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MASTERARBEIT

**Domenico Scarlatti's**  
*Essercizi per gravicembali:*  
didactic value  
and the mystery of the title

von

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## 1. Preface

The history of harpsichord music consists of countless collections of pieces created for a wide variety of purposes. Some of them are thought and written to be true pieces of art and are indeed the fruits of composers' feelings, thoughts and ideas. Others have the purpose of helping the pupil improve technical skills, composition technics or the knowledge of styles. Their titles and prefaces would differ dramatically, as well as the general structure of the collection. A simple example would be the 6 *Württemberg Sonatas*<sup>1</sup> and the 6 keyboard sonatas in the *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*<sup>2</sup> by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. In the preface to the sonatas he speaks about a great possibility to share his music, so that more people would have a chance to enjoy it,<sup>3</sup> while the second illustrates the text of the treatise and has clear didactic goals. With the increasing amount of published treatises and didactic music in 18th century it was pretty common to separate them from the solely performance music.

Though there is one collection which among others can be somewhat confusing for the modern reader. It is Domenico Scarlatti's *Essercizi per gravicembali* published in London in 1738<sup>4</sup>, which is the only contemporary printed edition of his works. This collection is dedicated to King John V of Portugal and has 30 pieces, each entitled "Sonata". As claimed by the composer himself, it is "an ingenious Jesting with Art, to accommodate you to the Mastery of the Harpsichord",<sup>5</sup> but we, as Readers, should not expect "any profound Learning".

In 1838-1840, Carl Czerny, student of Ludwig van Beethoven, especially famous for the etudes — which were nothing but didactic material to prepare the student for the sonatas of his teacher — prepared an edition of 200 Domenico Scarlatti's sonatas<sup>6</sup> including the ones from *Essercizi*. In the preface Czerny praised Scarlatti's skills and music, claiming that they possess a "natural and cheerful freshness of life wafting in them from an art that was then blossoming in its youthful power". Later he emphasises that the main reason to preserve this music is "because of the

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<sup>1</sup> Bach, Carl Philipp Emanuel. *Sei Sonate per Cembalo Dedicatae All'Altezza Serenissima Di Carlo Evgenio Dvca Di Wirtemberg e Teckh*. 1st ed. Nuremberg: Johann Ulrich Haffner, 1744.

<sup>2</sup> Bach, Carl Philipp Emanuel. *Sechs Sonaten Zu Versuch Über Die Wahre Art Das Clavier Zu Spielen*. Berlin: C.F. Henning, 1753.

<sup>3</sup> Bach, *op. cit.*, preface. "Le mie Sonate di Camera [...] mi permettono due grandi vantaggi: il primo che le medesime appoggiate e protette da sì nobil sostegno, sperar ne possono un compiacimento comune [...]". My translation

<sup>4</sup> Scarlatti, Domenico. *Essercizi per Gravicembalo*. London: B. Fortier, 1738.

<sup>5</sup> Kirkpatrick, Ralph. *Domenico Scarlatti*. 6th ed. USA: Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 102. Translation of the preface in the original facsimile of the first edition (Scarlatti, *op.cit.*, preface)

<sup>6</sup> Scarlatti, Dominic. *Sämmtliche Werke Für Das Pianoforte Edited by Karl Czerny*. Vienna: Tobias Haslinger, 1838.

great benefit that the study of them must even now grant every pianist”.<sup>7</sup> Czerny even considers him the founder of piano playing. Lastly he wrote that Franz Liszt — Hungarian composer and piano virtuoso who, among other pieces, has composed concert etudes that combined the didactic and artistic values — has performed Scarlatti’s music in public.<sup>8</sup>

Nowadays it is hard to imagine harpsichord or piano studies without the music of Scarlatti. During the last 250 years it became an extremely important part of both the didactic and performance sides of musicians’ lives. In this work I want to try to answer several questions about the *Essercizi per gravicembali*, such as: Why is it called *Essercizi* and how is this word used at that time? Many composers in Europe in 18th century call their works in a similar way, but does it always mean the same thing? Lastly I want to explore the didactic value of *Essercizi per gravicembali* and to analyse the difficulties of the sonatas and the ways to use them in the teaching process.

Fare well.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, preface.

“[...] wehenden natürlichen und heitern Lebensfrische einer damals ihrer Jugendkraft aufblühenden Kunst, [...]”

“[...] des grossem Nutzens wegen, den das Studium derselben selbst jetzt noch jedem Pianisten gewähren muss. [...]”

My translation

<sup>8</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>9</sup> Scarlatti, *op.cit.*, preface. My translation.

## 2. The term

The modern meaning of the word “Essercizi”, or as it written nowadays “Esercizi”, according to Italian dictionary *Treccani* is the same, as English “exercise”: “To exercise, in the various meanings of the verb: exercise of memory, of the mind; [...] exercise of a profession, an art...”.<sup>10</sup> Though as we know, the terms have a tendency to change their meaning during the centuries, especially when used in a specific context.

### 2.1. Essercizi and Lessons

During the early period of his life, Domenico Scarlatti was surrounded by the flourishing greatness of the most renowned musicians and artists of the first half of the 18th century. In a letter to prince Ferdinando de’ Medici Alessandro Scarlatti<sup>11</sup>, his father and one of the greatest composers of that time, addressed him as a young “eagle”. Domenico Scarlatti met and/or studied with Francesco Gasparini, Bernardo Pasquini, Arcangelo Corelli and of course Georg Friedrich Handel, with whom he had a great and important friendship.<sup>12</sup> Charles Burney in his *A General History of Music*<sup>13</sup> describes Scarlatti’s meeting with Thomas Roseingrave, an Irish composer and a huge admirer of Domenico Scarlatti. Roseingrave was stunned by the virtuosity and perfection of young Scarlatti’s performance, “Roseingrave declared he did not touch an instrument himself for a month”.<sup>14</sup> This meeting is one of the keystones in understanding the way the title of Essercizi was perceived at that time. Thomas Roseingrave was so impressed by the talent of young composer, that after returning to Great Britain, he played one of the most significant roles in establishing *The English cult of Domenico Scarlatti*, as described by Richard Newton.<sup>15</sup>

The Irish composer was the one to edit an edition of 42 Scarlatti sonatas including all 30 from *Essercizi*. It was printed in 1739, a year later than the original collection, under the title *XLII Suites*

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Esercizio’. In *Treccani*, n.d. <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/esercizio/>.

“L’esercitare, nei varî sign. del verbo: *e. della memoria, della mente; [...] e. di una professione, di un’arte, [...]*”. My translation.

<sup>11</sup> Scarlatti, Alessandro. ‘Letter to His Royal Highness Ferdinando de Medici’, 30 May 1705. Filza 5891, No. 502. Archivio Mediceo, Florence.

As found in Kirkpatrick, *op.cit.*, pp.21-22.

<sup>12</sup> Kirkpatrick, *op.cit.*, pp.32-33.

<sup>13</sup> Burney, Charles. *A General History of Music*. Vol. 2. 4 vols. New York: Frank Mercer, 1935, pp. 703-704.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> Newton, Richard. ‘The English Cult of Domenico Scarlatti’. *Music & Letters* 20, no. 2 (1939): 138–56.

