

Season Finale
Voice of the Romantic

May 5 & 6, 2012

Camille Saint-Saëns
(1835 – 1921)

La Muse et le Poète
Jacob Klock, violin
Ramona McKonkie, cello

Frédéric Chopin
(1810 – 1849)

Andante Spianato and Grande Polonaise, op. 22
Angelina Gadeliya, piano

INTERMISSION

Robert Schumann
(1810 – 1856)

Symphony No. 2 in C Major, op. 61
I. Sostenuto assai; Un poco piu vivace;
Allegro man non troppo; Con fuoco
II. Scherzo: Allegro vivace (Trios I & II)
III. Adagio espressivo
IV. Allegro molto vivace

Overview: Camille Saint-Saëns

Born: October 9, 1835, in Paris

Died: December 16, 1921, in Algiers

Work Composed: 1909 – 1910

Why It Matters: Saint-Saëns' later works were lost in the *avant garde* craze that dominated Paris in the early twentieth century. Though he wasn't provoking riots at his performances like Stravinsky, Saint-Saëns was still quietly innovating. His later works are thought by many to represent the culmination of the French Romantic.



He knows everything, but lacks inexperience.—Hector Berlioz, regarding Camille Saint-Saëns.

Camille Saint-Saëns composed *La Muse et le Poète* while on vacation in Egypt during the winter of 1909 – 1910. With atonal and *avant garde* music ruling Paris in the early twentieth century, Saint-Saëns was finding his music increasingly ignored in France, though he was still popular in England and America and continued receiving commissions. (His last orchestral work was, surprisingly, an overture called *Hail! California*.) *La Muse et le Poète* was originally composed for violin, cello and piano, and it is still performed that way today, but Saint-Saëns clearly intended the piece for soloists and orchestra from the beginning. Leaving the piece untitled, he sent it off to his publisher, where it was given its title, implying a programmatic characterization of a poet and his muse (“muse” having the double meaning of poet’s genius or perhaps an external, feminine inspiration). Saint-Saëns eventually signed off on this idea, though he had already described the piece as “a conversation between the two instruments instead of a debate between two virtuosos,” suggesting a new approach to the double concerto. The piece was premiered in 1910 in London with violinist Eugene Ysaÿe and cellist Joseph Hollmann.

About Camille Saint-Saëns: Many composers began as freakish children, but by any standards Saint-Saëns was an extreme case. As a two-year-old he could read and write, and was picking out melodies on the piano. Shortly after his third birthday he began composing, and by the age of five had given his first piano recital. At seven he was reading Latin, studying botany and developing what was to become an eighty-year interest in lepidoptery, (the study of butterflies and moths). As an encore after his formal debut as a concert pianist, the 10-year-old Camille offered to play any of Beethoven’s 32 sonatas from memory. In short, his childhood suggested Mozartian potential that was never realized. Saint-Saëns once remarked that he lived “in music like a fish in water” and that composing was as natural as “an apple tree producing apples.” And there lay the problem. As with Mendelssohn, the technique came so easily to him that it virtually extinguished the spark of originality.

That said, for years he was considered by many to be France’s greatest musical revolutionary, though his reputation grew more from his outspoken support for other composers’ music—especially Wagner’s—than from any work of his own. As well as promoting contemporary music, Saint-Saëns threw his energies into researching the work of his forerunners. Along with Mendelssohn, he was one of the first to reestablish the music of Bach (converting the skeptical Berlioz in the process) and he did much to restore Mozart to his rightful place, being the first to play a complete cycle of the piano concerti. Handel was another unfashionable composer to engage Saint-Saëns’ attention, and (as with Berlioz) Gluck held a fascination that lasted most of his life. By the time Saint-Saëns reached his mid-fifties, the past had won the upper hand over the present. Embittered, ill-tempered and restless, he became the arch-traditionalist, opposing the progressive music of Debussy and Ravel, bellowing outrage at the first performance of *The Rite of Spring*, and yet,

for all his reactionary pomposity, he was one of the first neo-classicists, embodying many of the finest traditional qualities of French music—neatness, clarity, elegance and dignity. His best epitaph is the rueful one he wrote for himself: “I ran after the chimera of purity of style and perfection of form.”

Overview: Frédéric Chopin

Born: February 22 or March 1, 1810 (church records and family accounts disagree), near Warsaw, Poland

Died: October 17, 1849, in Paris

Work Composed: 1830 – 1834

Why It Matters: With such an odd title and extended sections of solo piano without the orchestra, Chopin’s *Andante Spianato et Grande Polonaise Brillante* is often overlooked, but it is some of Chopin’s best writing for piano and orchestra and a fine example of his mature style.



Simplicity is the final achievement. After one has played a vast quantity of notes and more notes, it is simplicity that emerges as the crowning reward of art.—
Frédéric Chopin

Chopin composed his *Grande Polonaise Brillante* for piano and orchestra in 1830 – 1831, starting it during his final months in Warsaw and finishing the work in Vienna. The piece stood remarkably well on its own, but Chopin would return in 1834 to add the *Andante Spianato* to the beginning, publishing the combined work in 1836 as his op. 22 with a dedication to Madame d’Este. “Spianato” means “even” or “smooth,” and this is the only piece for which Chopin used the term, with obvious reference to the quiet rippling textures of the opening section. Chopin premiered the complete

Andante Spianato et Grande Polonaise Brillante at the Conservatoire Concerts in Paris on April 26, 1835.

