

ALBUM REVIEW

## Federico Colli: Scarlatti review — a rollercoaster performance takes us into piano heaven

Also reviewed: Maurizio Pollini: Beethoven

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Maurizio Pollini

**Federico Colli**

Scarlatti

★★★★☆

**Maurizio Pollini**

Beethoven

★★★☆☆

Pianists, pianists; such a swarm of them. Three types stand out among the sub-species. There's the callow and shallow, proficient in technique, but lacking the imagination or experience to apply skills with insight or flair. Another category is the distinguished veteran, the hopeful beneficiary of accumulated wisdom in standard repertoire, provided that the fingers hold out. And don't forget the iconoclast, youngish and thrusting, champion of bold interpretations, someone who never takes any note lying down.

Someone, in fact, like Federico Colli. From the opening moments of his second volume of Scarlatti keyboard sonatas, played on a modern Steinway, I entered piano heaven. Touch, articulation, tone, phrasing; every element worked in step to create agile music-making alive with subtle emotions, conscious thought and all other signs of intelligent life.

Since this is volume two, none of these qualities should come as a surprise. Scarlatti's kaleidoscopic reach and adventurous quirks are perfect for Colli's talents. The new element is the programme's organisation, with 16 sonatas, running in length between 52 seconds and more than nine minutes, grouped into contrasting pairs. Key signatures may be shared; characterisation and mood, never. If one sonata is perky, the other is relaxed; if one is regal, the other could be a barn dance.

Typically, this Scarlatti rollercoaster ends not with any grand slam, but a probably spurious little piece (KK95, in C major) that comes to a stop rather than a conclusion. Will Colli pick up the thread in a volume three? I hope so, although with an evolving stellar pianist, and one with wide horizons, that is probably being greedy.

Switching to the veteran class, we find Colli's fellow Italian Maurizio Pollini offering late thoughts on Beethoven's three final piano sonatas. It's hard not to be touched by the nobility flowing through the concluding arietta of Op 111. It's equally hard not to be annoyed by the soft-focused recording, capturing a concert performance at the Herkulessaal in Munich. Fast passages sound particularly muddy; dynamic contrasts are smudged. I would advise listening to a younger Pollini, with crisper fingering, recorded in sunshine, not under a cloud. (*Chandos/Deutsche Grammophon*)