



Camille Saint-Saëns

October 9, 1835 – December 16, 1921

Camille Saint-Saëns was born in Paris as the only child of Jacques-Joseph-Victor Saint-Saëns, an official in the French Ministry of the Interior, and Françoise-Clémence. Victor Saint-Saëns was of Norman descent, and his wife was from an Haute-Marne family.

Camille was born in the Rue du Jardinnet in the 6th arrondissement of Paris, baptized at the nearby church of Saint-Sulpice, and always considered himself a true Parisian.

Less than two months after the christening, Victor Saint-Saëns died of consumption on the first anniversary of his marriage.

The young Camille was taken to the country for the sake of his health, and for two years lived with a nurse at Corbeil, south of Paris.

When Camille returned to Paris to live with his mother, it was found that he had perfect pitch at just 3 years old. His widowed aunt began to teach him piano skills. At age 7, Camille began to take piano lessons from one of Paris' premiere piano instructors, Camille-Marie Stamaty. Clémence Saint-Saëns was well aware of her son's incredible talent, but she did not want him to become famous so young. Camille began giving small performances at the age of 5 but did not hold any public performances until the age of 10.

As a schoolboy Saint-Saëns excelled in many subjects. In addition to his musical abilities, he distinguished himself in the study of French literature, Latin and Greek, divinity, and mathematics. His interests included philosophy, archaeology, and astronomy. He carried these interests throughout his life.

In 1861 Saint-Saëns accepted his only post as a teacher, at the École de Musique Classique et Religieuse, Paris. He scandalized some of his more austere colleagues by introducing his students to contemporary music, including that of Schumann, Liszt, and Wagner. He conceived his best-known piece, *The Carnival of the Animals*, with his students in mind, but did not finish composing it until 1886, more than twenty years after he left the Niedermeyer school.

In February 1877, he finally had a full-length opera staged. His four-act "drame lyrique", *Le timbre d'argent* ("*The Silver Bell*"), reminiscent of the Faust legend, had been in rehearsal in 1870, but the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war halted the production. The work was eventually presented by the Théâtre Lyrique company of Paris and ran for eighteen performances. In December 1877, Saint-Saëns had a more solid operatic success, with *Samson et Dalila*, his one opera to gain and keep a place in the international repertoire. Because of its biblical subject, the composer had met many obstacles to its presentation in France, and through Liszt's influence, the premiere was given at Weimar in a German translation. Although the work eventually became an international success, it was not staged at the Paris Opéra until 1892.

In 1900, after ten years without a permanent home in Paris, Saint-Saëns took a flat in the rue de Courcelles, not far from his old residence in the rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré. This remained his home for the rest of his life. In November 1921, Saint-Saëns gave a recital at the Institute for a large invited audience; it was remarked that his playing was as vivid and precise as ever, and his personal bearing was admirable for a man of eighty-six. He left Paris a month later for Algiers, intending to winter there. While there, he died without warning of a heart attack on December 16, 1921. His body was taken back to Paris, and after a state funeral at the Madeleine, he was buried at the Cimetière de Montparnasse.

The Carnival of the Animals, with Verses by Ogden Nash

Introduction

Camille St. Saëns was wracked with pains
When people addressed him as "Saint Sains."
He held the human race to blame
Because it could not pronounce his name.
So he turned with metronome and fife
To glorify other forms of life.
Be quiet, please, for here begins
His salute to feathers, furs, and fins.

Royal March of the Lion

The lion is the king of beasts
And husband of the lioness.
Gazelles and things on which he feasts
Address him as Your Highness.
There are those who admire that roar of his
In the African jungles and veldts,
But I think, wherever a lion is,
I'd rather be somewhere else.

Hens and Roosters

The rooster is a roistering hoodlum,
His battle cry is cock-a-doodlum.
Hands in pockets, cap over eye,
He whistles at pullets passing by.

Wild Jackass

Have ever you harked to the jackass wild
Which scientists call the onager?
It sounds like the laugh of an idiot child
Or a hepcat on a harmoniger.
But do not sneer at the jackass wild,
There is method in his heehaw,
For with maidenly blush and accent mild,
The jenny-ass answers, shee-haw.

