

NAXOS

# SAINT-SAËNS

## Orchestral Works

Suite algérienne

Suite in D major

Suite for cello and  
orchestra in D minor

Serenade in E flat major

Guillermo Pastrana, Cello

Basque National  
Orchestra

Jun Märkl



## Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921)

### Orchestral Works

Born in Paris in 1835, Camille Saint-Saëns is one of the most extraordinary musical prodigies in the history of Western music. As a highly gifted pianist he made his concert debut at the age of ten, at which he announced to the audience that he would happily perform any of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas as an encore. Having studied at the Paris Conservatoire, he followed a conventional path as a church organist, first at Saint-Merri, Paris, and later at La Madeleine, where he remained for some two decades and was praised for his improvisatory prowess. He was much in demand throughout Europe and the Americas, enjoying a successful career as a pianist and composer; however, the perception of Saint-Saëns the composer changed throughout his lifetime, which coincided with a period of revolutionary changes in the arts. During his youth, he championed such progressive figures as Wagner and Liszt, yet in his later years he revealed a much more conservative approach, rooted in tradition and reactionary to the innovative developments of Debussy, Stravinsky and others.

Saint-Saëns was a keen traveller. His ventures took him to Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, North and South America, England, Scandinavia, Russia and the Canary Islands, but Egypt and Algeria were to remain his preferred holiday venues. Indeed, the composer met his death in Algeria during what was to become his final stay in the country on 16 December 1921. Saint-Saëns' personal experiences frequently translated into musical pieces, and a number of geographically themed works can be found among his output, such as the fantasy for piano and orchestra, *Africa*, the *Piano Concerto No. 5 'Egyptian'*, and the *Suite algérienne*.

The theme of the third movement of the *Suite algérienne* came to the composer during his initial visit to the country in 1873, appearing in the context of a single-movement piece called *Réverie orientale*. It was a great success at a charity concert in Paris on 7 June 1879, after which Saint-Saëns' publisher, Auguste Durand, urged him

to write more 'picturesque' pieces in a similar vein. The remaining three movements of the suite were composed in the seaside town of Boulogne-sur-Mer during the summer of 1880, and the whole suite was first performed in Paris on 19 December that year. As with the premiere of the *Réverie orientale* – the initial seed of this work – the audience received the suite enthusiastically, and it was published the following year with a dedication to Albert Kopff, an ophthalmologist and pianist of Alsatian origin, who became a friend of Saint-Saëns during his stay in Algeria.

The suite is essentially a musical picture postcard travesty of what was then a French colonial outpost in North Africa (hence the brazen confidence of the concluding *Marche militaire française*). The *Prélude* opens subtly and mysteriously, offering an initial view of Algiers. The traveller's approach by sea is reflected in the undulating movement of the music, while other phrases indicate the vessel approaching the harbour and glimpses of new and exotic sights, as well as the mounting excitement of the noises of the city. The second movement, *Rhapsodie mauresque* ('Moorish Rhapsody'), includes Saint-Saëns' re-workings of Arab tunes he had heard, and the exotic flavour is heightened by the inclusion of a tambourine towards the end. Next comes *Réverie du soir (À Blidah)* ('An Evening Dream at Blidah') (a city near Algiers), in which a gentle, romantic nocturne conveys all the lingering sensuality of the sounds and scents of the Arabian perfumed night. In the last movement, a French military march is worked up in elaborate style. A note in the score indicates that the composer not only emphasises his joy in viewing the French garrison, but also the security felt under its protection, expressed musically in the pompous rhythm of the march. This movement became a great favourite with military bands and Saint-Saëns himself recorded it in a piano arrangement. One of his biographers, James Harding, has suggested that its brisk, impatient, buoyant character is an unintentional self-portrait of the composer, who always felt the urge to have done with a work because the idea for another was already plaguing his restless brain.

