

Introduction and Rondo
Capriccioso
Paris, 1863

Kendall Grady
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Camille Saint-Saëns
1835-1921

Living nearly 90 years, **Saint-Saëns'** life spans from after the time of Napoleon and Neoclassicism to WW1 and the beginnings of modernism. During the growing phenomena of amateurism, Saint-Saëns appealed to the masses by writing in a variety of styles, most known for his illustrative Carnival of the Animals for children. Written for Sarasate, his esteemed Introduction and Rondo, meant to be the opening of his famous 3rd Violin concerto, contains the gypsy-like flavors similar to Bizet's Carmen written slightly later. Balancing between his desire to teach the masses about the history of music and be taken seriously in the great world of both French opera comic and Grand opera, the virtuosic piece for violin and orchestra is written within a classical form but as if a soprano diva were improvising it with syncopations, arpeggios, and falling sigh-like intervals.

The Introduction has in my opinion three separate areas: the slow and melancholy opening, the animated and short middle passage which climaxes, and the tranquil but sweet ending which quickly leads into the flourish that results in the almost flippant character of the rondo. A composer who was aware of his choice to be eclectic and absorb trends of the time and place, Saint-Saëns believed in form and the classic rules of beauty. In his Rondo, he takes the modern idea of a motif and structures the returning music with three different musically gestures. The use of trills maintains the oriental flavor but the simplicity of the gestures gives an authenticity to the character that in its own nature is profound.

As he grew in age, Saint-Saëns become more of a fighter for cleaner and defined composition and became increasingly suspicious of Debussy. Camille displayed personal anxiety between maintaining sentimentality for the past and embracing the new continuously changing environment. Most musicians don't realize Saint-Saëns studied astronomy and divination in school, which may be the reason he seems to make a rule of 3 although he never completely repeats himself, always subtlety changing the accompanying texture or even melody by one pitch, which then leads the performers and listeners into a new scene. Saint-Saëns had taste, and as a child prodigy was compared to the epitome of genius Mozart in his lifetime. It was the angry artists of the avant-garde who were starting the era of modernism that throughout the validity of Saint-Saëns work with contempt for his encouragement of musical enjoyment amongst the amateurs. In fact, due to its biblical themes, Saint-Saëns' great opera had to be premiered with the help of Liszt in Germany.

Unlike Debussy, whose patriotism lies in developing a distinctly french sound, Saint-Saëns' nationalism involved accepting other musical concepts and making them his own. The interjection of the "morbidezza," meaning "softly", is recalled again later and intercedes the vivacious passage with a more loving and reflective character. A supporter of then contemporary music in other countries, including Schumann, Saint-Saëns studied at the Paris Conservatoire and some of his students would include Ravel, Frank, and Bizet to whom he would train in the same beliefs. His friendship with Liszt would influence his work within the classical form to allow the musical syntax to tell a story, which the "impressionists" would then further by creating atmospheres and colors rather than characters and moods.

It is not surprising that in February of 1871 then Saint-Saëns along with his pupil Faure, and Frank and his younger rival Massenet became the founding members of the National Society

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of Music to support a pro-french musical society after the Franco-Prussian war. After Camille's resigning in 1886 and despite his disagreements with Debussy, Debussy would later transcribe the piece for four hand piano. For those of you interested in a more conservative interpretation, the Stern recording with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy from 1958 remains one of my favorite records.