



Ferenc FARKAS

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME FIVE

MUSIC FOR SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PLANCTUS ET CONSOLATIONES

DANCES FROM THE MÁTRA

SYMPHONIC OVERTURE

PIANO CONCERTINO

ELEGIA

LISZT ORCH. FARKAS

FUNÉRAILLES

Gábor Farkas, piano
MÁV Symphony Orchestra
Gábor Takács-Nagy, conductor

INCLUDES FIRST RECORDINGS

FERENC FARKAS: ORCHESTRAL MUSIC, VOLUME FIVE – MUSIC FOR SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

by László Gombos

This fifth Toccata Classics album of orchestral music by the Hungarian composer Ferenc Farkas (1905–2000) presents works for symphony orchestra – a medium that was, for him, the exception rather than the rule. But Farkas' entire life and *œuvre* were exceptional, even though his personality and music were characterised by moderation. The length of his artistic career was unique: he composed from the 1910s until the last minute of his life, quite literally: on 10 October 2000 he fell asleep while setting a poem by Lorca. With over a thousand works to his credit, he covered almost every genre, form and musical style. The variety of performing ensembles for which he composed is similarly wide, ranging from solo instrumental pieces, through unusual chamber-music combinations and vocal pieces, to orchestral works, cantatas, operas and musicals. Perhaps no other composer in the world has set texts by 130 writers and poets, in a total of sixteen languages. Farkas' life was as full as his worklist: as a professor at the Budapest Music Academy he coached several generations of composers, and previously he had worked as a choirmaster, répétiteur, film composer and school principal, later becoming an active public figure, as a jury member in music competitions, and writing many articles about music.

The incredible variety of his output is counterbalanced by two important characteristics. One is the relative emotional and expressive reserve of his music, which is free of aggressive and crude effects and also of extreme, wild passions. He did not seek brazen contrasts, overwrought tension or dramatic oppositions; for him the portrayal of beauty and harmony was far more important. The other characteristic is to be found in the dimensions of his music: monumentality was

no part of his creative language, and instead he found the way to self-expression in miniature, classical forms. His works are usually built from basic units of sections or movements that are only two or three minutes in length (and often shorter); indeed, though his stage pieces may last several hours, they have more in common with ancient coloured mosaics than monuments hewn from a single block. Any piece longer than ten to fifteen minutes generally has four or five movements and is structured like a suite. It is no coincidence that Farkas' concertos were usually called *concertinos*, and that he wrote *sonatinas* rather than *sonatas*.

Even so, some of his compositions don't fit easily into this framework (including most of the pieces in this album), and are exceptions not only in their larger forms and symphonic scoring but also in their more powerful emotional range. Two of them have their origin in Farkas' only attempt at writing a traditional, four-movement symphony, in 1952. He withdrew the piece after two performances but considered the first two movements to be worthy of further performances as independent works, and entitled them *Symphonic Overture* [1] and *Elegia* [2]. (Later, in 1970, he turned the third movement into a *Scherzo sinfonico*.) At the beginning of the 1950s, under Soviet political pressure, composers all over the eastern bloc were obliged to write accessible, optimistic pieces for the working class, and to fill abstract musical forms with programmatic content. Perhaps this expectation prompted the subtitle of Farkas' symphony: 'In memoriam 4. IV. 1945'. That was the day the Second World War had ended in Hungary, with the Soviet Army liberating the country from German occupation. The Siege of Budapest lasted 50 days, with the city finally surrendering on 13 February. Farkas and his family sat it out in the war-torn city, and when the fighting was over, he set to work with his customary optimism.

