

The Elephant

for Double Bass and Piano

Camille Saint-Saëns

Allegretto pomposo

Double Bass

Piano

8

15

23

f

f

mf

mf

sim.

Tortoises

for Double Bass and Piano

Camille Saint-Saëns

Andante maestoso

Measures 1-3 of the score. The piece is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The tempo is Andante maestoso. The piano part features a steady accompaniment of eighth-note chords in the right hand and eighth-note chords in the left hand. The double bass part has a melodic line starting in measure 1, with a *pp* dynamic marking. The first four notes of the double bass line are marked with a '3', indicating a triplet.

Measures 4-6 of the score. The piano accompaniment continues with eighth-note chords. The double bass part continues its melodic line, with a *pp* dynamic marking. The first four notes of the double bass line are marked with a '3', indicating a triplet.

Measures 7-9 of the score. The piano accompaniment continues with eighth-note chords. The double bass part continues its melodic line, with a *pp* dynamic marking. The first four notes of the double bass line are marked with a '3', indicating a triplet.

Measures 10-12 of the score. The piano accompaniment continues with eighth-note chords. The double bass part continues its melodic line, with a *pp* dynamic marking. The first four notes of the double bass line are marked with a '3', indicating a triplet.

Released from Captivity

by David Heyes

Whether we like it or not, the double bass will be forever linked with the large, lumbering and lugubrious elephant - much as the cello is with the elegant swan, or the tuba with Tubby!

It wasn't always the case, and certainly in the 18th century the double bass was an important and respected solo instrument with a vast repertoire of concertos and solo works by Dittersdorf, Vanhal, Hoffmeister, Pichl, Kohaut, Mozart, Kozeluch, Sperger, Zimmerman and Haydn. In the 19th century Giovanni Bottesini (1821-1889) was able to dispel the myth that the double bass was only an orchestral or bass-line instrument, and one report noted that his bass sounded like 'a cage full of nightingales.'

From 1886, the year of its composition, and 1922, the year of publication, the image of the double bass was changed forever. Saint-Saëns' famed *Carnival of the Animals*, a perennial favourite at children's concerts, represented the double bass in a humorous *pomposo* way and we are now blessed with our own 'national anthem'.

The Carnival of the Animals is one of Saint-Saëns' most popular works and it is perhaps ironic that, in a career lasting almost seventy years and having composed operas, concertos, symphonies, choral works and chamber music, he should be best remembered for a work that was only written as a musical relaxation.

In 1855 Saint-Saëns published *Harmonie et Mélodie*, a collection of critical writings which contained his own 'Gallic scepticism' and academic attitude to the music, and cult-like status, of Wagner and Bayreuth. The book and its reviews hardly went unnoticed in Germany, and during Saint-Saëns' German tour as composer and pianist, in January 1886, he met a degree of hostility from the press and public alike. His biographer, Bonnerot, noted that 'it was as much to forget this affront as to rest from the tour' that in February Saint-Saëns visited a small town in Austria to recuperate.

He had taught at the Ecole Niedermeyer from 1861-65 and always intended to write a work for his pupils there, but the lack of time had always prevented him from doing so. Now he had the time and *The Carnival of the Animals* was written as a method of relaxation. Subtitled *Grande Fantaisie Zoologique*, it has fourteen movements, scored for two pianos and chamber orchestra, and is a rare work of musical humour which never fails to thrill the audience - young or old. The first performance was on 9 March 1886 at the annual Shrove Tuesday concert organised by cellist, Charles Joseph Lebouc, and the pianists were Louis Diémer and the composer himself. A few days later it was played at the Lenten concert of *La Trompette*, a select Parisian chamber music society, but was then withdrawn for over thirty years.

Saint-Saëns' misgivings about the popularity of *The Carnival of the Animals* overshadowing his many other great achievements was entirely accurate and it was not released for publication until after his death in 1921.

His will contained the clause:

I expressly forbid the publication of any unpublished work, except Le Carnaval des Animaux, which may be issued by my usual publishers, M.M.Durand et Cie.

The complete work was published in 1922, just over thirty-five years after its composition, and *The Elephant* was released into the musical community. It now exists in a variety of editions, was used as background music for a series of tv advertisements for a well known UK superstore, and inspired the ever-popular *The Elephant's Gavotte* by New York bassist, David Walter.

One other enduring image is of an almost endless line of bassists, standing along the promenade in Port Erin, performing *The Elephant* during the 1978 Isle of Man Double Bass Competition. Director, John Bethell, astride a large inflatable elephant, conducted the assembled bassists as Clifford Lee manfully provided the accompaniment on a piano dragged across the beach. This was an excellent publicity opportunity, recorded by the BBC, and what else could they play?

Although the generally accepted image of the double bass as a low and rumbling-type solo instrument with no repertoire (we know better) is changing slowly, at least we have one work that is definitely our own and we can build on this by performing and promoting the many wonderful original works from our extensive 250 year repertoire.

[This article was first published in **Bass News** in December 1998 and is reprinted with permission from The British & International Bass Forum.]

Recital Music publish three editions based on The Elephant

RM031 The Elephant & Tortoises [Double Bass & Piano]

RM043 The Elephant [Double Bass Quartet or Massed Bases]

RM302 The Elephant [Double Bass & String Quartet]