

Camille SAINT-SAËNS

Piano Works, Paraphrases and Transcriptions

Volume 2:

Oratorio
Cantata
Occasional Pieces
J.S. Bach
Luis de Milan



divine art

ANTONY GRAY piano

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921)

I. Oratorio, Cantata and Occasional Pieces

1	Le Déluge, Op. 45 - Prélude	6:57
2	Sérénade, Op. 15	4:29
3	Hymne de la fête de pâques (after Berlioz, 'La Damnation de Faust')	7:34
4	Improvisation (from Album de Gauloises)	2:36
5	Chant du soir (after Schumann's Op. 85 No. 12)	3:02
6	Improvisation sur la Beethoven-Cantata de Liszt	16:09
7	Bagatelle I	3:29
8	Bagatelle II	2:29
9	Berceuse, Op. 105	3:14
10	Paraphrase sur Gallia de Gounod	12:34

Total duration CD/set 1

62:37

II. Bach and Milan

1	Fantaisie en ré majeur écrite par Luis Milan de Valence	3:31
2	Fantaisie en sol mineur écrite par Luis Milan de Valence	3:57

Douze transcriptions pour piano (après J.S. Bach)

3	I No. 1	Ouverture de la 29 ^e cantate, BWV29	4:03
4	II No. 2	Adagio de la 3 ^e cantate, BWV3	5:17
5	III No. 3	Andantino de la 8 ^e cantata, BWV8	5:56
6	IV No. 4	Bourrée de la 1 ^e Partita, BWV1002	3:35
7	V No. 5	Andante de la 2 ^e sonate de violon, BWV1003	5:33
8	VI No. 6	Presto de la 35 ^e cantate, BWV35	3:45
9	VII No. 7	Introduction et Air de la 15 ^e cantate, BWV15	2:51
10	VIII No. 8	Fugue de la 3 ^e sonate de violon, BWV1005	7:39
11	IX No. 9A	Largo de la 3 ^e sonate de violon, BWV1005	3:23
12	X No. 9B	Récitatif et Air de la 30 ^e cantate, BWV30	2:20
13	XI No. 10	Gavotte de la 3 ^e Partita, BWV1006	3:07
14	XII No. 11	Air de la 36 ^e cantate, BWV36	2:57
15	XIII No. 12	Choeur de la 30 ^e cantate, BWV30	2:37

Total duration CD/set 2

60:38

The Piano Music of Saint-Saëns

The term 'Renaissance Man' could have easily been coined to describe Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921). He excelled as composer, pianist, organist and conductor, he wrote poetry, plays and philosophy, he took an active interest, to the point of lecturing, in various sciences, and he was an inveterate traveller. His output is astonishing, with more than 160 opuses, many of which are substantial – 13 operas, ballets, symphonies. But as well as the published works there exists an enormous body of unpublished work, some of which consists of original pieces, (the *Carnival of the Animals*, for example, is without opus number, and was not published in his lifetime) but the majority is a series of arrangements, transcriptions and concert paraphrases that he made of works, or material, by other composers. He was famously generous, supporting many young composers at the start of their careers, and some of these arrangements were probably made to raise the profiles of composers he liked and admired.

In addition to all that, there are many, many arrangements of Saint-Saëns' own music, much of that work accomplished by the composer himself, but many arrangements were also made by others, and given that every moment of every day in Saint-Saëns' life was thoroughly well filled, it is unsurprising that this work should have been farmed out. Bizet, Fauré and even Debussy were among the most distinguished of these collaborators. It is highly likely that Saint-Saëns would have given approval of these arrangements before publication.

Unusually for a virtuoso pianist/composer, Saint-Saëns' works for solo piano do not make up either a sizeable, or particularly important part of his output. The Etudes are perhaps the best known, and there is a series of lovely Waltzes from quite late in his career, but most of the rest is isolated 'salon' type pieces, not all of absolutely first rank, but, needless to say, perfectly formed and delightful. It is in some of the arrangements and paraphrases that we find some of the most substantial works, however without exception these have all disappeared from the repertoire. It is hard to see why the many transcriptions by Liszt have maintained a place in the standard repertoire and not those of Saint-Saëns. Perhaps the less extravagant showmanship of

Saint-Saëns' works, despite no lack of technical difficulty and virtuosity, did not appeal to the concert pianists of the twentieth century.

