

PHD Theses

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From *choreae* to *aspirationes*:
Rákóczi-themed compositions by Farkas Ferenc

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I. The Antecedents of the Research

A retrospective approach to the work of Ferenc Farkas (1905–2000), extending beyond the boundaries of contemporary events, commenced in the second half of the 1960s. At that time, however, the composer was still one of the most influential figures in Hungarian music, surrounded by a considerable number of students and admirers. Consequently, the initial appraisals of his professional career and creative output were characterized by a tendency towards either apology or cautious diplomacy. Following the composer's death and the transfer of his legacy to a public collection (2015), this situation underwent a significant transformation. These events marks the beginning of a genuine critical evaluation of Farkas's oeuvre.

A comprehensive examination of Farkas's life and work has yet to be undertaken in the form of a major monograph or dissertation. To date, only two brief monographs have been published on the subject. However, József Ujfalussy (*Farkas Ferenc*, 1969) has solely relied on Farkas's earlier statements. László Gombos's work (*Ferenc Farkas. Hungarian Composers* 31, 2004), published after the composer's death, still largely reiterates the composer's own recollections.

The studies that deal with biographical details of Farkas are more comprehensive and objective than the existing monographs on the subject. Among the writings that emerged during the composer's lifetime, the work of János Breuer on the early years of Farkas is worthy of particular note. In the last decade, the accessibility of sources has facilitated the production of several studies focusing on specific phases or aspects of Farkas's life. The author of this dissertation has dealt with Farkas's early years in Budapest and Rome (1927–1931), Miklós Fekete examined Farkas's years spent in Kolozsvár/Cluj (1941–1944), while Éva Kelemen has explored Farkas's years spent in Székesfehérvár (1946–1948). Lóránt Péteri discussed Farkas's relationship with György Ligeti and explored the less glorious events of his career in the 1940s. The author of this dissertation has conducted a comprehensive investigation into the

relationship between Farkas and his “illegitimate master,” Zoltán Kodály.

In the course of his eighty-four years of composition, Farkas produced approximately 800 works. A number of lists have been compiled, but a comprehensive catalog of the compositional sources has yet to be published. A study by László Gombos (“Általános összefüggések Farkas Ferenc életművében” [General context in the oeuvre of Ferenc Farkas], 2005) provides a valuable resource for navigating the extensive corpus of Farkas's compositions.

It was only on rare occasions during Farkas’s lifetime that longer, independent analyses of individual works were published. One such example is György Kroó’s review of *Aspirationes principis* (“Rákóczi kantáta” [Rákoczi Cantata], 1976). In addition to the analyses of László Gombos, Tibor Tallián and István Dominkó, the study of Péter Bozó (“Csontos karabély – újratöltve: A *Csinom Palkó* a Farkas hagyaték forrásainak fényében,” 2015; in English: “Nationalism Reloaded: *Csinom Palkó* by Ferenc Farkas in the Light of the Sources of His Estate,” 2020) should be highlighted, which was one of the first studies to draw conclusions based on a critical examination of the documents preserved in the legacy. The works of Kroó and Bozó can be considered as the direct predecessors of the present dissertation.

The reception of Ferenc Rákóczi II and the Hungarian War of Independence, named after him, constituted a significant event in the history of Hungarian music. This topic has been the subject of several studies conducted over the past two centuries, which the dissertation references. Nevertheless, no comprehensive work on this subject has hitherto been produced which provides a summary and systematic account of the existing literature, as the first chapter of the dissertation does. The second chapter of the dissertation is based on the prefaces written for modern publications of the 17th-century dance sources mentioned. It is important to note, however, that these prefaces do not even mention the various arrangements that are presented for the first time in the dissertation.

II. Sources

The thesis is based primarily on the documents preserved in the estate of Ferenc Farkas. Since 2015, they can be accessed to all those interested in the Music Department of the National Széchényi Library in Budapest (the earlier history of the estate is discussed in detail in the introduction). At the time of submission of the dissertation, however, the complete processing of the documents had not yet been completed.

The collection's core comprises a range of materials related to Farkas's musical compositions, including sketches, drafts, fair copies, proofs, hand or mechanical copies, and printed materials.

