THE KEYBOARD SONATAS OF DOMENICO SCARLATTI AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY MUSICAL STYLE

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1

SCARLATTI THE INTERESTING HISTORICAL FIGURE[1]

Domenico Scarlatti does not belong. Whether we ask to whom, to where, or to what he belongs, and even if we ask the questions with the slight diffidence proper to any such form of historical enquiry, no comfortable answers can be constructed. The only category into which we may place the composer with any confidence, one especially reserved for such misfits, is that of the Interesting Historical Figure. Thus, although the significance of the composer's work, certainly in the realm of the keyboard sonata, is generally agreed, just how it is significant is yet to be happily established. Most treatments of composers and their music may be divided into two categories, depending on where they locate the composer's image – the rationale for the treatment is either one of reinforcement or one of special pleading, according to whether the composer lies within or beyond the canon. The normal way of arguing a case for the inclusion of music that lies outside the canon is to demonstrate its relevance to or influence on music that lies on the inside. Until the music or the composer concerned have crossed the threshold, this is effectively the only mode of treatment possible.

This may seem far too simple an equation, but one only need bear in mind the difficulty that has always been apparent in treating musical works of art on their intrinsic merits, as it were. Warren Dwight Allen, after surveying musicological writings spanning three hundred years, stressed the evolutionary current running through all of them:

> Some idea of progress, it seems, was fixed immovably in the ideology of musicology, and this was true whether musicologists dealt on the broadest scale with the music of widely separated cultures or on a narrow scale with musical events of a single culture in close chronological proximity. At every level music was treated in terms of its antecedents and consequents, not as a thing in itself. Music passed through elementary stages to more advanced ones. What was more advanced was almost always seen as better.[2]

Given this rather bleak prognosis, now well accepted in principle if not so easily avoided in practice, it is understandable that the only manoeuvre available to the special pleaders is to make a case for their subject as an antecedent of or a consequent

[1] This chapter is based on a paper given first at the University of Auckland in March 1995 and subsequently in shortened form at the British Musicology Conference, King's College, London, in April 1996.

[2] Joseph Kerman, *Musicology* (London: Fontana, 1985), 130. This represents Kerman's summary of Allen's findings.

to this or that composer, school, style. The reinforcers, on the other hand, are, even if unconsciously, busy affirming the status of their subject as an 'advanced stage'.

The place of Domenico Scarlatti in such a scheme, as suggested at the outset, is decidedly tricky. While he does not count as a genuine outsider in the manner of an Alkan or a Gesualdo, equally he does not fit well into any of the habits of thought through which we could expect to arrive at some construction of his significance. His father Alessandro, for instance, has long had a more secure place in history, although presumably few would claim him to be a better or more significant composer.[3] In fact, Domenico might be regarded as a unique test case for the nature of musicology as it has been practised in the last few generations, offering us a chance to reflect on its methodologies and priorities.

The circumstances of this claim to exclusiveness are worth reviewing. In every conceivable musicological sense, Scarlatti is a problematic figure. For one, we know remarkably few details regarding his life and views. Especially from the time he left his native Italy to serve the Princess María Bárbara as music tutor first in her native Portugal, then for the best part of thirty years in Spain until his death in 1757, we only have the means to put together the most minimal of biographies. More than one writer has commented that the scarcity of information almost seems to have been the result of some deliberate conspiracy.[4] Given the fact that only one single letter from the composer survives, such remarks are not altogether in jest. Related to this dearth of 'hard facts' is the lack of external evidence as to the composer's personality. Much has been made in the literature of the composer's alleged passion for gambling, with María Bárbara at least once having had to pay off his gambling debts, but even in this instance the verdict must be likely but not proven.

In the absence of information, the sonatas themselves have had to bear a good deal of such interpretative weight, a happy situation, one would think, in the search for the significance of the composer's work. In reality, though, the sonatas have often been used as evidence for personality traits as this bears on the biographical picture of Scarlatti rather than on the musical one. If we return for a moment to the matter of comparative ideologies, it is probably fair to say that music has long invested more capital in biographical portraiture than have the other arts. One rationale for needing a good control over biographical circumstances has been that it will tell us a great deal about the music that is the product of the personality – the greater the control over the life, the more acutely can we judge the works.

[3] For Cecil Gray in 1928, however, Domenico was 'a figure of infinitely smaller proportions and artistic significance' than Alessandro; *The History of Music* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1928), 139. Writing in 1901, Luigi Villanis stated: 'We will not find in [Scarlatti] the profound musician that lived in his father'; 'Domenico Scarlatti', in *L'arte del clavicembalo in Italia* (Bologna: Forni, 1969; reprint of original edition [Turin, 1901]), 166. That such verdicts have become less likely in the more recent past tells us more about the decline of Alessandro's reputation than about any change in the critical fortunes of his son.

[4] Malcolm Boyd, for instance, writes that 'it almost seems as if Domenico Scarlatti employed a cover-up agent to remove all traces of his career . . . and contemporary diarists and correspondents could hardly have been less informative if they had entered into a conspiracy of silence about him'. 'Nova Scarlattiana', *The Musical Times* 126/1712 (1985), 589.

