

HENRIQUE OSWALD (1852-1931)

Piano Concerto, Op.10

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835-1921)

Piano Concerto No.5, *Egyptian*, Op.103

ALBERTO NEPOMUCENO (1864-1920)

Suite Antiga, Op.11

Clélia Iruzun piano

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Jac van Steen conductor

OSWALD Piano Concerto, Op.10 (29:54)

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| 1 I Allegro (un poco agitato) | 14:56 |
| 2 II Adagio | 7:57 |
| 3 III Allegro | 7:01 |

SAINT-SAËNS Piano Concerto No.5 (28:50)
Egyptian, Op.103

- | | |
|---------------------|-------|
| 4 I Allegro animato | 11:27 |
| 5 II Andante | 10:54 |

6 III Molto Allegro 6:29

NEPOMUCENO Suite Antiga, Op.11 (13:10)

- | | |
|--|------|
| 7 I Prelude - Allegro commodo | 1:15 |
| 8 II Menuet I & II - Allegro con spirito | 4:05 |
| 9 III Air - Andante espressivo | 4:21 |
| 10 IV Rigaudon - Allegro con brio | 3:29 |

Total duration: 71:56

Recorded at St John the Evangelist, Upper Norwood, on October 7-8, 2019

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Henrique Oswald Piano Concerto Saint-Saëns Piano Concerto No.5 'Egyptian'

Clélia Iruzun - Piano

Jac van Steen - Conductor

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra



Piano Concertos by Oswald and Saint-Saëns

The late 19th century was a time of increasing national focus in classical music, with many composers looking to the musical traditions of their homelands for inspiration. But Henrique Oswald (1852-1931) and Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) were exceptions. Oswald was Brazilian by birth, but Swiss and Italian by descent. He spent much of his life in Europe, and his music draws on a range of German, Italian and French influences, including the music of Saint-Saëns. Though French himself, Saint-Saëns was also influenced by German models in his early career, especially the music of Robert Schumann. But, as his Fifth Piano Concerto demonstrates, his musical interests ranged wider still, the work drawing on music he had heard while visiting Egypt, and also on the sound of the Javanese *gamelan*.

Henrique Oswald was born in Rio de Janeiro and spent his early years in São Paulo, where he began piano lessons at an early age with his mother. At the age of 16, he travelled to Europe, originally planning to study with Hans von Bülow in Germany, but instead moving to Florence, initially to study at the Istituto Moriani, and remaining there for around 30 years. One of Oswald's piano teachers in Florence was the well-connected pianist Giuseppe Buonamici, who introduced him to Johannes Brahms and Franz Liszt. While resident in Italy, Oswald returned regularly to Brazil for concert tours. There, in 1889, he met Saint-Saëns, who was impressed with Oswald's music. The two men gave a performance of Saint-Saëns' Scherzo for Two Pianos, Op.87, during the visit.

Saint-Saëns played another important role in Oswald's later career. In 1902, Oswald submitted a short piano work, *Il neigel*, to a competition organised by the French newspaper *Le Figaro*. The jury, which included Saint-Saëns, as well as Gabriel Fauré, declared Oswald's piece the winner by unanimous decision. It went on to become his most famous work. The same year, Oswald returned to Brazil and was appointed director of the Instituto Nacional de Música in Rio de Janeiro. In 1904, Oswald and Saint-Saëns met again in Brazil, and gave another performance of Saint-Saëns' Scherzo as well as of the two-piano arrangement of his *Africa Fantasy*. Oswald resigned his position at the institute in 1906 and returned again to Europe. In 1909 he settled permanently in Rio, where he remained a prominent figure in Brazilian public life and continued to teach piano privately. In later life, Oswald predominantly wrote liturgical works and organ music, after his son, Alfredo, took holy orders.

Oswald's **Piano Concerto** was written around 1886, while the composer was resident in Florence and around the time of his meeting with Liszt. It is dedicated to Buonamici, his former teacher who had introduced them. The music is in a richly Romantic vein. The atmospheric opening, *Allegro (un poco agitato)*, with rippling piano figures accompanied by gentle but warm orchestral textures, evokes the piano concertos of Brahms, or even Tchaikovsky. The lyrical second theme is more reminiscent of Fauré, although the richness of the orchestration throughout the movement links it more to German traditions. The second movement, *Adagio*, again invokes Fauré in its sensitive melodic line and adventurous harmonies. The finale, *Allegro*, continues on without pause. The main theme is a tarantella and

the atmosphere throughout the movement is more Latin. Gioachino Rossini is suggested in the playful interchanges between piano and orchestra, while the nimble, rhythmically incisive piano writing recalls Saint-Saëns' Second Piano Concerto, especially in the bravura closing passages.

