



UNIVERSITY OF
THE THIRD AGE

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Programme Notes 11th October, 2019



Camille Saint-Saëns
1835 - 1921

DID YOU HEAR ABOUT SAINT-SAËNS' LIFE-LONG TROUBLE WITH WOMEN?

Caught between wife and mother, the composer's danse became macabre indeed. by Clive Paget in 'Limelight Magazine' July 2019

Composer, pianist, world's greatest organist (according to Liszt), conductor, expert on ancient music, playwright, poet, philosopher, caricaturist, mathematician, botanist, astronomer and archaeologist. Was there anything that Camille Saint-Saëns couldn't turn his hand to? Not for nothing did Berlioz – who was an admirer – write: “He knows everything, but lacks inexperience.” One field, however, in which Saint-Saëns must be counted a novice, was in his relationships with women.



Saint-Saëns as a boy

Not that he lacked exposure. Born in 1835, he was brought up in Paris by his domineering mother and an elderly great aunt who taught him piano. A prodigious talent, he was performing at five, made his professional debut at 10, and was admitted to the Conservatoire at the tender age of 13. By 23, he was organist at Paris's prestigious La Madeleine and he soon gained a reputation as one of France's most accomplished musicians (Hans von Bülow called him “the greatest musical mind” of the age).

Holding out as a bachelor until he was approaching 40, against the wishes of his mother Clémence, he finally took the marital plunge in 1875, wedding Marie-Laure Truffot, the 19-year-old sister of one of his piano pupils. There was no honeymoon, the couple moving in with old Mme. Saint-Saëns. Shortly afterwards, the danse became macabre indeed. Two sons were born, but both died within six weeks of each other, the eldest falling from a fourth-floor window of the family home in the Rue du Faubourg St-Honoré. Camille and Clémence both blamed the boys' mother.



Saint-Saëns in 1875 – the year of his marriage

Worse was to come. In 1881, Camille took his wife on holiday to La Bourboule where he promptly did a flit from the hotel, writing a few days later that he had no intention of returning. Marie went home to her family, passing away in 1950 at the age of 95.

In 1888, when his mother finally died, the *danse* became even more macabre. Saint-Saëns seems to have lost the plot, secretly fleeing Paris and travelling under a pseudonym to the Canary Islands. The French press had a field day, claiming, among other things, that he had died or was locked up in an asylum: "A musician runs away" and "Cherchez Saint-Saëns," they trumpeted. Rumour had it he was in Venice, Turkey, even holed up somewhere in the South Seas.

Forced to change hotels when he discovered the local police were convinced he was a spy, he was finally spotted by a journalist and compelled to return to France. Of course, there were many, like his friend Reynaldo Hahn, who simply assumed that Saint-Saëns was gay. Either way, from that time on he steered clear of close female friendships.

CLASSICALLY CURIOUS: THE RESTLESS TRAVELS OF CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

By Martin Buzacott - ABC Classic FM 15th January, 2019

He was music's Renaissance man, a former child prodigy whose genius extended beyond music to linguistics, literature and science. But Camille Saint-Saëns was a restless creative spirit whose constant travelling emerged in the wake of family tragedy.

Saint-Saëns's naturally inquiring mind meant that he had always been interested in travel, but now, following the breakdown of his marriage, he became an almost compulsive traveller, visiting all continents except Australia and Antarctica, and making 179 trips to 27 countries.



Concert tours took him regularly to Germany, England and the United States, and he also went to Spain, Portugal, Italy, Scandinavia, Greece, Russia, South America, Sri Lanka and the Canary Islands. But it was in North Africa that he found his spiritual home — and his physical home too. He documented many of his travels in musical works that he composed using themes collected along the way.

North Africa

Saint-Saëns first visited North Africa in 1873 and immediately found a musical theme that he incorporated years later into his *Suite Algérienne*. But beyond its rich musical culture, there was a magic about Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt that truly captured his imagination. There, the warm sun helped his always-frail health, and he could walk the streets anonymously — by this stage he was so famous in Europe that he sometimes had to travel under the assumed name of Charles Sannois. In his later life he basically removed himself to the city of Biskra in Algeria, where Bartok and Szymanowski would also find musical inspiration. Saint-Saëns spent his winters there, marvelling that "You board a beautiful ship in Marseille and 24 hours later you land in Algiers; and it is sun, greenery, flowers, life!"

