

Padre Antonio SOLER - 13 Sonatas  
Luigi BOCCHERINI - *Fandango* \*

Richard Lester, harpsichord

\* with David Ponsford, second harpsichord

1	Sonata in D major	R86	5:40
2	Sonata in D minor	R24	4:49
3	Sonata in C-sharp minor	R21	6:14
4	Sonata in D flat major	R110	4:23
5	Sonata in A minor	R118	3:29
6	Sonata in C minor	R19	2:55
7	Sonata in C major	M27	9:00
8	Sonata in F major	R56	7:10
9	Sonata in D major	R92d	5:40
10	Sonata in D minor	R39	3:04
11	Sonata in G minor	M38	5:54
12	Sonata in D major	R74	4:53
13	Sonata in G major	R43	3:47
14	Boccherini, Fandango *		5:46

Total playing time 72:49

The harpsichord music of Antonio Soler is to a great extent overshadowed by the keyboard works of his near contemporary Domenico Scarlatti, music master to Queen Maria Barbara of Spain. Scarlatti also suffered a similar fate at the hands of Bach and Handel whose greater diversity of works favoured them in the public's popularity pole. Soler though, rightly claims a prominent position amongst those few select composers who became beacons of the Classical Enlightenment and whose music possessed elements of genius.

Antonio Francisco Javier José Soler Ramos was born to Maria Teresa Ramos and Marcus Mateo Pedro Soler in 1729 in Olot, Catalonia. The actual date of his birth is unrecorded, but we can deduce mid-to-late November as an approximate time. Baptismal records testify that he was christened in the church of Saint Esteban on December 3rd of that year. We can also speculate that the Soler household was a musical one; his father served as a musician in the Numancian regiment and entered Antonio into the Escolonia of the Monastery at Montserrat when he was six. Entry into the famous choir school was decided by audition, so he either possessed a fine voice, or received excellent musical instruction from his father; possibly a combination of both that secured the deal. Soler remained there for about ten or eleven years in the twelfth century institution that was reputedly one of the finest musical establishments in the world.

His teachers at the Escolonia were Benito Esteve, chapel master and Benito Valls who was organist. Antonio's progress was rapid and at the age of fourteen he applied for the post as chapel master at two cathedrals and was appointed organist of the Cathedral at Seo de Urgell. At this same time he was also made a sub-deacon, and at the age of twenty-three took Holy Orders, entering the Escorial as a Hieronymite monk in the Order of Saint Jerome where he remained in relative confinement for the rest of his life. In 1757 he took over as *maestro di capella* after the death of Gabriel de Moratilla. His existence at the Escorial is well documented by a colleague who wrote an extremely detailed obituary notice, describing a man who loved his cell and was always there except for duty. Whilst at the Escorial, Soler studied with José de Nebra and Scarlatti. Familiarity with secular music was also part of a

musical education for the monks who were frequent visitors to Madrid as part of a wider learning curve. Soler's contact with the outside world is further documented in an obituary notice to a friend, the wind player, Pedro Serra, where Soler revealed that travelling musicians and dancers from Spain and abroad were frequent visitors to the Escorial; diversions he would clearly have witnessed.

Entertainment at the Escorial is scantily documented, but apart from courtly musical functions, we know that on festival days in particular, the streets of Madrid, thronged with people, processing, singing, dancing, and playing guitars and castanets with monks also participating in the festivities. San Isidro (a 12th century Saint) whose feast day is celebrated annually on May 15th in the Carabunchel suburb of Madrid is a prime example of how festivals from that period continue to this day. Contact with secular activities of this nature, especially song and dance, may well have provided the spark that lit the flamenco fire in much of his music.

The folk music of Spain has always held a great fascination for me and I have written extensively about it in a booklet entitled 'Flamenco Sketches' in my complete Scarlatti set (NI 1725-31). But where does one begin? My obvious starting point was several trips to Spain and in particular, Andalusia to find a gypsy with the longest memory as written evidence is exiguous. In the booklet, I set out to identify dances and their characteristics familiar to Scarlatti from which he may well have drawn inspiration. Flamenco, of course is a more modern term, but it is referred to in the eighteenth century, drawing from the roots of traditional Spanish folk music and dance. As a native of Catalonia, Soler would have been familiar with Catalan taste for the round dance from which the *sardana* evolved: a dance, usually in 6/8 time alternating with 3/4 and it is syncopation of this nature that animates the dance. The round dance in earlier forms was performed by medieval pilgrims to the Montserrat monastery, a tradition that survives to this day. Similar cross rhythms appear in the Sonata in C-sharp minor R21. Affinity with the folk music and dance of his native land clearly manifests itself in the syncopation and vocal melismas that infuse his

sonatas. Elements of *cante jondo* (literally deep song) are also evident in some sonatas embraced by the soul of this vocal style of flamenco. Yet another influence was Padre Miguel Basilio, a guitarist appointed at the Escorial who was famed for playing fandangos; it is reported that admirers would gather beneath his window to hear him play. Fingerprints of the 'galant' style are also vividly evident in his harpsichord music with expressions of melodic ingenuity, grace and beauty that are so characteristic of that period.

