



Farkas 1960

## Ferenc Farkas and Italy

The Hungarian composer Ferenc Farkas (1905–2000) had particularly close ties to Italy. This, however, was not only of decisive importance in his career but also an influence on the development of Hungarian music history through his students, which even indirectly left a mark on European music.

Farkas was the head of the composition department of the Budapest Academy of Music from 1949 to 1975, and his class produced such excellent composers as György Ligeti, György Kurtág, Emil Petrovics, Sándor Szokolay, Miklós Kocsár, Zoltán Jeney, Zsolt Durkó, and Attila Bozay. His legendary lessons played an important role in turning the interest of Hungarian composers toward Latin culture and loosening the grip of the German influence that lasted for centuries.

The first steps in this were already taken by Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály at the beginning of the century when they were introduced to the works of Debussy and looked for new paths based on ancient folk music. To mark this ever closer union with Latin culture, in the 1920s, while László Lajtha was establishing close relations with France, Farkas left for Rome to study at the Santa Cecilia Academy, at Ottorino Respighi's master school, where he stayed from 1929 to 1931.

When he arrived in Rome in the fall of 1929, Farkas already had considerable professional

experience. After obtaining his diploma, he had previously worked as a répétiteur and conductor at the Budapest Municipal Theatre for two years, but he felt at an impasse as a composer: while he tried to free himself from folklorism and the influence of Bartók and Kodály, he failed to find his style.

Finally, Respighi showed him a way out, and he started composing again in Rome, now in the spirit of the typical neoclassicism of early 20th-century Italy. Among his new works were the *Piano Sonata*, the *Fantasia* for piano and orchestra, the *Divertimento* for orchestra, and the first violin-piano *Sonatina*, originally titled *All' Italiana*. The following year saw the completion of the second *Sonatina* for violin and piano, the *Pastorali* song cycle, and the series of piano pieces entitled *Quaderno Romano* and *Canephora*.

Farkas followed Respighi's example both in his approach and in his referencing the musical past, but in terms of style Alfredo Casella and Gian Francesco Malipiero were closer to him. His songs and chamber works were soon successfully presented in the Italian capital, where the Teatro Indipendenti performed the comedy of Amelia Della Pergola (stage name Diotima) *Non ci sono più donne* with his music on March 15, 1930.

Inside the homes of the cultured society, at receptions and diplomatic events, Farkas himself often played the piano. He met Casella, among others, and became good friends with Goffredo Petrassi, who was a year older. Among his new friends was the puppeteer and set designer Maria

Signorelli, who often invited him to her parties. For the Hungarian newspapers, he sent reports about musical life in Rome: among other things, concerts organized in the Augusteo, performances of works by Pizzetti and Casella, orchestral concerts by Mascagni, composers' evenings by Richard Strauss and early music concerts led by Casimiri.

In Rome, he was also able to renew his relationship with the art of dance: even in Budapest, he had collaborated with the ballet dancer Flóra Korb on the staging of Stravinsky's *L'histoire du soldat*, for whom he provided piano accompaniment on dance evenings in Rome, and their performance was repeated in Capri.

At the Santa Cecilia Academy, Farkas got to know the aspirations of the new generation of artists, and thanks to his good communication skills, he got on good terms not only with young Italian composers but also with Hungarian visual artists and church musicians studying in Rome. Through the latter, he came upon the choir lessons of Raffaele Casimiri, the famous Palestrina researcher and conductor, where he could learn the style of Renaissance vocal polyphony.

Thanks to the Roman environment, young Farkas' attention turned to the common European past, especially to Italian culture. For two years he lived in the building of the Hungarian Academy in Rome (Collegium Hungaricum), in the Falconieri Palace on the banks of the Tiber. He traveled through Italy with new friends, and they aroused

his interest in the beauties of architecture and sculpture. He quickly learned Italian (he had already taken language lessons from the Italian-born actor Kornél D'Arrigo in Budapest), and the beauty of the language later inspired him to compose many songs and choral works. He set to music the poems of Renaissance masters Petrarch, Michelangelo, and Lorenzo de Medici, of the 19th century Giacomo Leopardi, Giosuè Carducci, and Giovanni Pascoli, and of his contemporaries Corrado Govoni, Nicola Moscardelli, Eugenio Montale, Salvatore Quasimodo, and Gianni Rodari.

