

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS'S CONCEPT OF "VIOLIN CONCERTO"

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SUMMARY. Charles Camille Saint-Saëns is a remarkable French composer, pianist, organist, conductor and musical critic from the second half of the 19th century. Saint-Saëns's principles of composition were developed under the influence of national traditions, of the creations of French harpsichord players, of Hector Berlioz and of the French opera. The work of this French composer is characterized by luminous lyricism, by a cheerful, joyful disposition, created by dynamic, expressive movements, by noble pathos and by peaceful contemplation. His style is characterized by recitative-melodious intonations and by an extensive use of popular music procedures and rhythmic dance formulas. The syntheses of classical and romantic principles, as well as the inclination towards symphonic poems and monothematic structures are specific features of Saint-Saëns's ample creations.

Keywords: Camille Saint-Saëns, French composer, French music, violin concerto, music for violin.

Motto:

*"Music expresses that which cannot be put into words
and that which cannot remain silent".
(Victor Hugo)*

Charles Camille Saint-Saëns is a remarkable French composer, pianist, organist, conductor and musical critic from the second half of the 19th century. Saint-Saëns's principles of composition were developed under the influence of national traditions, of the creations of French harpsichord players, of Hector Berlioz and of the French opera.

Saint-Saëns's compositional style has been greatly influenced by the works of J. S. Bach, G.F. Handel and of the Viennese classics, as well as by the **symphonic** poems of Franz Liszt.

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Saint-Saëns's compositional activity stands out through its richness and generosity. He wrote a large number of works in various genres. However, his greatest accomplishment can be found in the field of improvisational concert music.

The Violin Concerto No. 3 in B Minor Op. 61 by Camille Saint-Saëns is characterized by the lack of cadenzas in the solo instrument. The concert is dynamic and dramatic, being structured in 3 parts, of which the first one is written in the form of a sonata. The first part starts off with the *Exposition* of the main musical theme, an active and dynamic theme, supplemented with a *tremolo* in the orchestral score.

E.g. 1



Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.1 (1-18)

The manner of attack in interpreting the main theme is '*marcato*', which creates an intense, expressive sonority, with accents and dynamic indications of *forte*.

The secondary theme is lyrical, written in E Major.

E.g. 2



Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61 part.1 (95-108)

The melodic pattern is based on triplets and comprises the expressive intonations of an ascending seventh. The theme ends with a small cadenza, built on ascending chromatic notes.

The *Development* starts off with the main theme being announced in various keys: C Major, E Major, B Major.

E.g. 3

Camille Saint-Saëns Violin: Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.1 (122-143)

It is subjected to a metamorphosis process, through extremely rich metro-rhythmic techniques, which contain double notes with ascending musical passages of triplets.

The *Reprise* begins with a secondary theme, it is a mirror reprise.

E.g. 4

Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.1 (197-225)

The theme is written in the homonym tonality of B Major, then the main theme follows, yet enriched with new features, as compared to the *exposition*, such as the virtuosity of numerous musical passages of sixteenth notes. The Reprise ends with cadenza elements, based on the orchestral accompaniment and on its bravery character.

The second part of the concerto – *Andantino quasi Allegretto* – can certainly be considered the brightest, most natural and peaceful part of the concerto, thanks to the simplicity of the melody. At first, each phrase played by the solo instrument is like a new breath. The modes of attack are *legato* and *portato*, in the 6/8 measure.

The first two bars of the theme are rendered all through the entire part, in various states: with changes of the rhythmic formula; transposed by an octave. The underlying formula is comprised of: eighth note, bar-line, dotted eighth note, sixteenth note and eighth note – *legato*, afterwards – fourth note and eighth note – also *legato*, bar-line (grupetto 1); dotted eighth note, sixteenth note and eighth note – *legato*, dotted fourth note, bar-line (grupetto 2).

E.g. 5

The image shows a musical score for the first 20 bars of the second part of Camille Saint-Saëns' Violin Concerto No. 3, Op. 61. The score is written for a violin in 6/8 time, with a tempo marking of 'Andantino quasi allegretto' and a metronome marking of quarter note = 56. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into three systems. The first system starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes a section marked 'p semplice'. The second system features a first ending bracket and a second ending bracket. The third system includes a trill (tr) and a double bar line. The score is annotated with various musical notations, including slurs, accents, and fingering numbers (1, 2, 7, 2).

Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.2 (1-20)

From a dynamic viewpoint, the concerto begins in *piano*, thus preparing the entrance of the solo instrument. The theme of the solo instrument, the violin, remains unchanged, anchored in the atmosphere of '*piano*' dynamic markings.

Saint-Saëns specifies from the very beginning the nature of this part, through that "*dolce*" indication. In the first 20 bars, the orchestra complements the solo instrument, yet, after the 20th bar, the dynamic array changes, as the theme is stated at higher dynamic indications, such as *mezzoforte*.

In response to this dynamic crescendo, the orchestra comes into the spotlight with the theme announced in '*piano*'.