*de Pieces Pour le Clavecin*.<sup>16</sup> Here, a title common in France for a collection of solo pieces was used instead of a literal translation of the *Essercizi*. In the next chapters, I will discuss the structural peculiarities of this edition. In 1744 Charles Avison, another prominent composer working in Great Britain, publishes orchestral arrangements of Scarlatti sonatas under the title *Twelve concertos in seven parts...done from two books of lessons for the harpsichord composed by Sig. Domenico Scarlatti*.<sup>17</sup> The two books he refers to are clearly Roseingrave's *Piece Pour le Clavecin* edition, but now the sonatas are called the lessons. It seems to be a much closer term to the original title. But did it carry any didactic meaning at that time?

According to *Grove* dictionary — not anymore. The article says that a Lesson is “a term originally used in England to denote an exercise in performance or composition but eventually extended to cover almost the entire field of domestic keyboard music as well as some kinds of instrumental chamber music”.<sup>18</sup> Thomas Roseingrave in 1728 in London has published his collection of harpsichord music entitled *8 Suites of Lessons*<sup>19</sup>, which is nothing but a typical collection of harpsichord pieces. Furthermore, Scarlatti's friend and rival Georg Friedrich Handel says in the preface of his *Suites de Pieces pour le Clavecin*<sup>20</sup> published in London, that he “was obliged to publish some of the following Lessons”,<sup>21</sup> though the collection definitely has no didactic purpose.

Almost 30 years after the death of Domenico Scarlatti, Ambrose Pitman<sup>22</sup> edited a new edition of sonatas called *The Beauties of Domenico Scarlatti*. It is especially interesting due to the preface which I will quote almost fully.

“THE Lessons of Dominico [sic] Scarlatti have ever been esteemed by Musical Theorists for their many excellencies of Taste, Genius, and Originality. — But this Acknowledgement of Merit has hitherto been confined to a very limited Circle; their reception into General Practice having been greatly retarded by the many superfluous and studied difficulties with

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<sup>16</sup> Scarlatti, Domenico. *42 Suites de Pièces Por Le Clavecin*. London: Thomas Roseingrave, 1739.

<sup>17</sup> Avison, Charles. *Twelve Concerto's in Seven Parts [...] Done from Two Books of Lessons for the Harpsichord Composed by Sigr. Domenico Scarlatti*. London, 1743 (according to Clifford Barlett in the preface of the facsimile edition).

<sup>18</sup> Ferguson, Howard, and Kenneth L. Hamilton. ‘Study’. Oxford University Press, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.27018>.

<sup>19</sup> Roseingrave, Thomas. *Eight Suites of Lessons*. London, 1728.

<sup>20</sup> Handel, George Frideric. *Suites de Pieces Pour Le Clavecin*. Vol. 1. London, n.d.

<sup>21</sup> Handel, *op.cit.*, preface.

<sup>22</sup> Ambrose Pitman (1763-1817) was a poet and a composer. This few biographical notes were found by Marco Moiraghi and noted in Scarlatti, Domenico. *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*. Edited by Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi. Vol. 10. 10 vols. Milan: Ricordi, 2021, p. LII.

which they abound. — In Manuscript, their obscurity was not without an intention; - as they were expressly composed for the Practice of a very brilliant Performer, the Infanta Maria, to whom Scarlatti was Master of Music; every Opportunity was taken by the Author to introduce difficult and affected Passages, for no other use or reason than merely as extraordinary exercises for the eminent ability of his Pupil.

To remove these Obstacles, which have, in some measure, obscured such admirable Lessons from Public Notice, and that they may, in future, be more readily understood by the Student, has been the principal Design of the present Editor. [...] — unnatural and cramp positions of the hands, he has avoided or altered, that the fingering might be rendered easy and graceful [...]

Among the enthusiastic admirers of Scarlatti's Lessons, was the late Dr. Arne,<sup>23</sup> who always considered them, with the “Suites de Pieces” of Handel, as the best calculated Performances to compleat [sic] the Practical Part of a Musical Education. — And the Editor of the ensuing Work, must here acknowledge himself indebted to that celebrated Master for many improvements which were advised at the time he was the Doctor's Pupil, and when these elegant Pieces of Harmony constantly made a Part of his daily Studies.”<sup>24</sup>

This preface is wonderful in its value indeed. Ambrose Pitman rightly considers this sonatas to be a pedagogic tool while teaching the Queen of Spain Maria Barbara,<sup>25</sup> but he also shares his enthusiasm about practicing these pieces himself. Not only because of the artistic satisfaction they bring, but the improvement of his skills. He also simplifies some of the most complicated sonatas. This is especially clear in number 29, where the hands are crossed to their extreme and was originally thought by Scarlatti solely to impress the public. Pitman takes out all of the hand signs, so that the player can decide for himself how to divide the texture of the piece between the hands according to their skills, taste and musical sense.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Augustine Arne (1710-1778) was a English composer, keyboard player and teacher of Ambrose Pitman. More information can be found in Holman, Peter, and Todd Gilman. ‘Arne, Thomas Augustine’. Oxford University Press, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.40018>.

<sup>24</sup> Pitman, Ambrose. *The Beauties of Domenico Scarlatti [...]*. Vol. 1. London, n.d, preface.

<sup>25</sup> Kirkpatrick, *op.cit.*, p. 78.

“There is even the possibility that Domenico’s own development as a harpsichord composer was stimulated by contact with his talented pupil and by the necessity of providing music to further her progress. His entire later production is reported to have been composed expressly for Maria Barbara.”

<sup>26</sup> See Scarlatti, Domenico. *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*. Edited by Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi. Vol. 10. 10 vols. Milan: Ricordi, 2021, p. LII.

It is clear that even if the *Essercizi* were not literally thought as a didactic collection, they became so in such a short time. Domenico Scarlatti surely used his pieces during his lessons, as well as performed or improvised them brilliantly to enchanted public<sup>27</sup> and it is just another reason to underline their incredible value in the history of music.

## 2.2. Essercizi and Clavier-Übung

The German word Übung is the closest relative of Italian Essercizi and it was widely used in 17th and 18th centuries in the titles of various German music collections. Analysis of such may be of high importance on our path for unraveling the use of the term. *Duden*, the biggest modern dictionary of German, besides the already familiar meaning of receiving practical experience through exercises, suggests a new one: “contemplation for inner reflection, meditation as part of the Spiritual Exercises”<sup>28</sup> marking its use in the Catholic religion. Now it is impossible not to mention another term which in literal translation from Greek means “exercise” — asceticism. As *Britannica* dictionary says, is “the practice of the denial of physical or psychological desires in order to attain a spiritual ideal or goal”.<sup>29</sup> It is fascinating how, at some degree, such a point of view may fit the general idea of musical collections of that time — the music as an exercise for the enlightenment of the spirit and not just physical movement of the fingers. Leaving the speculations behind, we may still learn more in the following talk about several German musical collections.

In 1723 Johann Sebastian Bach, who has later composed the most renowned Clavier-Übung collection, has succeeded as cantor at St. Thomas in Leipzig after his predecessor Johann Kuhnau died on the 5th of June, 1722. The latter was the first to compose a collection of music named with such a title and it is him I would love to speak about first.<sup>30</sup>

Johann Kuhnau (1660-1722) was a prominent German composer, music theorist and teacher, who composed keyboard and sacred music. He also wrote several musical treatises and has taught important composers including Christoph Graupner and Johann David Heinichen. Out of his four printed collections of keyboard music the earliest two are of the highest interest for me. They are

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<sup>27</sup> An excellent example of this can be found in the previously mentioned quote from Burney, *op.cit.*, pp. 703-704.

