

De Falla's Hungarian Success: *A háromszögletű kalap* (1928)¹

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Abstract: In this study, I examine a hitherto completely unknown subject: the Hungarian reception of Manuel de Falla's ballet pantomime, *El sombrero de tres picos* (The three-cornered hat). As I point out, the story of the piece began well before Falla composed his music: Alarcón's novel was published in a Hungarian translation just two decades after the Spanish original. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the Budapest Opera House (Magyar Állami Operaház) and Municipal Theatre (Városi Színház) developed intensive opera, theatre, and ballet seasons, in association with the main European capitals during the first decades of the twentieth century. De Falla's ballet was premiered in Budapest in 1927 by Diaghilev's Russian Ballet, in the Municipal Theatre under the Hungarian title *A háromszögletű kalap*. The piece had such success that it had to be repeated three times. What is more, a Hungarian production was premiered in the Budapest Opera House one year later and this production continued until 1963, delivering a total of 75 performances. The sources (among others the handwritten performing scores) of this latter production preserved in the National Széchényi Library and in the Archives of the Hungarian State Opera House reveal an intense work of choreographic adaptation, along with careful design of staging, costumes, lightning, and scenery effects, all accomplished by great international personalities to make this very Spanish ballet understandable to the Magyar audience. Falla's work also found a significant support in the press, highlighting both the plot's universality and the expressiveness of his music, which had made it a Hungarian success.

Keywords: De Falla, ballet, reception history, Alarcón, *The Three-Cornered Hat*

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1. Alarcón's novel and its Hungarian translation

In 1874 Pedro Antonio de Alarcón (1833–1891) first published his novel *El sombrero de tres picos: historia verdadera de un sucedido que anda en romances escrita ahora tal y como pasó* (The three-cornered hat: a true story told in romances, written as it happened).² He had previously written a short story for a satirical Cuban newspaper and also published an extended version of it in five issues of *Revista Europea* between August and September 1874. This background explains why Alarcón, a writer usually given to the seriousness of late Romanticism, wrote a novel which is now considered one of the masterpieces of the comic genre in world literature.³

No less significant are the origins of the work. Alarcón himself admitted that he took the story from an eighteenth-century street ballad, *The Miller of Arcos*, which he expanded and elaborated. Later still, perhaps about 1810, a revised version called *A New Song of the Corregidor and The Miller's Wife* seems to have replaced the coarser *Miller of Arcos*. International scholarship has traced its origins as far back as Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which was translated into Spanish in 1543, as well as with numerous other, similar Italian, French, German and Russian works.⁴ Wherever the original source, it is clear that the basic story of *El sombrero de tres picos* emerges from a pan-European folk tradition. An ancestor of the tale can be found in a book translated into Castilian from Arabic in the thirteenth century.⁵

The *Sombrero's* plot is the Corregidor's ridiculous and vain attempt to seduce the beautiful Miller's Wife, and the unconsciously comic reaction of her husband, who thinks himself disrespected. He planned to take revenge seducing the bare Corregidor's wife, dressed in the Corregidor's clothes. In short, it is the clownish portrayal of a failed double adultery, a situation usually drawn catastrophically, brought to a truly comic climax.⁶

Internationally, Alarcón's *Sombrero* became one of the most popular novels ever to come out of Spain.

2. Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, *El sombrero de tres picos: historia verdadera de un sucedido que anda en romances escrita ahora tal y como pasó* (Madrid: Medina y Navarro, [ca.1874]).

3. Edmund de Chasca, "La Forma Cómica en el Sombrero de Tres Picos," *Hispania* 36/3 (August 1953), 283–288.

4. Samuel G. Armistead–Joseph H. Silverman, "El corregidor y la molinera and its German Ancestor: Schumacher und Edelmann," *Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung*, vol. 17 (1972), 55.

5. James D. Fernández, "Fashioning the Ancien Régime: Alarcón's *Sombrero de tres picos*," *Hispanic Review* 62/2 (Spring 1994), 235.

