

audite

# FRENCH CELLO



**Marc Coppey**

Orchestre philharmonique de Strasbourg  
John Nelson

**LÉON BOËLLMANN** (1862-1897)

**Variations symphoniques, Op. 23**

Moderato maestoso – Andantino

**CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS** (1835-1921)

**Cello Concerto No. I in A Minor  
Op. 33, R. 193**

I. Allegro non troppo 5:42

II. Allegretto con moto 4:59

III. Allegro non troppo 8:54

**GABRIEL FAURÉ** (1845-1924)

**Élégie, Op. 24**

Molto adagio 7:15

**ÉDOUARD LALO** (1823-1892)

**Cello Concerto in D Minor**

I. Prélude. Lento – Allegro maestoso 13:06

II. Intermezzo. Andantino con moto –  
Allegro presto 6:32

III. Introduction. Andante – Rondo  
(Allegro vivace) 7:42

**CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS**

**The Carnival of the Animals, R. 125**

XIII. The Swan (Le cygne) 3:38



### **Church and Salon – Léon Boëllmann's *Variations symphoniques***

In contrast to the piano and violin, the cello entered the great stage of the solo concerto relatively late. Of course, there were well-known cello concertos by Antonio Vivaldi, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Luigi Boccherini and Joseph Haydn as early as the eighteenth century but, characteristically, they only found their way into the repertoire during the twentieth century as part of the “early music movement”. Neither Mozart nor Beethoven (aside from the part in the “Triple Concerto”) nor Schubert considered it necessary to grant the cello a solo appearance with orchestra, possibly due to the instrument's sound, or due to a lack of convincing virtuosos.

Yet even before 1900, prominent soloists and teachers existed in many European countries who passed on their playing style and brilliance on the cello – especially in France. French playing culture and composition received a real boost with the institutionalisation of a cello class at the Paris Conservatoire, founded in 1795. The first professor, Jean-Baptiste Janson, was followed by celebrities such as Jean-Louis Duport, Charles-Nicolas Baudiot and Auguste-Joseph Franchomme. And it was above all their students who, in a continuous series, further developed the nineteenth century French style of playing, and it is their names which can be found in the dedications of contemporary works.

One of them was Franchomme's pupil Joseph Salmon who, at the Concerts Lamoureux in November 1892, premiered Léon Boëllmann's *Variations symphoniques*, Op. 23, as their dedicatee. Salmon probably immediately sensed what a gem the composer had placed on his desk. For this work unites all the virtues that made the cello a favourite in the French salons and concert halls: noble poise and elegance, bravado and unfiltered emotionality, but also compositional refinement. There is no question that the cello was the musical counterpart of the literary heroes of the time who populated the novels of Balzac, Hugo or Dumas père and fils.

Born in Alsace, Léon Boëllmann was surrounded by a touch of tragedy: he might have become a great successor to the renowned César Franck had he not succumbed to consumption in 1897 at the age of thirty-five. Boëllmann had studied at the École Niedermeyer in Paris which was dedicated to the restoration of sacred music and employed several distinguished teachers. From 1887 until his death, Boëllmann was organist at the Paris church of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul where he played the great Cavaillé-Coll instrument. In addition to organ pieces – including the well-known *Suite gothique* – he also composed orchestral and chamber music that is worth rediscovering.

Boëllmann clearly borrowed the title *Variations symphoniques* from César Franck's eponymous work for piano and orchestra: in both cases, the form of the variation is employed with a sense of drama and entirely non-schematically. The impetuous cello introduction, with which Boëllmann immediately opens the proceedings, during the course of the piece transpires to be the first theme, while the catchy cantabile melody in the andantino is, in fact, the second theme. It is varied three times, then the introductory theme makes a surprising return, spinning out into a form of symphonic development section. Again and again the vocal theme intervenes (sometimes accompanied by two harps), and at the end it builds up to an emotional apotheosis, whilst avoiding any sense of vulgarity. For a long time, this impactful work resolutely belonged to the cello repertoire; only after the First World War does it seem to have been displaced by another concept of modernity.

