

## Editor's notes for *Fuga bella - Coro de pobres que piden limosna*

This composition ("*Fuga bella* - Chorus of paupers who are begging for alms") is one of two *fugas bellas* by Hilarión Eslava used as examples of the art of the fugue and counterpoint in his *Escuela de composición, Tratado segundo, "Del contrapunto y fuga"*, the second of five treatises on composition dating to 1861-1871. During most of these years, Eslava chaired the department of Composition at the Royal Conservatory in Madrid, in addition to his duties as Master of the Royal Chapel. His *Escuela de composición* evidences his innate vocation as an educator.

In his second treatise, Eslava dedicates a chapter to the *fuga bella*, which he defines as a fugue "... with a well-defined character, and that is freely composed with expressive lyrics on a motif that is truly a melodic phrase." He goes on to discuss in detail the key attributes of this sub-genre of the fugue and its creation process. A key characteristic, according to Eslava, has to be the freedom with which a *fuga bella* must be composed, "...sacrificing for the benefit of the true beauty of expression, of elegant structure and of naturality and harmonic richness, all of the academic trifles of artificial complexity."

The lyrics in this short piece, scored for SATB voices and figured bass, consist of a simple but heartfelt supplication: "Una limosnita por amor de Dios; piedad caballero, rogaré por vos" ("A few alms for the love of God; have mercy, gentleman, I will pray for you."). For vocal practice purposes only, I have added my own original keyboard reduction (there is no reduction in the original score).

According to Eslava's biographer, Leocadio Hernández Ascunce, Eslava was a generous man and had a very strong sense of charity towards the less fortunate, a trait which the biographer illustrates with several specific anecdotes. In his latter years, Eslava would also sometimes draw his musical inspiration from melodies he would hear in the streets of Madrid, so it would be fair to assume that this piece might have been prompted by one of those encounters and a way for the *maestro* to tenderly recall it.

As seems to be common for Eslava, he provides very little instruction regarding dynamics for singing, instead relying on the instinct of the singers. I have honored this, but in the audio rendition you will hear volume swells that I have programmed to follow the direction of the singing voices (up or down, as the case may be). Obviously, it is up to the director as to final performance dynamics. The few dynamics that are visible are as per the original score.

In the treatise, the title to the piece points to a footnote with the following didactic observation:

"Esta fuga está compuesta sobre el motivo y contramotivo que dice el contralto al principio, y sobre el 2º motivo que aparece después en la entrada hecha en el tono de la dominante. "

("This fugue is composed on the motif and counter-motif that the alto sings at the outset, and on the second motif that appears later in the opening created in the key of the dominant [theme].")