6. Chasca, "La Forma Cómica," 283.

Not only was the text translated into at least seven different languages during the author's lifetime, but its storyline has since served as the basis for French, Belgian and German operettas, a number of films in both Italy and Spain and, of course, the ballet composed by Manuel de Falla.⁷

As a consequence, the folk origins and the cosmopolitan reception and assimilation of *El sombrero* seem to have torn the novel out of its immediate context – Spain, 1874 – and transformed it into a universal *divertimento*.

In 1894, only 20 years after the Spanish original, *El sombrero and other tales* were translated into Hungarian.⁸ Although it also included *El clavo* (The nail) and *El coro de ángeles* (The angels' choir), and two other tales by Alarcón, the introduction by "Alfonso Lajos" only referred to *El sombrero*.⁹ In fact, this apparently Hungarian preface was the translation of a Spanish review of the novel: it had been published by Luis Alfonso in the Spanish press in 1874 and had been included by Alarcón himself in the edition of his complete works later, in 1882.¹⁰

Alfonso did not rate the work that highly himself, but highlighted the plot's simplicity and the honesty of the language. Above all, he sang the praises of its Spanishness, with no need to incorporate foreign sources. Alfonso considered Alarcón a guardian of the best Spanish school traditions, plunging "Quevedo's writing into the colors of Goya's palette."¹¹ It is a pretty little image, starring the *Corregidor* and the Miller, with *majos* and *manolas* (male and female characters in Goya's paintings, respectively). There is no more than a picaresque narration, in the style of the tales of Cervantes or of Hurtado de Mendozas, in contrast to most Spanish literature, which was affected by foreign influences: "Nobody appreciates more than me the fact that Alarcón is a part of our literary heritage," Alfonso claimed. He also admired landscapes and descriptions of places, along with the true to life character portraits, and the comic scenes such as of Lucas returning to the mill, or of the splendid meeting in the *Corregidor's* palace. For Alfonso, Alarcón is a connoisseur, a thinker, an artist rearing his head in part and in whole. In fact, both conservative and progressive critics praised a Spanish novel which had left behind French influence, acclaiming a production which harked back to Cervantes, Quevedo and Goya: a true national work.¹²

Alarcón was already a well-known writer in Hungary in the late nineteenth century. Another of his great novels, *El Niño de la bola* was announced in the

7. Fernández, "Fashioning the Ancien Régime," 235.

8. Alarcón Péter [=Pedro de Alarcón], *A háromszögű kalap és más beszélyek*, transl. Gyula Haraszti (Budapest: Franklin-Társulat, 1894).

9. Alfonso Lajos [=Luis Alfonso], "Vélemény A háromszögű kalapról," in id., *A háromszögű kalap*, 3–10.

10. Eva F. Florensa, "Presentación," in Pedro A. Alarcón, *El sombrero de tres picos* (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 2017), IX.

11. Alfonso, "Vélemény A háromszögű kalapról," 6.

12. Florensa, "Presentación," X.

press in 1896¹³ and was published in Hungarian translation in the journal *Fővárosi Lapok*, under the title *Venegas Manuel* (as it was known in German) between 30 July and 27 September in the same year.¹⁴ *El sombrero* was also referred to as the literary source of *The Coquette*, an English operetta by the Frenchman Justin Clérice, which was premiered in 1899; that of *Der Corregidor*, a German comic opera by Hugo Wolf premiered in Mannheim in 1896; as well as that of another Austrian operetta entitled *Gerline*.¹⁵ Alarcón was even included in the first volume of *Tolnai világlexikona* (1912) with an entry highlighting his career as politician and writer with strengths in humour and in satire, being a novelist who was one of the main characters of the contemporary scene in Spanish literature.¹⁶

A second Hungarian translation, published in 1957, was probably also fostered by the great success which Manuel de Falla's ballet had had in Hungary since 1927. *A háromszögletű kalap* was published along with *Méregzsák kapitány*, translated from the tenth Spanish edition (1891) by János Benyhe, who also wrote a complete Alarcón biography, introducing him as a writer and as a politician from a land with a strong Arab heritage, and highlighting several stages of his writing, his vivid descriptions and imagination, and comparing him with another great Spanish master: the painter, Francisco de Goya.¹⁷