### **Between loneliness and lust for life – the Cello Concerto by Édouard Lalo**

While the excursion into concerto repertoire remained an exception for Boëllmann, Édouard Lalo owes his fame (especially in Germany) to one work in particular: his *Symphonie espagnole*, a hybrid of symphony and violin concerto, composed for the Spanish violinist Pablo de Sarasate. Even the ambivalent genre of the five-movement work makes it clear that Lalo had no interest in well-worn models. Following in the footsteps of German Romanticism, he sought a poetic, narrative musical idiom, which he enriched with influences from Spanish, Breton, Russian and even Scandinavian folk music – thus raising his oeuvre above all clichés of “Gallic” music in a highly original way and lending it a European character.

This approach was certainly not to be taken for granted from this officer's son with Spanish roots who had been born in Lille. For following his career as a violinist and member of Jules Armingaud's string quartet, Lalo advanced, after France's defeat in the war against Prussia (1870/71), to become one of the composers presented by the newly founded "Société Nationale de Musique" as heralds of genuinely French music. Lalo, however, was not going to be used for nationalist campaigns, but instead pursued his own path with his concertos, his chamber music and his works for the stage, moving away from the classicism of his supporter Camille Saint-Saëns and preparing the modernism of a Debussy or a Ravel.

On 9 December 1877, the Belgian cellist Adolphe Fischer played Édouard Lalo's cello concerto for the first time at Jules Padeloup's legendary "Concerts populaires" held at the Paris Winter Circus (which still exists today). In a letter to his friend Sarasate he described the circumstances of the premiere, which do not seem all that far removed from occurrences nowadays: "Fischer interpreted the concerto admirably, but the orchestra bothered me throughout the performance. Just imagine, in the same concert, Padeloup performed Berlioz' *Roméo*, which he had never conducted before, so that this difficult work consumed almost all rehearsals and my concerto was not prepared seriously at all. In the evening there were no gross blunders, but there was a lack of precision, the rhythms were wrong and the whole thing was far too loud."

Conversely, one can see what was important to Lalo in his cello concerto: rhythmic precision, transparency and subtlety of colour – but above all, the accurate dialogue between soloist and orchestra. For the work is often reminiscent, as the cellist Sol Gabetta once put it, of a great opera scene for a bel canto singer. And like every opera scene, the concerto begins with a dramatic orchestral opening and a recitative by the soloist: Lalo titles this first section "prélude". From the prelude material an angular, energetic D minor theme emerges in the allegro maestoso, to which Lalo – of course – adds a rapturous contrasting theme. According to the literary imagination of the nineteenth century, we have here a hero who defies heavy storms of fate (the motifs of the "prélude"), leaning on the shoulder of a faithful companion, and in the end emerging victorious.

"Intermezzo" was a title which Mendelssohn and Schumann had already preferred to the weighty "adagio"; in Lalo's work it also represents the meditation and seclusion from the world of the protagonist who, following the example of Byron's much-read *Childe Harold*, withdraws into the solitude of the wild mountains. This does not mean, however, that he is completely lost to the world: in the two presto interludes of Lalo's "intermezzo", the cello dances a kind of tarantella to capricious wind accompaniment. And in the finale, the dance becomes the dominant symbol of an ecstatic, self-expending existence. In rondo form, Lalo composes a series of dances with a Mediterranean flair that require the rhythmic precision which the composer missed at the premiere.

### **Ars gallica – Camille Saint-Saëns' Cello Concerto in A minor**

Camille Saint-Saëns – of the composers gathered on this album, the only "true Parisian" by birth – represents the secret pivot, so to speak, between the works performed here by Marc Coppey. Saint-Saëns composed what is probably the most famous recital piece for cello ever: *Le cygne* (The Swan), which forms part of the humorous "zoological fantasy", *The Carnival of the Animals*, in which the composer has a whole series of musical contemporaries (including himself) appear in animal costume. Shortly before the effervescent finale, a majestic swan glides across the imaginary water – a sublime and serene moment of harmony between creature and divine creation.

