

Camille Saint-Saens
Christmas Oratorio
Opus 12

Sunday, December 19
11:00 am | Sanctuary

Nicholas Todd Shumate, Conductor



WASHINGTON STREET
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Program Notes

featuring

Nicholas Todd Shumate Conductor
Louis Shirer, Organ
Rick Frierson Piano

Strings Andrew Lynn,
Damir Horvat, Audrey Harris, Tzu-Ying Liao
Soloists Maria Beery, Karly Shorter,
Yasmin Bradshaw, Johnnie Felder, and Craig Price



Text Translation

1. Prélude

2. Récit et chœur

(Tenor) Et pastores erant in regione eadem vigilantes et custodientes vigilias noctis super gregem suum.

(Alto) Et ecce Angelus Domini stetit juxta illos, et claritas Dei circumfulsit illos, et timuerunt timore magno. Et dixit illis Angelus:

(Soprano) Nolite timere! Ecce enim evangelizo vobis gaudium magnum, quod erit omnipopulo: quia natus est vobis hodie Christus Dominus in civitate David. Et hoc vobis signum: Invenientes infantem pannis involutum, et positum in praesepio.

(Baritone) Et subito facta est cum Angelo multitudo militiae coelestis laudantium Deum, et dicentium:

(Chorus) Gloria in altissimis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis! (Luke 2:8-14)

1. Prélude

2. Recitative and chorus

(Tenor) And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

(Alto) And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were so afraid. And the angel said unto them:

(Soprano) “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger”.

(Baritone) And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying:

(Chorus) “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men”. (Luke 2: 8-14)

3. Air

Expectans expectavi Dominum. Et
intendit mihi. (Psalm 40:1)

4. Air et choeur

Domine, ego credidi, quia tu es Chris-
tus, Filius Dei vivi, qui in hunc mun-
dum venisti. (John 11:27)

5. Duo

Benedictus, qui venit in nomine Domi-
ni! Deus Dominus, et illuxit nobis.
Deus meus es tu, et confitebor tibi.
Deus meus es tu et exaltabo te. (Psalm
118:26-28)

6. Choeur

Quare fremuerunt gentes et populi
meditati sunt inania? (Psalm 2:1)
Gloria Patri, gloria Filio, gloria Spiritui
Sancto. Sicut erat in principio, et nunc,
et semper, et in saecula saeculorum.
Amen.

7. Trio

Tecum principium in die virtutis tuae in
splendoribus Sanctorum. (Psalm 110:3)

8. Quatuor

Alleluja. Laudate coeli, et exulta terra,
quia consulatus est Dominus populum
suum; et pauperum suorum miserebitur.
(Isaiah 49:13)

9. Quintette et choeur

Consurge, filia Sion. Alleluja. Lauda in
nocte, in principio vigiliarum. Alleluja.
(Lamentations 2:19)

Egrediatur ut splendor justus Sion, et
Salvator ejus ut lampas accendatur. Al-
leluja. (Isaiah 62:1)

10. Choeur

Tollite hostias, et adorate Dominum
in atrio sancto ejus. Laetentur coeli, et
exultet terra a facie Domini, quoniam
venit. Alleluja. (Psalm 96: 8-13)

3. Air

I waited patiently for the Lord and he
inclined unto me. (Psalm 40:1)

4. Air and chorus

“Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the
Christ, the Son of God, which should
come into the world”. (John 11:27)

5. Duet

Blessed be he that cometh in the name
of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he
has given us light. You are my God,
and I will give thanks to you: You are
my God, I will praise you. (Psalm 118:
26-28)

6. Chorus

Why do the heathen rage, and the peo-
ple imagine a vain thing? (Psalm 2:1)
Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in
the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.

7. Trio

With you is sovereignty in the splen-
dor of holiness on the day of your birth.
(Psalm 110:3)

8. Quartet

Hallelujah. Sing, O heavens; and be joy-
ful, O earth. For the Lord hath com-
forted his people, and will have mercy
upon his afflicted. (Isaiah 49:13)

9. Quintet and chorus

Arise, daughter of Zion. Hallelujah.
Praise God in the night: in the begin-
ning of the watches. Hallelujah. (Lam-
entations 2:19)

Until Zion's righteousness therefore go
forth as brightness, and the salvation as
a lamp that burneth. (Isaiah 62:1)