Alarcón and *A háromszögletű kalap* had an intense presence in Hungarian culture, reflected by the press through many years. A biography of him was published in 1966, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of his death,¹⁸ and the novel was adapted for radio, ten years later.¹⁹ But undoubtedly, the most powerful medium to have kept the novel in the public eye was a West German film, introduced as a risqué costume comedy, which was often on Hungarian television in the 1970s, even as much as twice a week (see *Plate 1*).²⁰

During this time, another Hungarian magazine published a short notice in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of Alarcón's death, highlighting the writer and statesman who had depicted the life and morals of the country with humour and delight. As expected, *A háromszögletű kalap* is cited as a source for operas

13. "Új regényünk," *Fővárosi Lapok* 33/206 (28 July 1896), 7; "Irodalom, színház, művészet," *Magyar Újság* 7/87 (28 March 1898), 4.

14. See *Fővárosi Lapok* 33/208 (30 July 1896), 10. and 33/266 (27 September 1896) 17.

15. "Irodalom, művészet. Új angol operette," *Magyarország* 6/48 (17 February 1899), 9.

16. "Alarcón, Pedro Antonio de," *Tolnai világlexikona*, vol. 1 (Budapest: Magyar Kereskedelmi Közlöny, 1912 [1912]), 260.

17. János Benyhe, "Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, 1833–1891," in Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, *A háromszögletű kalap. Méregzsák kapitány* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1957), 228–231.

18. "A nap krónikája," *Dolgozók Lapja* 21/169 (19 July 1966), [8]; "Hírek," *Észak-Magyarország* 22/169 (19 July 1966), [6]; "Hírek, események," *Népújság* 17/169 (19 July 1966), [6]; "Hírek," *Pest Megyei Hírlap* 10/169 (19 July 1966), 5; "Hírek," *Petőfi Népe* 21/169 (19 July 1966), 4.

19. "trömböczky," "A háromszögletű kalap," *Szolnok Megyei Néplap* 27/52 (2 March 1976), 5; "A rádió és a televízió műsora," *Pest Megyei Hírlap* 21/68 (22 March 1977), 8.

20. "Kép és hang. Heti műsorajánlatunk. A háromszögletű kalap," *Petőfi Népe* 25/173 (25 July 1970), [5]; "Televízióműsor," *A Hét* 15/30 (26 July 1970), 16.

PLATE 1 Frame from *A háromszögletű kalap* (West German Film, 1970)

and for Falla's ballet. But finally, the man of letters is recognized simply because "many of his works were popular among Hungarian readers in the last century."²¹

2. *The Three-Cornered Hat* performed by the Ballets Russes in the Budapest Municipal Theater (1927)

In 1916 Manuel de Falla began to compose the score for a pantomime entitled *El corregidor y la molinera*, based on Alarcón's novel, with the playwrights Gregorio and María Martínez Sierra, "which over the course of the next three years was to be transformed by a team consisting of Massine, Picasso, and Falla himself into one of the Ballets Russes' most successful productions of all times, *The Three-Cornered Hat*."²² On 22 July 1919 *Le Tricorne* (the French name used by the Ballets Russes) received its premiere in London as a modernist work, representative of the Spanish music revival, and was declared to be an out and out triumph.²³ More than sixty reviewers from across London found the "witty score, cubist sets and virtuosic choreography [to be] a colorful realization of Spanish spirit, character and temperament."²⁴

21. "Hetvenöt éve," *Dél-Magyarország* 56/169 (19 July 1966), 4.

22. Andrew Büdwig, "The evolution of Manuel de Falla's *The Three-Cornered Hat*, 1916–1920," *Journal of Musicological Research* 5/1–3 (1984), 191–212.

23. Chris Collins, "Falla in Britain," *The Musical Times* 144/1883 (Summer 2003), 33.

24. Carol A. Hess, *Manuel de Falla and Modernism in Spain, 1898–1936* (Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 128–129.

