

Sinfonía Fantástica – Editor’s Notes

The “Sinfonía Fantástica” was written in 1842 by Hilarión Eslava for the opening of the Salón de Máscaras (Hall of Masks) of the Teatro del Circo in Madrid. Outside of the music for his three operas, this is perhaps Eslava’s only known truly symphonic work. Scored for a small orchestra, this one-movement composition combines elements of Eslava’s Romantic opera style and a certain lighthearted Spanish flair. This piece may have been commissioned by the Teatro del Circo, one of a few venues in Madrid where the city’s music fans of the time could enjoy the latest in European (mostly Italian) opera and Spanish lyrical works and ballet. Initially the home of a circus company and situated in central Madrid’s Plaza del Rey, the theatre was acquired in 1842 by José de Salamanca, first Marquis of Salamanca and Count of Los Llanos (and a notorious land speculator and *bon vivant*), who turned it into an opera house and musical salon but kept in its name the reference to its prior function. We have not been able to find any specific information about the Salón de Máscaras; whether it was the main performance space or some other part of the theatre, but we do know from other contemporary references that it was not uncommon for the high-heeled members of Madrid society to periodically congregate at masked balls held at theatres or other large venues like them.

In 1842, Eslava was at the height of his operatic glory, with very successful performances of his second opera, “La Tregua di Ptolemaide” in the cities of Cádiz and Sevilla. He was also becoming well known in Madrid, where his first opera, “Il Solitario” was premiered to grand acclaim at the Teatro de la Cruz in December, 1841, followed by dozens of performances. On August 1, 1844, Eslava witnessed the Madrid premiere of “La Tregua di Ptolemaide” at the Teatro del Circo. It was a great popular success, despite a two-year wait and having to overcome the jealousy and short-sighted reviews of some critics, and the increasing opposition from Eslava’s ecclesiastical superiors in Sevilla, who took issue with *their* priest and master organist at *their* cathedral writing music they considered frivolous and unbecoming.

The Teatro del Circo nonetheless struggled financially in later years, and was destroyed by fire in 1876. Rebuilt a few years later as Circo Price, it became the site of concerts, *zarzuelas* (Spanish operettas), variety shows, society balls, and again, circus shows. The building was demolished in 1970 and the site is now occupied by government offices.