Stated thus, this equation also sounds too simple, but it is the best explanation for the thrust of a good deal of musicological activity, whether applied to Scarlatti or any other composer. The assumption that music is primarily an expression of personality, of emotion, that in order to understand the music we must understand the man and his private circumstances, is historically bound to nineteenth-century music aesthetics, but it is a notion that has retained much of its strength through to the present day. And it is one that colours our approach to all the art music of at least the last few hundred years. Indeed, the notion has in the present scholarly climate received a new lease of life, if in rather different intellectual conditions. With the current emphasis on the 'situatedness' of music, an engagement with its public, social and political dimensions, the personal and emotional have been recovered for inspection. Thus any sense of an ideally strict separation between artist and work, or even person and persona, might be frowned upon as a species of puritanical modernism. If investigation of the perceived historical personality of the composer has to an extent been reclaimed as a legitimate object of study, it will naturally take a more ideologically contingent slant than the 'great man' approach of yesteryear. Such interpretations must still rely, however, on an abundance of the sorts of data which are in Scarlatti's case simply not there. Given the paucity of biographical information on Scarlatti, there has instead been the opportunity to grasp the music in all its glory – the sonatas constitute the only substantial 'hard facts' that we have. That opportunity has not been taken.

If this failure is due to the lack of evidence impeding the customary flow chart of musicological procedure, it must not be construed that the holes are only biographical – even more distressing is the impossibility of achieving good bibliographical control over the composer's works. The central problem is the complete absence of autographs. The two principal sources for the sonatas are the volumes, almost all copied by the same scribe, which are now housed in libraries in Parma and Venice (hereafter generally referred to as P and V). Neither contains the full number of about 550 authenticated sonatas, they contain the works in somewhat different orders, and there is no agreement about which of the two copies is generally the more authoritative. We cannot even be certain that the copies were prepared under the direct supervision of the composer, although at least some input from Scarlatti seems very likely. This lack of autographs means that no chronology for the sonatas can be established. We can distinguish only two 'layers'[5] amongst all the works – the first 138 of the sonatas in the Kirkpatrick numbering[6] were copied into V or published by 1749, thus fixing a latest possible date for composition, and the rest, copied between 1752 and 1757, may have been written earlier and/or later than

[5] Joel Sheveloff's term in 'The Keyboard Music of Domenico Scarlatti: A Re-evaluation of the Present State of Knowledge in the Light of the Sources' (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1970), 196, where he avers that 'the two groups of sources represent two definite though not completely separate layers of compositional activity'.

[6] This was first contained in the 'Catalogue of Scarlatti Sonatas; and Table of Principal Sources in Approximately Chronological Order' near the end of Kirkpatrick's seminal *Domenico Scarlatti* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 442–56.

this. Following Kirkpatrick's lead, a chronology has often been assumed that runs more or less in tandem with the sequence of copying of the works.[7] Much ink, though, has been spilt lamenting the impossibility of truly determining the order of composition of this vast corpus.

One might ask, though, just why it is so important to establish a chronology. The standard answer must be so that we can trace the stylistic and creative development of the sonatas. It is at this point that we must reflect on Warren Dwight Allen's 'ideology of progress' that underlies much musicological discourse. The lack of any chronology for the Domenico Scarlatti sonatas means that they cannot be fitted into the narrative pattern whereby earlier, immature works lead to more refined and masterful ones, whereby certain stylistic and creative elements gradually evolve while others fade away, where, in other words, the individual works are made to tell a story in which they function merely as pieces of evidence. A simple example of how chronology may be used as a prop can be found in the case of Mozart's Piano Sonata in B flat, K. 333. It was regarded as a comparatively immature and unremarkable work when its provenance was thought to be about 1778, its significance perhaps residing in the hints it gave of future work, but Alan Tyson's study of paper types has not so long ago established that its date of composition was in fact late 1783.[8] Since then the work has been credited with previously unsuspected qualities and now reflects the concerns of the 'mature' piano concertos that were about to be written. From this perspective, one can only hope that no dated Scarlatti sonata autographs ever come to light, since a knowledge of their chronology can only force a further distortion on this body of music. (Not that such distortions can be altogether avoided: without flattening out the particulars in a body of information, how can we 'know' anything at all?)

One might have thought, again, that the absence of this information would have driven scholars into a more direct confrontation with the works themselves, but by and large there has instead been a good deal of hand-wringing and a retreat into other problems of documentation, transmission and organology. Admittedly, these are once more rather intractable. For instance, Scarlatti has traditionally been regarded as the composer who wrote as idiomatically and comprehensively for the harpsichord as Chopin did for the piano of his time. However, recent research has suggested conclusions that sit uncomfortably with the idea of the composer's work representing a final flowering of harpsichord style and technique. Not only are the majority of the sonatas playable on the pianos owned by María Bárbara, at least those accounted for in her will, but there is strong circumstantial evidence linking Scarlatti with the history and promulgation of the early fortepiano.[9] Another issue

[7] 'The dates of the manuscripts prepared by the Queen's copyists seem to correspond at least roughly with the order in which the sonatas were composed.' Kirkpatrick, *Scarlatti*, 144.

[8] See 'The Date of Mozart's Piano Sonata in B flat, K. 333/315c: The "Linz" Sonata?', in *Musik, Edition, Interpretation: Gedenkschrift Günter Henle*, ed. Martin Bente (Munich: Henle, 1980), 447–54.

[9] See for example David Sutherland, 'Domenico Scarlatti and the Florentine Piano', *Early Music* 23/2 (1995), 243–56, and Sheveloff, 'Domenico Scarlatti: Tercentenary Frustrations (Part II)', *The Musical Quarterly* 72/1 (1986), 90–101.

concerns the possibility that the majority of the sonatas were conceived in same-key pairs. Naturally enough, amidst the heat generated by this dispute, the question of the artistic status of the pairings has been insufficiently addressed. Occasionally pairs have been examined for thematic connections of a rudimentary kind, which barely scratches the surface of the matter. All that the originator of the idea, Ralph Kirkpatrick, could really offer was the formula that the relationship between pairs was one of either contrast or complementarity.[10] This could cover a multitude of sonatas in the same key.