In autumn of 1927 the Ballets Russes made a Central European tour, in Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. They arrived in Budapest on 28 November, offering seven performances each with three works, from 29 November to 8 December, which indicated the presentation of an extended repertoire. They played the following works (the figures given in brackets show the number of Budapest performances of the piece in question): *Les Matelots* (2), *Les Biches* (4), *Prince Igor* (3), *La Chatte* (4), *La boutique fantasque* (3), *Romeo and Juliet* (2), *Le Tricorne* (2) and *Cimarosiana* (1).²⁵ During the 1920s, which has been called the golden age of the Ballets Russes, these pieces were considered to encapsulate the spirit of that time and, among them, *Le Tricorne* is praised as a colorful work with a strong narrative element, receiving over 200 performances.²⁶

A háromszögletű kalap, which was introduced as Manuel de Falla's masterpiece to the Hungarian audience, could not be presented on the first few days of that tour, due to a delay in the arrival of the set,²⁷ or perhaps because the difficult score could not be prepared by the theatre orchestra in just a few rehearsals.²⁸ Finally, the work was premiered as the closing work for the Friday 2 December session, and repeated as the opening work in the next performance, on Sunday 4 December.²⁹ All the critics praised the modernity of Falla's music, the lively choreography by Massine, and the surprising scenery and costumes which had been produced by Picasso.³⁰ Until then, Falla was only known in Budapest as a symphonic composer, as one of his works, thought to be *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1916), had recently been played by the Orchestra of the Philharmonic Society (Filharmóniai Társaság).

Although criticized by the use of an uncertain local color, Falla was defined as a sophisticated composer of rich invention, who characterized the dance figures with brief instrumental solos in a witty and illustrative manner.³¹ The scenery, with wide lines of Spanish villages, was also highlighted as the most artistic and beautiful image which had attracted attention recently. And the praise, for some reviewers, continued on to the dancers: Leonid Massine (*The Miller*), Loubov Chernicheva (*The Miller's Wife*) and Georges Balanchine (*The Corregidor*). However, for another critic, Sándor Jemnitz, unlike in the rest of pieces where the choreography surpassed the quality of the music, the dancers did not attain the orgiastic heights of Falla's brilliant and ardent music. According to Jemnitz they lacked a suitable sense of abandon. Chernicheva was too heavy footed, after the

25. Jane Pritchard, "Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes: An Itinerary. Part II (1922–1929)," *Dance Research* 27/2 (Winter 2009), 317.

26. *Ibid.*, 258.

27. "h. e." [=Emil Haraszti], "Irodalom és művészet," *Budapesti Hírlap* 47/273 (1 December 1927), 11.

28. "J. S." [=Sándor Jemnitz], "Művészet, irodalom," *Népszava* 55/273 (1 December 1927), 10.

29. Pritchard, "Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes," 317.

30. "Színház és művészet. Az orosz balett vendégjátéka," *Magyarország* 8/275 (3 December 1927), 10.

31. "cs. a." [=Andor Cserna], "Színház, zene, film," *Pesti Napló* 78/275 (3 December 1927), 13.

light Alice Nikitina, and even Massine was far from the brilliant imagination of the primoballerino Serge Lifar.³² Undoubtedly, however, despite such reviews, the blend of Falla's music, Picasso's scenery and costumes, and Massine's choreography and dance, combined to cause a true sensation in the Hungarian audience: "music, dance and stage produced a true crossfire."³³

3. *A háromszögletű kalap* as part of the repertoire of the Budapest Opera House (1928)

Only one year after the Budapest guest performance of the Ballets Russes, a Hungarian production of *The Three-Cornered Hat*, *A háromszögletű kalap* was announced in the press, with choreography by Albert Gaubier, "a former member of the Diaghilev ballet," conducted by Sergio Failoni. The main characters were played by the same dancers: Gaubier (The Miller) and Anna Misyey (The Miller's Wife), whilst other characters were danced by Rezső Brada (Toff), Gyula Harangozó (The Corregidor), Róza Józsa (The Corregidor's Wife) and Júlia Raksányi (A Flirty Girl). The song was sung by Ella Némethy, from off stage, while the new scenery and costumes were prepared by Gusztáv Oláh.³⁴