Tortoises

Come crown my brow with leaves of myrtle,
I know the tortoise is a turtle.
Come carve my name in stone immortal,
I know the turtoise is a tortle.
I know to my profound despair
I bet on one to beat a hare.
I also know I'm now a pauper
Because of its tortley, turtley, torpor.

The Elephant

Elephants are useful friends,
Equipped with handles at both ends.
They have a wrinkled moth-proof hide;
Their teeth are upside down, outside.
If you think the elephant preposterous,
You've probably never seen a rhinosterous.

Kangaroos

The kangaroo can jump incredible.
He has to jump because he's edible.
I could not eat a kangaroo
But many fine Australians do.
Those with cookbooks as well as boomerangs
Prefer him in tasty kangaroo meringues.

The Aquarium

Some fish are minnows,
Some are whales.
People like dimples,
Fish like scales.
Some fish are slim,
And some are round.
They don't get cold,
They don't get drowned.
But every fish wife
Fears for her fish.
What we call mermaids
And they call merfish.

Mules

In the world of mules,
There are no rules.

The Cuckoo in the Depth of the Woods

Cuckoos lead bohemian lives,
They fail as husbands and as wives.
Therefore, they cynically disparage
Everybody else's marriage.

The Birds

Puccini was Latin, and Wagner Teutonic,
And birds are incurably philharmonic.
Suburban yards and rural vistas
Are filled with avian Andrews Sisters.
The skylark sings a roundelay,
The crow sings "The Road to Mandalay."
The nightingale sings a lullaby,
And the seagull sings a gullaby.
That's what shepherds listened to in Arcadia
Before somebody invented the radia.

Pianists

Some claim that pianists are human,
And quote the case of Mr. Truman.
St. Saëns, upon the other hand,
Considered them a scurvy band.
Ape-like they are, he said, and simian,
Instead of normal men and wimian.

Fossils

At midnight in the museum hall,
The fossils gathered for a ball.
There were no drums or saxophones,
But just the clatter of their bones,
A rolling, rattling, carefree circus
Of mammoth polkas and mazurkas.
Pterodactyls and brontosauruses
Sang ghostly prehistoric choruses.
Amid the mastodonic wassail,
I caught the eye of one small fossil.
Cheer up, sad world, he said, and winked.
It's kind of fun to be extinct.

The Swan

The swan can swim while sitting down.
For pure conceit he takes the crown.
He looks in the mirror over and over,
And claims to have never heard of Pavlova.

Finale

Now we reach the grand finale,
Animale, carnivale.
Noises new to sea and land
Issue from the skillful band.
All the strings contort their features,
Imitating crawly creatures.
All the brasses look like mumps
From blowing umpah umpah umps.
In outdoing Barnum and Bailey and Ringling,
St. Saëns has done a miraculous thingling.

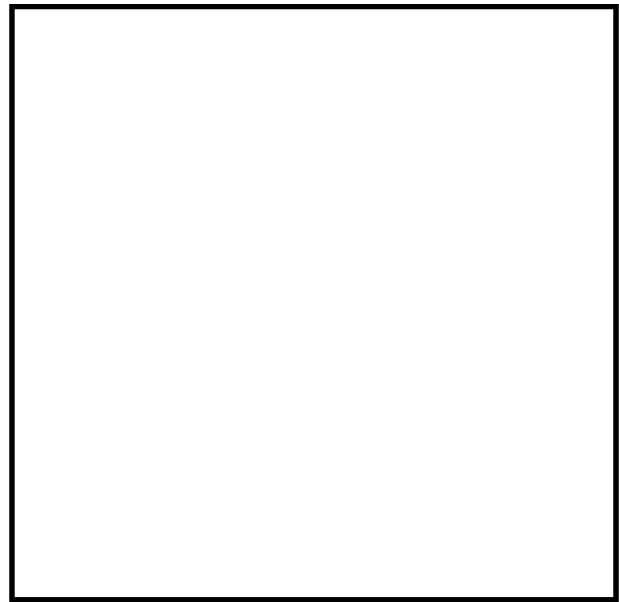
Composer Study

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Place of Birth: _____

Composer Fun Facts:



Instruments Used: _____

Famous Compositions: _____

Further Study:
