



The Alkan Society

Registered Charity no. 276199

www.alkansociety.org

President: Leslie Howard

Vice-presidents: Anne Smith, Hugh Macdonald, Nicholas King, Richard Shaw

Honorary Officers: Mark Viner *Chairman*, Nick Hammond *Treasurer*, Coady Green *Secretary*

Bulletin 94: March 2017

The Society's ruby anniversary

On Tuesday 18th January 1977, 40 years ago, four enthusiasts met with Ronald Smith to discuss the possibility of establishing an Alkan Society. The four were Robert Collet (then at the Guildhall School of Music), Martin Ball (Dulwich College), John Snelling and Dr John White. This informal meeting was followed by an inaugural meeting on 18th May 1977, at which 22 people were present (though with a total of 67 registering an interest).

Ronald Smith piano

Thursday
26 May 1977 7.45pm

Alkan

Symphony for Solo Piano
nos 4, 5, 6, 7 from 12 Studies in all
the minor keys, op 39

Cantique des Cantiques: 'J'étais endormie,
mais mon cœur veillait'
from 25 Preludes, op 31

Comme le vent
no 1 from op 39

interval

Concerto for Solo Piano
nos 8, 9, 10 from op 39
1st London performance of
complete version

Greater London Council
Queen Elizabeth Hall
Director: George Mann OBE

programme: 20p concert management: **Helen Anderson**

The Alkan Society

40 ANS.

UN HEUREUX MÉNAGE.

très lié.
avec tendresse et quiétude.

1977 to 2017

The meeting was held in the Waterloo Room, Royal Festival Hall, London. Those present, as well as discussing the constitution and activities of the new Society, were entertained by Ronald Smith, "in his inimitable way"¹, illustrating the Symphony and Concerto from op. 39 which he was to perform later in the same month. A copy of the programme for that concert is on the left.

A number of current members were present at the 18th May meeting. Drs Frank Lioni has kindly provided some pictures which he took on the occasion, two of which are shown on the next page. Although they are somewhat blurred, the great Ronald Smith can certainly be identified at the piano.

¹ See Bulletin no 3 (www.alkansociety.org/bulletin03.pdf)



Ronald Smith in 2003

Another founding member, Dr Peter Hick, was also present: his younger self may be the person in the blue-green shirt on the front row. He remembers Ronald Smith apologising for the inadequacy of the instrument which was not fully up to the task of coping with the rigours of *op. 39* – but says he was too much in awe of Ronald to speak to him at the launch of the Society. Peter also recalls meeting John White – perhaps the main driving force behind establishing the Society – before the meeting outside the Royal Festival Hall, on a seat overlooking the Thames. He identified John White by the initials JW on his briefcase.

The picture on the left shows Ronald Smith at one of his last recitals, in the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London.



This Ruby Anniversary edition of the Bulletin (*ruby* being the traditional nomenclature in the UK and US for a 40th anniversary – certainly less ugly than *quadrageennial*) features not only the usual mix of news, articles and reviews, but also a new *Distractions and diversions* section. There are some puzzles to help you pass those moments of boredom, as well as members' *desert island* favourites and other whimsical pieces.

As always, members are encouraged to submit articles, comments and letters, as well as further suggestions for a future *Distractions and diversions* column.

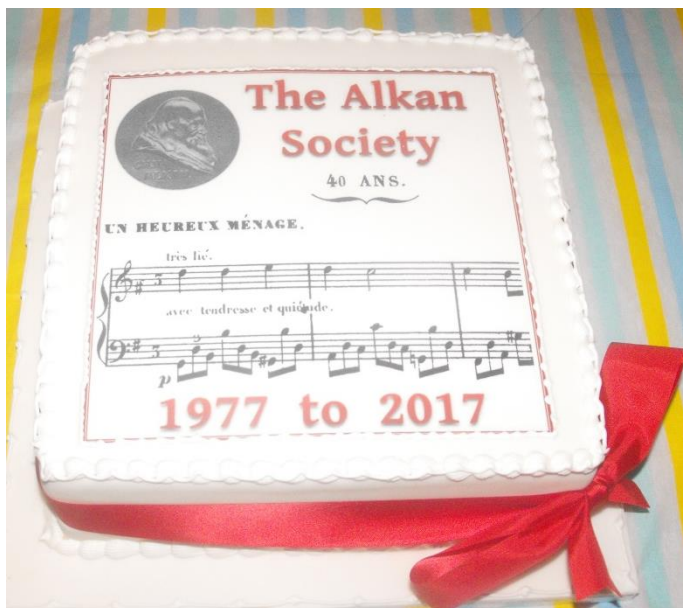
Please send contributions to the editor: treasurer@alkansociety.org, or by post to: Nick Hammond, Woodend House, High Stittenham, York YO60 7TW, UK

Society concerts

Annual Joint Societies Dinner-Recital

The Forge, London on 17th January 2017

The Joint Societies Dinner seems to have become an annual fixture in the calendar of musical London patrons, uniting participating Societies for an evening's get-together over a good meal and short concert with music by their respective favoured composers. The event has been going for five years now I gather; this year's event was organised by The Mahler Society, in partnership with the Liszt and Wagner Societies as well as the Alkan Society. There were about 75 people present from the four societies and some 14 of those were from the Alkan society.



Like previous dinner-recitals, the event was held at The Forge in Camden Town. This was a good venue and is an interesting one, having the frontage of a typical restaurant, with a bar as you go in, but there is a screened-off dining area with raised stage at the back wall on which sits a fine Steinway piano. There is good lighting and I understand that regular musical events are held here.

I chatted to a couple of Wagner Society members before the Dinner. Neither of them had heard of Alkan and indeed there was a feeling that the subtitle of our late President's first book (*Alkan, who was Alkan?*) hung over the evening at least in the company of those I talked to, both here in the bar and next to me at the table, although two new members of our Society did sit opposite me. We still have a lot to do!

I dined on a tasty *coq au vin* followed by cheese and biscuits and I'm sure had more than my fair share of the generous supply of wine on the table. On show in the bar area before the concert was the magnificent cake (shown above) prepared specially to celebrate the occasion which marked the 40th anniversary of The Alkan Society. Fittingly the cake had a remarkable icing "transfer" of the opening of the 3rd movement of the Piano Sonata, "40 ans - un heureux ménage". At the end of the evening, Mark Viner gained the attention of the diners by "playing the cake" (plus a few more bars), and the cake was cut and distributed amongst those attending – see more below.



The musical entertainment began with music by Alkan. Mark Viner (pictured left) stepped up and played the Prelude no 13 from op. 31, *J'étais endormie, mais mon cœur veillait....* (cantique des cantiques. 5= 2.). His playing was unannounced but following his performance Mark informed his audience that the Biblical title of the piece, "I was asleep but my heart waketh", was taken from The Song of Solomon, chapter 5 verse 2 adding that there were a precise five dots after the title in the composer's score alluding to chapter 5. I recall Alkan saying that if he had his time over again he would set the whole Bible to music. The gentle pace of the two quintuplets per bar had a very calming effect, something of a Benediction on the evening. The piece was a favourite of Busoni's about a century ago. The other piece by Alkan, also in G flat, was the 10th major key study from op. 35, *Chant d'amour – Chant de mort*. The reverie and fantasy of the extensive Love section was beautifully

articulated but I did wonder what those in the audience not aware of the piece beforehand made of its rather chilling bleak ending, as Death stalks in so eloquently reflecting the composer's quotation at the head of the score: "Just when you expect light, there will come darkness". The pair of pieces made an interesting and musically satisfying opening, prompting my neighbours at table to want to know more about this, to them, new name and elusive composer.

The Wagner Society stepped up next with three operatic excerpts and one of the *Wesendonck Lieder* capably sung by the Australian soprano Tanya Hurst who had been a finalist in the Wagner Society's own singing competition. Her vocal characterisation and projection was truly Wagnerian as we were treated to selections from *Lohengrin* (*Einsam in truben Tagen*), the *Wesendonck* song *Der Engel*, *Die Walküre* (*Du bist der Lenz*) and *Tannhäuser* (*Dich teure Halle*). Orchestral support was provided by the very capable hands of the Leslie Howard "Symphony Orchestra" and the selection of songs formed a satisfying group as a whole and rather more than the infamous "bleeding chunks".

Liszt Society president (and, of course, Alkan Society president) Leslie Howard then remained on the platform to give an all too rare performance of the *Reminiscences des Huguenots de Meyerbeer*, S412ii. Leslie lamented the fall from popularity of Meyerbeer who once had no less than five operas in production at the same time in Paris before noting briefly the story of the opera leading to the immolation at the conclusion, adding that the music at the end was based on the Lutheran chorale *Ein feste burg ist unser Gott*. There was some great bravura playing along the way, with notably fine passage work and difficult skips near the end, before the music of the rousing chorale was reached. Like much of Liszt the piece deserves to be better known, especially when given such a consummate performance as here.

Finally, the Mahler Society presented "Aspects of Love", being a group of five songs from the Mahler House (anything but *un heureux ménage!*), four songs by Gustav and one by Alma. Leslie accompanied again and there were sympathetic performances by the London-born baritone Maciek O'Shea who has sung regularly at the Oxford Lieder Festival and also been a winner of The English Song Competition. An engaging personality, he was quick to engage his audience and his warm tones proved well-tuned to this repertoire. The first three songs were by Gustav, beginning with *Frühlingsmorgen* (to a poem by Volkmann) before a song each from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (*Wer hat dies Liedlein erdacht?*) and *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (*Ich hab' ein glühend Messer*). Then we were treated to a song by Alma, setting a poem by Bierbaum (*Bei Dir ist es traut*) which sat well in the company of her husband's music before a rousing performance of *Liebst du um Schönheit* from Gustav's *Rückert Lieder*. Well sung and with great conviction this quintuplet from *chez Mahler* provided a splendid finale to the Concert.

All the performers took their place on stage to warm and prolonged applause (from left, Leslie Howard, Mark Viner, Tanya Hurst and Maciek O'Shea).

The musical performances and dinner behind us, it only remained for thanks from the various Societies involved. The Alkan Society led the way. Having "played in" the cake, Mark Viner said a few words relating to our ruby anniversary before the cake was ceremonially cut by Mark and myself (see picture on next page).

Having had the good fortune to be in London for the first meeting with Ronald Smith, Dr John White *et al* in the Waterloo Room of the Royal Festival Hall in 1977 to launch the Society, I had the honour of being asked to say a few words about Alkan which I duly did. I took my cue from the *Grande Sonate* and



encouraging those attending to look further into Alkan's music via YouTube and recorded performances on CD, but adding that although three of the four Societies taking part were household names that of Alkan was sadly not. We do indeed still have work to do.

Thanks from the Wagner and Liszt Societies followed, before final remarks and thanks from Mr Gary Waller of the Mahler Society brought the evening to a close. I think an enjoyable evening was had by all, though a few of the ladies present found the room temperature a bit on the cold side. I was quite comfortable I might add, and look forwards to the next Joint Dinner.

Peter Hick



Society concert series recital: Jan Hugo

St Mary's Church, Ealing, London on 3rd March 2017



With the support of the Keyboard Charitable Trust, the Society sponsored a recital by the young South African Jan Hugo, first prize winner of the 2014 Royal Overseas League piano competition and second prize winner of the 2016 Alkan-Zimmerman piano competition (no first prize was awarded). Jan's programme includes four of Alkan's preludes from op. 31 and the *Quasi Faust* movement from the *Grande Sonate* (op. 33), as well as two of Debussy's preludes (*Danseuses de Delphes* and *La puerta del vino*) and Liszt's *Légende I* (*St Francis of Assisi Preaching to the Birds*), *Sarabande* and *Chaconne* from *Handel's Almira* and the third *Mephisto Waltz*.

As we go to press with this issue of the Bulletin just before the concert took place, we are unable to provide a review.

Society concert series recital: Peter de Jager
St Mary's Church, Ealing, London on 7th April 2017

The next concert in our 2017 series is a recital by Australian pianist, harpsichordist and composer Peter de Jager. Peter is becoming established as one of Australia's most exciting musicians, with a diverse repertoire encompassing all periods of western classical music, which he often plays on period instruments, as well as musical theatre and cabaret.