The collection encompasses the surviving manuscripts and typescripts of Farkas's published writings, frequently with the author's subsequent corrections, along with clippings of interviews with him that were published, as well as posters, concert programs, and reviews. A substantial corpus of the author's writings and interviews, along with facsimiles of select posters, was published by László Gombos over a decade prior to the transfer of the legacy to the Széchényi Library (*Vallomások a zenéről – Farkas Ferenc válogatott írásai* [Confessions on Music - Selected Writings of Ferenc Farkas], 2004).

Additionally, the collection encompasses Farkas's comprehensive correspondence, which, in the majority of instances, includes copies of his own letters. Balázs Mikusi has previously published research on this subject, including the presentation of several representative excerpts from Farkas's correspondence („Farkas Ferenc, a menedzser” [Ferenc Farkas, the manager], 2015).

Another significant source consulted for this dissertation was the Hungarian National Film Archive, which preserves original documents (such as literary and technical scripts) related to the films discussed in the dissertation.

Approximately half of the *Vallomások a zenéről* is the publication of Ferenc Farkas's recollections, recorded during the summers of 1975–1981 in Balatonlelle and frequently referenced

by scholars. Gombos's edition of the text, however, is incomplete and presents a number of problematic issues from a philological perspective (see the introduction for a detailed discussion). The author of this dissertation, however, had access to a digital copy of the typescript of the original tapes, proofread by Ferenc Farkas and László Dalos. The typescript remained in the possession of the composer's son, András Farkas.

The dissertation was based on a large amount of Hungarian and foreign-language press documents, found in the *Arcanum Digitális Tudástár*.

III. The Structure of the Dissertation and The Methods Used

The present dissertation examines a selection of Ferenc Farkas's works related to the same theme and the same tradition: the works that evoke the era of the Rákóczi War of Independence and in which either (1) Rákóczi himself appears, or (2) it is a work that is a direct offshoot of the works included in (1). The selected group of works encompasses a diverse range of music, including music with or without lyrics, stage music and instrumental music, applied music and concert music. The author of this dissertation is convinced that, in the case of Farkas, an examination of such heterogeneous group of works reveals more about the composer, who was always in discourse with his time and always adapting to the surroundings around him, than if the works were classified and examined in the generally accepted ways (by period, by genre, etc.).

Chapter 1 summarizes the role of the former Transylvanian prince and the War of Independence led by him in the history of Hungarian music from 1711 to 1939. Chapter 2 demonstrates who and how arranged Hungarian dance melodies of the 17th century before Farkas.

Chapter 3 discusses the music for the film *Rákóczi nótája* [The Song of Rákóczi], which laid the foundations for Ferenc Farkas's Rákóczi oeuvre and during which he became acquainted with the unpublished dance melodies of the 17th and 18th centuries. Chapter 4 describes how the first reworks of the film music were

created (*Lőcsei táncok* [Dances from Lőcse], piano version of *Régi magyar táncok a XVII. századból* [Old Hungarian Dances of the 17th Century]).

Chapter 5 presents the compositions written in the 1950s (incidental music *II. Rákóczi Ferenc fogsága* [The Imprisonment of Ferenc Rákóczi II] and film music *Rákóczi hadnagya* [Rákóczi's Lieutenant]) and the parts of the operetta *Csinom Palkó* and the incidental music *Fúdd el szél* [The Wind Blows] that were taken over from *Rákóczi nótája*. Chapter 6 examines the different versions of *Régi magyar táncok a XVII. századból* and *Choreae Hungaricae* from 1948 to 1991. Chapter 7 deals with the cantata *Aspirationes principis*, composed on original texts by Rákóczi.

The dissertation primarily addresses the history of the genesis and reception of the selected works, with a more detailed musical analysis reserved for the *Rákóczi nótája* and *Aspirationes principis*. As the latter is the sole autonomous musical composition among Farkas's Rákóczi-related works that does not incorporate original melodies of the 17th or 18th centuries, and its musical style is adapted to reflect the prevailing conventions of the time, the final chapter employs a distinct analytical approach compared to the preceding chapters.

In light of the fact that, despite the considerable amount of previous research that has already been conducted, the study of Ferenc Farkas's biography is still in its infancy. Therefore, the thesis has also sought to provide a more comprehensive biographical background in chapters 3–7.

