



PROJECT MUSE®

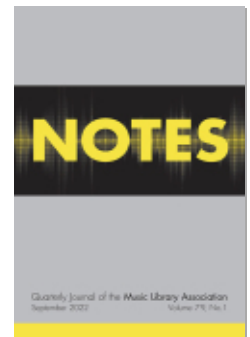
Saint-Saëns's Works for Violin and Piano

Michael Strasser

Notes, Volume 79, Number 1, September 2022, pp. 116-121 (Article)

Published by Music Library Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/not.2022.0084>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/863410>

are the incorporation of Schnittke's interlocutors' notes on scores and personal correspondence using existing editions and sketches from the Schnittke Archive at Goldsmiths.

Although the changes made to existing editions are important, the background, brief analyses of polystylism, location of serial structures, and analyses that are not immediately evident from the published score would be extremely useful. Much of the ingenuity of Schnittke's writing and that of his Thaw colleagues, like Gubaidulina, Suslin, and Denisov, comes from a mathematical attention to structural creation, timbral virtuosity, and a complex interplay

of affective elements and new developments of form. In Romantic music, the underlying form is presumed knowledge by all professionals working with a critical edition. Yet, in this generation of Soviet music, determining these structures requires an analysis of sketches, and even the composer's personal correspondence, which was used to compile other aspects of this series. This detailed theoretical analysis of each work is missing from these otherwise excellent editions.

ALEXANDRA BIRCH

University of California, Santa Barbara

SAINT-SAËNS'S WORKS FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Camille Saint-Saëns. *Andante d'une sonate pour violon et piano en ut majeur* (R deest); *Sonate pour violon et piano en si bémol majeur* (R 103); *Sonate pour violon et piano (inachevée) en fa majeur* (R 106); *Sonate pour violon et piano no 1 en ré mineur*, op. 75 (R 123); *Sonate pour violon et piano no 2 en mi bémol majeur*, op. 102 (R 130). Edited by Fabien Guilloux and François De Médicis. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2020. (œuvres instrumentales complètes, Sér. III, Vol. 4) [Front matter in Fr., Eng., and Ger.: foreword, p. vii–xii; preface, p. xiii–lxv; documents, p. lxxviii–lxxxvi; score, p. 3–120; crit. rep. in Fr., p. 123–51. Cloth. ISMN 979-0-006-54154-6. €266 (\$332.50).]

Camille Saint-Saëns was, during most of his lifetime, indisputably the most famous musician in France, a figure renowned both at home and abroad for his talents both as a composer and a pianist. Among the most prolific composers of his time, he contributed significant works across multiple genres and over a span of many decades. Yet for much of the twentieth century, Saint-Saëns and his music attracted relatively little scholarly attention. That situation has thankfully changed over the past few decades, as growing interest in the rich and varied musical life of *fin-de-siècle* France has resulted in increased focus on Saint-Saëns, with several new biographies in both English and

French, a three-volume meticulously-researched catalog of his works (Sabina Teller Ratner, *Camille Saint-Saëns, 1835–1921: A Thematic Catalogue of his Complete Works*, 3 vols. [Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2002–]), a comprehensive collection of his numerous reviews, essays, and other writings on music and musicians (Marie-Gabrielle Soret, ed., *Camille Saint-Saëns: Écrits sur la musique et les musiciens, 1870–1921* [Paris: Vrin, 2012]) and, most recently, a critical edition of his approximately 360 instrumental works to be published in a total of thirty-nine volumes organized into four series: orchestral works, concertos, chamber works, and works for keyboard.

The present volume, containing the composer's three early works for violin and piano (published for the first time) and his two published violin sonatas, is the fourth to be released, following a volume devoted to the string quartets and two in the orchestral music series: Symphony no. 3 and the Symphonic Poems. These latter two volumes were reviewed by James Brooks Kuykendall in *Notes* 77, no. 2 (December 2020), pp. 319–23.

A Foreword by the series editor, Michael Stegemann, opens the volume and is followed by an extensive Introduction with information on each of the individual works by its editors: François de Médicis and Fabien Guiloux. (Both the Foreword and the Introduction appear in French, English, and German.) A Documents section opens with a transcription of three short, undated pages containing questions from the publisher Auguste Durand (1830–1909) regarding Saint-Saëns's Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 1 in D Minor, op. 75 along with the composer's responses. This is followed by a series of plates reproducing manuscript pages from each of the works included in the volume and a page from the proofs of the violin part to the Sonata no. 2 in E-flat Major, op. 102 with corrections in the hand of Pablo Sarasate, who premiered the work with the composer at the piano. Following the newly edited scores of the five works, the volume concludes with the *Apparat critique* (i.e., critical notes, in French only) and a list of abbreviations.

Saint-Saëns's interest in the violin and its music began early, with the first work included in this volume, an Andante movement for violin and piano in C major, dating from summer 1841, when the composer was not quite five years old. It is, in fact, the first work the precocious child composed for an instrument other than the piano. A page from the manuscript (p. lxix),

with its crudely executed notation, provides striking visual testimony to its author's young age. The music is sometimes rather clumsy in its execution, and there are several notational errors. The editors decided against correcting these, arguing that they “document the musical knowledge and capacities” of the young composer (p. xlv).