<sup>28</sup> “6. der inneren Einkehr dienende Betrachtung, Meditation als Teil der Exerzitien”  
‘Übung, Die’. In *Duden Online*, n.d. <https://www.duden.de/node/187723/revision/429279>.  
My translation.

<sup>29</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "asceticism." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 20, 2013. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/asceticism>.

<sup>30</sup> According to Wolff, Christoph. ‘The Clavier-Übung Series’. In *Bach: Essays on His Life and Music*, 189–213. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 190.

called *Neue Clavier-Übung, Erster Teil* (1689)<sup>31</sup> and *Neue Clavier-Übung, Andrer Teil II* (1692)<sup>32</sup>. The first contains 7 suites in major tonalities, while the second has a sonata in major and 7 suites in minor tonalities. The first *Clavier-Übung* has a long and beautifully engraved preface, where Kuhnau explains the reasons of publishing this collection together with advice on the performance style and execution of the embellishments. He says: “Both those who seek to refresh the spirit of other studies at the keyboard, as well as those who have chosen this as their profession, will not be disappointed by it, especially if the students want to be informed of the following, that first of all, the courantes are to be performed in the French manner, but especially the gigues and minuets somewhat quickly, while the sarabantes (sic) and arias are to be performed slowly, and then the rest with good discretion.”<sup>33</sup> This music is addressed for both amateurs and professionals in their search for new music. The following explanations about the styles, genres and embellishments are more of a hint in understanding the ideas of the composer rather than a real didactic lesson.

Almost 10 years later, in 1698, Johann Krieger (1651-1735), German organist and composer, published his *Anmuthige Clavier-Übung*<sup>34</sup> — a collection of pieces in a variety of different genres: preludes, fugues, ricercares, fantasias, toccatas and a chaconne. It must have been an important collection at that time as Georg Friedrich Handel took it with him to Great Britain and showed to his friends there. As for the title — he was most probably inspired by the title of Kuhnau’s publication. The dedication and preface mainly speaks of the author’s gratitude for the possibility to share his music and the only advice he gives is to follow the composer’s style and wishes: “The favourable lover will then not only use this work for his own exercise, but also for imitating and following the manners and capriccios of the Author, and thus be best recommended, also let me further enjoy his affection”.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Kuhnau, Johann. *Neue Klavier-Übung, Erster Theil*. 1st ed. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Leipzig, 1689.

<sup>32</sup> Kuhnau, Johann. *Neue Klavier-Übung, Andrer Theil*. 1st ed. Vol. 2. 2 vols. Leipzig, 1692.

<sup>33</sup> From the preface of Kuhnau, Johann. *Neue Klavier-Übung, Erster Theil*. 1st ed. Vol. 2. 2 vols. Leipzig, 1692.

“So wohl diejenigen, so den von andern Studiis ermudeten Geist an dem Claviere wiederum zu erfrischen Suchen, als auch die, welche sich Solches zur Professon erwählt, nicht wenig damit zu vergnügen, zumalen, wenn die Incypienten bey der Manier sich folgendes zur Nachricht wollten dienen Lassen, dass man vors erste die Courranten nach französischen Art, absonderlich aber die Giguen und Menueten etwas hurtig, hingegen die Sarabanten und Arien langsam, und denn das andere Sonst mit guter Discretion zu tradieren pflege.” My translation.

<sup>34</sup> Krieger, Johann. *Anmuthige Clavier-Übung*. 1st ed. Nuremberg: Wolfgang Moritz Endter, 1699.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, preface.

“Der günstige Liebhaber wolle sich dann dieses Wercklein nicht allein zu seiner Übung, sondern auch zur Imitation und Nachfolgung der artlichen Manieren und Capriccien des Herrn Authoris, dienen und also bestens recommendirt seyn, auch mich seine Affection ferner geniessen lassen; [...]”. My translation.

Before discussing the famous four parts of J.S.Bach's *Clavier-Übung* there are three other collections worth mentioning. They all are composed by his pupil Johann Ludwig Krebs and are titled almost identically. The title page of the first collection says:

“First Delivery of Keyboard Exercises Consisting of Various Preludes and Modifications of Some Church Chants, Which Can Be Performed on the Organ as well as on the keyboard.  
Prepared and publicly published for the amateurs' amusement and especially for the great benefit and advantage of those who are eager to learn.”<sup>36</sup>

The following two *Clavier-Übung* have a Suite of 12 movements<sup>37</sup> and 6 sonatinas<sup>38</sup> respectively. Even though all three collections are addressed to amateurs or even beginners<sup>39</sup> who want to learn, the lack of any didactic commentary from the composer could simply encourage learning some new music or getting acquainted with a variety of genres.

Still there is nothing more complex and diverse in styles and genres than four *Clavier-Übung* composed by J. S. Bach. Being one of the few works published and revised during the composers lifetime, they are among the most elaborated and challenging keyboard pieces written by him. The 6 partitas for single-manual harpsichord in the first part;<sup>40</sup> Italian Concerto and French Ouverture for a double-manual harpsichord in the second part;<sup>41</sup> a prelude, Catechism chorales, duets and other pieces for organ in the third part<sup>42</sup> and finally *Aria with diverse variations*, also known as *Goldberg-variations* for a double-manual harpsichord in the last fourth part<sup>43</sup> — all compose a unique school of keyboard playing as well as show the composers incredible flexibility in the expression of his musical language.

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<sup>36</sup> From the title page of Krebs, Johann Ludwig. *Clavier-Übung, Erster Theil*. Vol. 1. 3 vols. Nuremberg: Balthasar Schmid, 1744.

“Erste Lieferung der Clavier Übung bestehend in verschiedenen vorspielen und veränderungen einiger Kirchen Gesänge, welche so wohl auf der Orgel als auch auf dem Clavier Können tractirt werden Denen Liebhabern zur Gemütliches Erziehung und besonders denen Lehrbegierigen zu Grossen Nutzen und Vorteil verfertigt und öffentlich heraus gegeben [...]”

<sup>37</sup> Krebs, Johann Ludwig. *Clavier-Übung, Zweither Theil*. Vol. 2. 3 vols. Nuremberg: Johann Ulrich Haffner, n.d.

<sup>38</sup> Krebs, Johann Ludwig. *Clavier-Übung, Dritter Theil*. Vol. 3. 3 vols. Nuremberg: Johann Ulrich Haffner, n.d.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, title page.

Here the composer specifies that this collection is addressed primarily to the beginners.

“[...] Denen Liebhabern zu angenehmen Zeit-Vertreib den Anfängern [...]”

<sup>40</sup> Bach, Johann Sebastian. *Clavier Übung*. Vol. 1. 4 vols. Leipzig, 1731.

<sup>41</sup> Bach, Johann Sebastian. *Zweyter Theil Der Clavier Übung*. Leipzig: Cristoph Weigel Junior, 1735.

<sup>42</sup> Bach, Johann Sebastian. *Dritter Theil Der Clavier Übung*. Leipzig, 1739.

<sup>43</sup> Bach, Johann Sebastian. *Clavier Übung* ["Goldberg Variations"]. Nuremberg: Balthasar Schmid, 1741.