The premiere took place on 29 December in the Opera House, and gave rise to great expectation, judging by the large number of press reviews which gave a complete overview of the ballet's reception and which also wrote about Falla's music and about Spanish culture in Hungary in general. Most of the critics began introducing Falla as a national composer, rooted in Andalusian popular tradition, even describing him as having Gypsy and Arab traits.³⁵ (It should be noted, that Hungary is a country where a significant Gypsy ethnic minority lives, and lived already at the time of the premiere of Falla's piece). At the same time, his art was considered to be strong, original, not conservative, and to be noteworthy internationally. In fact, Falla was regarded as Debussy's greatest disciple, a figure in the spotlight of modern Spanish music³⁶ and his music was often described as being refreshing, full of energy, rhythmic, with fire dances which captivated the audience's souls.³⁷ This expansion of Spanish popular music, the modernity and its familiarity for Hungarian audiences, is also clear when the press stated that "Falla's works are often included in our concerts, even Bartók himself belongs

32. "J. S." [=Sándor Jemnitz], "Művészet, irodalom," *Népszava* 55/275 (3 December 1927), 7.

33. François Gachot, "Orosz balett," *Nyugat* 20/24 (16 December 1927), 894–895.

34. "Színház, zene. Az Operaház heti műsora," *Budapesti Hírlap* 48/291 (23 December 1928), 11.

35. Pálma Ottlik, "Színház, művészet. A háromszögletű kalap. Ballet-bemutató az Operaházban," *Budapesti Hírlap* 48/295 (30 December 1928), 19.

36. "L. H.," "Két bemutató a M. Kir. Operában. Manuel de Falla egyfelvonásos balletjének és Hindemith zenei tréfájának bemutató előadása," *A Zene* 10/7 (15 January 1929), 124–126.

37. "m. i." [=István Milotay], "Színház, művészet. A háromszögletű kalap," *Magyarság* 9/295 (30 December 1929), 20.

to the performers of his works.”³⁸ Gyula Fodor, the critic of *Esti Kurír* was right: four years earlier, in 1924 it was Bartók who had played the piano solo on the occasion of the first Budapest performance of *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, when Falla’s piece was performed in two concerts given by the Philharmonic Society (on 26 and 27 October, respectively), conducted by Ernő Dohnányi.³⁹

On the occasion of the first performance of *A háromszögletű kalap*, one review stood out above all others in introducing both Falla and Spanish music to the Hungarian public. It was written by Aladár Tóth,⁴⁰ a leading musicologist and music critic in the 1920s. Tóth did more than merely inform the public about current musical events. He had a shrewd eye for promoting culture, which combined with his natural belligerence both to raise the general level of Hungarian musical life and to further appreciation of unfamiliar composers.⁴¹ Tóth began his review by invoking *Por nuestra música* (For our music), the nationalist manifesto by the composer and musicologist Felipe Pedrell, who had sought to vindicate both Spanish artistic traditions and what he regarded as the treasure hidden in folk songs (which he himself had collected directly from the peasants) as being the basis for Spanish music. This goal was later pursued by Albéniz and Granados, but Falla was the leading artist of the new Spanish music, creating “a real and honest poetry,” with a direct, authentic expression of Spanish character, exposing people’s lives “au plein air.” In Tóth’s opinion, Falla had moved beyond Pedrell’s “science hall,” and had even moved beyond Albeniz’s and Granados’s “concert hall,” to establish an outdoor Spanish music. In the process of this, Falla had become one of the best known and most respected musicians in all Europe, with the added advantage of being less high-brow than Stravinsky or Schoenberg. Listing Falla’s four stage compositions, Tóth described *A háromszögletű kalap* as being a brilliant, little pantomime with colorful, wholesome, lifelike music, interwoven with subtle inventions, and as being a piece of music which deserved to be a permanent fixture in the Opera House.

