

ANTONIO SOLER

SIX CONCERTI FOR
TWO KEYBOARDS

PHILIPPE LEROY &
JORY VINKOUR, HARPSICHORDS

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Concerto No. 1 in C Major (9:29)

1. Andante (4:53)
2. Minué (4:36)

Concerto No. 2 in A Minor (16:44)

3. Andante (7:04)
4. Allegro (4:15)
5. Tempo de Minué (5:25)

Concerto No. 3 in G Major (12:28)

6. Andantino (5:38)
7. Minué (6:50)

Concerto No. 4 in F Major (11:24)

8. Affettuoso – Andante non largo (4:37)
9. Minué (6:47)

Concerto No. 5 in A Major (12:37)

10. Cantabile (3:20)
11. Minué (9:17)

Concerto No. 6 in D Major (11:30)

12. Allegro – Andante –
Allegro – Andante (3:58)
13. Minué (7:32)

Total Playing Time: 74:15

Antonio Soler i Ramos (1729-1783) was baptized in Olot in the Comtat de Besalú of Catalunya on December 3, 1729. About that detail there is widespread consensus among historians and musicologists; but they rarely agree about further elements of the life and work of the composer best known since the late eighteenth century as **Padre Soler**. Like Johann Sebastian Bach, Soler's somewhat equally evasive contemporary during most of his first twenty years, what is known beyond any historical doubt is Soler's importance to the development of music for the keyboard from the virginals of the late Renaissance to the modern piano. Indeed, the parallels between Bach and Soler are telling. Bach's so-called English and French Suites for the harpsichord – works of which the musicians featured in this recording, Philippe LeRoy and Jory Vinikour, are acknowledged masters – are as comprehensive a body of work for the harpsichord as any composed during the eighteenth century. In that regard, Soler is recognized – along with Bach, the Couperins, and Rameau – as one of the founding fathers of his nation's distinctive style of music for the keyboard.

Tracing Soler's journey from Olot to service as *maestro de capilla* at the San Lorenzo el Real de El Escorial monastery is a Quixotic undertaking – perhaps fitting for an artist of Spanish origin. According to records, the six-year-old future composer enrolled at the Escolanía of the Benedictine abbey of Santa María de Montserrat in 1736. The young Soler's blossoming musical prowess was nurtured by the Escolan-

ía's resident maestri of the period, *maestro de capilla* Benito Esteve and organist Benito Valls, about whom almost nothing else is remembered.

In 1744 he was appointed as organist of Catedral del Santa María de Urgel, where one of the composers whose work likely exerted a strong influence on Soler's own liturgical music, fellow Catalan – by adoption, at least – Joan Brudieu, was *maestro de capilla* for more than four decades in the sixteenth century. Soler's appointment at the age of fourteen suggests both that he was precocious and that his artistic development was rapid. It is also alleged that the adolescent Soler was named organist at an unspecified "Santa Iglesia" in Lleida; but which, if any, of the town's churches employed him is unknown.

It was perhaps in 1752 that Soler first encountered Sebastià de Victoria Emparán y Loyola, the Bishop of Urgell, who, in addition to occupying the bishop's throne from 1747 until 1756, had previously served as a Prior of the Hieronymite community at the royal compound Monasterio y Sitio de El Escorial en Madrid, the seat of the Hapsburg and later Borbón ruling families since the reign of Felipe II. Asked by the Bishop to recommend a young man to be sent to El Escorial monastery as an organist, Soler reputedly – and for unknown reasons – volunteered himself.

In Soler's obituary in *Memorias sepulcrales*, the annals of mortality within the San Lorenzo el

Real de El Escorial monastery, an anonymous chronicler recounts that by his twenty-third birthday, Soler had embraced the rigors of monastic life as a novice, fully professing a year later. And what rigors they were! Typical days as a Hieronymite brother found Soler performing his ecclesiastical and musical duties for up to twenty hours, allowing only four hours for repose. After maintaining such a schedule, except for a few periods when his work was interrupted by illness, it is remarkable not only that Soler's compositional output extended to more than 500 pieces but also that anyone in the monastery's austere setting could persist at such an exhausting pace for thirty-one years.