In 1762, Soler's 'Llave de la modulación' was published; a highly controversial harmony treatise that drew criticism from many quarters. He was also credited with inventing a tuning device which he called *afinador* or *templante* with plucked strings that divided the octave into microtones. Soler's output of around 200 harpsichord sonatas were written for the Infante don Gabriel, favourite son of Carlos III whom Soler taught from around 1765. In fact, Soler taught three of Carlos III children, but it was the Infante don Gabriel's proficiency that shone to an extent that possibly rivalled that of Scarlatti's pupil Queen Maria Barbara. In 1768 Carlos III built a music room for the young prince known as the 'Casita de Ariba' which remains, restored, to this day and was used as a practice room housing many instruments. There was also an area for the audience to sit during concerts.

The prince rewarded Soler with an annual sum of 25 doubloons for his monastic requirements. Carlos III himself was no lover of music though and when he acceded the throne in 1760. Farinelli the great opera castrato singer was treated with chilly politeness, given a sum of money and dismissed. Italian opera became a thing of the past and when Farinelli was mentioned in conversation, the king would superciliously remark that, "capons were only fit to eat."

Many have speculated on whether Soler actually studied with Scarlatti. The two would certainly have met during the Spanish court's lengthy autumn visits between 1752 and 1756 and apart from the aforementioned Madrid manuscript testimonial, further evidence can be

found at the Fitzwilliam museum in Cambridge in a copy of Soler sonatas, printed in London. The book belonging to Lord Fitzwilliam is signed and dated 1796 and inscribed by him as follows - 'The originals of these harpsichord lessons were given to me by Father Soler at the Escorial, the 14th of February, 1772. Father Soler had been instructed by Scarlatti.'

The obituary notice of this devout and humble soul on December 20th 1783 stated that, 'Our Lord, who has decreed every moment of our lives, recalled him at half past five in the morning.' His other works include 6 quintets for string quartet and organ, 6 concertos for two organs, around 130 choral works with Latin texts and many *villancicos* (devotional works sung during matins on the feasts during the Catholic calendar).

### **LUIGI RUDOLFO BOCCHERINI**

Luigi Boccherini was born in Lucca, Italy in 1743 and was renowned as a composer and 'cellist. His father, also a cellist sent his son to study in Rome and from there in 1757, both gained employment in Vienna as musicians at the Burgtheater. In 1761, Boccherini went to live in Madrid where he was appointed music master to Carlos III younger brother, the Infante Luis Antonio. He would certainly have met Soler and it is interesting that both composers wrote fandangos. Soler's fandango appears on my recording of sonatas by Carlos Seixas and Soler (NIMBUS NI5836) and the version of Boccherini's fandango we hear on this CD is my own arrangement for two harpsichords from the last movement of Quintet No 4 in D major G448.

## THE MUSIC

During the eighteenth century, the term sonata was used to describe a work in binary form with two repeated sections and it was Domenico Scarlatti who largely elevated and immortalized the genre with exciting excursions far beyond the imagination of his contemporaries. It seems therefore natural that Soler should emulate his teacher and write in a similar manner and indeed some have incredible inventiveness. Soler nails his colours mostly to the 'galant' mast with, amongst other clues, frequent use of the Alberti bass; a device rarely used by Scarlatti.

The sonatas on this CD can be pigeonholed into three categories: the dance (sonatas R21, R118, R43 & R92d). Those which are slower and more vocal in nature (R4 & R110) with a hint of the melismatic expression found in *cante hondo*: a pure form of Andalucian folk music. And those which lean towards the new 'galant' style (R56 & M27). There are also frequent echoes of the guitar *punteado* and *rasgueado* styles, R86 & R43 which are also related to the dance.

I have used the universally accepted Rubio numbering. Father Samuel Rubio made an extensive study of Soler and catalogued all his music. Some of the sonatas are multi-movement and for the Sonata in D R92, I perform the fourth section, a complete binary sonata which I have labelled 'd.' The sonata in C major M27 appears in the Madrid Conservatory manuscript.

