Aims and Objectives

In the light of new musicological research, the aim and objective of this paper is to respond to interpretative questions in the Everest of Manuel de Falla's most abstract solo piano work, Fantasía bætica (1919) and to pose the question: could the work be Falla's true Homage a Debussy?

Context

Situated between the great virtuosic pillars of the piano repertoire, such as Albéniz's Ibéria (1906-1909), Ravel's Gaspard de la Nuit (1908), Alban Berg's Sonata, op. 1 (1908), and Charles Ives' "Concord" Sonata (1909-1915) Falla’s Fantasía bætica has been described as a kind of Spanish Islamey and an Andalusian Fantasy but not as an historical evocation. When Falla returned to Madrid from his seven years in Paris, the Spanish press found many of his ensuing works, such as El amor brujo and Noches en los jardines de España, to be too "Frenchified". This claim may rightly apply to his Fantasy, the last large-scale solo piano work which closes the so-called "Andalusian period" (1915-1919). Falla subsequently embarked on a search for universal synthesis that would include his masterpieces El retablo de Maese Pedro and the Concerto for Harpsichord (or Piano), Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Violin, and Violoncello. (“Bætica”, the ancient Roman name of Andalucía, Extremadura, and parts of Portugal, was suggested by Falla at the request of his publisher.)

The genesis of the Fantasy is found in the correspondence from Ernest Ansermet to Falla (in March, 1918, shortly before Debussy's demise) asking him to intercede with Artur Rubinstein on Igor Stravinsky's behalf (the latter was in dire financial straits because the Russian Revolution and the 1st World War had prevented him from receiving royalties). Instead of buying Stravinsky's Firebird manuscript, Rubinstein "had a better idea" - to commission new works from
Stravinsky (*Piano Rag Music*, 1919) and from Falla (*Fantasía bética*). Contrary to his normal working processes, Falla wrote his work quickly - within three or four months. Rubinstein was eagerly awaiting another crowd-pleaser to follow “Ritual Fire Dance”. However, he did not manage to learn the Fantasy for his upcoming Barcelona concerts, and instead gave the première on 8 February 1920 at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel for the Society of the Friends of Music in New York (in competition with Josef Hofmann’s Carnegie Hall recital). He played it only a handful of times afterwards and eventually abandoned it, complaining that it was too long and had too many guitar figures and glissandi.

If Rubinstein found Falla’s work unwieldy, then how can lesser pianists achieve success in performance? Beyond its difficult technical challenges, the key may be found in understanding its musical and interpretative nature, of which several elements will be discussed:

1) *Cante jondo* (*toque jondo, baile jondo*) and Andalusian figures: guitar *rasgueado* and *punteado* techniques; “¡Ay!” *jipío, cantaor, quejío, bulerías, seguidilla, fandango, guairja, copla, falsetas, taconeo*, others.

2) French elements and material borrowed from others and from himself: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, *El amor brujo, Noches en los jardines de España*.

3) Historical recordings - Mark Hambourg, *Manuel de Falla* (1876-1946) *Grabaciones Históricas* ALMAVIVA 0121; *1º Concurso de Cante Jondo*, SONIFOLK 20106) and manuscripts (AMF, LVA1, A1, B1-4, C1 in British Library). Hambourg’s interpretation, while it is rhythmically incorrect and makes liberal cuts, nevertheless reveals definite French tendencies.

Technical considerations must also be looked at:

4) Fingering. No markings are given by Falla, but guitar manuals in his possession (especially those by Rafael Marín) are helpful. Falla’s approach to the piano came from the French school, having studied with a student of Georges Matias, pupil of Chopin.

5) Pedalling indications - the French slur; *le piccole note sempre molto breve e senza pedale; 2 ped.* and others. In his recording of *Siete canciones populares españolas* Falla uses little pedal.

6) Dynamic shadings - some are excruciatingly difficult to execute on the modern piano, for example bar 63 allows only 2 beats for *ff-pp*. 

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7) Tempo and rhythmic interpretation (rubato). Falla provides enormous detail to guide the interpreter, although the middle section is a disguised guajira; alternating meters are not infrequent.

8) Structural form and harmonic preferences - rhapsodic form with improvisatory feeling (ABCDE+Intermezzo+ABCDF+Coda) and superimposed tonal-modal mixtures, influenced by exotic modes and the theories of Louis Lucas. Falla’s use of motifs is designed much in the way of French orchestral technique. Indeed the work was later considered as a piano and orchestral work and was transcribed by Halfetter for violoncello and piano.


10) Organological considerations. Falla knew harpsichordist Wanda Landowska from his Paris years. Not only did he write the first contemporary guitar piece (Le tombeau de Debussy in 1920), but also the first contemporary harpsichord work (Concerto, 1926). Awkward on the modern piano, the Fantasy works very well on the contemporary pedal harpsichord. Frank Pelleg is rumoured to have recorded the work on this instrument.

The final question remains: why would Falla write a work as short as Le tombeau to pay homage to his idol Debussy? Is not Fantasía bética - conceived shortly after Debussy’s death - the real homage to Debussy? In that vein and imbibing the French perfume permeating the work, “style does matter”. The interpreter should not be misled by Falla’s own words:

It is the only [work] written by me with ‘purely pianistic’ intentions, in what is referred to as instrumental technique. On the other hand, the title of ‘Baética’ has no ‘especially sevillian’ significance whatsoever...I only tried to pay homage to our Latin-Andalusian race. - Manuel de Falla -

**Methodology**

The methodology employed includes musical and historical analysis and comparison. An examination of sketch material and manuscripts housed at the Archivo Manuel de Falla in Granada and the British Library in London, as well as scrutiny of correspondence, Falla’s collected writings, Masters and doctoral dissertations, historical recordings, press reviews, organological issues, empirical evidence, and related matters are used to draw conclusions about interpretative issues.

**Key Contribution**
This paper presents an informed evaluation of Falla's *Fantasía bætica* in the light of new evidence, while providing interpretative keys for the performer, emphasising Falla's unique blend of French elements in what is clearly a Spanish work.

**Key Words**
Interpretation, piano, musical style, Manuel de Falla, *Fantasía bætica*

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Sketch Material and Manuscripts (including proofs)
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