

Editor's Notes for *Two Contest Pieces for Bassoon*

In 1854, Hilarión Eslava joined the Royal Conservatory of Music of Madrid (Real Conservatorio Superior de Música de Madrid, RCSMM) as a Professor of Composition, rising to the position of Director of Music in 1866. We now understand that one of his teaching responsibilities at the Conservatory was to compose short, technically challenging pieces for a variety of solo instruments, to be used in student year-end examinations and in competitions for aspiring professional instrumentalists.

The bassoon scores in this piece are from the “Colección de Melodías de Exámenes y Concursos para los Instrumentos de Orquesta” (*sic*), comprising about 160 manuscript pages of solo pieces for a variety of instruments by several composers, written during the period 1856-1876¹. Among these pieces were nine indicated as having been authored by Eslava, including these two bassoon pieces.

In reviewing the source document, it became clear that all of the scores were in the same handwriting. We imagine that some unfortunate student with remarkable penmanship must have been presented with a large stack of unsorted, deteriorating manuscript pages in various states of legibility, and tasked with organizing it and making it presentable. If so, that student did an outstanding job, and can be forgiven for a few possible notation errors that may have occurred or been left uncorrected in that process.

We speculate that aspiring or competing instrumentalists were asked to sightread these pieces as part of the judging process. They would have likely had little or no practice time. Looking at the bassoon pieces in this work, I concluded based on the pattern of rests (especially several measures at the beginning of a piece) that there must have been keyboard (or possibly other) accompaniment provided, as a reasonable aid for the student to readily establish the necessary tempo and mood while sightreading the music. Eslava may have even personally performed the accompaniment. Unfortunately, such accompaniments do not appear to have survived.

Never one to be deterred from a worthy mission by such challenges, I decided to write my own piano accompaniments. Therefore, what you have with this edition must necessarily be a somewhat *Rufin-esque* take on an Eslava melody, and I would hope that those among us who consider themselves enthusiasts of Eslava's music will not hold any feelings of disappointment against me. If the original accompaniments are ever found, I will certainly revise these transcriptions accordingly.²

On a related note, I should add that the first bassoon piece in this set (the *Andante mosso*) has already been edited by someone else (including the provision of a simple piano accompaniment) and printed by a Spanish commercial publishing house. Although the notes supplied with that transcription seem to imply that the piano accompaniment is Eslava's, no substantiating evidence is offered, and from what we know about this instrumental collection and the maestro's style, that seems, in fact, improbable. The accompaniment I have provided for the *Andante mosso* is uniquely mine and does not resemble the other published work except perhaps in some similar chord structures—and I trust is a little more interesting. I have thus far found no evidence that the second bassoon piece has ever been edited in this manner.

¹ A digital copy of this collection has been made publicly available and posted online by the RCSMM at <https://rcsmm.eu/general/files/biblioteca/00000438300-1.pdf>. Most recently consulted online Sept. 27, 2021.

² In the interest of full disclosure, you will note on the transcribed scores that the bassoon solos are listed as Eslava's and the keyboard accompaniment is clearly identified as my own.