

The Italian Age of Elegance

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Carlotta Masci, piano

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Track List

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|---|--------|
| 1. Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata in D minor K 9 | 3'50'' |
| 2. Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata in C major K 460 | 7'18'' |
| 3. Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata in C major K 159 | 2'29'' |
| 4. Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata in F minor K 239 | 3'34'' |
| 5. Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata in E major K 380 | 6'16'' |
| 6. Domenico Scarlatti, Fandango in D minor | 8'34'' |
| 7. Baldassarre Galuppi, Sonata in C major, I - Adagio | 8'51'' |
| 8. Baldassarre Galuppi, Sonata in C major, II - Allegro | 4'05'' |
| 9. Baldassarre Galuppi, Sonata in C major, III - Vivace | 3'24'' |
| 10. Domenico Cimarosa, Sonata in G minor C 61 | 3'36'' |
| 11. Domenico Cimarosa, Sonata in E-flat major C 74 | 3'06'' |
| 12. Domenico Cimarosa, Sonata in A minor C 55 | 2'14'' |
| 13. Domenico Cimarosa, Sonata in F major C 84 | 1'26'' |
| 14. Domenico Cimarosa, Sonata in F major C 71 | 5'35'' |

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Preface

Listening to a new interpretation of music from the past, in this case, some of the Sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti, Baldassarre Galuppi, and Domenico Cimarosa, is an experience that engages with the “intentional understanding” of the interpreter.

This means seeking out the plan, the preunderstanding, and the preconceptions that have guided the performance, and assessing how well these align with the text itself. As Martin Heidegger puts it, interpretation is not “the acquiring of information about what is understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding” (Being and Time, 1927).

It is precisely this characteristic of the hermeneutic circle that stands out in Carlotta Masci’s interpretation. The texts are amenable to this approach. The 18th-century lack of separation between composer and performer, the absence of rigid and predictable structural schemes, and the deliberate lack of absolute precision (especially concerning ornamentation) provide the spaces in which Carlotta Masci builds her project, fully exploiting her considerable technical skills and cultural and professional background.

The result is that she is able to highlight not only the expressive richness and character inherent in these works but also the surprising modernity hidden within a writing style that is often overshadowed by a misunderstood idea of lightness.

It is worth emphasising that the same elements defining this project enable Carlotta Masci to approach a repertoire originally written for the harpsichord or fortepiano on the modern piano without distorting it into unlikely imitations. The variations in colour, the crystalline timbre, and the clarity of Masci’s phrasing on the piano align seamlessly with the essence of these compositions, effortlessly bringing them into the contemporary realm.

Stefano Bracci



Carlotta Masci



Pianist Carlotta Masci captures hearts and ears with her ability to weave intricate melodies that resonate with deep emotion, displaying a mastery of technical prowess that resonates with the sheer depth of her virtuosity.

As a dedicated concert pianist, she passionately spreads the rich tapestry of classical piano culture to younger generations, crafting a musical journey that spans from the instrument's inception to contemporary compositions.

Born in the vibrant, eternal heart of Rome, Carlotta Masci refined her musical talents at the prestigious Conservatorio di Musica Santa Cecilia. Specializing in solo piano, chamber music, contemporary compositions and piano duos at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole, she delved deep into the intricacies of her craft guided by internationally esteemed maestros such as Gloria Lanni, Umberto Clerici, Marcella Crudeli, Lidija Bizjak, Maria Grazia Bellocchio, Marcella Crudeli, Bruno Canino, Sergio Calligaris and many others.

A laureate of numerous prestigious awards and competitions, Carlotta's artistry has graced the airwaves of Vatican Radio on three occasions, captivating audiences with her enchanting interpretations. While she is deeply engaged in chamber music collaborations, her solo performances have taken her across Italy, Europe, and the United States, where her magnetic presence and virtuosity command attention. In each captivating performance, Carlotta Masci invites listeners on a transformative musical odyssey, where the intricate interplay of emotion and technical brilliance leaves an indelible mark on the hearts of all who experience her artistry.

Portraits in Sound: Musical Exploration

The album transports us to the vibrant tapestry of a time replete with enchantment, stimulation, innovation, and upheaval: the eighteenth century.

It was an era of stark contrasts that propelled humanity into the modern age through the enlightenment, the industrial revolution, and the French revolution, virtually opening the doors to the concept of the modern human being.

From a musical perspective, however, while the eighteenth century is currently experiencing a lively renaissance, in educational circles, it remains tethered to the notion of a “cold” century where performers overly given to “acceleration or deceleration”, resulting in emotionally devoid renditions that strip this era of its authentic spirit. It stands as a transitional period, or almost a “subtraction,” from the subsequent century, the nineteenth century.

Contrary to expectations, the musical landscape of this era embarked on an adventurous journey across all genres, fuelled by an unmatched creativity and vibrant spirit. A pivotal development was the ingenious fusion of music with the theatrical realm, captivating audiences across Europe, with Italy at the forefront of this cultural phenomenon.

Domenico Scarlatti



Domenico Scarlatti(1685 - 1757), born in Naples, was raised under the influential shadow of his father, Alessandro, the renowned figure of the Neapolitan School.

