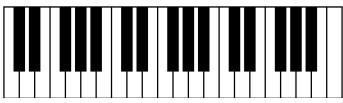


# Camille Saint-Saëns



*The Romantic Period refers to art and literature that values emotion and imagination as a way of understanding the world. For music, the Romantic Period began in Europe during the 1800s.*

Camille Saint-Saëns' life was so long that it spanned almost the *entire* Romantic period (he lived to be eighty-six years old); he even witnessed the rise of jazz and modern music in the 20th Century.



Saint-Saëns was born in Paris on October 9, 1835, and was a talented musician from an early age. His aunt began teaching him piano lessons when he was two years old, and he began composing almost immediately afterwards, finishing his first piano piece at age three.



Besides music, Saint-Saëns was interested in many subjects- the study of plants and insects, mathematics, geology, archeology, astronomy and music history.



As a composer, Saint-Saëns had very French characteristics, he wrote elegant music that was considered neat, clean, polished and never excessive. As a performer, he was considered to be a great organist and one of the best pianists of his time. Even while he played, he sat very still at the piano, and was always restrained, graceful and cool.

During the years that Saint-Saëns was composing, many beautiful buildings (including the Eiffel Tower), churches and instruments were being built in France. The compositions that Saint-Saëns is most known for include Carnival of the Animals, Danse Macabre and his Symphony No. 3, which features an organ just like the ones that were being built at that time.



In particular, *Danse Macabre* is a spooky piece that depicts an old French superstition.



On Halloween night, skeletons rise from their graves and dance to the music of a violin. Here, Saint-Saëns uses the xylophone to imitate the sound of their rattling bones! The skeletons dance all night until dawn; when they must return to their graves until next year.

In his relationships with other composers Saint-Saëns was either a good friend or an enemy – he held very strong opinions about music, and expressed them openly. During his later years, he became a grumpy sort of man, who fought the modern, more jazzy styles of music that were becoming popular.

*C. Saint-Saëns*

Composer Quick Facts  
Life Dates: 1835-1921  
Country: France  
Era: Romantic

# A Listening Map

Follow the listening map according to the arrows. Listen for the two themes that were outlined on the previous page.



We wish to thank the Reno Philharmonic for the use of this listening map.

## ***Danse Macabre* by Henri Cazalis**

On a sounding stone  
With a blanched thigh-bone  
The bone of a saint, I fear;  
Death strikes the hour  
Of his Wizard power  
And the specters make haste to appear.     *Specter: ghost*

From their tombs they rise  
In their deathly guise  
Obeying the summons dread.  
And gathering round  
With reverence profound  
They salute the King of the Dead.

Then he stands in the middle  
And tunes up his fiddle  
And plays them a gruesome strain.  
And each gibbering wight     *Gibbering: chattering or senseless talk*     *wight: creature*  
In the moon's pale light  
Music dance to that wild refrain.

Now the fiddle tells  
As the music swells  
Of the graveyard's ghastly pleasures.  
And they clatter their bones  
As with hideous groans  
They reel to those maddening measures.

The churchyard quakes.  
And the old abbey shakes  
To the tread of that midnight host.  
And the sod turns black  
On each circling track  
Where a skeleton whirls with a ghost.

The night wind moans  
In shuddering tones  
Through the gloom of the cypress tree.  
While the mad mob raves  
Over yawning graves  
And the fiddle bow leaps with glee

So the swift hours fly  
'Til the reddening sky  
Gives warning of daylight near.  
Then the first rooster crow  
Sends them scurrying below  
To sleep for another year.