



The Alkan Society

Registered Charity no. 276199

www.alkansociety.org

President: Leslie Howard

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Society concerts

Annual Joint Societies Dinner-Recital

The Forge, London on 19th January 2016

A meeting of fans of Alkan, Berlioz, Liszt, Mahler, and Wagner might seem to be a subject for a fantasy of the columnist Peter Simple, potentially ending in violence, uproar and recriminations. Nothing, however, could have been more civilized or rewarding than the dinner and recital convened by the societies dedicated to these great composers. Those attending were treated to a fine conspectus of musical romanticism in an innovative programme given by dedicated performers. And we may as a Society feel proud that three of the performers, Leslie Howard (pictured, above), Coady Green and Mark Viner (pictured), were of our brotherhood (although admittedly Leslie also sails under the colours of Franz Liszt – but given the excellent relations which subsisted between Alkan and Liszt themselves, we may regard this as the continuation of a great tradition).



The venue was The Forge in Camden Town, London, which proved ideal for the purpose. Seated at tables which enabled us to meet and chat with members of differing Societies, we were all within intimate proximity with the stage and were able to enjoy together an excellent meal after the music.

First up was Hector Berlioz. Laura Wolk-Lewanowicz, accompanied by Coady Green, gave us fine renditions of the chansons *La belle voyageuse* and *La belle Isabeau*. Between these Leslie Howard played Liszt's engagingly dreamy fantasy on the *idée fixe* from the *Symphonie fantastique*. This, like Mark Viner's stirring rendition of Liszt's *Phantasiestück* on themes from Wagner's *Rienzi*, which followed it, was a model of artistic collaboration, both between the two composers in each case and between those composers and the interpreter.



Laura's haunting performance of the *Liebestod* from *Tristan und Isolde* (accompanied by Leslie) took us to another atmosphere entirely. The journey undertaken by Wagner – from (as von Bülow once put it) the composer of "Meyerbeer's greatest opera" to the creator of a new world of emotional and musical experience – could scarcely have been more convincingly demonstrated.

Leslie's arrangement for piano and execution of the *Adagietto* from Mahler's Fifth Symphony were admirable, but this listener felt the need of an orchestra to do this music full justice. Laura, again accompanied by Coady, gave very effective and engaging performances of three of the songs from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*; I was particularly moved by *Um Mitternacht*.

I have to express some reservation about the choice, to represent Alkan, of four of the Op. 66 *Préludes*, played by Leslie and Mark in da Motta's four-hand transcriptions. This is by no means because of any reservations about the actual performance; but I have the feeling that our co-auditors from the other Societies may perhaps not have been entirely familiar with Alkan's *oeuvre*. Whilst for the dedicated *Alkaniste* these pieces are full of interest, those coming to them without knowledge of Alkan's other works will have been misled if they felt them to be typical. We may have missed an opportunity to develop attachment, or even enthusiasm.

However the following performance, of two of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, played in four-hand versions by Coady Green and Christopher Wayne Smith, ensured a rousing conclusion to the recital.

This meeting of different musical minds in a congenial setting offered an excellent opportunity to compare and contrast – and to identify similarities between – five highly original and idiosyncratic composers. I am most grateful to the performers and to those who worked to enable this fascinating event, and hope that it will presage more of the same.

David Conway

Advance notice: The 2017 Joint Societies Dinner-Recital will be held at the same venue on 17th January

Society concert series recital

St Mary's Church, Ealing, London on 6th July 2016

The Society sponsored a recital featuring two exceptional young artists who played major works from Alkan's *Douze études dans tous les tons mineurs* (op. 39).

Paul Wee (pictured right), played the *Concerto for solo piano* (op 39, nos 8-10), and Cowley Fu (below) played the *Symphonie for solo piano* (op 39, nos 4-7).



Paul Wee, born in Melbourne, Australia, studied with Angela Brownridge in London and with Nina Svetlanova in New York. Following many successful concert appearances, Paul decided not to pursue a career as a concert artist, qualified in Law and now practices as a barrister at Gray's Inn, London. Cowley Fu is based in Sydney, Australia, and is under the tutelage of Stephanie McCallum. Cowley has performed in the Sydney Opera House and, as a soloist, has appeared with orchestras performing Liszt's *Totentanz* and Shostakovich's 2nd Piano Concerto.