The utilization of sources from the composer's legacy presents the potential for the researcher to become inextricably linked with the composer's meticulously crafted narrative, making it challenging to maintain objectivity and detachment. In order to circumvent this potential issue, the present thesis has employed the following methodologies:

(1) In each instance, data from statements, writings, and letters was cross-referenced with contemporary memories,

information from contemporary press sources, and the findings of other researchers.

(2) A key feature of Farkas's public statements is the repetition of numerous themes and passages. Given his inclination to adapt his statements to suit the circumstances, the dissertation places significant emphasis on his omissions and the constantly changing manner in which he recalled events over time.

(3) In contrast to the protocolary interviews, the correspondence offers a more revealing insight into Farkas's genuine thoughts and opinions. Consequently, the dissertation considers the letters to be a crucial source of information.

(4) In contrast to numerous preceding publications on Farkas, the dissertation employs the music manuscripts not merely as illustrative material, but as a pivotal means of elucidating the history of the works' genesis. A comprehensive account of the sources constitutes a significant component of the dissertation.

IV. Results

The dissertation's primary contribution is the discovery of a trove of hitherto unexamined data pertaining to the life of Ferenc Farkas. In addition, it offers a comprehensive account of the genesis, reception, and biographical context of the selected compositions. The dissertation provides a multitude of illustrative examples to substantiate László Gombos's assertion that the substantial quantity of music created by the composer during the course of his occasional commissions can be interpreted as preliminary sketches for subsequent works. It also demonstrates that it is possible to determine, and thus always has to be sought out, which of the versions of works derived from the same source is the primary one. Ultimately, the dissertation demonstrates how Farkas, concealing his identity behind a pseudo-historical mask, adapted to the demands of the moment while employing a consistent set of methods and techniques throughout. The examination of *Aspirationes principis* offers insights into Farkas's genuine sentiments towards Rákóczi.

V. List of scientific publications related to the subject of the thesis published up to the submission of the dissertation

- „A Rákóczi nótájától a Régi magyar táncokig” [From *Rákóczi nótája* to *Old Hungarian Dances*]. *Parlando* 2015/5 <http://www.parlando.hu/2015/2015-5/NemethZsombor-FarkasFerenc.pdf>
- „Mester és »törvénytelen tanítványa«. Kodály Zoltán és Farkas Ferenc” [Master and His “Illegitimate Pupil”: Zoltán Kodály and Ferenc Farkas]. *Magyar Zene* 55/4 (2017): 454–474.
- „Farkas Ferenc pályakezdése (1927–1931)” [The Early Career of Ferenc Farkas (1927–1931)]. In: Anna Dalos – Viktória Ozsvárt (eds.): *Járdányi Pál és kora. Tanulmányok a 20. századi magyar zene történetéből (1920-1966)*. Budapest: Rózsavölgyi és Társa, 2020. 163–201.
- „Farkas Ferenc kolozsvári éveinek filmzenéi” [Ferenc Farkas’s Film Scores from His Cluj Years]. In: Emese Egyed–László Pakó–Emese Sófalvi (eds.): *Certamen VII. Előadások a Magyar Tudomány Napján az Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület I. Szakosztályában*. Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, Bölcsészeti-, Nyelv- és Történettudományi Szakosztály, 2020. 243–258.
- „A Szerelmi álmok – Liszt című film zenéje” [Music for the film *Szerelmi álmok – Liszt*]. In: Ákos Windhager (ed): *Tripolisz, Miskolc, Senlis – Cziffra György emlékezete*. Budapest: Magyar Művészeti Akadémia Művészetelméleti és Módszertani Kutatóintézet, 2021. 127–140.
- „Farkas Ferenc kuruc tematikájú kompozíciói. Rövid áttekintés” [Compositions of Ferenc Farkas featuring “kuruc” themes. A brief overview]. In: Sándor Bene–István Dobos (eds.): *Folytonosság és megszakítottság a magyar kultúrában. A doktoriskolák VI. nemzetközi magyarságtudományi konferenciája*. Budapest: Nemzetközi Magyarságtudományi Társaság, 2022. 599–606.
- „Master and his »illegitimate pupil«: Zoltán Kodály and Ferenc Farkas.” *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Seria Studia Musica* 68/1 (2023): 137–173.