Undoubtedly, a major contribution to the success of Falla’s music was the brilliant interpretation by a young Italian conductor, Sergio Failoni, a renowned disciple of Toscanini, who had just arrived at the Budapest National Opera.⁴² Some reviewers leapt to declare the conductor to be the very soul of the ballet’s music, who seemed to live inside the music, singing and dancing in his chair to the point of comedy or even caricature. He appeared to absorb each orchestral part into

38. Gyula Fodor, “Színház. A háromszögletű kalap. Az Operaház ma esti bemutatója,” *Esti Kurír* 6/295 (30 December 1928), 11.

39. “Z.,” “Budapesti zenei élet,” *Zenei Szemle* 9/3 (November 1924), 79.

40. Aladár Tóth, “Manuel de Falla-bemutató az Operaházban,” *Pesti Napló* 79/295 (30 December 1928), 22.

41. Ferenc Bónis, “Tóth, Aladár,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2001 edition), <oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed 30 July 2018).

42. Péter Várnai, “Failoni, Sergio,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2001 edition), <oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed 31 July 2018); György Nemes, “Sergio Failoni emléke. Beszélgetés a nagy karmester özvegyével,” *Muzsika* 1/8 (1 August 1958), 29–32.

his very being, which was what brought the score so vibrantly to life.⁴³ “The real sensation and value of this show,” was how the press reported his performance, thanks to his conducting style: tempo, rhythm, melody lines, and sound effects,⁴⁴ all combining to imbue the performance with a “pulsating life.”⁴⁵ Failoni was even considered “the successful hero of the show,” conducting Falla’s colorful melodic music with enthusiastic vigour and classical artistic knowledge, guiding the ballet and the orchestra without a score and showing a deep knowledge of this unfamiliar music.⁴⁶

Aladár Tóth is even more emphatic:

As for the performance of our Opera House now, its musical part was perfect. The hero of the premiere is undoubtedly the conductor Failoni, who has shown that he finds himself in the modern music realm with the same ingenious intuition as in the scores of Wagner and Verdi. ... With a strong sense of form, clear and noble outlines, he presented de Falla’s finely articulated musical building, solving the painterly problems of the score with fuzzy orchestral colors; and, at the same time, he immersed himself in lively folk rhythms with a lively temperament and almost demonic impulse, squeezing out the special aroma of Spanish dances with an unmatched sense of style; However, the freest of the folk dances was always uplifting and uplifted, and for a moment he was brutal and ordinary. In the lyrical details, we met a devoted painter of magical moods with a delicate, vibrating nerve in Failoni, who knows what he owes to the poet Manuel de Falla. Failoni, like everything else, also commanded this pantomime from the outside. The orchestra played first-rate and with full understanding followed the conductor’s wand of its outstanding leader.⁴⁷

All the critics praised the scenery and costumes, the fascinating drawing and color effects, originally designed by Gusztáv Oláh, a young architect and musician, who later became stage director and general manager of the Opera House.⁴⁸ Although the sets of the Ballets Russes were designed by Picasso, Oláh was recognized to be worthy of his place in the midst of this fresh creative fantasy, providing a generous, harmonious background to the ever-moving color.⁴⁹ The stage, with a

43. Ottlik, “Színház, művészet.”

44. Andor Cserna, “Színház. Magy. Kir. Operaház. A háromszögletű kalap. Manuel de Falla balettje az Operaházban,” *Magyarország* 35/295 (30 December 1928), 11–12.

45. “m. i.” [=István Miltotay], “Színház, művészet.”

