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Manuel Espona

COMPLETE PIANO
SONATAS

VOLUME 1

Melani Mestre *piano*



Manuel Espona 1714-1779
Complete Piano Sonatas, volume 1

Sonatas para Tecla, volume 1

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|----------------------------|------|
| 1. Sonata No.1 in D minor | 4'40 |
| 2. Sonata No.2 in D minor | 2'27 |
| 3. Sonata No.17 in A minor | 3'36 |
| 4. Sonata No.3 in B flat | 5'42 |
| 5. Sonata No.4 in B flat | 5'05 |
| 6. Sonata No.5 in G minor | 4'57 |
| 7. Sonata No.6 in G minor | 3'51 |
| 8. Sonata No.16 in G minor | 5'44 |
| 9. Sonata No.11 in E flat | 5'58 |
| 10. Sonata No.12 in E flat | 4'17 |
| 11. Sonata No.7 in C minor | 6'02 |
| 12. Sonata No.13 in G | 5'27 |
| 13. Sonata No.24 in G | 5'21 |
| 14. Sonata No.9 in E | 5'04 |

world premiere recordings

Melani Mestre *piano*

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Manuel Espona (1714-1779) – Complete Piano Sonatas, volume 1

Born in Sant Feliu de Torelló, Catalonia, in 1714, Manuel Espona died on 9 January 1779 at the Monastery of Montserrat, where he had been an acolyte between 1724 and 1733, studying with Father Vicenç Pressiach.

Montserrat was one of the main centres of musical study and practice in eighteenth-century Spain, so we should not be surprised by the great quantity and quality of the works composed there during the Enlightenment, an age in which instrumental music was finally beginning to forge its own path as it freed itself from its liturgical, ecclesiastical and literary dependence.

Espona, who took holy orders in 1733, was unquestionably one of the leading composers active at Montserrat. Until now, however, he has been a neglected figure, thanks to a lack of information about both his monastic life and his output, dedicated primarily to keyboard works and oratorios.

Espona shared the post of *maestro de capilla* of Montserrat's renowned Escolania (school for choristers) with Father Benet Esteve (1701-70). His pupils included Antoni Soler (1729-83), who went on to become one of the greatest Spanish composers of his day, continuing the style of his teacher and creating an immense catalogue of sonatas and other keyboard works, notably the Six Quintets for harpsichord and string quartet and the famous *Fandango* in D minor.

At the time of writing, Manuel Espona's own catalogue of keyboard works is known to comprise 27 sonatas, most of which are held by the Biblioteca de Catalunya in Barcelona; I recently prepared the first complete edition, now published by Hispania Música.

The keyboard music of Espona and his contemporaries is exceptional in its richness, quality and imagination, whether written by those also active at Montserrat, such as Narcís Casanovas (1747-99), Anselm Viola (1738-98), Benet Julià i Ros (1727-87) and Josep Antoni Martí (1719-63), or by composers working elsewhere in Spain such as Josep Teixidor (1750-1811), Josep Freixanet (1730-62), Felipe

Rodríguez (1760-1815), Sebastián Albero (1722-56), Manuel Blasco de Nebra (1750-84) and José Ferrer (1745-1815).

Each of these composers succeeded in developing his own individual style, while still abiding by canons that were largely fixed and predetermined for practical reasons – works were written for a particular kind of keyboard instrument or to suit the temperaments used in different monasteries or other places of worship or culture.

Manuel Espona's works, however, are notably unique and individual in nature, leaving behind the typical Italian-influenced tradition of the first half of the eighteenth century, as represented by Joan Baptista Cabanilles. This is reflected not only in the way he develops a highly original musical discourse, but also in his choice of key for each sonata, his modulations, his painstaking and elaborate ornamentation, his innovative rhythmic textures and a whole host of differences that lift these works above the rest, turning them into a genuine musical treasure trove.