Today Saint-Saëns is remembered mostly by a handful of works. Only one of his operas is played regularly, his large scale choral works are rarely, if ever, performed, and a couple of his concertos get regular outings. The *Carnival of the Animals* and *Danse Macabre* are of course ubiquitous. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that the audience for classical music has a limited capacity, but it does mean that many fine works have effectively vanished. This relative neglect started fairly shortly after his death. By then he was being seen in musical circles as anachronistic, set trenchantly in the old ways and very wary of modernism (this can in fact be debated at length!) however he was still hugely loved by the concert going public, and was given a spectacular funeral. However the appetite for all things new gradually eclipsed the 'old-fashioned' to the extent that even the *Organ Symphony* received a very cold and dismissive review in London in 1935. Perhaps things are now changing, with more recordings of less well known works, and these recordings of Saint-Saëns' transcriptions, with a couple of original works, hope to throw some light on a neglected area of an important composer.



Antony Gray

Saint-Saëns: Oratorio, Cantata & Occasional Pieces

Saint-Saëns wrote his oratorio *Le Déluge*, Op 45 in 1875, with the first performance the following year. It is written about with great enthusiasm as one of the composers' best works, but it is rarely heard today. The vocal score was published in 1876, and the *Prelude* issued as a separate piece for piano solo. No-one is credited as the arranger, so it is possible that Saint-Saëns himself produced the piano score – a relatively straightforward labour given that he would have originally written the work in short/piano score. At least he will have supervised all aspects of publication. The *Prelude* is scored for strings alone in the orchestral version, with a violin solo in the final section which became quite well known. Editions for violin and piano were also published. A somewhat archaic feel and a fugal style at the beginning of the *Prelude* suggest the antiquity of the subject.

Originally written for the salon combination of piano, harmonium, violin and viola, the *Sérénade*, Op. 15 of 1865 was one of Saint-Saëns' earliest successes, at least in commercial terms. It very quickly became a hit and was issued in numerous transcriptions, both by the composer himself and others. Saint-Saëns produced a version with voice, with words by Louis Mangeot, the present piano transcription, and a much later orchestration. Among the many other versions appeared, in 1899, one scored for two mandolins and piano. However the fact that new versions of the *Sérénade* were being produced as late as this show that the work had remained popular, with Thomas Beecham conducting the orchestral version in London in 1913. Neither the piano or orchestral version deviates from the original text, although the version for piano is certainly carefully re-imagined, and has an extra chord at the end, not present in either of the other versions. Once again this is a charming salon piece, with some delightful harmonic touches, that has undeservedly disappeared from the repertoire.

Hector Berlioz completed *La Damnation de Faust* in 1846. The first of his earlier *Huit Scenes de Faust*, *Chant de la fête de Pâques*, was incorporated, revised and rescored, as the beginning of Act 2. In 1855, at the age of 20, Saint-Saëns made this masterly

transcription which remains completely faithful to the original score, but creates the impression of being an original piano work, so deft is Saint-Saëns' imagination in transferring the choral and orchestral score to the piano. Berlioz was an early admirer of Saint-Saëns' talent, and they were to work together editing early French music as well as the operas of Gluck.

The curious little *Improvisation* was written for an *Album du Gaulois* in 1885. In it, Saint-Saëns seems to be experimenting harmonically, building up strangely dissonant harmonies, which then resolve with complete logic. It was dedicated to *Madame la Comtesse de Mercy-Argenteau*, who wrote to thank him for the manuscript and dedication, saying the piece was 'a little pearl – as fine as possible', which indeed it is. It has not been reprinted since the original publication.