During those three decades, Soler clearly endeared himself to his brothers. Less than two years after his arrival at El Escorial, he secured from the monastery a substantial annual pension for his father, a respected regimental musician, and he seems to have risen uncontested to the post of *maestro de capilla* either following the 1757 death or retirement of his predecessor, Padre Gabriel de Moratilla. (Some sources suggest that Padre de Moratilla died at El Escorial in 1788.) Furthermore, the monastery financed publication of Soler's seminal 1762 treatise *Llave de la modulación y antigüedades de la música*, which received a controversial response, inspiring Soler to correspond with the famous pedagogue Giovanni Battista Martini, seeking support for his theories. Soler's missive addressed to Padre Martini in Bologna – in comically poor Italian – survives, but there is no concrete proof that the esteemed Padre

Martini replied. In the unsigned remembrance of Padre Soler published in *Memorias sepulcrales* after his death on December 20, 1783, the composer was affectionately praised for his altruism and virtue.



Originally designated as **Seis Conciertos de dos Organos Obligados compuestos por el Pe. Fr. Antonio Soler** and dedicated “para la diversion del Smo. Infante de España Dn. Gabriel de Bourbon,” Soler's **Six Concerti for Two Keyboards** did not appear in print until the third series of the Barcelona-based Instituto Español de Musicología's (now the musicological arm of Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas) *Musica Hispana II* was published incrementally between 1952 and 1962. It is commonly asserted that the *Six Concerti* were composed circa 1770, but any evidence regarding what and who inspired them is circumstantial at best.

One of the foremost enigmas of Soler's musical evolution is the question of whether he studied with his older Neapolitan colleague Domenico Scarlatti. The last quarter century of Scarlatti's life was spent in Spain, where he was *maestro de música* to first Princess and then Queen Consort María Bárbara. During the reign of María Bárbara's husband Fernando VI, the Spanish court relocated to El Escorial each autumn, accompanied by Scarlatti. María Bárbara's tenure as Queen Consort continued until August 1758, slightly more than a year after

Scarlatti's death, so it is feasible that Scarlatti was in residence with the Borbón court at El Escorial each autumn from 1752 to 1757, years that coincided with Soler's monastic career. Though he wrote admiringly of "Don Scarlatti" in *Llave de la modulación y antiedades de la música*, Soler did not credit Scarlatti among his teachers. Whether the omission was one of accuracy or modesty is impossible to ascertain. Stylistic kinship among Soler's and Scarlatti's oeuvres for keyboard is often cited as proof of the claims that the younger composer studied with the elder; but their similar styles could just as credibly be attributed to cultural osmosis.

In late 1758, less than a year before Carlos III's ascension to the Spanish throne, Soler was appointed harpsichord tutor to the eventual Infante, Don Gabriel de Borbón. Like Soler at the start of his Escalonia schooling, Don Gabriel was six years old when his studies with Soler began. The young Infante's imagination was obviously stoked by his work with Soler: by the time that smallpox ended his short life in 1788, the Infante had amassed an impressive collection of musical instruments that included a rare *vis à vis* organ housed in the basilica at El Escorial. A specially made instrument featuring two consoles on opposite sides of a single cabinet containing the pipes and bellows, the organ's configuration enabled a pair of musicians to play simultaneously. This capability qualifies the curious organ as a leading candidate as the instrument for which the *Six Concerti* on this disc were composed. But the organ's compass largely adheres to the parameters common in

conventional organs of the time, which complicates definitively associating the instrument with these concerti, as Soler's writing covers an exceptionally wide range. Still, the logical conclusion, legitimized by the composer's dedication in the manuscript, is that Soler intended the *Six Concerti* for performance by himself and his star pupil, Don Gabriel, described by contemporary accounts as a first-rate virtuoso.

The *Six Concerti for Two Keyboards* have an interesting sequence of keys. Concerti One and Two are respectively in C major and its relative A minor, Three and Four are in the adjacent keys of G major and F major, and Five and Six are in the dominant and tonic keys of A major and D major. Whether this suggests that the *Six Concerti* were conceived for performance in pairs is open to interpretation, but the progression of keys engenders an organic flow not unlike those of Bach's *Wohltemperierte Klavier* and Chopin's Op. 10 and Op. 25 *Études*. As performed here on harpsichords, the clever construction of the alternating *primo* and *secondo* parts is strikingly apparent, especially as managed by these players, who observe all of Soler's indicated repeats, enhancing an appreciation of the skill with which Soler composed these intimate, but spirited – and quintessentially Spanish – concerti.

