



# Camille SAINT-SAËNS

## *Piano Concerto No. 4 in C minor*

**Camille Saint-Saëns** (born October 9, 1835, Paris, France—died December 16, 1921, Algiers, Algeria) was one of the most extraordinary prodigies in music history. He was an organist, pianist, conductor, and composed over 300 works in various musical genres. He also dabbled in science, mathematics, astronomy, archeology, and was a critic, traveller, poet, playwright, philosopher, and essayist. Saint-Saëns is primarily known for his symphonic poems and for his opera *Samson and Delila*. A child prodigy on the piano, Saint-Saëns gave his first recital at the age of eleven. He studied organ and composition at the Paris Conservatory, and in 1855 his *Symphony No. 1* was first performed. He became organist at the celebrated Church of the Madeleine in Paris, and from 1861 to 1865 was professor of piano at the Niedermeyer School, where his pupils included Gabriel Fauré and André Messager. In 1871 Saint-Saëns founded the Société Nationale, an organization dedicated to the performance of music by French composers.

First performed October 31, 1875, Saint-Saëns' **Piano Concert No. 4 in C minor** was premiered at the opening of Edouard Colonne's "Artistic Association" (a series of concerts dedicated to the memory of Georges Bizet). Critics hailed the work as encompassing "the force of Liszt and the suavity of Chopin." The concerto is a provocative experiment of traditional musical form. The piece is divided into two movements with only one full stop in the middle. Each section however is divided further into two parts, with further subdivisions in the second of the two movements. The concerto commences without the tradition of an orchestral introduction; instead a single phrase is played pizzicato in the strings, beginning with an upward leap from C natural to F sharp (a tritone). There is also no formal introduction for the solo part either (merely orchestra and soloist alternating statements at different pitch levels). Saint-Saëns masterfully transforms themes and matches soloist and orchestra in skill and technique. The Andante is introspective and hymn-like while the Allegro vivace is a vivacious scherzo that is an alteration of the main theme of the first movement. The chorale-like closing theme then surrenders to a virtuosic pianistic cascade, driving soloist and orchestra to the work's robust conclusion.