

Editor's Notes for *Domine, salvum fac regem* (Lord, save the King)

This delicate *a cappella* motet by Hilarión Eslava was written for the occasion of the royal wedding of Spanish king Alfonso XII and María de las Mercedes de Orleans, in January 1878. The words (copied at the bottom of this text) are taken from the last two verses of the Vulgate translation of Psalm 19 (Psalm 20 in the Book of Psalms).

Well before Eslava's time, the same words were incorporated into a motet by French composer Jean Mouton for the coronation of King François I at 1515, later adapted by such notable composers as Jean-Baptiste Lully and François Couperin for use at the French royal court. Customarily sung at the end of every Mass at the Chapel of Versailles, the motet also unofficially became the French royal anthem until the 1789 Revolution. The incipit is additionally the well-known acclamation and the title of the English national anthem, *God Save the King*. In some versions of the motet (though not here), the psalm verses are followed by the traditional *Gloria Patri*.

The version of Eslava's motet used as the basis for this transcription came to us courtesy of Spain's Royal Palace Library (Biblioteca de Palacio). The score, consisting of seven pages, is carefully handwritten and bears the following dedication on its front page (*sic*):

Domine salvum fac regem

Motete á voces solas

Dedicado á S.A. la Serenisima Señora Infanta

D^a María de las Mercedes de Orleans

con motivo de su regio casamiento con S.M.

el Rey de España D. Alfonso XII.

Por el Maestro Director de la Real Capilla Musica de S.M.

Hilarion Eslava

Domine salvum fac regem

Motet for solo voices

Dedicated to HRH the Most Serene Princess

María de las Mercedes de Orleans

on the occasion of her royal nuptials with HM

The King of Spain Alfonso XII.

By the Master (and) Director of His Majesty's Royal Chapel of Music

Hilarion Eslava

The last page includes Eslava's signature, with the place and date of the composition listed as Madrid, January 14, 1878, nine days before the royal wedding, which took place at the Real Basilica de Atocha in Madrid.

After six years of political turbulence, which included the last stages of a festering civil war, a revolution and the forced exile of his mother Queen Isabel II, the short reign by an Italian king, the proclamation of a short-lived Republic, and finally a military coup that put him in power, the accession of Alfonso XII in

1874 to the royal throne and the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty in Spain was welcome by most Spaniards with a well-justified sense of relief.

Alfonso XII was barely 17 years old when he was proclaimed king in 1874. Probably an illegitimate son of Queen Isabel II, he was nonetheless a popular figure throughout his relatively short reign until his death at age 27, of tuberculosis. In 1878, he married his first cousin, María de las Mercedes, initially against his mother's will. It was, however, a true royal love story, and their wedding was much celebrated by the people of Madrid. Sadly, María de las Mercedes died only six months later, possibly from typhoid fever and complications from a miscarriage, just two days after her 18th birthday. The king and the nation were devastated by the news. Hilarión Eslava, who since his first appointment to the court in 1844 had been close to the royal family, traveled to Madrid from his retirement home despite being severely ill, so he could be present at the Royal Chapel during the days following the Queen consort's death, and led a performance at the Royal Palace of his *Misa de Difuntos*, barely able to stand up. He died a month later.

María de las Mercedes was born and baptized in the Royal Palace, and so Eslava would have known her all of her life. Moreover, she was raised in Sevilla, Eslava's adoptive homeland, so they shared that additional connection too. The motet, written at a time when the composer's health was already extremely frail, would have been truly a work of great affection and respect.

Latin Lyrics	English Translation
Domine salvum fac regem et exaudi nos in die qua invocaverimus te.	Lord, save our King and hear us in the day in which we shall call upon Thee.



María de las Mercedes de Orleans, future Queen of Spain. Photograph by Augustin Aimé Joseph Le Jeune, carte-de-visite, ca. 1875. Public domain



Wedding of Alfonso XII and María de las Mercedes de Orleans on 23 January 1878 at the Real Basilica de Atocha, Madrid (engraving). Public domain



Wedding portrait of Alfonso XII and María de las Mercedes de Orleans, 1878, anon., Palacio Real. Public domain