

Editor's Notes for "Te Deum Laudamus"

The *Te Deum* (from its incipit, *Te deum laudamus* "Thee, O God, we praise") is a Latin Christian hymn originally written in the 4th century. The term "*Te Deum*" can also refer to a short religious service, held to bless an event or give thanks, which is based upon the hymn. This intricate choral/orchestral work by Hilarión Eslava falls into that latter category. This work was specifically written to celebrate the birth of Isabel de Borbón y Borbón (1851-1931), first child of queen Isabel II and (officially) her consort Francisco de Asís de Borbón. As heiress to the royal crown at the time of her birth, she received the title of Princess of Asturias. In later years, Isabel de Borbón became a much beloved member of the royal family, especially in Madrid, where she was popularly known as "La Chata" (an affectionate nickname referring to her small, pudgy nose; the word also often endearingly applied to someone considered likable or nice).



Isabel de Borbón y Borbón, oil on canvas portrait by Vicente Palmaroli y González (1834–1896), dating from 1866. Collection of the Palacio Real, Madrid

Isabel was a patron of the arts and technology and was well known for her great love of music. She died in exile in Paris, only months after Spain's ill-fated Second Republic was proclaimed.

As the Master of the Royal Chapel, a renowned composer, and a highly esteemed presence at the Court, it would have been natural for Eslava to contribute this work on such an important royal event. The dedication on the title page of the piece reads "to the birth of Her Most Serene Highness the Princess of Asturias, by the Master of the Royal Chapel, Hilarión Eslava."

In connection with this event, by the way, there is an interesting anecdote: As the queen and her newborn daughter and their cortege were headed for the official presentation of the infant at the church of Nuestra Señora de Atocha, the queen was the object of an assassination attempt by a knife-wielding priest, which the queen survived unscathed thanks to her thick vestments and corset, and the quick action of her company. The baby was unharmed. The ceremony took place a few days later. That would have made the *Te Deum* all the more poignant.

You can learn more about Isabel, Princess of Asturias at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabella, Princess of Asturias \(1851%E2%80%931931\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabella,_Princess_of_Asturias_(1851%E2%80%931931)), or in Spanish, at [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabel de Borb%C3%B3n y Borb%C3%B3n](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabel_de_Borb%C3%B3n_y_Borb%C3%B3n).

This *Te Deum*, based in part on the ancient “canto llano” (plainsong) version of the hymn is presented in two movements entitled *Te Deum Laudamus* and *Te Ergo*. Each movement contains several distinct sections, including a delightful choral fugue towards the end of the *Te Ergo* (“Fiat misericordia tua...”).

The English translation is as follows:

We praise thee, O God : we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.
All the earth doth worship thee : the Father everlasting.
To thee all Angels cry aloud : the Heavens, and all the Powers therein.
To thee Cherubim and Seraphim : continually do cry,
Holy, Holy, Holy : Lord God of Sabaoth;
Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty : of thy glory.
The glorious company of the Apostles : praise thee.
The goodly fellowship of the Prophets : praise thee.
The noble army of Martyrs : praise thee.
The holy Church throughout all the world : doth acknowledge thee;
The Father : of an infinite Majesty;
Thine honourable, true : and only Son;
Also the Holy Ghost : the Comforter.
Thou art the King of Glory : O Christ.
Thou art the everlasting Son : of the Father.
When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man : thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.
When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death :
 thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.
Thou sittest at the right hand of God : in the glory of the Father.
We believe that thou shalt come : to be our Judge.
We therefore pray thee, help thy servants :
 whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.
Make them to be numbered with thy Saints : in glory everlasting.
O Lord, save thy people : and bless thine heritage.
Govern them : and lift them up for ever.
Day by day : we magnify thee;
And we worship thy Name : ever world without end.
Vouchsafe, O Lord : to keep us this day without sin.
O Lord, have mercy upon us : have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let thy mercy lighten upon us : as our trust is in thee.
O Lord, in thee have I trusted : let me never be confounded

For more about the origins of the *Te Deum* as a hymn, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Te_Deum.

This *Te Deum* was one of Eslava's best-known works. In his biography of the composer, Leocadio Hernández Ascunce makes special mention of this composition, noting that for many years, Eslava's *Te Deum* "... was heard with the greatest emotion in all of the solemn celebrations of the Court and in the principal churches and cathedrals of Spain..."

Hernández Ascunce adds that upon learning of Eslava's death in 1878, the French composer Jules Massenet wrote a heartfelt condolence letter addressed to Prof. Emilio Arrieta at the Royal Conservatory in Madrid, which read in part:

I convey to you, your colleagues and students, my profound sorrow for the loss of the great artist D. Hilarión Eslava, glory of the Spanish musical art, whom I knew and much appreciated. Not long ago, I heard, with singular pleasure, the *Te Deum* by this master at Saint-Etienne. I am familiar with his treatises, which reveal new directions. Glories are immortal, despite death's wish to take them away. Please be assured of my respect and my unalterable affection.

Jules Massenet
October 28, 1878