Both pianists received standing ovations from the enthusiastic audience. Some comments from members attending: "the recital was a total triumph"; "it was a concert of a lifetime"; "it was absolutely fabulous"; "still recovering from that incredible performance of the *Concerto* which I thought was up there with the very best".

Following strong demand, a CD recording of the recital has been prepared and is available for purchase by Society members only. For further details, see:

<http://www.alkansociety.org/Society-CD-recordings/society-cd-recordings.html>

In addition, Paul Wee's performance of the *Concerto* was video-recorded and is available on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqeB6lfvM1Q>



Roger Smalley: an appreciation



The composer and pianist Roger Smalley died on 18th August 2015, aged 72. Smalley was not only a highly respected and distinctive composer, but widely recognised for his performances of both contemporary music and the wider repertoire. He was a great champion of neglected composers, not least of Alkan.

Roger Smalley was elected a vice-president of the Alkan Society in 1992 and members from that time will be familiar with his contributions both to the Society and to the wider recognition of Alkan's works. Below we reproduce some excerpts from earlier editions of this Bulletin.

Before that, however, Peter Grove has kindly recorded some personal memories.

"I first met Roger Smalley when I was reading Natural Sciences at Trinity College, Cambridge and he was the Composer in Residence at King's College. I had discovered Raymond Lewenthal's recording of Alkan works a couple of years earlier, but had become frustrated that so few of the printed scores were available apart from Lewenthal's own album for Schirmer. Roger played some unfamiliar pieces at the CUMC, the university music club, including some major-key studies, and I asked him where he found the scores. The Cambridge Music Shop had a

few old editions, often second-hand, and some reprints in a reduced format then became available, including the complete Op.39 minor-key Etudes. At last my collection began to grow, and once the two Alkan Societies in Britain and France were formed, the momentum gathered, in spite of Billaudot's tenacious attitude to copyright. Now, of course, almost everything can be found on the Internet. How times change. Roger was a frequent recitalist around Cambridge and was equally impressive in classical and contemporary repertoire: one concert had a memorable performance of Beethoven's op.101 sonata. He also did some conducting and directed a very accomplished concert which included Webern's extremely difficult Concerto for nine instruments.

"I also encountered Roger as a leading light in the university contemporary music society and I recall several intriguing meetings which ranged from the fascinating to the downright bonkers and frustrating. There was the small group listening to the new LP recording of Stockhausen's "Hymnen" in his rooms at King's, with his colleague Tim Souster sitting very close to the loudspeakers. Completely different was a session in the King's disco on the influence of pop music on his own ("Pulses" for 5 x 4 instruments and "Beat Music"). It included a 20-minute track ("Sister Ray") of not much more than one chord from The Velvet Underground and a rather better piece from Soft Machine, who were to appear to a mixed reception in the first-ever pop Prom which Souster helped to plan. Cornelius Cardew gave an extremely puzzling lecture-recital, opening with some callisthenics, but also containing some surprisingly sensitive piano-playing. Part of his Scratch Orchestra Prom was played on the "Today" programme, with an all-too-clear shout of "Rubbish!" at the end of his "Great Learning". Finally there was an early performance by Smalley and Souster's electronic quartet, Intermodulation, with some early examples of Peter Zinovieff's VCS3 synthesisers (as heard on Pink Floyd's "Dark Side of the Moon") used to give their interpretation of Stockhausen's "Set sail for the sun". Its "score" consists entirely of verbal instructions: "Play a tone for so long / until you hear its individual vibrations. Hold the tone / and listen to the tones of the others - to all of them together, not to individual ones - and slowly move your tone / until you arrive at complete harmony / and the whole sound turns to gold / to pure, gently shimmering fire". Those were the days. Fortunately Roger's music had rather more substance. He wrote occasionally for the Musical Times and a section from his article about Stockhausen's 70-minute one-chord vocal piece "Stimmung", in which he quoted one of the composer's naïve "erotic poems" and declared the work to be a masterpiece, made it into "Pseuds' Corner" in "Private Eye"!