In the title J. S. Bach writes that he composed it for the “enjoyment of music lovers”. The word “Liebhabern”, which I took liberty to translate in the context as “music lovers” while literally it means “those who have love”, would normally correspond to amateurs and it is the exact word as in the prefaces of previously discussed composers. Nevertheless it is hard to compare simple sonatinas by Krebs with the sophisticated and difficult monstrosity that is the *Goldberg-variations*.

These are not all of the Clavier-Übungen ever composed and published in Germany in 18th century,<sup>44</sup> but the aforementioned examples are accurate enough to understand that the meaning of the title “Clavier-Übung” is similar to English “Lesson” and describe a collection of musical pieces published following the wish of composer to share his music. It is the “refreshment of spirit”, “joy of music lovers”, “amateurs’ amusement” which besides being beautiful figures of speech may refer to the spiritual exercises. We can improve our technical skills, knowledge of style and genres, get an inspiration and ideas for the improvisation and composition — we can learn so much, but by the end, what is playing music, if not a meditation which brings joy to music lovers?

### 2.3. Essercizi in Italy

Despite the fact that equivalents of the Italian term were widely used across Europe, except probably for France where the closest relative was the word *pièces*, it is hard to find any other collection called Essercizi in Italy. Of course there was published music which, in some ways, may be considered as didactic, even though it may look slightly speculative. Also we can be certain that they were not called essercizi. For instance Girolamo Frescobaldi in his *Il primo libro di capricci, canzon francese, e ricercari*<sup>45</sup> starts the preface addressing “The students of the work”.<sup>46 47</sup> The word “students” here implies everybody who would study this music and not only beginners or pupils. He gives an inspiring speech encouraging the player to continue despite the difficulties of the composition. As we can see from the title there is not a single mention of any sort of exercises. Moreover, sometimes they have simply used the name of a toccata, as one of the most common keyboard genres in Italy in the 16th and 17th centuries, as a possibility to write an instructive piece.

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<sup>44</sup> Vincent Lübeck, Christoph Graupner, Georg Andreas Sorge and other German composers have named their works as *Clavier-Übung*.

<sup>45</sup> Frescobaldi, Girolamo. *Il Primo Libro Di Capricci, Canzon Francese, e Ricercari Fatti Sopra Diversi Soggetti, et Arie in Partitura*. Vol. 1. Venice: Alessandro Vincenti, 1626.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, preface. “Gli studiosi dell’opera [...]”.

<sup>47</sup> Both this and the following examples in this chapter are inspired by the article: Ferguson, Howard, and Kenneth L. Hamilton. ‘Study’. Oxford University Press, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.27018>.

In Girolamo Diruta's (1554-1610) pedagogical treatise *Il Transilvano*<sup>48</sup> we see several toccatas which are composed by the author as didactic pieces for those who study the art of playing a keyboard instrument.

Francesco Durante (1684-1755) seems to be the only one to have a keyboard music collection with the title somewhat reminiscent of *Essercizi*. Renown Italian composer, student of Alessandro Scarlatti, among other works has left a manuscript entitled *Sei Sonate per cembalo divisi in studii e divertimenti*.<sup>49</sup> At the same time the "studies" in this case are rather a name for contrapuntal movements followed by homophonic *divertimenti* composed in a 2 movement sonata form. Even if somebody would call these "studies" a lesson in counterpoint, which is highly doubtful, I am highly convinced that this are not the exercises we are looking for.

#### **2.4. Geistliche Übungen, Leçons spirituelles and Essercizi spirituali**

Moving away from keyboard music collections, it would be important to look at two examples of instrumental sacred music.

The genre of *Leçons de ténèbres*, sacred music written for the three nights before Easter, was common in the 17th and beginning of 18th centuries. Among such composed by Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Louis-Nicolas Clerambault and other renowned French composers, the most famous remains the one composed and published later in 1714 by Francois Couperin.<sup>50</sup> "Tenebrae" from Latin means "darkness" and is a common name for the church services in the above mentioned sacred days. Here the word "leçons" is obviously used in the meaning of spiritual exercises or, to be more accurate, prayers.

Répertoire International des Sources Musicales (RISM), the biggest catalogue of musical sources, shares with us one more example of sacred vocal music. Domènec Terradellas (1711-1751), Spanish composer who has studied with Francesco Durante in Naples, has composed an oratorio called *Giuseppe Riconosciuto Da rappresentarsi nell'essercizi vespertini*<sup>51</sup> on the text written by Paolo Metastasio (1698-1782). The libretto is based on the chapters 37 to 46 of the first book of Moses<sup>52</sup> and, as the title of oratorio suggests, should be "performed during the evening prayers".

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<sup>48</sup> Diruta, Girolamo. *Il Transilvano*. Venice: Giacomo Vincenti, 1593.

<sup>49</sup> Durante, Francesco. *Sei Sonate per Cembalo Divisi in Studii e Divertimenti*. Neaples: Philippus de Grado, 1730.

<sup>50</sup> Couperin, François. *Leçons de Ténèbres à Une et à Deux Voix*. 1st ed. Paris, 1714.

<sup>51</sup> Terradellas, Domenico. 'Giuseppe Riconosciuto, Da Rappresentarsi Nell'essercizi Vespertini de R. R. P. P. Dell'Oratorio S. Filippo'. Score, 1736. SANT Hs 4134. Santini-Bibliothek Münster.

<sup>52</sup> Wikipedia. "Giuseppe riconosciuto". Last modified June 16, 2021. [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giuseppe\\_riconosciuto](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giuseppe_riconosciuto)

Described in Duden *geistlichen Übungen* or in this cases French *Leçons sprituelle* and Italian *essercizi spirituali* bring us back to the term's use discussed in the previous chapter. It makes us think one more time about the choice of the title of Domenico Scarlatti's collection. This could have been an expressed devotion to the Music and Art and represent the sonatas as 'esercizio', not only for fingers and mind, but the spirit and soul.

### 3. Didactic value of Domenico Scarlatti's *Essercizi per gravicembali*

#### 3.1. The diverse perception of Scarlatti's sonatas in the editorial approach of the 18th century

As an introduction to the analysis of the pieces it is worth discussing the way they were perceived in the 18th century. Of course as we found out in the previous chapters, nobody sees the collection as a didactic method, yet there are some other interesting aspects worth mentioning.

The discussion whether Scarlatti's sonatas are meant to be in pairs or not are ongoing since Ralph Kirkpatrick has introduced this idea and used it while cataloguing the pieces.<sup>53</sup> However, attempts to unite such lonely standing pieces in the times of big suites or several movement sonatas and concertos have begun right after publication of the *Essercizi*. The edition of 42 sonatas, mentioned in chapter 2.1, edited and published by Roseingrave in London doesn't really have sonatas, but allemandes, fugues, arias, menuettos [sic] and pieces entitled with tempo markings, as Allegro, Presto etc. They are grouped by key and form big constellations of pieces, typical at that time.

Charles Avison, in his orchestral transcriptions of these sonatas, takes each piece as a movement of a four-movement concerto. Due to the domination of the faster sonatas in the collection, he composed his own slow movements for some of the concertos.<sup>54</sup> A similar approach, though without composing extra movements, was done by previously mentioned Ambrose Pitman. He combines Scarlatti's sonatas in 6 larger, two- or three-movement Lessons, which was common at that time.<sup>55</sup>

In all form and varieties of groupings of Scarlatti's pieces, it is important to remember that for certain reasons Scarlatti calls each of them a sonata, a term which implies the beginning and the end of the piece in itself. Then he unites them under the title of *Essercizi*, which doesn't carry any suite-like meaning, but possibly instead divides the pieces even more. Such a point of view, described in W. Dean Sutcliffe's book *The Keyboard Sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti*<sup>56</sup>, may only inspire a much more insightful look at each of the individual sonatas.

