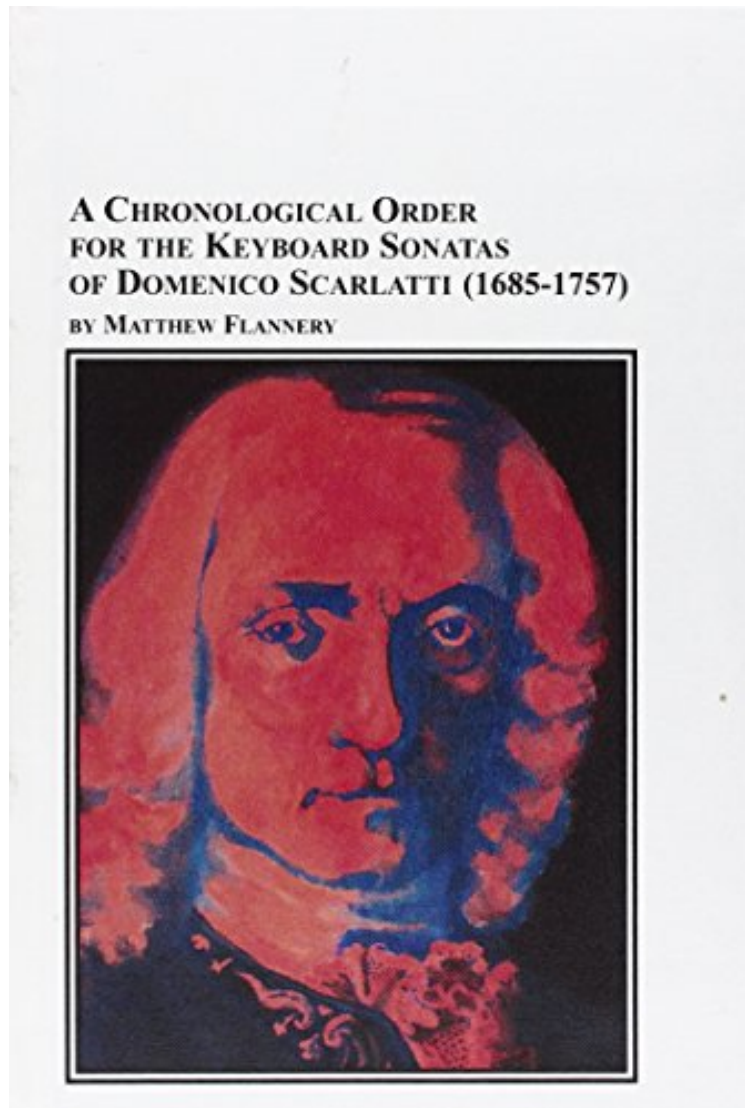


(Ebook free) A Chronological Order for the Keyboard Sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti 1685-1757 (Studies in the History and Interpretation of Music)

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Matthew Flannery

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Matthew Flannery : A Chronological Order for the Keyboard Sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti 1685-1757 (Studies in the History and Interpretation of Music) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Chronological Order for the Keyboard Sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti 1685-1757

(Studies in the History and Interpretation of Music):

In the data-poor arena of Scarlatti research, this work, avoiding a primarily musicological or organological approach, analyzes large-scale patterns of musical characteristics over all (or parts) of a sonata sequence founded primarily on the Parma manuscript. Preface Stephen Dydo This monograph is in some ways the strangest example of music theory I have ever seen. It doesn't talk about music in the usual sense. There is not, anywhere within its covers, a single musical example. Nor is there an analysis of a single musical phrase. No individual note is ever here discussed. What's more, we don't hear very much at all about particular pieces. On the other hand, the composer under discussion does fleetingly enter in, and we might find, for example, that the harpsichords he played earlier in life don't seem to have had as many keys as the ones he played later. But these brief walk-ons are not, in any real sense, biographical. The pertinent facts are mentioned, and then the composer, as a living, breathing man, is dismissed from our presence. Our relationship with him is occasional and occurs at a great remove. What this monograph is about, really, is a mass of music. In particular, it is about the mass of music that is Domenico Scarlatti's extant opus for the keyboard. (We do not say "entire opus" because the point of this study is to characterize the most significant part of his work.) Furthermore, this mass of music is discussed, not as a collection of some 550 solo keyboard pieces, but rather as the mass itself. The individual piece is discussed, on the infrequent occasions when the discussion zooms in even this closely, only as an element that helps to shape the mass of which it is a part. Individual pieces are frequently referenced, but generally only to note their keys or tempo markings. Again, these features are delineated only to define the shape of their enclosing aggregate mass. The size and ingredients of the mass are partly what make this discussion so unusual. A discussion of Beethoven's late quarters, say, involves us with an aggregation of pieces that we can easily visualize and, given a little time, audition in our mind's ear. Even a discussion of Bach cantatas involves us with a group of musical entities that are reasonably delineated from one another, at least by title, text, instrumentation, and so forth. However, in the case of Domenico Scarlatti's sonatas, we are dealing with 550 pieces all written for essentially the same instrument, all of them about the same length, and all having a similar structure. (The cases where there are differences in structure only become further tools for defining the shape of the enclosing mass.) To imagine all of these pieces at once requires a vision not unlike that described in Wallace Stevens' *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*: Among twenty snowy peaks, the only moving thing was the eye of the blackbird. Vision of such scope is beyond most of us without a stretch of the imagination. Fortunately, as readers, we can let Matthew Flannery do the imagining for us, while we sit and watch the view. This is the landscape that we can see: a huge expanse, a collection of many, many hours of listening. We don't get a sense of peaks and valleys, but rather of slowly changing surfaces, changing in one detail, then another, in a gradual fashion. The occasional jagged abruption stands out in relief simply because of the overall smoothness of the landscape. The putative goal of this monograph is the establishment of a chronology for Scarlatti's keyboard works. The precise chronological sequence of creation of each of the 554 sonatas is not indicated by any of the published editions from Scarlatti's time, nor is there any documentary evidence from other sources that is useful in dating the sonatas. Therefore, the only way we can reasonably hope to give relative dates to these pieces is by examining the internal evidence. Yet, is it not enough for us to know that his early career focused heavily on operatic works, to the extent that we have mostly operatic or other vocal works from the early part of his career, with few extant keyboard works to speak of; and that the extant keyboard pieces were mostly written in the later part of his career, at a time when he was not, so far as we know, burdened with many other compositional tasks? Surely, this fact by itself would give us plenty to chew on while ruminating through his massive body of keyboard sonatas. Flannery's principal tool in his broad analysis is the delineation of various stratified patterns that run through the sequence. These features, or "occurrence patterns" and "sonata groups," involve a wide range of characteristics: pitch range, tempo, rate of unfolding, style, formal structure, notation style, etc. In the end, Flannery delineates 28 occurrence patterns and 26 sonata groups in his analysis. Each of these is presented as a type of activity that occurs more often, or in a more particular way, in some sonatas than others. We are presented, one after another, with new layers of activity and then are escorted through the various permutations of each layer. This kind of analysis is at odds with the type that we expect to be applied to a single piece. Although a thoughtful examination of a particular work of music will very likely, perhaps at the outset, review the core vocabulary of the composition - even describing what occurrence patterns and what sonata group are fundamental to such a work -, it is more often the singularity of that piece that sparks our interest. The number of A major chords in a piece in D, the number of repetitions of the first and second theme in a sonata-allegro composition, the relative prominence of arpeggiated chords: these are all, in effect, background to the stuff that makes us listen to the same piece repeatedly. The singular events - the one and only appearance of the first theme in the relative minor, the unique stretto passage, the reappearance of the fugal subject in the "wrong" transposition - these are the sort of thing that makes us sit at attention. So why should the caring and attentive listener find joy in the remote view of an entire life's work, with the seductive details blurred from the distance? Isn't our core musical experience based on the building up of a musical view based on the succession of individual and discrete