The Sonatas

Nearly all of Espona's 27 keyboard sonatas have survived in manuscript form, possibly in the hand of a copyist, and are held at the Biblioteca de Catalunya in Barcelona (shelf marks M 921/15 and M 921/16). Other scores are housed in the Montserrat Archive (shelf mark AM 2290,2 and Ms. 2290) and in Teruel (in the famous *Manuscrito de Valderrobres I*).

All these works are single-movement sonatas in binary form, reflecting the legacy of the Scarlatti era. Like many of those written by his pupil Soler, Espona's sonatas are characterised by their *galant* style, without foregoing moments of virtuosity, brilliance and restrained lyricism.

Fast and slow tempi alternate here; major keys give way to minor keys. Each sonata is an entity in itself, with its own personality, although we can discern behind every one of them the inimitable hand of a genius, one to be discovered and enjoyed.

This entire magnificent compendium of sonatas must surely have been written

for the harpsichord, given the nature of the works and the fact that their tonal and rhythmic features are so characteristic of that instrument. Given the “modernity” of Espona's idiom, it is not surprising that they translate almost flawlessly to the modern piano, which is capable of conveying the wealth of timbres and dynamics woven into the sonatas' melodic and harmonic fabric. Indeed the piano perhaps allows the whole range of dynamics, articulations and ornamentations that make up the Espona style and brand to be heard in even sharper focus.

I hope when listeners first hear these beautiful sonatas they will discover a new world of colour and sensation, independent of the historical connotations that shaped each and every one of them, since all composers share the desire to transcend the boundaries of time with works granted immortality by ever new, if ephemeral, approaches to musical interpretation.

© Melani Mestre – Pianist · Conductor · Composer · Music researcher

Translation: Susannah Howe

“Sonatas para tecla” vol.I

Nacido en Sant Feliu de Torelló, Catalunya, en 1714, murió el 9 de enero de 1779 en el Monasterio de Montserrat, donde sirvió de monaguillo durante los años 1724 y 1733, siendo discípulo del Padre Vicenç Pressiach.

Siendo Montserrat uno de los principales epicentros del estudio y de la praxis musical durante el siglo XVIII en España, no es de extrañar la gran cantidad y calidad de las obras que allí se forjaron a la luz de la Ilustración, en la que finalmente la música instrumental tomó su propio camino, emancipándose cada vez más de la dependencia litúrgica, eclesiástica y literaria.

Entre ellos, Manuel Espona ocupa un lugar sin duda predominante y, hasta la fecha, aún inédito y desconocido, debido tanto a la falta de información sobre su vida monacal, ya que sirvió en el Monasterio de Montserrat desde el año 1733, como del conjunto de su obra, básicamente dedicada a la música para tecla y al oratorio.

Espona desarrolló el cargo de Maestro de Capilla de la reconocida Escolania de Montserrat junto al Padre Benet Esteve (1701-1770), y entre sus discípulos más destacados encontramos a uno de los más grandes exponentes de la composición del XVIII español: el Padre Antoni Soler (1729-1783), quien se convertirá en un gran continuador del estilo precursor de su maestro hasta cosechar un inmenso catálogo de sonatas y obras para tecla, entre las cuales podemos destacar los 5 “Quintetos para clave y cuarteto de cuerda” y el famoso “Fandando” en Re menor.

El catálogo de las obras para tecla de Manuel Espona lo forman, hasta la fecha, una colección de 27 Sonatas, custodiadas y conservadas, en su mayoría, en la Biblioteca de Catalunya, en Barcelona, y que recientemente ha editado en su totalidad, por primera vez, la editorial Hispania Música, revisada por el pianista Melani Mestre.

Al igual que otros compositores coetáneos de Manuel Espona, como por ejemplo Narcís Casanovas (1747-1799), Anselm Viola (1738-1798), Benet Julià i Ros (1727-1787) o Josep Antoni Martí (1719-1763), todos ellos montserratinos, u otros

contemporáneos como Josep Teixidor (1750-1811), Josep Freixanet (1730-1762), Felipe Rodríguez (1760-1815), Sebastián Albero (1722-1756), Blasco de Nebra (1750-1784) o José Ferrer (1745-1815), la producción de música para tecla, ya fuera clave, clavicordio u órgano, es de una riqueza, calidad e imaginación inigualables.