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<sup>53</sup> Sutcliffe, W. Dean. 'Pairs'. In *The Keyboard Sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti - and Eighteenth-Century Musical Style*, 3rd ed., 367–75. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 367-368.

<sup>54</sup> See the preface of Avison, Charles. *Avison - Scarlatti*. UK: King's Music Gmc, 1992.

<sup>55</sup> Scarlatti, Domenico. *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*. Edited by Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi. Vol. 10. 10 vols. Milan: Ricordi, 2021, p. LII.

<sup>56</sup> Sutcliffe, *op.cit.*

### 3.2. Analysis of the selected sonatas

For the analysis I will use the latest edition of Ricordi, the preface of which was already mentioned. My goal here is to register some of the main technical and musical challenges these sonatas have, to see if there is any increase in difficulty throughout the collection as well as to describe if and how these pieces can be used as didactic material.

#### 3.2.1. Sonata K. 1. Allegro in d minor

This sonata is in a two-part form, as are most of the following, and is one of the shortest in the collection. It has just 31 bars, which are divided in 13 bars in the first part and 18 in the second.

The first sonata is not particularly challenging. It is however useful for developing the independence of each hand and prepares the pupil for much more complicated jumps in the following sonatas. Its structure is also easy enough for the pupil to analyse on their own. After a little question-answer motif between the voices, a long sequence starts in the middle of the second bar. This may be the place for introducing the topic of smooth transition between dynamics. The following ascending movement in bars 7 and 8 may be seen as a test of the student's ability to react – the left hand should leave the note smoothly and fast enough to let the right hand “catch” the repeated note in time. Frequently repeated short motives in the following bars bring the topic of “echo” dynamics on the harpsichord — when, how and why to use them.

The second half of the sonata develops the material introduced before and makes some of the places more complicated to execute. For instance, octave jumps in the left hand in bars 3-5 become more challenging later in bars 22-25. Taking care of keeping the touché soft and light, and teaching how to precisely measure the movement of the hand is the right way to go. Bars 26-27 are a good exercise for the independence of the fingers in the right hand — the 16th notes should be played with first 4 fingers while the quarter note occupies the 5th one. It is of incredible importance that the wrist is not tensed. This will be more challenging if the pupil is little and has small hands.

The embellishments in the sonata are not complicated and are infrequent. They are always in the soprano and never follow each other in chains of trills, but there is definitely some place to add more embellishments as well to vary some sequences in the repetitions.

Sonata K. 1 may be a very good introduction for beginners to Scarlatti's music.

### 3.2.2. Sonata K. 2 Presto in G major

This piece, despite being another example of a rather small sonata, is technically more advanced.

The pupil has the opportunity to challenge the flexibility and stretching abilities of their hands. This sonata almost fully consists of alternating 16th and 8th notes in both hands, bar by bar or two by two (see fig. 1). Besides practicing the finger movements and developing stretching between the fingers, this sonata also requires a variety of small and well calculated articulations between the groups of intervals. Despite the increase in difficulty, there is almost always a possibility to give a more active hand a bit of rest between quick parallel motion in fourths and sixths intervals.



Figure 1. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*, ed. Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi, vol. 10, 10 vols (Milan: Ricordi, 2021), Sonata K. 2, p. 5, bars 13-17.

Unlike the previous sonata, here the whole piece is written with one technical and rhythmical idea. Nevertheless, sudden changes from major to minor require a good reaction from the pupil with appropriate timing and/or changes in touché. The repetitiveness of the motives and enlarged repeated cadences call for the variety of dynamic decisions — not only “echo” effect, but crescendo and diminuendo as well. Structurally, it is important that the pupil can musically decide which one of the repeated elements of the phrase leads to the cadence or to some new material.

Sonata K. 2 explores new technical and musical difficulties, but is still accessible to pupils in the early part of their musical education.

### 3.2.3. Sonata K. 3 Presto in a minor

The third sonata in the collection proposes new tasks for the pupil. While being longer than previous sonatas and having a *presto* tempo indication, the dominant note value is a quarter note. This sonata does not have virtuosic arpeggios, passages or tricky repeated notes.

The main task for a pupil in this piece is to manage articulation in the two-voice, imitative texture full of ties (see fig. 2, p. 18). It is important to remember that all of the resolutions should be

soft, the beginning of imitations should be clear and the preparation of dissonances should be articulated. There are also many descending, chromatic passages with several possibilities of articulation. The ascending notes of the chords written in quarter values would also require a clever fingering, so that the passages would remain smooth and fast enough not to break the harmony.



Figure 2. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*, ed. Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi, vol. 10, 10 vols (Milan: Ricordi, 2021), Sonata K. 3, p. 6, bars 10-13.

This sonata is valuable for teaching different kinds of small articulation. The dissonances, which come on the weak or “bad” beat, would break a typical scheme of articulation.

### 3.2.4. Sonata K. 6 Allegro in F major

The Sixth sonata is a relatively fast, elegant and light piece written in 3/8. This is the first piece to be full of 32nd note passages, which is its main challenge.

Sonata K. 6 is quite homogeneous in its textural decisions. Besides the part with unisons it almost always has fast passages in 32nd notes and an accompaniment in 8th notes. The main task for the pupil is to make the 32nd notes as light as possible, as they are in many cases just a scale or written-out embellishment. For instance, the first passage starting in bar 5 is just a three-octave, F major scale. It is also important to take care of the fuller, two- or three-voice accompaniment while playing the fast notes. It shouldn't be influenced by the passages, but played softly and with well thought out articulation. The latter will bring different colours to the harmony. In the first half of the piece basically all passages are in the right hand. The second half brings some difficulties to the left, but they are not as difficult as those in the right. Also the sections in minor and the changes to major are more expressive and inventive here than in the first half. To find the right rubato and articulation to make such sections expressive enough would be another pleasant task for the pupil.

Regarding the technical aspect, this piece is not highly demanding, but requires very good contact with the keyboard while having relaxed hands. The majority of the scales and passages are not difficult, but in the right tempo and with an appropriate musical expressivity it brings new challenges to the pupil.

### 3.2.5. Sonata K. 7 Presto in a minor

Sonata K. 7 is significantly more difficult than all of the previous ones. This is the first piece in the collection to introduce long passages with crossed hands. In addition to being fast, it elevates the difficulty of other textures, such as jumps, trills, parallel sixth and octaves.

Ambrose Pitman, who was mentioned earlier, certainly had this sonata in mind, amongst others, when complaining about unnatural positions of the hands and unnecessary difficulty of some of the sonatas. Just in the first half of the piece the 22 bars of crossed hands, suggested by Scarlatti without a clear musical need, are most probably intended to impress the public (see fig. 3).

The image displays five systems of musical notation for Domenico Scarlatti's Sonata K. 7, Presto in a minor. Each system consists of a treble and bass clef staff. The first system (bars 7-12) includes a 'D' chord marking in the bass staff. The second system (bars 13-18) continues the piece. The third system (bars 19-24) shows a change in the bass staff. The fourth system (bars 25-30) features trill markings in both staves. The fifth system (bars 31-36) shows a change in the bass staff. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

Figure 3. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*, ed. Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi, vol. 10, 10 vols (Milan: Ricordi, 2021), Sonata K. 7, p. 26, bars 7-36.