Flight into Fantasy



Saint-Saëns had a brilliant mind. His formidable intellect was not limited to music. He had a profound interest in - and knowledge of - geology, botany, butterflies, and maths.

Even in later life, Saint-Saëns's prodigious intellectual gifts produced all kinds of creative results, including his great African-themed works like the "Egyptian" Piano Concerto no. 5 and Africa for Piano and Orchestra. But he was also a gifted linguist who could pick up foreign languages at will, he wrote literature and poetry, published articles about acoustics, and pursued active interests in geology, botany, astronomy, natural history and mathematics, often corresponding on specialist subjects with some of Europe's leading scientists.

But Saint-Saëns didn't share the fashionable enthusiasm for the new wave of French composers. When he quarrelled with Debussy and then called Rite of Spring-era Stravinsky insane, Saint-Saëns effectively removed himself from the French musical culture that he more than anyone had helped to create. Nevertheless, in 1910, he was the only major French musician who travelled to Munich to hear the premiere of Mahler's Eighth Symphony.

Death in Algiers

At the end of 1921, the 86-year-old Saint-Saëns gave a well-received recital in Paris and then left as usual for his annual winter "hivernale" in Algeria. But on 16 December that year, not long after arriving in his beloved North Africa, he suffered an unexpected heart attack and died in Algiers. His body was repatriated and he was given a state funeral in the Church of the Madeleine. There amid the crowd of mourners, concealed behind a heavy veil and seated well away from the many dignitaries, was his estranged wife Marie, who hadn't seen him in decades and who lived on until 1950, aged 95.



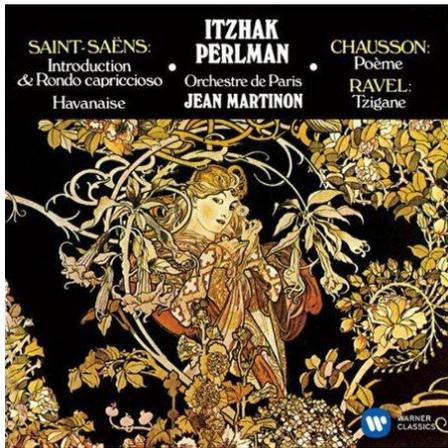
The grave of Charles Camille Saint-Saëns at the Cimetière Montparnasse, Paris.

Quotes (Source: 52 composers.com)

- "There is nothing more difficult than talking about music."
- "The artist who does not feel completely satisfied by elegant lines, by harmonious colours, and by a beautiful succession of chords does not understand the art of music."
- "the closest France has come to producing another Mozart" - (Faure about Camille).
- "If he'd been making shell-cases during the war it might have been better for music."—(Maurice Ravel on Camille Saint-Saëns).

Today's Selections

Introduction et Rondo Capriccioso in A Minor, Op. 28



Saint-Saëns composed this work in 1863. The date of the first performance is not known. The score calls for solo violin and an orchestra consisting of pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets, with timpani and strings.

Like many composers who write concertos for instruments they do not play, Saint-Saëns welcomed the advice of the great Spanish violinist, Pablo de Sarasate, when he composed music for solo violin.

They met when Sarasate was just fifteen and Saint-Saëns twenty-four, and at the very beginning of a long and productive career. His exceptional gifts as an organist and composer were already winning him distinguished and influential friends, including Gounod, Rossini, and Berlioz.

Sarasate, equally talented and audacious, had approached Saint-Saëns hoping that he would compose something for him to play. “Fresh and young as spring itself,” Saint-Saëns remembered the violinist, “the faint shadow of a moustache scarcely visible on his upper lip, he was already a famous virtuoso. As if it were the easiest thing in the world, he had come quite simply to ask me to write a concerto for him.” Saint-Saëns, like Bruch, Lalo, Joachim, Wieniawski, and Dvořák in the coming years, was flattered and charmed by Sarasate’s request, and agreed at once.

