
NEWS & INFORMATION

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TO WIT:
SOLER'S SUNNY SONATAS
EVOKE SMILES

David Schrader concludes his selective, two-part survey of Antonio Soler's imaginative harpsichord sonatas with a CD of witty pieces that elicit smiles and others that bring to mind a wealth of instrumental timbres, most notably Spanish guitar and baroque trumpet flourishes (Cedille 90000 009).

Schrader plays vivaciously; his readings sparkle with freshness and immediacy that make these 200-year-old pieces seem almost new. The new disc includes nine sonatas, with the cheery, quasi-classical, four-movement Sonata No. 62 flanked by pieces in conventional Baroque single-movement form.

The small independent Cedille label fine tunes its audiophile credentials by further refining the microphone-placement techniques that led American Record Guide to say of Volume I, "We have never heard more beautiful, natural, realistic harpsichord sound." And this time, Schrader performs on his own French-style harpsichord, a microphone-friendly instrument that sounds highly agreeable on CD. The harpsichord (shown on the CD booklet cover) has two keyboards that can be played separately or in tandem, affording a wide expressive range. Schrader characterizes the upper

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keyboard as somewhat more resonant, the lower keyboard as more flute-like and fundamental-rich. The harpsichord's fast, responsive keyboards are especially well suited to Soler's virtuosic demands.

In the liner notes, Schrader writes of Soler's musical humor, at one point conjuring the image of the composer "snickering" as keyboard players careen through Sonata No. 10's devilishly difficult passages. (The sonata calls to mind cartoon-like cat-and-mouse escapades, carnival calliopes, tubas, and melodramatic piano tracks for silent movies -- although no one claims Soler was that prescient.) Schrader says historical evidence indicates Spanish royalty and clergy did have a sense of humor (the Inquisition notwithstanding).

Many of Soler's later sonatas show the emergence of the Classical age, but Sonata No. 81, with its sudden contrasts, prefigures even Romantic forms. The exhilaration the listener senses in the music might well relate to the thrill of venturing beyond old barriers.

Although a Spanish quality permeates Soler's music in general, the leisurely paced Sonata No. 74 takes this association to another level: it's written (and performed) in a way that makes the harpsichord sound uncannily like a guitar. Particularly colorful, this sonata also evokes trumpet fanfares in coda-like passages.

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Soler: Sonata No. 1 in A major; Sonata No. 2 in E-flat major;
Sonata No. 3 in B-flat major; Sonata No. 8 in C major;
Sonata No. 10 in B minor; Sonata No. 62 in B-flat major;
Sonata No. 70 in A minor; Sonata No. 74 in D major;
Sonata No. 81 in G Minor
David Schrader, harpsichord
Cedille 90000 009

Note to Broadcasters: For an intriguing segment, segue the guitar-like Sonata No. 74 with Spanish guitar music. Also recommended: the lovely Minue de rivolti movement from Sonata No. 62.