An example of the plethora of arrangements/transcriptions which abounded throughout the 18th/19th centuries is this relatively straightforward reduction of Schumann's Op. 85 no 12, scored by Schumann originally for piano duet, into a version for piano solo. Schumann's original is sparsely scored, so the arrangement needs scant modification. Saint-Saëns performed the transcription in 1865. At some point he also produced an orchestral version of the work, and both were published in 1872.

One of Franz Liszt's early works was a cantata written for the inauguration of the Beethoven monument in Bonn, in 1845. In 1870, according to Sabina Teller Ratner, Liszt revised and reorchestrated the work for a commemorative performance honouring Beethoven's centenary. Both works are rarely heard today, the first version not having survived in its full orchestral score. Saint-Saëns attended the 1870 performance, and it is presumably this version of the cantata on which he based his '*Improvisation sur la Beethoven-Cantate de F. Liszt*', also published in 1870. The piece opens with a quotation of the theme of the slow movement of Beethoven's 'Archduke' trio. The music then develops a very Lisztian dimension before finishing with a grandiose finale based on the main theme of the first movement of the 'Eroica' symphony. The *Improvisation* was dedicated to Louise Langhans, a German pianist, as was Liszt's cantata, although there is no record of a public performance.

Two unpublished pieces from 1858, were provisionally called, by Saint-Saëns' secretary and early biographer Jean Bonnerot, '*Deux Bagatelles*'. Perhaps these two pieces were either originally intended to be part of the opus 3 *Bagatelles*, originally published in 1856, or perhaps the beginning of a second set of Bagatelles. Both manuscripts lack an actual title.

The *Berceuse*, Op. 105 was an occasional work written in 1896 for the birth of a daughter of one of Saint-Saëns' influential circle, Madame de Villers, at her request. Originally written for piano four hands, Saint-Saëns offered his publisher to make a version for two hands. In the end this labour fell to Isidor Philipp, and was published in the version for two hands in 1903. It is an example of Saint-Saëns' fecundity that even such a relatively slight work is perfectly formed, perfectly executed and delightful.

Saint-Saëns was in London in 1871 to attend the London International Exhibition. Charles Gounod had been commissioned to write a cantata for the event, and produced his work *Gallia*. It was rapturously received, quickly published in London (by Novello), France and the United States, but has subsequently disappeared completely from the repertoire. Saint-Saëns produced his *Paraphrase sur Gallia* almost immediately, and it was published in the same year, also by Novello. It has also disappeared completely from the repertoire. Once again it is hard to understand why. Gounod's original is a fine work, conforming to the Victorian tastes of the time, but Saint-Saëns really raises it to another level. He compresses all four sections of the cantata into a single, twelve minute movement, adding delightful counterpoint to the soprano solo second section, in place of Gounod's rather conventional accompaniment, and adding an almost Lisztian array of arpeggios, rushing scales and thunderous chords. Gounod's glorious final theme is given a majestic send-off. Saint-Saëns is recorded as having performed the work at least a couple of times, and was always open about his admiration for Gounod.

Bach and Milan

It may seem unlikely to discover in Saint-Saëns' works two transcriptions of lute pieces by the 16th century Spanish composer named on the first edition as D. Luis Milan de Valence (but who is usually now known as Luis de Milan) but it is indicative of Saint-Saëns' wide-ranging musical interests. He was involved in editing much early French music, unfashionable at the time, and was in fact one of the earliest pianists to perform the Mozart piano concertos which were virtually unknown in France. The extent to which Milan was unknown, at least in France, at the time is emphasised by the fact that Saint-Saëns caused to have written on the published title page "*Compositeur espagnole du XVIe Siecle*" under Milan's name.

The transcriptions were dedicated to Count Guillermo de Morphy, who had worked at the Spanish court and made an important study into Spanish lute music. Saint-Saëns wrote the two transcriptions during a break in Las Palmas in 1898 and gave the premiere later that year in Madrid. These are no mere 'transcriptions'. They are pianistically conceived, and considerably expanded from the lute originals, recognisably baroque, but unmistakably 'modern'. In 1913 he made a version for harp, but sadly this has not survived.