With contrasting Andante and Minué (Minuet and four variations) movements, **Concerto No. 1 in C Major** is an elegant piece that excludes the formal but electric atmosphere of the Spanish court. Only **Concerto No. 2 in A Mi-**

nor deviates from the two-movement structure – its Andante, Allegro, and Tempo de Minué being both entertaining and expressive in equal measures. **Concerto No. 3 in G Major** begins with a lightly textured Andantino that gives way to a sprightly Minué (Minuet and six variations) requiring players' fingers to dance over the keyboards. The Affettuoso – Andante non largo and Minué (Minuet and four variations) movements of **Concerto No. 4 in F Major** are delightfully piquant, with the Spanish flavors of the music stimulating the musical palate. With its lovely Cantabile and vibrant Minué (Minuet and seven variations), **Concerto No. 5 in A Major** is the most emotionally demonstrative of the concerti, its dynamic extremes evocative of the characteristic antipodes of the Spanish temperament. The sixth **Concerto, in D Major**, is arguably the most musically adventurous of the concerti: Soler's manipulations of tempos and rhythmic figurations in its Allegro – Andante – Allegro – Andante and Minué (Minuet and four variations) movements reveal an intelligence equal to the most gifted of his contemporaries.

Details of composers' lives are invaluable resources in providing contexts for their music. In essence, though, music either is good or is not. These *Six Concerti for Two Keyboards* are unquestionably good music. As played on this disc by two extraordinary musicians, which elusive biographical facts could tell us more about Padre Antonio Soler than these delectable fruits of his genius?

— Joseph Newsome



After simultaneously studying harpsichord with Kenneth Gilbert at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris, where he was awarded a *premier prix*, and earning a degree in musicology at the Sorbonne, gifted harpsichordist, organist, and musicologist **Philippe LeRoy** continued his studies with revered pedagogue Huguette Dreyfus. In addition to special studies under the tutelage of Early Music pioneer Gustav Leonhardt, he participated as an honors student in the prestigious and competitive postgraduate department of the Paris Conservatory, the *Troisième cycle/cycle de perfectionnement*, in which he took part in the fortepiano class of Patrick Cohen.

An organ student of Olivier Latry and scholar of Baroque organ repertoire under the supervision of Gilbert and Leonhardt, Philippe has participated in summer courses offered by several respected European institutions, including Sienna's Accademia Musicale Chigiana, Académie musicale de Villecroze, and Académie musicale de Clisson. In 1998, he received the top prize of the International Harpsichord Competition in Warsaw, followed in 2000 by victory in the Twelfth Bach Competition in Leipzig, where he was also awarded the Mitteldeutscher Rundfunks Special Audience Prize. Philippe has been heard in performance as a solo harpsichordist throughout Europe and as an organist specializing in Baroque repertoire, where he favors French, Spanish, and Italian music of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.



He has performed on France Musique/Radio France on several occasions, and his début recording was sponsored by the French Association for Artistic Action (now Culture France) as part of their series *Declic*, dedicated to young French winners of international music competitions. From that start, his subsequent recordings have received numerous accolades: his 2007 recording of the rarely heard complete works of Armand-Louis Couperin on the Syrius label was named Best Instrumental Recording of the Year by online magazine *NewOlde.com*, and his recordings of J. S. Bach's concerti for two and four harpsichords under the direction of Didier Talpain and virtuoso sonatas by Sebastián de Albero and Padre Antonio Soler were welcomed with rave reviews. In addition to his concertizing on harpsichord and organ, Philippe is Director of Programming for Milwaukee-based Great Lakes Baroque.