The first work he composed for Sarasate, completed that same year (1859), was his A major violin concerto. Four years later, he wrote this Introduction and Rondo capriccioso, a brief work with a reflective opening, almost like an operatic recitative and a dazzling aria full of fireworks, tailor-made to show off Sarasate’s famed technique. It immediately became standard virtuoso fare, and, after Georges Bizet arranged it for violin and piano, it became mandatory for any talented and daring violinist. Sarasate went on to enjoy a long career as one of the greatest of romantic virtuosos — he lived until 1908 and was the first important violinist to make commercial recordings.



Pablo de Sarasate
(obviously after the
moustache had grown a
little)

(From Programme Notes by Phillip Huscher for a concert given in 2010 by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra)

The recording we hear is by Violinist Itzhak Perlman accompanied by the Sadler's Wells Orchestra conducted by Charles Mackerras. The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnsPnyILdrw>

Piano Concerto No 2 in G minor, Op 22

This concerto was famously caricatured by pianist Sigismund Stojowski as 'beginning like Bach and ending like Offenbach'. It has three movements – the solemn 'Bach' first movement (marked *Andante sostenuto*), a scherzo in Mendelssohnian spirit but with sonata-form structure, and a concluding 'Offenbach' tarantella (*Presto*) – and was written in the space of 17 days during spring 1868.



The impetus for its composition was Saint-Saëns's friend and frequent piano duet partner Anton Rubinstein. The Russian was visiting Paris and remarked that he'd never conducted an orchestra in the French capital and suggested putting on a concert. Saint-Saëns thought this a splendid idea and, having ascertained that the next available date at the Salle Pleyel was in three weeks' time,

undertook to write a concerto for the occasion.

He had been toying with such a project for some time, his First Piano Concerto having been written a decade earlier. While he was in the throes of composition, his pupil Gabriel Fauré showed him the score of a *Tantum ergo* he'd written as an exercise at the Ecole Niedermeyer. Saint-Saëns, so the story goes, gave it an approving glance, put the score in his pocket and said: 'Give it to me. I can do something with that!' It became the tranquil theme that arrives after the first orchestral tutti.

The first performance with the composer as soloist and Rubinstein conducting was on May 13, 1868. Saint-Saëns wrote: 'Not having had the time to practise it sufficiently for performance I played very badly, and except for the scherzo, which was an immediate success, it did not go well. The general opinion was that the first part lacked coherence and the finale was a complete failure.' Since then it has been one of Saint-Saëns's most popular and frequently played works, and has been almost as frequently sniffed at by the higher-minded critics who view it as a shallow virtuoso showpiece. 'Those who criticize Saint-Saëns for his frivolity,' wrote the composer's biographer James Harding, 'should try one day to write music as airy and sure-footed as this. They would not find it easy.'

(Acknowledgement: Jeremy Nicholas writing in 'Gramophone' (UK) magazine April 2015).

We hear the final ("presto") movement played by Arthur Rubenstein accompanied by the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Andre Previn. This performance was filmed in 1975 when Rubinstein was 88 and nearly blind.



The complete concerto is on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVCvJZtzkqQ&t=1228s>

The presto movement begins at 19 minutes 31 seconds.

Cello Concerto No 1 in A minor, Op 33

Saint-Saëns' remarkable knowledge of instruments other than his own enabled him to be one of the very few composers who wrote concertos that remain in the active repertoire of violinists, cellists and pianists as well as frequently-performed sonatas for violin, oboe, bassoon and clarinet. In addition to two cello concertos, he also enriched the repertoire with two cello sonatas, a suite for cello and orchestra, many short pieces for cello with orchestra or piano and numerous chamber works that include the cello.



August Tolbecque

He dedicated his first cello concerto, written in 1872, to his friend August Tolbecque (1830-1919), solo-cellist of the Conservatoire orchestra and, like the composer, a man of many talents: cellist, music historian, author, violin maker and collector and restorer of antique musical instruments.