For the symphony, he used musical material from incidental music written in 1950 for the film *Felszabadult föld* ('Liberated Land'). The first movement, which after a slow introduction becomes increasingly vehement, was naturally associated by the audience at the premiere with the battles of the siege, and the heroic mood of the end of the movement with victory. After this classical sonata-form movement, the *Elegia*

is certainly no lament for the Soviet heroes, as one contemporary critic suggested. Indeed, this music is not a tragic funeral march, but contemplative in nature, looking towards a new beginning and revival. It can be no accident that the dactylic *pizzicato* bass line heard soon after the opening, and present almost throughout the movement, is reminiscent of a theme in Zoltán Kodály's *Budavári Te Deum*. The pieces even share a similar subtext: Kodály's work, premiered in 1936, was written for the 250th anniversary of the recapture of the Hungarian capital (from which, in 1686, the Turks were expelled by the united Christian troops of the Holy League). There the choral fugue begins with the words 'Pleni sunt coeli et terra maiestatis gloriae tuae' ('Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Thy glory'), and it seems reasonable to assume that Farkas wanted to send a message by quoting this theme, which many in his audience would have recognised. The listener has the sense of coming out of the cellar after the battle, looking around in the light among the ruins and giving thanks to God for having survived. Hope in new life became tangible for Farkas when his son András was born on 10 April 1945. And he could rest assured that the Communist 'comrades' would not decipher the religious reference in his work.

After the war Ferenc Farkas was the choirmaster at the Budapest Opera House, and then in autumn 1946 he was asked to found and direct the Music Conservatoire in Székesfehérvár in central Hungary (the capital of the country in the Middle Ages). In the two years he spent there, Farkas organised many concerts and often performed himself, as a pianist. In 1947 he composed the **Concertino for Piano and Orchestra** for himself, although circumstances always seemed to dictate that when the piece was performed, somebody else played the solo part. When the conductor Ferenc Fricsay commissioned a harpsichord concerto from him in 1949, he reworked the piano concertino for harpsichord and a smaller orchestra.¹ He wrote of the work:

In these three movements I did not delve to the depths of serious problems; my aim was to make continuous, light-hearted, cheerfully playful music, which assumes a graver

¹ The Harpsichord Concerto, recorded by Miklós Spányi and the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra, was released on Toccata Classics tocc 0230.

tone only in the contemplative lyricism of the second movement and the trio of the third movement.²

The entire work is suffused with the scent of Hungarian folk-music: in the first movement, an *Allegro* [3], its influence is still masked by the style of international Neo-Classicism, but then it comes to the fore in the lyrical melody of the *Andante* slow movement [4]. The *Allegro* third movement [5], which at nearly eight minutes is long for Farkas, is written in the spirit of the folksong-finale typical of contemporary Hungarian composition.

The orchestration of Liszt's *Funérailles* [6] (No. 7 of the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* of 1847–49) owes its genesis to a film. Even as a young man, Farkas had a reputation for being able to compose with admirable speed in any given style, for any duration or performing ensemble and so, from the early 1930s, he was repeatedly asked to write film music and incidental music for radio and theatre; in the event he wrote over 100 such scores. He was entrusted with compiling the music for Márton Keleti's *Dreams of Love*, a two-part biographical film about Franz Liszt shot in 1970. Unusually, this time he used excerpts from existing Liszt works for the relevant moments in the film, with minor alterations as required.

One of the Liszt pieces used was a four-minute excerpt from the piano piece *Funérailles*, which Farkas orchestrated for large orchestra. The original piano composition bears the subtitle '1849 October', thus both referring to the death of Liszt's close friend Chopin, and commemorating the victims of the failed Hungarian revolution of 1848 against Habsburg rule (the victorious Austrians executed thirteen of the captured high-ranking officers on 6 October, which ever since has been the memorial day for Hungarian heroes). András Farkas also took part, as a conductor, in an early screening of the work, and was so taken by his father's orchestration that he persuaded him to make an orchestral version of the entire work. It was completed in 1974 (the end of the score bears the inscription 'D. G. 12 May 1974'), with Farkas following Liszt's own practice of deepening the effect of a piano work with the much wider palette of

² Typescript in the composer's estate.

orchestral colours. Although a ballet performance took place in the Budapest Opera House in 1986, the belated concert premiere did not take place until 2 December 1998, when the dedicatee, András Farkas, conducted the MÁV Symphony Orchestra.