"A few years later I met Roger's brother Peter as an opponent in a squash club in Salisbury. Peter is a mathematician with no musical pretensions, but enjoys music, particularly early music, as a listener. He was a patron of our local chamber orchestra and in his retirement made some beautiful harpsichords which were in great demand for performances in the area. He was extremely impressed to meet someone who had actually heard of his brother. We were both at the Prom in 1982 in which the premiere of Roger's Symphony was played to a very enthusiastic audience. I think the Prommers particularly liked the use of tuned wine-glasses. Roger moved to Australia, but Peter gave me his address and he very kindly sent me a copy of his two-piano transcription of Alkan's pedal-piano Impromptu on a Chorale of Luther, which we had heard him and a friend perform at the Royal Academy of Music. As the then Secretary of the Alkan Society I had some bound copies made and gave

them to our collection at the Guildhall School. Several years later they were still waiting to be indexed and added to the other scores. I hope they can still be found. I never received his transcription of the Benedictus, but the fact that it has been recorded shows that at least some scores are in circulation.

“Roger returned to Britain occasionally to visit his family, and on one occasion he and I had a very enjoyable duet session including, naturally, Alkan's three Marches, about which he had some very humorous observations. He told me of some of the commissions on which he was working, including an almost Alkanian idea of a concerto for contrabassoon. His career in Australia was a very successful one and he came to be regarded as one of their own. Peter proudly went Down Under to see him receive the Membership of the Order of Australia in 2011, an award comparable to our own MBE. In his later years his piano-playing had been hampered by the onset of Parkinson's, but my memories of him as a fine musician and approachable person will endure.

“Ashgate published a book about his music in 2012, written by Christopher Mark, the author of Roger's entry in "Grove", now Oxford Music Online. I presume that it has fewer mistakes than their Alkan book by William Eddie, which has several howlers in the text as well as a verbatim copy of Ronald Smith's list of works with no updates or corrections. Following a recent takeover, there are rumours about the future of Ashgate, so it might be worth finding the book while you still can. Like most of their publications it is expensive, but an electronic version is also available.”

Peter Grove

Below we reproduce a number of excerpts from earlier issues of the Bulletin. These illustrate not only Roger's wide-ranging scholarship and enthusiasm for Alkan's works, but his very considerable performance skills. The Society will miss him.

From Bulletin 22 (January 1984)

PERSONALIA

We are pleased and honoured to announce that Roger Smalley, the distinguished composer, pianist and teacher, has recently joined the Society. Stephen Walsh's lengthy article in the New Grove examines his many compositions. But in addition to his activities in this field, Roger Smalley has also spent much time pursuing his interest in Alkan. In a recent letter to the Secretary he writes 'Time does nothing but increase my admiration of Alkan's unique genius'. He also mentions performing Beethoven's Third

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Piano Concerto with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra (conducted by David Measham) in November 1981. On that occasion he played Alkan's mammoth cadenza. Incidentally he wrote about this cadenza in 'Two Virtuosos' Cadenzas for Beethoven' in Music and Musicians in 1972. He has also performed the Cello Sonata a couple of times in Australia with Rohan de Saram, has arranged Op. 54 and 69 for 2 pianos and recorded them for Australian radio, and has arranged several Esquisses for string quartet. 'The Impromptu Op. 69, he writes, 'emerges as one of the major works for two pianos of the 19th century. Only things like Brahms - Haydn and Reger's Beethoven Variations can be compared with it'.

As a foot-note, he comments on his interest in playing the Piano Trio but inability to locate a copy of the score and parts. Alas, although many musicians have expressed similar feelings, the work is currently out-of-print. There is a copy in the British Library (h.557.b.(6)) but this can only be photographed on to microfilm, making its later conversion to photocopies for performing use rather expensive and unsatisfactory. If any member finds a copy in good condition, with the score and both parts (whether the early edition with no publisher (just 'Paris 1841' on the title-page) and the distinctive plate-number 'A', the Richault or the later Costallat one (plate '9541 R')) please purchase it (if less than about £15) and contact the Secretary for reimbursement. It could then be put in the Guildhall Library and photocopied as required.

From Bulletin 27 (October 1985)

ALKAN'S MOZART CADENZA: Patrick Lee of Harlow has sent us the following:- 'On 3rd August, at the Cambridge University Concert Hall, Roger Smalley gave what is believed to be the first public performance of Mozart's piano concerto no. 20 in D. minor (K466) with the first and third movement cadenzas which Alkan wrote as part of his arrangement of the whole work for solo piano. On this occasion Roger Smalley played the concerto in its original form with the Sinfonia of Cambridge, conducted by Peter Britton. There was a full house for the concert which also included Haydn's symphony no 76 and Beethoven's Pastoral symphony. Whilst it is always enjoyable to hear a 'new' Alkan work, to me the cadenzas seemed a bit 'over the top' in the context of the sublime work into which they were interpolated. In other words, the contrast between the pianistic styles of Mozart and Alkan was so extreme as to make the latter's cadenzas sound out of place - a least at a first hearing - so perhaps further hearing would modify this impression'.