In its original form, the *Suite in D major, Op. 49* might be considered a remnant of a now defunct genre: music for harmonium. This instrument enjoyed great popularity in the 19th century, especially in France. The fact that Saint-Saëns originally composed the *Suite in D major* for harmonium in 1863 can be seen, therefore, as conforming to the fashion of the time, and as the instrument was often seen as a 'substitute orchestra', it was inevitable that in 1869 he prepared an orchestral version for the Concerts Litolff held at the Paris Opera. The suite is largely characterised by French Baroque dance movements, as found in the music of old French masters such as Rameau, but also (and most famously) in the solo violin, cello and keyboard suites and partitas of Bach. Beginning with a *Prélude* dominated by low, rustic-sounding drones, a stately *Sarabande* follows which, despite its Baroque inspiration, simultaneously seems to look ahead to the music of Elgar (not least the *Serenade for Strings*, 1892). This gives way to a lively *Gavotte*, a medium-paced dance in ABA form, whose middle 'B' section sees the return of a drone (this time in the upper strings), supporting a pair of duetting flutes. The remaining two movements leave the world of French Baroque dance music behind: after the calm introspection of the gently flowing *Romance*, the *moto perpetuo* drive of the *Final* rounds off this attractive suite with a *scherzo*-like finesse.

The *Suite in D minor, Op. 16* was originally conceived for cello and piano, but was revised and orchestrated in 1919 (Saint-Saëns wrote two new movements for the orchestral version, the *Gavotte* and the *Tarentelle*). As with the *Suite in D, Op. 49*, it is structured around dance movements, though not all from France. The opening *Prélude* seems to inhabit the same idiom as Bach's solo cello suites, while the following *Sérénade* has hints of Spain, as well as the famous *Pavane* of Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924), one of Saint-Saëns' pupils, in its identical scoring at the start – a solo flute and pizzicato strings opening this gentle waltz. The *Gavotte* is altogether more formal in nature, but it relaxes as echoes of Bach are

heard again in the folk-like trio section, where the cello plays unaccompanied with a tonic drone in a double-stopped passage that recalls the second *Gavotte* from Bach's *Cello Suite No. 6*. The mood shifts for the reflective *Romance*: after several statements of the main theme, Saint-Saëns briefly borrows (perhaps inadvertently) the opening of the central *Adagio* from Mozart's *Third Violin Concerto* and develops this, leading to a passage of greater intensity, after which the principal theme returns, a solo flute decorating the cello's melody. The final *Tarentelle* sees Saint-Saëns indulging his playful side while at the same time demonstrating his contrapuntal skill (a final homage to Bach), and is finished off with a triumphant conclusion.

The *Serenade in E flat major, Op. 15* is something of a Saint-Saëns rarity, no doubt due to its rather eccentric scoring of piano, organ/harmonium, violin and viola/cello. Composed in 1865, it is one of his earliest works to include an organ within a chamber ensemble, though it now exists in various transcriptions for orchestra, piano solo, piano four-hands and piano quartet. It is dedicated to Princess Mathilde Bonaparte Demidoff, who in 1860 had exempted Saint-Saëns from military service. The piece was first performed at a soirée held by the Prince of Hohenzollern on 7 January 1866, with the composer himself playing the organ. It was performed on two more occasions that year, with the third performance boasting an audience that included Berlioz, Gounod and Liszt.

**Dominic Wells**

## Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921)

### Œuvres orchestrales

Né à Paris en 1835, Camille Saint-Saëns est l'un des prodiges les plus extraordinaires de l'histoire de la musique occidentale. Pianiste superbement doué, il débute au concert à l'âge de dix ans et annonce à la fin de sa prestation qu'il se fera un plaisir de jouer en bis n'importe laquelle des trente-deux sonates de Beethoven. Il passe par le Conservatoire de Paris, devient organiste titulaire à Saint-Merri, puis à La Madeleine où il restera pendant une vingtaine d'années et sera admiré pour ses talents d'improvisateur. Il est extrêmement sollicité à travers l'Europe et en Amérique, et mène avec succès une carrière de pianiste et de compositeur. Cependant, la manière dont il est perçu comme compositeur évolue au cours de sa carrière qui coïncide avec une période de changements révolutionnaires dans les arts. Si, durant ses années de jeunesse, il se fait le champion d'artistes novateurs comme Wagner et Liszt, il adopte ensuite une attitude bien plus conservatrice, ancrée dans la tradition et rétive aux innovations de Debussy, Stravinsky et d'autres.

Saint-Saëns aimait voyager. Ses périples l'emmenèrent en Espagne, au Portugal, en Italie, en Grèce, en Amérique du Nord et du Sud, en Angleterre, en Scandinavie, en Russie, aux îles Canaries, mais c'est l'Égypte et l'Algérie qui demeurèrent ses lieux de villégiature préférés. C'est d'ailleurs en Algérie qu'il mourut, le 16 décembre 1921. Il transposait fréquemment ses impressions de voyage dans sa musique et quelques-unes de ses œuvres sont liées à un lieu géographique, notamment la fantaisie pour piano et orchestre *Africa*, le Cinquième Concerto pour piano « égyptien » et la *Suite algérienne*.