This excerpt can be clearly played without hand crossing while maintaining the expressivity of the material. The following trills in the soprano voice of the chords in the right hand would be played with less comfortable 5-4 or 5-3 fingering. The parallel rows of sixths can be played with the position fingering, but would demand wider stretching of the hand and a fast and precise movement of the thumb in the last two intervals. Finally, the organ point in the end of the first part brings another uncomfortable jump in the left hand (C-c-c'), which demands some practice to make it clean. This sonata has also larger amounts of embellishments, including the ones in the middle voices of the chords. The appoggiaturas before the trills also leave less time to execute the embellishments. To underline the ending Scarlatti writes a scale in parallel octaves in the left hand, which may be a challenge for some of the pupils. Lastly, due to the amount of different sections the structure of the piece may fall apart. The important task here is to build the dramaturgy of the sonata in such a way that it still feels as one piece.

Sonata K. 7 is quite an impressive piece to be heard and especially seen by the public. This piece requires good technical preparation as well as educated ears to make it expressive. It is still not as difficult as some of the next sonatas, but it clearly demands a certain ease in playing to provide the strongest theatrical impression.

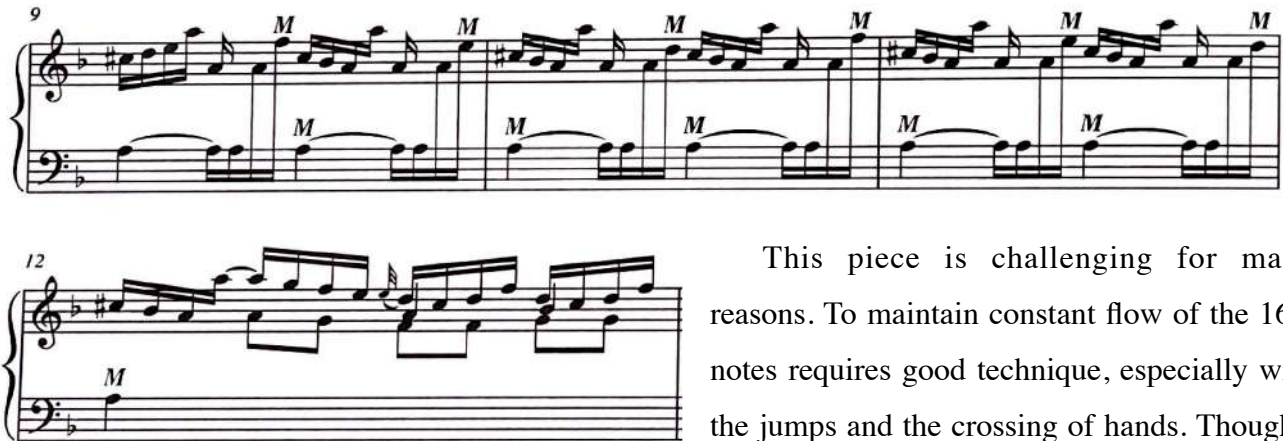
### *3.2.6. Sonata K. 12 Presto in g minor*

While sonatas K. 8, K. 9 and K. 11 are rather calm and/or cantabile and don't introduce any undiscussed difficulties, sonata K. 12 represents a more complicated version of K. 10. It is of interest to us, not just for its unending rows of 16th notes shared between both hands, but for its almost annoying repetition of the same motives.

Broken arpeggios in the beginning of the piece in the right hand are afterwards imitated by the left hand. They should sound as similar to each other as possible. Arpeggios bring us to the very quick appoggiaturas on the 16th notes, which in this tempo sound like clashes or almost acciaccaturas. There is no time to make them soft. In this case the tempo is dropped and the flow is ruined. From bar 9 the same motif appears 7 times basically unchanged (see fig. 4, p. 21). It has an uncomfortable and very quick jump in the left hand over the right and back. Besides the technical issue, the performer needs to find a way to make musical sense out of the repetition of the motif. When later the soprano voice has excessively repeated single notes, it is of a great importance to always maintain a longer phrase and to react immediately on the harmonic changes. Finally, in some of the repeated motives Scarlatti writes an embellishment only the first time. It may make sense to

play them in all similar places, as it clearly underlines the repetitiveness that the composer used as a mean of expression.

Figure 4. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*, ed. Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi, vol. 10, 10 vols (Milan: Ricordi, 2021), Sonata K.12, p.48, bars 9-12



This piece is challenging for many reasons. To maintain constant flow of the 16th notes requires good technique, especially with the jumps and the crossing of hands. Though I think that the main task here is to find an expressive way to play the same motives again and again.

### 3.2.7. Sonata K. 18 Presto in d minor

This Presto is an example of a very mature musical composition with a variety of expressive, textural solutions. The intensity of the d minor tonality is underlined by dense chromatic lines, usage of the wide range of the keyboard, inventive harmony and texture colourations of different registers of the keyboard. All this makes this piece exceptionally valuable in the repertoire of any harpsichordist.

Sonata K. 18 maintains most of the technical difficulties discussed earlier: long passages of 16th notes in a fast tempo, jumps, quick embellishments. With the right fingering chromatic passages are not too uncomfortable. Nevertheless, the risk of rushing the passages, as well as the jumps before and after the echo, are very common.

It is important to notice how Scarlatti changes the answers in echo according to the register of the keyboard. For instance in bars 13-14 he adds the thirds to the bass voice, so that the answer in the lower register is thicker. In bars 18-20 the written out slow trill in the left hand makes noise out of which the intervals in the right hand create the waves of crescendo and diminuendo. Unlike the left, to achieve such effect the right hand should be well articulated (see fig. 5, p. 22).

This piece is also rather unique in the unity of the composition. Even between the two parts Scarlatti did not leave any place to breathe. Nevertheless, it is crucial to find spots where the music is

not as dramatic, so that both the player and the listener have the possibility to breathe. If the whole piece is played loudly and rushed, it can be very tiring for both performer and public.

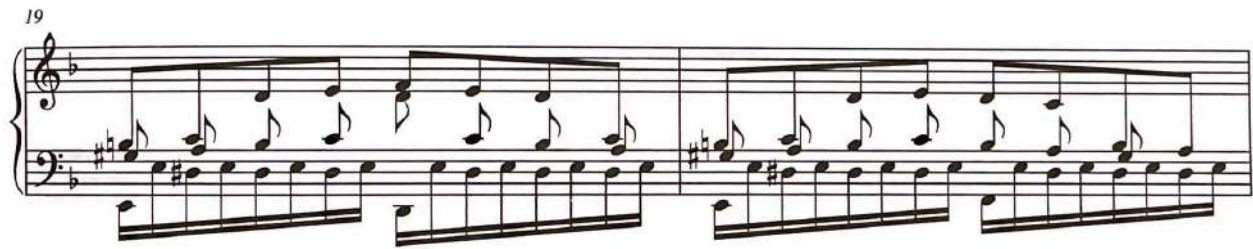


Figure 5. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*, ed. Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi, vol. 10, 10 vols (Milan: Ricordi, 2021), Sonata K.18, p.77, bars 19-20

Sonata K. 18 is a great piece to learn how to think calmly while playing an expressive, technically demanding fast piece. The ability to think in long phrases, to plan the climax and to maintain the ability to play the less important parts lightly is very important. This sonata requires some performance experience, musical knowledge and self control, but is worthwhile to study and perform. It may be mercilessly placed next to other intensively chromatic pieces in d minor such as *Toccata Settima* by Michelangelo Rossi<sup>57</sup> or *Chromatische Fantasie und Fugue*, BWV 903, by J. S. Bach,<sup>58</sup> for a stronger impact on the public.