Planctus et consolationes – another funeral piece, and also linked to film music – is one of Farkas' masterpieces. In eight sections which form a single overarching movement, the work was written in 1965 in memory of Farkas' friend, the Hungarian-born film-director, archaeologist and ethnographer Paul Fejos (originally Pál Fejős). He and Farkas had met three decades earlier, in 1932, when Fejős returned from America for a film shoot. For a short initial period Farkas played piano in the studio orchestra and orchestrated a few excerpts of film music, but as soon as Fejős found out that between 1929 and 1931 Farkas had studied with his favourite composer, Ottorino Respighi, in Rome, he commissioned music from him for his next film *Ítél a Balaton* ('The Verdict of Lake Balaton', which was known in English as *The Waters Decide*), together with Viktor Vaszy. Over the following years Fejős and Farkas collaborated on many films in Vienna and Denmark, and also travelled together, mostly in Europe but on one occasion making it as far as Morocco. In 1941 Fejős gave up filming to spend his time on archaeology and anthropology. He became director, and then president, of what became the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research in New York, and taught cultural anthropology at Stanford, Yale and Columbia Universities.

Fejős was gravely ill when he met Farkas for the last time, in Vienna in 1962. When Farkas learned, by telegram, of his friend's death a few months later, in spring 1963, he decided to erect a fitting musical monument to Fejős. As the title suggests, *Planctus et consolationes* combines the two different emotional states of the title, mourning and consolation, into a single movement. The *Introduzione* [7] represents the moment of death and the shock at hearing the news, and then a funeral march alternates with the various phases of consolation (*Marcia funebre I* [8] – *Consolatio I* [9] – *Marcia funebre II* [10] – *Consolatio II* [11]). With its slightly out-of-tune references to happiness and youth, *Consolatio II* acts as a scherzo within the work. Rather than proceeding with another funeral march, Farkas reverses the order of changes of mood: two consolatory sections flank the last passionate movement (*Consolatio III* [12] – *Furioso* [13] – *Consolatio IV* [14]). *Consolatio*

III begins and ends with a musical quotation: the cellos play three bars from one of Fejős' favourite pieces, Respighi's *Le Fontane di Roma* (from the fourth part, with the subtitle 'La Fontana di Villa Medici al tramonto'). Farkas develops the entire movement from the quotation. The instruments enter successively, in imitation, and then, starting with the flute, the melody is heard in inversion. The *Furioso* moves from a mood of rebellion against fate to the final consolation, resignation and final acquiescence.

This album is rounded off by a light dance-composition, ***Dances from the Mátra***, written in 1968 for the Eger Symphony Orchestra. Farkas chose a theme connected to the commission and the venue for the premiere: the town of Eger in northern Hungary and the nearby Mátra Hills. The musical material was drawn from his own romantic folk-opera *Vidróczki*, premiered in 1964, the plot of which is based on a folk-ballad, well known in Hungary, about the notorious outlaw of the Mátra Hills, Márton Vidróczki, in the mid-nineteenth century (Kodály used the ballad in his *Mátrai képek* ('Mátra Pictures') for a *cappella* chorus, for example). In *Vidróczki* (and in the incidental music for the 1959 radio play which preceded it) Farkas had used folk-music related to the Mátra area. ***Dances from the Mátra*** is a three-movement suite with the 'Magyar-style' dances from the opera, with a ternary 'Legényes' (a dance for young men) [15], a 'Leánytánc' (girls' dance) with oscillating rhythms [16] and a fast 'Cigánycsárdás' (Gypsy csárdás) [17] to finish.