Le thème du troisième mouvement de la *Suite algérienne* lui vient durant sa première visite dans le pays, en 1873. Il apparaît dans un morceau baptisé *Réverie orientale* qui remporte un grand succès à un concert de bienfaisance à Paris, le 7 juin 1879. L'éditeur Auguste Durand presse ensuite Saint-Saëns d'écrire d'autres pièces « pittoresques » dans une veine similaire. Le compositeur s'exécute : les trois autres mouvements de la suite voient le jour à Boulogne-sur-Mer durant l'été 1880,

et la suite entière est donnée à Paris le 19 décembre. Comme pour la *Réverie orientale*, premier germe de l'œuvre, l'accueil du public est enthousiaste. La partition est publiée l'année suivante avec une dédicace à Albert Kopff, ophtalmologiste et pianiste d'origine alsacienne qui s'était lié d'amitié avec Saint-Saëns en Algérie.

Cette suite est essentiellement une série de cartes postales musicales de ce qui était alors un avant-poste du territoire colonial français d'Afrique du Nord (d'où la fière assurance de la *Marche militaire française* conclusive). Le *Prélude*, qui nous offre une première vue d'Alger, ouvre l'œuvre de manière subtile et mystérieuse. L'approche du voyageur par bateau se reflète dans le mouvement ondulant de la musique, tandis que certaines phrases reflètent le navire arrivant au port et les premiers détails nouveaux et exotiques que l'on aperçoit, ainsi que les bruits de plus en plus forts qui parviennent de la ville. Le deuxième morceau, *Rhapsodie mauresque*, renferme des mélodies arabes que Saint-Saëns avait entendues durant son séjour, et le parfum exotique est rehaussé à la fin par la présence d'un tambourin. Vient ensuite la *Réverie du soir – à Blidah* (ville proche d'Alger), doux nocturne romantique qui véhicule toute la sensualité des sons et des parfums de la nuit arabe. Le dernier morceau, la marche militaire, est façonné dans un style élaboré. Dans une note de la partition, le compositeur souligne la joie de voir un régiment français mais aussi le sentiment de sécurité qu'il inspire, ce qui s'exprime dans le rythme pompeux de la musique. Cette marche devint un morceau favori des fanfares militaires et Saint-Saëns en enregistra une transcription pour piano. L'un des biographes du compositeur, James Harding, estime qu'il faut voir dans son caractère vif, gai et impatient un autoportrait involontaire de Saint-Saëns, lequel se montrait toujours impatient de terminer une partition parce que son esprit agité était déjà tourmenté par l'idée de l'œuvre suivante.

Dans sa forme originale, la Suite op. 49 en ré majeur peut être considérée comme un vestige d'un genre défunt :

la musique pour harmonium. Cet instrument jouissait d'une grande popularité au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, notamment en France. Le fait qu'à l'origine, en 1863, Saint-Saëns composa sa Suite en *ré* majeur pour harmonium est donc une concession au goût de l'époque, et comme l'instrument passait souvent pour un « ersatz d'orchestre », on ne s'étonnera pas que le compositeur préparât en 1869 une version orchestrale qui fut donnée aux Concerts Litoff, à l'Opéra. La partition est largement calquée sur la suite baroque française dont on trouve des exemples entre autres chez Rameau, mais aussi dans les suites et partitas de Bach pour violon, violoncelle ou clavecin. Elle s'ouvre sur un *Prélude* où résonne un bourdon rustique dans le grave. Suit une *Sarabande* majestueuse qui, malgré son inspiration baroque, semble en même temps anticiper la musique d'Elgar (notamment sa *Sérénade pour cordes* de 1892). Elle cède la place à une *Gavotte* entraînante et vive de forme ABA à dont la partie centrale ramène un bourdon (cette fois-ci dans les cordes aiguës) soutenant un duo de flûtes. Les deux derniers mouvements quittent l'univers de la danse baroque française : se succèdent une *Romance* calme, introvertie et fluide, et un *Final* énergique, mouvement perpétuel qui conclut l'œuvre avec une légèreté de scherzo.