About six months later, Saint-Saëns again tackled the genre, composing a complete Sonata for Violin and Piano in B-flat Major in three movements. This work is dedicated to Antoine Bessems (1806–1868), a Belgian violinist who was a friend of Berlioz, played first violin at the Théâtre-Italien, and performed as a soloist in Paris and in several other European cities. In the 1840s, he appeared with the young Saint-Saëns in various Parisian salons, and the essay includes an 1840 review of one such occasion, when the two performed an unnamed Beethoven sonata (p. xxxii). The manuscript score is in Saint-Saëns's hand and a separate copy of the violin part in another hand (probably that of Bessems) corrects the young composer's errors, including some triple-stop chords that are almost impossible to play. (These corrections are included as *ossia* in the new edition.) The Documents section includes reproductions of pages from Saint-Saëns's manuscript and the violin part (pp. lxx–lxxi).

The last of these youthful works is an unfinished sonata dating from 1850 or 1851. It consists of a complete opening sonata movement and an incomplete scherzo movement. As with the Sonata in B-flat Major, this work probably resulted from Saint-Saëns's acquaintance with a violinist, in this case a young musician named Achille Dien (1827–1904) who joined a cellist named Alexandre Batta (1816–1902) and the fifteen-year-old Saint-Saëns in chamber music sessions where they would explore the music of Reber and such masters as

Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Mendelssohn. (The editors suggest that an unfinished Saint-Saëns piano trio dating from 1849 might have been intended for this ensemble.) Although incomplete, this work provides evidence of its composer's growing musical maturity.

The two published violin sonatas, dated from 1885 and 1896 respectively, are among a distinguished series of French violin sonatas that were written during the decades following the Franco-Prussian War, including Fauré's Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Major, op. 13 (1877) and Franck's Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Major (1886). As was the case with at least two of Saint-Saëns's youthful sonatas, both of the published sonatas were inspired by the composer's relationships with a noted violinist.

The dedicatee of the Sonata no. 1 was Martin-Pierre Marsick (1847–1924), who had a notable international career as a soloist and as leader of the Marsick Quartet, which performed frequently at concerts of the Société nationale de musique, founded by Saint-Saëns and Romain Bussine (1830–1899) in 1871. The Second Sonata was composed while Saint-Saëns was traveling in Egypt from January through March of 1896. The composer dedicated it to the violinist Léon-Alexandre Carembat (1861–after 1934) and his pianist wife, Marie-Louise (1862–1934), explaining to Durand that he appreciated the fact that they frequently performed his works “without letting me know in any way, whereas so many others, whenever they play anything by me, even at the end of the world, quickly send me the program with a view to laying claims to my gratitude. That did deserve a reward, I promised to do something for them, and I have kept my promise” (letter from the composer to Auguste Durand, 6 April 1896, quoted on p. xlii). Nevertheless, he did not intend to give

the couple the rights to the first performance of the work. Instead, he envisioned premiering it himself with Pablo Sarasate (1844–1908) at a concert planned for June 1896 at Salle Pleyel to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his first public concert, which had taken place in the same hall and, in fact, that is where the opus 102 sonata work was first heard.

Much of the information presented above comes from the lengthy and highly informative Introduction. The editors begin their essay with a brief summary of the history of the violin sonata in France after 1800 and then present detailed information about the sources, background, and significance of each of the three unpublished youthful works. As might be expected, they devote considerably more space to the two published sonatas, covering the genesis of each work, its early performances, and reception. They quote liberally from early reviews and letters exchanged between Saint-Saëns and Auguste Durand, many of which have not been published, although the editors note that an annotated collection of this important correspondence is in preparation. There is even an extended examination of the possibility (indeed, probability) that the opus 75 sonata was the model for the so-called “Vinteuil Sonata” that figures so prominently in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The essay concludes with a section devoted to Editorial Principles for the volume and some interesting Performance Notes, one of which deals with the pianist's handling of the pedal in a certain passage of the opus 75 sonata. Another quotes a letter to Durand in which Saint-Saëns explains how the performers should approach the dynamics in the Adagio movement of opus 102, cautioning that the violinist should not attempt match the pianissimo of the piano, explaining that the piano's dynamic is

intended to allow the violin to stand out (p. xlvi).

There is much in this introductory essay that will prove valuable to scholars, but also information that performers and teachers will find useful. In addition to the passages noted above, one could point, for example, to Saint-Saëns's letter to Durand of 10 March 1896, in which he tells the publisher of his newly-completed opus 102 sonata and offers a characterization of both his sonatas that might influence a performer's approach to each work. "It is not a *concert* sonata like the first [opus 75], it is quite a serious *chamber* work; it will not be understood till the eighth hearing" (p. xli).

