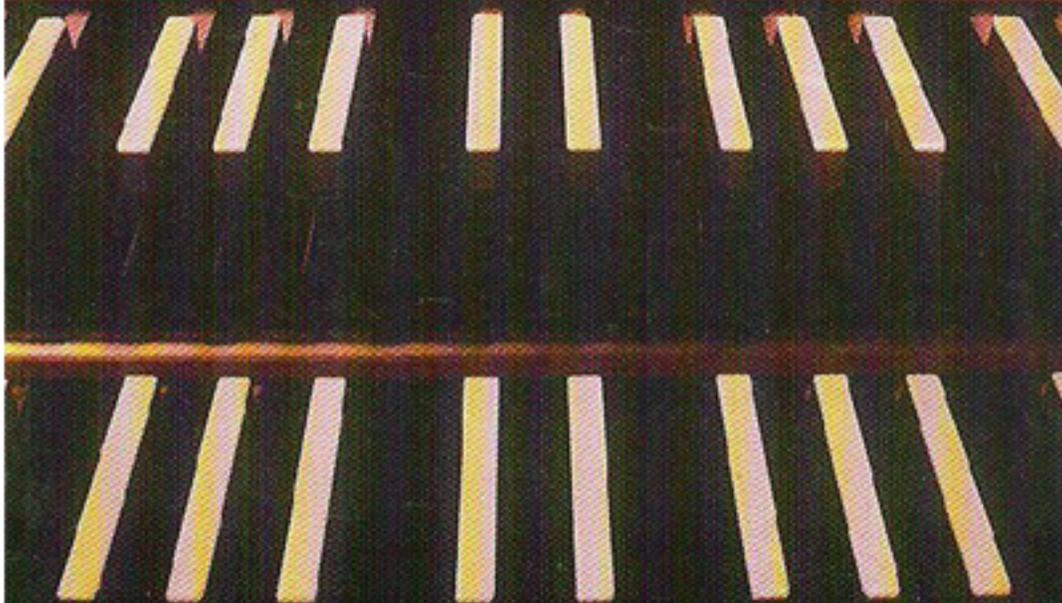


Cedille Records
CDR 90000 009

Padre Antonio Soler
HARPSICHORD SONATAS, VOLUME II



DAVID SCHRADER

PADRE ANTONIO SOLER (1729-1783)

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|------------|---------------------------------|---------|
| 1 | Sonata No. 1 in A major | (4:12) |
| 2 | Sonata No. 2 in E-flat major | (3:31) |
| 3 | Sonata No. 3 in B-flat major | (5:20) |
| 4 | Sonata No. 8 in C major | (7:27) |
| 5 | Sonata No. 10 in B minor | (9:18) |
| 6-9 | Sonata No. 62 in B-flat major | (25:08) |
| | 6 I. Rondon. Andantino con moto | (6:58) |
| | 7 II. Allegretto expresivo | (6:55) |
| | 8 III. Minue di Rivolti | (4:26) |
| | 9 IV. Allegro spiritoso | (6:32) |
| 10 | Sonata No. 70 in A minor | (5:06) |
| 11 | Sonata No. 74 in D major | (9:03) |
| 12 | Sonata No. 81 in G minor | (5:33) |

David Schrader, harpsichord

TT: (75:56)

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The Keyboard Music of Soler

Although Padre Antonio Soler composed many medium and large-scale works for the church and other venues, he is best known for his keyboard sonatas. These highly varied works occupy a central position in Soler's oeuvre and represent a unique contribution to the repertoire for harpsichord, organ, and fortepiano.

Antonio Francisco Javier Jose Soler y Ramos was baptized on December 3, 1729. Destined for a career in the church, in 1736 he entered the choir school of the great Catalan monastery of Montserrat, where he studied with the monastery's "Maestro," Benito Esteve, and its organist, Benito Valls. After becoming *maestro de capilla* at Lerida circa 1750, Soler was ordained to the subdiaconate in 1752. He entered the Hieronimite

monastery at El Escorial, the large palace and college cum monastery established a century and a half earlier by King Philip II, taking the habit on September 25, 1752. Soler became *maestro de capilla* at El Escorial in 1757, upon the death of the incumbent maestro, Domenico Scarlatti. The monastery's extant records, or *actos capitulares*, note that Soler had an excellent command of Latin, organ playing, and musical composition, and that his conduct and application to his discipline were exemplary.