But Saint-Saëns also set a milestone with his (first) Cello Concerto in A minor of 1872, at a time when French music was determined to distance itself from German influences after the war against Prussia and the humiliating coronation of Wilhelm I as emperor at the palace of Versailles. Saint-Saëns, co-founder of the aforemen-

tioned “Société Nationale de Musique”, was the ideological head of the *ars gallica* movement that rejected “Wagnérisme”, instead referring back to its very own, French, traditions since the baroque operas of Lully and Rameau. In this context, the central allegretto con moto in the cello concerto seems like a programme: instead of an emotional slow movement, one hears a dainty minuet in which the cello’s voice sounds like a meditation by the composer on the virtues of a simple and crystal-clear art of sound – music in breeches, as it were, which is just as far removed from dazzling virtuosity as it is from Wagner’s intoxicating sonorities.

At the same time, Saint-Saëns was not so naïve as to regard such “music in the old style” as a viable alternative to the musical present. His concerto therefore is a daring experiment in form in one movement that draws on similar models of Schumann or Liszt. The central theme of the first and final parts is formed by the cello’s cascading figure from the opening of the work, which leads into several “sighs”; here Saint-Saëns uses the soloist’s improvisatory gesture as a constructive cell providing a sense of unity and consolidation for the concerto. In the first part he juxtaposes the main theme with a rapturous romance, and in the rondo finale with two new melodies: an instrumental cavatina developed from the sighing motif of the opening theme, and a sweeping melody that rises into stratospheric harmonics at the end. Above all, however, the cello is challenged here in all its expressive ranges, from the grand, noble tone to dizzying virtuosic turns and runs. And at the end, Saint-Saëns clears the tragic minor tonality by moving into a liberating A major. On 19 January 1873, the concerto was premiered at the Paris Conservatoire by its dedicatee Auguste Tolbecque – a very interesting musician who not only appeared as a virtuoso performer, but also created, as a violin maker and expert on historical instruments, a sense of awareness of the French musical tradition.

### **Elegiac Fragment – Gabriel Fauré’s Op. 24**

Camille Saint-Saëns and Gabriel Fauré – theirs was a lifelong friendship that lasted from Fauré’s studies with Saint-Saëns at the École Niedermeyer until his teacher’s death sixty years later. Fauré, who had relocated to Paris from the south of France, owed his older friend his connection to contemporary music, his introduction to the “Société Nationale de Musique”, but also his post as organist at the church of La Madeleine in the centre of Paris, where he provided the musical framework for services on behalf of the busy Saint-Saëns. Perhaps the most striking difference between the two musicians was that Saint-Saëns had been known to the French music world from an early stage as a highly prolific child prodigy, whilst Fauré’s renown did not proliferate until the late 1870s.

At that time he had attracted attention with his first Violin Sonata, Op. 13, and in 1880 he started working again on a duet, this time for cello and piano. As was so often the case, Fauré composed the slow middle movement first – this time, however, continuing onwards proved cumbersome, which led him to the pragmatic decision of publishing the fragment with the title of *Élégie*, Op. 24. In a sense, this piece could be considered as the serious counterpart to Saint-Saëns’ *Swan*, which was composed a little later: in the *molto adagio*, over sombre C minor chords, the elegiac melody of the cello descends resignedly, but later soars to dramatic intensity. In the closely related key of A flat major, new, floating melodies are heard – which Fauré entrusted to the woodwinds in his orchestral version of 1895, arranged for the conductor Édouard Colonne – before they are taken up by the cello. They are heard once more at the end of the *Élégie*, before the piece finally freezes in Beethoven’s “fateful key”.

Michael Struck-Schloen  
Translation: Viola Scheffel

**MARC COPPEY** cello

Recognized for his celebrated interpretations as soloist, his extensive exploration of chamber music with some of today's finest musicians, and his dedication to widening the cello literature, Marc Coppey is considered to be one of the world's leading cellists – recently also with a growing reputation as a conductor on the international podium.

