



**Antonio
SOLER**

**Sonatas
for Harpsichord
(Complete)
Volume 1**

**Gilbert Rowland,
Harpsichord**

Antonio Soler (1729 - 1783)

Sonatas for Harpsichord (Complete) Vol. 1

Owing mainly to the tireless efforts of the late Father Samuel Rubio and other editors in making many of his works available in print during the past forty years, Antonio Soler is now justly regarded as the most important composer active in Spain during the second half of the eighteenth century. He was born at Olot, in the province of Gerona in north-eastern Spain in 1729 and baptised on 3rd December. At the age of six he entered the famous choir school at the Monastery of Montserrat where he studied organ and composition. Before that he probably received some tuition from his father, who was a regimental bandsman. In 1744 he was appointed organist at the cathedral in Seo de Urgel and was later ordained as subdeacon there.

At that time the bishop of Urgel asked him if he knew of a boy who could play the organ and who wished to take holy orders at the Escorial. Soler volunteered himself, saying that he very much wanted to take the vows and retreat from the world, and so on 25th September 1752 he became a monk and entered that famous monastery near Madrid, built by Philip II. He also became master of the Chapel there, probably in 1757 following the death of his predecessor, Gabriel de Moratilla. Soler remained there until his death in 1783.

During the years 1752 to 1757 Soler is reputed to have studied composition with Domenico Scarlatti and many of Soler's sonatas show his influence to a marked degree both in form and musical language. Despite his probable debt to Scarlatti, however, Soler's own personality is very much in evidence in these works. Many of these sonatas like Scarlatti's are single movements in binary form, that is, in two sections, each of which is repeated, although Soler also composed a large number of multi-movement sonatas. It is quite possible that he was one of the copyists of some of the manuscript volumes of Scarlatti's sonatas, now housed in Venice and Parma.

Fortunately for posterity Soler's wish for a quiet life did not work out quite as he intended. Apart from his monastic duties he was expected to train the choir, provide choral music for services, and provide the Royal family with secular and instrumental music during their frequent visits to the Escorial. The Spanish court regularly spent the autumn there. Soler's huge output runs to nearly 500 individual works, including ten masses, sixteen motets, fifty psalms, 28 hymns, nine Magnificats, fourteen litanies, seventeen lamentations for Holy week, 21 pieces for funeral services, 128 cantatas and *Villancicos*, which combine singing with instrumental accompaniment, dancing and theatrical effect, 22 theatre works, six quintets for string quartet with harpsichord or organ obligato, six concertos for two organs, a fandango, and about 150 keyboard sonatas, most of which were intended for harpsichord.

Soler was also interested in theory and the history of music. In 1762 he published a treatise on modulation entitled *Llave de la Modulación* which started some heated arguments in Spain among musical theorists of the time. One of its staunchest defenders was the Italian composer, Padre Martini of Bologna (1706 - 1784), with whom Soler frequently corresponded during the years 1765 to 1771, and in 1766 he mentioned in a letter that he had begun a six-volume work on the history of church music. Five years later he wrote to say the work was nearly completed. His interest and expertise in tuning is demonstrated by his construction of an "Afinador" or tuning-machine, which divided a tone into nine parts and was meant to show the difference between a major and minor semitone. He was also an expert on organ construction and his advice was sought on the building of new organs for Málaga and Seville Cathedrals. Among his writings not related to music was a book on Castilian and Catalan currency exchange rates which he produced in 1771. No portrait of Soler exists. Martini requested one for his gallery of great musicians, but unfortunately the Spanish monk modestly declined.

Soler's achievement is even more astonishing considering that much of his day would have been taken up with prayer and the routine of the community.

Periods of illness often prevented him from working. On at least two occasions he complains in his letters to Martini that he is suffering from malaria. We learn from the anonymous obituary of Soler, written by a fellow monk on the day he died, that he survived on only four hours sleep most nights, often retiring at midnight or one o'clock in the morning before rising at four of five o'clock to say Mass. He often resented having to leave his cell when duty called, and even during recreation periods he often took all his writing materials with him so that he could continue composing. Mention is also made of his religious devotion, compassionate nature, scholarly interests and excessive candour. Soler died at the Escorial on 20th December, 1783 from a gradually worsening fever which he had caught the previous month.