Peter won the inaugural Australian International Chopin Competition in 2011, was awarded fifth prize and best Australian competitor at the Southern Highlands International Piano Competition in 2013. In 2015 he was a finalist in the Symphony Australia Young Performers Award, and in 2016 he was awarded second prize in the Australian National Piano Award. In 2014, Peter was awarded the Freedman Fellowship, an annual prize of \$15,000 with which he commissioned a 100-minute Piano Sonata by Chris Dench.

He will perform the UK premier of the first part of the new Dench Piano Sonata¹, as well as Alkan's *Symphonie* (op.39, nos 4-7), from *Douze études dans tous les tons mineurs*.

Further details of the recital and information on the venue and tickets are available on the Society web site (www.alkansociety.org).



Membership of the Alkan Society

As of February 2017, there are 77 fully paid-up members of the Society (including Honorary members), plus a further 33 whose subscriptions are currently overdue: we anticipate that many of these will pay the 2017 subscription as, at time of writing, subscription reminders have not been sent out. There are now seven student members.

Whilst the largest number of members are from the UK (68), 11 other countries are represented, including USA (12), Australia (6), Germany (5), France (4), Japan, Netherlands and Austria (3 each). Nine members joined in 2016 and we are seeing a modest increase in membership (numbers of new members in 2014 and 2015 were 5 and 7 respectively).

¹ Details of Dench's Piano Sonata may be seen at: <http://chrisdench.com/piano-sonata>

Alkan's *Acte d'opéra*

Nick Hammond, François Luquenot and Seth Blacklock

Eagle-eyed Alkanists will have spotted a strange entry in the full catalogue of Alkan's works: *Acte d'opéra*, with no composition or publication dates or any further details. The work does not feature in Ronald Smith's volumes (*Alkan: The Man, The Music*) and a cursory internet search reveals virtually nothing. What can the work be? Is it possible that Alkan wrote a one-act opera and so little is known about it? Might it refer to a transcription for piano, along the lines of his transcription of the overture to Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*, or perhaps a solo piece along the lines of the final piece in *Les Mois* (op. 74), entitled *L'Opéra*. The purpose of this article is to establish some basic facts about this work. Did Alkan write a one-act opera? Was it ever performed? What sort of work was it? What was its fate?

The simple answer to the first question is that he almost certainly did, but from thereon in the evidence raises more questions than it answers. The evidence we have used comes from entries in contemporary journals and publications, many of which are now available in facsimile on the web.

The earliest clue we have found is in December 1845 (*La France Musicale*, n° 50, 14 Dec. 1845):

OPÉRA-COMIQUE. — On a répété cette semaine le dernier acte de l'opéra de M. Halévy. Ce théâtre a besoin d'un succès pour faire oublier les derniers ouvrages de M. Scribe, le *Ménétrier* et la *Charbonnière*, et il l'obtiendra. On dit le poème de M. de Saint-Georges amusant et la musique remplie de jolis motifs. Cet ouvrage ne sera pas représenté avant le 5 janvier.

On répète aussi l'opéra en un acte de M. Bazin. Il sera joué à peu près en même temps que celui de M. Halévy. — Puis viendra celui de M. Bazzoni. Du reste, ce ne sont ni les compositeurs, ni les poèmes, ni les partitions qui manqueront à l'Opéra-Comique. En voici la preuve. M. Buisselot a trois actes, M. Clapisson a trois actes, M. A. Thomas a trois actes, M. A. Boïeldieu a trois actes, M. E. Boulanger a trois actes, M. Cadeau a trois actes, M. Scudo a un acte, M. G. Hequet a un acte, M. Alkan a un acte, sans compter ceux que nous oublions ou que nous ne connaissons pas.

[English translation²: Opéra-Comique - The final act of M. Halévy's opera has been rehearsed this week. This theatre needs a success in order to dispel memories of M. Scribe's latest works, *Le Ménétrier* and *La Charbonnière*, and it will achieve it. M. de Saint-Georges' libretto is said to be amusing, and the music full of attractive melodies. The first performance of this work is not until 5th January.

M. Bazin's one-act opera is also being rehearsed. It will be performed at more or less the same time as M. Halévy's. They will be followed by M. Bazzoni's. Indeed, the Opéra-Comique will have no shortage of composers, librettos or scores. Consider: M. Bazzoni has three acts, M. Clapisson has three acts, M. A. Thomas has three acts, M. A. Boïeldieu has three acts, M. E. Boulanger has three acts, M. Cadeau has three acts, M. Scudo has one act, M. G. Hequet has one act and M. Alkan has one act, not to mention those that we have forgotten or do not know about.]

We include this lengthy quote because it gives some feel for the busy schedule of the *Opéra-Comique* and the number of active composers of the operatic genre in Paris at the time. The final sentence suggests that Alkan was either writing an operatic piece or at least considering doing so.

The *Opéra-Comique* company was at the time staging its productions at the second Salle Favart building (illustrated): this had been opened in May 1840, following destruction of the first Salle Favart by fire in 1838. The new house seated 1,500, so to plan to have a work performed there would be no trivial matter.

It is relevant to note that the genre *opéra comique* was not always comic or light in nature: the term generally covers opera that contains spoken dialogue. For instance, Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* was premiered by the *Opéra-Comique* company in 1840, Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust* in 1846 and Bizet's *Carmen* in 1875.



² We are grateful to Julian Haxby for providing English translations of all the quotations in French

But back to Alkan. News of his plans seems to have travelled as far as Berlin, with an entry in the *Berliner musikalische Zeitung*, Volume No 22, of 30 May 1846:

pranstimme, aber von etwas kaltem Naturel. — In der komischen Oper wurde eine neue vieraktige Oper von Bazin „le trompette de M. le Prince“ gegeben, die sehr niedlich ist, aber schlecht ausgeführt wurde. Dieser Neuigkeit werden komische Opern von Doche, Alkan, Bazzoni und Andere folgen. Im September kommt eine neue dreiaktige Oper von Auber zur Aufführung. Tho-

[A new opera called “*Le trompette de M. le Prince*” with four acts by Bazin was performed at the Opéra-Comique. It is a very cute opera, but the performance was really bad. Comic operas by Doche, Alkan, Bazzoni and other composers will follow this new piece by Bazin. A new opera with three acts by Auber

will be performed in September.^{3]}

This report is in the context of news from Paris. It is of interest that the term *komische* (comic) is used, though whether this applies equally to all the listed new operas is uncertain – but it is a clue that Alkan’s work may have been a comedy.

There is then nothing (as far as we know) in the Parisian press until January 1847, when we see a veritable barrage of announcements⁴.

La France musicale (10^e année: n° 2, p. 13), 10 Jan. 1847:

Alkan va entrer en répétition avec un opéra en un acte, à l’Opéra-Comique. Le poème est de notre ami et collaborateur L. Gozlan [Alkan is to begin rehearsals of a one-act opera at the Opéra-Comique. The libretto is by our friend and colleague, L. Gozlan]

Le Progrès musical (2^e année: n° 3, p. 3), 17 Jan. 1847

On annonce que M. Alkan a fait recevoir un acte, et qu’il viendra bientôt à la scène. L’auteur du libretto est M. Léon Gozlan [It has been announced that M. Alkan has delivered a one-act work, which will soon be staged. The libretto is by M. Léon Gozlan]

Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris (14^e année: n° 3, p. 27), 17 Jan. 1847

Le théâtre de l’Opéra-Comique a mis à l’étude un ouvrage en un acte dont la musique est de M. Alkan. Ensuite viendra un autre ouvrage de même dimension, dont la musique est de M. Offenbach [The Opéra-Comique theatre has started work on a one-act opera, with music by M. Alkan. It will be followed by another work on a similar scale, with music by M. Offenbach]

La Critique musicale (vol. 1 n° 12, p. 95), 17 Jan. 1847

On va mettre en répétition à l’Opéra-Comique un opéra en un acte, musique de M. Alkan, paroles de M. Léon Gozlan [The Opéra-Comique will be rehearsing a one-act opera, with music by M. Alkan and words by M. Léon Gozlan]

La Presse Musicale (21 Jan., p. 8), 21 Jan. 1847

On répète l’opéra de M. Auber, et on va mettre à l’étude une pièce en un acte de M. Offenbach, dont la musique a déjà fait grand plaisir dans les concerts. Le poème est de MM. Deforges et Bernard Lopez. Il est aussi question de monter un opéra en un acte de M. Alkan, paroles de M. Léon Gozlan. [M. Auber’s opera is being rehearsed and plans will be made for a one-act work by M. Offenbach, whose music has already brought great pleasure to concert audiences. The words are by Messrs. Deforges and Bernard Lopez. There is also talk of staging a one-act opera by M. Alkan, with words by M. Léon Gozlan]

Le Ménestrel journal de musique (14^e année: n° 8), 24 Jan. 1847

On répète également un acte de M. Alkan, poème de M. Léon Gozlan, ainsi que celui d’Offenbach, paroles de MM. Deforges et Bernard Lopez. [Rehearsals are also in progress of a one-act work by M. Alkan, with words by M. Léon Gozlan, and of Offenbach’s, with words by Messrs. Deforges and Bernard Lopez]

These multiple announcements certainly provide strong indications that Alkan had written, and more or less completed, a one-act opera by early 1847. It appears to have been delivered to the Opéra-Comique company and was either actively in rehearsal or about to be so.

Unfortunately no title or other details are given. The only clue in these announcements about the nature of the opera is that “it will be followed by another work on a similar scale, with music by M.

³ We are grateful to Hartmut Schock for providing an English translation of this German quotation

⁴ From here, we provide only the French transcription and the English translation, not the facsimile images

Offenbach". This appears to refer to Offenbach's very first operetta, *L'Alcôve* (he went on to write a further 97 operettas).

We will take a small diversion to consider the Offenbach work as it may give some clues as to Alkan's opera. Offenbach's librettists, as listed above, differ in part from those listed in other sources, but this is likely to be an error by *Le Ménestrel journal de musique* and need not concern us. *L'Alcôve* was premiered on 24 April 1847, though not under the auspices of *Opéra-Comique*, but at the *Salle Moreau-Sainti*. The entry for Offenbach in Greene's *Biographical Encyclopedia of Composers* sheds some light on this:

"...He importuned the *Opéra-Comique* to let him do work for its stage. The failure of his first dramatic effort, a vaudeville called *Pascal et Chambord* at the Palais-Royal in 1839 did not bode well, and the *Opéra-Comique* did not heed his pleas for another eight years. [...] The *Opéra-Comique* finally, in 1847, agreed to let Offenbach adapt a one-act comedy, *L'Alcôve*, but then it shuffled its figurative feet so long that the composer produced it on his own."

Jean-Claude Yon's book on Offenbach⁵ provides further information. Here is a précis of relevant sections (translated from French by François Luguenot). "In 1986, the new *Opéra-Comique* director, Alexandre Basset, commissioned Offenbach to prepare *L'Alcôve*. Based on a libretto by Philippe-Auguste-Alfred Pittaud de Forges, Adolphe de Leuven and Eugène Roche, the plot takes place during the Revolution; for the opera, it was reshaped by de Forges. But Basset was not in a hurry to stage the work: too many works in reserve or a lack of goodwill (...) and Offenbach eventually decided to produce his opera at *Salle Moreau-Sainti*, 18 rue La Tour-d'Auvergne. *L'Alcôve* consists of nine pieces. It was subsequently translated and adapted in German by Sternau as *Marielle oder Sergeant und Commandant* and staged in the *Kölner Theater* on January 9th, 1849."

An announcement for Offenbach's concert appears in *La Presse Musicale* (3^e année n° 19, p. 7), on 22 Apr 1847⁶. If we assume that the two parts of the concert were of approximately equal length, it seems that *L'Alcôve* was a work of some substance, perhaps up to an hour in length. This allows us to speculate that Alkan's work "on a similar scale" may have been of similar length.

This diversion has provided us with a tentative idea of the duration of Alkan's opera, and also suggests that the *Opéra-Comique* was prone to "shuffling its feet"; this may be significant as the story unfolds.

