

MUSIC APPRECIATION SECTION

GREAT COMPOSERS OF MUSIC

SECOND SERIES

By BERT PAUL OSBON *

VI. SAINT-SAENS



Saint-Saens

SAINT-SAENS, (pronounced *sahn-sahn*) was an excellent student. He was cultivated, alert, and versatile, and his modesty and sincerity made him well-liked everywhere.

This composer succeeded in writing almost every style of music. He wrote symphonies, symphonic poems, chamber music, songs, *concertos*, oratorios, and operas. He was a versatile and powerful composer. His compositions include 5 symphonies, 4 symphonic poems, 5 piano *concertos*, and 10 operas.

From his earliest years Saint-Saens gave concerts in many parts of the world. Throughout his life he retained remarkable vigor, and thus was able to make public appearances until he was more than eighty years old. This gifted composer visited Algeria, and has pictured the Oriental life there in his charming *Suite Algerienne*. He was in America in 1906 and again in 1916. He was an amateur astronomer, and spent considerable time in his private observatory in the Canary Islands. He died in Algiers in 1921.

Very young boy he took keen delight in listening to musical sounds. So it did not surprise his parents that he early developed ability to play the piano under the instruction of his aunt with whom he began to study music when he was two-and-a-half years old. When he was six years old he gave his first public piano recital. He continued to give concerts until he was more than eighty years old.

This noted French genius was born in Paris in 1835. He was sixteen years old when he produced his first symphony, and lived to become a great pianist and famous composer. He also became a well-known organist, and played the organ at one of the large churches in Paris.

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The greatest opera which Saint-Saens wrote is *Samson and Delilah*, which is sometimes called a music-drama. It was first produced in 1877, and is often sung as an oratorio. This opera narrates the well-known Bible story of the strong man Samson and the seductive Delilah who finally secured his downfall. You should hear a good singer sing one of the fam-

ous solos from this opera which is called *My Heart at Thy Sweet Voice*. An excellent phonograph record has been made of this selection.

Another famous composition by Saint-Saens is called *Danse Macabre*. It portrays the midnight revels of the spirits who rise from their graves on Hallowe'en. By a clever orchestration the rattling of the bones of the skeletons is heard; then Death tunes his violin, and a lively dance follows. This is finally interrupted by the crowing of the cock, and all the spirits and their skeletons return to the graves.

In another composition Saint-Saens had the amusing idea of picturing in music the habits of birds and animals. He wrote a series of little tone pictures called *The Carnival of the Animals*. All of these may be heard by means of phonograph records. One of the little pictures in this series is called *The Swan* (*Le Cygne* in French). This is a favorite solo, and is played on the violin, or the cello, or the organ. Another of these tone pictures suggests "the royal lion" as he walks majestically and gives forth his mighty roars. In another picture the hens and rooster are suggested in a very comical manner. Again, a big, heavy tune depicts

the elephants. Young people always enjoy these tone-pictures, and you should hear them at the first opportunity.

Try and learn to spell and pronounce this composer's name correctly (get a person who speaks French to help you), and remember something about his life and his music.

QUESTIONS

1. Who was Saint-Saens?
2. Can you spell and pronounce his

name correctly? (*sahn-sahn*)

3. Tell of his early life as a boy.

4. Tell of his personal characteristics.

5. What kinds of music did Saint-Saens write?

6. Name some of his compositions.

7. Tell of

his most famous opera.

8. Tell of his *Danse Macabre*.

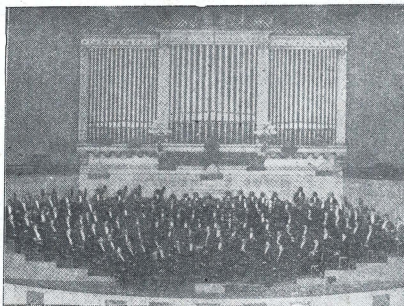
9. Tell of his *Carnival of the Animals*.

10. Have you ever heard any of the music composed by Saint-Saens?

11. What is a tone-picture?

12. What are some of the tone-pictures in Saint-Saens' *Carnival of the Animals*?

13. Describe the picture which you would see in your mind if you listened to Saint-Saens' *Danse Macabre*.



Saint-Saens wrote music for a great symphony orchestra like this one.