



Charles-Camille SAINT-SAËNS

Concerto for piano and orchestra No. 5

Charles-Camille Saint-Saëns (9 October 1835 – 16 December 1921) was a prominent French composer, organist, conductor, and pianist of the Romantic era. Renowned for his versatility, his most celebrated works include *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* (1863), the *Second Piano Concerto* (1868), the *First Cello Concerto* (1872), *Danse macabre* (1874), the opera *Samson and Delilah* (1877), the *Third Violin Concerto* (1880), the *Third Symphony* ("Organ" Symphony, 1886), and *The Carnival of the Animals* (1886). Saint-Saëns was a child prodigy, making his concert debut at just ten years old. After studying at the Paris Conservatoire, he embarked on a successful career as a church organist, first at Saint-Merri and then at La Madeleine, the official church of the French Empire. Following his departure from La Madeleine, he pursued a career as a freelance pianist and composer, gaining acclaim across Europe and the Americas.

Although Saint-Saëns was initially enthusiastic about the modern music of his contemporaries such as Schumann, Liszt, and Wagner, his own compositions adhered largely to classical traditions. His commitment to traditional structures often put him at odds with the emerging Impressionist and Expressionist movements. Despite this, his neoclassical elements, which would later influence composers like Stravinsky and Les Six, reveal his progressive side.

Saint-Saëns held a brief teaching position at the *École de Musique Classique et Religieuse* in Paris, where his students included Gabriel Fauré. Fauré, in turn, taught Maurice Ravel, ensuring Saint-Saëns's lasting influence on French music. Despite being seen as somewhat reactionary towards the end of his life, Saint-Saëns's contributions to music, particularly his mastery of melody and orchestration, cemented his legacy as a significant figure in French musical history.

Saint-Saëns's **Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 5 in F major, Op. 103**, known as the "Egyptian" Concerto, is a remarkable work composed in 1896 that showcases the French composer's fascination with Egypt. This concerto is celebrated for its vivid orchestration and the incorporation of exotic influences, inspired by Saint-Saëns's travels in the region. Structured in three movements, the concerto opens with an *Allegro* that presents a lively and rhythmic theme, demonstrating a dynamic interplay between the piano and the orchestra. The second movement, *Andante*, provides a lyrical and reflective contrast with its flowing piano melody and delicate orchestral accompaniment. The final movement, *Allegro non troppo*, concludes the work with energetic rhythms and a joyful character, echoing the exotic elements of the previous sections.

Premiered in Paris in 1896 with Saint-Saëns as the soloist, the concerto quickly gained acclaim for its imaginative use of orchestral color and thematic innovation. It remains a standout piece in the piano concerto repertoire, highlighting Saint-Saëns's ability to blend classical form with innovative, programmatic elements.