Also present were Dr. Roderick Munday, of Peterhouse, Cambridge, who says 'Roger played beautifully and the house was packed'. He found the Alkan cadenzas 'full of Alkanesque fireworks and brooding'. 'The audience, despite a short note in the programme, was evidently unprepared for it', Roderick says, 'and seemed slightly startled, so that the interval talk very much revolved around it'. (Roger Smalley is a member of the Alkan Society).

From Bulletin 29 (April 1986)

REPORT OF THE JANUARY MEETING: A lecture/recital by Roger Smalley with Cathy Travers at the Royal College of Music on January 8th. There were 20 members and six guests present. (The following is a summary of Roger Smalley's talk)

Roger Smalley began the evening with an introductory talk on Alkan's **Benedictus op. 54** for pedal piano which he has transcribed for two pianos. He explained that in his transcription he had endeavoured to preserve the textures of the original. There had been a previous transcription, in the 19thC by José Vianna da Motta in which he had filled out the textures. Roger then gave a brief summary of the work. "It is in three parts, ABA form. The opening section is in D minor and is predominantly in the lower registers of the piano and is counterpointed by a high ethereal melody. The two melodies are closely related by the interval of a fourth. The two ideas are alternated twice and then the tempo changes to an alla breve, very vigorous, highly contrapuntal march-like section. The key changes from D minor to D major. It gathers momentum and builds to a splendid climax. The original melody appears in D major and the piece ends suddenly." Roger then commented on the possible meaning of the title. "Alkan frequently put religious titles to his works. The text of the Benedictus - Blessed is he who goes in the name of the Lord. The idea of salvation and redemption, moving from the gloomy slow D minor to the glowing D major and being one of those spiritual progressions which we find in other works such as the Quasi Faust movement of the Grande Sonate". There then followed a splendid performance of the Benedictus by Roger Smalley and Cathy Travers.

Next came the **Three Marches for four hands op. 40**. Roger commented "These Marches are wonderful, vintage Alkan. Very witty pieces, a rare commodity in music. The **1st March** is a brisk march and the only one which has a direct da capo of the first section after the trio. The trio is one of his typical drum and pipe imitations. The **2nd March** is quite a bit slower. It is in E flat but has a lengthy introduction which suggests that it is going to be in C major. The trio is extremely witty and is constantly interrupted on unexpected offbeats. The march returns in a shortened form and leads to a coda. The **3rd March** sounds like a brass band march and could be arranged for that medium. It has another exceedingly witty trio in which the melody is decorated by more and more grace notes. In the accompaniment there are sforzandos, seemingly at random and always in the wrong place. The first idea comes back briefly then at the end it suddenly bursts into a riot of banging and crashing and dies away to nothing at the end". Roger and Cathy then played the Three Marches bringing out the humour of the pieces.

After the interval we came to Alkan's **Impromptu op. 69** for pedal piano. Roger described the work as "Alkan's greatest work for pedal piano and one of his half dozen greatest works". Roger has arranged the work in quite an elaborate way but again has not changed the textures. He then commented on the title - "Impromptu is a very strange title, suggesting a small lightweight work. In fact it is an exceedingly weighty piece."

"It is based on the Chorale of Luther - Ein Feste Burg and he only uses the melody of the Chorale. In form and treatment it is very unusual. In some respects it is like a theme and variations, but in other respects it is like a passacaglia. Another interesting point about the piece is that although it is continuously played it is divided into four sections - a first movement, scherzo, slow movement and finale. It looks forward to the kind of complex, several movements in one form that you get in Schoenberg's 1st string quartet or 1st Chamber Symphony, which are always pointed out as

early examples of this coalescing of several different formal structures into one overall form.. Already in the 1860's you get Alkan doing the same sort of thing. Another fascinating aspect about the whole work is that although you get these different characteristics - 1st movement, scherzo, slow movement, the basic tempo remains the same - 63. But by applying that number to different basic units he achieves different speeds of movement in different parts of the piece. In the slow section the harmonisation is quite extraordinary and in fact throughout the piece the harmonisation is remarkable. There is not a commonplace bar in the whole work, every bar is sparkling with invention." Roger and Cathy then played the Impromptu which was probably receiving its first performance in this country, although they have played it in Australia and recorded it for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, who have broadcast it.

