

# Tribute

Emilio Rey García

ISMAEL FERNÁNDEZ de la Cuesta [y González de Prado] is a native of the historic and picturesque hamlet of Neila, Burgos province. Of pre-Roman origin, the Neila pueblo attracts tourists with its two Romanic churches and various mansions—in one of which Ismael, the one son among five children, was born December 11, 1939. Both his father Daniel, who died January 28, 1987, and his mother, Guadalupe, who in 1992 reached the age of 91, stemmed from traditional Castilian families.

The parish priest in Neila, where Ismael spent his first ten years, was the extraordinarily cultivated native of Covarrubias, D<sup>n</sup> Basilio Cuesta Gil (b 1908). This *párroco* was a personal friend of the renowned philologist, historian, and academician Ramón Menéndez Pidal, and friendly with other learned figures at Madrid. The rectory inhabited by Cuesta Gil is now lamentably abandoned and in ruins. However, during the long autumn and winter months of Cuesta Gil's residence, he often organized theatrical spectacles of all types, some written by himself—such as, for instance, the three-act verse drama, *Don Juan de Neila* (in which he conjured up anew the tenth-century ambience in Castile during Count Fernán González's epoch).

Influenced strongly by D<sup>n</sup> Basilio, Ismael on October 18, 1950, became an intern at the Oblatorio of the Benedictine monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos. There he began studying not only humanities, leading to an ecclesiastical career but also music—very intensively. Until his voice broke, he was head boy chorister, thus following the examples provided by the famous Benedictines P<sup>re</sup> Casiano Rojo (1877–

1931) and P<sup>re</sup> Germán Prado (1891–1974). P<sup>re</sup> Augusto Pascual (b 1927), later (1992) abbot of San Salvador de Leyre in Navarra, taught the youthful Ismael Latin, Greek, and Spanish grammar. The classical courses included Virgil and Anacreon in the original tongues. Among Spanish poets Garcilaso and Fray Luis de León loomed large. Fortunately for Ismael, the abbot of Silos, D<sup>n</sup> Isaac M<sup>o</sup> Toribios Ramos, was himself a superlative Latinist, who had collaborated with Robles Dégano in editing Latin and Spanish grammars.

After obtaining the *bachillerato* and completing his novitiate, Ismael professed simple vows December 18, 1956. His musical preceptors in the years prior to his departure November 9, 1958, for Saint-Pierre de Solesmes abbey, included Padres Dionisio Alarcia (b 1913), Cosme M<sup>o</sup> Hernando (1926–1980), Julio López Iglesias (b 1933) and Antonio Orta (b 1928). During the 1956–1958 biennium his instructor in Aristotelian-Thomistic Logic, Metaphysics, Ethics, and the history of philosophy (always having recourse to original Latin texts) was the Salamanca University graduate, P<sup>re</sup> Francisco Sánchez (b 1905). During his quadrennium at Solesmes, 1958–1962, culminating in his graduation from the Université Catholique d'Angers, Pères Georges Frénaud, Paul Nau, André Joubert, and Louis de Tardy de Mont-ravel (among others) guided his theological studies. Concurrently he immersed himself in Gregorian paleography and studied plainchant interpretation and direction with Dom Joseph Gajard (1885–1972). Fellow students with whom he shared his zeal for musical investigation and performance included his

monastic colleagues, Pères Georges Benoît-Castelli, Jacques Hourlier, Jean Claire, Pierre Combe, Charles Desportes, and Michel Huglo.

But however illustrious his teachers, Fernández de la Cuesta's nonpareil humanistic and musical acquisitions resulted not merely from classroom experiences at Silos and Solesmes. Rather, they show how valuable was his lengthy access to these abbeys' incomparable libraries and archives. His reputation as one of the best and most solidly prepared among contemporary Spanish musicologists (see Antonio Gallego's article in the *ABC* daily, October 2, 1992)—together with his numerous professional triumphs—continue today bearing witness to the exceptional advantages of all types that were his during his student days (he obtained his licentiate in Romance philology from the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia = UNED).

Upon his return to Silos in the winter of 1962, he was appointed director of the monastic choir formerly conducted by Casiano Rojo, Germán Prado, Dionisio Alarcia, and Julio López. Continuing as director to 1973, he used a new method inherited partly from Solesmes. In rehearsals of Gregorian chant he insisted on giving every note and neume its correct hierarchical significance within phrase context, and in devoting maximum care to clean pronunciation of the Latin text.

As a result of the outstanding artistic results obtained musically and textually, the Silos choir soon began receiving calls to concertize, both in Spain and abroad. These included invitations from the Ministry of Education's Comisaría de Música, successively headed by the two renowned musical authorities, Federico Sopena and Antonio Iglesias.

Especially memorable was the choir's concert in the Madrid Teatro Real, November 21, 1972, on the eve of St. Cecilia's day. Reviewers such as Antonio Iglesias and Antonio Fernández Cid wrote glowingly of the choir conductor's supreme skill in *Informaciones* (November 22, 1972, page 31) and in *ABC* (November 23, page 92). Thus alerted to Fernández de la Cuesta's nonpareil merits as a conductor, Roberto Pla arranged for the choir to record three LP's in Hispavox's historical series; Archiv Produktion of Deutsche Grammophon followed suit with a *Canto Mozárabe* album (1973).