10. Chorus

Bring an offering and come into his
courts. Let the heavens rejoice, and let
the earth be glad, before the Lord: for
he cometh. Hallelujah. (Psalm 96:8-13)

Program Notes*

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) A 19th and 20th century Renaissance figure, Camille Saint-Saëns was born in Paris in 1835, the son of a minor government official. His father died three months after his birth, and he was reared by his mother and his great-aunt. He was an incredible child prodigy. His great-aunt, Charlotte Masson, taught him music and beginning piano. Saint-Saëns was playing piano at the age of two and composed his first work when he was three and a half. He gave his first public performance when he was a little over four and a half. By the time he was the age of five, he was studying such music as the full score of Don Giovanni. At age 10, he gave his début recital, playing from memory the Beethoven Piano Concerto, No. 3 in C minor and the Mozart Piano Concerto, No. 15 in B flat, among other works. As an encore, he told the audience that he would play any of Beethoven's sonatas from memory. The press called him "the French Mozart." At this time he also studied composition with Pierre Maledin and Gottfried Weber.

Saint-Saëns loved to learn. As a child, he studied the French classics, religion, and Latin and Greek, as well as mathematics, natural sciences, astronomy, archaeology and philosophy. He entered the Paris Conservatoire in 1848 and studied organ with François Benoist and composition with Jacques Halévy, also taking singing lessons and classes for accompanists. Between 1848 and 1852, he composed various works, including a symphony, choral works and chamber music. In 1852, he won a prize from the Société Sainte-Cécile for his Ode à Sainte-Cécile. In 1853, he was appointed organist at St. Merry in Paris and wrote a mass dedicated to the Abbé. The Abbé invited his new organist to join him on a trip to Italy, the first of Saint-Saëns' many future travels abroad.

In 1857, Saint-Saëns left St. Merry to become organist at the Madeleine, a position he held until 1877. Between 1861 and 1865, he taught at the Ecole Niedermeyer, a school founded to improve French musical standards. His students included Gabriel Fauré and organist-composer Eugene Gigout, both of whom became friends. His students found him inspiring, and the classes included exciting discussions of contemporary music and the arts. Saint-Saëns became known as an organ virtuoso and master of improvisation. Liszt heard him play and pronounced him the greatest organist in the world, as well as a gifted pianist and composer. Saint-Saëns became friends with such composers as Berlioz, Gounod and Rossini. He also became acquainted with the music of Wagner, Schumann and Liszt, promoting it to the annoyance of the conservative French musical establishment. He also brought the score of Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov to France on his return from a Russian concert tour.

In 1871, Saint-Saëns and Professor Romaine Bussoine founded the Société Nationale de Musique, an organization devoted to the performance of music by living French composers. Other members of the Société included Gabriel Fauré, César Franck and Edouard Lalo. The organization premiered works by Saint-Saëns, Emmanuel Chabrier, Claude Debussy, Paul Dukas and Maurice Ravel. During this time, he began composing symphonic poems, including Omphale's Spinning Wheel (1871), Phaéton (1873), Danse Macabre (1874) and The Youth of Hercules (1877), influencing the future development of that musical form in France. He also was one of the first major composers to use folk songs as themes in his music.

Saint-Saëns was interested in the music of the past, including the work of Bach, Mozart and Handel. Handel, especially, was an influence on Saint-Saëns' own oratorios, including *Le déluge* 6 (1875) and *The Promised Land* (1913.) In addition, Saint-Saëns was a writer, publishing articles in the journals *Renaissance Littéraire et Artistique* (under the pseudonym 'Phémus'), *Gazette Musicale*, *Revue Bleue*, *L'estafette* (articles on Wagner's Ring cycle) and *Le Voltaire* (articles on harmony and melody.) He reversed his support of Wagner's music during World War I and suggested that it be banned in France. Saint-Saëns also wrote articles on aspects of ancient Roman theatre and art, as well as philosophy.

In 1875, Saint-Saëns married 19-year-old Marie-Laure Truffol, They lived with his mother. The marriage was unhappy and unsuccessful, although it produced two children. Both sons died in 1878 within six weeks of each other, one from an accident and one from illness. Saint-Saëns blamed his wife for these tragedies and in 1881, when they were on vacation, he walked out of their hotel and never returned. They separated legally and she never saw him again. She died in 1950 at the age of 95.