The English translation of the Introduction by Vincent Giroud is generally accurate and idiomatic, but there are occasional mistranslations or instances of clunky phrasing that stand out all the more due to their relative rarity. One reads, for example, that ". . . Marsick's string quartet produced itself regularly at concerts presented by [the Société nationale de musique]" (p. xxxii; The French "*se produit*" should be translated as "appeared"). In the section devoted to Proust's "Venteuil Sonata," a quote from *À la recherche de temps perdu* is introduced rather clumsily: "Here is what Proust describes it when Jean visits a salon and hears the sonata again" (p. xxxix). Such faults rarely impact one's understanding of the text, but they detract from the overall excellent quality of the essay and translation and could have easily been avoided if the editors had engaged a native English speaker to read through the translation as a final check. (And the same might also be said of the German translation.)

In his Foreword, Michael Stegemann lays out the rationale for this ambitious, multi-volume project, arguing that many of Saint-Saëns's published works had not been newly edited since their first publication. He contends

that these early editions "are often full of errors" (p. ix) and that reprints and subsequent editions (which may or may not have included corrections) must be compared both to the original editions and to various manuscript sources. He further points out that many youthful works (such as those included in this volume), transcriptions, arrangements, and other miscellaneous items that might be useful to scholars have remained in manuscript and are thus not easily accessible.

A close comparison of the new edition of the opus 75 sonata with the first edition (available online at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b525013878>) and a widely-available edition prepared by Zino Francescatti (New York: International Music Company, 1976) reveals some improvements, especially in regards to phrase markings, which would benefit performers' interpretations of certain passages. Various aspects of the notation have been modernized and cleaned up as well. (The Francescatti edition also modernizes stem directions but otherwise follows the conventions of the Durand edition fairly closely.) In addition, Saint-Saëns's musical abbreviations (as when an accompanimental figure is repeated across several measures) have been spelled out, which in some cases makes for a rather busy-looking page. One could argue for or against this particular change, but it does perhaps give one a truer visual sense of the musical texture. In the opus 75 sonata, there do not appear to be any pitch or rhythmic errors in the Durand edition so the improvements in this edition, while welcome, would not result in a substantially different reading of the work.

The new edition is based on the Durand first edition and the autograph score (available online at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52500916v>), and the critical notes document disagreements between these sources

and indicate where changes have been made in the new edition. Some of the notes, however, contain errors of various kinds. For example, there is an indication that the piano part in the autograph score is missing a * (pedal release sign) at m. 161 of the first movement. Based on the precedent established by previous notes, this suggests that this mark is present in the first edition and also appears in the new edition. But there is no such sign in the first edition, nor does it appear in the new edition. Even more puzzling is the fact that this measure is in the middle of a phrase, which would make it an odd place to release the pedal, and there is no *Ped.* sign in the measures preceding m. 161 in the first movement. In fact, this note refers to m. 161 in the second movement, not the first, and is thus misplaced. At least one other note (dealing with a measure that Saint-Saëns omitted and illustrated with a reproduction of the passage in question) is likewise mistakenly listed as referring to the first movement when in fact the passage is found in the second movement (mm. 232–34).

Another puzzling note refers to the piano part in the second half of m. 299, stating that the new edition “restores” the *sva* indication above the arpeggiated figure in the right hand (thus continuing the arpeggio found in the first half of the measure) so that it matches mm. 287 and 291, which contain the similar figures. But neither the autograph score nor the first edition includes an *sva* sign in m. 299 and, in fact, neither does the new edition. So the note might have reflected an early editorial decision that was eventually changed. (And there are strong musical arguments that suggest that the figure as written is correct.)

While the majority of the critical notes are accurate, there are enough that don’t seem to reflect the reality of what’s on the page to suggest that the

final editing of this section was somewhat flawed and that one should approach individual notes with a certain amount of caution. (In the cases cited above and the others that I observed, there seems to be no problem with the edition itself but, rather, a lack of coordination between the notes and the edition.) Of course, preparation of a critical edition is a tedious process, with many opportunities along the way for errors to make their way into print, but one would hope that some of these more obvious flaws might be avoided in future volumes.

As noted above, the critical notes appear only in French, but most readers with only an elementary knowledge of the language should be able to navigate them without much problem. But such readers might not be familiar with some French musical conventions, and in future volumes the editors might consider adding some of these to the list of Notes critiques abbreviations. For example, even readers with a fair understanding of French might not understand that the symbols *P° inf.* and *P° sup.* (i.e., “piano inferior” and “piano superior”) refer, respectively, to the lower and upper staves of the piano part.

In his review of the new edition of the Symphony no. 3, James Brooks Kuykendall questions whether the new editions of Saint-Saëns’s instrumental works offer enough of an improvement over the generally accurate early Durand editions to warrant the expense involved in producing (let alone buying) these volumes. It is certainly a fair question and, as stated above, the new edition of the violin sonatas will not radically alter our understanding of these works. But especially in the case of a volume like this, which contains works which have never appeared in print, I would argue that the contribution to scholarship is certainly not negligible. And the introductory essay contains valuable

information, much of it not previously available, which will benefit both scholars and performers. While perhaps not appropriate for every library, this new critical edition of the Saint-Saëns instrumental works has the potential to contribute significantly to the growing body of scholarship into the life

and works of one of the most important French musicians of the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century.

MICHAEL STRASSER
Baldwin Wallace University