La Suite op. 16 en *ré* mineur fut conçue à l'origine pour violoncelle et piano, puis révisée et orchestrée en 1919 (Saint-Saëns écrit deux nouveaux mouvements pour la version orchestrale, la *Gavotte* et la *Tarentelle*). Comme la Suite op. 49, elle se compose principalement de danses, mais pas toutes d'origine française. Le *Prélude* semble faire appel au même langage que celui des suites pour violoncelle de Bach, tandis que la *Sérénade* qui suit a des couleurs espagnoles et rappelle la fameuse *Pavane* d'un élève de Saint-Saëns, Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924) : l'orchestration est identique au départ, une flûte sur des pizzicato de cordes, qui esquisse une valse délicate. La *Gavotte* est dans l'ensemble plus formelle de caractère mais se détend dans le trio central qui fait référence à la musique populaire et où résonnent

à nouveau des échos de Bach : dans un passage sans accompagnement, le violoncelle joue en doubles cordes une mélodie sur un bourdon qui rappelle la deuxième *Gavotte* de la Sixième Suite pour violoncelle du maître de Leipzig. Le climat change avec la *Romance*, méditative. Après plusieurs énoncés du thème principal, Saint-Saëns emprunte brièvement (peut-être inconsciemment) le début de l'*Adagio* central du Troisième Concerto pour violon de Mozart, qu'il développe jusqu'à un passage de grande intensité. Puis le thème principal revient au violoncelle, avec une ornementation de la flûte. Dans la *Tarentelle* finale, le compositeur laisse parler son côté enjoué tout en montrant son habileté contrapuntique (ultime hommage à Bach) et achève l'œuvre sur une conclusion triomphante.

La *Sérénade* op. 15 en *mi* bémol majeur est un peu une curiosité dans l'œuvre de Saint-Saëns de par son instrumentation singulière : piano, orgue ou harmonium, violon, alto ou violoncelle. Composée en 1865, c'est l'une de ses premières partitions de musique de chambre faisant appel à l'orgue – elle existe cependant aujourd'hui dans diverses transcriptions pour orchestre, piano seul, quatre mains et quatuor avec piano. Saint-Saëns l'a dédiée à la princesse Mathilde Bonaparte Demidoff qui avait usé de son influence en 1860 pour le faire exempter du service militaire. Entendue en première audition le 7 janvier 1866 à une soirée donnée par le prince de Hohenzollern, avec le compositeur à l'orgue, elle fut reprise à deux autres concerts la même année. Au dernier d'entre eux se trouvaient Berlioz, Gounod et Liszt dans le public.

**Dominic Wells**

*Traduction : Daniel Fesquet*

## Guillermo Pastrana



The Spanish cellist Guillermo Pastrana was born in Granada in 1983 and began his studies at the Conservatory there when he was six, developing his exceptionally early musical interests and his love of the cello. At the age of seventeen he travelled abroad, studying with Ivan Monighetti in Basle, where he now lives, and enjoying an active career. He has appeared in concerts and recitals in various cities and international festivals, collaborating with distinguished conductors including Antoni Wit, Aldo Ceccato, Michał Nesterowicz, Paul Daniel, Josep Vicent, Manuel Hernández Silva and Miguel Ángel Gómez-Martínez. He has been praised by critics and audiences for his musicality, quality of sound, technical perfection and stage charisma.

[www.guillermopastrana.com](http://www.guillermopastrana.com)

## Basque National Orchestra (Orquesta Sinfónica de Euskadi)



Today the Basque National Orchestra (BNO) is one of the leading symphony ensembles in Spain. Founded in 1982, and thanks to an established, well-structured schedule, the Orchestra gives regular performances throughout the Basque region as well as international tours and maintains a busy recording schedule highlighting Basque composers. The BNO participates as a guest orchestra at summer festivals and opera performances, and maintains an active outreach programme developing, through workshops and concerts, a growing social network for the integration of people with disabilities. Robert Trevino became the orchestra's music director as of the 2017/2018 season. The BNO's former music directors include Jun Märkl, Andrey Boreyko (as principal guest conductor), Andrés Orozco-Estrada, Gilbert Varga, Cristian Mandeal, Mario Venzago, Hans Graf, Miguel Angel Gómez Martínez, Mathias Kuntzsch, Maximiano Valdés and Enrique Jordá, its founder. It has also collaborated with solo artists such as Maria João Pires, Frank Peter Zimmermann, Mischa Maisky, Antonio Meneses, Christian Zacharias, Leonidas Kavakos, Radu Lupu, Joaquín Achúcarro, Arcadi Volodos, Alexander Lonquich, Katia & Marielle Labèque, Nicholas Angelich, Heinrich Schiff, Alban Gerhardt, Vadim Repin, Viviane Hagner, Jennifer Koh, Zoe Nicolaidou, Ainhoa Arteta, María Bayo, Carlos Álvarez and Carlos Mena.

