Cembalo Paradiso

Anna Paradiso Harpsichord

D Scarlatti, Leigh, Froberger,
A Scarlatti, Paradies,
Frescobaldi, JS Bach,
d’Anglebert, Royer
ANNA PARADISO
My first decisive meeting with baroque performance practice at the harpsichord was through Gordon Murray. Luckily all my piano teachers at the conservatory in Bari had been superb musicians (I received my solo diploma cum laude in piano in 1998) but while I was studying for my solo diploma in harpsichord (that I received with full marks in 2002) I was at the same time the Summer courses with Murray at ‘Antiqua BZ’ in Bolzano, and I studied privately in Vienna. I learned many things there that still are part of my playing today. In the meantime, I graduated at the faculty of classical studies in Bari and I received a scholarship for a doctorate in Latin literature. Although Antiqua BZ awarded me with a tour of concerts at the Brezice Festival in Slovenia, by then my life had been overtaken by Ovid’s poetry. I spent a period studying at Oxford University, where I also taught Latin grammar. I also taught classical culture at the Royal College of Technology in Stockholm, where I received a post-doctorate. It was then that I decided to dedicate myself entirely to my musical activities, studying also for an Advanced Master in harpsichord and basso continuo at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm with inspiring teachers such as Mayumi Kamata and Ulf Söderberg. Part of my Masters studies were at the Conservatorio Cimarosa in Aveilino with Enrico Baiano, whose endless enthusiasm for lively discussions on Frescobaldi and French music from the 1600s were of great stimulation for me. Baiano is also one of the greatest experts of Neapolitan baroque music for keyboard, and of partimenti - both fields very dear to me. I have also played for Christoph Rousset, whose artistry and knowledge are always accompanied during our meetings by extreme kindness and patience in hearing my ideas.

I have played as continuist and soloist at the harpsichord, as well as at the piano, in most of the major festivals in Sweden and in the most prominent halls of Stockholm. I have performed also in Italy, England, Finland, Germany, USA and Japan. Together with my baroque ensemble Paradiso Musica I have recorded JS Bach, CPE Bach and Telemann for BIS. Among other enthusiastic responses from international critics, Paradiso Musica’s disc The Father, the Son and the Godfather was named by BBC Music Magazine ‘chamber music choice of the month’ in January 2012. In duo together with my husband, recorder player Dan Laurin, I have performed in many countries (both at the harpsichord and at the piano) and recorded in 2004 for BIS. Our next recording will include all sonatas for flute by JH Roman. I have also given lectures in European conservatories and courses about baroque music and classical rhetoric. When not performing, I enjoy researching ancient sources on original fingering and basso continuo and the vast semi-unknown collection of baroque Neapolitan manuscripts in San Pietro a Majella in Naples.

THE PIECES
Domenico Scarlatti’s Sonata in D minor shows off both the composer and the player. Here Scarlatti seems even more than usual attracted to asymmetric phrasing and abrupt endings, followed by sudden rest where there is no music at all. Yet the piece propels forward with an irresistible energy, imitating the mandolin, that fashionable instrument of eighteenth century Naples. The result is a mix of moods, and in my version I try to underline the nervous, paranoid feeling that runs through out the piece - more of a ‘character piece’ than one would expect, quite Romantic in nature, about 100 years too early! Or maybe it’s just a snap-shot of urban living in Southern Europe in the eighteenth century?

After the first world war, painters, composers and writers faced a massive destruction of aesthetic values and norms. Many thought it impossible to ‘rebuild art’ based on a lost society, and the link between ethics and aesthetics became a burden that eventually forced some artists to break any connection with tradition or the past. The loss of identity and purpose is still felt, but it also provided a ‘clean slate’ that gave us Berg’s violin concerto, Webern’s concentration of expression and Schönberg’s string quartets. The English response to the human catastrophe of 1914-18 was different. Composers indeed tried to reconnect to the musical language of the past, primarily through the use of historical forms and harmonic processes. At the same time the Early Music movement was gaining momentum from the urge to define a cultural belonging. Some of its first stars, such as recorder player Carl Dolmetsch and his musical partner for more than half a century, harpsichordist Joseph Saxby, set out to encourage composers of the day to write for their ‘old’ instruments. Walter Leigh’s Concertino from 1934 is a beautiful example of how to adapt an ancient musical instrument to a new language without distorting its innate voice. Like many of his English colleagues, Leigh is a strong melody maker, whose contrapuntal approach weaves a fine texture where all players have something interesting to say. There is something grand about Leigh’s music that I can only describe as the work of a truly great artist: the first movement’s strong intellectual approach to thematic material is contrasted with the elegant flow of gestures and the slightly jazzy harmony of the long cadenza; the second movement is so sad, so heartbreakingly beautiful that only the rustic playfulness of the third movement may prevent the soloist from bursting into tears… Again Leigh comes very close to the central ideas of the baroque: the constant struggle between reason (counterpoint) and passion (melody). Hence there are many parallels between the Bach concerto on this recording and Leigh’s concerto. In his short life, Leigh managed to develop an individual style which is also reflected in many works for the recorder. He was killed in action in Tobruk, Libya, in 1942.

