

## Editor's Notes for Scene 1 in the Third Act of *Pietro il Crudele* (*Pedro El Cruel*)

Although he clearly enjoyed and excelled in his operatic works, Eslava's opera career was nipped in the bud early on by his ecclesiastical superiors and by the shifting fortunes of Spain's nascent opera companies. Thereafter, the composer had to limit the exercise of his talents almost exclusively to sacred music. His opera works lay in almost complete oblivion. Fortunately, Eslava was also a revered teacher, and some of his devoted students tried years later to rescue fragments of his opera scores by transcribing them into piano and solo works. Such is the case for this piano reduction by José Rodríguez of an unnamed chorus in Act 3, Scene 1 of Eslava's third and final opera, *Pietro il Crudele*, or "Peter the Cruel" (1843), originally also titled *Don Fadrique*.

Unlike Eslava's first two operas, which are set in faraway lands, this three-act dramatic work takes place in Sevilla, where Eslava was at the time a popular figure and Master of the Music Chapel at the Cathedral. The Italian libretto was by Luigi (Luis) Bertocchi, the same librettist Eslava collaborated with on his acclaimed second opera, *La Tregua di Ptolemaide* (1842). *Pietro il Crudele* was premiered in Sevilla, where it appears to have had only a short run.

Peter the Cruel (Pedro I de Castilla) was the king of Castile and León from 1350 to 1369, born August 30, 1334 in Burgos, Spain and died March 23, 1369 in Montiel, Spain. Though surrounded by (and often engaging in) violence, treachery, and bloody revenge, whether King Peter was exceptionally cruel is debatable; he has also been referred to as "King Peter the Just". In his shifting allegiances and the treatment of his foes, Peter was probably no worse than many of his ruling contemporaries. Peter did have a complicated life, including a secret marriage to Maria de Padilla, who apparently was the love of his life and with whom he had several children amid two other marriages that were forced upon him by various circumstances. Ultimately, he was murdered by his half-brother Enrique (Henry) de Trastámara (the future Enrique II of Castile).

The story here is one that would have been vaguely familiar to his audience: Blanca (Blanche of Bourbon, the king's original wife) and Don Fadrique, the king's stepbrother (twin brother of Enrique de Trastámara), with whom he maintained a turbulent and often violent relationship, are invited to Sevilla by Pedro under the pretext of seeking reconciliation. The truth is Pedro holds a deep grudge against both and is up to no good. Complicating the plot, in this story, Blanca and Fadrique are in love (spoiler alert: things end up poorly for them).

The opening scene of the third act of the opera is a festive midsummer celebration (*Velada de San Juan* –St. John's eve, June 23<sup>rd</sup>) hosted by King Peter in the gardens of his palace, the beautiful Alcázar de Sevilla. Young men and women merrily sing accompanied by the sound of tambourines and castanets. This transcription nicely captures the distinctive rhythms of traditional Andalusian music. It is interesting to contrast this piece, which is presumably a fairly direct reduction of the original piece in the opera, with a freer rendition based on this theme by another of Eslava's students, pianist José Pinilla, titled *La Velada de San Juan en Sevilla*, which I transcribed earlier and can be found at [https://musescore.com/rebecca\\_rufin/la-velada-de-san-juan-en-sevilla-st-john-s-eve-in-seville](https://musescore.com/rebecca_rufin/la-velada-de-san-juan-en-sevilla-st-john-s-eve-in-seville).



*(The gardens of the Alcázar de Sevilla. 2016 photo by Antonio Rufin)*

For more about Eslava and his music, visit <https://hilarioneslava.org/home/home-en/>.