The careers of Oswald and Saint-Saëns, a generation before, bear striking similarities. Both were hailed as prodigy pianists, and both went on to long adult careers as pianists and composers. Like Oswald, Saint-Saëns became a *de facto* musical ambassador for his country, giving concert tours, as pianist and conductor, well into his 80s. And, like Oswald, he was influential in the future course of his country's music, a teacher of Fauré, who in turn taught Ravel, both later composers revering Saint-Saëns' music.

Saint-Saëns was born in Paris and studied at the Paris Conservatoire from the age of 13. His studies included organ, and in 1857 he became the organist of the Église Sainte-Marie-Madeleine, a prestigious position he held for 20 years. Early in this tenure, Liszt heard Saint-Saëns perform at the Madeleine and declared him the finest organist in the world. Liszt was one of many composers from the German-speaking world to influence Saint-Saëns' early music, but the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 changed his focus. He served in the National Guard during the war and the following year established the Société Nationale de Musique to promote French music and young French composers, and to balance the perceived dominance of German influences. Yet his music and career both retained a cosmopolitan character: he soon began writing symphonic poems, after the model of Liszt, and his most successful opera, *Samson et Dalila*, was

premiered in Weimar in 1877, at Liszt's recommendation, after it was rejected in Paris because of religious prejudices against the staging of biblical stories. In his last decades, Saint-Saëns became known as a musical conservative, an opponent of the Modernism represented in Paris by Debussy and Stravinsky. But he remained a key figure of the French musical establishment and continued to tour, especially to Britain and America, where his large-scale oratorios were well received.

Holidays in exotic climes were another prominent feature of Saint-Saëns' later years, and he often wintered in northern Africa. The **Fifth Piano Concerto** was composed on one such trip, in Egypt in 1896, hence its nickname, the *Egyptian*. The work was written for a gala concert to mark the 50th anniversary of Saint-Saëns' debut at the Salle Pleyel, when, aged just 10, he had performed concertos by Mozart and Beethoven. The gala concert in 1896 also featured violinist Pablo de Sarasate and flautist Paul Taffanel. When Saint-Saëns came to perform his new concerto, he introduced it with a short poem, written for the occasion, praising his mother and thanking the public for their continued support.

The concerto has an exotic flavour from the very opening of the first movement, *Allegro animato*, the piano's gentle melody lightly accompanied to create a fairy-tale atmosphere. The piano part soon increases in complexity, but even the most virtuosic passages retain a sense of lightness, due to the open voicing of the piano harmonies and the transparency of the woodwind-focussed orchestration. Saint-Saëns described how the second movement "takes us... on a journey to the East and even, in the passage in F-sharp, to the Far East". The journey

begins propulsively, a forceful *Andante* with driving syncopations in the strings and flamboyant piano roulades. It eventually settles into a lyrical main theme, *Allegretto tranquillo quasi andantino*. This theme is the concerto's most "Egyptian" element. Saint-Saëns described it as a "Nubian love song". He had heard it sung by boatmen as he travelled up the Nile on a *dahabiah* (a barge-like passenger sailing boat) and wrote it down on his sleeve for future reference. The next melody – the passage in F-sharp – is even more exotic. The left-hand melody is accompanied by high repeating figures in the right, which Saint-Saëns likened to chirping crickets and croaking frogs. The Far Eastern aspect that the composer cites may be Javanese gamelan, a similarly percussive and hypnotic sound. Saint-Saëns heard *gamelan* music performed at the 1889 Paris Exhibition, as did Debussy, who soon began using similar ideas in his piano music. Saint-Saëns claimed to have been less enthusiastic, but this passage suggests an influence.

The finale, *Molto Allegro*, is another propulsive but delicately textured movement. It has the character of a virtuoso keyboard showpiece, and in 1899 Saint-Saëns adapted the movement as the final piece of his Second Book of Piano Studies, Op.111, where it was titled "Toccata". The composer again spoke of travel in his description of the movement, saying it evoked "the joy of a sea-crossing" but cautioning "a joy that not everyone shares". The nautical imagery is clear from the start, with the rumbling of a boat propeller from the bass end of the piano. The incessant pace and rhythmic drive continue through the movement, with the propeller motif alternating with lighter textures in the high woodwinds before the work comes to a riotous conclusion with a brief but frenzied coda.