We of course have to consider performance practice with Leigh’s music as well as with any other style. The harpsichord at the time of the concerto was ‘modern-
ized'. Joseph Saxby's score (which formed the base for my interpretation) is full of annotations such as numerous indications of dynamics, achieved through pedal-operated registration changes. I chose to use an 18th century French harpsichord for this recording - authentic or not, I very much like the resulting 'neo-baroque' lightness, which also underlines the origins of this jewel of a concerto.

Johann Jakob Froberger was a true world musician: born in Germany he spent most of his life in Rome, Florence, Vienna, and Paris, and wherever he worked he profoundly influenced colleagues and musical styles. Even Mozart and Beethoven are said to have studied his works. The same rhetorical devices and ornaments used in his music. They include repetitions to emphasize a concept, sudden breaks to create suspense, jumps and sighs, strange harmonies to express pain or wonder... Familiarity with this kind of tradition is an excellent occasion for the harpsichordist to show off all sorts of tricks, and the incredible variety of phrasing. To play this piece is like donning a series of masks - some variations are very lyrical and even romantic, while others are rather controlled, some simply crazy! And who said that Italian baroque aesthetic: lights, shadows, theatrical gestures that break a mood, harmonic proportions that are distorted into unexpected shapes, rich contrasts. This music is for me like a Caravaggio painting, where religious devotion and celestial beatitudes are expressed with realism - often even violent - vitally, rather than by means of contemplative meditation. I wonder if these two supreme geniuses of my country ever met in the streets of Rome...

The fingering I have chosen for these toccatas is the one described by Girolamo Diruta in his didactic book Il Trattato, popular in Italy in Frescobaldi's period, and even later, too, as shown by treatises and surviving fingered pieces in Italy between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The musical result of this repertoire depends a lot on the use of old fingering. For instance, Diruta uses different fingerings for the left and the right hands depending on the direction of the scales, creating an interesting integral effect of off-beat accents that help delineate individual musical figures.

Using old fingerings was for a long time almost a taboo subject within the keyboard world. Where recorder players would go on forever talking about lè, de, lè, re, le, ta-ka and ha, and violin players try to make the difference between bow-strokes as clear as possible, a

Italian in flavor. Like Frescobaldi in some of his toccatas, hundreds of years later, and only today he is thoroughly influenced colleagues and musical styles. Even Mozart and Beethoven are said to have studied his works. The same rhetorical devices and ornaments used in his music. They include repetitions to emphasize a concept, sudden breaks to create suspense, jumps and sighs, strange harmonies to express pain or wonder... Familiarity with this kind of tradition is an excellent occasion for the harpsichordist to show off all sorts of tricks, and the incredible variety of phrasing. To play this piece is like donning a series of masks - some variations are very lyrical and even romantic, while others are rather controlled, some simply crazy! And who said that Italian baroque aesthetic: lights, shadows, theatrical gestures that break a mood, harmonic proportions that are distorted into unexpected shapes, rich contrasts. This music is for me like a Caravaggio painting, where religious devotion and celestial beatitudes are expressed with realism - often even violent - vitally, rather than by means of contemplative meditation. I wonder if these two supreme geniuses of my country ever met in the streets of Rome...

The fingering I have chosen for these toccatas is the one described by Girolamo Diruta in his didactic book Il Trattato, popular in Italy in Frescobaldi's period, and even later, too, as shown by treatises and surviving fingered pieces in Italy between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The musical result of this repertoire depends a lot on the use of old fingering. For instance, Diruta uses different fingerings for the left and the right hands depending on the direction of the scales, creating an interesting integral effect of off-beat accents that help delineate individual musical figures.

Using old fingerings was for a long time almost a taboo subject within the keyboard world. Where recorder players would go on forever talking about lè, de, lè, re, le, ta-ka and ha, and violin players try to make the difference between bow-strokes as clear as possible, a
harpsichordist using fingerings suggested by some of the greatest composers and players of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries might be met either with silence or contempt. Even stranger is that amongst those who did advocate the use of old fingerings some espoused a ‘middle way’, believing that the articulations that naturally result shouldn’t be heard, and that the player should still strive for an equal touch. And yet set against these original sources dealing with articulation describe how to make fine patterns of different accents, and couple that to the theory of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ notes (nota cattiva and nota buona). The original source from before 1800 that I ever came across talks about equalization of the notes as a goal. On the other hand every player is entitled to his or her own opinion, and we leave this to the aesthetic outlook of each and every performer. I for my part teach my beginner students of the harpsichord old fingering, which isn’t more complicated than any other fingering system - and I firmly believe that the choreography of the fingers helps shape the phrasing.