[www.euskadikoorkestra.eus](http://www.euskadikoorkestra.eus)

## Jun Märkl



Photo: Christiane Höhne

Jun Märkl was music director of the Orchestre National de Lyon from 2005 to 2011 and principal conductor/artistic advisor of the MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony until 2012. In recognition of his tenure in Lyon and his very successful nine-disc Debussy cycle with the orchestra on Naxos [8.509002], in 2012 he was honoured by the French Ministry of Culture with the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. He also toured with the orchestra to Japan and major European halls and festivals. He has appeared as a guest conductor with leading orchestras in the United States, Europe and Japan, and at the Met, Covent Garden, Vienna State and Dresden Semper Operas. He also enjoys a close relationship with the NHK Symphony with which he conducted the first Japanese *Ring* cycle in Tokyo, and has performed and given premieres of many of Toshio Hosokawa's works, including *Lotus under the moonlight* with Momo Kodama in 2006. Born in Munich to a German father, a distinguished concertmaster, and a Japanese mother, a solo pianist, Märkl studied violin, piano and conducting at the Musikhochschule in Hanover, going on to study with Sergiu Celibidache in Munich and with Gustav Meier in Michigan. In 1986 he won the conducting competition of the Deutsche Musikrat and a year later won a scholarship from the Boston Symphony Orchestra to study at Tanglewood with Leonard Bernstein and Seiji Ozawa. Soon afterwards he had a string of appointments in European opera houses followed by his first music directorships at the Staatstheater in Saarbrücken (1991–94) and at the Mannheim Nationaltheater (1994–2000). Jun Märkl has long been a highly respected interpreter of the core Germanic repertoire from both the symphonic and operatic traditions, and, more recently, for his refined and idiomatic performances of the music of Debussy, Ravel and Messiaen. He is Invited Professor at the Kunitachi College of Music in Tokyo.

[www.junmarkl.com](http://www.junmarkl.com)



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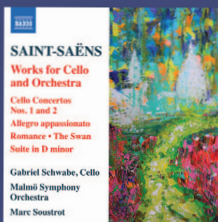
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Saint-Saëns' travels often resulted in geographically themed works, such as the *Suite algérienne*: this exotic musical picture postcard – full of perfumed sensuality and the brazen confidence of march themes – reflects the composer's visits to colonial North Africa. The two suites on this recording are both structured around dance movements and were originally scored for different forces – the *Suite in D major*, Op. 49 for harmonium, the *Suite in D minor*, Op. 16 for cello and piano. The engaging *Serenade*, Op. 15, rarely performed with its original, exotic scoring, is heard here in an orchestral transcription.

Camille  
**SAINT-SAËNS**  
 (1835–1921)

**Suite algérienne, Op. 60 (1873/1880)**

19:11

- |   |                                 |      |
|---|---------------------------------|------|
| 1 | I. Prélude                      | 3:49 |
| 2 | II. Rhapsodie mauresque         | 5:19 |
| 3 | III. Rêverie du soir (A Blidah) | 5:39 |
| 4 | IV. Marche militaire française  | 4:14 |

**Suite in D major, Op. 49 (1863/1869)**

20:03

- |   |               |      |
|---|---------------|------|
| 5 | I. Prélude    | 2:52 |
| 6 | II. Sarabande | 2:59 |
| 7 | III. Gavotte  | 3:19 |
| 8 | IV. Romance   | 6:45 |
| 9 | V. Final      | 3:45 |

**Suite in D minor, Op. 16bis  
 (version for cello and orchestra) (1919)**

21:10

- |    |                                  |      |
|----|----------------------------------|------|
| 10 | I. Prélude: Moderato assai       | 2:28 |
| 11 | II. Sérénade: Andantino          | 3:31 |
| 12 | III. Gavotte: Allegro non troppo | 3:47 |
| 13 | IV. Romance: Molto adagio        | 7:12 |
| 14 | V. Tarentelle: Presto non troppo | 3:46 |

**15 Serenade in E flat major, Op. 15 (version for orchestra, 1865)** 6:15

Guillermo Pastrana, Cello 10–14

**Basque National Orchestra/Orquesta Sinfónica de Euskadi**  
**Jun Märkl**

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 a Lane* by August Macke (1887–1914) (The Yorck Project / City Museum, Göttingen, Germany)