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RaymondOrchestra1/15/18Domenico ScarlattiAbout the Baroque Era:

Originally the term Baroque was derogatory as it meant “ misshapen pearl”.

This referred to the new exaggerated and ornate style of the period, which was at first frowned upon by music critics. It appears that the first reference of this word was in a satirical review of Hippolyte et Aricie, an opera. But the term was rarely used in the time period in which this music was composed and is more of a modern convention. The composer Giuseppe Domenico Scarlatti was a famous Italian harpsichordist, organist, and composer of the baroque period, transitioning into the classical period. He was born in 1685, on the same day as Johann Sebastian Bach and George Friedrich Handel, fellow baroque composers) in Naples (which was then part of Spain, but now is part of Italy).

Scarlatti was the sixth of ten children of composer and teacher Alessandro Scarlatti. Growing up in Naples he most likely studied under his father and Francesco Gasparini, a Venetian composer. Later, while in Venice it appears Scarlatti became a close friend of Handel. Scarlatti became a renowned harpsichordist during his teen years. He composed primarily for keyboard (harpsichord and early pianofortes).

Domenico Scarlatti began his career by writing operas, chamber cantatas, and other vocal music, but he is most remembered for his 555 keyboard sonatas, written between approximately 1719 and 1757. His harpsichord pieces are all unique without many unifying similarities, but contrasting textures and bold dissonance were focuses of his famous “ virtuoso

pieces”(sonatas). Earliest pieces he composed for the harpsichord appear to most likely be dance pieces, or in forms imitating what his father wrote.

He was made composer and organist of the royal chapel in Naples in 1701, at which time he would have been only 16 years old. It is known that he helped rewrite an opera in Naples in 1704. The next that is known of him is that he was in Rome in 1709 working as court composer for the exiled Polish queen Casimire and wrote several operas for her theater. During this time in Rome he also took part in a competition against Georg Friedrich Handel at the home of the Cardinal. Scarlatti won the prize for best harpsichordist and Handel won best organist.

Throughout his life Scarlatti held Handel in the highest respect as a musician. Until 1719 Domenico was maestro at the Basilica of St. Peter, and at some point after this he moved to London and produced an opera. After this period in Britain, Scarlatti began working for the court of Portugal as court composer and music teacher to the princess.

He returned to Rome in 1727 and married his wife Maria Caterina Gentili on 6 May 1728. In 1729 he moved to Seville (Spain), staying for four years. In 1733 he went to Madrid as music master to Princess Maria Barbara, who had married into the Spanish royal house. The Princess later became Queen of Spain. Scarlatti remained in the country for the remaining twenty-five years of his life, and had five children there. After the death of his first wife in 1742, he married a Spaniard, Anastasia Maxarti Ximenes. Among his compositions during his time in Madrid were a number of the 555 keyboard sonatas for which he is best known. In his lifetime he only published 30 of his

most famous works, his “ Exercises”, and they were well received throughout Europe.

He also wrote some operas, cantatas, symphonias, and religious pieces. Hundreds of his sonatas continued to be published in the centuries after his death. He is regarded as one of the great baroque composers, considered by many to be second only to Johann Sebastian Bach, and is known mainly for his “ Exercizi” and his 555 sonatas.

Scarlatti’s sonatas were of both the sonata da chiesa (that is, suitable for use in church), and the sonata da camera (proper for use at court). The court sonatas were usually followed by dances and all movements were in the same key. He also wrote fugues. The fugue is a compositional technique using two or more voices, built on a subject (a musical theme), that is introduced at the beginning in imitation (repetition at different pitches) and which recurs frequently in the course of the composition. A fugue usually has three sections. In the Middle Ages, the term was widely used to denote any works in canonic style; by the Renaissance, it had come to denote specifically imitative works. Since the 17th century, the term fugue has described what is commonly regarded as the most fully developed procedure of imitative counterpoint.

Sonata K. 141In this sonata as in most of Scarlatti’s sonatas, the main focus is the piano, or more likely in his time a harpsichord. This is one of his works which is characterized by the fast tempo, with many flourishes and a repetitive melody/pattern.

One of the highlights or focuses of this piece would be the many oscillations along the keyboard. This tends to be performed in a fast style which seems to emphasize the technical aspects of the piece and the skill of the player, more than bringing out the occasional more beautiful and musical aspects of the piece. I don't know how Scarlatti played it, maybe he did play it this fast also to thrill audiences with his technical ability.

Some of the lower parts sound mechanical to me like the sound of a train. Some of the right hand's flourishes have a lighter sound and are the more interesting part for me. This is one of Scarlatti's last pieces, dating from 1756-1757, which means it was written a year before, or the year that he died. K. 30 in g minorThe Cat's FugueThis piece is in another style used by Scarlatti, the fugue. Fugues flourished alongside the sonata during this time period.

It is an example of a slower Scarlatti's piece. One hears a strong repetitive base occasionally creeping up, much like a cat stalking prey, or walking on the keyboard, and a playful winding melody is heard constantly. The composition Date 1738-1739 means that this was written during Scarlatti's time in Spain.

This is my favorite piece that I'm mentioning in this paper. To me it just has an appealing pattern and sound, rather than some of his other more rapid pieces. One interesting thing about Scarlatti's works is that since only a limited number of them were published during his lifetime, the majority that we have were published from copies and many of his original notations may have been lost along the way. In other words, most performances are

interpretations. You can find them performed at different tempos, and with different dynamics, both on piano and harpsichord. Personally I usually prefer the piano to harpsichord, since the harpsichord has a characteristic plucking or twanging sound. But Scarlatti was famous for his harpsichord playing so listening to it on harpsichord I can imagine how it sounded in Scarlatti's own time.

K. 1 in D minor Again the many trill like sounds are prevalent in this third and final Scarlatti piece I'm examining. There are again many glissandos throughout this piece. The piece has a kind of bell-like sound, as in many of Scarlatti's court sonatas. This piece may be my least favorite of the three I'm reviewing in this paper.

For me there isn't a clear melody to draw me in, but more of just an ongoing pattern up and down the keyboard. It is a bit too jumpy and is just a bit abrasive and too repetitive. It sounds a little hyperactive and birdlike (like a woodpecker maybe?).

But it is kind of amazing that some of the trills really seem to resemble a bird. It isn't something with a singable tune that I would remember or any really catchy harmonies. It was first published in 1738 and was most likely written for the court of Spain.