From 1964 to 1970 Fernández de la Cuesta taught Liturgy and Theology at Silos, in 1967–68 Liturgy at the Facultad Teológica del Norte de España at

Burgos, and from 1968 to 1970 Liturgy and Music in the Seminary of the Spanish Institute of Foreign Missions (also at Burgos). From 1969 to 1971 he was editor of the periodical *Liturgia* (discontinued after Vatican II's edicts went into effect). After revision, several of his articles in *Liturgia* were published in his second book, *Cristianismo sin Ritos* (1971). His first book, published in 1965, *El "Breviarium Gothicum" de Silos* contained his transcription of Silos MS 6, preceded by an explanatory introduction.

Named in 1964 a consultant to the Liturgical Commission of the Spanish Episcopate, he suffered—in company with other prominent liturgiologists, such as Miguel Altisent, Tomás de Manzárraga, José Prieto, and Tomás Aragués (priests who were later joined on the commission by composers, among them Cristóbal Halffter, Carmelo Alonso Bernaola and Miguel Manzano). With them he suffered because after Vatican II, musical quality no longer seemed to matter very greatly, so far as "reformers" of the liturgy were concerned. Frustrated by the downward musical slide and for other more personal reasons, Fernández de la Cuesta sought release from his monastic vows. On March 26, 1973, he left Silos and two years later, on February 14, 1975, was granted secular status by Pope Paul VI's rescript N° 3166/74. Nonetheless, his ties to Silos continued close. In 1988 he founded the Friends of Silos Society, of which he remained president during the next quadrennium. In 1988 he also founded the periodical *Glosas Silenses*.

Following release from his monastic vows, Fernández de la Cuesta in 1973 and 1974 held a grant awarded by Huarte and Company, for the study of Mozarabic music. During part of this time he examined the Mozarabic codices at the British Library in London. Also during the same productive two years he translated Salinas's *De musica libri septem* into Spanish for publication in Rodrigo de Zayas's *Opera omnia* series (Editorial Alpuerto, 1983). He also joined Université de Montpellier scholar Robert Lafont in the preparation of a complete edition (1980) of the troubador musical legacy and meanwhile continued work on a definitive catalogue of medieval musical sources in Spain (1980).\*

In 1984 and 1985 he taught courses at the Universidad Menéndez y Pelayo in Santander (Baroque and

\*See Lothar Siemens Hernandez's review of *Manuscritos y fuentes musicales en España. Edad Media* in *Inter-American Music Review*, vii/2 (Spring–Summer 1986), pp. 121–122.

Renaissance music). On December 20, 1975, he married Doña Ascensión González Serrano; their three children are Beatriz (b 1977), Isabel (1979), and Daniel (1981).

In late summer of 1978 José Moreno Bascaña, then director of the Real Conservatorio Superior de Música at Madrid, named him interim professor of Gregorian Chant. From that time forward his ties with P<sup>c</sup> Samuel Rubio—who as professor of musicology was aided by D<sup>r</sup> D<sup>n</sup> Dionisio Preciado—grew progressively stronger. On May 25, 1983, he himself rose to a tenured professorship of musicology in the Royal Conservatory—after brilliantly passing an examination of his credentials and abilities presided over by Mariano Pérez Gutiérrez, then Director of the Conservatorio Superior at Seville. The other members of the jury were Samuel Rubio, José Vicente González Valle, Antonio Martín Moreno, and Gonzalo Martín Tenllado.

Following this appointment Fernández de la Cuesta took his teaching duties very seriously. His star pupils have included Pilar Escudero, Gerarda Arriaga, M<sup>a</sup> Concepción Peñas, José Sierra, Emilio Rey, and more recently Ramón Sobrino and Alfonso de Vicente.

In mid-December 1984 at the annual General Assembly of the Spanish Musicological Society, Fernández de la Cuesta was elected President (succeeding the founder of the Society, Samuel Rubio, then in the thrall of his final illness). From 200 members in 1984 the Society more than doubled its membership during the next biennium. With its phenomenal increase in size, so also the number and range of its publications and other activities grew.

His self-abnegating devotion to all causes of the Society, his talents as a conciliator, and his support of youthful talent, found further outlet when beginning in 1988 he paid his first visit to Latin America. From September 19–30, 1988, he gave a medieval music seminar at Caracas, sponsored by the Vicente Emilio Sojo Foundation. In the same year he joined Professors Emilo Casares Rodicio and José López-Calo, S.J., on the editorial board of the *Diccionario de la música española e hispanoamericana*.

From April 3–9, 1992, the XV International Musicological Congress meeting at Madrid owed its brilliant successes in large measure to Ismael Fernández de la Cuesta's unequalled ability to generate goodwill among conflicting personalities and warring organisms, his attention to the welfare of participants from areas as distant as Australia, Chile, California, Israel, and Japan, and his access to key governmental figures. In recognition of his unsurpassed abilities as investigator, administrator, pedagogue, and organizer, he continues receiving appointments to Spain's most notable cultural entities and his honored leadership illuminates every forward movement sponsored by the Spanish Musicological Society.

The conclusion of the Tribute is reserved for Volume 2, which contains a comprehensive bibliography and discography. Three international encyclopedias carry Ismael Fernández de la Cuesta entries: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, second edition (2001), *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart Personenteil* (2001), and the *Diccionario de la música española e hispanoamericana* (1999). Each entry is equipped with bibliography.