Another concern, one that Scarlatti research has mostly addressed with a bad conscience, is the matter of Spanish folk influence. Some have claimed that certain sonatas amount to virtual transcriptions of flamenco or folk idioms, while others have tried to minimize its import. Italian writers have often preferred to find in Scarlatti an embodiment of Mediterranean light and logic. A typical sentiment comes from Gian Francesco Malipiero: 'far more than the Spaniard of the habanera or malagueña, which make their transient apparitions, it is the Neapolitan who predominates with the typical rhythms of the Italians born at the foot of Vesuvius. Domenico Scarlatti, in fact, is a worthy son of Parthenope; mindful of Vesuvius, he loves to play with light and fire, but only for the greater joy of humanity'.[11]

This is just a variant of a common strain in the literature on all Latinate composers, from Couperin to Debussy, whose achievements can only be defined in opposition to the assumed creative habits of the Austro-Germanic mainstream: their music lives by lightness, delicacy, precision, logic and all the rest. More surprising, on the surface, is that Spaniards have mostly been reluctant to deal with questions of folk influence, and indeed with Domenico Scarlatti at all. Whether this suggests a bad conscience or not, in a strange way this may be allied with the too easy assumption by Italian writers that Scarlatti counts firmly as one of their own. The extent of the Scarlatti literature in Italian is in fact not so great in its own right, suggesting that nationalistic considerations have played a part here too. In other words, another of the things that Scarlatti does not belong to is a country. He thus lacks the weight of an entire culture industry behind him.[12] Nationalism is of course another of those properties that we define in relation to mostly Germanic and nineteenth-century norms. We are barely aware any more of the nationalist agendas of German writers past and present, just as it is difficult for us to hear the ethnic accents in German music, so firmly does it constitute the mainstream of our musical experience. Hence when trying to make something of Scarlatti's music we are not readily able to align him, at least as a point of reference, with the art music of a particular culture.

There are various lower-level features to the sonatas that have also proved to be stumbling blocks in the literature. There is, for instance, a marked inconsistency in the

[10] See Kirkpatrick, *Scarlatti*, 143. [11] 'Domenico Scarlatti', *The Musical Quarterly* 13/3 (1927), 488.

[12] A comparable eighteenth-century case is that of Zelenka. Michael Talbot notes 'the cultural problem [of] "ownership" of the composer' in his review of *Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679–1745): A Bohemian Musician at the Court of Dresden* by Janice B. Stockigt, *Music and Letters* 83/1 (2002), 115.

sources' ornamental indications, so frequent that this cannot simply be put down to scribal error. Performers (and editors) overwhelmingly correct these inconsistencies so that parallel places contain parallel ornamentation, so tidying up their 'scripts' well beyond any claims for licence as understood from eighteenth-century performance practice. Few players seemed to have stopped to consider whether it is precisely our instinct for such symmetrical tidying that the composer is playing with. All this is by way of re-emphasizing that almost all the effort in the Scarlatti literature has gone into problems of evidence – which will be amplified in the more detailed survey of the literature that follows in Chapter 2 – and very little into critical interpretation. The rationale for this is apparent enough, and only reflects in extreme form the customary work habits of musicology as a whole (extreme form because the amount of evidence that can be dealt with is so comparatively slight). Back in 1949 Curt Sachs entertained thoughts relevant to our consideration of the nature of Scarlatti research:

> Do not say: 'Wait! We are not yet ready; we have not yet dug up sufficient details to venture on such a daring generality.' There you are wrong. This argument is already worn out, although it will none the less be heard a hundred years from now, at a time when specialized research has filled and overflooded our libraries so completely that the librarians will have to stack the books and journals on the sidewalks outside the buildings. Do not say: 'Wait!' The nothing-but-specialist now does not, and never will, deem the time ripe for the interpretation of his facts. For the refusal of cultural interpretation is . . . conditioned by the temperaments of individual men, not by the plentifulness or scarcity of materials.[13]

Scarlatti research may thus be seen to have painted itself into something of a corner, virtually denying the admissibility of critical interpretation until more facts become available.

But why relive past battles? This questioning of positivistic rigour may seem no longer necessary; haven't we established new contexts for investigation, indeed new definitions of what 'knowledge' we are after? Yet musicology remains highly dependent on outside reinforcements for its assumed methodologies and for its sense of self. A strong allegiance to 'scientific method' has been replaced, at least at the cutting edge, by a strong allegiance to 'interdisciplinarity', with particular emphasis on literary studies. This interest has barely been reciprocated. Also uniting old and new is the consequent skirting of what Scott Burnham calls 'our fundamental relation to the materiality of music'.[14] The very notion that 'the music' exists as a self-evident category for investigation has become highly compromised, of course, but what is meant here goes beyond the usual considerations of the work concept. It means being able to fix on the corporality of the art – the way, through our understanding of its grammar and feeling for its gesture, that music incites our physical involvement and so renews a claim to be self-determining and intrinsically meaningful.[15] There has

[13] Cited in Kerman, *Musicology*, 127.

[14] 'Theorists and "The Music Itself"', *Journal of Musicology* 15/3 (1997), 325.

[15] Note in this respect the contention of Charles Rosen that 'in so far as music is an expressive art, it is pre-verbal, not post-verbal. Its effects are at the level of the nerves and not of the sentiments.' *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (London: Faber, 1971), 173.

on the whole been a failure in the discipline to address the study of music in this most concrete sense: we have been so busy problematizing the status and apprehension of music that we do not square up to its sensuous material impact. The issue of materiality, indeed, can be raised with particular urgency in the case of Domenico Scarlatti, given some of the most striking traits of his music.

