profound musical change. How the visually virtuoso 'English' sonatas functioned in the world of the Spanish court and the chamber where María Bárbara had her lessons is difficult to know. But in England, the reception of an 'English' Scarlatti – wild, capricious, Italian, immensely difficult and amusing, new and bold, picturesque and ornamental – is well documented.

Domenico Scarlatti's impact on eighteenth-century musical life is best understood though a study of the independent life of his music as it circulated in print and manuscript. It is that history which must be uncovered and understood to take the full measure of Scarlatti. As with Handel, it is possible to document the performance of Scarlatti's music in England across the length of the century and to register its place in the larger culture of music and the arts. This history of Scarlatti in performance has been outlined above. It is a story literally played out by the men and women who learned and performed the sonatas and those who listened and watched. Scarlatti's life and work in Spain is ultimately less knowable in its details than his disembodied presence on harpsichord and fortepiano music desks in London, where all kinds of keyboard players, from old men to little boys and girls, were impersonating him and the Queen of Spain by playing flashy music from the royal private lessons, some so desperate to cross their hands 'without ever missing a time' that they did it on the seats of dining-room chairs. Scarlatti's sonatas found an enduring niche because of their flexibility in different performance contexts. The published sonatas became 'musical classics' on their own terms in England by way of their utility for professional and would-be professional performers. This flexibility is reflected in Scarlatti's abiding presence in aesthetic debates. Avison, Price and Crotch all had to deal with Domenico because players continued to play his music. The foregoing sketch, an eighteenth-century portrait *in absentia* of the 'English' Scarlatti, suggests how Domenico Scarlatti might be moved out of courtly isolation and into the thick of the eighteenth-century musical marketplace.