There is one further promising diversion, but sadly a dead-end. A report in *La France musicale* (10^e année, n°12) of 21 March 1847:

Remarquons qu'un petit opéra en un acte, *Alix*, a été joué sans que les journalistes ne fussent invités; il a passé inaperçu. [We note that a brief one-act opera, *Alix*, was performed, without journalists having been invited to attend. It passed unnoticed.].

Might *Alix* be the title of Alkan's opera? However, it turns out that *Alix* was a work by one Alexandre Doche, as reported (rather unkindly) in *La Presse Musicale* (3^e année, n° 14) of 18 March 1847:

Première représentation d'*Alix*, opéra-comique en un acte paroles de MM. Nus et Follet, musique de M. Doche. Il n'y a pas longtemps que M. Doche a fait représenter un opéra qui eut peu de succès, *le Veuf du Malabar*. *Alix* ne nous paraît pas devoir fournir une plus longue carrière. [First performance of *Alix*, a one-act comic opera, with a libretto by MM. Nus and Follet and music by M. Doche. Not long ago M. Doche presented an opera that enjoyed little success, *Le Veuf du Malabar*. We do not expect *Alix* to run for much longer.]

Turning back to the reports of Alkan's work, the publications are unanimous in naming the librettist as Léon Gozlan. Gozlan was born in Marseille in 1803, and was a novelist, playwright and journalist living in Paris from 1828 (pictured on the next page in about 1840). As a young man, he had had to go to sea to earn a living. Like Alkan, he was Jewish. Gozlan now takes centre stage in our narrative.

— Voici le programme du concert-spectacle donné par Jacques Offenbach. le samedi 24 avril. — *Première partie* : 1^{re} chœur de et Venise, chœur composé par J. Offenbach et chanté par l'Union chorale; — 2^o concerto pour violoncelle, composé et exécuté par J. Offenbach; — Air italien, chanté par M^{me} Iweins d'Hennin; — 4^o Solo de piano, composé et exécuté par Goria; — 5^o *Le Sylphe des amours*, mélodie, et le *Muletier*, chant espagnol, composés par J. Offenbach, et chantés par M. Barbot; — 6^o Solo de flûte, composé et exécuté par Dorus; — 7^o Romances chantées par M^{me} Iweins d'Hennin; — 8^o *Chant d'adieu*, mélodie tarentelle, pour violoncelle, composée et exécutée par J. Offenbach. — *Deuxième partie*. — *L'Alcôve*, pièce de MM. Desforges, Leuven et Roche, musique de J. Offenbach, jouée par MM. Grignon fils, Barbot, M^{me}, M^{lle} Rouillié. — M. Levassor finira par des chansonnettes.

⁵ Jean-Claude Yon (2010). *Jacques Offenbach* (2nd ed.). Gallimard: Paris

⁶ The concert is reviewed in a following issue of *La Presse Musicale*: 3^e année n° 21, p 3 (6 May 1847)



Alkan with a libretto. This is inaccurate: our eminent colleague has written to us, asking us to correct this, which we hasten to do.]

On the 24th January 1847, *La France musicale* (10^e année, n°4, p 30) reports:

M. L. Gozlan, notre ami et collaborateur, nous prie d'annoncer qu'il ne travaille point pour l'*Opéra-Comique*. C'est par erreur qu'il a été désigné comme auteur d'un poème en un acte qui doit entrer bientôt en répétition. [Our friend and colleague, M. L. Gozlan, asks us to announce that he does not work for the *Opéra-Comique*. He was erroneously identified as the librettist of a one-act work on which rehearsals are due to begin soon.]

And again on 24 January in *La Critique musicale* (vol. 1, n°13, p. 103):

Nous avions annoncé, d'après un journal, que M. Léon Gozlan avait confié un poème à M. Alkan. Ce fait est inexact: notre célèbre collaborateur nous écrit pour nous prier de le rectifier, ce que nous nous empressons de faire. [We reported, quoting a journal, that M. Léon Gozlan had supplied M.

What can we make of this? Perhaps there was a simple mistake and Gozlan was not the librettist. If so, why is the name of the real librettist not given? Alternatively, Gozlan may indeed have been the librettist, but was in dispute with the *Opéra-Comique* company (as suggested by the announcement in *La France musicale*) and did not wish his work to be produced in their theatre. If so, his retraction seems rather late: if he was in communication with Alkan he would have known the plan to deliver the work to the *Opéra-Comique*. Finally, he may have been the source of the libretto, but was in dispute with Alkan about its treatment and was unhappy to be identified as the author of the final version.

It may be that this issue can be resolved through further research into Gozlan's papers or letters, although to date no connection between Alkan and Gozlan has been found. Whatever the truth about the librettist, following Gozlan's retraction we see no further reports of the work in the Parisian press. While the fate of the planned performance may be linked to Gozlan's intervention, equally some other last-minute change of plan by the *Opéra-Comique* (shuffling its feet?), or a further unknown intervention, may have been responsible. It is even possible that if Offenbach's *L'Alcôve* was to be paired with Alkan's work as a double bill (although there is no direct evidence for this), then the planned performance of *L'Alcôve* may have been cancelled too. There is also no known evidence of a relationship between Jacques Offenbach and Charles-Valentin Alkan.

There is a rather sad postscript to our documentary evidence. In a letter to his friend François-Joseph Fétis dated 25 July 1847, Alkan wrote:

Ce que vous voulez bien dire à l'occasion du 6^e degré (...) m'engage à vous envoyer un petit morceau qui se trouve dans un petit acte que j'ai fait il y a quelques années, mais qui n'a pas encore été représenté. Il s'agit ici d'un simple accord, mais qui, je crois, n'a point | été | [biffé] encore été employé de la sorte. Et à propos de cet acte, non représenté à mon grand regret, je réponds à un autre reproche que vous me faites, entouré de tant de choses obligeantes, à la vérité, que j'y réponds, plutôt pour m'excuser en partie à vos yeux, que parceque [sic] j'en éprouverais du ressentiment. [What you kindly agreed to say with regard to the 6th degree of the scale (...) prompts me to send you a brief fragment which is part of a short one-act work which I wrote a few years ago, but which has not yet been performed. It is a simple chord, but one which I do not think has [erasure] ever been used in this way. And with regard to this act, unperformed to my great regret, I reply to another of your criticisms of me, coupled, true, with so many kind remarks that I reply rather as a partial apology to you, than because I feel any resentment.]

This certainly confirms the fact that the one-act opera existed and that it remained unperformed. Also of interest is Alkan's statement that the work was written "a few years ago", which may shed further light on Gozlan's retraction.

So we are left with very little hard information: nothing on the nature of the work, its topic, its scoring, or even the fate of the manuscript. It does seem plausible that the work was of a comic rather than tragic nature, particularly if it was composed in the early 1840s, which saw some of Alkan's more ebullient works, such as the *Pas redoublé* (composed 1840), and indeed some of his more lyrical miniatures, such as the *Nocturne* (op. 22). However this is mere speculation. But surely the failure to stage the opera was yet another blow – along with the failed plans for the performance of his B minor Symphony and his failure to be appointed as Head of Piano at the Paris Conservatoire – contributing to his increasingly reclusive lifestyle.

And how about the manuscript? The “brief fragment” which Alkan promised to send to Fétis may still be in the extant archive of Fétis’s papers and letters. And just perhaps the *Opéra-Comique* company kept a copy of the score or some of the parts, and – who knows? – maybe at this late stage these can be recovered. But even this faint hope seems unlikely: the 2nd Salle Favart was completely destroyed by a terrible fire on 25 May 1887 (as illustrated). But there’s a sliver of hope: while much was lost in the fire, apparently not all of the company’s archives were incinerated.



The *Opéra-Comique* web site⁷ reports:

Si l'Opéra de Paris, chargé dès son origine d'une fonction politique de centralisation de l'art musical, sauvegarda ses archives de manière quasi exhaustive, l'Opéra Comique

conserva les siennes de façon irrégulière, sans bibliothécaire ni archiviste en titre dans ses équipes. Pour un chef d'orchestre risquant sa vie dans l'incendie du 25 mai 1887 – Jules Danbé – afin de sauver un maximum de partitions et en particulier les manuscrits (dont celui du Roi malgré lui de Chabrier), combien de directeurs et d'artistes quittèrent leurs fonctions en emportant comme souvenirs des partitions, des maquettes, des imprimés, des costumes... Il en résulte aujourd'hui une extraordinaire fragmentation des fonds, chez des particuliers et dans les collections publiques. [Whilst the Opéra de Paris – part of whose official function, from its inception, was to act as a musical hub – preserved nearly all its archives, the Opéra Comique kept its records only erratically, having no staff librarian or archivist. Though one conductor, Jules Danbé, risked his life in the fire at the theatre of 25 May 1887 to rescue as many scores as possible, and particularly manuscripts (including Chabrier's *Le Roi malgré lui*), how many directors and musicians removed scores, set designs, prints or costumes as souvenirs on leaving the Opéra Comique? This accounts for the huge dispersal of these assets, now held by private individuals or in public collections.]

Members of the Society are encouraged to take forward our preliminary investigations of this lost work.

⁷ <http://www.opera-comique.com/fr/mediatheque/archives>

Some notes on the Overture to *Le Prophète* by G.Meyerbeer arranged for four hands piano by Ch. V. Alkan

Stephanie McCallum

Stephanie McCallum and Erin Helyard's new CD (TRPTK [Triptych] TTK0005), released in November 2016, includes the arrangement of the Overture to *Le Prophète* and is reviewed on pages 23-27 of this issue.

After a gestation of more than a decade and several years in production, the third and most sensationally successful of Meyerbeer's grand operas, *Le Prophète*, received its first performance on April 16, 1849 at the Paris Opera, following in the frothy wake of *Robert le Diable* and *Les Huguenots*. At around three and a half hours in length, the opera had been carefully pruned down from more than four hours of original music, and amongst the discarded material was its Overture, an 11-minute virtuosic orchestral showpiece for large orchestral forces. Until the 1990s, this work was known, if at all, almost entirely through Alkan's four-hand piano transcription.

An excellent summary of the orchestral Overture's sparse performance history is given in notes to Meyerbeer's diaries, the resurrection of the work taking place relatively recently:

It was performed in public only once, in one of Padeloup's concerts at the *Cirque Napoléon* (1868), where it was not well received (see Lionel Dauriac, *Meyerbeer* [Paris: Felix Alcan, 1913], p.215). The full score has been reconstructed from the original orchestral material in the possession of Breitkopf & Härtel by Reiner Zimmermann and Siegfried Irmer (1990), and it was played at the Meyerbeer bicentennial celebration in Paderborn (2 October 1991) by an amateur orchestra. It was subsequently further revised from the autograph by Matthias Brzoska, as part of the preparation of the new critical edition of the score for Ricordi (Munich), and performed on 30 October 1997 at the Folkswang Hochschule, Essen.¹

The original orchestral version of the Overture has also now been released on a Naxos disc, *Meyerbeer: Overtures and Entr'actes from the French Operas* (2014) performed by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra conducted by Darrell Ang.

Six months after the April opening of *Le Prophète*, and despite the Overture being cut from the opera performances, on Sunday 3 November, 1849 Meyerbeer wrote in his diary - 'looked through the full score of the overture to *Le Prophète* and gave it to Alkan, who will prepare the piano version'². Only six weeks later on Tuesday 18 December, Meyerbeer wrote- 'called on Alkan (*aîné*), who played me the overture to *Le Prophète* in the four hand arrangement that he has made.'³ This arrangement did subsequently appear in some Brandus editions of the vocal score, even though the orchestral version remained unpublished, replaced in the opera by a dozen brief orchestral bars before the first vocal entry.

