

Editor's Notes for *Contest Piece for Contrabass*

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 contrabass part in this piece, which dates to 1857, is 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 this contrabass score.

In reviewing the source document, it became clear that all 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 contrabass piece in this work, it is obvious based on the pattern of rests 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 accompaniment. 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 accompaniment is ever found, I will certainly revise the transcription accordingly.²

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 contrabass solo is listed as Eslava's and the keyboard accompaniment is clearly identified as my own.