There is in any case another side of the story that must be conceded. Joel Sheveloff, the doyen of Scarlatti sonata scholars, has often warned of the need to tread with great caution, given the many uncertainties surrounding text and transmission.[16] The details of Scarlatti's style remain so comparatively strange to us that the inability even to establish highly authoritative texts affects our global view of the composer far more seriously than might normally be the case; our perception of his style, after all, is dependent on the accumulated impression of a wealth of details. When so many of these details vary from source to source or simply remain ambiguous, then particular scholarly care may indeed be in order. Postmodern musicology can afford to disdain the methods of positivism when so much of the 'dirty work' has already been done; it still finds uses for much of the material thus created. It is another matter altogether to launch oneself beyond such concerns when, as is the case with Scarlatti, there is often the thinnest of documentary bases. With future progress along such lines looking to be highly unlikely, barring a major breakthrough, it may be time to gamble a little.

This is the dilemma facing any fresh approach to Scarlatti. Postmodern musicology does not necessarily allow much more room for manoeuvre given the state of knowledge than do the more traditional methods. Indeed, while the type of contexts sought may have changed, there is now a stronger sense that music may not be approached in the raw. This is guided by the conviction that what we call 'the music' is constructed according to various perceptual and cultural categories and is not innate; it is not simply there for universal access. Nor can one underestimate the impact of documentary difficulties. Imagine, for example, what the state of play might be in the literature on Beethoven's symphonies or Verdi's operas without a knowledge of chronology and a comforting array of documentation. What could one write and, indeed, how could one write were all this contextualizing material absent?

This is not to imply that there does not exist a fairly substantial body of commentary on the sonatas themselves. Unfortunately, with hardly any exceptions this has dealt with 'the sonatas' rather than sonatas, discussed according to a few well-worn notions. 'Characteristic features' such as the harsh dissonances, the freakish leaps and all the other technical paraphernalia are accounted for, Spanish elements are mentioned, as are other 'impressionistic'[17] features such as the employment of fanfares, street cries and processional material, and there is often evidence of a form fetish occasioned by the use of the term sonata itself for these pieces. Most writings on

[16] See for instance Sheveloff, 'Frustrations [I]', 422 and 428. This article and its successor, cited above in fn 9, will hereafter be referred to as 'Frustrations I' and 'Frustrations II' respectively.

[17] I borrow this term from Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music*, rev. edn (New York: Norton, 1973), 456, without necessarily dissenting from all its implications.

the sonatas, however, fail to go much beyond this level of characteristic features and therefore tell us little about the dynamics of the individual work. Underlying such approaches may be the subtext that, however splendid the results, the Scarlatti sonatas are a product of a transitional style and a mannerist aesthetic from which too much coherence should not be expected. Accordingly the literature emphasizes freedom and improvisation and variety rather than seeking to investigate the composer's sense of musical argument as conducted in individual works. It takes refuge in evocation. If we want a deeper understanding of Scarlatti's style, though, and of the part his work plays in the development of eighteenth-century musical language, there is no substitute for a detailed reading of particular sonatas, informed by a reassessment of what constitutes a context in the case of Scarlatti.

Reference just now to 'the development of eighteenth-century musical language' may appear to fit uneasily with the earlier dismissal of ideologies of progress, yet there need be no injury as long as 'development' is not taken to suggest the sort of inexorable improvement and organic growth of a style that it all too often connotes. Not only that, but the monsters of evolutionary ideology, labels for musical periods, are indispensable in attempting to get closer to Scarlatti's achievement. That the composer has one foot in the Baroque and one in the Classical era is one of the commonplaces in his reception history, and, although this very fact has ensured marginal status for Scarlatti in all history textbooks – since he does not clearly belong to either period – it can be turned to account in a more useful way than suspected. My contention is that, due to the circumstances of his life, which involved near incredible changes in environment and professional demands, and obviously even more due to his creative turn of mind, Scarlatti was acutely conscious of his own style. This in effect meant being conscious of styles, of various options for musical conduct. After all, the composer at various points of his career found himself in positions as different as writing operas for an exiled Polish queen, acting as chapel master at the Cappella Giulia in the Vatican, and being music tutor within a Spanish royal family of strange disposition in a strange environment. What these changes may have promoted, or merely confirmed, was a reluctance on the composer's part to identify himself with any one mode of speech in the keyboard sonatas, to make a virtue out of not belonging, or not wanting to belong. Of course all composers are to a greater or lesser extent conscious of their own style, and the eighteenth century saw many composers addressing the perceived stylistic pluralism of musical Europe, but what I think makes this a distinguishing mark of Scarlatti is that none of the styles or modes of utterance of which he avails himself seems to be called home.