Saint-Saëns' largest collection in this field is the *douze transcriptions* of works by Johann Sebastian Bach. There are two sets, the first made in 1861 and the second in 1873. Two are labelled 9A and 9B, meaning that the total set in fact has 13 numbers. Was he superstitious? (In fact no. 7 is now thought to be by Johann Ludwig Bach, a second cousin of J.S.)

The Bach revival had been going on since Mendelssohn had rediscovered the St Matthew Passion, and Saint-Saëns had the D minor Concerto in his repertoire, again well ahead of his time. Liszt had already made a number of transcriptions of organ works, Schumann had written piano parts for the solo violin sonatas, among others. Unlike Liszt however, Saint-Saëns drew from the church cantatas, only recently published in yearly issues, and the solo violin works. So in essence there are two distinct types of transcription here.

For the cantata movements it involved making the orchestral/vocal score playable on the piano, and in some cases adding continuo realisation, while in the case of the violin works it was necessary to fill out the implied harmonies, turning the works into convincing keyboard works.

However, unlike, for example, the Milan transcriptions, Saint-Saëns here stays faithful to the original text. Once again, clearly Bach, but also satisfying 'modern' piano works. Among many engaging touches could be mentioned the beginning of no. 5, the *Andante* of the third violin sonata, which is initially set – an octave lower than the original – for left hand solo, before being opulently filled out at the repeat of the theme. The fugue from the C major violin sonata becomes an astonishingly magisterial edifice.

At the time of writing the first set, Saint-Saëns was teaching at the Ecole Niedermeyer, and each piece is dedicated to one of his students, the first of those being Gabriel Fauré. Fauré could be said to have been a 'favourite' pupil of Saint-Saëns, who was only ten years older, and their friendship and Fauré's gratitude and appreciation of the older man would last their whole lives. Perhaps the only other dedicatee to be remembered today is Albert Perilhou, who would go on to be a distinguished organist and teacher, and a composer, although little of his work is known today. (The others are Eugene Gigout, Adolphe Dietrich, Adam Laussel and Emile Lehman.) It may be noted that in the original edition, the first piece was referred to as Cantata No. 28 whereas in fact it is now known as no. 29.

The second set was dedicated to Wilhelmine Szarvady, one of the most distinguished pianists of her time, and highly regarded by Berlioz. Saint-Saëns played many of these transcriptions himself in a number of concerts during his lifetime.

The Pianist

Antony Gray was born and educated in Victoria, Australia. He graduated from the Victorian College of Arts where he studied with Roy Shepherd and Stephen McIntyre, winning several awards and prizes, including the Allans Keyboard Award two years running. In 1982 he received a scholarship from the Astra foundation to continue his studies in London with Joyce Rathbone and Geoffrey Parsons.

Antony based now for many years in London, has long been regarded as one of the most interesting and communicative performers of his generation. His career to date has encompassed solo and chamber music performances around the world, as well as regular recordings for CD and radio. He has been a (selective) champion of contemporary music and has premiered many pieces written for him. He has also championed many neglected composers such as Enescu, Dussek and Martinů. Since his time at college he has been a champion of many living composers, and his work with Australian composers Malcolm Williamson and John Carmichael has been particularly productive.

Antony Gray is one of ABC Classics' most prolific recording artists, having recorded fourteen discs of solo piano music for the label, as well as featuring on a recital disc for KNS Classical and a number of other recording projects. Recordings already released include the complete solo piano works of Eugene Goossens, Malcolm Williamson and John Carmichael, as well as the late piano pieces of Johannes Brahms, on ABC Classics. He also features in a performance of the John Carmichael piano quartet on the highly successful disc 'Sea Changes'.

He has also made a 3-disc set of Bach transcriptions, including several written specially for the recording, and a 5-disc set of the complete piano works of Francis Poulenc, including a number of works recorded for the first time, both again on ABC Classics. On joining Divine Art his most recent release (July, 2021) is a fascinating double album of rare works written for piano teacher and pupil entitled 'Il Maestro e lo Scolare'. Companion to this present disc, released early 2022, is volume 1 of the Saint-Saëns piano transcriptions.



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ANTONY GRAY



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