events? Yet, the reverse process, focusing on the tectonic movement of massively instanced occurrence patterns, only occasionally drilling down to something as localized as a particular piece, is enormously satisfying when applied to such large spans of music because, as Flannery writes, it "can paint in our minds something that our view of the keyboard sonatas has lacked till now: a temporal landscape of the origins and development of the highest achievement of Scarlatti's composing career."

"What this monograph is about, really, is a mass of music. In particular, it is about the mass of music that is Domenico Scarlatti's extant opus for the keyboard. (We do not say "entire opus" because the point of this study is to characterize the most significant part of his work.) Furthermore, this mass of music is discussed, not as a collection of some 550 solo keyboard pieces, but rather as the mass itself.... The size and ingredients of the mass are partly what make this discussion so unusual..... Vision of such scope is beyond most of us without a stretch of the imagination. Fortunately, as readers, we can let Matthew Flannery do the imagining for us, while we sit and watch the view. This is the landscape that we can see: a huge expanse, a collection of many, many hours of listening." - (From the Preface) Stephen Dydo "....scholars' neglect of Scarlatti has nothing to do with merits of the music per se, much of which is extraordinarily rich in color, technical novelty, rhythmic intrigue, and melodic invention. Rather, one suspects, historical researchers, theorists, and commentators have been deterred by the scarcity of letters, diaries, manuscript catalogues, or other documents on which scholars like to practice their research skills, not to mention the sheer, almost unmanageable size of the repertory to be examined, explained, and interpreted - a daunting task in any event, made especially challenging by the absence of any firm basis on which to undertake a systematic, detailed, or illuminating study. Given this circumstance, Matthew Flannery's study, which tackles head-on some of the most difficult questions surrounding this great body of works, is most welcome. The author's central topic is chronology, i.e., the order in which the sonatas were written, as a prerequisite for any attempt to evaluate the sonatas or weigh and interpret their historical significance..... Whether pitched purely to specialists, or modified to appeal to a wider audience of scholars, students, performers, record collectors, or general music enthusiasts, Flannery has come up with an excellent piece of research that is bound to have significant impact upon publication." - Floyd Grave, Rutgers University "Matthew Flannery brings to the repertory of Domenico Scarlatti's keyboard music a fresh perspective based on statistical methods none before him has essayed. The more than 500 individual movements in this body of work display even more than the usual number of problems, or difficulty of deducing a solution, because of an unusually meager source disposition; we possess not one page definitively offering Scarlatti's musical handwriting at any stage of a piece's development. No sketches, working copies, fair copies, proofs, or corrected drafts have ever surfaced for any of his vocal or instrumental music. The several scribal copies of the keyboard sonatas all appear late in his career, with no indication of how close the time of composition might be to the date of transmission. In seeking out patterns of this transmission, Flannery hopes to detect answers to these questions. In my humble opinion, he has shown novel insights into these sonatas that deserve to be studied and evaluated slowly and carefully by the community of musical scholars dedicated to explicating the music of Scarlatti, as well as lovers of his music among the educated public. This seems to me the most important contribution to this complex of problems since analytic catalog of Alain de Chambure that appeared in 1988." - Joel Sheveloff, Boston University "About the Author Matthew Flannery, New Brunswick NJ, was educated at Reed College and the University of Chicago (philosophy) and Rutgers University (city and regional planning). He refines English translations of Chinese poems from 200-1200 CE, collects recordings of western classical chamber and solo music in historical depth, edits scholarly papers, translates the occasional poem of Georg Traki, and collects Chinese calligraphy and seal stones.