A simple example of this property can be heard in the Sonata in A major, K. 39, shown in part in Ex. 1.1. This work has the virtue, for present purposes, of corresponding to most listeners' idea of a typical piece of Scarlatti. Its stylistic starting point is undoubtedly the early eighteenth-century toccata of the *moto perpetuo* type. It is not hard to understand the way in which writers can lapse into a mode of superlative evocation when attempting commentary on such music; it seems to invite all the

Ex. 1.1 K. 39 bars 6–17

stock references to vitality and virtuosity. Yet it seems to me that the almost obscene energy of the piece is harnessed to a particular end, that of taking Baroque motor rhythms beyond the point where they can sustain their normal function. Instead of being agents of propulsion, they take over the piece and threaten to strip it of any other content. Only the references to the repeated-note figure of the opening hold the piece together. Especially notable is the overlong ascending progression of the first half (bars 7^4–17^3), which seems to represent a nightmare vision of sequences without end, allowed to run riot.[18]

What is 'typical' about this sonata is its swiftness and athleticism, and for once we must reverse the claims of stereotyping to make an important observation. There

[18] Sheveloff, Kirkpatrick and Giorgio Pestelli all mention the connection between this sonata and K. 24, to the detriment of the former. See Sheveloff, 'Frustrations I', 416; Pestelli, *Le sonate di Domenico Scarlatti: proposta di un ordinamento cronologico* (Turin: Giappichelli, 1967), 158; and Kirkpatrick, *Scarlatti*, 155–6. Surely, though, it is only the openings and closings of the halves that are so similar. Aside from that, K. 39 has an independent existence.

can be no doubt that a high proportion of the Scarlatti sonatas are fast and, if one will, loud. It seems that it is the generally more responsible critics who try hardest to mollify this fact, stressing the variety of the composer's moods, his ability to write slower and apparently more heartfelt movements as well. A good many performers also seem conscious of not wanting to play Scarlatti up to his reputation, and consequently they invest their performances with what seems to me a false *gravitas*; by slowing the speed of execution down, they obviously hope to make the composer sound more 'serious'.[19] But there is no getting around the fastness of the majority of Scarlatti sonatas.

What is wrong with speed? Once more the problem lies with our nineteenth-century ears. Ironically for an age thoroughly associated with the so-called rise of the virtuoso, the nineteenth century also bequeathed us a suspicion of virtuosity, which for our purposes may be translated as a suspicion of prolonged displays of virtuosity at high speed. Only so much may be allowed, the received opinion seems to go, before there must be a return to real invention: the exposing and development of themes. One senses a comparable response to the totality of Scarlatti sonatas: fast movements are all very well, but if only there weren't so many of them the composer's image might be more solid. (When Brahms sent a volume of Scarlatti sonatas to his friend Theodor Billroth, he wrote 'You will certainly enjoy these – as long as you don't play too many at a time, just measured doses.'[20] Too much unhealthy excitement was evidently to be avoided.) Unfortunately, our cultural conditioning means that for us serious is cognate with slow, or at least a moderate speed: thus the Beethoven slow movement represents the ultimate in depth of communication, the Mahler slow movement is intrinsically more worthy of contemplation than the Mendelssohn scherzo. These terms are bound up with a discursive model for composition, the highest to which instrumental music can aspire in nineteenth-century aesthetics – presumably the reason why speed kills is that it does not readily allow time for the perception of an unfolding musical plot. While there are many Scarlatti sonatas which could involve a possible dramatic or narrative sequence, loosely understood, for many others we will have to find alternative models that can satisfy us intellectually and obviate the need to be apologists. If our conditioning suggests to us that the business of music is above all emotional or mental expression, we can consider as an alternative the notion of music as bodily expression. In the case of Domenico Scarlatti, the simplest way of saying this is music as dance.[21]

Dance in this sense is not necessarily meant to call to mind minuets and waltzes, and not even the various Iberian and Italian forms that may have inspired the composer;

[19] Note Christophe Rousset's assumption that the performer preparing a recital will want to include 'a certain number of slow movements to allow some air into the programme, where the speed and exuberance of Scarlatti risk becoming tiring'. 'Approche statistique des sonates', in *Domenico Scarlatti: 13 Recherches*, proceedings of conference in Nice on 11–15 December 1985 (Nice: Société de musique ancienne de Nice, 1986), 79.

[20] Cited in Eric Sams, 'Zwei Brahms-Rätsel', *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 27/12 (1972), 84.

[21] Compare the hypothesis of Ray Jackendoff, also proceeding from the parallel with dance, that 'musical structures are placed most directly in correspondence with the level of body representation rather than with conceptual structure'. *Consciousness and the Computational Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 239.

it is simply to suggest that music may function balletically as well as, or instead of, discursively. Our inclination to place one above the other as an object for study and contemplation may or may not have an inherent aesthetic justification, but it seems to me to be another symptom of music's unsure sense of itself: we are happiest when accommodating those works that suggest literary models or parallels, just as nineteenth-century musical culture addressed itself constantly to literature.

The D major Sonata, K. 277 (Ex. 1.2), may, as we shall see, contain its own plot, but I have chosen it for consideration in the first instance because it will enable us to focus on the composer's awareness of style, indeed, on the construct of style altogether. To return to Curt Sachs, we may be 'not yet ready' for an approach to this individual sonata and to the two that follow, but a confrontation – in at the deep end, as it were – with some of the music that animates my whole enterprise may suggest to the reader the urgency and fascination of the task.

The natural lyrical eloquence at the start of K. 277 is a quality that Scarlatti normally feels the need to shape in some overt way; he is rarely content with an idyll, preferring to give such pieces a sense of dramatic progression. 'Temperament' becomes a foil for the lyricism, with a strong sense of creative intervention in what can in fact become quite an impersonal mode; witness for example Bach's 'Air on the G string'. Only in anachronistic nineteenth-century terms can we hear the lyricism of Bach's movement as involving the expression of personal or individual emotion. If the Air does indeed express grief or nostalgia, then it must be heard as collective in its import; note also in this regard the measure of 'control' provided by the consistent movement of its bass line. Scarlatti is not at all interested in such means or ends; to invoke our style labels once again, his starting point is the galant notion of the individual lyrical voice. This is reinforced by many aspects of diction in the opening material, with its small-scale, detailed inflections of melodic writing – the Lombard rhythms, grace notes, appoggiaturas, and *Schleifer*-type figures.[22] All these, along with the very indications 'Cantabile' and 'andantino', are markers of the galant. Such 'miniaturism' helps to delineate a voice that does not speak on the basis of collective authority or experience, but as if on behalf of the lone individual.