The performance concluded one of our most interesting and successful meetings. We are very grateful to Roger and Cathy for all their hard work and for giving their services free to the Society.

From Bulletin 32 (April 1987)

ROGER SMALLEY ARRANGEMENTS

Roger Smalley's very effective arrangement of eight of Alkan's *Esquisses* were broadcast on Radio 3 on March 4th. The pieces were described as 'Characteristic pieces' and were played by Equale Brass.

In Bulletin 35 (May 1988) is a longer article by Smalley on Alkan's cadenza for Beethoven's 3rd piano concerto, first published in *Music and Musicians* in May 1972. This article is too long to reproduce here but may be seen in Bulletin 35 on the web at:

www.alkansociety.org/Publications/Society-Bulletins/bulletin35.pdf

We are sorry to have to announce the deaths of two long-standing members of the Society.

Barry Elliott died peacefully in hospital on 8th February 2016. Barry, who lived near Loughborough, was an enthusiastic correspondent with the Society, both with previous Officers (Nicholas King and Julian Haxby recall interesting and pleasant correspondence with him) and more recently with myself. A letter from Barry on Alkan's putative mental illness is published in Bulletin 76.

Reynaldo Reyes, an international concert pianist, died in Baltimore on 15th February 2016. Professor Reyes had been a member of the music faculty at Towson University for over 50 years, and was a champion of Alkan's music. An enthusiastic report of one of his all-Alkan recitals (featuring a selection of the 24 Preludes and three of the Minor Key Studies) can be seen at:

www.philstar.com/opinion/15388/reynaldo-reyes-awesomeclara%E2%80%99s-flamenco-fiery

Note from the editor

You, the members of the Society, are the lifeblood of the Bulletin. Please do not be shy in contributing articles, letters, comments or ideas for inclusion in future issues. Any submissions or suggestions would be most gratefully received.

Nick Hammond (treasurer@alkansociety.org)

An Alkan puzzle

John Goslin, Bournemouth

Beethoven died in 1827, when he was working on his tenth symphony in E \flat . His sketches for it went unrecognized until they were discovered in 1984-5 by Dr Barry Cooper, who went on to compose a putative version of the first movement, which was performed in 1988¹.

Meanwhile, Alkan (born 1813) composed one of his finest works, *Grande Sonate 'Les Quatre Âges de la Vie'* in 1847. This piece is in four movements corresponding to four ages: 20, 30, 40, and 50. This last movement is subtitled *Prometheus in chains*.

I discovered something strange years ago now: first, consider the theme from Dr Cooper's reconstruction of the first movement: it is a ten-note theme in E \flat , and on the repeat the eighth note (G) is added, making it an eleven note theme, thus:



If one then turns to Alkan's Age 50 a theme emerges, albeit in a different key (B), which is a carbon copy of the one just quoted – the same metre, the same chord sequence!

How can this be? There is absolutely no way in which Alkan could have known about the Beethoven sketches for a 10th symphony. A very weird synchronicity, as Mr Jung would have said.

However, in correspondence with me, Dr Cooper pointed out the following:

The first five notes of the theme – at a different tempo – occur in the Pathétique sonata, movement 2:



And more to the point, in the Beethoven string quartet op. 18 no 2 movement 1, one finds:



which parallels the first eight notes (minus the “passing” G) – though, again, in a very different rhythm.

Alkan would of course have been very familiar with these two Beethoven works.

We have to conclude that Beethoven's work on his tenth symphony displays, consciously or otherwise, use of his “back-catalogue” when constructing his theme.

Nonetheless it remains quite extraordinary that Alkan, independently, should have come up with exactly the same theme, and I now feel quite sure that his subtitle *Prometheus in chains* refers not to Goethe, or to Alkan himself, but to his great master – Beethoven, and his deafness.

¹ Recorded on IMP CD PS 1530, 8 Sept. 1988, by London Symphony Orchestra under Wyn Morris

In this essay, US member Laura Snyderman reviews some key aspects of Alkan's earlier years as a composer and performer, and touches upon several little-known facts. Members may find the essay a helpful introduction for friends and colleagues who are less familiar with Alkan's life.

