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122 Recording of the Month



Federico Colli
Scarlatti Sonatas Vol. 2
 'Colli's springy touch... is marvellously responsive to the passing weather in this beautifully contrived landscape'

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Reviews

110 CDs, Books & DVDs rated by expert critics

Welcome



The idea of 'the difficult second album' seems to plague pop and rock artists, but I'm not sure classical musicians have the same problem. It's

certainly not the case for 12 Ensemble, whose fantastic second album *Death and the Maiden* receives a glowing five-star review this month. At its heart is Schubert's quartet arranged for string orchestra, and it sounds thrilling in the ensemble's hands. Then there's John Wilson and his Sinfonia of London; they follow their sensational Korngold debut (see November's 'Recording of the Month') with a very fragrant disc of French treasures – our Orchestral Choice. Plus there's this month's Chamber Choice, which sees Bach keyboard works reimagined by the viol consort Phantasm. It's Phantastic. **Michael Beek** *Reviews Editor*

This month's critics

John Allison, Nicholas Anderson, Michael Beek, Terry Blain, Kate Bolton-Porciatti, Gary Booth, Geoff Brown, Anthony Burton, Michael Church, Christopher Cook, Martin Cotton, Christopher Dingle, Misha Donat, Jessica Duchen, Rebecca Franks, Hannah French, George Hall, Malcolm Hayes, Julian Haylock, Claire Jackson, Daniel Jaffé, Erica Jeal, Berta Joncus, Erik Levi, Natasha Loges, Andrew McGregor, David Nice, Roger Nichols, Bayan Northcott, Steph Power, Anthony Pryer, Paul Riley, Jan Smaczny, Roger Thomas, Sarah Urwin Jones, Kate Wakeling, Helen Wallace

KEY TO STAR RATINGS

★★★★★ Outstanding
 ★★★★ Excellent
 ★★★ Good
 ★★ Disappointing
 ★ Poor

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RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Opposites attract in Colli's kaleidoscope

Michael Church is left dazzled by the Italian pianist's bewitching second volume of Scarlatti sonatas – and thirsty for more...



D Scarlatti

Keyboard Sonatas, Vol. 2 – Sonatas in G major, KK 63, 144, 427 & 431; F sharp minor, KK 25; F sharp major, KK 318; C minor, KK 40; G minor, KK 30 & 35; F minor, KK 466; E major, KK 531; D minor, KK 64; A major, KK 279; D major, KK 118; B minor; KK 87 & C major, KK 95

Federico Colli (piano)
 Chandos CHAN20134 62:42 mins

WDean Sutcliffe's erudite liner note points out that amid the many things we don't know about Domenico Scarlatti – there are no letters in his hand, no autographs of his sonatas – is how he wanted his sonatas to be paired, and it was apparently

his intention that they should be. The two most authoritative sources for these works pair them according to key, thus suggesting their intrinsic musical compatibilities.

Federico Colli, in his own liner note, offers a radically new rationale for pairing. Dispensing with similarity of key, he explains that his own pairings have been determined by his desire to present the sonatas in such a way as to embody his Platonic idea of the harmony of beauty through opposition. It's clear that no editor has had the temerity to rein in Colli's pseudo-philosophical prose, but behind his windy rhetoric there actually lurks an important insight. At the heart of Scarlatti's art, with its gritty dissonances, unsettling harmonic progressions and aggressively juxtaposed styles, lies that concept of opposition. Colli may present his chosen 16 sonatas as eight double ones, but there's just one pairing where the sonatas are so close in style and tone – KK 63 and 64 – that they might almost be twins.

Recording of the Month Reviews

BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE
CHOICE



Sonata reshuffle:
Federico Colli comes
up with new pairings

The rest are juxtaposed as complementary opposites.

Yet at one level, all this feels beside the point. To me – and probably to most other listeners – each sonata is a microcosm, a world in itself; when I listen to one of these perfect little works, I do so in and for the moment; I don't contrast it, either consciously or unconsciously, with what I may have just heard the moment before.

No, the real point of this recording is its wonderful pianism; and unlike many contemporary pianists – most notably Lucas Debarge – Colli takes no liberties with the text. We are led gently, KK 144 being played with demure delicacy before KK 427 is delivered with explosive brilliance, and KK 25 with

infectious joy. Then the kaleidoscope is shaken and shaken, creating a riveting hour, with most of the works being refreshingly unfamiliar. The three best-known ones are played bewitchingly: the repeats

The real point of this recording is Federico Colli's wonderful pianism

of KK 87 in B minor sing in winsome *sotto voce*; the almost atonal 'Cat's Fugue' becomes a massively muscular dance; the lyrical KK 466 in F minor – drawn out to nearly ten minutes, thus allowing its exquisitely leisurely ornamentation to fill the air – is so ravishing that I wished it went on even longer.

And there are surprises, too. KK 431 – all 16 bars of it lasts just 52 seconds; KK 95, which most scholars think is not by Scarlatti, rounds off the recording in Mozartian musical-box style, its end hanging in mid-phrase.

Colli's springy touch throughout is marvellously responsive to the passing weather in this beautifully contrived landscape: if he does a Ralph Kirkpatrick and records all 555 sonatas, I will be in the queue to get them.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Hear excerpts and a discussion of this recording on the monthly **BBC Music Magazine Podcast** available free on iTunes or classical-music.com

An interview with Federico Colli



Why did you decide to pair the sonatas in the way you have?

I felt that putting these sonatas together by tonality, harmony or speed was not enough for the complex personality and beauty of Scarlatti. Western countries have always thought that the negative has a positive value – think about Romantic music by Beethoven and Schumann; they create from opposition. I really wanted to show that in this earlier period, contrast is not a negative thing. These pairs of sonatas – and the cover of the album – follow this idea.

Do you think Scarlatti was ahead of his time?

I wouldn't say ahead of his time, but I'd love to say that because his music is so beautiful and so true, it's eternal. It is for me, for you, for my grandfather 60 years ago, it was for the beginning of the century; it's forever! Our purpose is to answer this vital question: why do we still need to play this music? In my opinion we need to find the present moment in this music. This music is as beautiful now as it was 200 years ago. And it will be beautiful in 300 years. That's the mystery and beauty of a masterpiece.

Have you come to know the man better through his music?

I was so surprised by his personality. Nobody told me that Scarlatti was so spectacular and so deep. People told me that Scarlatti was a very simple composer; a good composer to start with – little children could improve their skills and ability, and nothing more. And it was not true. I studied a lot and I believe I now have a clearer portrait of Scarlatti. I was so surprised and so happy to discover the beauty of this music.