### 3.2.8. Sonata K. 24 Presto in A major

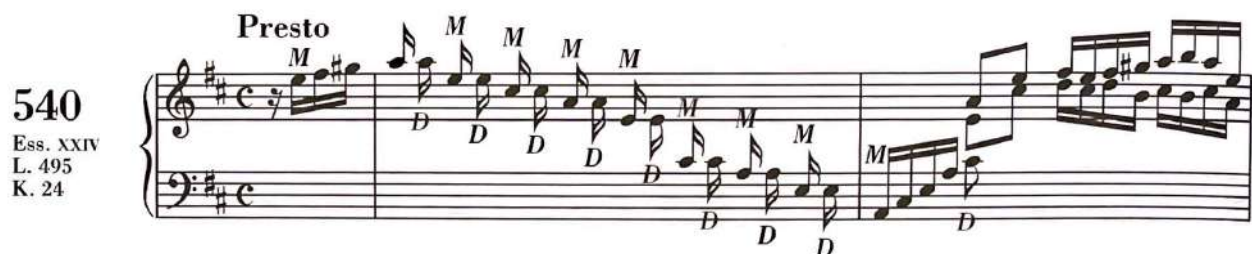


Figure 6. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*, ed. Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi, vol. 10, 10 vols (Milan: Ricordi, 2021), Sonata K.24, p.100, bars 1-2

Sonata K. 24 continues the usage of the repeated notes technique. In this collection such technique was first introduced in Sonata K. 17. Besides that, it has long and fast fantasia-like scales and very fast jumps of the left hand over the right hand and back.

In this Sonata, Scarlatti uses repeated notes as a replacement for an arpeggio (see fig. 6). Throughout the piece such sections are usually carrying just one harmony and don't have mixed

<sup>57</sup> Michelangelo Rossi, 'Settima Toccata', in *Toccate e Correnti d'intavolatura d'Organo e Cimbalo*, 1st ed. (Roma: Croce di Genova, 1657), 20–23.

<sup>58</sup> Johann Sebastian Bach, 'Chromatische Fantasie Und Fugue' (ca 1740), Mus. ms. Bach P 651, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.



Figure 7. Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin*, 1st ed. (Paris: Chez L'Auteur, Le Sr Boivin, Le Sr Leclerc, 1727), p.15.

directions, unlike similar ones in the *Quatrieme double* from *Gavotte* by J.P. Rameau (see fig. 7). A slightly different concept can be seen for instance in bar 24, where the left hand 8th note is followed by the same 16th note in the right. The scales divided between hands are not very challenging. The following section is similar to the ones discussed in the previous sonatas. Somewhat new would be the movements of parallel thirds in the right hand, first occurring in bar 12. They are comfortably written in groups of two and are not complicated when played with a position fingering. Unlike the parallel thirds, the jumps of the left hand in bar 23 and following similar places are indeed as challenging as impressive when played cleanly. The six 8th notes in the left hand are divided by jumps of two or three octaves and require great coordination and precision. Finally, this Sonata also has quite full chords with acciaccaturas — up to 6 voices. When executed with an appropriate arpeggiation, the harpsichord gives very expressive crispness and sharpness to such harmonies.

While at the first glance this sonata may look quite easy for an advanced pupil, it has very unfriendly and risky sections. Nevertheless, when practiced well it is an impressive, pleasing and light piece for the public to listen to. From a didactic point of view, it lacks consecutive repetition of certain types of technique to be given as a way to develop it. Despite that, it is a challenging piece which can be used as an opening piece or an encore for the concert.

### 3.2.9. Sonata K. 26 Presto in A major

This piece contains a large variety of textures discussed above. It is full of parallel octaves, hand crossings, quick jumps up to three octaves, repeated notes and other coordination difficulties.



Figure 8. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*, ed. Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi, vol. 10, 10 vols (Milan: Ricordi, 2021), Sonata K. 26, p. 112, bars 30-31.

In Sonata K. 26 Scarlatti utilises a lot of ideas he used earlier, but certainly elevates their difficulty as well as the complexity of the music. The passages of parallel octaves are longer, sections with crossed hands become trickier and the jumps remain extremely large and fast. For instance in bar 30, while the hands are crossed, in the right hand the composer breaks the chords with a single note on

the downbeat and a third on the upbeat (see fig. 8, p. 23). Instead of writing the third as an accompaniment, he distinguishes a jumping bass voice and a scattered, sporadic alto voice, which appears on an upbeat to disappear on the downbeat. Such complexity in the texture requires a lot of attention and practice, if all the little nuances are meant to be brought to the listener.

This Sonata, as well as the next ones, is very challenging, but worth dedicating time. When even seemingly simple places are written with high sophistication, it brings joy to be able to find the ways to show the smallest detail to the listener. This music can surely be used as didactic material for advanced students.

### 3.2.10. Sonata K. 27 Allegro in B major

Unlike most of the previously discussed sonatas, K. 27 is a rather calm and introverted piece. This Sonata is also one of the most played pieces from *Essercizi*.

The main challenge for the student in this piece is to keep the softest touché possible in spite of technical challenges. The hand crossing leaps in the left hand should remain as calm as Alberti bass in the right.



Figure 9. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*, ed. Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi, vol. 10, 10 vols (Milan: Ricordi, 2021), Sonata K. 27, p. 116, bars 4-6.

The flow of the ascending and descending passages by the end of both parts should be played gently and without unnecessary accents. The repeated notes in bars 29-31 should be played with changes of fingers or with the help of the left hand, so that the risk of accents is minimised. All the fast modulations that Scarlatti writes are still to be executed softly.

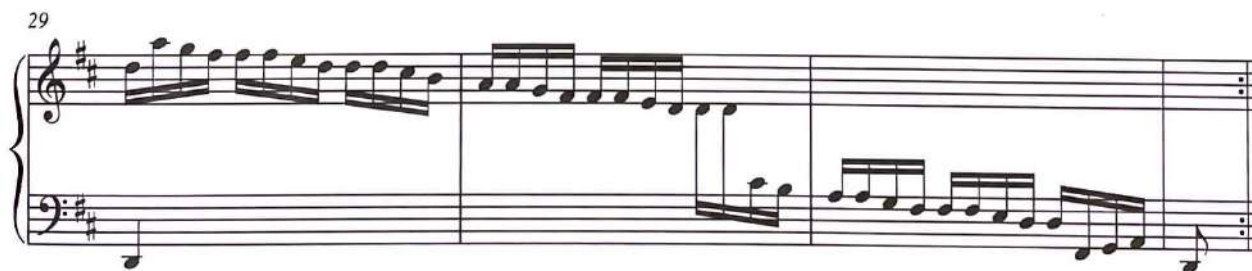


Figure 10. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*, ed. Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi, vol. 10, 10 vols (Milan: Ricordi, 2021), Sonata K. 27, p. 117, bars 29-32.

