**September 16, 2021 - Camille Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila***

Join me this week on the Thursday Night Opera House for Camille Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* (*Samson and Delilah*). Loosely based on the Book of Judges in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), it's notable for its superb choruses, lavish spectacle, and the sensuous beauty of Dalila's music. Interestingly, the opera--a staple of the French repertoire--had its premiere in Weimar, Germany on December 2, 1877, thanks to Franz Liszt, who directed the Court Opera there. Paris did not see *Samson* until 1890, at the Théâtre Eden, and the Paris Opéra--which long objected to portraying biblical subjects onstage--did not capitulate until 1892.

The story takes place in Gaza. Samson (tenor **Plácido Domingo**) leads a successful Hebrew revolt against their Philistine overlords, in which the ruler Abimélech (bass **Jean-Philippe Courtis**) is killed. Prompted by the High Priest of Dagon (baritone **Alain Fondary**), the Philistine seductress Dalila (mezzo-soprano **Waltraud Meier**) renders Samson powerless by cutting off his hair, from which his strength is derived. Finally, Samson's strength is restored to him through prayer, and he pulls down the Temple of Dagon, killing his enemies and himself.

**Myung-Whun Chung** conducts the Chorus and Orchestra of the Bastille Opera, Paris in this 1992 EMI recording.

**Rita Gorr** (Dalila) is joined by **Jon Vickers** (Samson) in "Mon coeur s'ouvre a ta voix": <https://youtu.be/R_QmJXpK5Fw>.

As a bonus, we’ll hear highlights from another Saint-Saëns opera that’s occasionally performed, *Henry VIII*, with **Philippe Rouillon** in the title role, **Michelle Command** as Catherine of Aragon, and **Lucile Vignon** as Anne Boleyn.