

Encounters



My discovery of the piano and of pianists is intimately bound up in my life with the sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti. At the age of twelve, soon after coming to France, I came across Horowitz and his famous recording of the sonatas. In Albania there had not been many opportunities to listen to records made by great instrumentalists. The Horowitz quickly became one of my favourites. I soon felt as if I knew these short, stylish and often melancholy works by heart. Naturally, they were transposed in my mind onto the violin, and I amused myself by playing fragments of them. I ended up trying to score one of them (Kk 54) entirely from memory, a venture which quickly taught me not to be so daring. I was twelve years old, and the work, which I did still manage to write out in full, seemed in the end to be playable only with such exertions as would sweep away any of the pleasure I had had in listening to Horowitz's performance of it.

For a long time thereafter this approach seemed to me to be a pitiful kind of masturbation. A clumsy performance of it would have been far beyond my technical abilities at that time, yet it remained more firmly anchored in my mind and fingers than many other works that I had spent far more time practicing. What's more, presumably because I had never brought this project to fruition, the violin transposition of a Scarlatti sonata kept on recurring in my feelings as a performer with a persistence that was as useless as it was bizarre.

But this unfortunate episode, which I counted as a violinist's vice, fortunately left my love for Scarlatti intact. After Horowitz, I discovered with amazement and pleasure the only two sonatas that Lipatti had recorded, which made me feel that there was perhaps truth in a performance when immense expressivity was combined with equal humility. Then came Michelangeli, whose tone seems to stand on the edge of a silence more profound than any other; the diabolical Argerich in Kk141, and Christian Zacharias producing a harsher and very Spanish sound, and finally Scott Ross who taught me that the figure of 555 sonatas was not just a number, and that pianists were still a long way from having taken out all the jewels from this box of treasures.

My failed attempt at the age of twelve remained nonetheless in my memory. One chord in particular that I could not manage in the fourth bar of Kk54 seemed unplayable without having two bows. Then, one day, three years ago, I suddenly thought it would be a good idea to look at the maestro's scores instead of relying entirely on the memory of my twelve-year-old ear. So began a fascinating labour that despite some moments of doubt brought me far more pleasure than frustration. Its end result is the present recording.

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