A large number of Soler's instrumental works, including many of the sonatas, were composed for the Infante Don Gabriel (1752 - 1788), son of Carlos III, whom Soler served as music master from the mid 1760s. Some of the most lively and exuberant keyboard music ever composed is contained in many of these sonatas, in marked contrast to the austere and sombre surroundings where they were written. As with Scarlatti, Spanish folk-song and dance elements feature prominently in many of Soler's sonatas. He had a very personal way of stringing together short groups of motifs and repeated phrases as well as having a highly original gift for modulation. Soler was much influenced by the changing musical fashions of the second half of the eighteenth century and some of the single-movement sonatas, as well as the four-movement works dating from the late 1770s and early 1780s approach the Viennese classical school in musical language. Soler used Alberti bass figurations much more frequently than Scarlatti. There are also a large number of slow movements amongst the single-movement works which contain some of his most profound and memorable music. There are well over a hundred single-movement works, three two-movement sonatas, eleven four-movement works, and a set of six three-movement sonatas intended for organ. Nearly all of these were published by Rubio between 1957 and 1972. As with Scarlatti,

none of these works survive in the composer's hand. Soler's sonatas are scattered throughout some fifty manuscript sources with one printed edition. The principal sources are manuscript copies housed in the Escorial, the Monastery of Montserrat, the Biblioteca central de Barcelona, a manuscript containing 29 sonatas belonging to the private library of Paul Guinard, Director of the French Institute in Madrid, a late eighteenth century English publication of 27 sonatas collected by Lord Fitzwilliam, who visited Soler in 1772, and the Madrid Conservatory Manuscript containing twelve sonatas. Only sonatas composed after 1777 have dates attached and all of these are multi-movement works. Soler also claimed to have written four books of harpsichord sonatas by 1765.

Recent research has shown that, as in the case of Scarlatti, many of the single-movement sonatas were intended to be played as pairs, though this is not always apparent in Rubio's edition, except in the case of Rubio Nos. 1 - 27, which follows the same numerical sequence as the previously mentioned English edition. Many of Soler's sonatas make use of the full five-octave compass and were probably originally played on a 63-key harpsichord with a compass from F to g'' which Diego Fernández built for the Infante Don Gabriel in 1761.

March-like rhythm characterize the beginning and end of both sections of the lively, spirited work *Sonata No. 1 in A major*. Ascending and descending scales feature prominently as do repeated notes and chords suggestive of Spanish guitar strumming.

Sonatas Nos. 85 and 90 in F sharp minor and F major are one of the rare instances of minor / major paired sonatas among Soler's output. Like some of Scarlatti's works No. 85 begins with imitation between the hands which is soon abandoned in favour of a more harmonic texture, and there are some lively syncopated rhythms. No. 90 is an exhilarating Spanish dance of much virtuosity and contains some remarkable modulations. The first half presents three distinct ideas including a memorable hand-crossing passage near the end

of both halves which has been likened to a Catalonian folk-song. New material is introduced at the start of the second section, and the opening figure developed at the beginning of the work appears at the end of both halves, thus making it one of Soler's more unified pieces.

Sonata No. 110 in D flat major is one of Soler's most heartfelt and lyrical slow movements. Some of the exotic harmonics and modulations arise through use of the Phrygian mode, which is an important feature of Spanish music.

Sonatas Nos. 54 and 15 in D minor are both rhythmically lively works, the first achieving its drive and momentum partly by the use of downward moving scale passages, and the second being very much a virtuoso work with its pounding Spanish rhythms and frequent hand-crossings. The texture is often enriched by added octaves in the bass, the guitar often suggested by rapid broken chord patterns, and the influence of flamenco is strongly felt.

Sonata No. 101 in F major is a buoyant Spanish dance in 6/8 time, with frequent use of open fifths in the bass suggesting the drone of bagpipes. There are some Scarlattian leaps in both hands towards the end of each section.

Sonatas Nos. 18 and 19 in C minor are in a key that seems to have been one of Soler's favourite keys for writing poignant slow movements and the first sonata of this pair is no exception with its wistful lyricism enhanced by sparse textures. Again there are some bagpipe drone effects. With No. 19 imitation in the manner of a fugue is abandoned after the first four bars. Scales, arpeggios, passages in thirds, chromaticism, and repeated notes all contribute to the forward momentum and varied figuration. Use of the Phrygian mode gives some passages a very Spanish flavour, particularly the passage starting at bar 13 which also opens the second half.