It was Alessandro’s constant presence that afforded Domenico his earliest forays into the dynamic Italian music scene of the era. In a poignant letter introducing his son to Ferdinando de Medici, the Grand Prince of Tuscany, Alessandro expressed, “This son, akin to a soaring eagle, must not linger idle in the nest, and I shall not hinder his flight.”

Thus, propelled by his father’s unwavering support, young Scarlatti traversed the vibrant musical landscapes of Naples, Florence, Venice, and notably Rome. It was in the latter, amidst the cultural flourish at Queen Maria Casimira of

Poland’s court in Palazzo Zuccari from 1702 to 1714, where Scarlatti’s artistic trajectory found pivotal momentum. Immersed in Rome’s Arcadian ambiance, a cultural milieu that had blossomed since the late seventeenth century, Scarlatti’s musical oeuvre, especially in the realm of melodrama, bore the indelible imprint of this evocative era.

The conclusion of Scarlatti’s Roman sojourn in 1719 heralded a new chapter, marked by sojourns in Portugal and eventually Spain. Here, as Music Master to the infanta Maria Barbara of Braganza, who would ascend to the throne as queen, Scarlatti dedicated his entire corpus of 555 sonatas. Madrid, where he would spend the remainder of his days, became the nurturing cradle of his musical legacy amidst its vibrant artistic tapestry.

In attempting to encapsulate Domenico Scarlatti's instrumental repertoire in a single word, "pure heterogeneity" resonates most profoundly. Each of his sonatas boasts a diversity and differentiation that not only sets them apart from one another but also within themselves. It's a challenge not to be captivated by the sudden harmonic peaks, dynamic crescendos, fragmented harmonies, unexpected modulations, and fleeting moments of idyllic beauty that define his compositions.

Scarlatti's journey through instrumental interpretation is undoubtedly one of the most contentious and controversial tales of our era. Perhaps that is what makes it most fascinating. His entire musical oeuvre reflects a fusion of Italian classical influences, absorbed during his formative years, and the allure of Iberian folklore, which held him spellbound during his sojourns in Portugal and Spain. In the Sonata in D minor K9, also known as "Pastorale," Scarlatti seems to relive his Roman years spent at Palazzo Zuccari, at the court of Queen Maria Casimira, immersed in the bucolic charm of Arcadia; nymphs, shepherds, pipes, and bagpipes animate imaginary scenarios of extreme elegance.

The evocation of these atmospheres also appears in Sonata in E major K380, framed by melodious themes, delicate resonances, and the call of distant drums and horns. Scarlatti's adeptness at evoking diverse sounds through the keyboard, drawing inspiration from popular instruments, shines through in Sonata in C major K159. It is marked by lively, fast-paced rhythms that vividly capture the atmosphere of a hunting expedition. The echoing horns take us back to the scene of hunts organized for the court's amusement along the Tagus River and in the Aranjuez woods.

Sonata K460 emerges as one of Scarlatti's most expansive and diverse compositions, boasting abundant thematic material and sharp phrasing that intertwine and resurface throughout the piece. Just as numerous folk instruments found their way into the court thanks to Scarlatti's remarkable ability to evoke them on the keyboard, the lively rhythms of popular dances found resonance in the grand halls of the royal palace through the allusions woven into his sonatas, as exemplified in Sonata in F minor K239, where the spirited fandango rhythm reigns supreme.

In the rich tapestry of Spanish and Portuguese folk traditions, the fandango begins its journey with a gentle tempo, gradually building momentum towards an *accelerando*, all while maintaining its initial rhythm, culminating in a fervent and swirling dance that not only showcases the dancers' prowess but also exerts a magnetic pull on the audience's attention. A special mention is warranted for the enigmatic Fandango in D minor.

Discovered in a manuscript bearing the title "Fandango del Signor Scarlate" at the close of the twentieth century, its stylistic departure from Scarlatti's other works is unmistakable.

If indeed penned by Scarlatti, one might speculate that it originated beyond the confines of the court, perhaps not intended for the queen. Scarlatti's fondness for taverns and inns, where he absorbed the essence of Spanish folk music, could have influenced this composition. However, this remains conjecture. The rendition featured on this album incorporates interpretive nuances by the performer.



Baldassarre Galuppi



Baldassarre Galuppi (1706-1785), as portrayed by Charles Burney in his work "The Present State of Music in France and Italy" published in London in 1771, emerges as a man whose "...character and conversation are natural, intelligent, and agreeable." Burney depicts him as "...little in figure and thin, but has very much the look of a gentleman."

Additionally, Burney praises Galuppi's compositions as "...always ingenious and natural..." and notes that "...he stands so high among the present race of musicians in Venice, that he seems a giant among dwarfs." (Burney, n.d., pp. 176-178)¹

Unfortunately, despite being highly esteemed and appreciated during his lifetime, Galuppi gradually faded into obscurity after his death.

As Enrico Fubini remarks, "...it is useless to recall how in the eighteenth century music was a genre

of very rapid consumption, subject to all the whims of fashion." (Fubini, 1979, p. XXVI)² Except for two periods spent abroad, from 1741 to 1743 in London, where he curated the repertoire of Italian opera at the Haymarket Theatre, and from 1765 to 1768 in St. Petersburg at the court of Empress Catherine II, Galuppi spent most of his life in Venice.

