

Editor's notes for *Fuga bella de carácter de plegaria religiosa*

This composition ("*Fuga bella* in the manner of religious prayer") 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: "Recibe, Dios mío, mi súplica tierna y la gloria eterna concede a tu grey" ("Receive, my God, my tender supplication, and eternal glory grant Thy flock"). For vocal practice purposes only, I have added my own original keyboard reduction (there is no reduction in the original score).

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.

In the treatise, the title to the piece points to a footnote with the following didactic observation: "This piece is composed around the motif and counter-motif that are sung by the soprano voice in the first eight measures and the counterpoint sung by the tenor voice."

There is at least one recent (2008) recording of this work, by the Coral de Cámara de Pamplona under the direction of David Guindano Igarreta, on the ARSIS label. It can be found as well on YouTube, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TXP8LVWn8A>.