Cada uno de ellos llegó a elaborar un estilo verdaderamente propio, aún siguiendo unos cánones más o menos fijados y predeterminados por exigencias instrumentales, ya fuera por el tipo de teclado al cual iba destinada la obra o por cuestiones de afinación establecidas en cada monasterio o lugar de culto y cultura.

Pero en el caso de Manuel Espona, esta singularidad y personalidad parecen no tener límites, dejando muy atrás el estilo típico de Joan Baptista Cabanilles, que constituyó el cliché típico de la primera mitad del siglo XVIII, de clara influencia italiana. Este hecho se materializa no tan solo en la elaboración de un discurso musical sin precedentes sino a la hora de escoger las tonalidades para cada Sonata, sus modulaciones, la cuidada y elaborada ornamentación, la novedad del tejido rítmico y un sinfín de diferencias que realzan estas obras por encima de las demás, constituyendo un verdadero tesoro musical.

Las Sonatas

Prácticamente el conjunto de las 27 Sonatas para tecla de Manuel Espona se conserva en manuscrito, posiblemente de copista, en la Biblioteca de Catalunya, en Barcelona, bajo los topográficos M 921/15 y M 921/16. Otras se conservan también en el archivo del Monasterio de Montserrat bajo el topográfico AM 2290,2 y Ms. 2290, y en Teruel, en el famoso Manuscrito de Valderrobles I.

Todas las Sonatas son bipartitas y estructuradas en un solo movimiento, herencia de la época de Scarlatti, y se caracterizan, como buena parte de las de su discípulo Antoni Soler, por un estilo galante, sin desistir del virtuosismo, la brillantez y el lirismo contenido.

Los “tempi” rápidos se van alternando con los lentos; las tonalidades mayores

van dando paso a las menores. Cada Sonata tiene su propia entidad, su propia personalidad, aunque detrás de cada una hay la mano de un genio por descubrir y disfrutar, con un trazo único e irrepetible.

Ciertamente todo este magnífico compendio de Sonatas estaba dedicado al clavicémbalo, tanto por su naturaleza como por los rasgos tímbricos y rítmicos, tan propios de este instrumento. Asimismo, y dada la “modernidad” del lenguaje de Espona, no sorprende que estas obras, interpretadas al piano moderno, gocen de una traducción casi inmaculada, ya que encajan como un guante a la hora de transmitir toda la riqueza tímbrica y dinámica intrínseca en el trasfondo del discurso melódico y armónico. De esta manera, el piano permite aún más, si cabe, enfocar y detallar toda la gama de matices, articulaciones y ornamentaciones que conforman el estilo y la marca Espona.

Es nuestro deseo que el oiente, escuchando por primera vez estas bellísimas obras musicales, descubra todo un nuevo mundo de colores y sensaciones, al margen de todas las connotaciones históricas que forjaron cada una de estas Sonatas, ya que es la voluntad de todo compositor transgredir la frontera material del tiempo y llegar a la inmortalidad de su arte mediante la actualización constante, y al mismo tiempo efímera, de la interpretación musical.

© Melani Mestre

Hailed by international critics as “A truly virtuoso musician of the world elite” (*"The Daily Telegraph"* – 1997, London / *"Ziua"* – 1998, Bucharest), since debuting with the *Dortmund Festival Orchestra* in 1998, performing Rachmaninov's *Piano Concerto No.2*, **Melani Mestre** has risen to become one of the most internationally acclaimed pianists and conductors of his generation.

Under the seasoned tutelage of *José A. Calvo* and *Alicia de Larrocha*, themselves disciples of *Frank Marshall*, Melani directly inherited the cherished Catalan Piano Tradition of *Enrique Granados*.

