

Editor's Notes for *Tu es Petrus*

Tu es Petrus, a motet for SATBB choir and organ remains to this day one of Hilarión Eslava's best-known compositions, as the wide proliferation of transcriptions and audio and online video recordings attest. This solemn motet, rich in contrapuntal details, seems in its style to recall an earlier time in musical history. It is built around Matthew 16:18-19, considered Christ's command to Peter to lead an earthly Church:

*Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram
ædificabo Ecclesiam Meam,
et portæ inferi non prævalebunt adversus eam.*

(You are Peter, and on this rock
I will build My Church,
and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.)

The source document for this transcription was a scanned copy of *Tu es Petrus* published by Eslava's nephew Bonifacio Eslava in 1870, which we obtained from Eresbil (Basque Music Archives), although an identical version is also available at the Biblioteca Nacional de España (<http://bdh.bne.es/bnearch/detalle/bdh0000101777>), among several other sources.

The cover, with the composer's handwritten initials, includes the following notation:

"Este motete fue compuesto para la función que la Asociación Católica de Madrid celebró el día 11 de diciembre de 1870 para pedir a Dios por el SUMO PONTÍFICE PIO IX."

("This motet was composed for the event that the Catholic Association of Madrid celebrated on December 11, 1870 to pray to God for HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS IX.")

Pius IX (1792-1878) was head of the Roman Catholic Church from 1846 to 1878, the longest verifiable papal reign, and presided over a number of major events in the history of the Church of Rome, including the loss through war of the Papal States to the new Kingdom of Italy, in September 1870. The event referenced on the title page of *Tu es Petrus* would have likely taken place in the context of this particular event and the civil, religious, and political turmoil that ensued.

In his *"Estudio bio-bibliográfico de Hilarión Eslava"*¹, the composer's biographer Leocadio Hernández Ascunce discusses this specific motet in the following terms:

"On the *Tu es Petrus* that has been so often requested and always with so much interest listened to by the palatine nobility in the liturgical life of the Royal Chapel, it must be

¹ Hernández Ascunce, Leocadio, *Estudio bio-bibliográfico de Don Hilarión Eslava: músico y maestro de músicos navarro*, Pamplona, Diputación Foral de Navarra, Institución Príncipe de Viana [1978], pp. 189-190. This is a quote translated from an article LHA wrote in 1928, which is included in the book.

recognized that, despite a somewhat bombastic *non proevalebunt* (sic), the solemn and severe style of the bass chorus and the melodic repetition of the quartet of solo voices made this composition of Eslava's the obligatory work in the great acts of Catholic affirmation, which are not infrequently held in the Royal Chapel."



Pope Pius IX ca. 1864 (public domain image)

A little oddly, Hernández Ascunce then goes on to quote from a letter from a certain Monsignor Angelo Pizzardo to Hilarión Eslava dated May 12, 1860 (ten years prior to the motet's 'official' public premiere and publication [?]) in which this Papal emissary praises Eslava's motet as—

"... (as a work that) could be truly and justifiably be called a triumphal hymn to the Pope."

adding that—

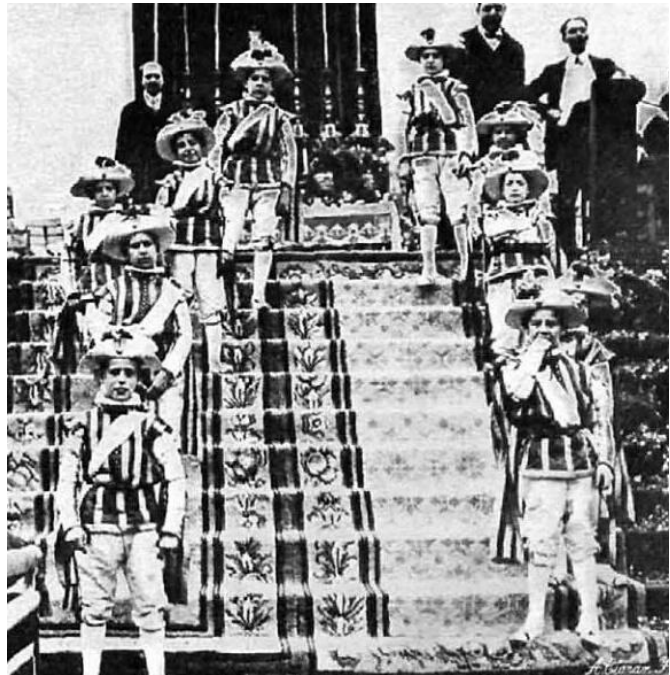
"... I could very well say that this (listening to Eslava's *Tu es Petrus*) has left in my heart a most pleasant and indelible memory of the kindness of Spain in the fertile and dashing inspiration of your composition."

During the XXII Eucharistic Congress, which was held in Madrid under the auspices of Spain's king Alfonso XIII in June 1911, 33 years after Eslava's death², a number of Eslava's motets were performed, *Tu es Petrus* being singled out as the object of great public acclaim.

² First celebrated in 1881, Eucharistic Congresses are Catholic (typically annual) religious events convened by the Pope for the purpose of bringing together the faithful in homage to the Holy Eucharist and to realign the Church's mission. The 1911 Congress was a controversial event (due to Spanish political events of the time), in spite of (or

Finally, as further evidence of the enduring popularity of this music, the people of the border town of Irun in the Basque Country/Euskadi celebrate the Feast of Saint Peter and Saint Martial every June 29th at the church of Santa María del Juncal with a heartfelt rendition of *Tu es Petrus*, a tradition that dates back to at least 1935. Here's a video recording of the 2017 performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibj1ZeSKkxY>³.

Sevilla's Class of 1911 "*seises*" during the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi, days before departing for Madrid to participate in the XXII Eucharistic Congress.⁴



perhaps because of) which it had massive participation. Interestingly, the Congress was organized by Isabel de Borbón y Borbón, the king's aunt, whose birth in 1851 was feted by the Royal Chapel with an especially dedicated *Te Deum Laudamus* by Eslava, which I have also had the pleasure of previously transcribing.

³ We thank our *irundarra* friend Juan Larruquert for bringing up this tradition to our attention.

⁴ Image published by Sevilla's "*El Liberal*" newspaper, June 16, 1911. The *seises* had a close association with Eslava during his tenure as Master of the Chapel at the Cathedral of Sevilla, so their participation in this event would have been too (indirectly) a way to honor Eslava's memory.