He recalled his student years like this: "Living in Rome and Respighi's personality freed in me the skills of a composer which had been dormant for years. As artistic tuition, the 'corso superiore' offered open courses, enrolment was discretionary, one was free to attend and there wasn't any fee. As a form of certificate, Respighi wrote a letter in which he said I had completed the school course and he recommended that my *Divertimento* be performed in the Augusteo (a performance which unfortunately did not come about).

The course of my professor, Ottorino Respighi, wasn't based on the tuition of composition in the strict meaning of the words; on the contrary, the Maestro made general remarks about the pieces we submitted and commented on their shortcomings with a few sensitive observations. His ideas on orchestration helped us greatly, as did his recommendations

about verse setting, for example, in writing my song cycle *Pastorali*.

Respighi captivated his students with his extraordinary personality, he was a man of the world, spoke several languages, and loved telling anecdotes and amusing stories. He was very well informed and had a great knowledge of the most diverse range of subjects. In the first year, he taught us in the Palazzo Farnese, then we visited him at his home Villa I Pini some distance from Rome. One day he spoke to us enthusiastically about his *Brazilian Impressions* (*Impressioni brasiliane*), which he was in the process of completing. The connection of my works with Respighi is often mentioned, stating that they reflect his influence. This can't be true because I didn't know his compositions well; I had only heard *The Fountains of Rome*, *The Pines of Rome*, and *Roman Festivals*, but Respighi's individuality and character meant more to me than these."

Three of the works included in this CD album were created in the Rome years: the piano cycles *Quaderno Romano* and *Canephora*, as well as the first *Piano Sonata*. The *Sonata* was the first to be completed in 1930, according to the composer's statement, following the pieces by Casella and Mortari. Farkas started composing in May towards the end of the first academic year and finished it in Budapest in September. Its first public performance took place on December 16, 1930, at Farkas's first composer's evening in the chamber concert hall of the Budapest Academy of Music. Although László Gergely was

successful in his performance, the three-movement composition with a classical structure (1. *Allegro*, 2. *Adagio*, 3. *Allegro*) was not included in the repertoire and has not yet been published.

By contrast, *Quaderno Romano* received numerous performances throughout Europe after the premiere on January 20, 1932, interpreted by Pál Kadosa, which took place at the concert of the New Hungarian Music Society in Budapest. Farkas then described the piano cycle as follows: "my composition is not an illustrative series of Italian travel impressions, it is simply a "Roman notebook" because it was written in Rome in March 1931. The six interrelated small piano pieces, each of which I dedicated to a Hungarian friend of mine living in Rome, belong to a cycle, the titles only refer to the mood of the pieces. A cadenza-like introductory movement [*Preludio*] is followed by a calmer *Cavatina* with two themes that merge later. The third number [*Dialogo*] is a dialogue between two parts, the fourth is a fast, rhythmic *Caccia* (hunt) – then a unison *Passeggiata* (walk) leads to the recitative-like epilogue [*Epilogo*], which closes the cycle."

The title of the series refers to the ten-stave sheet music notebook in which the author wrote down the pieces. In the edition published in 1957, the Hungarian friends in Rome, whose portraits Farkas presumably drew with the music, appear only with their initials. From these, only the recipients of the *Cavatina*, *Caccia*, and *Epilogo* have been identified: they are the painter C. Pál Molnár, the sculptor Tibor Vilt and the

painter Gyula Hincz.

