

*Tarantella, Op. 6 (1857)*

Camille Saint-Saëns/Walter and Elsa Verdehr

The *Tarantella* is a lightly scored work in A–B–A form with uncomplicated harmonies and crisp 6/8 rhythms which give it the *moto perpetuo* character of a tarantella. The dramatic outer sections are in the key of A minor and have a highly articulated, breathless theme. Sandwiched between them is a lovely lyrical, dolce passage in A major. The coda accelerates to a *prestissimo* for a rousing, exciting close. The *Tarantella*, originally for flute and clarinet with orchestra or piano, was adapted for the violin-clarinet-piano trio by Walter and Elsa Verdehr.

In 1857, the well-known French composer, Saint-Saëns (1835-1921), wrote the *Tarantella, Op. 6*. An account of the first performance is given by Lyle Watson in *Camille Saint-Saëns: His Life and Art*:

Having recently become acquainted with Rossini, Saint-Saëns became a frequent visitor at his house and often played or acted as accompanist at the evening receptions at the apartment on the *Chaussee d'Antin*. The first performance of the *Tarantella* was for one of these receptions by Rossini, to take place under circumstances of anonymity.

Two noted artists of the day, Dorus (flutist) and Leroy (clarinetist), readily agreed to play the duet, and as there was no written programme, the guests were under the impression that the new work was from the pen of their host.

At the conclusion of *soirée musicale*, the flatterers and fawning admirers pressed their congratulations upon Rossini, acclaiming the composition as a masterpiece. The elderly musician allowed the practical joke to run to its uttermost limits in this way, then, taking hold of his protégé's hand, announced the authorship of the duet and quietly 'floored' the sycophants.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Watson, Lyle. *Camille Saint-Saëns: His Life and Art* with a preface by Leff Pouishnott (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1923). Reprinted (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1970), pp. 18–19.