Sonata No. 43 in G major is a brilliant, flamboyant piece, demonstrating Soler's love of rapid repeated notes, wide leaps, and figurations derived from broken chords and arpeggios. After the double bar there is an abrupt

transition from D major to B flat, and the repeated note passage together with other material heard in the first half is developed in the second.

Sonata No. 91 in C major is the first of a set of six four-movement sonatas (Op. 4) dating from 1779, although some of the individual movements of these works existed as single-movement sonatas in earlier copies. By this time Soler had virtually moved away from the influence of Scarlatti, and although there are a few Spanish dance-type pieces among this collection where his influence is still present, it is mainly the international styles represented by people like Boccherini, who had been employed at the Spanish court from 1768, and Haydn which dominate these late works. In each of the Op. 4 set the slow movement is placed first, a device Haydn adopted in some of his earlier symphonies, followed by a fast movement, a pair of contrasted minuets, and a lively finale often headed *Pastoril*.

In the case of No. 91 an *Andantino con moto* of much grace and charm is followed by a vigorous, driving *Allegro di molto* with full, almost orchestral sounding textures. Tremolando effects in the bass feature prominently here. The first of the *Minuets*, containing many of Soler's characteristic turns of phrase calls to mind similar movements from the six concertos for two organs, while the much faster second minuet features some of the composer's unique harmonic twists. The drive and exuberance of the *Allegro Pastoril* which follows, with its folk-like melodies and dashing runs, forms a brilliant conclusion not only to this sonata but to this group of sonatas as a whole.

© 1996 Gilbert Rowland

Gilbert Rowland

Gilbert Rowland was born in Glasgow in 1946. He studied the harpsichord with Millicent Silver at the Royal College of Music and made his début while still a student at Fenton House, following this quickly with recitals at the Wigmore Hall. Further recitals at the Purcell Room, Greenwich Festival, the 1985 Scarlatti Festival in Berlin, together with frequent broadcasts for BBC Radio 3, have established his reputation as one of the country's leading harpsichordists. His recordings of works by Soler and Fischer and his numerous Scarlatti recordings have received considerable acclaim from the musical press.

DDD

Playing
Time:
71'07"

8.553462

STEREO

Antonio
SOLER
(1729 - 1783)**Sonatas for Harpsichord (Complete) Vol. 1**
Gilbert Rowland, Harpsichord

- | | | | | | |
|----------|---------------------------------------|--------|-----------|---|--------|
| 1 | Sonata No. 1 in A Major | (4:12) | 9 | Sonata No. 19 in C Minor | (5:42) |
| 2 | Sonata No. 85 in F Sharp Minor | (5:23) | 10 | Sonata No. 43 in G Major | (3:41) |
| 3 | Sonata No. 90 in F Sharp Major | (4:34) | | Sonata No. 91 in C Major (Op. 4, No. 1, 1779) | |
| 4 | Sonata No. 110 in D Flat Major | (6:58) | 11 | Andante con moto | (8:20) |
| 5 | Sonata No. 54 in D Minor | (3:36) | 12 | Allegro di molto | (5:00) |
| 6 | Sonata No. 15 in D Minor | (4:09) | 13 | Minuetto I (Andante maestoso); Minuetto II (Allegro) | (3:40) |
| 7 | Sonata No. 101 in F Major | (4:03) | 14 | Allegro pastoril | (4:26) |
| 8 | Sonata No. 18 in C Minor | (7:21) | | | |
- (Sonata numbering from the Rubio Edition)

Recorded in Epsom College Concert Hall, Surrey,
from 3rd to 5th July, 1995.

Producer / Engineer: John Taylor

Music Notes: Gilbert Rowland

French style two-manual harpsichord by David Rubio, 1976.

Harpsichord tuned and prepared by Andrew Wooderson.

Cover Painting: Portrait of Mariana Waldstein by Goya

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIOALL RIGHTS RESERVED. UNAUTHORISED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE,
BROADCASTING AND COPYING OF THIS COMPACT DISC PROHIBITED.
© 1996 HNH International Ltd.
© 1996 HNH International Ltd.
DISTRIBUTED BY: MVD MUSIC AND VIDEO DISTRIBUTION GmbH,
OBERWEG 21C-HALLE V, D-83008 UNTERHACHING, MUNICH, GERMANY.

IC 5537

NAXOS



7 30099 44622 8