He held the position of Chapel Master at St. Mark's and taught at the Conservatori degli Incurabili e dei Mendicanti. A highly prolific composer, he tackled all musical genres of his time: from melodrama to comic opera, from sacred music to instrumental music.

His collaboration with Carlo Goldoni, for whom he scored about twenty comedies, was particularly fruitful. His keyboard production with over a hundred sonatas is particularly significant. He is, after Scarlatti and before Clementi, one of the most important Italian composers of keyboard music.

Baldassarre Galuppi's sonatas adhere to the classical sonata structure, divided into multiple movements, exemplified by the sonata featured in this album. Sonata in C major No. 5 stands as a masterpiece of elegance, refinement, simplicity, and structural balance. It's nearly impossible not to be captivated by the initial movement, the Andante, which envelops the listener with its continuous embrace of recurring thematic motifs, gradually unfolding in a slow yet unceasing delineation of the melodic line.

The subsequent movement, the Allegro, bursts forth with vibrant rhythm and recurring thematic flashes that engage the listener's ear. This vivaciousness reaches its pinnacle in the third and final movement, Allegro assai, where it appears to transcend, embodied in a fresh, virtuosic, and effervescent rhythmic structure that maintains a delicate yet energetic demeanour.

¹ Charles Burney, "Viaggio musicale in Italia" EDT/MUSICA, 1979, pag. 163.

² Enrico Fubini in Charles Burney, op. cit., pag. XXVI.



Domenico Cimarosa



Domenico Cimarosa (1749 - 1801), born into a humble family in Aversa, was left an orphan and destitute after his father's death. He was taken in by the Franciscan friars of San Severo, where he learned to read, write, and gained some knowledge of music.

His aptitude for music led him to be admitted to the Conservatorio di Santa Maria di Loreto, where he remained for ten years. Representing the Neapolitan school, he is recognized as one of the greatest Italian opera composers of the late 18th century.

Alongside his prolific operatic output, comprising over seventy titles, Cimarosa demonstrated a keen interest in instrumental keyboard music, composing around 120 sonatas for harpsichord and fortepiano, an instrument he greatly admired. After a successful

career that saw him perform in major Italian cities, Cimarosa, attracted by the popularity of Italian musical theater in Russia, followed in the footsteps of Baldassarre Galuppi and traveled to St. Petersburg in the service of Catherine II from 1787 to 1791.

During his return journey to Italy, he stopped in Vienna, where he was hosted by Emperor Joseph II and later by Leopold II. It was during this time in Vienna that he composed his most famous opera, "Il matrimonio segreto" (The Secret Marriage), which premiered at the Burgtheater in 1792 in front of the emperor. The opera was such a success that it was reportedly repeated in its entirety. Upon his return to Naples, riding on the wave of his Viennese success, "Il matrimonio segreto" was performed at the Teatro dei Fiorentini in 1793 and ran for a record-breaking one hundred and ten consecutive nights.

These were years of great popularity for Cimarosa in his hometown, eventually earning him the title of Maestro della Cappella Reale (Master of the Royal Chapel).

Unfortunately, following the events of the French Revolution, the Parthenopean Republic was proclaimed in Naples in 1799, leading to the expulsion of the king. Cimarosa was asked to compose a patriotic anthem, which thrust him into the city's political turmoil. However, the Republic's existence was short-lived, and upon the king's return, Cimarosa was arrested and imprisoned. After several months in detention, he was released. Deeply affected by the traumatic experience, he left Naples for Venice in search of peace and tranquility. Regrettably, he passed away shortly thereafter.

Domenico Cimarosa's keyboard sonatas are greatly influenced by the Parthenopean School and their true strength is the beauty of the melodic line handled with wisdom and rigour, the true pearl of each sonata.

These are sonatas in a single movement, in the manner of Scarlatti's sonatas, although it is speculated that they were composed with the idea of playing them in two by two, for example by placing a bright and lively sonata alongside a slow and melancholic movement or vice versa³.

Precisely for this reason, starting with the last two on this album, the choice of placing Sonata in F major C 84 alongside Sonata in F major C 71 is by no means accidental; the former, with its pastoral and idyllic character, seems to present itself almost as an introduction to the next sonata, which is longer and more vibrant. Going backwards, rarefied and out of time, the short Sonata in A minor C 55 appears like a small miniature and envelops us with its nostalgic and subdued singing.

Of a completely different character is Sonata E-flat major C 74, an allegro that, after the brief introduction, captivates the listener with its freshness and spontaneity, easily audible echoes of tambourines and sparkling Partenopean folk melodies. A nostalgic adagio of incredible refinement characterizes Sonata in G minor C 61, simple but fascinating harmonies support a melodic line of rare beauty that seems to want to transcend time.

³ In this regard, it should be noted that the English musicologist Kirkpatrick also hypothesizes this mode of execution for Scarlatti's sonatas. "Domenico Scarlatti", Torino, ERI, 1984, pag. 270



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