Johann Sebastian Bach is no stranger to music which almost seems to bleed with emotion. The F minor concerto is a piece full of uneasiness and commotion, another ‘romantic’ piece if you will. But it is also a journey, from a complicated first movement with an abundance of strained harmonies and twisted melodies, passing a moment of divine beauty and peace in the second, to a climax, a peak of tension. Also, long sections with repeated patterns ascending higher and higher create what in rhetoric is called a non satis est ullo tempore longus amor.

The second movement on the other hand is calm and lyrical, a beautiful melody freely hovering in the air over a steady pizzicato bass - like the human soul singing her song of life while being aware of its own agitation and trouble. The final fugato seems to solve all the emotional struggles, leading them to order through hard intellectual work. However, it doesn’t manage to do so completely, leaving open some cracks for the soloist to reveal her anguish. Curiously enough Bach also seems to involve himself in the ancient conflict between reason (prima pratica) and emotion (seconda pratica). The classics never were far away for an intellectual like Bach.

Jean-Henri d’Anglebert is in one way the quintessence of French music. Before Francois Couperin, he can be considered the composer with whom French works reached their most refined and most elaborate level. I believe that once a player can master the style and technique, the access to later harpsichord French music becomes easier. The three pieces I chose for this album demonstrate some of d’Anglebert’s most outstanding qualities. The wonderful harmonic travel of the prelude non mesuré unravels itself in different rhetorical gestures and dramatic expressions contained in the chords, and in the melodic elements that now and then peep out. The dreamy Allemande emerges from a rich and elegant ornamentation. In the Courante, the two hands have different roles, where the right hand contains the typical melodic and syncopated rhythm of this dance, whereas the left hand plays a more fluid accompaniment. The courante will encounter a similar treatment later in the French tradition, for example in Rameau.

In one way Joseph-Nicolas-Pancrace Royer’s Le Vertigo is typical of the descriptive style of French harpsichord repertoire from this period, with its presentation of a particular aspect of the human soul, or character. I agree with those who believe that the word vertigo in this context doesn’t mean really ‘dizziness’, but I cannot say with absolute confidence if it might mean ‘sudden anger’ or rather ‘whim’ (as I believe more probable on the basis of a text by Molière from the same time). In any case, Le Vertigo stands out for the innovative virtuosic technique that it demands: a true parade of dexterity for the player. In the first piece one measures the power and theatrical drama, where an apparent calm is constantly ruffled by turbulence and explodes periodically in a burst of percussive chords.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My warmest thanks go first of all to Dr David Hansell, internationally renowned researcher, accomplished recorder player, and most kind and generous sponsor for this recording. May this CD be a humble token of gratitude and friendship for you, David!

I should also like to thank my friend Robin Bigwood for giving me the opportunity to record on his label. Skilled, patient and tolerant producer, wonderful harpsichord player, many-sided talent, Robin has been the most ideal companion in this journey. Thanks also to the outstanding musicians who have joined me in the two harpsichord concertos: my friends Mats and Henrik from my group Paradiso Musicales, together with Jonas, Josef and Tomas.

Warm thanks go also to Fredrick Österling and Anders Blomquist at Musikaliska; Andrew Mayes, for finding me of a copy of Leigh’s Concertino; the staff at T-Light Design in Hägersten; Masao Kimura for sending his beautiful Guarneriano harpsichord from Japan just on time for the recording; Margaretta Willberg at BIS; Jan Åkerblom for many hours of patient and silent filming of the recording sessions; and my parents, Marisa and Nicola Paradiso, for giving a much needed mainland home to our harpsichords.

I want to conclude with a thought of gratitude and love for my husband Dan Laurin. This recording would never have happened without him. His sublime artistry and profound experience in the musical field will never cease to amaze and inspire me! Non satis est ullo tempore longus amor.
Recorded December 2011 to February 2012 in Sweden, at Musikaliska Stockholm and Länna Church

Production, recording & editing: Robin Bigwood
Tuning: Dan Laurin

Booklet photos & design: Robin Bigwood
Anna Paradiso photos: Pelle Piano

INSTRUMENTARIUM
French harpsichord by Francois Paul Ciocca (2008) after Nicolas and Francois Blanchet (1730)
PARADIES, D' SCARLATTI, ROYER, BACH, LEIGH

Neapolitan harpsichord by Masao Kimura (2012) after Onofrio Guarracino (ca. 1650)
FRESCOBALDI, A' SCARLATTI

Flemish harpsichord by Antonio de Renzis (1987) after Anonymous (end of the 17th century)
FROBERGER, D' ANGLEBERT

ADDITIONAL MUSICIANS
Jonas Lindgård (leader, Bach)
Josef Cabrales (leader, Leigh)
Henrik Frendin (viola)
Mats Olofsson (cello)
Tomas Gertonsson (bass)