László Gombos, born in 1967, is a Hungarian musicologist. He graduated from the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest in 1990 (as a choral conductor) and in 1995 (in musicology), and in 1995–98 he took part in the musicological PhD programme of the Liszt Academy. He taught music history at the University of Debrecen from 1998 to 2002, and since 1995 he has been a professor at the Béla Bartók Conservatoire in Budapest. Since 1994 he has been a member of the research staff at the Institute for Musicology in Budapest. His main area of interest is Hungarian music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The pianist **Gábor Farkas** (no relation to the composer) was born in 1981 and graduated from the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest in 2005. He finished his doctoral studies in 2014 at his alma mater under the mentorship of Zoltán Kocsis. At the same time he was a student of William Grant Naboré at the International Piano Academy at Lake Como. During that time he amassed a series of prizes: he won the Béla Bartók Piano Competition in Baden-bai-Wien in 2000, first prize of the Hungarian National Radio Piano Competition in 2003, the 63rd International Liszt Piano Competition in Weimar in 2009, along with the Audience Prize and an award for the best performance of a Haydn sonata; in March 2008 he was awarded a special state prize as 'best young artist of the year', in November of that year he won the 'Junior Prima' prize of the Prima Primissima Foundation, in May 2009 he received the Gundel Art Prize awarded by the prestigious Gundel House restaurant in Budapest; and in March 2012 he won the Franz Liszt Award (the highest Hungarian state award for artists). In October 2015 he became an honorary citizen of the city of Ózd in northern Hungary.



In recent years, as well as appearing in the major concert halls of Hungary, he has performed in such prominent venues as the Teatro la Fenice in Venice, the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, the Konzerthaus in Berlin, the Auditorio Nacional de Música in Madrid, the NCPA Concert Hall in Beijing, the Seoul Art Center, Shanghai Oriental Art Center and the Bunka Kaikan in Tokyo. He recently gave his debuts at the Carnegie Hall, the Wigmore Hall and the Konzerthaus in Vienna and made an extended tour in China and Japan. He has played at a number of prestigious international festivals, among them the International Piano Forum in Berlin, the Schumann Festival in Zwickau, the Bach Festival in Thuringia, the 'Pëlerinages Kunstfest' in Weimar, the Musicathlon in Beijing and the Vilnius Piano Festival; the Hungarian festivals at which he has performed include the Budapest Spring Festival, the Kaposfest in Kaposvar and the Ferenc Liszt Festival in the Castle of Gödöllő.

Among the conductors with whom he has worked are Philippe Bender, Ádám Fischer, Olaf Henzold, Kobayashi Ken-Ichiro, Zoltán Kocsis, Olli Mustonen, George Tchitchinadze and Tamás Vásáry. His debut CD, entitled *An Evening with Liszt*, released by Warner, won the Grand Prix of the Franz Liszt International Society as the best 'Liszt' recording of 2009. His second album was a live recording of the opening concert of the Liszt Year, 2011, with Zoltán Kocsis and the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra, also a Warner release. He has also recorded for Brilliant Classics and Hungaroton, and his most recent CD, *Liszt: Opera and Song for Solo Piano*, was released by Steinway & Sons in 2016.

Besides his active concert life, he is the youngest professor at the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest and regularly gives master-classes at the Tokyo College of Music; he is also a jury member of the Piano Teachers' National Association International Piano Competition in Tokyo.

A native of Budapest, **Gábor Takács-Nagy** began to study the violin at the age of eight. As a student of the Ferenc Liszt Academy, he won First Prize in 1979 in the Jenő Hubay Violin Competition and later pursued studies with Nathan Milstein. His chamber-music teachers at that time were Ferenc Rados, András Mihály, Zoltán Székely, Sándor Végh and György Kurtág. From 1975 to 1992 he was a founding member and leader of the Takács Quartet, which made many recordings for Decca and Hungaroton. In 1996 he founded the Takács Piano Trio and made world-premiere recordings of works by Liszt, László Lajtha and Sándor Veress. In 1998 he established the Mikrokosmos String Quartet with compatriots Zoltán Tuska, Sándor Papp and Miklós Perényi, recording in 2008 the Bartók string quartets, for which they were awarded the 'Excellencia' prize by *Pizzicato* magazine. In 1982 he was awarded the Liszt Prize.