Perhaps under the influence of Liszt, whom Saint-Saëns fervently admired, the concert's three movements are interconnected and the principal theme runs through the entire work. This theme, comprised of legato running triplets, is a unique one that unites the cello's lyrical quality with the instrumental virtuosity that satisfies performers and pleases audiences. Saint-Saëns solves the balance problem, the greatest difficulty in writing a successful cello concerto, through careful scoring that often leaves the cello playing alone with the orchestra contributing only punctuating chords.

(Acknowledgement Jeffrey Solow –Cellist at www.jeffreysolow.com)

The first cello concerto has always been one of Saint-Saëns's most popular pieces, Casals choosing it for his London debut in 1905. Tunes abound, but not in any disorderly way: the main themes of the outer movements move upwards, the second themes downwards; if, that is, the opening cello motif can be called a 'theme'—the composer's biographer Brian Rees refers to it as 'an artefact rather than a melodious outburst'. The central minuet is a movement of pure delight and, in those uncertain times, no doubt reassured Parisian audiences that French culture had after all survived, one critic remarking that here the composer was making up for a recent 'divergence from classicism'. The return of earlier material in the third movement may owe something to Saint-Saëns's study of the cyclic patterns found in Liszt, to whom he remained indebted all his life.

(from notes by Roger Nichols for Hyperion Records UK 2014).

We listen to the 2nd movement (allegretto con moto) played by Mstislav Rostropovich accompanied by the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Carlo Maria Giulini.

The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwUqnPQdjl&t=649s>

The movement commences at: 5 minutes 47 seconds





Danse Macabre Op. 40

The composer's third symphonic poem abandoned Classical myth for Romantic horror. Death is up there on most composers' radars as a worthy inspiration. Saint-Saëns happened on the subject in the early 1870s, originally setting to music a strange, art-house poem by Henri Cazalis, which has the first line 'Zig, zig, zig, death in cadence'.

Originally it was for voice and piano but Saint-Saëns reworked it a couple of years later, substituting a violin for the voice and adding the full orchestra. The result caused widespread consternation: not merely the deformed 'Dies irae' plainsong (another borrowing from Berlioz), but that horrible screeching from solo violin? And a xylophone? Not to mention the hypnotic repetitions (would *Boléro* have been written without them?). There's a whole narrative that unfolds in the piece, with the violin representing death himself and the story starting at midnight – hence the twelve chiming opening notes. Those who knew the song were aware that in the churchyard the skeleton of the countess danced with that of the cart-driver – this with memories of the Commune all too vivid. Could such populist and, it had to be faced, memorable music count as 'serious'?

When it was premiered at one of the Parisian Châtelet concerts (these took place in the Théâtre du Châtelet) it was immediately encored in full. Thirty years later, Debussy wrote of the piece: "M. Saint-Saëns won't hold it against me if I dare to say that there he gave hope".

(Acknowledgement: hyperion-records.com.uk)

It has remained one of Saint-Saëns's most popular pieces, with television providing endless opportunities to hear it again in theme tunes. Some may recall it as providing the theme for the television series "Jonathon Creek".

In the *Danse Macabre*, or *Dance of Death*, skeletons escort living humans to their graves in a lively waltz. Kings, knights, and commoners alike join in, conveying that regardless of status, wealth, or accomplishments in life, death comes for everyone. At a time when outbreaks of the Black Death and seemingly endless battles between France and England in the Hundred Years' War left thousands of people dead, macabre images like the *Dance of Death* were a way to confront the ever-present prospect of mortality.

The performance hear is by Les Clefs de l'orchestre de Jean-François Zygel with l'Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71fZhMXIGT4> .

Samson et Dalila Opus 47

The Biblical story of Samson and Delilah

In the Hebrew Bible (The Christian 'Old Testament') the 'Book of Judges' describes successive individuals, most likely tribal or local leaders, each from a different tribe of Israel, recognized by local groups or tribes beyond their own and described as chosen by God to rescue the people from their enemies and establish justice.

Samson appears at a time when the tribes of Israel are under threat from the Philistines - an ancient people who lived on the south coast of Canaan between the 12th century BC and 604 BC. Delilah is a woman mentioned in the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Judges. Thought to be in league with the Philistines, she is loved by Samson, a Nazirite who possesses great strength and serves as the final Judge of Israel.