This Sonata is extremely fragile. Besides the danger of losing the fineness of the touché, the piece may provoke an exaggerated expressivity in the performance. Such would affect and cover all the little details in the piece and break the unending flow of the 16th notes. K. 27 requires a deep, careful and creative cooperation of the student with the score and the keyboard.

### 3.2.11. Sonata K. 29 Presto in D major

Now that the increase in complexity and difficulty of the sonatas throughout the collection is clear, I would like to discuss the most theatrical and therefore immensely difficult sonata from a technical point of view.

Sonata K. 29 is the longest and one of the most virtuosic pieces in the collection. It is mostly such due to the Scarlatti's indication of hand placement. It is full of absolutely ridiculous places where the hands are crossed to their extreme. For instance, in bar 5 on the second beat the right hand plays D while the left plays fis''-a''.



Figure 11. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*, ed. Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi, vol. 10, 10 vols (Milan: Ricordi, 2021), Sonata K. 29, p. 124, bars 3-5.

Similar examples are in bars 14-15 with parallel thirds played with crossed hands (see fig. 12) or in

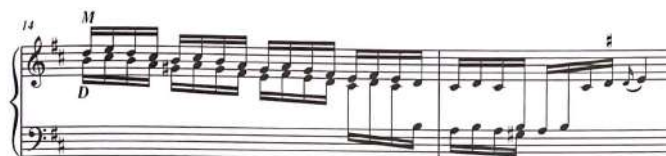


Figure 12. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*, ed. Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi, vol. 10, 10 vols (Milan: Ricordi, 2021), Sonata K. 29, p. 125, bars 14-15.

sonata becomes much easier. Yet this was not what Scarlatti imposed. He excessively makes the piece on the limit of being playable.

The extensive length of the sonata and its difficulty and complexity may be overwhelming for

bars 20-24, where in martellato-like texture the lower voice is played by the right hand (see fig. 13). Indeed, if one takes these indications away,

as Ambrose Pitman did in his edition,<sup>59</sup> this



Figure 13. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*, ed. Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi, vol. 10, 10 vols (Milan: Ricordi, 2021), Sonata K. 29, p. 125, bars 20-21.

<sup>59</sup> Pitman, Ambrose. *The Beauties of Domenico Scarlatti [...]*. Vol. 1. London, n.d, preface.

many of the students. The main task of this sonata is not just to impress a listener, but also a viewer. It is supposed to be played with *sprezzatura* — all the difficulties should sound easy. This Sonata is a showcase of Scarlatti’s creativity as composer and technical brilliance as a performer.

### 3.2.12. Sonata K. 30 Moderato in g minor

Domenico Scarlatti’s *Essercizi* ends with a long and dark fugue. As opposed to the sonata, the shape of which the composer treated in lots of different ways, the fugue has a very strict structure.

An expressive and dissonant theme (see fig. 14) is gradually passed through three voices. Only by the end he adds the fourth voice to double the bass line. Such compositional decisions together with rows of parallel sixths and certain harmonic complexity may remind the student of the fugues by G. F. Handel (see for instance Allegro from Suite in E minor, HWV 429).<sup>60</sup>



Figure 14. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonate per Clavicembalo - Critical Edition*, ed. Emilia Fadini and Marco Moiraghi, vol. 10, 10 vols (Milan: Ricordi, 2021), Sonata K. 30, p. 131, bars 1-5.

It is somewhat symbolic that after all the creative chaos of Scarlatti’s ideas, the collection ends with the fugue. The “ingenious Jesting with Art”,<sup>61</sup> as he wrote in the preface, ends with the most elaborate genre in solo keyboard music. Didactically, for a student, it is very important to know that Scarlatti knows how to write strictly structured pieces very well and that each one of his compositions has a certain shape.

<sup>60</sup> George Frideric Handel, *Suites Du Pieces Pur Le Clavecin*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (London, 1725), Suite Quatrieme HWV 429, Allegro, pp. 38-43.

<sup>61</sup> Kirkpatrick, Ralph. *Domenico Scarlatti*. 6th ed. USA: Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 102. Translation of the preface in the original facsimile of the first edition (Scarlatti, *op.cit.*, preface).

## 4. Conclusions

The sonatas from Domenico Scarlatti's *Essercizi per gravicembali* have played a great role in the history of keyboard performance practice for nearly 300 years. During this time the way in which both performer and listener perceive this music has changed many times. In this work we have seen how easily the title was changed — *Essercizi* become *Piece Pour le Clavecin*, *Lessons* and even *Beauties*. The order of the pieces was changed, and some sonatas were transcribed for other instruments, simplified, edited, modified etc. Though what stayed unchanged is the deepest admiration for the composer and the wish for this music to be played and never forgotten.

Despite the word “*essercizi*” in the title, in the preface to his collection Scarlatti asks the reader “not to look for a profound learning”. As discussed in the first chapter, the meaning of this term has many meanings and was quite widely used in the music collections of the 18th century. Nevertheless, in most cases it was used not as indication of a didactic collection of pieces, but rather as a generic title common at that time. Such cases can be seen in *Clavier-Übung* collections in Germany or *Lessons* in Great Britain. A somewhat different situation appears in France and in some of the pieces in Italy, where terms *Leçons* and *Essercizi* were used in the titles of sacred music. By the end, modern dictionaries share many meanings of the discussed term and many of them may suit the general concept of publishing music at that time. We often see in the prefaces such words as “joy”, “spirit”, “amusement” etc. This just indicates that we can exercise not just our fingers, but our soul, mind and spirit, our hearing and attention to the newest ideas prepared and published by those composers.

While such explanations of the term may have led us away from the didactic usage of *Essercizi per gravicembali*, the sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti were widely used in teaching nearly since the moment they were composed. Many of his sonatas were written for his student the Queen of Spain Maria Barbara. Some of the later publications in 18th and 19th centuries discuss the incredible value that these sonatas can bring to teaching. That's why the third chapter of this work was dedicated mainly to the analysis of the sonatas and description of their value in teaching. The 12 sonatas I chose are a showcase of the variety of tasks and difficulties, which may be addressed in different years of student's education. It is important to mention, even though the collection was not meant to be didactic, that the difficulty of the pieces with some exceptions is increasing throughout the collection. The last several sonatas require careful practice and dedication even from the most advanced of students, while the first ones may be given somewhen in the beginning of the studies.

Scarlatti's variety of textures and compositional techniques, as well as broadness of harmonic language could not have gone unnoticed. These pieces are always welcome in the concert hall and are extremely useful in teaching. What is important to remember, is that perceiving these *Essercizi* with all possible meanings of the term will help to underline the immense expressivity and beauty of this music.

## **Abstract**

This work is dedicated to Domenico Scarlatti's *Essercizi per gravicembali* published in London in 1738. It explores the term "essercizi", or "exercise" in English, through an excursus in the similar collections and pieces throughout Europe: the English *Lessons*, the German *Clavier-Übungen*, the Italian *Essercizi* and the French *Leçons*. While in some cases the term is employed in generic titles for non didactic collections of music, in others it is used in sacred music. Some of the dictionaries also provide us with the definition of spiritual exercise. The second half of the work includes the analysis of 12 selected sonatas from the collection from a didactic point of view. Each of them imposes new technical challenges to the student and may be used by different ages and skill levels. Even though the collection was not printed as clearly didactic material, it can be and is widely used as such.

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