A protégé of Lord Yehudi Menuhin and Mstislav Rostropovich, Coppey first shot to international acclaim at the age of 18, winning First Prize and 'Prize for the Best Bach Performance' at the prestigious Leipzig Bach Competition (1988). Soon thereafter, he made major debuts in Paris and Moscow in collaboration with Yehudi Menuhin and Viktoria Postnikova, and performed at the Évian Festival. Since then, Coppey has carved out an impressive solo career, working regularly with many of the world's finest orchestras and conductors. An avid chamber music player, Marc Coppey has explored and performed the cello repertoire intensively with renowned artists and ensembles. From 1995 to 2000 he was a member of the Ysaÿe Quartet.

The breadth of Coppey's repertoire is testament to his profound musical curiosity: alongside mainstream cello literature, he is a champion of lesser-known and contemporary works. He has given the world premieres of cello concertos by Lenot, Mantovani, Meïmoun, Monnet, Tanguy, and the French premieres of works by Carter and Tüür. In addition, numerous leading contemporary composers have dedicated works to Coppey.

His recordings have received critical acclaim worldwide. They include works by Beethoven, Debussy, Emmanuel, Fauré, Grieg, Strauss, Dubois, Bach, Dohnányi, Matalon and Dutilleux. Together with the Pražák Quartet, Marc Coppey has recorded the Schubert Quintet, and with pianist Peter Laul the Beethoven and Brahms Cello Sonatas, Russian Cello Sonatas and a Schubert album. His audite debut recording with Haydn and C.P.E. Bach Cello Concertos (aud. 97.716) raised international attention. The following recording of Bloch's Schelomo and Dvořák's Cello Concerto (aud. 97.734) with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and Kirill Karabits received several international awards and was nominated for the International Classical Music Awards (ICMA). His recording of Shostakovich's Cello Concertos (aud. 97.777) again received several awards and great critical acclaim.

In addition to his solo career and his chamber music activities, Marc Coppey is Professor at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris and gives master classes across the globe. He is artistic director of the Colmar Chamber Music Festival as well as the Zagreb Soloists. He was made Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres by the French Cultural Ministry in 2021.

Marc Coppey was born in Strasbourg, France. He studied cello at the conservatory of his hometown, continued at the Paris Conservatoire and at Indiana University in Bloomington, USA. Today he resides in Paris. He performs on a rare cello by Matteo Goffriller (Venice, 1711), the "Van Wilgenburg".

## JOHN NELSON conductor



Grammy Award winning conductor John Nelson is recognised worldwide as one of America's most eminent conductors, as well as an acknowledged specialist for the music of Hector Berlioz.

John Nelson studied at the Juilliard School in New York, where he received the Irving Berlin Conducting Prize. Over the course of his career, he has served as music director of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, the Caramoor Music Festival in New York and the Orchestre de chambre de Paris. In addition, Nelson has held the positions of principal guest conductor of the Orchestre national de Lyon, artistic advisor of the orchestras of Nashville and Louisville, and he is presently the principal guest conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Costa Rica – the country in which he was born to American missionary parents.

During his career spanning some five decades, Nelson has conducted the world's leading orchestras and ensembles in North America, Europe, and Asia. A champion of operatic repertoire, he has also conducted in the great opera houses across the globe.

His complete recording of Berlioz's *Les Troyens* with Joyce DiDonato, Michael Spyres, and the Orchestre philharmonique de Strasbourg was met with outstanding critical acclaim in 2018 and received numerous accolades such as the BBC Music Magazine's Award for Opera, the International Opera Award, Gramophone Magazine's Opera Recording of the Year as well as Recording of the Year, and a nomination from The Sunday Times for Recording of the Decade. The outstanding success led to further Berlioz recording projects and special events, reinforcing Nelson's work and authority as a leading Berlioz specialist, among them, reuniting with Orchestre philharmonique de Strasbourg, Joyce DiDonato, and Michael Spyres, the performance and recording of *La Damnation de Faust*. In addition, Nelson's distinguished discography includes Handel's *Semele* (Grammy Award), Berlioz's *Béatrice et Bénédicte* (Diapason d'Or), the complete Beethoven Symphonies and Piano Concertos with the Orchestre de chambre de Paris, and DVDs of Bach's B minor Mass and St. Matthew Passion, Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* as well as Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*.

Recognised also as a great interpreter of the sacred music repertoire, in 1994 Nelson co-founded SOLI DEO GLORIA, an organization based in Chicago that commissions works of sacred music from foremost international composers, such as Christopher Rouse, James MacMillan and Roxanna Panufnik.