Soler is known for his theoretical writings, which, in addition to the famous *Llave de le modulacion* (key to modulation) of 1762, even include a treatise on the conversion rates between Catalan and Castilian currencies. While the principles contained in the *Llave* are still recognized as valid, it is well to note that the modulations were considered radical enough in eighteenth century Spain to elicit critical rebuttal, to which Soler himself responded with a 1765 tract entitled *Satisfacción a los reparos precisos* (reply to specific objections).

Like his illustrious predecessor at the Spanish court, Soler also enjoyed the patronage of a member of the royal family, Prince Gabriel, the son of Charles III. Soler wrote many of his sonatas for the prince, who also inspired Soler's Six Concerti for Two Organs and his quintets for keyboard and strings. While Scarlatti's influence on Soler is evident, salient differences exist in the two composers' works for keyboard. Soler composed more sonatas in a relatively moderate tempo than did Scarlatti; the *acciaccaturas* (dissonant notes played quickly in between harmonic tones of chords, literally "the crushed ones") so germane to Scarlatti's musical language rarely appear in Soler's keyboard works; and Soler made frequent use of Alberti bass patterns, which Scarlatti tended to avoid. Similarities, however, include the demand for virtuosic technique, a fondness for syncopations, and a thorough infusion of Spanish folk music.

Soler's music spans two eras. Born during the latter part of the baroque period, Soler lived to compose music reflective of a later tradition. Eight of the sonatas on this recording are of the single-movement design favored by Scarlatti. The one multi-movement work represents an unusual assimilation of the classical style.

Unlike the graceful, sensuous idiom cultivated by the French clavecinistes, the music of Soler, whether in a moderate or a quick tempo, gives an immediate impression of urgency and vigor. Composed of an

elaborate linkage of cadential formulas, Soler's pieces abound with changes of texture, extremes of range, and all types of virtuosity in which both player and listener are meant to take delight.

The harmonic design of the two-part, one-movement sonatas is fairly uniform: if the sonata is in a major key, the first half will progress from tonic to dominant. If the work's tonality is minor, the first half will lead to the relative major, and the second half will return to the tonic. Yet the variety of ways in which Soler treats this familiar formula is astounding. Most notable in the A major Sonata that opens this record are the fanfares at the work's outset and the many repeated notes that flicker throughout the second half. The Sonata No. 2 in E-flat is characterized by trills and thirds in the right hand, and athletic leaps in the left. Although the third sonata is in a more moderate tempo and has none of the virtuosic romps of its two predecessors, it still conveys a sense of inexorable forward motion. The clever linking of phrases allows for no moment of repose despite the tempo indication of *Andante*.

The eighth sonata in C major introduces a new dimension to this recording — that of the terrace dynamics available to instruments with two keyboards. Although the eighth sonata is more sectional than the third, its interplay of different dynamic levels lends variety and interest. The raised neighbor tones of the secondary theme and the general regularity of the phrases creates a listening experience that the Italians would call a "piacevole."

With the Sonata No. 10 in B minor, however, the world of driven, intense virtuosity returns with a vengeance! The chief demand on the player is that of passing the left hand quickly over the right in a veritable fusillade of passages that would beggar the most exacting target practice of a veteran skeet-shoot. When storms of trills and rapid, cascading runs are added to this already formidable docket, one can only imagine the specter of Soler snickering at the challenged performer, simultaneously manufacturing perspiration while in search of expression. The scope of the piece is of surprisingly large dimension, however, and the effect of dark intensity it produces well repays the efforts of the player.

