

FB's radio request on Brian Kay's programme on Radio 3 on 19 Nov 2006

FB sends his request by e-mail on 9 Oct 2006:

Dear Brian Kay,

For your request for music that illustrates a theme I would like to nominate Scarlatti's Harpsichord Sonata in E Major Kk 380 (L 23). This vividly depicts a Spanish street procession moving with a steady tread behind a small banda whose trumpets and drums strike up every so often. At one point the music touches a G high in the treble, which I believe is a note only rarely scored for the 18th century harpsichord. The tune is once-heard-never-forgotten. The way it recedes into the distance as the little band marches away is poignant.

I first heard this played by Wanda Landowska at an Oxford recital when I was an undergraduate in the 1940s. He has stayed with me ever since. I never lose the tune in my head and can always reproduce it instantly. I can say this of very few tunes!

The programme on Radio 3 on 19 Nov 2006

Brian Kay speaks:

And to follow it something rather similar, though turning the clock back to the earlier years of the 18th century, moving from Salzburg to Spain and from orchestral music to the sound of the harpsichord. Francis Bennion has e-mailed to tell me that he first heard Scarlatti's e-major sonata, Kk 380, when he was an undergraduate back in the 1940s. And its image of a Spanish street procession marching with steady tread behind a small band whose trumpets and drums strike up occasionally is a tune once heard never forgotten. And he'd like to hear it again. So I'll tell you what Francis once again, as it's the first of two Scarlatti sonatas on a Trevor Pinnock CD, I'll throw in Kk 381, also in e-major, as a bonus. Yours comes first.

[Scarlatti's Kk 380 and Kk 381 played.]

The flying fingers of harpsichordist Trevor Pinnock playing two keyboard sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti Both in e-major, Kk 380 and Kk 381. The first one requested by Francis Bennion and the second thrown in for good measure.

FB writes to Brian Kay after the broadcast On 28 Nov 2006

Thank you for broadcasting my Scarlatti request on 19 November. I received an email from a listener wishing it had been the Wanda Landowska version. I replied agreeing with him, and I wonder whether, as it is so short, you would consider playing that version in a future programme so that listeners can judge. It is on EMI Classics CDH 7 649342.

Trevor Pinnock did not get much of what, using the term incorrectly, I might term Landowska's portamento. By that I mean a sense of the movement of the band as it were carrying itself though the little village. Of course Pinnock was using a proper harpsichord in contrast to the one which Landowska had made for herself in 1912. This is according to the blurb by Lionel Salter accompanying the CD, which adds that her instrument was in marked contrast to the 'frail and feeble-toned harpsichords' then existing' It goes on-

"[It] went far beyond the true historical harpsichord; and its elaborate pedal mechanism led her to vary its tone-colours frequently and to adopt some fanciful registrations. Her interpretations were romantic, and she was not over-concerned with textual authenticity . . . Nevertheless what shine through the playing of this apparently fragile (but in fact tough and

determined) virtuoso ... are her musicality, vitality, incisiveness, rhythmic control and a concentration which enabled her to continue unperturbed even when anti-aircraft guns thundered outside .. ."

You can hear these Paris guns on the recording!