

# A Music Lesson on a Soler Sonata

with Alicia deLarrocha's Interpretive Remarks

Music printed on pages 25-26

Reported by Dean Elder

"Three hundred sonatas?" I said in disbelief. "But not just by Soler."

"Si, si," she replied. "And there are many others not yet printed."

"But on the jacket notes of your recording — Alicia de Larrocha plays Antonio Soler 8 Piano Sonatas (Epic Record BC 1389) — it says there are 75."

"Yes, but after that was written, many more have been discovered and printed. For the moment, there are six books of them and there will be many more. Padre Soler had a big, big production . . ."

I had chosen a Soler Sonata in D Major as a work to ask Alicia de Larrocha, world-famous interpreter of Spanish music, for lesson suggestions because it is a sonata which young students, as well as intermediate and advanced, can play and enjoy. In no way an esoteric museum piece, of interest mostly to specialists, it is a piece immediately appealing and pedagogically rewarding.

Born in northeastern Spain, Antonio Soler (1729-1783), *el padre*, entered the school of sacred music run by monks in the abbey of Montserrat when six years old. There he received a thorough musical education. When 22, he became organist in the Spanish Court at *El Escorial*, studying with Jose de Nebra and from time to time with Domenico Scarlatti.

Soler played Scarlatti's sonatas, studying his style, his way of combining Spanish folk elements with classical form. I asked Madame de Larrocha how Soler is like Scarlatti and how he is different.

*Soler, in general, takes the dances which are absolutely Spanish. There are, for example, several sonatas which have the rhythm of the Zapateados, popular dances. This is the difference: even if Scarlatti took on some of the essence of*

*Spain, he is not purely Spanish as is Soler. Soler naturally shows the influence of Scarlatti, of the epoch, of the instruments, the kind of writing and the character of that time.*

*For 31 years, until his death, Soler was a part of the Spanish court and composed a vast quantity of chamber music, songs, incidental music to plays, keyboard pieces, masses, motets, and concertos, many of which are either still in manuscript or have been lost. It was only in the twentieth century that he was rediscovered.*

"What edition do you use?"

*I use the UMA, the Union Musical Espanola, edition of Padre Samuel Rubio. It offers the greatest possible guarantees of authenticity and presents the text without any expression signs, with the exception of the rare ones which Soler himself put in the manuscripts. But concerning ornaments and interpretation, my version is completely my own.*

"What about interpretation?"

*The interpretation of Soler is something difficult to talk about because you know the door to the clavinists, the door to the 17th and 18th centuries has such a great liberty in the manner of playing, the method of the ornaments, and so on. And it is necessary to see the performance of these works like this. It is not possible to play pieces of this era in any one way.*

*You must understand the era, the style, and then naturally see the elements which you must have — the rhythm, the clarity, the nuance — and then each person must do what he believes he must do.*

"How should students work on the Sonata in D Major?"

*First of all, I would tell students to study and understand the*

*form. They should analyze the form, study the era, and know the sonority they want on their instrument. They must perfect the bass which is the rhythm; their playing must have the necessary clarity and evenness. Then afterwards they should try for color together with the accents, the attack, and do something which makes the piece gay and colorful.*

Following are measure by measure comments, based on Alicia de Larrocha's recording of the Sonata in D Major, together with her applicable comments:

*Allegro. Gay, colorful, bright (♩-circa 80), in general with small accents on "one" of each measure.*

*M. 1. The first phrase forte, the left-hand upbeat triplet fast. The right-hand sixteenth notes should be well articulated and even, the left-hand eighth notes sharp staccato.*

*M. 5. The second phrase piano, and this time for color and clarity the right-hand sixteenth notes poco staccato.*

*M. 8. A fast trill, beginning on the note above.*

*M. 9. The right-hand sixteenth notes poco staccato, corresponding to the touch of the repeated notes in measure 12, the left-hand eighth-note octaves staccato.*

Notice that the phrases are of different lengths — sometimes 1, 2, 3, or 4 measures, sometimes elliptic: measures 9-12, a three-measure group; measures 12-14, a two-measure group; measure 14, one measure; measures 15-17, a two-measure phrase as is its sequence in the next two measures.

*Mm. 19-25. Larrocha accents the third-beat left hand notes, phrasing them over to the first beats, not accenting the changes of harmony; whereas the right hand sixteenth notes are accented*

on the first beats. Notice the descending bass line, the ascending soprano. Measure 19 is again a one-measure group, corresponding to measure 14.

*Mm. 27-31.* This four-measure melodic fragment, in A major, like a second theme, can be played forte with measures 36-40 piano as echo, or as Larrocha does on her recording: two measures forte, then two piano. I asked her if she preferred echo effects in bigger or smaller phrases:

*I don't like to make nuances of very short duration, because it is difficult to hear quick changes from forte to piano, to make the change quickly. Even on the clavichin, it is difficult. But even more so on the piano because the possibility is less to change the sonority suddenly. So in a small part like this, the ear can't capture the change.*

"You play forte for two measures, then piano for two measures on your recording," I said.

*Is it like that on the recording? Then, I play it differently each time. You can't give a guide for things which you do on the spur of the moment. Fortunately, we change; life changes every moment. Pupils should practice it both ways and then decide.*

### Staccato

*Mm. 31-33.* Both hands staccato. Practice it with various touches.

