THE ALKAN SOCIETY

25 Esquisses pour piano

Inspired by Ch. V. ALKAN
Composed by members of the Alkan Society

ESQUISES

25 Motifs
In issue 97 of the Alkan Society Bulletin, Richard Murphy proposed that members of the Society be invited to compose a piano piece lasting no more than 150 seconds inspired by Alkan’s Esquisses, op. 63. These could be imagined either as a tribute to Alkan and his op. 63 or, more broadly, as an opportunity for a composer – whether professional or amateur – to be stimulated and influenced by Alkan.

The deadline for submissions was Alkan’s 206th birthday, 30th November 2019. The project was timed to coincide with the 100th issue of the Bulletin, published in April 2020. To encourage amateur composers in particular, the printed edition of our new Esquisses was anonymous. This subsequent on-line edition (November 2020) now includes the names of the composers.

The number and variety of submissions certainly exceeded our expectations. All submissions were accepted without alteration. Most were hand-written, and these have been carefully and expertly transcribed using notation software by our Honorary Secretary, Dr José López, to whom we owe a very significant debt of gratitude. The pieces are in alphabetical order of title.

We feel that the collection demonstrates how Alkan’s Esquisses can spark an imaginative compositional response. It is up to you, the readers and performers, to explore whether you agree.

Editorial team
Nick Hammond, High Stittenham, UK
José López, Miami, USA
Richard Murphy, London, UK
Richard Shaw, London, UK
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Catching as catch can

Vivace \( \frac{4}{4} \) = 100

il tutto staccato

John White
Chevauchez dans l'obscurité
(Ride into darkness)

agitated

approx. $\frac{1}{4} = 140$

Philipp Rhein

© Philipp J. Rhein

(Ride into darkness)

Chevauchez dans l'obscurité
(Ride into darkness)

agitated

approx. $\frac{1}{4} = 140$

Philipp Rhein

© Philipp J. Rhein

(Ride into darkness)
Chevauchez dans l'obscurité
Long mf leggiero no r. ped. bright top notes poco rit. no r. ped.

q $= 120$

mp

una corda 'til bar 7

Bright top notes to end

R. ped.

S.P. - sustain (middle)pedal

r. ped. - right pedal
Esquisse

Dolce con anima

Frederik Keygnaert

Piano

con ped.
Esquisse mécanique

In commemoration of Charles-Valentin Alkan

Allegro moderato

\( \Leftrightarrow 208 \)

Hugh Shrapnel

Piano

No Ped.

\( \text{giocoso, with } \text{élan} \)
Note: A nod at Alkan's 'Tutti de Concerto', op.63 no 15, within a different stylistic frame of reference, with a wink at the British complexity school along the way.
Figure-skating

Allegro suave  \( \frac{1}{2} = 120 \)

Piano

John White
Fils des Cloches
(inspiré par Charles-Valentin Alkan's Esquisses Op.63 No.4)

Allegretto \( j = 80 \)

Alex Bolton
Fragment de quatuor

Allegro agitato

Brian Inglis

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NOTE: This piece takes a transcription of Alkan's tantalising opening for a projected string quartet in C minor as a starting point, then leads it in a slightly different direction...
Hiding and Seeking

Allegro leggiero \( \text{\textcopyright John White} \)

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{Piano} \\
\text{sotto voce}
\end{array} \]

\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{Hiding and Seeking} \\
\text{\textcopyright John White}
\end{array} \]
Le festin du Prophète Élie - petites variations sur un thème juif

Andante \( \text{\textit{q.}} = 76 \)

M:V: avec ferveur

Ha Na vi

E l i a hu

Andante \( \text{\textit{q.}} = 76 \)

pp simile

q.=q

ff brusquement

simile

leggierissimo
25  \( \text{diaboliquement joyeux} \)

\( \begin{array}{c}
\text{p} \\
\text{mf} \\
\text{mf} \\
\text{p} \\
\text{mf} \\
\text{mf} \\
\text{p} \\
\text{mf} \\
\text{p} \\
\end{array} \)
Performers decide when to use right hand for bass clef notes
Arrows indicate precise moment to use middle pedal
Les cloches

Brian Inglis

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quasi organo ("mixtures")
Note: A very different take on bell sounds to Alkan's op.63 no 4, with a side nod at the kind of
colour and keyboard 'orchestration' found in the piano music of Debussy (as well as
Alkan). A slight echo, too, of the implacable mysticism of the latter's final unnumbered
piece from Op. 63, 'Laus Deo'.