The programme concludes with the solo piano work ***Suite Antiga*** (Suite in the Old Style) by the Brazilian composer and conductor Alberto Nepomuceno (1864-1920). Like Oswald, Nepomuceno studied in Europe – in Rome and Berlin – and later became a key figure in Brazilian musical life, succeeding Oswald as Director of the Instituto Nacional de Música in Rio de Janeiro in 1906. (In 1909, Oswald returned to the Instituto to give a performance of his Piano Concerto: Nepomuceno conducted the concert.) The *Suite Antiga* dates from Nepomuceno's student years in Berlin. There, he met the Norwegian pianist Walborg Rendsbo, a student of Edvard Grieg. The couple married in 1893 and travelled to Norway where they were guests of Grieg at his home in Troldhaugen. Nepomuceno wrote his *Suite Antiga* during the stay, and Grieg was so impressed with the piece that he persuaded his own publishers, Peters, to release it.

The work is closely modelled on Grieg's own *Suite from Holberg's Time*, from which it borrows the subtitle, "Suite in the Old Style", and the names for three of its four movements. As with the Grieg, the "old" style is represented by Baroque dance forms – the Prelude is followed by a Menuet, Air and Rigaudon – but the harmonies and expression are clearly of the Romantic era. Back in Berlin, Nepomuceno graduated from the Stern Conservatoire the following year, conducting a concert with the Berlin Philharmonic that included *Suite Antiga* in an arrangement for string orchestra.

Clélia Iruzun

Clélia Iruzun's endearing artistic personality, which combines her native Brazilian spirit with her exceptional musical gifts, has enabled this much-admired London-based pianist to build an enviable reputation for her performances of a wide range of music, from the great classical repertoire to works by significant figures from across the Americas.

Clélia has performed over 30 concertos for piano and orchestra, including the great classical and romantic concertos and also important Spanish and Latin American works.

Clélia Iruzun initially studied at the School of Music in Rio de Janeiro before becoming an advanced student at London's Royal Academy of Music, where she won a number of major prizes. She has subsequently worked with Nelson Freire, Jacques Klein, Stephen Kovacevich and Fou Ts'ong, among other international artists, and many important Brazilian composers have written works for her.

Clélia's busy life embraces frequent appearances across Europe, the Americas and Asia. She has performed on television and radio in many countries, including frequent broadcasts for BBC Radio 3.



Photograph: Simon Weir

Clélia has made a number of highly successful CDs ranging from Latin American composers to Concertos by Mendelssohn and the British composer Elizabeth Maconchy. Her latest releases include the Piano Concertos of Francisco Mignone and Isaac Albéniz with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Jac van Steen and the Piano Quintets by Amy Beach and Henrique Oswald with the Coull Quartet, released by SOMM recordings, have received great acclaim.

www.cleliairuzun.com



Jac van Steen

Jac van Steen was born in The Netherlands and studied orchestra and choir conducting at the Brabants Conservatory of Music.

Since participating in the BBC Conductors Seminar in 1985, he enjoys a busy career conducting the best orchestras in Europe, including the posts of Music Director and Chief Conductor of the National Ballet of The Netherlands, the orchestras of Bochum, Nürnberg, Staatskapelle Weimar, the Opera and Philharmonic Orchestra of Dortmund, Musikkollegium Winterthur and Principal Guest conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. He is currently Principal Guest conductor of the Ulster Orchestra and Prague Symphony Orchestra.

He made his debuts with Opera North and the Volksoper, Vienna in 2013 and with Garsington Opera in 2015. He returned to Opera North for *Il tabarro* and *Suor Angelica*, the Volksoper Vienna with Korngold's *Das Wunder der Heliane* and Garsington Opera with *Pelléas et Mélisande* (2017) and *The Bartered Bride* (2019). Regular visits to the UK include the Philharmonia Orchestra, CBSO and Royal Philharmonic. He made his debut in Tokyo with the New Japan Philharmonic. He participates in numerous recordings and live concert broadcasts for the BBC and has recorded a substantial number of CDs with various orchestras.

Besides his conducting activities, he is Professor for Conducting at the Royal Conservatory of Music in The Hague. He regularly works with the Royal Northern College of Music, Chetham's School of Music (Manchester) and the Royal Academy and Royal College of Music, London. In 2018, he led the Jette Parker Young Artists showcase organised by the Royal Opera House, London.



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