In 2002, following in a long line in Hungarian musical tradition, Gábor Takács-Nagy turned to conducting, creating in 2005 his own string ensemble, the Camerata Bellerive, as orchestra-in-residence at the annual Festival de Bellerive in Geneva. In 2006 he became the

Music Director of the Weinberger Kammerorchester and in August 2007 the Music Director of the Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra. The VFCO performs every summer in the Verbier Festival and also in numerous European and Asian cities throughout the year. With the VFCO he regularly collaborates with Martha Argerich, Emmanuel Ax, Joshua Bell, Vadim Repin and Jean-Yves Thibaudet, as well as with the singers Barbara Bonney, Angelika Kirschlager and Frederica von Stade. From 2010 until 2012 he was Music Director of the MÁV Symphony Orchestra, Budapest. Since September 2011 he has been Music Director of Manchester Camerata and since September 2012 has been Principal Guest Conductor of the Budapest Festival Orchestra. In January 2013 he was appointed Principal Artistic Partner of the Irish Chamber Orchestra.

Gábor Takács-Nagy is a dedicated and highly sought-after chamber-music teacher. He is Professor of String Quartet at the Haute École de Musique in Geneva and International Chair in Chamber Music at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. In June 2012 he was awarded honorary membership of the Royal Academy of Music in London, and in March 2017 he was awarded the prestigious Béla Bartók-Ditta Pásztory Prize.

Toccata Classics released his recording of the Tenth Symphony of the Irish composer John Kinsella on TOCC 0242.

The **MÁV Symphony Orchestra** was founded in 1945 by the Hungarian State Railways (Magyar Államvasutak). Shortly after the Second World War, it established its name by carrying a series of concerts to war-damaged towns all over the country. As time passed, the Orchestra developed a wide-ranging repertoire from Baroque to contemporary music, and is currently ranked among the best professional ensembles in Hungary.

MÁV SO concerts take place in the most respected concert halls of the country, like the Music Academy, the Palace of Arts or the Italian Cultural Institute (the former venue of the Hungarian parliament) in Budapest. Besides full-orchestra concerts, it regularly



Photo: Zsuzsanna Rozsa

performs chamber music and youth concerts and participates in the famous Budapest Spring Festival.

Throughout its history, the Orchestra has established close connections with famous Hungarian and international musicians. Gergely Kesselyák has been conductor of the MÁV Symphony Orchestra since 2010, and Péter Csaba has been the Artistic Director and Chief Conductor since September 2012. The Orchestra has a long-established friendship with Ken-Ichiro Kobayashi: it was the first orchestra he conducted abroad after winning the first International Conducting Competition of Hungarian Television (MTV) in the spring of 1974, and he has conducted many MÁV SO concerts in Hungary and Japan since then. As a sign of mutual appreciation, Kobayashi was named Honorary Guest Conductor, beginning in the season 2014–15.

The other conductors with whom the Orchestra has worked include Moshe Atzmon, Herbert Blomstedt, János Ferencsik, Franco Ferrara, Lamberto Gardelli, James Levine, Kurt Masur, Uri Mayer, Yuri Simonov, Hans Swarowsky and Carlo Zecchi. Among the soloists who have performed with the Orchestra are Lazar Berman, José Carreras, Jeanne-Marie Darré, Roberto Díaz, Plácido Domingo, Helen Donath, David Geringas, Jenő Jandó, Zoltán Kocsis, Luciano Pavarotti, Miklós Perényi, Menahem Pressler, Dezső Ránki, Ruggiero Ricci, Kiri Te Kanawa and Tamás Vásáry.

The MÁV SO has played in every European country and across South America, as well as in Lebanon, Hong Kong, Japan, China and Oman. The Orchestra is also a regular performer in the Musikverein in Vienna. One of the most memorable appearances was a special concert in 1988 for Pope John Paul II at his summer residence in Castelgandolfo. The Orchestra played in the legendary ‘Three Tenors’ production in the Tokyo Dome in 1999, with 32,000 people and members of the Imperial Family attending, and performed on Pavarotti’s Farewell Concert Tour, too – over the course of two years, it presented ten concerts with the *bel canto* tenor across Europe.

The labels which have released the Orchestra’s recordings include Hungaroton, Naxos, Sony and Toccata Classics. A recent recording received the Critics’ Choice Award from the *American Record Guide* in 2014. In 2013, the Orchestra recorded the Hungarian national anthem, composed by Ferenc Erkel, at the request of the National Olympic Committee, and from now on, this version is to be heard during the Olympic Games throughout the world.



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