* white note glissando, not too fast, gradually slowing down, diminuendo al niente
(last few notes should be key-noise only, without sounding pitch).

17 November 2019
Note: This piece references the trajectory from Rameau's 'Rappel des oiseaux' to Messiaen's Petites esquisses d'oiseaux via Ravel and Alkan, whose op. 63 Esquisses certainly fall within this space of French pianism. In the inimitable words of Richard Gorer: 'he stands like some musical pithecanthropus as a link between the clavecinistes, and the impressionists of the early years of the twentieth century'.

12 August 2019
Prélude XI

Brian Arlon Sunday
fini le 19 juillet, 1995
Erratum: b19, LH - 1st chord should have an Fx (double sharp)
Remembering

Tempo di valse \( \frac{3}{4} \) = 70

John White
Romancing

Andante sostenuto

Piano

5

cantabile

9

13

17

legato

John White
Tarantellinetto
Esquisse

Allegro \( \dottedbreve = 134 \)

Ryan Layne Whitney
The First Female Referee

Dave Smith

Piano

Xaxado  \( \frac{1}{4} = 90 \)

Dave Smith

The First Female Referee
In a 1974 programme note for a concert including five of his piano sonatas, the composer John White drew attention to a notable aspect of Alkan's music, namely “The exposition of mysterious order”, referring to the kind of surprises which occur in spite of (and more often because of) the strict compositional discipline involved. This observation had no small effect on The first female referee, the title taken from Hunter of Stories, a collection of brief writings by the Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano.
to Florian Mitrea

The Lord is my Shepherd

homage to Alkan - after an ancient Hebrew melody for Psalm XXIII

Gently flowing - flexible and expressive

con ped.

Alan Mills
A tempo (poco sost.)

più rallent.

Ritardando, sempre rubato

Poco meno mosso

ancora più rallent.
Trotting

Allegro leggero \( \text{\textit{d}} = 70 \)

John White

Piano

leggieramente

legatissimo ma non forte
83' Utan Satir

John Goslin

Piano

Moderato

(Add octave below)

f relentless

now quiet

mp

mf

f maestoso

arpeggio

tremolo
arp. on the white keys
Vent d'Ouest
Esquisse d'apres Alkan

Nigel Hitchman
Waltzing

John White

Piano

Moderato lyrico \( \frac{4}{4} = 60 \)

\[ \text{etc.} \]
And a sketch/esquisse from Alkan – the Parisian self-isolator

The image\(^1\) shows a detail from the first page, fourth system, first bar, of the manuscript of *Les regrets de la nonette* for piano in G minor, dated 7 July, 1854. Pen and black ink on commercially produced manuscript paper from Paris c. 1850. Six notes, two dots, stem, tie before first note, beam, slur, and cross-hatching with border.

The dedication to Louise at the top of this particular page may indicate Alkan’s attempt at a fair copy when transcribing from a dedication-free draft – though, by definition, a fair copy would be correction-free.

We see the original 14\(^{th}\) bar with right-hand notes only. The three chords are C and E flat, B flat and D, B flat and D. This last chord may be the error Alkan made, as all similar figurations fall typically by step, i.e., no preceding notes immediately repeated. A lapse of concentration perhaps – very easily done when copying. Was he annoyed with himself? Whatever, Alkan made the decision to continue writing after this correction, and not to start a new page. He also left a sizeable blot on the bass clef in bar 11. Without scientific examination, neither bar seems to have left evidence of the use of a blotting substance, leaving these marks with a strong colour profile.

The blot indicates that Alkan may well have used a dip pen. The nib would have had an oblique cut of perhaps 15 degrees from top right. This gives vertical lines the much thinner width-variation used for note stems than the thicker horizontal lines used for beams. He would have been practised in the technique of rotating the pen slightly to facilitate these differences. It appears that he used a rounder nib for the cross-hatching and its border. The black note-heads are neat roundels. The concluding minims each have a two-stroke form – a shorter upper and longer lower curve. Alkan’s border work takes precedence over the cross-hatching grid.

Unambiguously isolating this bar from the rest of the music was a forcefully articulated process of containment and offers a striking visual focus to the page.

Richard Murphy

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\(^1\) This image and its context is on view at IMSLP; see imslp.org/wiki/Les_regrets_de_la_nonette_(Alkan%2C_Charles-Valentin)