Saint-Saëns' most famous opera, *Samson et Dalila*, had its premiere in 1877. A generous patron left him a large bequest, giving him time to compose. He resigned his position at the Madeleine and devoted himself to composing and conducting, as well as appearing as a concert artist. He continued to perform at the *Société National*, but quit in 1886 when Vincent d'Indy wanted to include the music of foreign composers. In 1881, he was elected to the *Académie des Beaux Arts* and in 1884, he was made an officer of the *Legion of Honor*, receiving several awards from that organization.

His mother's death in 1888 affected Saint-Saëns greatly. He went to Algiers, a place he enjoyed, for solace, and moved his possessions to Dieppe upon his return. He began to travel widely, going on concert and conducting tours to the rest of Europe, South American, the Canary Islands, Scandinavia, East Asia, and Russia, where he met Tchaikovsky. In 1886, he was on holiday in Austria when he wrote *The Carnival of the Animals* for friends as a joke. He refused to have it published during his lifetime, except for the movement entitled *The Swan*. It finally was published in 1922. Saint-Saëns composed less after his mother's death and his music became less popular in France. He still was popular in England and the United States, and visited both on several occasions. He first visited the United States in 1906, giving concerts in Philadelphia, Chicago and Washington, D.C. He returned in 1915, when he gave performances and lectures in New York and in San Francisco at the *Panama Pacific International Exposition*, and was an official representative of the French government. He played the organ in his popular organ symphony and composed a work especially for performance at the *Exposition*.

Saint-Saëns was the first major composer to write for the cinema, creating a noteworthy score for the 1908 silent film, *L'assassinat du Duc de Guise*. He continued his scholarly pursuits as well, working on editions of music by Beethoven, Liszt, Mozart, Rameau, Lully and Charpentier. He also continued to compose, travel, perform and conduct until his death. In August 1921, he gave a concert in Dieppe, playing seven works which represented his 75 years as a concert pianist. He went to Algiers in December and died there at the end of the month.

Saint-Saëns was indeed a person of multiple gifts. Jeremy Nicholas notes in his July 2004 BBC Music Magazine article on Saint-Saëns, “To an extraordinary degree, Saint-Saëns mastered every field of endeavour to which he turned his eclectic mind. In addition to being a virtuoso pianist and organist, he was also a conductor, caricaturist, playwright, poet, philosopher, and essayist on botany and ancient music; he wrote with authority on science, mathematics, astronomy and archaeology, he was a critic and a scholarly editor of music, and he composed nearly 400 works, touching every field of music. These pieces include ten concertos, five symphonies, 39 chamber works, some 50 solo piano pieces, music for half a dozen stage plays, 13 operas, dozens of secular and religious choral works, more than 90 songs and nearly 40 transcriptions. Among them are works dedicated to electricity (*La Feu Céleste*, 1900) to airmen (*Aux Aviateurs*, written in 1911 soon after Blériot crossed the Channel), to miners (*Aux Mineurs*, 1912), and to workers (*Hymne au Travail*, 1914)...” The June 2009 issue of BBC Music Magazine places Saint-Saëns as No. 7 on a list of the ten greatest child prodigy composers.

Serge Berthoumieux comments in his 1977 notes on a recording of Saint-Saëns’ Violin Concerto, “There can be no doubt that he was a man of outstanding genius: this was universally admitted, and yet he was held somewhat in contempt because he did not fully belong to his own time-- indeed he had indirect links with all periods. He was born in 1835: the deaths of Beethoven, Schubert and Weber had taken place less than ten years earlier; Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn were at the height of their form; Schumann and Wagner were beginning their careers. He was brought up in isolation from the world, in an essentially feminine and artistic milieu with Classical sympathies, and remained uninfluenced by a long life of contact with all the Romantics, all the creative artists whose works contained the seeds of the 20th century... Saint-Saëns worked in every genre, always aiming for and cherishing formal and stylistic perfection... The aim of his music is elegance of melodic line and architectural beauty...”

Christmas Oratorio

Late in 1858, the Church of the Madeleine commissioned twenty-three-year-old Camille Saint-Saëns to write an oratorio for that year’s Christmas celebration. He set to work on December 4, and by December 15 had finished a ten-movement work telling the Christmas story, with additional commentaries upon that event. Saint-Saëns’ Christmas Oratorio is an intimate work that requires solo singers, a chorus, and small instrumental forces—an organ, a harp, and strings. In this work, Saint-Saëns blends a number of musical styles—narrative recitatives, folk-like melodies, passionate operatic solo passages, and simple choral writing.