## INSTRUMENTS

In 1761 Diego Fernandez built a large compass harpsichord of 63 keys (F, to g''') for the Infante don Gabriel. It probably sounded very similar to the unsigned Spanish instrument in the Courthauld Institute in London; a copy by Andrea Goble is used for six sonatas on this CD (tracks 1 – 6). Its robust character when both eight foot registers are engaged is well

suited to the more powerful sonatas, yet capable of great delicacy when a single register is used.

A copy by Michael Cole of the Portuguese harpsichord by José Joachim Antunes (F, to F'') in the Finchcocks Museum of musical instruments in Kent again lends a healthy sound to the sonata in C major M27 and more subtle tones to the Sonata in F major R56 (tracks 6 & 7).

The remaining sonatas are played on a copy of an early 17th century Italian harpsichord (short octave G/B to d'') by Colin Booth, ideally suited to the crystalline nature of the music (tracks 9-15). The Spanish copy (F, to f'') is tuned in Vallotti, A=415 as is the Antunes, and the Italian instrument is at A = 440 and tuned in Werkmeister III.

The two instruments for the Boccherini Fandango belong to David Ponsford. A harpsichord by Andrew Garlick (1993) after Jean-Claude Goujon (c.1749) and an instrument by Robert Goble & Son (Oxford, 1988) after Carl Conrad Fleischer (Hamburg, 1720) both tuned at a pitch of A=440, temperament: Vallotti.

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## **RICHARD LESTER**

In a distinguished musical career spanning nearly five decades, Richard Lester's musical prowess has come full circle. A Fellow of the London College of Music, he gave organ recitals at many famous venues early in his career. He studied harpsichord with George Malcolm and made his London debut to critical acclaim in 1972 and two years later was hailed as 'one of our leading players' by the Daily Telegraph. Now recognised globally as one of the great masters of the harpsichord, Richard Lester was recently awarded a prominent position in the Penguin Guide to the 1000 Finest Classical Recordings following a long association with Nimbus Records. He also received the 'outstanding accolade' in International Record Review in September 2011. A comprehensive discography of 50 CDs includes the complete Scarlatti sonatas listed in the Penguin Guide to Recorded Classical Music, plus sonatas by Seixas, Soler and Haydn and Mozart piano sonatas on a Schantz fortepiano of 1795. Concert schedules included broadcasts for BBC radio and television, harpsichord recitals at the Royal Festival Hall South Bank Centre, Wigmore Hall, Bath International Festival, Bruges Festival, engagements abroad – and master classes and workshops at Dartington Summer School in Devon with Fernando Valenti.

Equally at home with Romantic and modern organ music, he has performed widely, works by Howells, Vierne, Widor and Messiaen at many chapels and Cathedrals including King's College, Cambridge, St Paul's, Coventry and Ely Cathedrals and in 2011 at Westminster Cathedral where he played Bach, Vierne and Messiaen. He has held posts as Director of Music at the Mall Preparatory School in Twickenham, Oakley Hall School in Cirencester and as Master of the Choristers at Cirencester Parish Church he directed courses there and at Bristol Cathedral for the Royal School of Church Music. Now semi-retired from the major concert platform, he has recently completed a set of recordings of Frescobaldi's music on historic instruments which also includes Canzoni played by his daughter, Elizabeth on Renaissance recorders. A project to record the complete organ masses of Cavazzoni, Gabrieli and Merulo with the Schola Gregoriana del Duomo di Bergamo is now underway.

In 2010, he and his wife Jackie converted to the Catholic faith and he is now Director of Music at St Peter's Roman Catholic Church in Cirencester. For a full biography and discography visit [www.richardlester.org.uk](http://www.richardlester.org.uk)

## **DAVID PONSFORD**

David Ponsford is both a musicologist and a professional organist and harpsichordist, and is an authority on keyboard music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An exhibitioner at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, he studied organ with Peter Hurford, Lionel Rogg and Piet Kee, and harpsichord with Kenneth Gilbert and Gustav Leonhardt. On graduating from Cambridge he was appointed Assistant Organist at Wells Cathedral. Later, he was awarded a PhD at Cardiff University where he is an Associate Lecturer as well as Conductor of Cardiff University Chamber Orchestra and the University Choir. He also teaches organ and harpsichord at Bristol University. He has recorded for ASV, Gaudeamus, Hyperion, Riverrun, NPC and Guild, and in 2004 was awarded a Leverhulme Research Fellowship. His edition of Biber's Mystery Sonatas was published by Ut Orpheus, Bologna, in 2007, and he is the author of 'French Organ Music in the Reign of Louis XIV' (Cambridge University Press, 2011). For a full biography and discography visit [www.davidponsford.org](http://www.davidponsford.org)

Recorded by Raymond Fenton, Atkyns Sound

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