

## Editor's Notes for *Di Mia Vita* from the opera *Il Solitario*

*Il Solitario* was Hilarión Eslava's first opera, sung in Italian from a libretto by Cesare Perini. Premiered in 1841 in Cádiz, this opera was met with enthusiastic acclaim in Cádiz, Sevilla, Madrid, and Pamplona. You can read more about Eslava's operas and about *Il Solitario* in particular in Chapter V of the 2024 biography of the maestro, *Con cánticos sonoros: La música, la vida y la España de Hilarión Eslava / With ringing songs: The music, the life and the Spain of Hilarión Eslava*, published by the Centro de Documentación Musical de Andalucía in Granada (Spain) and available online in the original Spanish, followed by an English translation, at <https://zenodo.org/records/13960113>.

The original source for this transcription was a printed score obtained from the Biblioteca Nacional de España (BNE) in Madrid. It appears to have been part of a set (it is labeled "Nº 2") and bears the handwritten signature "P.E. Calahorra." The printer is unknown. Though the score refers to the composer as "Eslaba" (the Basque spelling of the maestro's name, used in his early professional career), printed musical scores were not common in Spain until the late 1850's or early 1860's, so this work would have likely been published years after the opera was composed, and when the dramatic works of Eslava were no longer, or only very seldom being performed in theatres. The piece is labeled as a "cavatina" and is written for solo soprano and also contains some short women's chorus parts, along with a piano reduction of the orchestral accompaniment "arranged by the author."

I initially transcribed this piece in 2019 – one of the first results of an ongoing project to recover the music of Hilarión Eslava. The printed source score contained numerous errors in its Italian lyrics, and practically no punctuation, making it difficult to determine the accuracy of the text. And although I do have a copy of the libretto in Italian that was printed for the opera's premiere in Cádiz, a further problem I ran into was that this number was almost entirely absent. My only backup has so far been a version of the libretto that features this cavatina in Spanish, from a much later production of the opera in Pamplona, in 1851 – more on that below.

This dramatic cavatina is for Scene VI of the first Act in later versions of the opera. In this scene, Elodia (*Il Solitario's* love interest) is longingly gazing at the mausoleum of her late uncle, the Baron of Herstatt, who took her in as an orphan after the murder of her father. She lays a wreath at the tomb and sings a song of tribute to him. The lyrics match the Cádiz libretto quite well up to a point, specifically Measure 28 (at "te devuto"). After that, there is little to no resemblance, neither in Scene VI, nor anywhere else in the entire libretto. The title words "*Di mia vita*" in fact do not occur at all, nor do any of the remaining lyrics, except for a few common words here and there. Furthermore, there was no chorus of handmaidens present during Scene VI in the libretto – rather the entire scene consisted of Elodia rhapsodizing a more prolonged version of the tribute to her uncle. So, for the transcription, I instead have had to rely on the original score and the Pamplona libretto in Spanish to edit the text. I am aware of the existence at BNE of a printed libretto in Italian issued in Madrid in 1841, but I have not yet been able to consult it, so I don't know if it features this particular number.

This deviation may have been due to changes introduced by the composer after the first libretto was printed. We do know of an incident that occurred when the opera was performed in Madrid in 1842, which could have prompted these and other revisions. One of Eslava's contemporary biographers points

out that during the rehearsals for the opera in Madrid, a few of the lead singers in the local company were dissatisfied with some of the existing arias, and, with less than a week before the first performance, threatened to quit unless their solos were changed to their satisfaction. The impresario apparently was unable or unwilling to oppose this obviously unreasonable demand. In a feat of incredible musical heroism and talent, Eslava revised the score and added new numbers to suit the singers' wishes in a matter of a few days, saving the performance. This might have well been one of the new or revised pieces.

Lastly, though my first (2019) transcription limited the accompaniment to Eslava's piano reduction, for this latest version, and having now acquired some experience transcribing the maestro's opera and orchestral scores, I am providing my own (optional) orchestral reconstruction, which I hope is a fair and respectful representation of Eslava's setting and style.

The Italian lyrics (transcribed to the best of my ability) and my English translation follow:

ITALIAN LYRICS	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
<p>ELODIA: Oh! Cener muto che una pietra guarda! Santissim' ombra di quell' uom cortese, che orfanella mi accolse, ond' ai perigli d'empia Corte sottrarmi e al assassino di mio Padre, ricevi in pio tributo questo serto d'amore a te devuto.</p> <p>Di mia vita, sul mattino, più per me oscurato e il cielo, ogni speme, un mio destino vieni a togliermi crudel. Giorno e sera mesto il cuore pianto amaro verserá, si, pianto amaro, amaro, verserá, ah! si, ne il sorriso dell'amore per me al fine splenderá Che fu? L'ancelle riedono...</p>	<p>ELODIA: Oh! Mute ashes guarded by a stone! Holiest shadow of that courteous man, who adopted this orphan, so that I could escape from the perils of an impious Court and from my Father's murderer, receive in pious tribute this wreath of love due to thee.</p> <p>In my life, each morning the sky is more darkened, and every hope is taken away by my cruel destiny. Day and evening, my sad heart will weep bitterly, yes, bitter tears will pour. Ah! Yes, in the end the smile of love will shine for me. What was that? The handmaidens return...</p>
<p>CORO DI DONNE: Serena o mai, quel ciglio, della vittoria il figlio prepara a te l'imen.</p>	<p>WOMEN'S CHORUS: Serene or not your brow, the victorious son prepares your wedding.</p>
<p>ELODIA: Cessate! Ah, mio periglio, non più straziarmi il sen. Quel uom terribile, oh Dio, tacete, voi m'uccide, te non più parlar. Celeste folgore tronca il mio accento, fine al tormento, fine al penar.</p>	<p>ELODIA: Cease! Ah, my peril, tear my breast no more. That terrible man, oh God, be silent, you kill me, speak to me no more. A celestial thunderbolt cuts short my speech, end the torment, end the pain.</p>
<p>CORO DI DONNE: Il suo delirio chi pu calmar?</p>	<p>WOMEN'S CHORUS: Who can calm her delirium?</p>