A more important ingredient for the shaping of the whole work, though, it seems to me, is folk music, and perhaps Spanish flamenco in particular. K. 277 contains nothing whatever on the surface that suggests this, but the sort of influence meant is more profound than the appropriation of various idiomatic features. Contact with such a folk art seems to have made this composer acutely aware of the gap between folk idiom and its expressive world and the way art music in contrast behaves. It is a distinction between distance and control and what is perceived as a musical present tense. For all that the galant may as a point of departure represent comparative

[22] A *Schleifer* is normally a figure of three notes covering the interval of a third, the first two rapidly played to act as a decoration to the final one. The classic form of the figure is found at the beginning of bar 12, but there are many variants to be found, for instance at bars 13^4 or 8^{2-3}.

Ex. 1.2 K. 277 bars 1–40

Cantabile andantino

freedom of action, in the context of the whole work its claims to just that freedom are undermined. The musical present tense referred to enters when the normal style of melodic speech disappears, at bar 27; this is particularly marked given the detailed inflections of the previous writing as described before. At bar 27 the melodic voice seems to stop, to be replaced by undifferentiated rhythmic movement in consistent four-part crotchet chords, with unpredictable and complex harmonic movement. The top line does not of course lose all melodic character, but in this context it seems like a skeleton. The most ‘expressive’ part of the sonata is therefore the most

Ex. 1.2 (*cont.*)

plain, the least mediated stylistically – in the terms of the rest of the piece, it may be regarded as primitive.

If the harmonic movement from bar 27 is the most striking feature of this passage, this may profitably be compared with the opening. Part of the delicacy of the idiom here is the lack of decisive bass movement; instead the bass moves in small steps. The first two bars express the tonic by means of neighbour-note formations, and indeed the first strong perfect cadence does not occur until the end of the first half. In this

respect and in its high tessitura, leaving the conventional bass register largely vacant, it seems to be formed in deliberate opposition to the solid, continuo-like bass lines of the Baroque. The first break to the idyll occurs at bar 16, with the unexpected repetition of the cadential unit. After the undidactic freedom of organization of the earlier music, with melodic ideas shifting in and out of focus,[23] the sudden square formality of the repetition at 16 arrests our attention. The resumption of the material of this repeated bar at 20 strengthens the sense of the intervening passage (bars 17–19) as a *minore* insertion. It casts a shadow without proving too disruptive. That it does represent a break with the fluid galant diction, however, is remarkably confirmed at the outset of the really significant interruption. The first beat of bar 27 picks up on precisely the pitches that began bar 17, $c\natural^2$, b^1 and e^1, here verticalized into a thoroughly characteristic dissonance. It is also significant that the first beat of bar 17 contains the last Lombard rhythm of the piece.

The opening of the second half may seem reassuring enough, but it is disruptive in its own way. The answering unit of bar 2 has now become an opening gambit. The expressive weight of bar 2 is helped in context by the registral isolation of the G–F♯ progression in the right hand, followed as it is by a jump to $a\sharp^1$ in bar 3. Bars 25–6 in fact exploit this feature by their turn to B minor, featuring A♯s. The interrupting passage then seems to energize the unit beyond its previous manifestations. At bar 31 the melodic range is wider, as is the whole tessitura, and the texture is heavier. After this the figure is made to settle down until it resumes the likeness of the opening. Thus bar 33 is identical with bar 2 (and bar 24), but now with a more unequivocal closing function; in conjunction with this, the $c\sharp^2$–d^2 succession in the right hand of bar 32 suggests the same pitches as in the very first bar.

It is almost as if we have turned full circle, although such an expression suggests a satisfying dramatic symmetry that is not present. The rupturing force of the outburst – note especially the crude voice leading of bar 28^{3-4}, which is so remote from any notion of *galanterie* – may allow the return of the opening figures, but these could be understood as remnants. All the most characteristic aspects of the melodic writing fail to reappear at all, creating a binary form that is very far from being balanced. Instead of such a resumption, from bar 34 we hear continuous melodic triplets that are a far cry from the rather small-scale diction of the first half, but this style is equally remote from the plain crotchets of the interruption. Materially, it takes its cue from elements in the first half – bars 34 and 37, for instance, allude once more to bar 3 – but the melodic triplets almost seem like a means of regaining equilibrium after the unexpected outburst.

This stream of song seems to inhabit a different sphere, almost as if it is a commentary on both the preceding vehement expression and the galant gestures of the first half. What are we to make of this sonata as a total structure and what can we compare it with to comprehend it? We hear a succession of three radically different

[23] Note, for example, the parallelism of descending units at 3 (from g^2), 8 ($f\sharp^2$), 12 (e^2), then 18 (from d^2, with the preceding e^2 functioning in this light as a quasi-appoggiatura). This parallelism does not coincide with structural or phrase boundaries and hence may be heard as a free association of material, 'personal' in organization.

rhythmic–melodic types with barely any interaction between them – galant nicety, plain crotchets that would deny any melodic finesse,[24] and then an 'endless melody'. Both latter types are preceded by three bars of the opening gesture repeated, as if to give a point of comparison. From this perspective, the material of the opening two bars could be conceived as a kind of frame, a sort of ritornello that provides the cement for an out-and-out progressive form. Rather than the question mark provided by this reading of the structure, with the composer reviewing various styles and forms of expression without committing himself to any of them, a more optimistic interpretation is possible. Bars 34ff. may be heard as a kind of liberation: the brutal interruption of the galant melodic style, a codified and socially determined expression of the individual voice, allows for the entry of a purer form of song, which we are to understand as a more genuinely personal voice. No matter which interpretation is finally more congenial, one must repeat that the essential genius of the structure may well owe its provenance to an engagement with folk music, and its implications for the means chosen by art music. This, I contend, lifted Domenico Scarlatti right out of all notions of expressive routine and settled styles, encouraging the sort of fruitful creative schizophrenia on display in K. 277.

