

### THREE INDISPENSABLE FRENCH COMPOSERS: Berlioz, Saint-Saëns, Fauré

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#### WHY INDISPENSABLE?

In Germany Schubert would take a poem and turn it into his *Wanderer Fantasy* - a piano work inspired by poetry. In Russia Tchaikovsky would take Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and turn it into an orchestral fantasy, and in France **Hector Berlioz** (**ek-tohr bear-leeoz**) (1803-1869) would take his impressions of a trip to Italy and turn them into his *Roman Carnival Overture*.

A generation later, **Camille Saint-Saëns** (**pr: kah-meal Saehn-Saehnss**) (1835-1921), fresh out of music school, wrote a piano concerto that in orchestration and structure was unlike any piano concerto written before. French composers were reshaping the rules of composition, paving the way for other European masters that followed.

Still later, **Gabriel Fauré** (**gah bree-ehl foe-reh**) (1845-1924) created in his *Dolly Suite* a new form: a collection of memories and vignettes - pieces simply united by a poetic theme assembled into a *suite*.

Music was becoming a story-telling art, over a hundred years after Antonio Vivaldi wrote his story-telling composition *The Seasons*.

#### THE MUSIC IN THIS LECTURE

Hector Berlioz – *Roman Carnival Overture*

Camille Saint-Saëns - Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor

Gabriel Fauré – *Dolly Suite*



Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)



Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)



Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Hector Berlioz rejected writing the kind of pretty tunes in fashion during his lifetime, and instead he used quirky snippets of melody that suddenly appear only to quickly vanish before one even has a chance to “catch” them.

In the *Roman Carnival Overture*, after an abrupt opening, a sweet melody is played on the *Cor Anglais* – a “cousin” to the oboe, that had rarely been used by composers before Berlioz.



Now the original melody that was hinted at in the opening bars of the overture bursts forth. It is a typically Italian *Tarantella* (pr: tah-rahn-**tehl**-lah) that occupies the rest of the composition.

With constant shifts in rhythm, novel harmonies, and unconventional orchestrations Hector Berlioz dared to walk to the beat of his own drum, shunning all the intractable old notions in composition. He moved orchestral music into his 19th century, French in style, but international in appeal.



The Rome Carnival is hundreds of years old. Primarily a festival for children, the tradition of the Carnival in Rome lives on. From Thursday to Shrove Tuesday masked participants are seen around Piazza Navona and Via del Corso. Typical characters are Colombina, Pulcinella, Arlecchino, and Pantalone.

**ROMAN CARNIVAL OVERTURE** <https://youtu.be/0nJUSHqSaV8>



**Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)**

Camille Saint-Saëns (pr: kah-**meal Saehn-Saehns**) was a musical prodigy who made his concert debut at the age of ten. After studying at the Paris Conservatory, he first followed a career as a church organist, and later as a successful pianist, much in demand in Europe.

Saint-Saëns was important in the development of French music. He had for students Gabriel Fauré (**pr**: gah-bree-**ehl** foe-**ray**) and Maurice Ravel (**pr**: Moe-**reess** Rah-**veil**), both of whom were strongly influenced by their mentor.

Although he developed a reputation for being a conservative, Saint-Saëns supported and promoted the modern music of his day, including that of Richard Wagner (**pr**: **Ree**-hard **Vahg**-nehr), although he claimed not be influenced by his compositions

*"I admire deeply the works of Richard Wagner despite their bizarre character. They are superior and powerful, and that is sufficient for me. But I am not, I have never been, and I shall never be of the Wagnerian religion."* - Saint-Saëns

Saint-Saëns introduced his students to the music of the great composers.

*"After allowing the lessons to run over, he would go to the piano and reveal to us the works of the masters from which the classical nature of our program of study kept us at a distance and who were scarcely known."* - Gabriel Fauré

The Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor was composed in 1868. Saint-Saëns, at age 23 wrote the concerto in three weeks and had very little time to prepare for the première with himself at the piano.