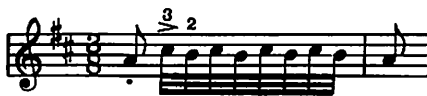
*Mm. 33-35.* The right-hand sixteenth notes poco staccato with accents on "one," the left hand with accents on "two."

*The kind of staccato I play depends on the color which I want to give. If I want to give a very rhythmic character, I play the staccatos dry; if I want a more elegant character, I play less dry. For these reasons I take a little pedal, or use no pedal. The attack is shorter or longer. All the color comes from the way you play the legatos, the staccatos, the accents.*

*In these measures, sometimes I play staccato for clarity, as on the record, sometimes not. If I play in a hall that has much resonance, which is not very clear, I would play staccato to have more clarity. If I play in a hall that is extremely dry, I wouldn't play it staccato because I would obtain too hard a sound. You have to adapt yourself to each moment.*

*For recordings you have to play more clearly than in a big hall and you have to know what sonority the technician is giving you. If you listen a little before you make the recording, you will hear what you have to do. And the recording is never successful because you do one thing at the moment, and when you listen afterwards you have absolutely different ears. You don't hear at all the way you heard before. And then when you listen to the recording a year or so later, you feel and hear still differently.*

*M. 35.* Played:



### Ornaments

*I add ornaments but not octaves. I play according to my ideas. The ornaments are mine; they aren't always written. Sometimes I play more ornaments than written, depending on the sonata. Also playing on the piano is not the same as playing on the harpsichord or clavichord.*

*The ornaments a pupil plays will, of course, depend upon his facility. If he plays the ornaments poorly, not clearly, and can't give them the necessary sound, I would suggest that he omit them, which is much better than playing them poorly.*

*On the last page, measure 91, I make a slight variation which is not written:*



*These things are the liberty which the interpreter had during this epoch. Each person and editor will do different things.*

### Pedal

On her recording, Alicia de Larrocha takes touches of pedal on wide intervals when forte — measures 27, 28, 36, 37, 51, 52, 53, for example. "What about pedal?" I asked.

*In general, without pedal, of course. But pedal, too, depends on the hall and the instrument. If the sound is too dry, I take small pedals from time to time to obtain the sonority or color which I want, but never pedal to connect the notes.*

### Repeats

"And you believe it desirable to play all the repeats?"

*The repeats are the form, and if you don't take the repeats, the form is unbalanced. But from time to time when, for example, I play an encore and the sonata would be too long with the repeats, I cut. But that's not good!*

*Mm. 55-59.* Four measures forte. This second half of the sonata which begins in the parallel minor, D minor, instead of being a reprise of the beginning, develops from measure 55 to measure 79 the idea first stated in measures 12 et al.

*Mm. 59-63.* Four measures, as echo, in piano.

*From m. 65.* The right hand is in two-measure melodic sequences, whereas the bass is moving harmonically, in V7-I sequences overlapping the sequential movement of the right hand.

*M. 70.* The last measure of the sequence is elliptic, becoming the first measure of the ascending right-hand figures. Poco a poco crescendo in these measures to measure 76, corresponding to measures 20-25 of the exposition. Some editions have the last note of measure 73, an ascending A. Larrocha plays it as E flat, keeping the last two notes a descending third as in the other measures of the sequence.

This:



Not this:



"What final advice would you give?" I asked.

*You have to give a guide to young pupils. While they are learning the notes, acquiring the necessary evenness, have them practice with various touches. After they have been given a guide and have perfected the notes, they may do other things. That's natural. Years pass, your musical culture and understanding grow; your ideas change. But in the beginning, the pupil has to start step by step, thoroughly and carefully. When you start to ride a bicycle, you can't start by riding without your hands, by just letting the bicycle fly!*

# Sonata

Edited by Dean Elder  
as recorded by Alicia DeLarrocha

PADRE ANTONIO SOLER

Happy, Bright (♩ = circa 80)

Allegro

*staccato*

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with a treble and bass clef. The first system (measures 1-5) includes dynamics *f* and *p*, and features a *staccato* instruction. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5. The second system (measures 6-11) includes a *fast trill* and *poco staccato* markings. The third system (measures 12-17) includes a *f* dynamic and a *p poco espressivo* marking. The fourth system (measures 18-23) includes *poco a* and *poco cresc.* markings. The fifth system (measures 24-29) includes a *dim.* marking and a *staccato* instruction. The score is filled with various musical notations including slurs, accents, and specific fingering instructions.

30 *poco staccato*  
*staccato*

35 *f* *p*  
*staccato*

40 *poco staccato*

45 *f* *tr*

51 *rit.*

55 *f* *p*

60

(*f* - V7)

65 *dim*

i ) (Eb V7 I ) (C-iv

70 *p* *poco staccato* *poco a poco cresc.*

V7 i V7 ) (g - V7

75 *tr*

i V7 i ) d - V = D+ V

79 *f* *p* *staccato* 31

84 *f*

90 *p* *staccato* 31 5

95 *f* 5 4 3 tr

101 *rit.* end of trill