In spite of the evidence of this and many another sonata, received opinion is that Scarlatti was either unconnected with the galant as a style or extremely indifferent to it. His one surviving personal letter, written to the Duke of Huescar in 1752, is often cited in support of this contention.[25] In it he makes a familiar lament on the poor compositional standards of the younger generation, claiming that few of them now understand '[la] vera legge di scrivere in contrapunto'- the true laws of writing counterpoint.[26] The letter has always been taken at face value; it seems somehow indicative that one of the few pieces of 'hard' evidence we have has been so 'objectively' interpreted – in other words, misinterpreted, in my view. Not only does the musical evidence disprove the notion that Scarlatti was out of sympathy with or uninterested in newfangled styles like the galant – K. 277 cannot be heard simply as a besting of the idiom – but a calm acceptance of the composer's ringing words on counterpoint is contradicted by the reality of the sonata texts themselves. Such a contradiction can be found in the C minor Sonata, K. 254.

This sonata, written almost entirely in two parts to an extent actually very rare in Scarlatti, may be thought of as a skit on counterpoint, or an invention gone wrong. A good many Scarlatti sonatas do in fact begin with imitation between the hands, but in the majority of cases this has no larger consequences for the texture of the work. Here, however, the opening, suggesting the learned style in its use of a

[24] In his recording of the work (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi: 05472 77274 2, 1992) Andreas Staier adds a trill at 29^1 and splits the right-hand thirds of bar 30^{2-4} into unfolded quavers, as if uncomfortable with the nakedness of this passage.

[25] For example by Eveline Andreani, 'Autour de la musique sacrée de Domenico Scarlatti', in *Domenico Scarlatti: 13 Recherches*, 99; Francesco Degrada, 'Tre "Lettere Amorose" di Domenico Scarlatti', *Il saggiatore musicale* 4/2 (1997), 300–301; and Sebastiano Arturo Luciani, 'Domenico Scarlatti. I: Note biografiche', *Rassegna musicale* 11/12 (1938), 469.

[26] The original text is contained in Luciani, 'Note I', 469, and Kirkpatrick, *Scarlatti*, 121, offers a translation.

Ex. 1.3a K. 254 bars 15–24

typical contrapuntal tag,[27] is taken as a pretext for the examination of various types of counterpoint, mostly of a fairly bizarre sort. From bar 10 we hear in the left hand an *alla zoppa*, or limping, figure, counterpointed against a straight-crotchet right hand in a concertina-like pitch construction. The effect of this is indeed rather lame, especially after the decisive opening and energetic continuation. From bar 17 the contrary motion between the parts is replaced by imitation, which goes badly wrong, with the consecutive fourths at 19 and 23 having an obviously ugly effect (see Ex. 1.3a). Even worse, the first of each is an unresolved tritone. Slightly more hidden are the parallel fifths that follow on from these fourths in the same bars. 'The true laws of writing counterpoint' are not much in evidence here.

From bar 33 the previous methods of parallel and contrary motion between the two parts are combined, but the result is much messier than this sounds. The real relevance of this passage is more that it continues the ways of unsuccessfully combining independent and notionally equal parts. The right hand especially here has the flavour of a voice in species counterpoint or a conventional filler motion in a contrapuntal texture. Note too the staggered parallel fifths at 33–5. Altogether the passage sounds distended well beyond any functional basis. The right-hand part moves down an octave before reversing its direction, as if to avoid a continuation of the consecutives; meanwhile the left hand strides pompously down nearly three octaves in an unchanging dotted rhythm. The literal repetition of the whole phrase only emphasizes its uncertain import. The piece in fact seems to be going around in circles.[28] One almost wonders whether the work has a specific target, whether in fact it is a satire. Certainly the inconsequentiality of the contrapuntal textures and the signs of mock ineptitude are hard to miss. At least one would think so;

[27] This tag is virtually identical with that which opens K. 240, where it is, however, just one element in a very heterogeneous sonata. Compare also the start of K. 463.

[28] Note also the unexpected and awkwardly timed return of bars 6ff. at 25ff.; in addition, the cadential bar 32 recurs at 39 and 46, the passage from bar 10 is reworked from 29, and the left-hand line at this point recurs *in toto* at 36–9 and 43–6.

Ex. 1.3b K. 254 bars 92–101

in his recording of the complete sonatas, Scott Ross's version of the work is not only soberly paced in the manner discussed before but finds a number of ways to soften the harsh profile of the piece.[29] This is symptomatic of the embarrassment that the composer often induces in the contemporary performer, who prefers to retreat into the sort of 'good taste' that may be rather more appropriate for various contemporary keyboard repertories.

This softening is particularly unwelcome since the composer himself attempts something of the sort shortly after the double bar. From bar 57 we hear a far more acceptable form of imitative texture; even though the parallel fourths remain at bars 58 and 60, they grate much less than those heard in the first half.[30] At bars 61–2 we again hear earlier material that is contextually sounder and more directed; the material from bar 10 is limited to two bars in duration and acts as a successful transition. Another solution of a sort follows, when from bar 63 the opening tag is reused four times in succession, as at the start of both halves of the piece. Here the tag is transformed into a little galant episode; it is put into a homophonic setting and becomes cadential rather than enunciatory. The change in texture is significant, with a striking move to three parts instead of the two associated with the would-be 'strict style'. The purpose of this transformation would seem to be to mock the pretensions of the opening more directly than the intervening matter has already done.