The series *Canephora*, begun in June 1931 in Rome and finished in Budapest in November, does not contain painting but architectural-sculptural parallels. The Greek title, which means basket-bearers, refers to the ancient Athenian noble ladies who were chosen annually for the task of carrying the baskets containing the sacrificial tools on their heads during religious festivals. Their shape can be seen in many cases on the columns and friezes of ancient buildings. Farkas later reworked the piano cycle for the organ. The first performer of this in 1962, Sebestyén Pécsi – perhaps following the composer's explanation – saw in the series a musical pair of five members of a colonnade or group of statues, in which the two powerful members on the edges flank three slimmer ones. In the music, there are three lighter movements (2. *Andante*, 3. *Leggierissimo*, 4. *Lento*) between the heavy *Preludio* in ABA form and the eventful closing *Fugue*.

Ottorino Respighi's influence in Farkas' oeuvre is also shown by how he brought the music of old times to life with the help of various arrangements. Farkas moved to Kolozsvár (now Cluj-Napoca) in 1941, as he was invited to become chorus master of the Kolozsvár National Theater and a teacher at the conservatory (in 1943 he became music director of the former and director of the latter). In the Transylvanian Hungarian city, he organized early music concerts under the name Collegium Musicum,

and for these occasions, he reworked many 16th and 17th-century Hungarian dances for other instruments.

For one of the 1943 concerts, he transcribed *Three-lute fantasias* by Bálint (Valentin) Bakfark for piano (originally for harpsichord). Born in the second half of the 1520s, the Transylvanian musician was the most famous lute virtuoso of his time. He studied under the Italian master Mathias Marigliano in Nagyvárad (now Oradea), then served the Hungarian, Polish and Austrian rulers while traveling through Europe. He spent his last five years in Padua, where he died in 1576.

The first piece selected by Farkas (*Moderato, non troppo lento*) was the lute fantasy no.1 published in the Lyon lute book of 1553, which follows the imitative structure of contemporary motets. The other two pieces are not from Bakfark's famous printed volumes but survived in other sources. Farkas's 2nd piece, the *Andante*, is a transcription of Bakfark's lute fantasy no.8 and follows the freer form of the chansons. As the last of the series (no.3 *Allegro*), Farkas transcribed Bakfark's Fantasia no.10, which is a free adaptation of a vocal piece, the chanson *Rossignolet qui chante au verd bois* by Jacobus Clemens non Papa.

For Farkas it was important, throughout his life, to write easy-to-understand, melodic music. Sometimes, however, he felt the need to break away from the diatonic world of neoclassicism and folk song arrangements for a while. This

happened to him in 1957, when he heard the works of Boulez in Vienna and participated in the Prague Spring Festival. Following contemporary musical impressions, he returned to his earlier twelve-tone experiments. However, he was not an adherent of Schönberg's trend but approached the technique from the more relaxed, Latin world of Luigi Dallapiccola and Frank Martin, whose modern tools he continued to use in the same spirit as before.

His piano cycle *Hybrides*, composed in 1957 and published in London in 1960, is based on the inversions of a single twelve-tone row. The French title suggests he realized a peculiar synthesis of the 12-tone technique and traditional composing, creating a kind of "tonal dodecaphony". In everything, it complies with the rules of dodecaphony, yet it mostly features readily-perceivable melodies played in the context of classical dance forms and character pieces. The Italian titles of the movements are also archaic: 1. *Soggetto*, 2. *Marcietta*, 3. *Melodia*, 4. *Minuetto*, 5. *Tarantella*, 6. *Notturmo*, 7. *Valsette*, 8. *Cadenza*, 9. *Fughetta* and 10. *Moto perpetuo*.

The symbolic number three dominates in Farkas' piano piece **3x33**, composed in 1991, all three movements of which consist of 33 bars. In the same year, a 9-movement string trio version of the same piece was also produced, which was published with the same title in 1993 by Bèrben publishing house in Ancona, but due to the logic of the former, it might even be called 3x3x33. Farkas also emphasized the importance of the numbers in the manuscript of the chamber music

cycle by writing bar number 33 at the end of each movement.

