

Editor's Notes for *Veneremos con firmeza*

This is the tenth and final piece (at least that we know of) in the series of *Villancicos y Bailes de Seises* written by Hilarión Eslava during his first few years as Master of the Chapel at the Cathedral of Sevilla, a position he held between 1832 and 1844. As in most other cases, the digital scan of the source manuscript was procured from the archives of the Cathedral of Sevilla, via the Institución Colombina in Sevilla.

Villancicos are a traditional form of Spanish song, frequently on a religious theme and, in olden times, not exclusively associated with Christmas, as they are today. *Villancicos* typically consist of an introduction, a refrain (“*estribillo*”) and a set of “*coplas*” or verses, each part with its own prescribed meter. The *Baile de Seises* is a form of children’s 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, one of Eslava’s responsibilities was to look after the education and well-being of the *Seises*. He also wrote nearly a dozen villancicos for the *Baile de 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 freely draw on traditional Spanish folk music.

As mentioned earlier, I have previously transcribed nine other *Villancicos y Bailes de Seises* by Eslava, so for additional historical context, rather than repeat myself here, I will direct you to <https://hilarion eslava.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Ed-Notes-candor-de-luz-eterna-orchestrated.pdf>. In these notes I will focus on this specific *villancico*.

This piece was written specifically in honor of the *Santísimo (Sacramento)* or Blessed Sacrament, so it would have been most likely performed during the Feast of Corpus Christi (the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, in May or June). The date on the manuscript is 1834, two years after Eslava’s installation as Master of the Chapel at the Cathedral of Sevilla. The music is cheerful and uplifting in style, and the lyrics make a repeated reference to “*el pan que bajó del cielo*” (“*the bread that came down from heaven*”). This time we have been unable to determine the source of the lyrics.

The original manuscript for this piece was provided to us in the form of a general score (which appears to be in Eslava’s own handwriting), and a collection of *particellas* of less certain hand and date. The trombone and cello parts were only included as *particellas*, indicating that they may have been added later.

Following are a few more detailed observations about the score:

1. There were sparse as well as conflicting dynamic and articulation instructions between the *particella* set and the full score, and also between individual parts. The vocal parts were especially lacking in dynamic instruction, so for clarity, I did add suggested dynamics that do not appear in the source. I did my best to discern Eslava’s true intent, but it would be wise to consult the original version if in doubt.
2. Castanets are not mentioned in the source manuscript, but this is a traditional “must” for *Bailes de Seises*. As is typical for Eslava’s *villancicos*, there is a musical interlude at the end of the *estribillo* section where

traditionally castanets would be played by the *Seises*. Here, I added a suggested rhythm for castanets, which may be changed or omitted at the discretion of the conductor.

- The trombone part (which could actually be played by an alternative brass instrument such as a tuba) was at odds with the pattern I've seen in the other *villancicos* I have transcribed. Typically, Eslava (or whoever actually added the trombone *particella*, as the trombone does not appear in any of the main scores for Eslava's other *villancicos*) would have likely meant to use the trombone to reinforce *forte* bass sections, leaving it silent in the *piano* (soft) sections. Yet this *particella* has the trombone part playing in the quiet sections (without any indication that it should be played quietly therein) and often is silent during the loud sections. I concluded that these were unintended fatal errors by the copyist, which warrant re-doing the trombone part to match the usual pattern of reinforcing loud bass parts. Anyone who chooses to perform my transcription may want to consider revisiting the source manuscript and exercise their own judgment in this regard.

SPANISH LYRICS	APPROXIMATE ENGLISH TRANSLATION
<p>INTRODUCCIÓN Veneremos con firmeza a este Santo Sacramento admirando el gran portento de su majestad inmensa, nos ofrece la fineza de su Santo amor y celo, que comamos en su mesa el pan que bajó del cielo.</p> <p>ESTRIBILLO Eres nuestro gran consuelo, eres esperanza y vida, y para nuestra comida, el pan que bajó del cielo</p> <p>COPLAS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> O dulce pan excelente que el pobre necesitado, con un tan sólo bocado le das todo suficiente, mi alma enferma y doliente te procura con anhelo, pues eres omnipotente, el pan que bajó del cielo. Cante mi lengua y alabe este misterio sagrado, porque a sí mismo se ha dado en un manjar tan suave. Mayor caridad no cabe entre cielos y el suelo quedárenos bajo llave el pan que bajó del cielo. 	<p>INTRODUCTION Let us firmly venerate this Holy Sacrament, admiring the great wonder of His immense majesty, He offers us the fineness of His holy love and zeal, that we may eat at His table the bread that came down from heaven.</p> <p>REFRAIN You are our great consolation, you are hope and life, and for our nourishment, the bread that came down from heaven.</p> <p>VERSES</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> O sweet excellent bread that to the needy poor, with a single bite you give in abundance, my sick and suffering soul seeks you with longing, for you are omnipotent, the bread that came down from heaven. Let my tongue sing and give praise to this sacred mystery, because He has given Himself as such a mild delicacy. There is no greater gift between the heavens and the earth, than for us to be able to keep under key the bread that came down from heaven.