

## Editor's Notes for Hilarión Eslava's *Paráfrasis de la Cántiga 14*

Hilarión Eslava is considered by many Spain's first true musicologist. His efforts allowed rescuing a large number of Spanish early sacred music works from obscurity, much of this work being evidenced in his monumental *Lira Sacro-Hispana* (1852-1860). In a few instances, he also reimagined or 'paraphrased' samples of early music into fully developed Romantic symphonic and choral works, as is the case here.

The *Cántigas de Santa María* are a collection of 420 Spanish medieval canticles written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, typically describing miracles and the veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus. They are traditionally attributed to King Alfonso X, also known as "The Wise", although historians have concluded that his court musicians probably wrote many of them. As can be seen by the images on the cover page of this score, in medieval times the *Cántigas* were sometimes documented in beautifully illuminated codex form.

Although this particular *Cántiga* is identified as No. 14 by Eslava, it is actually No. 13 – perhaps a nod to the ancient superstitions regarding the number 13? It tells the story of Elbo, the Thief, who was hanged for his crimes, but survived through the divine intervention of the Virgin Mary. Eslava only used the refrain and the first of the six verses included in the *Cántiga*. If one compares the medieval neumatic music notation shown on the cover image to the melody of this *Cántiga*, it becomes evident that Eslava was doing his best to correctly interpret the melody as written, and also utilizing the ancient Galician lyrics. Eslava's beautiful orchestral arrangement, composed relatively late in his career (1861), starts out rather simply, but grows steadily in grandeur and complexity as the piece progresses.

The original score clearly indicates that the solo part is to be sung by a contralto, and indeed for most of the piece that seems appropriate. However, starting at Measure 135 this solo part starts building to a much higher register, topping out at A<sub>5</sub>, well beyond what even professional contraltos can melodiously manage. I believe it is really more of a mezzo-soprano range, but I maintained the indication as written.

This *Cántiga* is more fully described in the Oxford University "Cantigas de Santa Maria" database, which can be explored at [http://csm.mml.ox.ac.uk/index.php?p=poem\\_list](http://csm.mml.ox.ac.uk/index.php?p=poem_list). Oxford provides the following synopsis of the full text of *Cántiga* 13:

"A thief named Elbo always prayed to the Virgin and commended himself to her. One day he was caught stealing and the magistrate ordered him to be hanged. As Elbo was hanging on the gallows, the Virgin supported his feet so that he did not choke. He stayed on the gallows for three days. The magistrate passed by, noticed the thief was still alive, and had the rope adjusted. The Virgin continued to protect Elbo. The thief spoke to the magistrate and his men, explaining that the Virgin had been keeping him alive. The magistrate praised the Virgin and had him taken down from the gallows. Elbo joined a monastery."

Medieval Galician/Portuguese lyrics	Approximate English translation
Assi como Jesucristo estando na cruz salvou un ladrón, assi sa madre outro de morte livrou.	As Jesus Christ, while on the cross, saved a thief, so his mother saved another from death.
E por end' un gran miragre vos direi desta razón que feze Santa Maria dun mui malfeitor ladrón que Elbo por nom' avia mas semp'r' en sa oraçon a ela s' acomendava e aquilo lle prestou.	Indeed, a great miracle, and I tell you the reason that Santa Maria helped this thief, named Elbo, was because he always prayed to her and committed himself to her.

A useful pronunciation guide for the lyrics can be found at <http://www.cantigasdesantamaria.com/csm/13>

For more about Eslava and his music, visit <https://hilarioneslava.org/home/home-en/>