Ronald Smith suggests that *L'Opéra*, one of the *Six Characteristic Pieces* (1838) which eventually appeared as part of *Les Mois* (Op. 74), was a parody of French grand opera⁴, possibly of Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* and *les Huguenots* which were the talk of Paris in the 1830s. Whatever the case, it is clear that Alkan and Meyerbeer began to move in similar musical circles a few years after the publication of the *Six Characteristic Pieces*. Brigitte François-Sappey notes that in 1843 Alkan and Meyerbeer both attended the first private performance of Franck's oratorio, *Ruth*, at les salons Erard. Also present were Adam, Halévy, Liszt, Moscheles, Spontini and other respected musicians.⁵

Meyerbeer was also present at concerts Alkan gave in his brief attempt at a comeback to performance in 1848 and 1849. Meyerbeer writes in his diary on Sunday Feb 13, 1848 of a '...Soirée at d'Ortigue's, where Alkan played one of his highly original piano compositions: a funeral procession followed by a triumphal march...'⁶

¹ Giacomo Meyerbeer, *The diaries of Giacomo Meyerbeer Volume 2 The Prussian Years and Le Prophète 1840-1849*, trans., ed. and ann. Robert Ignatius Letellier (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999-c.2004),

² Meyerbeer, *Diaries*, 374

³ Meyerbeer, *Diaries*, 381

⁴ Ronald Smith, *Alkan Vol.1 The Enigma* (London and New York: Kahn & Averill, 1976), 26

⁵ Brigitte François-Sappey, *Charles Valentin Alkan* (Paris: Fayard 1991), 16

⁶ Meyerbeer, *Diaries*, 282

The same march made another appearance a year later when Meyerbeer attended Alkan's concert with strings on May 5, 1849, the last before Alkan's ensuing 25-year reclusive period. Smith mentions that it was described in the press as a 'bold experiment, attempted for the first time, of a concert comprised exclusively of classics and earlier music' but that Alkan also included 'several of the slighter *Préludes*, and a new *Zorcico* in quintuple time... [and the] *Marche Triomphale*.'⁷

Meyerbeer's visit a few months later on November 3rd, and his request for the four hands arrangement of the Overture, was only a little over a fortnight after Chopin's death on October 17 and so provided an absorbing task for Alkan at a time when he must have been strongly affected by the loss of his friend. It is interesting that Meyerbeer wished to preserve the Overture in this version despite its removal from the opera performances. Alkan's own *Ouverture* which he included as No. 11 in his Op.39 *Etudes dans tous les tons mineurs*, was published in the set in 1857 but may have been written much earlier. It would be interesting to know the exact date of composition in relation to Alkan's work on Meyerbeer's Overture.

The Overture had cost Meyerbeer enormous labour over a long period and must have been abandoned with regret. Back on New Year's Day in 1848 he wrote, 'must work at *Le Prophète* daily. Even though this opera was completed six years ago, with the exception of the overture and ballet music, I nevertheless would like to test each piece, and improve and alter it should that seem appropriate.'⁸ Then later that month after visiting his librettist, Scribe, he writes: 'The many partial attempts that I have so far made at composing the overture to *Le Prophète* have perhaps not been without some success after all. The music is taking shape in my mind, even if still in vague, misty fragments...'⁹ He worked on it on a journey home to see his wife, Minna, in Berlin a few months later, unpacking his 'travelling fortepiano' at various stops, and continued often on a daily basis over months but was usually dissatisfied. In November he wrote: 'Worked on the overture before breakfast, in the course of the morning, and also in the evening. The whole day, however, yielded nothing special for this piece.'¹⁰

But by early December he had finished the content of the Overture and then embarked on the laborious process of instrumentation and scoring, with revisions. On Christmas day he wrote: 'Finished the revision of the overture. As I was playing it, one of the strings of my piano snapped, something that has never happened in years because of my delicate handling of the instrument. My superstition read this as an unfavourable prediction about the success of this piece...'¹¹ In March of 1849 the overture was finally in rehearsal but 'make[s] little impression' and in a rehearsal later that month '...The overture unfortunately elicited not the slightest reaction and I was advised to cut it...'¹² By the beginning of April, in a general rehearsal of all five acts, Meyerbeer realised 'With the intervals (one hour and twenty minutes) it lasted from 7.30 until 1 o'clock, in other words four hours and sixteen minutes of music...'¹² By the opening on April 16 there had been 23 orchestral rehearsals and the overture was gone.

The critic Gautier commented: 'These three operas [*Robert le diable*, *Les Huguenots* and *Le Prophète*] compose an immense symbolic trilogy, filled with profound and mysterious meaning; the three principal phases of the human soul are found represented there: faith, examination and illumination. Faith corresponds to the past, examination to the present, illumination to the future. In order to be made visible, each one of these ideas has taken its necessary form: *Robert le diable* the fairy tale; *Les Huguenots* the chronicle; *Le Prophète* the pamphlet.'¹³

After the Paris opening, seasons followed in Covent Garden and, further afield than Europe, in New Orleans (1850) and New York (1853) with many revivals over the next half century. It was financially spectacularly successful for the composer. He wrote at the time of the Paris opening: 'The amount that I have received for the score is the highest yet paid: Brandus has given 19,000 fr. for the rights of publication in France, Delafield & Beale 17,000 fr. for rights in England and for the exclusive right of production there, Breitkopf & Härtel 8,000 fr. for the publication rights in Germany – 44,000 fr. in all...'¹⁴

⁷ Smith, *Alkan Vol.1*, 47-48

⁸ Meyerbeer, *Diaries*, 275

⁹ Meyerbeer, *Diaries*, 279

¹⁰ Meyerbeer, *Diaries*, 316

¹¹ Meyerbeer, *Diaries*, 322

¹² Meyerbeer, *Diaries*, 348

¹³ Gautier, *L'histoire de l'art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans* (Paris 1858-59) 6:82; translated, quoted in Karin Pendle, "Eugène Scribe and the French Opera of the Nineteenth Century", *The Musical Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (1971): 505. Cited in Meyerbeer, *Diaries*, Note 109, 388

¹⁴ Meyerbeer, *Diaries*, 352

The drama of the opera, set in 1534 among Anabaptists in Holland and then Münster in Germany, is played out in the contrasting themes of the Overture from battle songs and processional marches to a stirring triumphal hymn, *Roi du Ciel et des Anges*, heralding a novel stage effect of sun breaking through misty gloom. (The first appearance of this theme in Alkan's arrangement comes in bar 156 [at 2'54"] on the CD] marked *pp dolce*.) The story line involves a fraudulent leader who claims divinity, but who is also increasingly violent and out of control. Climactic moments include his public betrayal of his mother and as finale, his lover setting a slow burning fuse to a powder keg which blows up the palace in which the Prophet and his accomplices are banqueting, before she realises that the hated Prophet and her lover are one and the same person and subsequently plunges a dagger in her own breast.

Alkan's four hand transcription employs his usual uncompromising attitude to part writing, with the fugue (at bar 465 [8'50"]) involving hand crossing of extreme complexity. In the recording we have observed Alkan's unusual long pedal markings creating a sense of distance or a dream-like quality. Alkan also creates innovative textures for percussive drum rolls which are totally logical and effective on the straight strung Erard piano which he habitually used, but which would sink into confusion on the modern cross strung Steinway. (Note the bass drum roll cross-rhythm at bar 529 [10']).) The great beauty and multiple orchestral layers of this transcription can only be achieved with the clarity of these straight strung instruments. Alkan marks the original orchestral instrumentation in passages where motifs are tossed about the orchestra, and one clearly hears marked entries of oboe (e.g., bar 140 [2'35"]), and a duo of bass clarinet and sweetly lyrical valved trumpet marked *con molto portamento* (bar 194 [3'39"]). The clattering tremolandi create terrifying extremes in dynamic, and the piercing clarity of high trills against deep percussion and brass give the full range of orchestral sweep and colour.

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Are the *Esquisses* primarily programmed in a visual manner?

Yui Morishita¹

A thesis by Mr Yukirou Murai, concerning the hidden intention of Alkan's *Esquisses*, was published in the Alkan Society Bulletin no. 92 (pages 6-15)². We have some concerns about his view and in this short article we explain why. First, we reconfirm the key sequence of the *Esquisses*, which can essentially be seen as being based on a musical intention. Next, we look again at the calculation of the probability made by Mr Murai that the "star-shape" key sequence could occur by chance, and consider its appropriateness. Based on these two demonstrations, we examine the validity of his thesis. The reader is advised to look at Mr Murai's original article before reading this critique.

Structure of the *Esquisses*

The *Esquisses* are a collection of characteristic pieces, comprising 49 miniatures, 48 numbered and one without number. Their key sequence is ordered, starting with *C major*, with a pattern circulating through all twenty-four keys twice in two different ways. It is worth noting that the numbered *Esquisses* are divided into four volumes, each with 12 pieces. Each pair of volumes (one and two, and three and four) cover 24 tonalities, but their orders are split at the midpoint. All four volumes begin in the key of *C*, either major or minor. This is really a unique idea of Alkan which can't be found in any other composer's works.

The first volume is a sequence of alternating major and minor keys, with a repeating pattern of a perfect 4th upward and minor 3rd downward. In other words, a major key and its subdominant minor key make up each pair (starting *C major* and *F minor*), which then proceeds upward by a major 2nd. The key sequence in volume two is a mirrored version of the first volume, with the opposite pattern of major and minor (thus starting *C minor* followed by *F major*). Likewise Volume 3 is composed of a pair of a major key and minor key, but this time the dominant minor (so starting *C major* and *G minor*) which goes upwards by major 2^{nds}, in other words an alternation between major key and minor key which covers a circle of fifths. Volume 4 is its mirror order (starting *C minor* then *G major*). Thus the *Esquisses* tonality scheme has a solid structure with 12 pieces as a unit, which underpins the admirable quality of the work.

It is interesting to compare the first and last piece of each volume. Roughly speaking, Volume 1 starts and ends with slow music while Volume 2 begins slowly and ends with fast music. Volume 3 starts and ends fast, Volume 4 starts fast and ends slow. Thus the four volumes are differently characterized by the nature of the opening and closing music; overall there is a slow-fast-slow plan. This would indicate that Alkan divided the *Esquisses* into four volumes with a clear musical conception.

Is the probability of appearance of the *Star of David* "as small as 1.78%"?

There are only twelve ways to circulate through all 24 keys whilst retaining the mirror image relationship of 12 pieces as described above. From these, eight result in the drawing of a "Star of David" using Mr Murai's method (if you follow his 'neglect symmetric sequences' rule, it becomes 4 out of 6). That is to say, when you try to satisfy the obvious features of the key sequence of the *Esquisses*, the figure that appears most frequently is a hexagonal star, and even if you choose two ways at random, both draw it with a probability of approximately 44%.

The sequences used by Mr Murai in his calculation is chosen without considering the fact that a pair of volumes form a mirror image in parallel key relationships. Moreover, it also includes sequences that do not satisfy the feature of alternation of major and minor key. It seems to me somewhat farfetched to assume these as "equally likely".

I would like to give priority to the music itself

Mr Murai's argument has other doubts. He emphasizes the odd numbered volumes, but how can we treat the even numbered volumes? Volume 4 depicts an inclined hexagonal star, but volume 2 draws a hexagon. If the purpose of the tonality arrangement is drawing the figure, would it not have been more

¹ We are grateful to Takio Hosoya for translating this article from Japanese into English.

² Available on the web at: <http://www.alkansociety.org/Publications/Society-Bulletins/Bulletin92.pdf>

natural, as in volume 3 and 4, to choose a principle that draws an inclined hexagonal star in volume 1 and 2? Or maybe volume 1 and 2 were not originally necessary?

Overall, it is natural to interpret that the emergence of the “Star of David” is coincidental, a geometric figure often naturally resulting from the number “12” of the tonality system. The operation of arranging major keys and minor keys on the same circumference of circle of fifths, without distinguishing their nature, and linking them by a straight line is a little specific. It does not seem reasonable to seek the cause of the emerging structure, based upon the *Esquisses* mirrored and alternating key relationships, using this specific and narrow methodology.

Each piece in the *Esquisses* is full of amazing inspiration, published in four distinctly colour-coded volumes, providing a large-scale overall picture together with the final unnumbered piece. The *Esquisses* have all virtues mentioned above, so the cycle is an extraordinary, special and historical work. I am convinced that this work was made with a truly musical intention, not with the scheme of drawing a geometric figure.



Alkan in examination syllabi

Society member Brian Doyle has noted that there appears to be an increase (from a very low base) in the inclusion of Alkan works in the current repertoire and syllabi of Colleges of Music in the UK. The inclusion of Alkan works in music examination syllabi is an important means for his music to be more widely appreciated, especially by young pianists.