About Frédéric Chopin: Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849) was born in Warsaw to a French father and Polish mother, and although his Polish heritage was essential to him throughout his life, he would spend nearly the last half of his life in Paris. He began his piano studies with Adalbert Zwiny, who focused primarily on the music of Bach and Mozart at a time when their music was far from fashionable. Nonetheless, it gave the young Chopin a firm foundation in music and unique perspective for his compositions. At twelve, he enrolled at the Warsaw Conservatory, studying composition with Josef Elsner. He left in 1829 but immediately composed his Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Minor, op. 21, which he premiered the following year. He soon left Poland, where he met Schumann and also learned of the Russian invasion of Poland, which affected him deeply. At the end of 1831, he left for Paris, where he was a major success. He met free-thinking novelist Aurore Dudevant (better known today as George Sand, despite her gender) in 1838. Dudevant was a major influence on his work and they carried on a turbulent relationship that would last until 1847, after which Chopin composed very little. Having long suffered from tuberculosis, Chopin finally succumbed in October, 1849.

Overview: Robert Schumann

Born: June 8, 1810, in Zwickau, Saxony

Died: July 29, 1856, in Bonn, Germany

Work Composed: 1845 – 1846

Why It Matters: Schumann's symphonies are notoriously challenging to perform and interpret, but they also represent the culmination of Schumann's orchestral style and important counterparts to the symphonies of Mendelssohn and Brahms.



I am affected by everything extraordinary that goes on in the world and think it over in my own way ... then I long to express my feelings and find an outlet for them in my music: a poem, something infinitely more spiritual, the result of poetical consciousness.—Robert Schumann

In a letter dated September 20, 1845, **Robert Schumann** had exciting news for his friend and fellow composer, Felix Mendelssohn: “Much drumming and trumpeting has been going on inside me for a few days (trumpet in C); I do not know what will come of it.” The rumbling was his **Symphony No. 2 in C Major, op. 61**. In a constant battle with depression, Schumann explained the symphony further in a letter to Georg Dietrich Otten, Music Director of the Hamburg orchestra: “I wrote the symphony in December 1845 only halfway recovered; I think this can be heard in the music. Only when I was working on the last movement did I begin to feel more myself again; and indeed I felt better after the entire work was complete. Otherwise, it only reminds me of a dark period. I see your sympathy from the fact that even such painful sounds can cause interest ... and that you did not fail to notice my melancholic bassoon in the adagio, which I certainly placed there with particular preference, but which has cheered me up the most.”

Schumann made revisions to the symphony, completing the final version of the score on October 19, 1846. The premiere followed in Leipzig on November 5 with Felix Mendelssohn conducting. The program was so lengthy that it hampered the reception of the work, but the premiere was still a major success for Schumann. Considering Schumann's mental condition, the symphony is surprisingly upbeat, with a triumphant ending. Oddly, the symphony and Schumann's Piano Concerto in A Minor both had disastrous premieres in Dresden, where the Schumanns had recently moved.

About Robert Schumann: The life of Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856) is one of the unfortunate tragedies in the history of music. Schumann died a failure in his own eyes, a life cut short by insanity and a musical legacy plagued with self-doubt. His music was a confessional of his inner, tormented life.

He was a middle-class child from Zwickau, Saxony. His father, a bookseller and novelist, died when Robert was just sixteen. Robert's sister, unable to accept the tragedy, committed suicide—a devastating act from which Schumann would never completely recover. He enrolled in the law program at Leipzig University and seemed ready for success. He supplemented his law studies with music, but was told by his music professor that he had no talent whatsoever. This parting led him to private study with Friedrich Wieck, a notable teacher and piano maker from whom Schumann was renting a room. There he met Wieck's daughter, Clara, when she was only nine years old but showing signs of prodigious talent as a pianist. In a few years, Robert would fall in love with Clara—a relationship strictly forbidden by her father. It wasn't until 1840, one day

before Clara's twenty-first birthday, that Schumann won legal action to overturn Wieck's opposition to their relationship and marry Clara.

Schumann was a promising pianist, but he had a strange obsession with the natural inability of the little finger and ring finger to move independently of each other. (Their tendons overlap inside the hand.) Schumann devised a contraption that he hoped would strengthen and liberate the two fingers, but the machine ruined his hands. Schumann made the situation far worse by continuing to use the machine and seeking all sorts of hackneyed cures. On being diagnosed with syphilis, he was prescribed mercury treatments which made everything worse.

With his piano career at a halt and his compositions receiving little attention, Schumann turned to music critique and began publishing his own journal, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Many of his treatises were written from two perspectives that Schumann saw as the two parts of his inner mind; he called them Florestan (the passionate and impulsive youth) and Eusebius (the intellectual).

A certain darkness overtook Schumann's life. Manic depression had begun to affect his work. Despite Mendelssohn's offer of a piano professorship at the new Leipzig Conservatory, Schumann's repeated breakdowns led to a resignation and a move to Dresden. As Clara's performing career flourished, it only underscored the indifference of the world toward Schumann's music, even though Clara performed his music whenever she could. His works were seen as too serious, and he had a decided inability to compose the operas, festival cantatas, and salon-pieces that were making good money in those days. He tried a brief spell as a conductor in Leipzig beginning in 1850, but four years later the post ended with recriminations and disaster. Schumann attempted suicide by throwing himself into the Rhine, but survived and was committed to an asylum near Bonn. He died there in July, 1856, devastated by tertiary syphilis and having starved himself in his depression.