

## Editor's notes for "*Salve joh Virgen! más pura*" – *Villancico y Baile de Seises*

Here is another of Hilarión Eslava's *Villancicos* and *Bailes de Seises* from the archives of the Cathedral of Sevilla, which we have obtained thanks to the Institución Colombina. *Villancicos* are a traditional form of Spanish song, frequently (though not necessarily always) on a religious theme. They typically consist of an introduction, a refrain ("*estribillo*") and "*coplas*" or verses, each part with its own prescribed meter. The "*Baile de Seises*" is a form of children's sacred liturgical dance that has been traditional in some parts of Spain, most prominently in Sevilla, for many centuries and is still performed today on a few specific celebrations of the Roman Catholic liturgy. In the Cathedral of Sevilla (the object of this particular piece), the *Seises* (singular "*Seise*") are a group of ten pre-adolescent boys who are dressed in traditional baroque-era costumes, striped in blue or red depending on the occasion, their heads covered by plumed hats of matching colors. Their name comes from the Spanish for "six" ("*seis*"), as they were originally six boys who were trained as leading choirboys, educated and boarded at the church's expense.

During his time as Master of the Chapel at the Cathedral of Sevilla (1832-1844), one of Hilarión Eslava's responsibilities was to look after the education and well-being of the *Seises*. He also wrote nearly a dozen *villancicos* for the *Seises*, a task that he once referred to as "one of his greatest pleasures" as a composer. I believe he enjoyed this form of music because it gave him opportunity to draw on traditional Spanish folk music and dance styles, and because of the appreciation with which this form of music was always received by the people of Sevilla.

I have previously transcribed and described several other *Villancicos y Bailes de Seises* by Eslava, so for additional historical context, rather than repeat myself here, I direct you to <https://hilarioneslava.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Ed-Notes-candor-de-luz-eterna-orchestrated.pdf> In these notes I will focus on the specific music.

This piece was originally written for the celebration at the Cathedral of Sevilla of the festivity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (the octave and the eight days that follow, December 8-15). For this celebration, the *Seises* are garbed in traditional sky blue and white striped costumes, the colors associated with the Immaculate Conception (white for purity and sky blue for celestial love). After a stately introduction, the *estribillo* of this particular *villancico*, in its lively 6:8 time, seems to evoke a *jota*, a Spanish song and dance form especially popular in Spain's region of Aragón and in Eslava's native Navarra. In fact, years after he left Sevilla, Eslava gifted this music to the city of Pamplona in Navarra for the celebration of one of its principal devotions, the Virgen del Camino, in a setting for SATB, tenor solo and organ, and with lyrics adjusted appropriately. There, that *villancico* is known as the "*sevillanas a la Virgen del Camino*", despite the music not really having much in common with Sevilla's popular dance form. There is a further version of the lyrics to the Virgen del Carmen, of uncertain origin. I have previously edited both of these latter versions, catalogued as CPE-161. They are included on this page and can be also accessed at <https://musescore.com/user/29381772/scores/5591468>. The "*sevillanas*" have been also recorded and can be found both as a professional-quality recording (notably, with the Coral de Cámara de Pamplona) and in amateur videos in YouTube.

The manuscript for this piece in its (truly) original, fully orchestrated Sevilla version came to us in the form of a general score (which appeared to be in Eslava's own handwriting), and a collection of *particellas* of less certain hand and date. The original composition dates to 1832, in the first year of Eslava's appointment as Master of the Chapel of the Cathedral of Sevilla.

The source of the lyrics is unclear, and might have perhaps been written by Eslava himself. The second verse of the *copla* does not appear in the general score, except as an additional page with just the poem, appended with the name “Eslava” with the date 1873.

1. The general score provided a single staff entitled “*Bajo Gen.*”, which was clearly intended to be played by a bass instrument of some sort. There were no staves provided for separate cello, contrabass, organ, or bass brass instruments. To me, this indicates that Eslava was open to using whatever bass instruments might be available for a performance. The *particella* set provided separate cello and contrabass parts (which were basically identical to the *Bajo* part), as well as a single part labeled for trombone. This basically duplicated portions of the *Bajo* part. For the bass brass instrument, Eslava usually used the (now archaic) ophicleide, but a trombone or tuba would work well. The instrument I use in my synthesized version is actually a trombone.
2. There were sparse as well as conflicting dynamic and articulation instructions between the *particella* set and the full score, and also between individual parts. I did my best to discern Eslava’s true intent, but if in doubt it would be wise to consult the original version if in doubt.
3. Castanets were not mentioned in either the general score or the *particellas*. However, there is a instrumental section in the *estribillo* that clearly lends itself to insertion of castanets in accordance with the *Baile de Seises* tradition. Furthermore, in modern renditions of the *sevillanas* alluded to earlier, I have heard castanets played extensively throughout most of the piece. I have therefore added castanets, with a rhythm that sounded well to my ears, but of course can be omitted or replaced by another.

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

SPANISH LYRICS	APPROXIMATE ENGLISH TRANSLATION
<p>INTRODUCCIÓN            Salve ¡oh! Virgen más pura y más bella,            que la aurora y que el astro del día;            Hija, Madre y esposa ¡oh María!            y la puerta de Dios oriental.</p>	<p>INTRODUCTION            Hail, O Virgin, more pure and more beautiful,            than the dawn and the daystar.            Daughter, Mother and wife, O Mary!            And the gate of the eastern God.</p>
<p>ESTRIBILLO            A la Madre de Dios escogida,            compañeros cantad,            y de España Patrona real,            Compañeros cantad.            Concebida sin pecado original.</p>	<p>REFRAIN            To the chosen Mother of God,            companions raise your song            and of Spain’s royal Patroness,            companions, raise your song.            Conceived without original sin.</p>

(continued on next page)

SPANISH LYRICS	APPROXIMATE ENGLISH TRANSLATION
<p>COPLAS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="250 344 699 621">1. Norte fijo en el mar proceloso, nos libertas del duro naufragio, Arca santa, que fuiste presagio de salud y de vida al mortal. Porque a ti ni el silbido espantoso del soberbio aquilón se resiste, ni del Cocito impuro acreciste ni un momento su mundo raudal.</li> <li data-bbox="250 663 747 940">2. Pues de España sois Madre piadosa, de la Iglesia abogada constante, No nos niegues tu auxilio un instante, alcánzanos la gracia final. Tus virtudes cual mística rosa, que se exhala en ámbares divinos, nos enseñan los rectos caminos, nos prometen la gloria eternal.</li> </ol>	<p>VERSES</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="821 344 1380 621">1. Fixed north in the stormy sea, you free us from the devastating shipwreck, Holy ark, you were the harbinger of health and life to mortals. For neither the frightful howl of the formidable north wind resists you, nor did your tears add for even an instant to the impure flowing Cocytus.</li> <li data-bbox="821 663 1333 940">2. For you are Spain's pious Mother, the church's constant advocate, Do not deny us your help for a moment, Grant us the final grace. Your virtues like a mystic rose that exhales in amber divine, teach us the right way, promise us eternal glory.</li> </ol>