

This piece of music was written by a French composer called Camille Saint-Saëns.

It is an orchestral piece based on a poem by the French writer, Henri Cazalis. The music describes the gruesome happenings in the churchyard of a small French village on Halloween.

This is ‘Programme music’ because it tells a story in music.

**Points to listen for. Follow using a ruler:**

1. The twelve soft chimes of the witching hour of midnight are heard on harp and French horn.
2. The mysterious cloaked figure of Death appears. He drums his heels upon the tombstones and then tunes his violin urging skeletons to rise from their graves.
3. They begin to dance to a waltz tune heard first on the flute, then on the violins.
4. Then Death plays the main waltz tune upon his violin.
5. The next tune is played on oboe and bassoon, echoed by Death’s violin. Later, we hear the first phrase of this tune on the violin and the second on the xylophone, imitating the eerie clatter of the dancers’ bones.
6. The pace of the waltz becomes more and more frantic. The strings suggest the wind rustling through the graveyard trees.
7. Then, after this dramatic impression of sound and movement, there is a sudden silence – as the oboe signifies cockcrow and the first light of dawn.
8. Immediately, the skeletons disappear into their graves. There is a reminder of Death’s melancholy violin; then he, too, disappears . . .