Commanding a vast repertoire of more than 100 concertos for piano and orchestra by Spanish composers (*Granados*, *Malats*, *Albéniz*, *Blancafort*, *Falla*, *Cassadó*, *J. Gómez*, *E. Serrano*, *Molleda*, etc), Ukrainian composers (*Kosenko*, *Lyudkyevich*, *Bilash*, *Barvinsky*) and others including *Ástor Piazzolla*, *Xaver*



Scharwenka, Nikolai Medtner and Ignaz Paderewsky, Melani tenaciously champions the little known and oft neglected hidden treasures of Spanish and International Classical Music repertoire, showcasing them in his performances as a solo pianist, in chamber music, and as an orchestral conductor.

Successfully combining the role of both pianist and conductor, Melani Mestre's collaborations are a catalogue of over 80 of the world leading orchestras, including the *London Symphony Orchestra, London Festival Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra, Mexico State Symphony Orchestra, Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra, Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra of Cuba, Czech National Symphony Orchestra, Wiener Kammerorchester, Prague Chamber Orchestra, Rumanian National Philharmonic Orchestra, Aguascalientes Symphony Orchestra, Iasi Philharmonic Orchestra, Israel Netanya Kibbutz Orchestra, Istanbul Chamber Orchestra, etc.*

Among Melani's musical projects, highlights include his revelational discovery in 2009 of previously unpublished and unfinished manuscripts of Enrique Granados' *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*. Subsequently edited and completed by Melani Mestre, the work was premiered worldwide by himself, accompanied by the Lviv Symphony Orchestra, at the Lviv Philharmonic Concert Hall, Ukraine in 2010 - the same year the work was published by the Editorial Boileau Publishing House, Barcelona.

Melani Mestre also completed the landmark first-ever recording of the concerto, accompanied by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under the baton of maestro Martyn Brabbins for the British record label, Hyperion Records. This project also included another worldwide first recording of *Isaac Albéniz' Rapsodia Española Op.70* in its original version, orchestrated by *Albéniz*, which, along with the *Concierto Fantástico Op.78* was also discovered by Melani.

Within his capacity as a composer, Melani's portfolio contains impressive works spanning opera, chamber music, instrument solos, concertos, film scores, outstanding

among which are the recent "*Hollywood Concerto*", for violin and orchestra (premiered by José Adolfo Alejo and Aguascalientes Symphony, Mexico, on 2019), "*Concertango*", for piano and orchestra (premiered on 2014 at the Palau de la Música, Barcelona), the "*Violintango Concerto*" (concerto for violin and orchestra premiered in 2010, Ed. Boileau), "*Suite Exotique*" (Ed. Boileau), for Cello solo, "*Festive Overture, on folk Ukrainian themes*" (premiered at the 3rd *Improvizacia* Festival with Lviv Symphony), "*Catalan Overture: El bosque de las hadas*" (premiered by the Gdansk Baltic Philharmonic in 2007) and the opera "*Don Juan, príncipe de las tinieblas*", premiered in Barcelona in 2005 with a libretto by *Josep Palau i Fabra*.

On the 5th of January 2019 the *St. Petersburg Philharmonic Society* has premiered in Russia Melani's "*Violintango Concerto*" at the Great Hall of the Philharmony, after its premiere in Switzerland (2016) by *Ensemble Eperanza* and in Poland (2017) by the "*Archetti*" *Chamber Orchestra*.

Recently, on the 13th of February 2020, Melani Mestre has presented the world premiere of the Joaquim Malats Piano Concerto accompanied by the Pazhardzik Symphony Orchestra (Bulgaria) under the baton of Maestro Grigor Palikarov.

At the age of only 25, Melani won a professorship at the Piano Chair of *Escuela Superior de Música de Cataluña (ESMUC)*. Nowadays he is Director of the Barcelona International Music Academy, leading the Piano and Conducting Departments, and Piano Professor at the Progreso Musical Conservatory in Madrid.