The repertoire list for the London College of Music piano diplomas includes:

- Barcarolle, op. 65 (*for DipLCM in Performance*)
- Esquisses, op. 63 (any six) (*for ALCN in Performance*)
- Le Festin d’Esopé, op. 39 no 12 (*for LLCM in Performance & FLCM in Performance*)
- Symphonie, from op. 39 (*for FLCM in Performance*)
- La Vision, op. 63 no 1 (*for Piano grade 7*)

The Trinity College London repertoire list includes:

- Barcarolle, op. 65 (*for ATCL in Performance*)
- Concerto da camera no 2 (*for FTCL in Performance*)

These listings are likely to be incomplete. The editor would be delighted to hear from any members about the inclusion of Alkan works within piano examination syllabi, both in the UK and elsewhere.

A note on performances of Alkan at London's Bechstein Hall

Nick Hammond

London-based members, and indeed many others, will be familiar with the Wigmore Hall as one of the prime venues in central London for chamber music and song. The Hall was built between 1899 and 1901, and, with its excellent acoustics, featured many of the great musicians of the 20th century. The building was commissioned by *Bechstein Pianofortefabrik*, the piano manufacturer, and was built next to their showrooms in Wigmore Street; it was initially known as the Bechstein Hall. However the outbreak of war in 1914 brought hostility to German firms in London. Bechstein was forced to cease trading in London in June 1916, and all its property, including the concert hall, was seized and summarily closed. The entire business, including studios, offices, warehouses, 137 pianos as well as the Hall itself, was sold for £56,500. The Hall alone had cost £100,000 to build. It was renamed the Wigmore Hall and following some refurbishment reopened in 1917.

Some details of concerts from the early days of the Bechstein Hall are available on the Wigmore Hall website (wigmore-hall.org.uk). Concert programmes from 1901 to 1943 are housed at the Royal College of Music Library Special Collections, and further materials from 1906 to 1914 at City of Westminster Archives. This note is merely to alert members to a number of performances of Alkan at the Bechstein Hall, despite the almost total disregard of his music during the early decades of the 20th Century.

On the afternoon of Tuesday 3rd November 1903, the performers at first concert of the ninth series of the *Barnes-Phillips' Chamber Concerts* (evidently a popular series) were "Miss Ethel Barns, Mr Charles

TWO STUDIES—	
First performance in London	{ Andantino in G major Allegro barbaro in F major (On the white keys.) } C. V. Alkan.
HERR EGON PETRI.	




Phillips, pianist Herr Egon Petri and accompanist Mr Cyril Miller". The programme included Porpora's *Violin Sonata in G major*, the first performance of songs by Cyril Scott, Dora Bright and Ethel Barns, the first performance of Liza Lehmann's *Romantic Suite for Violin and Piano*, the first London performances of Bruch's *Russian and Swedish Folk Melodies for Violin and Piano* and of Ernst's *Hungarian Airs* and Loewe's Ballad "Archibald Douglas". This was followed by Egon Petri playing Alkan (programme excerpt shown above), and finally a sequence of splendidly-titled songs by Bendix (*Auf Wiedersehn*), Needham (*I Vunder Vy*), Willeby (*Flower Fetters*), Goetz (*Say not Good Night*) and Squire (*The Jolly Sailor*).

Egon Petri (pictured left) was only 21 at the time – one feels that programming Alkan was a brave decision for an up-and-coming virtuoso. The two works are, of course, numbers 3 and 5 from the major key studies, op. 35. I have not been able to locate a review of the concert, although others may be able to do so.

The next concert featuring Alkan appears to have been on Friday 10th February 1911, where Adela Verne (born 1877) made her Wigmore Hall debut. Her programme was varied, including Mendelssohn's *Six Preludes and Fugues* (selection) and *Scherzo in B minor*, Mozart's *Pastorale variée* (K.Anh. 209b), the fourth movement from Weber's *Piano Sonata No. 1*, Brahms' *Piano Sonata No. 3*, Rubinstein's *Concert Etude on False Notes*, selection from Cervantes' *Six Cuban Dances*, *Le Vent* from Alkan's *Trois morceaux dans le genre pathétique* (op. 15/2), and Liszt's *La campanella*.

Le Vent was, it seems, well-known in the early part of the 20th Century as something of a war

BECHSTEIN HALL.		
FRIDAY, FEB. 10th, at 3 p.m.		FRIDAY, FEB. 10th, at 3 p.m.
Reappearance in London of		Under the direction of Messrs. IBBS & TILLET.
ADELA VERNE		
After her triumphant tours through America, Canada, Mexico, and Cuba.		

horse. Sorabji wrote that it was “familiar – too familiar one is tempted to say, for most people think of Alkan, indeed only know him, as the composer of *Le Vent*.”

Adela Verne had a long and distinguished career, although few of her performances were recorded, and there seem to be no other evidence of her playing Alkan. She was preparing for her first recital at London’s newly-opened Royal Festival Hall when she died in February 1952, aged 74.



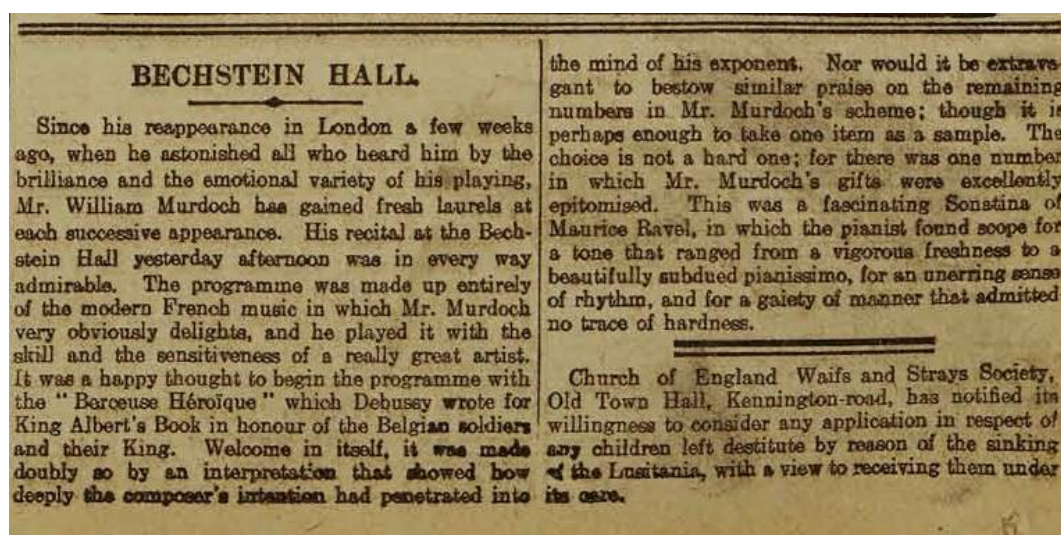
Our final Alkan event was on Tuesday 11th May 1915, when William Murdoch gave a recital of “modern French works”. (Given the date, about ten months after the start of hostilities, it is of interest that the programme cover still advertises “Bechstein Grand Pianoforte”). Murdoch’s programme included a selection of works by Debussy, Ravel, Déodat de Séverac and Alkan (*Allegro barbaro*, op 35 no 5, *Le festin d'Esopé*, op 39 no 12). It would be interesting to know whether this was the first UK performance of *Le festin*, and what the audience made of it.

The concert was well reviewed by the *Daily Telegraph* a few days later, although the Alkan works were not specifically mentioned (see below).

William Murdoch was an Australian pianist, born in 1888, so he would have been 27 at the time. He became particularly well regarded as a chamber musician, and premiered in public Elgar’s two chamber works with piano, the *Violin*

Sonata in E minor (in June 1919, with Albert Sammons) and the *Piano Quintet in A minor* (in May 1919, with Albert Sammons, William Reed, Raymond Jeremy and Felix Salmond).

This note merely scratches the surface of evidence for early 20th Century performances of Alkan. Now that much more concert archival material is readily available, either through the web or through deposits in libraries, there are great opportunities for further research, and on a more scholarly basis than this introduction.



Letters to the editor

Sir,

Robert Warwick's letter about John Ogdon (*in Bulletin 93*) stimulated me to riffle through my audio cassettes and I found my 'off air' recording of the concert he mentioned:



Manchester Summer Recital

First of eight concerts direct from Studio 7, Manchester John Ogdon (piano)

Thursday
11 June
1987
13.05

Chopin Fantasy in F minor, Op 49
Alkan Fantasy in A flat, Op 76 No 1. for the left hand;
Allegretto alia barbaresca in F sharp minor, Op 39 No 10 Liszt
Mephisto Waltz No 1

Series producer PAUL HINDMARSH (Ticket information from BBC Concerts Promotion, PO Box 27, Manchester M60 1SJ) BBC Manchester

The Left Hand Etude didn't lose coherence from lasting 15 minutes instead of the more usual 11. I'd loved to have heard Ogdon play this in his pomp, as he did in 1957. Was it recorded then? Who else played it at that time?

The Concerto's last movement (12.5 minutes), lacks momentum but not sparkle, and gives us a chance to appreciate Ogdon's appreciation of Alkan's colourful timbres.

Thanks to Robert Warwick for reminding me.

Yours faithfully,

Richard Murphy, London

Members are encouraged to send letters, comments or articles to the Editor
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CD reviews

Alkan: Piano Collection 2 (Concerto)

Yui Morishita, piano

ALM Records ALCD-7203, released (in Japan) October 2016, length 66 minutes

Études dans tous les tons mineurs 8-10 (Concerto), op. 39	49'38
I. Allegro Assai	29'03
II. Adagio	10'36
III. Allegretto alla barabasesca	9'59
Gigue et Air de ballet dans le style ancien, op. 24	6'30
I. Gigue	1'42
II. Air de ballet	4'48
Le Chemin de fer: étude pour piano, op. 27	4'51
Désir, fantaisie pour piano	4'17



Reflections by Richard Murphy

Études dans tous les tons mineurs, Op 39/8 – G# minor: triple time 3/4 at 160 bpm (beats per minute); published 1857

The brass at the start of Klindworth's orchestration of 39/8 sound very soft-grained in comparison to this startlingly dry, percussive, and closely recorded attack. I wonder what precise sound Alkan had in mind when writing *quasi trombe* under the first notes.

From 8'02, the extraordinary skittering passage which leads – 2 minutes later – to the *tutti* return, is played with capillary clarity. The balletic tip-toe touch is achieved with virtually no pedal, providing an X-ray of a usually cloudy picture, most notably in the hammered return in leaping LH four-part chords of the third subject in E minor at 9'39. It could not be cleaner. Alkan's intuitive and unerring way with massive long-range climax-building is truly an awesome gift which deserves specific recognition and celebration.

It's quite a shock – at 15'58 – to hear unpedalled the first two bars of this repeated four-bar unit, which is played 13 and a half times, in counterpoint to the movement's second subject. Now rendered spectral in hollowed octaves, this passage includes the wonderful bitonal C major vs G sharp bars, from 16'39. At 17'49, the second *lanciato* section disappoints because the ascents take longer than the descents.

Another surprise, from 24'40, is the articulation of a melodic phrase usually ignored by performers, occupied as they are by the demands of swiftly repeated notes. As the chordal element fades to leave alternating single fingers tracing the movement's opening melody 25'46, it is given ambience with pedal, reminding me of Saint-Saëns' 1896 5th Piano Concerto – the Egyptian – yet another example of the French taste for Arab Africa. It's not purely an etude in mistake-free repeated notes.

(I recommend listening to Klindworth's arrangement for piano and orchestra of this movement only. By turns, it's amusing, jaw-droppingly appalling – the end of the piece, instructive in the differences and similarities between Alkan and Liszt and Saint-Saëns, but it's not without good ideas too. Alkan knew about it. It is available on Naxos 8.553702.)

Études dans tous les tons mineurs, Op 39/9 – C# minor: triple time 3/4 at 60 bpm

The solo entry at 00'40 is notable for the left hand dictating the flow of the melody. Once again, there's no pedal, so there's no glow to the melody. The *sostenuto* written directly under the left-hand notes is achieved with finger control only. Terrific control is apparent in the muted triplets at 6'05 and all the way to the end.