This improvement in technique does not last, though, and the passage from bar 85 sounds even more confused than its first-half equivalent. The right hand changes direction more unpredictably, and the repetition of the phrase from bar 89 is now

[29] For instance, he changes manual in the repetition of bars 33–9, to create an echo effect, and adds a number of ornaments which to me suggest a 'civilizing influence' (Erato: 2292 45309 2, 1989). This complete recording was made in 1984–5, and so finished in time for a tercentenary presentation on Radio France, in a series of more than 200 broadcasts. Commercial release then took several more years.

[30] This of course depends on the performance of the ornaments here – if one realizes the appoggiatura and its resolution in a minim–crotchet rhythm, then parallel fifths will result! The very fact of the new notation, however, with the leeway in performance it allows compared to the original at bar 19, seems to signify some mollification.

staggered to begin halfway through the bar. From bar 94, though, we have one of the composer's most striking inspirations. With any reasonable agreement among the parts and hands obviously doomed to fail, here unanimity and coordination are explicitly achieved in each hand successively (see Ex. 1.3b). Here finally there is perfect imitation between the hands, but in a context that is clearly not contrapuntal in any standard way. The change of texture and use of parallel sixths are enormously striking in such a context, as is the change to stichomythic units after the prevailing long-windedness of the syntax. The passage has a strong flavour of elbowing out of the way the previous nonsense. The repeated right-hand line from 98 also seems to be part of the attempt to block the annoyances of previous material. In effect the composer dramatically abandons the textural and syntactical premises of the piece. In defence of the Ross recording, it must be said that such a work, like many others by Scarlatti, is rather exhausting for the listener and performer to cope with. Alain de Chambure has written of the 'slightly chaotic charm' of the sonata,[31] which makes it sound gentler than it really is. The intermittent ugliness and sprawl, even if to parodistic ends, ask hard questions of what we are to prepared to accept in the name of art music.

K. 193 in E flat major also begins with an imitative point, but one that is rather more problematic in execution (see Ex. 1.4a). The imitation in the second bar immediately goes wrong, the left hand imitating at the seventh, without an initial small note, which is then restored in bar 3 in both hands. The parallel tenths of bar 3 also correct the very exposed parallel fourths of the previous bar, echoing those we heard in K. 254. Bar 2 once again raises the issue of Scarlatti's attitude to counterpoint, and therefore, by implication, to the traditional musical values with which it is associated. The composer's tendency to abuse common practice in this way exemplifies what Giorgio Pestelli refers to as a quality of 'disdain' in the sonatas.[32] Scarlatti often uses worldly trappings as a starting point for his structures – here the respectability of proceeding from an imitative point, in K. 277 a cantabile line of the purest galant pedigree – and then skews or discards them, often showing them up by the passionate profile of later material. As well as a simple 'disdain' for certain conventions, the quality may also be defined as an unwillingness on the composer's part to be heard to be spelling out any creative intentions, and a reluctance to give full elaboration to an affect (suggesting a strongly anti-Baroque orientation). It also seems that the composer is not seeking approval through musical 'good behaviour'. The pride and delight in technique shown by Mozart, for example, are foreign to Scarlatti; he is not so much a pragmatist as hostile to customary notions of craftsmanship. And so artistically, as well as indeed historically, the composer seems to prefer not to

[31] *Catalogue analytique de l'oeuvre pour clavier de Domenico Scarlatti: guide de l'intégrale enregistrée par Scott Ross* (Paris: Editions Costallat, 1987), 99. He also writes, perhaps less acutely, that 'this uncomplicated little sonata appears to be an experiment in the staggering of imitation voices'.

[32] See 'The Music of Domenico Scarlatti', in *Domenico Scarlatti: Große Jubiläen im Europäischen Jahr der Musik* (Kulturzentrum Beato Pietro Berno Ascona: Ausstellung 24 August–30 October 1985), second edn (German–English) (Locarno: Pedrazzini Editions, 1985), 84.

Ex. 1.4a K. 193 bars 1–49

belong to the club. This can be seen too in the shaping of the first five-bar unit. Given that Scarlatti does reuse its characteristic rhythm throughout the piece, can this unit be described as a ‘theme’? It comprises just a scrambled opening and then a cadence.

This question of terminology is again relevant to our immersion in nineteenth-century models for musical conduct. We are used to understanding theme as being cognate with idea. Of course, we would never expect the two to be identical, but in practice we would expect an opening theme to have a good deal to do with the creative ‘idea’ of a work. In Scarlatti, on the other hand, we have a composer who is almost uniquely offhand about his openings; only Haydn can compete in this

Ex. 1.4a (*cont.*)

respect. (With Haydn, though, obstacles are generally set up as a creative challenge to overcome. While this applies often enough to Scarlatti too, there can be another sense that the obstacles are there to throw us off his trail.) The ideas behind the music seem often to have nothing to do with any 'theme' that we can recognize, yet our intellectual habits tell us that any opening must be taken seriously and regarded as some sort of definitive or purposive creative statement.

Scarlatti in fact provides his own commentary on the opening 'theme'. At bar 6 he immediately moves away from the tonic, as if he wants to leave the mess behind. Tellingly, the syntax becomes very square and solid, with prefabricated units moving sequentially and by the circle of fifths. The parallel sixths of bars 10–12 and 18–20