Charles-Valentin Alkan: an obscure leading composer of the 19th Century

Laura Snyderman, Peabody Institute, Baltimore

Liberated from the restriction of classical conventions, Parisian composers of the mid-nineteenth century felt free to express themselves, and many adopted the attitude that strictly musical considerations — harmony, melody, rhythm and form — were of secondary consideration to the communication of the poetic idea. As composers felt less and less beholden to structural prescriptions of their eighteenth century predecessors, incidents of musical ambiguity increased. By the end of the century musicians produced works of enormous harmonic complexity and inscrutable formal design.

Often less recognized in history textbooks for Parisian musical influence, Charles-Valentin Alkan, a child prodigy in organ and piano, was an important figure in nineteenth century Paris, particularly for his tonal variety and innovative compositional style. Regarded by many contemporaries merely as a virtuoso with antiquated pianistic and compositional taste, Alkan's compositions show an incredible display of virtuosity and unusual use of harmony, comparable to Franz Liszt and Frédéric Chopin, both whom admired and respected him for his daring and unforgiving works.

Alkan's concert life began from an early age – by thirteen he was already introduced to the Paris salons by his proud teacher Joseph Zimmerman.¹ Alkan was skilled both at the piano and in organ. In 1827 he was favorably reviewed for performing his own Op. 1, *Variations sur un theme de Steibelt*². After his travel to London in 1833 and 1835, his second *Concerto da Camera* performed by celebrated pianists Henry Field, and in 1834 he won the *Conservatoire de Paris* first prize for organ. By age 22, Alkan established himself as a virtuoso pianist and a composer. In 1837 his recital concert of Op. 15 *Trois morceaux dans le genre pathétique* was reviewed favourably by Franz Liszt and critiqued extensively by Robert Schumann³. From then on he began playing predominantly his own works, as well as transcriptions (for example movements from Beethoven's 7th Symphony for eight hands⁴).

As Alkan's prestige grew within the Parisian circle, he began to meet and develop friendships with other esteemed pianists in and around the city. He continued to earn an honorable reputation, enough so to be inducted as a notable "pianist-composer" to the *Société Académique des Enfants d'Apollon* in 1832⁵. This only enhanced his social stature among artists, and he became acquainted with Dumas, Franck and, most importantly, Chopin. Chopin greatly admired Alkan for his incomparable technique and powerful playing,

¹ Zimmerman was arguably the most influential teacher at the Paris Conservatoire from 1826-1848 who would later teach César Franck, Charles Gounod, and Georges Bizet. He was a former student of Cherubini and known for his opera compositions and as a contrapuntist. It should be mentioned that Alkan remained Zimmerman's favourite pupil throughout his career (Smith, 17).

² Eddie, 5.

³ Schumann did not favour Alkan's works, particularly due to the chromaticism in *Le Vent*. Schumann noted that Alkan exploits an unnecessary abundance of technical display, claiming the etude to be "a chromatic howl over an idea from Beethoven's A major symphony" (Smith, 21). He did, however, proclaim Alkan to be "The Berlioz of Piano" for his extension of harmonic capabilities, as well as his motivic employment in his third etude (Schonberg, Eddie, 43). Liszt, on the other hand, reviewed Alkan's works in an exceedingly favourable light, exclaiming that the *Trois morceaux dans le genre pathétique* "could not be more distinguished, and, even given friendly rivalry, are likely to invoke great interest with musicians" (Eddie, 7). Liszt, unlike Schumann, was strongly affected with the romantic gestures in *Le Vent*. Liszt was struck by the almost impressionistic patterns set within a distinct structure, as well as the technical skill needed to play the piece. Liszt states (on *Le Vent*):

Is the most romantic of the three [etudes]. By uninterrupted flurries of chromatic semiquavers, the composer has wonderfully portrayed the eternal sound of those winds which monotonously wail for days on end, laying waste the health and grasses of contemplation to the melody which soars above those quiet murmurs, like the song of the poet or lover, who looks on at life's tragedies without sadness, because he feels within himself the sweet radiance of a memory or a hope (Eddie, 45).

⁴ Alkan's eight-handed transcription of the Allegretto and Finale from Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* was performed with Zimmerman, Gutmann and Chopin in 1838 (Eddie, 7).

⁵ Eddie, 6.

while Alkan similarly expressed deep regards for Chopin's melodic and effortless harmonic style. To this effect, they began what would be a friendship of admiration and respect⁶. Alkan's career was continuing a steady climb; by 1838 he reached marked fame amongst pianists collaborating on projects such as the eight-handed transcription of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony mentioned above.