Études dans tous les tons mineurs, Op 39/10 – F# minor: triple time 3/4 at 100 bpm

This is a performance which runs somewhat counter to the perceived tradition built up over the last 40 years. The Op 39 no 7's 'ride to hell' is not duplicated here, thereby stimulating a reminder of Chopin's Polonaise Op 22 from 1831. Morishita takes it at slightly under 100 and gives the left hand rhythm

greater prominence than is usual. This highlights its harmonic dissonances but also imparts a fresh elegance to the dance. The opening right hand melody seems under-characterised in comparison – the upbeat arabesque fading into the down beat, and the second beat completely missing its accent. These choices seem so deliberate and are so consistently applied that I feel I must be missing something obvious.

The first Tutti at 0'23, while not exactly gentle, is allowed to breathe, and the left hand produces a softer and sustained drone. Rebecs are, after all, small stringed instruments, which is what Alkan asks for. Once again, the sounds of the souk perhaps.

The more measured approach shows in the passage I call Somersault City. The use of a safety net really changes how he wants it to be heard (at 2'13). It's a phenomenally efficient and pinpoint clear and steady rendition, but gone is the roar of the grease paint and the smell of the crowd – and I miss them, while being grateful for the full notated score. What did *Allegretto alla BARBARESCA* mean to Alkan? Barbary, the Barbary Coast (Morocco), barbarian (savage)??

Whichever, this is still a breathtaking piece as Pelion is piled on Ossa towards the coda.

Morishita's approach to melody in the Concerto

- In op. 39/8 - at 00'43, the lyrical RH is crowded out by the accentuated LH
- In op. 39/9 - at 00'40, the *molto espressivo* RH takes a back seat to the rhythmic LH
- In op. 39/10 - at 00'08, the rhythmic LH pushes the RH melody to the sidelines.

It's my opinion that the content of RH and LH will be clearly heard if the hands are separated in decibel terms. Magnifying LH material to the volume level of the RH definitely damages the melody's presence and character. There is little in the way of Alkan's RH melody in this performance that is not tethered to the ground. No soaring here.

In op. 39/8 - at 03'20, Alkan writes a melody with many grace notes and trills. The pitch and beat of each melody note is underplayed by YM – being subsumed by the decorative web preceding it. Does Alkan really ask that the melody lose the pillars of its vocal arc?

In op. 39/10 - at 00'08, there's a similar example of the melodic RH losing its backbone after a busy ornament.

I'll still listen to parts of this Concerto performance for the clarity of some of the most demanding sections and for the control of certain colours, for example the 2nd movement drum beats, but I feel that there's little projection of the music's melodic passion or soul.

Gigue and Air de Ballet in the old style, op24 – published 1844

Gigue: A minor: quadruple compound time 12/8

The three obvious differences from the Smith recording of the Gigue are:

1. The two opening and closing notes of each section are played quietly – as Alkan asks.
2. The short passages with notes grouped in twos – Smith slows down, Morishita speeds up (e.g., at 00'16-19 and 00'36-39).
3. All printed dynamics are correctly observed.

Very well played.

Air de Ballet: D minor: duple time 2/2

I'd heard this before I was ready for it, years ago. I'm ready now. There are more sections than I was expecting. The texture is based on octaves and their chords. The projection of melody is 'in-your-face' *forte* for at least four minutes. Definitely uncompromising, and with Alkan's usual odd phrase lengths – five bars, in this case. Phrase endings just about retain the dancing gesture of a bow or a curtsy. So it's old style dancing and old style modality.

Section 2 is lighter, in the major, and includes, at 1'11, an unusual effect of contrary motion voices stuck inside static octaves. A slight passage of frilly Mendelssohn follows, to be beaten into annihilation by the return of the opening right hand part accompanied by a stronger left hand line now decorated with more passing-note octaves. The end, I thought.

But wait; here's a most uninspired section in A major with the melody in octaves and with plain left-hand chords. The noise level is raised. Then silence and two false starts of the opening - *pp*!! Then, a full rendition with running left-hand octaves really ploughing through the ivories - which the right hand is forced to join - how could it not. The opening four notes of the tune are played *fortissimo* in very low eight-part chords. I find this gesture so amusingly gross that I can't help laughing. It's quite overpowering. Have a couple of drinks and turn up the volume to 12.

There are obvious premonitions of the style of *En rythme Molossique* (1857) - a much more serious piece, but I also think of *Bombardo Carillon* for pedalier (1872) and its (much gentler) humour¹.

Chemin de fer, op 27 - D minor: duple time 2/4; published 1844

This was a popular piece right into the early 20th Century. It's in Alkan's toccata and etude style. It has many similarities to *Comme le Vent* (1857), but is more extreme, not in speed, but with its train whistle onomatopoeia. Very effectively rapid.

Désir - A flat major: quadruple time 4/4; published 1844

Unlike the previous piece, this one won't frighten the horses. 'Gently pulsing crotchet chords with top-line tune followed by a section full of quaver movement in the background' sums up the texture. The usual mucking around with three-beat phrases, then six-beat ones. A slightly quirky cadence feel, another modulation, sweet, tender, legato, expressive, nothing louder than *mf*, but fatally uninteresting melodies. The opening could be mistaken for 'Onward Christian Soldiers' and that's what stays with me. It's inoffensive and bland - unless you consider 'bland' to be offensive. The choice of title is a mystery to me.

"A homely miniature" - Ronald Smith.

In 1844, Parisian purchasers of the sheet music for the last four pieces on this disc must have wondered if Alkan had any comfortable middle ground in his compositional output. The contrast is so stark between the two parts of Op 24 - the *Gigue* being a texturally spare two-line creation asking for nothing but plain fingerwork, emotionally restrained and chromatically austere, though engaging the ear with its imitative patterns - the *Air* being a physically draining ordeal of chords and octaves, in a punch-between-the-ears shouting rhetoric, pretty much guaranteeing a visceral reaction. Though not braced as an opus, further violent contrast is unavoidable between the next two pieces: op27's percussive *ostinati* and rampaging right hand rushing the length of the piano, and *Désir*'s limited range and general *mezzoforte* cuteness. On this showing alone, we are presented with a composer who relished extremes.

Morishita's Concerto performance, while full of interest, has too many emotional lacunae for a strong recommendation from me, but his way with the stylistically less involved pieces that make up the last 16 minutes of the disc is irreproachable.

The CD may be ordered through Amazon Japan (go to www.amazon.co.jp and type Morishita Alkan into search box and follow links, using an automatic translate on your browser). Individual tracks are also available via iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/alkan-piano-collection-2-concerto/id1155423247>

¹ It is of interest that the English organist W. T. Best (1826-1897), an early advocate of Alkan, adapted and played the *Air de Ballet*, amongst other pieces, in his organ recitals. See article in *Bulletin* 79 (available on Society web site) for further details.

Le Prophète: works for four hands**Stephanie McCallum and Erin Helyard, piano duo***Performed on Erard pianos**TRPTK TTK0005, released (in The Netherlands) October 2016, length 68 minutes*

Meyerbeer: Le Prophète: Ouverture, arr. Alkan	12'30
Alkan: Neuf Grands Préludes op. 66, arr. da Motta	40'56
1. Moderatamente	3'20
2. Andantino	4'26
3. Allegro moderato	1'50
4. Tempo giusto	4'42
5. Quasi adagio	5'02
6. Andantino	4'20
7. Alla Giudeesca	4'28
8. Lento	3'07
9. Adagio	8'46
Moscheles: Hommage à Weber, op. 102	14'33
1. Allegro vivace	4'30
2. Andantino	3'55
3. Allegro vivace	6'08



We have commissioned two independent reviews of this important release

Review I: Richard Shaw

This fine CD comes from trptk, a new recording company with a refreshing approach to the industry. Founded just three years ago, “TRPTK is not being led by commercialism”, their website (www.trptk.com) declares. “We only record music because we are passionate about art. Our goal is to raise the standards of recording quality, and we only work with technology of the highest quality, that perfectly captures the emotion of music as transparent as possible...” They have certainly brought out a winner of a CD in Stephanie McCallum and Erin Helyard’s *Le Prophète: works for four hands*. The CD, jacket and informative notes are all very enticing (and for this reason I recommend readers order their hard copy straightaway, rather than going for the download option). The performances of all three works are at the highest level. The CD also showcases the full range of sonorities available from Alkan’s favourite piano maker, Erard of Paris. The three pianos recorded here date from 1839 (Moscheles), 1847 (Meyerbeer/Alkan) and 1898 (Alkan) and are in particularly good playing condition, a tribute to the care and skills of Frits Jaumaat (Maison Erard, Amsterdam). His infectious commitment to these pianos is clear from a visit to www.erard.nl.

Stephanie McCallum tells us much about the background to Alkan’s arrangement for four hands, one piano of the Overture to Meyerbeer’s opera *Le Prophète* on pp 12-14 of this Bulletin. In a nutshell, owing to time restrictions Meyerbeer’s vast overture was omitted from all performances of the opera and until the 1990s, when the orchestral score and parts were unearthed, this substantial work was known only in Alkan’s versions for one piano, four hand (recorded on this CD) and for piano solo (see below). We can see the music of Alkan’s arrangement for piano duet, by going to the *imslp* website (put ‘Alkan Meyerbeer imslp’ into google and select ‘Arrangements...’).

There is another version of the Overture by Alkan, too, one which has been omitted from all recent serious listings of Alkan’s works. The *Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris acquired its copy of Alkan’s arrangement of the work for solo piano in 1877, via the dépôt légal system. The plates pp.2-27 show it was published by Brandus et Cie, rue Richelieu 87. The publisher was at this address from December 1848 to January 1851, and the plate number ‘B et Cie 5190’ suggests a range from late autumn 1850 to early 1851. The plate number for Alkan’s piano duet version is ‘B & Cie 5191’. We can assume then that Alkan worked on both versions late in 1849 and they were both published late in 1850. Both of Alkan’s versions relate to his original works of the period, for

in exploring piano textures and figurations suitable for conveying elaborate orchestral writing, he was enriching the palette at his disposal for his own solo writing. Listen to almost any single moment of track one and it will bring to mind sonorities found in Alkan solo works. Of course, the path of Meyerbeer's music is often quite different from Alkan's, more direct and straightforward, even if they share a common (and often fascinating) pianistic language.

Examples of McCallum and Helyard's fine orchestral playing in the Meyerbeer abound. Just listen to Track 1 2:35-, 2:45-, 4:18 for three such moments, made possible through their thrilling balancing and colouring of the various orchestral layers. Their handling of the pacing at 4:51-5:20 is also admirable. Here, the music appears to be rounding off in the key of G, only to change course with a violent, dramatic jerk to A \flat (and then to C \sharp minor). With less capable pianists, over-keen to hurtle through the music, this might have seemed merely chaotic. A super efficient performance of the orchestral version, conducted by Darrell Ang with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (available from Naxos) whips along at a charge, lasting a few seconds over eleven minutes. Significantly, our pianists take almost one and a half minutes longer, and there's certainly no loss of excitement or diminution in virtuosity. Instead, the performance behaves like a succession of coiled springs, releasing momentum with complete conviction. A masterclass in dramatic pacing.

Track 1: 10'30. Those curious to know whether or not Alkan was responsible for coming up with his own rather pianistic invention (rapid, delicate triplets, outlining a calmer melody) can check out the orchestral version. Surprisingly, the exact same texture is in the orchestra, although Alkan's version somehow seems more idiomatic. A hint, perhaps, that Meyerbeer wrote first at the piano, then transferred his original thoughts to the orchestra.

Tracks 2 to 10 feature Alkan's *11 grands préludes et 1 transcription du Messie de Hændel* Op.66, in an arrangement by José Vianna da Motta. After two years of study with Benoît, Alkan received his *Premier Prix* in organ playing from the Paris Conservatoire at the age of twenty-one, long after he had obtained similar prizes for solfège (aged 7), piano (10), and harmony and accompaniment (13). The organ, and its repertoire, clearly held a particular fascination for Alkan. He became obsessed with the possibilities offered by a special piano, to which an independent pedal-board had been attached. He wrote about and demonstrated his beloved *piano à clavier de pédales* (was this made specially for him by Erard?) at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1855 (Paris' answer to Prince Albert's pioneering Great Exhibition of 1851 in London) and proceeded to write a number of works for the instrument. His *11 grands préludes et 1 transcription du Messie de Hændel* came out in 1867 and was dedicated to his colleague César Franck. Da Motta, already an admirer and active promoter of Alkan's neglected music, brought out his version for piano four hands in 1906, dedicating his volume to Isidor Philipp. His aim was to bring this music back into circulation, and in a form that made it more likely to be played and heard; no concert halls or salons had suitable pedal pianos...