Delilah is bribed by the lords of the Philistines to discover the source of his strength. After three failed attempts at doing so, she finally goads Samson into telling her that his vigour is derived from his hair. As he sleeps, Delilah orders a servant to cut Samson's hair, thereby enabling her to turn him over to the Philistines who gouge out his eyes and force him to grind grain in a mill at Gaza. Whilst there his hair began to regrow.



When the Philistines took Samson into their temple of Dagon, Samson asked to rest against one of the support pillars; after being granted permission, he prayed to God and miraculously recovered his strength, allowing him to grasp hold of the columns and tear them down, killing himself and all the Philistines with him.

The Opera

Saint-Saëns began work on Samson and Delilah in 1876. Although the orchestration was not yet complete, Act 2 was presented in a private performance in 1870. In spite of many precedents, the French public reacted negatively to Saint-Saëns's intention of putting a Biblical subject on the stage. The alarm on the part of the public caused him to abandon working further on the opera for the next two years.

In the summer of 1872, Franz Liszt was highly interested in producing new works by talented composers and persuaded Saint-Saëns to finish Samson and Delilah, even offering to produce the completed work at the grand-ducal opera house in Weimar. Encouraged, Saint-Saëns began composing Act 1 in late 1872 and worked on it sporadically for the next few years. Saint-Saëns completed the score in 1876 but no opera houses in France displayed any desire to stage the work. Liszt's sustained support however led to the work being mounted in Weimar, Germany, in 1877.

When it was due to open at London's Covent Garden, the Lord Chamberlain slapped a ban on the whole opera, stopping all but concert performances until 1909 – some thirty years after its original run in Weimar.

The matter of censorship, it seems, was once again, because the subject is biblical and the powers-that-be were very nervy about letting it on stage at all. The company was allowed to present the opera in a concert version, only. So, English audiences were deprived of seeing, in their fully staged glory, some of the most beautiful moments in French opera and, indeed, Saint-Saëns's only regularly performed stage work.

This opera contains the sumptuous Bacchanale and arguably the most beautiful tune ever written for a mezzo, ' Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix' ('softly awakes my heart').

We listen to two these items from the Operetta: "Softly Awakes my Heart" sung by Jessye Norman and the "Bacchanale in a 1983 production by the Metropolitan Opera of New York with the orchestra being conducted by James Levine.

Softly Awakes My Heart



"Softly awakes my heart" is the central aria in "Samson and Delilah" and one of the most popular in the lyrical repertoire. This aria is the dramatic core of the opera: Delilah is using it to seduce Samson into revealing the secret of his great strength. It is poignant due to the feelings expressed, but also because it heralds the fatal destiny: Delilah, who wanted to seduce Samson to bring him down, is hoisted by her own petard by truly believing in his false promises.

Jessye Norman made more than one recording of this aria. We hear an early one, and arguably the best. You will find it on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71fZhMXIGT4> .

Bacchanale

A Bacchanale is a musical composition depicting an orgiastic and drunken revel. The one we hear comes at the opening of the final scene of the opera where Samson is led in to the temple of the pagan god Dagon as the Philistines' prepare a sacrifice to commemorate their victory. They dance in wild frenzy.



The link to YouTube is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdpmTuxzs3Q>

Violin Concerto No. 3 in B Minor, Op. 61

During a period in French music when composers' reputations rested first of all with their degree of success in the emotional world of opera, Saint-Saëns proved himself a maverick by preferring the cooler, more abstract realm of instrumental music. He composed the last of his three violin concertos for Pablo de Sarasate, previously the inspiration for his Violin Concerto No. 1, and the Introduction and Rondo capriccioso. He wasn't alone in drawing inspiration from the sovereign skills of this Spanish-born, Paris-resident virtuoso: Edouard Lalo (*Symphonie Espagnole*), Max Bruch (*Concerto No. 2* and *Scottish Fantasy*), and Antonín Dvořák (*Mazurek*) also created works especially for him.