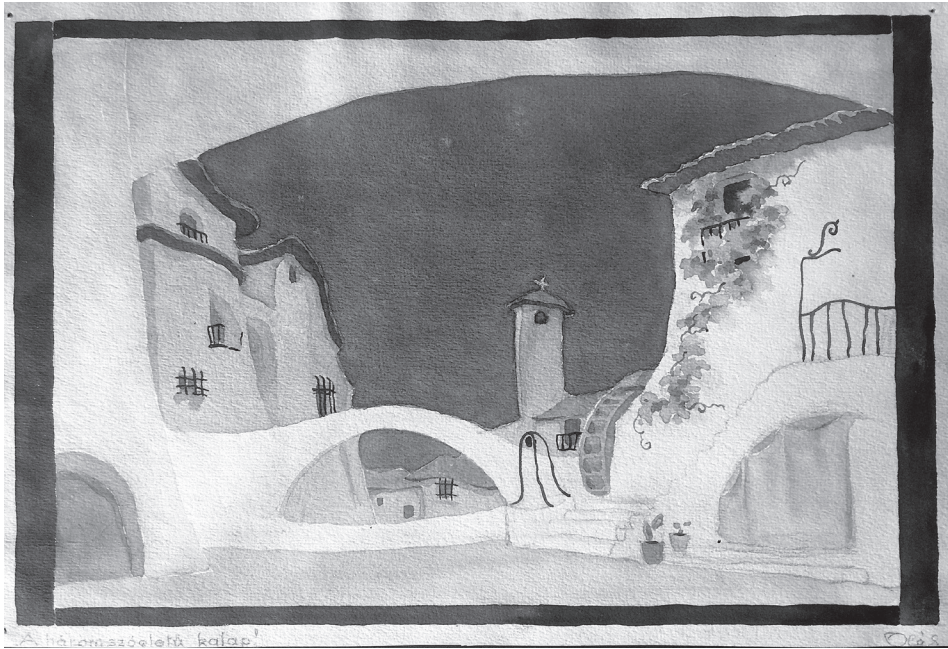
46. “d. f.,” “Színház, művészet. A háromszögletű kalap,” *Nemzeti Újság* 10/295 (30 December 1928), 45.

47. Tóth, “Manuel de Falla-bemutató az Operaházban.”

48. Vilmos Somogyi, “Operai Pantheon. Oláh Gusztáv (1901–1956),” *Muzsika* 5/11 (November 1962), 21–22. For a digital exhibition introducing Oláh’s scenic art, see Zita Burda, “Az opera varázslója,” (2006) <<http://mek.niif.hu/04100/04135/html/>> (accessed 30 July 2018).

49. “m. i.,” “Színház, művészet.”

PLATE 2 Sketch by Oláh for *A háromszögletű kalap* (Budapest, Opera House, 1928).
From the Theater History Collection of the National Széchényi Library, Budapest (KE 86)



starry sky, “brought the spring charm of Andalusian villages to the audiences”⁵⁰ (see *Plate 2*). Costumes were also praised as being brilliant, elegant, and as being “where the real fantasy, the mark of the real talent, burns.” In fact, Oláh’s design was truly original, based on the clothes of the common people of Spain, but with a touch of modernity, drawn from the aesthetic of the cabaret and operetta of the 1920s (see *Plate 3*).

The focus of attention was not only on the scenery and costumes, but also on the surprising visual effects: “Forty minutes holds forty surprises for the eye as well. The young Hungarian poet of the stage picture is not only hands-on, but his taste is also unmistakable, and he is always uplifting, individual and interesting.”⁵¹ In fact, Oláh was a gifted pianist and he started always with the score, studying the music as a “rhythmic winding more than an expression of the plot or the ambience.”⁵² He threw himself into heart of that “rhythmic winding”, in order to charge his work with visual meaning. As a result, Oláh is often described as a

50. “d. f.,” “Színház, művészet. A háromszögletű kalap,” *Nemzeti Újság* 10/295 (30 December 1928), 45.

51. Fodor, “Színház. A háromszögletű kalap,” 11.

52. Somogyi, “Operai Pantheon,” 22.

PLATE 3 Clothes design for ladies by Oláh for *A háromszögletű kalap*
(Budapest, Opera House, 1928).

