Domenico Scarlatti’s “Internal Rhythm”
in the Trajectory of Manuel de Falla’s Piano Works
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Just as it is impossible to excel the contrapuntal mastery of Bach, it will be impossible for anyone to surpass the internal rhythm of Scarlatti.

Manuel de Falla (1876-1946)¹

The influence of Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757) can be traced throughout the trajectory of Manuel de Falla’s œuvre, from the early zarzuela of La casa de tócame Roque (1902)² to the abstract Fantasia bætica (1919) and the impressionistic Psyché (1924); from the post-nationalistic masterpieces of El retablo de Maese Pedro (1919-1923) and the Concerto per Clavicembalo (o Pianoforte), flauto, oboe, clarinetto, violin e violoncello (1923-1926) to Falla’s final, unfinished scenic cantata, Atlántida (1927-1946). Scarlatti’s rich keyboard idiom attracted Falla, himself an outstanding pianist who had won Spain’s Ortiz y Cussó national competition in 1905 against such renowned pianists as Frank Marshall. Falla continued to perform Scarlatti for most of his career, culminating in an all-Scarlatti recital in Granada in 1927 (170th anniversary of Scarlatti’s demise). Too, the purchase of yet another volume of the Scarlatti sonatas during Falla’s final years in Argentina confirms the interest of the Andalusian composer in that of Neapolitan, whom he deemed as “ours” when in a good humour or “Italian” when in a bad humour.

The Baroque re-discovery, prevalent at the beginning of the 20th century amongst musicians in Paris where Falla was resident from 1907-1914, was viewed in various ways – through performance of the original works on modern instruments; performance of transcriptions on modern instruments; or performance of original works on historical instruments, now removed from the museums and re-examined in a new light on the performance stage. Falla’s compatriot, Enrique Granados (1867-1916), expounded

² Spanish musicologist Begoña Lolo makes a case for 1900 as the date for completion of this work. The work is based on an 18th century text, with only remaining music being its Overture, partially recast as the “Danza del Corregidor” from El sombrero de tres picos (1917-1919). See the article by Elena Torres below.
augmenting - or transcribing - the scarlattian material for modern instruments.³ Falla, on the other hand, chose to reduce it to the bare essence for historical instruments, the most obvious example being the last movement of the *Concerto*.

From his studies of folk music in Madrid from 1901-1904 with Felipe Pedrell (1841-1922), Falla became particularly attracted to Scarlatti’s usage of Spanish popular music. Folk melodies were analysed with an eye for potential harmonic or rhythmic generation. In his published writings, he confirmed: “In popular song I think that the spirit is more important than the letter….The rhythmic or melodic accompaniment is as important as the song itself. Inspiration is therefore to be found directly in the people…”⁴

Falla collectively annotated his Scarlatti scores, marking: 1) arpeggios-chords from guitar tunings; 2) appoggiatura usage; 3) cadential material; 4) internal pedals; 5) harmonic and thematic employment; 6) comparison with the Venice codex; 7) performance practice issues such as doubling the right hand with the violin; 8) Spanish folk material with their rhythmical and melodic-harmonic (including the oft-used Andalusian or Phrygian cadence) figures, etc.⁵ From amongst his unclassified papers at the *Archivo Manuel de Falla* (AMF) in Granada, Spain, is noted Falla’s observation of “the melodic character of rhythm [in] eighteenth-century objective music,” which he termed “*Monotonal*” and “*Polyrhythmic music*”.⁶

Falla also derived influence from the rich circle of composers with whom he came in contact - Debussy, Ravel, Dukas, Stravinsky, to name a few - transforming it into his personal style.

The teachings of French impressionism and Russian folklorism indicated to Falla a more intense means of expression in the Spanish musical idiom; they led him to discover the intrinsic dynamism of folk melody in its entire scale of values. The timid attempts of Albéniz to utilize certain rhythmic motives as a

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link between the different sections of a composition are surpassed in Falla’s work by his unleashing of the elemental forces of rhythm.7

Through Falla’s exploration of oriental scales (akin to the Andalusian cante jondo, or flamenco idiom, which Scarlatti undoubtedly heard), exoticism and magic, as well as primitivism, he enriched his compositional palette.

In his harmonic constructions, Falla, like Scarlatti, generated dense chords from guitar tunings and figures, himself studying the guitar, as several annotated guitar manuals in the AMF attest.8 The religious Falla could no more leave tonality than leave his religion. He could, however, stretch it to its utmost limits. Using only the major or minor chord, he derived a “theory of resonance” or chord regeneration, which found support in the teachings of the 19th-century Louis Lucas, and which reached its apogee in Falla’s middle period works, as the document Superposiciones testifies.9

Falla never directly defined Scarlatti’s “internal rhythm”. From one source close to Falla10, it is seen as “the relationship of the symmetry between the phrases and cadences”. Inherently, two other elements may be discerned: 1) meter displacements and/or alternating meters; and 2) “the crux” (that point in each half of the bi-partite Scarlatti sonata where “the thematic material, which is stated in parallel fashion at the ends of both halves, establishes the closing material”)11 - to use Ralph Kirkpatrick’s term. Study of material from various sources confirms these elements.12

Abundant examples of “internal rhythm” may be found in Falla’s works. Some examples of “internal rhythm” in Falla and his “school” of the Generación del ’2713 are noted:

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7 Mayer-Serra, 1943, p. 5.
8 Series “Aires andaluces” by Rafael Marín (AMF, I. N. 38) and Rondeña by Julián Arcas (AMF, I. N. 136).
9 See Nancy Lee Harper “Rodolfo Halffter and the Superposiciones of Manuel de Falla” in ex tempore (Summer 1996), p. 58-94. Superposiciones was published in 1975-76 (facsimile ed., Carlos Lecea, Madrid) for the anniversary of Falla’s birth. It consists of 4 pages of sketches in Falla’s handwriting, 2 of which are chord generations and 2 of which are examples taken from Falla’s own works.
10 Mayer-Serra, p. 10.
12 These include analysis of Falla’s works, study of his annotated Scarlatti scores at the AMF, scrutiny of his sketch material in the Concerto and Retablo, and Superposiciones, testimonies and letters of his pupils of the Generación del ’27 - notably Rodolfo Halffter, as well as Ernesto Halffter, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and Josep Valls - and other archival material at the AMF in Granada.
13 Generación del ’27 commemorated the 300th anniversary of the poet Luis Góngora and consisted of musicians, poets, artists, etc. The group of eight musicians, who called themselves ‘grupo de ocho’, were: Rodolfo and Ernesto Halffter, Julián Bautista, Gustavo Pittaluga, Fernando Remachá, Salvador Bacarisse, Juan José Mantecón, and Rosa García Ascot.
1. symmetry between the phrases and cadences - Scarlatti *Gavota*, K. 64; Falla *Concerto*, 3rd movement;

2. meter displacement and/or alternating meters that result from this symmetry, a technique borrowed from the Renaissance – Scarlatti, Sonata, K. 502, Falla *Fantasia baetica*, middle section and coda (10/16);

3. “crux” (Scarlatti, Sonata, K. 3; Rodolfo Halffter, *Dos sonatas de El Escorial*, nº 1)\(^{14}\);

It is not until after 1905 and the composition of his opera *La vida breve* that Falla’s piano works show evidence of the sophisticated technique of “internal rhythm”. These works include: “Montañesa” from *Pièces espagnoles* (1906-1909); *Noches en los jardines de España* (1909-1916); *Fantasia baetica* (1919); *Homenaje a Debussy* (1920), also for the guitar; *Canto de los remeros de Volga* (1922); *Concerto for Harpsichord (or Piano), Flute, Clarinet, Oboe, Violin, and Violoncello* (1923-1926); *Homenaje a Dukas* (1935). Naturally this influence is found in his theatrical works, such as *El retablo de Maese Pedro* and those which are transcribed for piano, such as “Ritual Fire Dance” from *El amor brujo* (1915) or the “Corregidor’s Dance” from *El sombrero de tres picos* (1917) and in the piano solo transcription of *Siete canciones populares españolas* (1914, arr. by Ernesto Halffter\(^{15}\)).

While Falla’s “internal rhythm” in his piano works is found in all three situations listed above, the first and second were generally preferred. He did not write in bi-partite forms, so the idea of the crux did not apply to his works with the exception of the last movement of the *Concerto*. Through the study of Scarlatti with Falla, his followers, such as Rodolfo Halffter, Ernesto Halffter, Rosa García Ascot, and Joaquín Nin-Culmell applied these techniques to their works.

Just as Falla used tonality ambiguously, so was his approach to the piano. Although it emulates the *flamenco* guitar, the *Fantasia baetica* - Falla’s most abstract solo piano work - could conceivably have been written for modern harpsichord had it not been for pianist Artur Rubinstein, dedicatee of the work. Thus, it would have been the first modern harpsichord piece of the 20th century, instead of the *Concerto*. Supposedly\(^{14}\) See Linton Powell’s “Rudolfo [sic] Halffter, Domenico Scarlatti, and Kirkpatrick’s Crux” in *The American Music Teacher*, vol. 25 (July 1976), p. 4-7.

\(^{15}\) Ediciones Manuel de Falla, Madrid.
Frank Pelleg recorded the *Fantasia* on harpsichord.\(^{16}\) This author, through experimentation on her modern pedal harpsichord, confirms the adequacy, even preference, of this instrument in the *Fantasia*. While organological matters are not the main consideration here, it is clear that the 18\(^{th}\) century aesthetic replaced that of the 19\(^{th}\) century in Falla’s works as he progressed, leading to outright harpsichord usage in *Retablo* and the *Concerto* (for Harpsichord or Piano!). Harpsichord stops on pianos, harp-lutes, and player pianos were some of the keyboard simulations that Falla used in his piano works or transcriptions.

Through usage of an 18\(^{th}\)-century technique – Scarlatti’s “internal rhythm” – Falla found a tool that allowed him to not only “cortar el camiño”, but to develop some of the most memorable music of the 20\(^{th}\) century. Without a doubt, a subtle Neapolitan perfume continually laces the works of this Andalusian composer, who acknowledges “…that in the music of Domenico Scarlatti…there is a force of musical substance, very superior at times to other great musicians, who, however, enjoy the more elevated prestige, and this perhaps was due to…the limited instrumental means, to which [“our” Scarlatti] was subjected….”\(^{17}\)

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\(^{16}\) Harper, 2005, p. 79.