In the following bars, up to the middle part, the solo instrument passes through various dynamic states, from '*pianissimo*' to '*sforzando*'. Here, it also tackles some passages of virtuosity, both ascending and descending, which have to be interpreted with great ease.

E.g. 6

III
p

poco cresc. p

pp tr.

Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.2 (34-49)

In these passages of virtuosity, the solo instrument has only a complementary role, as the theme is to be played by the orchestra.

The trills provided for the solo instrument are to be interpreted in the classical manner, namely from the basic note, going upwards.

The middle part starts at no. 2, with a more compelling character, with large dynamic indications: '*mezzoforte*', '*forte*', '*sforzando*'; the marking of "*fp*" is often used both in the solo instrument, as well as the orchestra.

E.g. 7

f

mf espress.

fp fp fp

II

Camille Saint-Saëns Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.2 (64-82)

From an interpretative viewpoint, the mode of attack used throughout the entire middle part is '*legato*'.

Saint-Saëns makes the shift from *development* to *reprise* by using two ascending passages, each of them being comprised of three triplets or nine sixteenth notes.

The *reprise* starts off with the theme played by the orchestra and gradually returns to the initial dynamic markings of the first part, '*piano*'. Once again, the composer mentions that "*dolce*" marking in the solo instrument. The theme is "restless", with passages of virtuosity and with trills. The author also uses other means of expression, such as *flageollete*.

E.g. 8

dolce tranquillo e semplice

p molto tranquillo

III morendo

Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.2 (131-152)

The composer feels the need to permanently specify the character that he wishes for this part of the concerto, namely '*Dolce y tranquillo*', ending with '*morendo*'.

The third part, '*Molto moderato e maestoso*', represents polychrome panoply of dispositions, moods, dynamic markings and artistic techniques.

E.g. 9

Molto moderato e maestoso ($\text{♩} = 66$)

f

V

Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.3 (1-7)

From the very beginning of this part, we can notice a dialogue between the solo instrument and the orchestra, without them overlapping on one another. Beginning with the ninth bar, Saint-Saëns changes the tempo to '*piu mosso*' and, in bar 11, he specifies '*ad libitum*'. In that same 11th bar, the composer overlaps two techniques: the orchestra plays '*tremolo*' and the solo violin plays sixteenth notes with the bow frog, giving the musical theme a dramatic shade.

At bar 20, we find a change in tempo - '*Allegro non tropo alla breve*'.

E.g. 10

The musical score for E.g. 10 consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with the tempo marking 'troppo (♩ = 96)' and the instruction 'arco'. The music is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It features a series of sixteenth-note patterns, often grouped in threes. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1, 2, and 3. Bowings are marked with 'v' and 'f'. The second staff continues the pattern with similar markings and includes a 'II' section. The third staff concludes the passage with more sixteenth-note runs and fingerings.

Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.3 (22-37)

Up to point '1', Saint-Saëns anchors the sonority of the solo instrument in a '*forte*' marking, with small variations.

E.g. 11

The musical score for E.g. 11 consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a boxed number '1' and the marking 'p appassionato'. The music is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps. It features a mix of quarter and eighth notes, often with slurs. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1, 2, and 3. Bowings are marked with 'v'. The second staff includes a 'cresc.' marking. The third staff includes a 'dim.' marking and a 'p' marking, followed by a 'n' marking under a slur.

Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.3 (44-65)

When the solo instrument reaches point '1', it must play the theme "appassionato", and in 'piano'. In this fragment, as well, he uses various techniques, such as: 'legato', 'staccato', 'portato', accents and flageolets.

The episode comes with a different character, 'cantabile' that shifts to 'dolcissimo sempre pianissimo'.

E.g. 12

Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.3 (123-181)

This is maintained until the 'A tempo' indication, which comes along with a 'leggiero' marking in the solo instrument.

E.g. 13

Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.3 (212-216)

Here, we can notice an alternation between triplets in 'legato' and triplets in 'staccato'. Hence, the 'staccato' in the orchestra is to be played lightly, suavely and compactly.

The reprise has two distinct features: 'Maestoso fortissimo – Dolce' in piano and 'Maestoso piu allegro' in fortissimo.

E.g. 14

Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.3 (239-250)

Here, we rediscover techniques and modes of attack used in the *exposition*, such as 'staccato', 'legato', trills, accents, but also 'tenutto'. Starting with no. 9, the composer overlaps two sonorous planes: the solo instrument in 'forte' and the orchestra in 'piano'. The lyrical theme played by the solo instrument has long note durations; therefore the emphasis must be laid on a good control of the musical notes and on sonorous quality.

E.g. 15



Camille Saint-Saëns Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.3(365-396)

The ending, 'Piu Allegro', is prepared by the passages of triplets in the solo instrument. The whole ending is played in 'fortissimo'.

E.g. 16



Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, part.3 (435-453)

The concerto ends in a grandiose 'fortissimo'.

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