Regarding Concerto No. 3, Saint Saëns wrote, "During the composition of this concerto, Sarasate gave me invaluable advice, to which is certainly due the considerable degree of favour it has met with on the part of violinist themselves." Sarasate gave the premiere in Paris on January 2, 1881. He was not initially pleased with it, feeling it was insufficiently virtuosic to fully satisfy the public. It was only after Belgian soloist Eugene Ysaÿe won great success with it that Sarasate's enthusiasm revived and he took it into his repertoire.



Its dramatic content is confined to the outer movements. They also offer frequent opportunities for violinists to show off their technical prowess. The sweet, melodious second movement provides an interlude of graceful repose.

(from Program Notes by Don Anderson for a recital in 2019 by the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra).

We listen to the second movement. The soloist is a young South Korean virtuoso, In Mo Yang, and the orchestra is the Orchestre National de France conducted by Neeme Järvi. The relative YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VldQjYl0gzg&t=1485s>

Symphony No 3 in C minor Opus 78 (The Organ Symphony)

"I gave everything to it I was able to give. What I have here accomplished, I will never achieve again." Thus spake Camille Saint-Saëns about his C minor Symphony, "avec orgue" (with organ), the third and last of his symphonies, and one of the crowning glories of his prodigious life in music.



I make a plea that we take the Organ Symphony seriously as one of the late 19th century's most significant and technically sophisticated orchestral works. And also of course that we enjoy its remarkable concatenation of tunes, colours, and kaleidoscopic thematic invention that have made the symphony so popular ever since its premiere in London's St James's Hall in 1886, when Saint-Saëns himself conducted the orchestra of the Royal Philharmonic Society, who had commissioned the piece.

It's all too easy to think of the Organ Symphony as a perennial symphonic pot-boiler, one of those knackered ex-thoroughbred warhorses of the repertoire whose every appearance on concert programmes is another stage in its consignment to the orchestral glue-factory.



The 1895 T.C. Lewis organ of Albion Church, Ashton-under-Lyne

It doesn't help that the Big Tune of the last movement is one of the most used and abused motifs of classical music history, in everything from Disney's Babe movies to it being adopted as the national anthem of the micro-nation of Atlantium, a postage-stamp-sized potential principality in Eastern Australia. Its over-familiarity means it's hard to recognise the real achievement of this symphony which fused what were genuinely cutting-edge innovations with Saint-Saëns's inherently classical, conventional (with a small "c") instincts.

So forget what you might think you know about this symphony, and prepare to re-hear the rafinesse, joie de vivre, and technical coup-d'orchestre of arguably Saint-Saëns's greatest single composition.

(Acknowledgement: theguardian.com February 25, 2014)

We listen to the Finale with British organist Jonathan Scott performing his own arrangement on the organ of Victoria Hall, Hanley, UK. This is the first performance of the complete transcription and was filmed live at the Victoria Hall Organ Prom concert on Saturday 13th April 2019.

The Youtube link (for the transcription of the complete symphony) is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT7dQy2YT6Y&t=647s>

The finale begins at 28 minutes into the symphony.

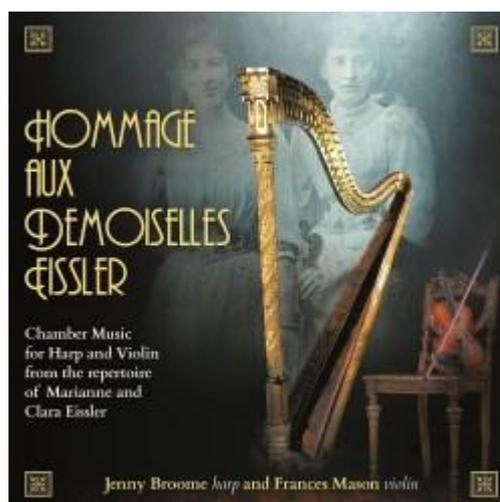
A separate performance by Jonathon Scott of his transcription of the Finale only, played on the 1895 T.C. Lewis organ of Albion Church, Ashton-under-Lyne, UK. can be seen and heard on YouTube at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eq_jzx-gLBk

Fantaisie for Solo Harp Op.95

The Fantaisie was composed in March of 1907 on a trip to Italian Riviera for the Eissler sisters: Marianne, a violinist and Clara, a harpist. The sisters were Moravian born and Paris trained musicians who developed a lively performing career. Saint-Saëns had met the sisters some ten years earlier and promised them a duo.