The four-movement plan of the Sonata No. 62 in B-flat is clearly a mark of the emerging classical period and esthetic, but the forms of the individual movements themselves is not at all in keeping with the tradition

we have come to expect from better-known composers of the late 18th century. Despite the generous length of this sonata, the content of each movement is lightweight, and the outer movements are quite eccentric. The humorous first movement is cast not in sonata-allegro form, but as a rondo — a form generally associated with final movements of classical sonatas. The second and fourth movements are cast in the binary form of the one-movement sonatas. Only the third movement, a minuet, seems to have found its proper place as a component of a classical sonata. The finale departs from Soler's usual harmonic scheme: instead of the dominant, F major, the harmony arrived at toward the end of the first half is in the minor key of the mediant, D minor. The transparency of texture and the graciousness of motion inherent in all four movements could well have become mired in convention had those movements (especially the outer ones) been cast in the standard classical forms. The keyboard writing and form of each movement are sufficiently out of the ordinary to ensure intrigued listening over many hearings.

The 70th and 74th sonatas return us to the single-movement format. Each is a perfect foil for the other. No. 70 is characterized by a headlong virtuosic drive, while the dignified No. 74 presents arresting harmonic progressions, and lots of cesurae (pauses) so the listener can savor the unusual harmonies.

The last sonata on the recording, No. 81 in G minor, is like two completely different pieces smashed together into one schizophrenic sonata. As the harmony moves from the tonic to the expected relative major, the tempo suddenly shifts from the beginning's wild prestissimo to an impassioned cantabile. The rest of the sonata is something of a pitched argument between these very different characters that is at once fascinating, passionate, and complete. While one does not speak of classical *Sturm und Drang* in Spanish music, the idea does not seem impossible here.

As with my first recording of Soler, the changes in accidentals that I supply periodically throughout the disc are in accordance with performance practice applicable to the rendering of 18th century Spanish keyboard music. Repeated passages are apt to be slightly embellished.

The instrument used in this recording is a double-manual harpsichord built by Lawrence G. Eckstein of West Lafayette, Indiana in 1983. It is based

on the Dumont-Taskin harpsichord which is kept in the museum of the Conservatoire National de Paris. It has two sets of unison-pitched strings and one set tuned an octave higher. Extensive work on the instrument's action was carried out by Paul Y. Irvin. The harpsichord is tuned to A=415 Hz, and the temperament used is similar to that devised by Thomas Young (c. 1800).

-- David Schrader

About the Performer

Born in Chicago in 1952, David Schrader received his Performer's Certificate (1975), Masters (1976), and Doctor of Music Degree (1987) from Indiana University and is now a Professor at Roosevelt University's Chicago Musical College. A familiar figure to audiences in the Windy City, the multifaceted Schrader has been hailed for his performances of baroque and classical repertoire on harpsichord and fortepiano, and music of vastly divergent styles and eras on organ and piano. Mr. Schrader has appeared in recital and performed with major orchestras throughout Japan, Europe and North America, including frequent appearances as soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under such celebrated conductors as Daniel Barenboim, Claudio Abbado, Erich Leinsdorf, and Sir Georg Solti, with whom Schrader has made three recordings for London Records. David Schrader is currently organist at Chicago's Church of the Ascension and a member of the Rembrandt Chamber Players.

Critical praise for Schrader's first Soler CD ("Fandango & Sonatas" – Cedille Records CDR 90000 004)

"Schrader uncovers a wealth of detail in the richly patterned sonatas without obscuring the larger designs. The popular 'Fandango' has perhaps never received so exhilarating a reading. — *Chicago Tribune*

"We have never heard more beautiful, natural, realistic harpsichord sound... The playing? Excellent... There is no better recording on CD... How about it for volume 2, Mr. Schrader?" — *American Record Guide*

Also by David Schrader: Bach Complete Toccatas & Fugues for organ on one CD (CDR 90000 006)

"Schrader[']s minute rhythmic innovations turn these familiar Bach works into a vivid listening experience." — *San Jose Mercury News*