

F.A.M.E.  
January 2005

## Camille Saint-Saens (1835- 1921)

### Preparation

Put CD in player. Get familiar with the buttons so you can easily start, stop, move to another track, and adjust the volume. Write the composer's name on the board (two dots over the e in Saens.) Write the following animals on the board: Lion, Kangaroo, Swan, Hens and Roosters, Elephant. Also write the following musical instruments: piano, cello, clarinet, violin, flute.

### Introduction to the Music

Let's listen to some music. *Play track 2 of CD.* The music you just heard is the first movement from a suite called **Carnival of the Animals** by Camille (*cah-MEEL*) Saint-Saens. He created impressions with sound. He is a French composer, so we pronounce his name the French way. *Ask children to hold their noses and say "san- SAWN."* The music is called "Introduction and Royal March of the Lion." Remember that the lion is the king of the jungle. I will play it again so you can listen for rumbling sounds that portray the lion (*play track 2*).

Now let's play a game. You will hear four more movements from **Carnival of the Animals**. After each one, write down which animal you get an impression of and which instruments you hear (use the list on the board). We have already identified the lion. *Play tracks 3, 6, 7, and 14 (about 6.5 minutes of music total). Pause briefly after each for the children to write down their guesses. If the children get restless, have them close their eyes during the music to improve their focus.*

Here are the answers. The first movement was "Hens and Roosters," with the cackle of the hens in the piano and strings, and the voice of the roosters in the clarinet. Let's listen again (*play track 3*). The next piece was "Elephant" with a solo double-bass (the largest and deepest-toned instrument of the violin family, played with one end resting on the floor) set against a waltz rhythm on piano. Listen again (*play track 6*). After that you heard "Kangaroos" played by the two pianos. The halting rhythms suggest the hesitant movement of these animals. Picture kangaroos as we listen again (*play track 7*). The last selection was "The Swan," the most celebrated movement of the entire suite. A beautiful, serene melody for the cello simulates the majestic movement of the swan. Let's listen again (*play track 14*).

### The Element of Dynamics

Do you remember the elements of composition for music? (*Call on volunteers*) They are melody (the part you hum), rhythm (the beat of the music), harmony (chords that enhance the melody), and dynamics. Today we will focus on dynamics, which means how loud or how soft a piece is played. Please raise your hand if you have taken music lessons. Who

wants to draw the symbols for “play louder” and “play softer” on the board? (*crescendo* < and *decrescendo* >) A person who can read music knows what to do when he or she sees these symbols. A symphony conductor, such as John Philip Sousa who we studied last time, tells the orchestra to increase their dynamics by lifting hands in the air, palms up. (*Demonstrate crescendo motion. Have students do it with you.*) The conductor indicates a decrease in dynamics by lowering hands with the palms down. (*Demonstrate decrescendo motion. Have students do it.*)

### **Dynamics Activity**

We’re going to practice some dynamics by using them in speaking and later on by drumming. How many of you have a messy room? Let’s imagine that your Mom tells you to clean your room. The first time she tells you, she would probably say it in a normal voice. (*Have students say, “Clean your room” softly.*) Later on she comes in and sees that the work is not done, so she would say it louder. (*Have students say, “Clean Your Room” loudly.*) The last time she comes in and discovers it is still a mess, how is she going to say it? (*Everyone shouts, “CLEAN YOUR ROOM!”*)

Now we’ll do the drumming. Pat the tops of your thighs softly. I will be the conductor, and you watch me and follow the dynamics. When I raise my hands, you drum louder and louder. When I lower my hands, you lower the volume from loud to soft to very soft. Let’s try it. (*Spend a minute or so conducting the drumming.*) Thank you, that was fine.

### **Biography of Camille Saint-Saens (optional)**

Parisian Camille Saint-Saens was only a few months old when his father died. His loving and attentive artist mother and his devoted great aunt Charlotte raised him. Impressed with Camille’s perfect pitch, Aunt Charlotte began teaching him the piano at age two and a half. Unlike other children that age, he took the piano quite seriously, listening carefully as he struck each note, learning its name quickly.

His mother and aunt also found Camille to be especially curious about sounds. As a two-year-old, he would imitate bell tones, striking clocks, creaking doors, boiling teakettles, and other household noises, trying to discover how they were made. Musically gifted, Camille at age 10 was appearing in public playing the difficult music of Mozart and Beethoven. After the formal program he offered to play any of Beethoven’s sonatas from memory!

Saint-Saens had interests other than music. He had a well-rounded education in a regular school where he demonstrated an aptitude for Latin. He was fascinated by mathematics and natural science. He particularly loved geology, and when very young he acquired a geologist’s hammer to help obtain fossil specimens from the local rock quarries. Astronomy was another passion throughout his life. Royalties from his music financed a telescope built especially for him, and he thought nothing of running away from a rehearsal to observe some event of the heavens such as a solar eclipse.

Saint-Saens also found time for fun. He enjoyed impersonating people. Once, while on a trip to Russia, he and Tchaikovsky did an impromptu ballet that brought down the house.

In the early 1860s, Saint-Saens began developing a reputation as a fine composer and a piano virtuoso. Composing seemed natural for him; he could easily work for 12 hours at a stretch carrying on animated conversations at the same time. Saint-Saens said that he lived in his music like “a fish in water.”

In 1875 at age 40, Saint-Saens married a woman half his age and fathered two sons. Sadly, they died as children within six weeks of each other—one fell from a fourth story window, the other had a childhood disease. Filled with grief, Saint-Saens blamed his young wife. While they were on vacation together, he disappeared, filed for legal separation, and they never saw each other again.

Saint-Saens experienced family life through his closeness to the family of one of his students. He also spent much time and thought helping young artists and composers and teaching French audiences to enjoy good music. When his mother died, he was quite depressed, but he soon began to travel. He always took his pet dogs and enjoyed the adulation he received, especially in England and the United States.

Saint-Saens wrote prolifically, including books, letters, and articles on philosophy and science. He also produced a play and wrote poetry. Energy, drive and versatility characterized his activities. His music is precise, orderly, and polished. He died suddenly in Algiers (north Africa) in his 86<sup>th</sup> year.