Writing on the occasion of Saint-Saëns birthday, Clara Eisler wrote:



"The Saint-Saëns work we harpists most often play is perhaps 'The Swan', whether we perform it as a harp solo or accompanying a solo instrument. But of his three works actually written for harp – the Fantaisie, Op. 95, the Morceau de Concert, op. 154 and the Fantaisie for violin and harp, op. 124 – my favourite by far is the Fantaisie for violin and harp".

The Eissler sisters played the work for Saint-Saëns on a trip through Paris in May of that year. Saint-Saëns wrote to his publisher, "The Demoiselles Eissler were in transit in Paris and have played my duo for me, which pleased me very much".

They premiered the work in London that July. The beauty of the piece and its thoroughly romantic style made it an instant favourite with audiences. Marianne wrote to Saint-Saëns, thanking him for the piece:

"My sister and I owe one of the biggest successes of our career you. Your famous name gave us a full room with a musical and educated audience, we were inspired in our task, and I would venture to say that we have played your divine works well. Happy birthday and thank you, M. Saint-Saëns!"

This piece was a product of the later period of his life, one that was very productive. Saint-Saëns had survived numerous personal emotional upheavals, and by this time was firmly established as a musical reactionary against the music of the young Impressionists like Debussy.

(Acknowledgement: harpmastery.com)

Saint-Saëns knew how to write perfectly for harp and the Fantaisie, Op. 95 is a rich composition that exploits much of the harp's beauty, including trills, glissandos, harmonics, striking melodic lines and has a lovely harp cadenza.



Here, the Fantasie is played on the pedal harp by Russian harpist Kathrin Butterfly. The link to her performance is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwsmCb8hlls>

Carnival of the Animals

While Saint-Saëns regarded the Carnival of the Animals as one of his two great works of 1886 (the other is the Organ Concerto), it was written initially as a bit of fun for friends, and Saint-Saëns even requested that it was never published or performed throughout his lifetime as he thought the work detracted from his 'serious' image!

Only 'The Swan' was published in his lifetime, but the 14 movement piece has now become a cornerstone of classical music.



Each of the music's 14 movements represents a different animal, including a lion, donkey, and elephant, as well as fossils, an aquarium, an aviary and – Saint-Saëns' little joke – pianists, possibly the most dangerous animal of them all.

The music is beautiful, funny, and clever all at once. The Swan, one of the most iconic movements, is scored for two pianos and a cello solo, with the calming cello tune representing the bird's effortless gliding, and the rolling piano chords paint a musical picture of the swan's hidden feet, paddling furiously under the water.

(Acknowledgement: Classicfm.com).

The Carnival of the Animals is by turns pompous (lions), prancing (kangaroos), and ponderous (the elephant) and a thoroughly frivolous pastiche of musical quotes and allusions. The novelty of its orchestration—which includes a glass harmonica, xylophone, and two pianos, along with a few winds and strings—has drawn the attention of film and TV directors and parts of the work (especially “The Swan”) appear in countless soundtracks, most recently “The Zookeeper’s Wife” (2017).

Across its fourteen movements, we often hear send-ups of the theatrical spectacles and lush (or even saccharine) romanticism of Rossini and Meyerbeer.

From a purely audio perspective, perhaps its most famous recording is by the Andre Kostelanetz Orchestra with Noel Coward reciting verses written for the work by Ogden Nash.

We listen to the Introduction and the Conclusion from the Kostelanetz recording book-ending a performance of “The Swan” played on the cello by Yo-Yo Ma accompanied by the Boston Pops Orchestra conducted by John Williams.



It is a little publicised fact that “The Swan” was played at Saint-Saëns’ funeral in Algiers.

The YouTube link to Yo-Yo Ma’s performance is

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNbXuFBjncw>

The Kostelanetz recording can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPeCT2y6yAc&t=512s>



Ogden Nash, August 19, 1902 – May 19, 1971



Noel Coward, December 16, 1899 – March 26 1973