Da Motta omitted Alkan's rumbustious Prelude 1 (in F major), Prelude 10 (a scherzando in B \flat minor) and an excerpt from Handel's *Messiah*. He also altered Alkan's original sequence: 1 Allegro (F major), 2 Allegro moderato (D minor), 3 Andantino (B \flat major), 4 Moderatamente (G minor), 5 Quasi-Adagio (E \flat major), 6 Andantino (C minor), 7 Andante: Alla Giudeesca (A \flat major), 8 Tempo giusto (F minor), 9 Langsam (D \flat major), 10 Scherzando (B \flat minor), 11 Lento (F \sharp major), Nos.26 et 27, du *Messiah* de Hændel: Recitativo, Largo (Thy rebuke hath broken his heart), Largo e piano (Behold and see). Note Alkan's systematic exploration of keys a third away from each other. Da Motta's volume arranges them thus: Track 2 = Alkan's Prelude 4 Moderatamente (G minor), Track 3 = Alkan's Prelude 3 Andantino (B \flat major), Track 4 = Alkan's Prelude 2 Allegro moderato (D minor), Track 5 = Alkan's Prelude 8 Tempo giusto (F minor), Track 6 = Alkan's Prelude 5 Quasi-Adagio (E \flat major), Track 7 = Alkan's Prelude 6 Andantino (C minor), Track 8 = Alkan's Prelude 7 Andante: Alla Giudeesca (A \flat major), Track 9 = Alkan's Prelude 11 Lento (F \sharp major), and Track 10 is Alkan's beautiful Prelude 9, a slow, reflective movement in 6/8, marked *Langsam* by Alkan and *Adagio* by Da Motta (D \flat major).

Da Motta explains the reordering in his Preface: 'We have sacrificed the ordering of the keys of the original for another principle which seems to us of greater importance; we have endeavoured to give a poetic unity to the nine pieces, so they create the development of a spiritual drama. [Tracks 2-4] The problem is presented, [Tracks 5-7] Development of the struggle between a feeling of revolution and the hope for peace, [Tracks 8-10] Prayer - The martyr's final words *Gethsemane - Redemption*.'

When listening to this recording I wondered just how Da Motta had contributed to Alkan's original. A quick glance at the two scores – both available via *imslp* (google 'imslp alkan op.66') – shows that all Da Motta did was double Alkan's bass line (mostly). Pianists working on the Da Motta version may also be fascinated by aspects of Alkan's fingering and phrasing, sometimes revised by Da Motta. This is vintage Alkan, full of invention, and matched by a great performance. Just listen to the wonderful, beautifully-judged sonorities of Track 5 at 2:21-2:55 - a tribute to the pianists, their piano and the recording team.

Moscheles' *Grand Duo Hommage à Weber* was announced in Hofmeister's invaluable monthly catalogue of new music publications in March 1842. See for yourself by going to www.hofmeister.rhul.ac.uk (a valuable and fascinating resource for exploring music on sale at a particular time in the mid-19th century). There are plenty of helpful references (with the all important dates of publications, and publishers) to Alkan, too... Weber died on June 5, 1826 at 103 Great Portland Street, London (there's a blue plaque outside) having conducted the première of his new opera (to an English text) *Oberon* at Covent Garden two months earlier. A glance at Alfred Loewenberg's *Annals of Opera* (1943) shows us that when *Hommage* first appeared the two operas featured in Moscheles' masterly symphonic potpourri, *Euryanthe* and *Oberon*, had been widely circulated. *Euryanthe* (premiered in October 1823) had appeared across much of Europe (Riga was to see it later in 1842) but *Oberon*, while receiving many performances in English in London's Covent Garden (and at Drury Lane in German in April 1841), was less frequently heard on the continent in the early 1840s.

Moscheles' fine work was written for his sister-in-law Emilie Jaques' (née Embden) two lucky daughters, Bertha (aged 22) and her younger sister Ina (aged 20). For sheer quality and craftsmanship, it outshines by far most potpourris of the period (note just how many appeared in the pages of Hofmeister each month...). As well as a splendid vehicle for displaying the impressive pianistic talents of the sisters, it was no doubt also written to draw fresh attention to the beauties of *Oberon*. To see the music go to the *imslp* website (put 'Weber Moscheles imslp' into google).

The performance of the outer movements of Moscheles' work (tracks 11 and 13), both marked *Allegro vivace*, have a wonderful sparkle and energy. Thus is counterbalanced with the poetry of the central *Andantino con moto*. Note how in Track 12 (00:26) McCallum's distinctive, soloistic singing line is imaginatively supported by Helyard's very fine accompaniment, always alert, but daringly in the background. Here (as elsewhere) Helyard's experience as an opera conductor and continuo player shines through. Helyard and McCullum make such fine duo partners. Both have the digital mastery and imagination to coax a vast range of colours and characters from the keyboard. All their choices of characterisation seem in sympathy with the musical writing, and they never lose that invisible thread that projects from the concert platform to the auditorium. That's a remarkable feat for a recording.

By rights this CD should be in for several awards. It should certainly be on the shelves of every serious performing institution, and in the hands of all who value vital and creative piano playing of the highest quality, not to mention listeners who love to explore rare repertoire. A remarkable achievement.

Review II: Richard Murphy

Meyerbeer, *Le Prophète: Ouverture* (arr. Alkan)

What an arresting opening. There are surprises aplenty in melodic direction, dynamics, texture, and instrumental timbre. The piccolo pierce of this keyboard's highest notes is unbelievable. Both piece and performance are a terrific showcase for this 1847 Erard piano. It does justice to all that's asked of it in this extremely effective and difficult 1850 transcription by Meyerbeer's friend, Alkan. Listening to the orchestral original¹ was, for me, a complete eye-opener to both men, the composer and the transcriber. I am bowled over by the original and in awe of how brilliantly faithful is Alkan's work. He successfully translates melodic timps, grumbling and thunder timps, skirling strings and woodwind, cymbals, *fortississimo* orchestral chords, velvet *pianissimos*, and everything in this gorgeous score². A palpable hit, even after half a dozen listenings the past month!

Moscheles: *Hommage à Weber*

The Weber/Moscheles (on an 1839 Erard) is a different creature, being a pot-pourri of 'tunes' sans any orchestral notions. After an ear-tickling first couple of minutes with scales and arpeggios, the ear became less engaged by the bland musical pleasantries that followed. The most satisfying section was the separately tracked central four minutes of lyricism. The final part struggled to hold my attention on three occasions.

Alkan: *Neuf Grands Préludes op. 66* (arr. da Motta)

There couldn't be a stronger contrast between José Vianna da Motta's (VdM's) stylistically self-effacing redistribution of Alkan's original parts, and his self-indulgent redistribution of Alkan's 12 pieces. As presented, the original dozen is reduced to nine. The two Germanic 'Baroque bookends' have gone, as has the obviously exciting 'scherzando' romp which is no. 10. Alkan's purposely plotted key scheme has also been given the bird, and the new order of pieces is: 4, 3, 2, 8, 5, 6, 7, 11, 9.

I take heart from this meddling for it allows the listener to now also ignore Alkan's plan. I can listen to my favourites in any order, or singly. I just wish that VdM hadn't given such priority to his programme [a soul's journey (see booklet)] over the completion of the whole opus for transcription. Alkan did not write a narrative to Opus 66; my response to each piece does not suggest one, so I more especially resent the exclusion of Alkan's original music. The overlaying of a late 19th Century psycho-religious text is all very well, but.....

No track numbers are given. VdM's 1-9 performing order is on tracks 2-10. For those following the Billaudot score of the Pedalier music I will pair track numbers with Alkan's original order.

Track 2/A4: A brusque military tone of voice alternates with a flowing cantilena. VdM cuts 4 bars, and 15 bars of very fast decoration – a practical decision.

Track 4/A2: We encounter grace-note power with on-beat insistence. This special effect from Alkan's imagination, most notably at 1'40, heralds both Janáček's *Sinfonietta* and Bernard Herrmann's music for the shower scene in *Psycho*. Also included is a touch of Beethoven's *Pastoral* bucolics.

Track 6/A5: An *adagio* starting with a solo, then duo, then trio, then a quiet *tutti* voiced like Brahmsian piety, with 10ths stalking in the bass. A repeat of the start leads to the unusual effect of 42 high 4/5-note chords as the backdrop to an increasingly urgent rising bass melody

¹ https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x38jnx4_giacomo-meyerbeer-le-prophete-ouverture_music

² Stephanie MacCallum's article (in this issue, pp 12-14) suggests that Meyerbeer was not composing (at the piano) with an orchestral template in his mind. His piano allowed him to write the bare abstracts of the music – pitch, rhythm, phrases etc. Timbre, choice of instrument, orchestral sections – these were decisions to follow at a later date. Alkan then reversed the process.

Mark Starr has done an edition of this overture, and has printed his own orchestrations of Alkan's op. 39 too.

harmonised by one of Alkan's exactly measured tremolos – in mid-register. One of the most delicious pieces in the set.

Track 7/A6: One of the oddest pieces of 'dance' music I've heard. Starting with a heavy, sticky, *barcarolle* feel, we stumble upon a *ppp*, *staccatissimo* faux-folk dance sounding for all the world like a 'back-to-the-old-days' bit of mild-mannered modality and false-relations written by English composers in the early 1900s. This accumulates massive volume, but at length recedes to a repeated high bell sound. Another Alkan wonder.

Track 8/A7: This is reminiscent of *Esquisse* op. 63/13, *Ressouvenir*. A long solo melody is then repeated with harmony – the first 8 bars in quiet block chords, which continue while the 'solo' moves to the bass. The sensitivity of this performance won me over to the piece, though unsynchronised ensemble is a pity in such exposed music. A note of the melody is omitted at 2'08.

Track 10/A9: It's worth examining the length of this piece in performance:

- Alkan 5'40 (based on his metronome mark)
- Kevin Bowyer 6'45
- Maltempo+ 7'41
- This disc 8'46
- Nicholas King 9'58

The gently throbbing 6/8 triplets suggest an atmosphere of trancelike devotion, with its simple melody floating over the slowly changing 6-7-8-part harmony. There are some lovely passing-note chords of typical Alkan flavouring and beautifully simple key changes – down a tone, up a third, like stepping onto different clouds. A very gratifying piece. Despite my thoughts on VdM's choices, I have absolutely no objections to finishing my listening with this one.

I will be revisiting the first two composers without any doubt. I had no trouble with the piano choice. Alkan Society members were grateful to hear part of this programme from this duo in February 2015 in London (all but the Meyerbeer). I hope their recording acts as an alert to duos everywhere to try this still-wonderfully-fresh and recently re-presented repertoire.

Now, I must disclose what Vianna da Motta denied us. Listen to Olivier Latry play No 10 on Alkan's pedalier!³

The disc is packaged in a handsome, dark, double gatefold cover, opening out like an altar panel triptych; hence the company's initials TRPTK. The 'light-grey-against-black' text in the 16-page booklet is a mistake. How many over-45s checked its ease of legibility?

Will someone competent to do so please complete the opus transcription – especially Nos 10 and 1?

³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDl-v_sD2uM

Distractions and diversions

An invitation...

Find at least 50 references, both direct and indirect, to Alkan. Email your solution to the Editor (treasurer@alkansociety.org) by 24th April. A prize (CD of a rare performance of the *Symphonie*) will be awarded to the most accurate answer (the judges' decision is final). *Thanks to Richard Murphy*

INVITATION: LE FESTIN d'ALKAN (as-tu déjeuner déjà?)