For the unpublished piano version, he selected only three movements, identical to the sixth ("*scherzo*"), first ("*intrada*" [intradà]), and fifth ("*ninna-nanna*") movements of the string trio, and did not write the trio's Italian movement titles into the manuscript, which was probably not intended to be final. In the first *Scherzo* movement, only ***Allegro ostinatamente*** is included, in the second *Intrada*, ***Allegro valorosamente***, while in the final piece, instead of the title borrowed from the Italian children's song *Ninna nanna*, he wrote *Ringató* (Lullaby) in Hungarian, and next to it, the phrase ***Dondolante***, which matches the mood. The pieces show Farkas's characteristic later style, simplified in its means. The atmosphere, texture, and harmonies of the last piece remind us of Franz Liszt's similarly Italian-inspired late mourning music, *La lugubre gondola*.

The original version of the three piano pieces entitled ***Maschere*** was also composed for chamber music in 1983, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Italian painter Gino Severini. During his student years in Rome, he was intrigued by a book in which Severini's Pierrot figures were illustrated, and later he also liked the artist's commedia dell'arte figures very much. During the composition, he chose wind instruments (oboe, clarinet, bassoon) because, in his opinion, they can evoke the somewhat abstract, "masked" world of the "characters" of

the pieces. He sent the score to the painter's widow, who in gratitude presented him with a Severini reproduction. One of his paintings can be seen on the cover of this CD. Farkas selected three of the trio's five movements (no.3–5) for the piano version: 1. *Colombina*, 2. *Povero Pulcinella*, 3. *Arlecchino*.

In the summer of 1983, the year he composed *Maschere*, Farkas wrote his piano piece *Movimento improvvisato* at the request of Ádám Fellegi. The Hungarian pianist premiered it in Canada, at the St. Lawrence Center for the Arts in Toronto in April 1984. The composer said this about the interesting, sometimes virtuosic composition: "It got its title from the fact that I avoided any preliminary design guidelines, I wrote it as one writes a novel, always what came next, according to my feelings, had to follow on from the preceding events. Of course, symmetries were created unintentionally and a coherently logical form instinctively took shape.

*Lászlóombos*

(Translated by Malcolm Sharps)



1929 - Ferenc Farkas and Ottorino Respighi at the Accademia Santa Cecilia in Rome

# Ferenc Farkas

(1905-2000)

Piano Works vol. 1

*Farkas e l'Italia*

*Suggestioni barocche*

## **Quaderno Romano** (1931)

01.	Preludio	03'06"
02.	Cavatina	02'16"
03.	Dialogo	01'44"
04.	Caccia	01'30"
05.	Passeggiata	01'06"
06.	Epilogo	01'45"

## **Hybrides** (1957)

07.	Soggetto	00'55"
08.	Marcietta	00'37"
09.	Melodia	00'57"
10.	Minuetto	01'24"
11.	Tarantella	00'47"
12.	Notturmo	01'38"
13.	Valsette	00'51"
14.	Cadenza	02'03"
15.	Fughetta	01'42"
16.	Moto perpetuo	01'18"



**Tre Fantasie** (Bakfark - Farkas) (1943)

17.	I Moderato, non troppo lento	03'22"
18.	II Andante	02'05"
19.	III Allegro	02'15"

**3x33** (1991)

20.	I Allegro ordinatamente	00'50"
21.	II Allegro valorosamente	01'06"
22.	III Dondolante	01'47"

**Canephoraë** (1931)

23.	1 Preludio	02'16"
24.	2 Andante	02'06"
25.	3 Leggierissimo	00'45"
26.	4 Lento	02'31"
27.	5 Fughetta	01'32"

28. **Movimento improvvisato** (1983) 05'53"**Maschere** (1983)

29.	Colombina	01'15"
30.	Povero Pulcinella	01'05"
31.	Arlecchino	01'54"

**Sonata n. 1** (1930)

32.	I Allegro	06'32"
33.	II Adagio	06'21"
34.	III Allegro	05'20"

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Piano Works

vol. 1



Stefano Cascioli

*piano*



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