

## ***Sinfonía Fantástica* – Editor’s Notes**

The “*Sinfonía Fantástica*” was written in 1842 by Hilarión Eslava for the opening of the Salón de Máscaras (Hall of Masks) of the Teatro del Circo in Madrid. Outside of the overtures for his three operas, this is perhaps Eslava’s only known truly symphonic work. Scored for a small orchestra, this one-movement composition combines elements of Eslava’s Romantic opera style and a certain lighthearted Spanish flair.

The source for this transcription was a conductor’s score obtained from ERESBIL (Basque Music Archives) that appeared to be a handwritten transcription from an earlier source. Unlike the manuscripts I have transcribed that were clearly contemporaneous to Eslava, the handwriting was neat and precise, dynamics were consistently applied between parts, and there were numerous *mezzo-forte* indicators (which I have not typically seen in Eslava’s manuscripts, especially those from his early years). I suspect that many of the dynamic indicators were added by the transcriber – perhaps at the request of conductor who was planning to perform the work. That said, we have not found a more authentic, contemporary source for this particular work, so I generally transcribed it faithfully with respect to this source, only correcting a few obvious musical errors. I did add a few *crescendos*, *decrescendos*, and tempo changes where the written dynamics created too stark a contrast to my ear, but this was for playback purposes and they are rendered invisible in the printed score, as I consider these discretionary to the conductor and performers.

The Teatro del Circo, located in Madrid's Plaza del Rey, was originally built in 1834 under the name of Circo Olímpico for the exclusive use of a company of equestrian acrobats. From June 1842, it became a stage for Italian opera and artistic dance, mainly classical ballet and Spanish dance. We have not been able to find any specific information about the Salón de Máscaras – whether it was the main performance space or some other part of the theatre – but we do know from other contemporary references that it was not uncommon for the high-heeled members of Madrid society to periodically congregate at masked balls held at theatres or other large venues like them.

By 1842, Eslava was at the height of his operatic glory, with very successful performances of his second opera, “*La Tregua di Ptolemaide*” in the cities of Cádiz and Sevilla. He was also becoming well known in Madrid, where his first opera, “*Il Solitario*” was premiered to much acclaim at the Teatro de la Cruz in December 1841, followed by dozens of performances.

Meanwhile, the luxurious Salón de Máscaras had become one of the most eagerly anticipated venues in Madrid for the celebration of masked balls. In January 1842, Hilarión Eslava was invited to compose a piece for its grandiose opening; an invitation perhaps reflecting the Madrid success of *Il Solitario* a month earlier. The highlight in the preliminary program at this venue included a "chorus" with lyrics by a "Señor Hidalgo" and music by Hilarión Eslava, with the rather titillating title of “*Orgía*” (“orgy” in English). However, a chronicle printed after the soirée describes a different program, beginning with a purely orchestral work by Eslava: this *Sinfonía Fantástica*, a work that the reviewer described as “brilliant” and “exquisite”. No *Orgía* is mentioned in the article. Prudence must have prevailed (!).

On August 1, 1844, Eslava witnessed the Madrid premiere of *La Tregua di Ptolemaide* at the Teatro del Circo. It was a great popular success, despite a two-year wait and having to overcome the jealousy and short-sighted reviews of some critics, and the increasing opposition from Eslava’s ecclesiastical superiors

in Sevilla, who took issue with *their* priest and master organist at *their* cathedral writing music they considered frivolous and unbecoming.

The Teatro del Circo nonetheless struggled financially in later years. In 1851, it transitioned to *zarzuela* (a Spanish operatic genre) productions, along with other uses. It ceased to exist in 1876, destroyed by a fire. Rebuilt a few years later as Circo Price, it became the site of concerts, zarzuelas, variety shows, society balls, and again, circus shows. The building was demolished in 1970, and the site is now occupied by government offices.