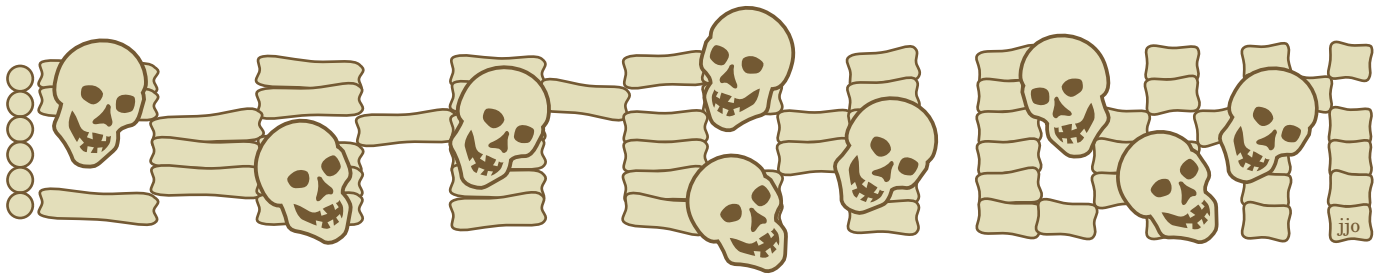


# October Fretbone Exercises

## A Skeletal Sightread



Play those bones like a xylophone ...

**Exercise 1:** I 2 II 2 III 4 IV 3 V 3 VI 3 VII 1 VIII 4 IX 3 X 4 XI 4 ④

♩ = 120

Exercise 1 . . . . .	Saint-Saëns(1874): Danse Macabre, Op.40 . . . . .	1
----------------------	---	---

## Danse Macabre and Halloween

A mere 150 years ago when Camile Saint-Saëns wrote *Danse Macabre* that term referred to the dead being summoned from the grave by the devil on Halloween night to **dance** until dawn, and his composition has many such allusions.

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danse\\_macabre\\_\(Saint-Sa%C3%ABns\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danse_macabre_(Saint-Sa%C3%ABns))

The orchestral work begins with twelve chimes signifying midnight, and the opening theme is a lone violin on a screeching **tritone** interval (known historically as the *diabolus in musica* i.e. “the Devil in music” due to its perceived dissonance) as though played by the devil himself.

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tritone#Historical\\_uses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tritone#Historical_uses)

This piece was also the first orchestral use of the European **xylophone**, whose clattering wooden blocks were used by Saint-Saëns to evoke the rattle of bones when the skeletons rose to dance (the series of rapid staccato notes after the tritones).

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xylophone#Western\\_xylophone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xylophone#Western_xylophone)

To drive the point home, Saint-Saëns also quoted the ancient *Dies Irae* chant from the Mass for the Dead, but that part is not included in this exercise.

## Danse Macabre at the Olympics

Surprisingly, this piece was part of the opening ceremonies for this year's Olympics in Paris! It's in a video segment where the masked torch bearer drops into the **Louvre** like some art thief, and then the subjects in the paintings and sculptures gradually come alive and scurry to the windows to watch the boat procession on the Seine. Yes, they were long dead, but was the torch bearer supposed to be the devil? Judge the scene for yourself ...

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onP5-DKSbI4&t=3655s> (in 2024 Olympics)

## Danse Macabre in the Middle Ages

Four hundred years before Saint-Saëns, the term “Danse Macabre” was a **meme** in late medieval European art in which a series of full-length portraits of living people, often popes and emperors, were interleaved with images of dancing skeletons, as a kind of *momento mori* to remind people of their mortality and the vanity of earthly power. The skeletons always have the last laugh. Take a quick scroll through the example images here ...

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danse\\_Macabre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danse_Macabre)

And read below about the calamities that may explain that morbid preoccupation ...

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis\\_of\\_the\\_late\\_Middle\\_Ages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_of_the_late_Middle_Ages)

*This exercise is from the yet to be released book “Chromatic Fretboard Exercises”, which contains over a thousand such exercises and will be made available for free on IMSLP. It may be freely copied and modified, but with the condition that it be attributed to J. J. Olson (CC-BY license).*

*Interested? Contact Jeff Olson at [jjocanoe@gmail.com](mailto:jjocanoe@gmail.com)*

*P.S. It easiest to follow these links if you **get the pdf** as indicated on the first page.*