Description

1. Prelude

A pastoral instrumental prelude sets the mood for the Christmas story, evoking images of a shepherd playing a flute, and a rustic manger, with the holy family and adoring animals. Although Saint-Saëns comments that this movement is in the style of Bach, it is pure 19th century Romanticism.

2. Recitative and chorus

In Saint-Saëns’ beautifully crafted recitative, tenor and alto declaim the beginning words of the beloved story, almost as Gregorian chant. The soprano sings the

words of the angel with great joy and passion. With intensity and great feeling, the baritone describes the multitude of angels singing praise, accompanied by energetic eighth notes in the strings. The chorus responds with joyous praise to God in the highest and wishes for peace on earth.

3. *Air*

This lovely aria speaks of how patiently the narrator has been waiting for the Lord. Saint-Saëns sets the gentle melody in 3/4 time, almost as if it were a lullaby.

4. *Air and chorus*

In this aria, the tenor passionately affirms the belief that the Lord is the Son of God. Sopranos and altos concur in passages that almost sound like cadences at the end of a hymn.

5. *Duet*

The text for this movement is taken from the Catholic liturgy—the Gradual of the Proper of the Second Christmas Mass. A Gradual is a chant within the Mass, usually taken from the Psalms. Modern Graduals consist of two Psalm verses, which need not be from the same Psalm. In fact, some Graduals may contain non-scriptural texts. In this case, Saint-Saëns uses three verses from Psalm 118 in a dialogue between soprano and baritone. He uses only the harp for accompaniment. The movement is divided into three musical sections, mirroring the three textual sections. Section 1 is an imitative dialogue. Section 2 uses more ornamentation. Section 3 has more legato, sustained passages.

6. *Chorus*

This movement is divided into two sections. In Section 1, the chorus dramatically questions why the nations are angry at imaginary things. Saint-Saëns begins the movement with the chorus entering together and asking why? To indicate agitation in the next section, he has the basses enter first, the tenors next, with notes that clash somewhat, then sopranos, and finally altos. He has sopranos, altos, and tenors together ask a second question: why do these nations imagine a vain thing? The questions are answered in Section 2, which is in a totally different key and mood. The chorus calmly and sweetly sings the doxology, a homophonic hymn of praise to the Trinity— Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

7. *Trio*

Movement 7 reminds the listener of Saint-Saëns' gifts in composing beautiful, flowing, romantic, operatic melodies. The movement is divided into three sections. In Section 1, tenor and soprano sing imitative passages, while the baritone enters with a slight variation on the melody. The three voices overlap at the end of the section. In Section 2, the three voices come together singing descending scale passages, while the harp plays elaborate ornamentation underneath. In Section 3, Saint-Saëns creates a variation on the vocal structure of Section 1, as the harp plays a different supporting pattern. Voices come together homophonically at the end, as the harp concludes the movement.

8. *Quartet*

Saint-Saëns sets this movement for two sopranos, alto, and baritone. It is crafted in Handelian style.

9. *Quintet and Chorus*

This movement is the most elaborate of the Oratorio. It is divided into five sections. Section 1 is a reprise of the opening instrumental prelude. In Section 2, the tenor soloist leads a quintet of soloists in a call-and-response style setting of

the text urging all to rise and praise God. The text is punctuated with alleluias sung by the whole chorus. Section 3 is another call-and-response structure, urging all to praise God even at night. Saint-Saëns uses a different pattern for the soloists, while the chorus repeats the alleluias as set in Section 2. In Section 4, the two sopranos and alto soloists act as descants, imitating the instruments in the opening prelude. The tenor and baritone imitate the alleluias sung by the chorus. Section 5 is sung by the chorus in unison— first the tenors and basses almost as a chant. They are followed by sopranos and altos singing a conclusion, mirrored by tenors and basses. The instruments conclude the movement again repeating the melody of the opening prelude.

10. Chorus

Saint-Saëns concludes the Oratorio with a majestic hymn of praise.

**Program notes by Helene Whitson*

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*Christmas Eve at
Washington Street*

A Line In Time
(The Birth of Jesus)
A dramatic presentation
4:00 pm | Sanctuary

*Join us as the inkeepers's wife tells the
story of Jesus' birth on the day long ago
that divided time.*



*Christmas Eve at
Washington Street*

Traditional Service

- Candle Lighting
- Scripture Readings
- Carols • Communion

5:30 pm • Sanctuary