The career of internationally acclaimed harpsichordist and conductor **Jory Vinikour** has taken him from his native Chicago to performance venues on five continents. Following studies in Paris with Huguette Dreyfus and Kenneth Gilbert as a Fulbright scholar, he garnered First Prizes in the Warsaw and Prague Spring Festival International Harpsichord Competitions, which catapulted him to public attention. As a concert artist, Jory's repertoire ranges from the Baroque works that are harpsichordists' typical fare to masterworks of the twentieth century and music for harpsichord by twenty-first cen-

tury composers, several of whom have written works especially for him. He has worked with a number of the world's leading orchestras and conductors, including performances under the batons of Marek Janowski, Armin Jordan, Fabio Luisi, Marc Minkowski, John Nelson, and Constantine Orbelian. Equally celebrated as a recital accompanist and vocal coach, Jory has shared stages with artists of the calibre of David Daniels, Vivica Genaux, Magdalena Kožená, Annick Massis, Anne Sofie von Otter, Dorothea Röschmann, and Rolando Villazón.

Jory's work as a continuo player and répétiteur has found him taking part in productions in many of the world's greatest opera houses and concert halls. Recent theatrical engagements include harpsichord continuo for Telemann's *Don Quichotte auf der Hochzeit des Comacho* with Chicago's Haymarket Opera and musical preparation for Salzburg Festival's August 2015 production of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* with Cecilia Bartoli, Rolando Villazón, and Christopher Maltman.

His association with Les Musiciens du Louvre Grenoble is documented on several critically lauded recordings. His continuo playing is heard on Deutsche Grammophon's recording of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* with Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Yannick Nézet-Séguin and also distinguish the label's account of *Le nozze di Figaro*, recorded in concert in July 2015. Alongside successful recordings of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, Toccatas, and Sonatas for flute and harpsichord,



and Händel's 1720 Suites for harpsichord, Jory's recordings of the complete harpsichord works of Jean-Philippe Rameau and *Toccatas*, a disc of modern American music for harpsichord, received Grammy Award nominations for Best Classical Instrumental Solo.

In September 2015, Jory took part in the inaugural performance of Great Lakes Baroque, an organization of which he is a founding member and Artistic Director. November 2015 found him in Norway for performances of Benjamin Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Bergen National Opera and a special "Symfonisk marathon" concert in which he directed the Bergen Filharmoniske Orkester. In December 2015, he was heard in New York in a sold-out solo recital at Carnegie Hall. Jory made his début as a conductor of opera with a production of Händel's *Agrippina* for West Edge Opera in Berkeley, California, in August 2016. His current plans include conducting Purcell's *Fairy Queen* for Chicago Opera Theater in November of 2016.



The Harpsichords

Harpsichords by John Phillips, Berkeley, California, 1993 (Mr. Vinikour) and 2011, courtesy of David Cates (Mr. LeRoy), after 18th-century Florentine originals

The 18th-century Florentine harpsichords represent the height of Italian harpsichord making. Spare in architectural detail and

musical frivolity, they manage to wring the very most out of the Italian traditional design with their brilliant singing trebles and their clear and powerful basses. A number of important builders may be associated with these instruments, including Bartolomeo Cristofori – better known as the inventor of the piano – as well as his students and followers.

Florentine pianos seem to have first appeared on the Iberian Peninsula coincidentally with Domenico Scarlatti's arrival in Lisbon in 1719. Recent research by John Koster and others has shown that Florentine harpsichords were also imported, and the two types of instruments were used side by side until very late in the 18th century. Eventually, however, the local harpsichord makers adapted the Florentine style of building – heavy-cased, single-manual instruments, with two unison registers strung in brass – to their native traditions in Portugal and Spain.

Today a number of Portuguese instruments survive that are native interpretations of Florentine designs. Unfortunately, no Spanish harpsichords in this Florentine-based style survive, although there is ample evidence of their existence through invoices, inventories, and the music itself.

– John Phillips

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Assistant engineer: Dann Thompson

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Booklet editing: Anne Maley

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Spanish, 1746–1828

Boy on a Ram, 1786–87

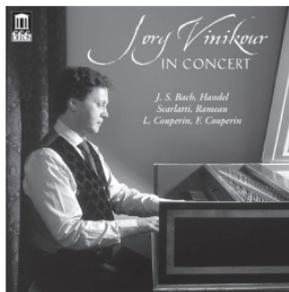
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Also Available — with Jory Vinikour, harpsichord



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Jory Vinikour in Concert



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Dedicated to the memory of Jory Prum, a true lover of everything musical and creative.

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