DATE: Valentine's Day

ADDRESS: Double Flat / Rue Daru / Pres de l'orme / Paris

TRANSPORTS: Omnibus No2 / Chemin de fer: Platform 27

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: Napoleon

A commencer

Prières / Grâces

MENU - DOIGT BUFFET

Pâté de Foi Gras

Crudités Banales

Mineurstrone

Quasi Toast

Hiller Beans

Baguettes de tambours

MAINS (réunis)

Tournedos alla Rossini

Dodo ou Perroquet roti

Minuet steak

SALADES

Fusée

DESSERTS

Fromages de la Bord avec Bath Olivers

Including Chalk an' Cheese

Petits Four-hands

En Sponge

A BOIRE

Your sommeliers will be Jean qui Rit and Démocrite

Morhange Juice

Château Jaco

Château Bat aux (20 ans)

Champsagne (30 ans)

Triple (sharp) sec (40 ans)

Glen Morhangie (50 ans)

Chopin Vodka

Crème de tenths

Pseudo-naïveté (Cocktail)

Piano: Erard

Joyeux Pâque a Tutti

ATTENTION: Regrets que Baruches seraient à 10:16 sharp!

End of dinner puzzle: Find 1x3 - Gottschalk and ChAlkan are as chalk and cheese

Petit contes

Member George Hitching, who recently gave the first Norwegian performance of the *Ouverture* (from op. 39) in Tønsberg city library, reports that after practising on the morning of the concert, one of the librarians said a cheerful hello and then “Have you finished tuning the piano now?”! George reports that, despite this, the evening concert went well.

An Alkan clerihehew and limerick

Charles-Valentin Alkan
Quite a name for quite a man.
But if he had kept Morhange
We'd have our rhyme for orange.
With thanks to Victor Lloyd

It is on a Parisian *balcon*
One can see the composer Chas. Alkan.
With his son Delaborde,
With an Erard on board,
They are off *en vacances* to Les Balkans.
With thanks to Richard Murphy

Desert island discs

In a well-known UK radio programme, Desert Island Discs, a guest is invited to choose eight recordings they would like to take with them to a desert island. The rules do not permit a large collection (such as Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* or the complete Beethoven Symphonies) to be selected. Alkan Society members were invited to propose their eight favourite Alkan pieces to take were they to be so stranded.

Many thanks to the six members who responded to this challenge (and also to the few who responded but said such a choice was impossible).

The results are in, and the pieces chosen, with the numbers of people choosing them (N in the table below), are shown in the table below.

Opus	Work	N	Comments
Op 21	Duo pour piano et violon	1	
Op 27	Le Chemin de Fer	1	
Op 31/3	Prélude: <i>Dans le Genre Ancien</i>	1	
Op 31/8	Prélude: <i>La Chanson de la Folle au Bord de la Mare</i>	2	I was haunted by Ronald Smith's old recording
Op 33	Grande Sonate (complete)	1	
	30 Ans: Quasi Faust	1	Massive in every concept and realisation
Op 35/5	Allegro Barbaro	1	
Op 35/9	Contrapunctus	1	Craftsmanship plus humour plus 'dry as dust' texture plus hypnotic Trio with bold harmonic clashes; flavours of both Stravinsky and Beethoven
Op 35/10	Chant d'amour – chant de mort	1	
Op 38/1	Chant: <i>Assez Vivement</i>	1	
Op 39/12	Le Festin d'Esopé	2	The first Alkan piece I heard
Op 39/4-7	Symphonie	1	
	2 nd movt only	1	
Op39/8-10	Concerto	1	
	Concerto (1 st movt)	2	The <i>locus classicus</i> of so much about the man
Op 40/3	Marche no 3 (duet)	1	
Op 41/3	Petite Fantasia no 3 (Presto)	1	
Op 47	Sonate de concert (Piano & Cello)	3	
Op 50/1	Capriccio alla soldatesca	1	
Op 52	Super flumina Babylonis	1	

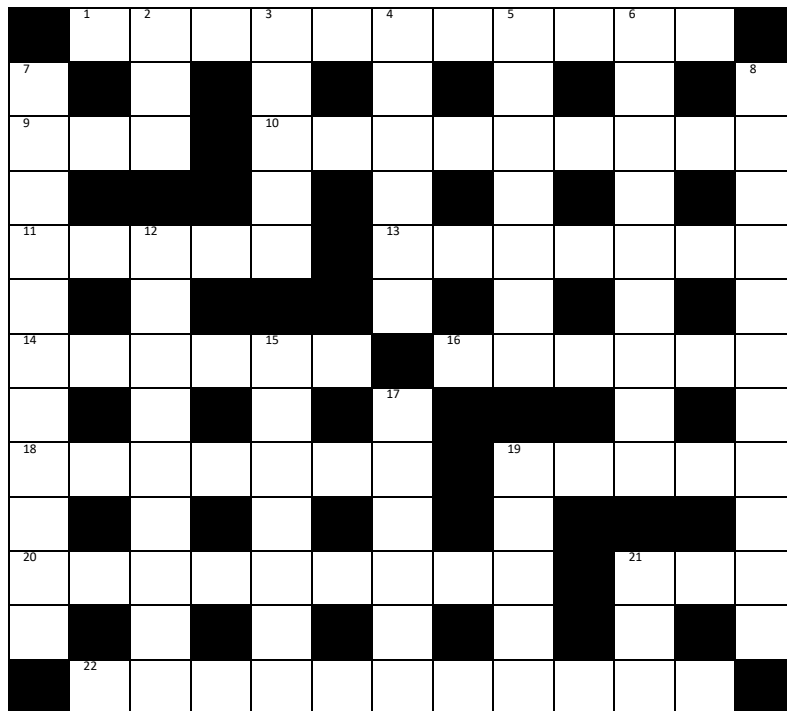
Op 54	Benedictus (pédalier)	1	
Op 61	Sonatine	4	
	2 nd movt	1	French, poised, logical harmony clashes - almost by another composer it's so polished.
Op 63/35	Esquisse: <i>Musique Militaire</i>	1	Obsession is given the character of a jerky military martinet puppet, whose barked orders become increasingly hysterical. A cartoon in music.
Op 63/43	Esquisse: <i>Notturmino-Innamorato</i>	1	A real jewel
Op 63/46	Esquisse: <i>Premier billet doux</i>	1	Wonderfully sophisticated writing which strongly contradicts the first word of the title. This is no novice. Very polished, and after the tortures of each line - a very tender end. Breathtaking.
Op 63/49	Esquisse: <i>Laus Deo</i>	2	Almost any of Op 63 What's it all about? Wonderfully baffling and sacramental
Op 64/2	Prières: <i>Moderato</i>	1	
Op 64/11	Prières: <i>Andantino</i>	1	
Op 65/3	Chant: <i>En canon</i>	1	Despite the flowery framework, here is purity of process, beauty of line, and Frenchness of intonation
Op 65/6	Chant: <i>Barcarolle</i>	1	
Op 66/9	Grand prélude: <i>Langsam</i>	1	
Op 66/10	Grand prélude: <i>Scherzando</i>	1	
Op 69	Impromptu sur le Choral de Luther	2	His greatest variation set. A compendium of quirks and teeming imagination; his learned love of preceding styles. I'd like the recording by Goldstone & Clemmow: fearless, thrilling, stylish, sensitive, synchronous, powerful and virtuosic. Chapeau bas!
Op 70/6	Chant: <i>Barcarolle</i>	1	
Op 75	Toccatina	1	
WoO	Petit Conte	1	
<i>And more in hope than expectation...</i>			
	Chants – complete	1	
Op 35	Complete	1	
Op 39	Complete	1	
Op 63	Esquisses – complete	1	A gallery of 49 unique sketches - not preparatory works, but fully finished, coloured, and polished portraits of psyches, tableaux, movement, old humours, in a gallimaufry of styles encompassing the affects of centuries of human utterance, from classical Greece and Rome onwards. <i>Laus Deo</i> indeed.

Some respondents asked for a luxury to help them while away their time. One asked for the desert island to be equipped with both a Steinway concert grand and a facsimile of the Erard pedalier, “since I expect to have plenty of time to learn how to use the pedals”. Another requested the music for the Grande Sonate (op.33) and Douze études (op.39), in lieu of the Bible and the complete works of Shakespeare, as well as the luxury of a pedalier.

We have some favourite choices: the Sonatine, op.61, is a nose ahead of the field, featuring on five of our six desert islands, while the Concerto for solo piano from op.39 (especially the first movement) and the Cello Sonata (Sonate de concert, op.47) were chosen by three desert islanders. More striking is the very wide selection from across the gamut of Alkan's works, with all genres and forms represented (bar his meagre extant vocal and orchestral output). This testifies to the wide appeal across Alkan's varied styles.

Readers are encouraged to listen to, or play, some of the works with which they may be unfamiliar.

Prize crossword (Set by En Songe)



Notes:

- Some, but not all, clues are Alkan-related.
- Where answers refer to Alkan's works, the original language is retained.
- All of the clues are cryptic, making use of double meanings, anagrams, follow-ons or other such ploys.

Solutions should be sent to the editor* to arrive by 24th April. The first correct solution (drawn randomly from a hat) will win a CD of the complete Vianna da Motta transcriptions of Alkan's op 53, op 64 and op 66, played by Vincenzo Maltempo and Emanuele Delucchi. Prize donated by Toccata Classics.

* treasurer@alkansociety.org, or Nick Hammond, Woodend House, High Stittenham, York YO60 7TW, UK

Across

- 1 See 22 across
- 9, 21 down Jaco was one, in French (6)
- 10 One informal 7 playing 8? Or perhaps whoever cast it.
- 11 The elixir of those rarely-performed variations (5)
- 13 Traditionally followed by thundery tenth month (3, 4)
- 14 Dig found in one hundred geese (6)
- 16 Barbarous mode? Initially not daily (6)
- 18 Charting a great dynasty engulfing mobile feature (7)
- 19 Begin to mix a bender? (5)
- 20 Least, most: is CVA's opus list in this? (5, 4)
- 21 See 2 down
- 22,1 Random mod can cheat truth, major study shows (5, 1, 5, 5, 2, 4)

Down

- 2, 21 across Did he have a twinkle in this when he wrote 15 down? (3, 3)
- 3 Muddled genie paired with lava in wordless song (5)
- 4 Second hand, at least when following a fantasy (6)
- 5 Keyboard prowess? Upset my tears! (7)
- 6 Downfall out in rain (9)
- 7 President first loads Mr Thin (6, 5)
- 8 Head start on Pacific 231 of nearly 80 years (6, 2, 3)
- 12 Lob too close to an opponent in 15 (Eng); not something a tuner should do (9)
- 15 Nocturnal jumper? (7)
- 17 Made a deal in greylag reeds (6)
- 19 Sweeper in probe somewhere (5)
- 21 See 9 across



The Alkan Society

aiming to promote the education of the public in the knowledge,
understanding and appreciation of the life and work of Alkan

Registered Charity
no. 276199



The **Alkan Society**, founded in 1977, is an organization with members from across the globe. It is based in the UK and registered as an official Charity.

The Society promotes the life and work of the French composer and pianist Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813-1888). It supports regular recitals, produces publications (including a regular Bulletin) and is the definitive source of information on Alkan's life and works.



About Alkan

Alkan was recognised by Liszt and Chopin as one of the outstanding musicians of their day. His music has been championed by such eminent performers as Claudio Arrau, Ferruccio Busoni, Jack Gibbons, Marc-André Hamelin, Raymond Lewenthal, John Ogdon, Egon Petri and Ronald Smith.

His works cover a vast gamut of forms, moods and techniques, combining rigorous classicism with bold modernity. His individual use of harmony and rhythm, extraordinary imagination, and uncompromising keyboard writing guarantee his music a unique place in the repertoire, making him one of the great figures of the Romantic era.

Join the Alkan Society

Annual membership fee: £20; Students £10

As a member you:

- ✓ Contribute to the aims of the Society
- ✓ Can purchase discounted tickets for our recitals
- ✓ Receive regular bulletins and other news
- ✓ Can contribute announcements and promotions to our website
- ✓ Can benefit from our expert query service on the life and music of Alkan

Join at:

www.alkansociety.org

Or contact: membership@alkansociety.org

Who we are

President: Leslie Howard; **Vice-presidents:** Anne Smith, Hugh Macdonald, Nicholas King, Richard Shaw
Chairman: Mark Viner; **Secretary:** Coady Green; **Treasurer:** Nick Hammond

Information: info@alkansociety.org

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