## ORCHESTRE PHILHARMONIQUE DE STRASBOURG

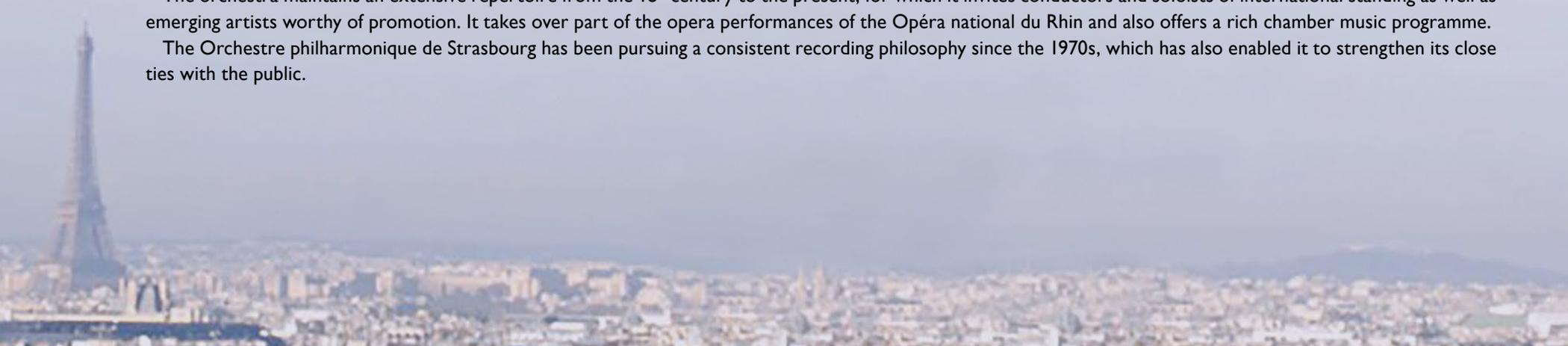
Recognized as an “Orchestre national” in 1994, the Orchestre philharmonique de Strasbourg is one of the major orchestras in France. With 110 permanent musicians perpetuating its dual French-German tradition, the orchestra pursues ambitious projects in the field of symphonic music. Due to its rapidly developing recording activity, the orchestra has steadily increased its international reputation.

The Orchestre philharmonique de Strasbourg has a history of over 160 years and is one of the oldest orchestras in the country. It was founded in 1855 by the Belgian Joseph Hasselmans, and its musical directors throughout history have included such eminent figures as Hans Pfitzner, Guy Ropartz, Ernest Bour, Alceo Galliera, Alain Lombard, Theodor Guschlbauer, Jan Latham-Koenig and Marc Albrecht. After nine years under the direction of Marko Letonja, Aziz Shokhakov became the 15<sup>th</sup> musical and artistic director of the Orchestre philharmonique de Strasbourg in September 2021.

The orchestra regularly performs in major concert halls in France and Europe: the Philharmonie de Paris, the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, the KKL in Lucerne, the Gasteig in Munich, the Musikverein in Vienna etc. Recently, it has resumed its previous international tours, which in the past had taken it to Japan, Brazil and Argentina. In June 2017, the orchestra performed in a series of concerts in South Korea, which was so successful that it resulted in an immediate re-invitation for the next season.

The orchestra maintains an extensive repertoire from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present, for which it invites conductors and soloists of international standing as well as emerging artists worthy of promotion. It takes over part of the opera performances of the Opéra national du Rhin and also offers a rich chamber music programme.

The Orchestre philharmonique de Strasbourg has been pursuing a consistent recording philosophy since the 1970s, which has also enabled it to strengthen its close ties with the public.





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**Marc Coppey:**

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**Durand**

**Camille Saint-Saëns:**

**The Carnival of the Animals 'The Swan'**

*arrangement for cello and chamber*

*orchestra by Paul Vidal*

**Camille Saint-Saëns:**

**Cello Concerto No. 1, Op. 33**

*art direction and design:*

**AB•Design**

**audite**

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