From the Theater History Collection of the National Széchényi Library, Budapest (KE 2139)



PLATE 4 Anna Mисley, Gyula Harangozó and “operetta” dancers;
A háromszögletű kalap (Budapest, Opera House, 1928). *Magyar Ballet 1826–1939* (17)
 From the Theater History Collection of the National Széchényi Library, Budapest



master of colors, of the spectacular, and as a result of both, a master of delivering high impact scenes.⁵³

On the subject of the choreographer, opinions were divided. Albert Gaubier had been invited to the Budapesti Royal Orfeum ballet as a dancer, during the season before the great success of de Falla's work. He was subsequently hired for the Operaház, where he went back after surgery and a long recovery period.⁵⁴ The press introduced him as dance master from the Warsaw opera and as a member of the Diaghilev Ballet.⁵⁵ For some reviewers, his choreography was excellent, similar to that of the Ballets Russes of the previous year, filling the stage with vibrant

53. András Mikó, "Oláh Gusztáv (1901–1956)," *Muzsika* 9/12 (December 1966), 14–15; Judit Sándor, "Most lenne 80 éves Oláh Gusztáv," *Muzsika* 24/8 (August 1981), 39–41.

54. "'Nem vagyunk – orfeumban!' Radnai Miklós fölmentette operaházi alkalmaztatásától Albert Gaubier-t," *Pesti Napló* 80/4 (5 January 1929), 13–14.

55. In fact, Gaubier was educated as a dancer in Warsaw opera and being a young he joined the famous Ballet Russes, then at the peak of its career, where he danced, among others performances, in *La Chatte* by George Balanchine in 1927. But he left Diaghilev company immediately because he did not feel comfortable with the enormous rivalry and the mobbing to a young dancer inside. The Budapest opera ballet direction was a great opportunity to create his own choreography for *Le Tricorne*. He never forgot his Hungarian experiences, including Hungarian dancers and choreographers in the grants from his foundation in Denmark until nowadays. See Erik Aschengreen, *Fra et liv med dans: Erindringsessays* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2016).

life, brilliant colors, natural, easy movement, and human expressions rather than fixed, frozen smiles.⁵⁶ All the critics recognized his intense focus on teaching and on directing this complicated choreography, as well as the noticeable progress made by the dancers in just a few weeks. All praised Gaubier's Miller as being full of expressiveness, dancing the fandango with passion and grandeur,⁵⁷ successfully announcing his arrival as a great dance artist.⁵⁸ And they also highlighted the imagination and subtle elegance of Anna Misley (The Miller's Wife), the grotesque caricature of Gyula Harangozó (The Corregidor), and the backstage singing of Ella Némethy. Nevertheless, as a choreographer, Gaubier was considered to have little to do with the music in what Tóth regarded as a "non-musical dance concept," with a poor conception of group scenes and little sense of musical rhythm and movement.⁵⁹ In addition, Gaubier was accused "of smuggling [in] well-known acrobatic-style stunts of the girls of modern revolution into the tradition of ballet, not always with taste"⁶⁰ (see *Plate 4*).

The stress of all the work, followed by the reaction from the critics, seemed to have taken its toll on Gaubier. He had a falling out with Failoni during the third performance, and was replaced as The Miller for the following sessions by Rezső Brada.⁶¹

All the same, *A háromszögletű kalap*, this first Hungarian production of Manuel de Falla's *The Three-Cornered Hat*, became a permanent piece in the Budapest Opera House.

56. Ottlik, "Színház, művészet"; "h. s." [= Sándor Hevesi], "Színház," *8 Órai Újság* 14/295 (30 December 1928), 9.; Fodor, "Színház. A háromszögletű kalap"; "L. H.," "Két bemutató a M. Kir. Operában."

57. Ottlik, "Színház, művészet."

58. "m. i.," "Színház, művészet."

59. Tóth, "Manuel de Falla-bemutató az Operaházban."

60. "L. H.," "Két bemutató a M. Kir. Operában."

61. "Nem vagyunk – orfeumban!," *Pesti Napló* 80/4 (5 January 1929), 13–14.