The concerto begins with the soloist playing a long introduction, after which the orchestra enters. A brief second theme appears, followed by a middle section of increasing speed. The main theme is then heard again, and the soloist is given a long *cadenza* (**pr**: Kah-**den**-tzah) (a moment in which the soloist plays unaccompanied by the orchestra.)

The second movement is marked *Allegro Scherzando* (Animated and playfully), giving the pianist an opportunity to bring out the lighthearted aspect of Saint-Saëns' music.

The concerto's final movement is to be played extremely fast with both orchestra and soloist gaining momentum as they hurl towards a big ending.

Saint-Saëns was an original, a master orchestrator, an inexhaustible inventor of melodies, a fountain of musical ideas, a curious researcher of other musical cultures, and an individualist who ignored those envious of his success and passed on his knowledge to many gifted students.



Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor <https://youtu.be/tVCvJZtzkqQ> Arthur Rubinstein with the London Symphony Orchestra, André Previn, conductor



Gabriel Fauré giving a piano lesson to Kitty, the daughter of Emma Bardac, the composer's companion.

The works of Gabriel Fauré (pr: ga-bree-ehl Foe-ray) represent the culmination of a musical tradition that dates to the works of Hector Berlioz, almost a half century before him. That tradition defined French music as elegant, subtle, and expressive.

Fauré's music links the Romantic Era of his predecessors with the modern compositions of the first decades of the 20th century as represented by the music of Maurice Ravel, Claude Debussy (Pr: clod-day-bieuw-see), and Francis Poulenc (pr: frahn-seas poo-lank)

Fauré has a sizeable body of work: chamber music, piano music, and songs all filled with appealing melodies and rich harmonies.

The American composer Aaron Copland once wrote about Fauré: *"The themes, harmonies, form, remained essentially the same, but with each new work they became fresher, more personal, more profound. Fauré developed a musical idiom all his own by using subtle dissonances and special effects, anticipating Debussy's Impressionism. He did not recognize nationalism in music... if it has to express feelings or traits that belong to any particular nation."*

Fauré was born into a cultured family, and his talent became clear at the age of nine, when he was sent to a music college in Paris, where he was trained to be a church organist and choirmaster. After graduating from college Fauré earned a modest living as an organist and teacher, but he found no time for composing. When he became successful in his middle age, he still lacked time for writing music, so he retreated to the countryside in the summers to concentrate on his composing.

In a letter to Fauré, prior to his appointment to a professorship at the Paris Conservatoire, its director, Théodore Dubois (pr: te-oh-door dew-bwah) said: *"I have been often told that your music is too vague...too modulated... too fussy..."*

The following day Fauré replied in writing with his usual uncanny modesty: *"The defects of which I am accused are those that I hate the most, since the only kind of music that moves me is that which is clear, concise, precise, and brief!"*

Even though he is not as well known outside of France as other composers from that nation, Fauré was recognized by his country's government with an unprecedented national tribute that was held for him in Paris in 1922, headed by the president of the Republic.

Gabriel Fauré in a letter to his sons, three days before his death wrote: *"When I am gone, you will hear some people say about my music: 'Is that it?'... There is always bound to be a moment when one is forgotten. That does not matter either. I have done what I could and only God is my judge."*



The ***Dolly Suite***, Op. 56, is a collection of pieces Gabriel Fauré wrote to mark a birthday in the life of Kitty, the daughter of his companion, Emma Bardac.

The ***Dolly Suite*** comprises six movements: ***Berceuse*** (lullaby), ***Miaou, Le jardin de Dolly*** (Dolly's Garden), ***Kitty-valse, Tendresse*** (tenderness), and ***Le pas espagnol*** (Spanish step)

***Dolly Suite*** <https://youtu.be/WY05HLxbk0M> performed by the *Orquestra Sinfônica de Minas Gerais* – conducted by Charles Roussin

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