Curiously and abruptly, Alkan left the concert scene in 1839. Some musicians attribute this sudden leave to the lack of matching musical taste between Alkan and the "Parisian bourgeois audiences"⁷. His peculiar compositional style may not have been consistent with expectations of collaborations, concerts, or social events in the Parisian salons.

During this time, however, Alkan did not disappear from the music scene completely. He spent his reclusive five years composing and becoming involved with the Jewish community in Paris. Alkan wrote his set of *Études* (later published as op. 76), in which he explored a Paganini-worthy technical display of *tremolando* effects, in tune with the concert études of his contemporaries, Liszt and Chopin. Apparently, Alkan did not see his retirement as permanent in light of his continued participation in selected concerts, such as Franck's oratorio *Ruth*, together with Liszt, Halévy, Meyerbeer and a few other notable pianists⁸.

MUSIQUE NOUVELLE DE PIANO.		TITRES DES ÉTUDES.
ÉTUDES DE GENRE.	H. PRUDENT	Comte d'autrefois. — Marine. — Le Buisson, ballade. — Les Regrets. — Feu Follet.
	Op. 16. — 1 ^{er} Livre. Prix : 20.	
LE DÉPART. FANTAISIE ÉTUDE.	S. THALBERG.	Op. 55. Prix : 7 fr. 50.
LE CHEMIN DE FER. Étude. 9 fr.	C. V. ALKAN.	Grande fantaisie à 4 mains sur DON JUAN.
LE PREUX — Étude. 9 fr.	L. DE MEYER.	BAJAZET. Op. 23. — Prix : 5 fr.
MARCHE MAROCAINE. Op. 22. — Prix : 7 fr. 50 c.	T. DOEHLER.	OP. 54. Prix : 7 fr. 50 c.
ANDANTE SUR LA ROMANCE DE DOM SÉBASTIEN.	F. LISZT.	FARIBOLO PASTOUR. SOUVENIRS DU BÉARN. } Prix : 8 fr.
MARCHE FUNÈBRE. DE DOM SÉBASTIEN. Pr. : 7 f. 50.	POUR PARAÎTRE DU 10 AU 15 NOVEMBRE.	
<p>1^{er} Le célèbre morceau de PRUDENT sur NORMA et l'HOMMAGE à HAENDEL sur le magnifique chant de JUDAS MACHABÉE; — 2^e Deux nouvelles compositions de H. ROSELLEN sur I LOMBARDI et MARIA DI ROHAN; — 3^e le GALOP ÉTERNEL et six Polkas, par F. KALBRENNER.</p>		

Figure 1: Advert for new music (*La France Musicale*, 10 Nov 1844)

In 1844 Alkan wrote a collection of piano miniatures beginning with a *Nocturne* Op. 22, inspired by John Field and Frédéric Chopin's writings. The piece highlighted lyricism and included even more diatonic harmonies⁹. His next work, the *Saltarelle* Op. 23, eventually became one of his most popular. Inspired by a Baroque form Saltarello – the name originated from a lively fourteenth century dance – the piece stood out with its impressive jumps and melodic chromaticism cleverly laid out within a tightly controlled harmonic structure within a large scale ternary form¹⁰.

That same year, Alkan began performing in public again. While he didn't spend much time advertising his initial concert appearance, advertisements for several of his works appeared in *La France Musicale* (an example is shown in Fig. 1). Interestingly, there is also passing reference, in the News section of the issue of 3rd November 1844, to Alkan's B minor symphony – a work never performed and now lost (see Fig. 2). In many ways Alkan depended on his past concert life and Zimmerman to spread the word of his recital reemergence. Zimmerman organized his second recital, in which Alkan would premier his *Air de ballet dans le style ancien* Op. 21 and *Saltarelle* Op. 23. Contrary to the stylistic considerations of the romantic crowd, Alkan programmed much of his first recitals with baroque music, paralleled with his own works.

La fantaisie pour piano, à quatre mains, de C.-V. Alkan, sur *Don Juan*, et ses deux études, *le Preux* et *le Chemin de fer*, vont paraître sous très peu de jours. Bientôt après sera publié son magnifique concerto dont il a joué l'hiver dernier des fragmens qui produisirent une si grande sensation. Cet hiver, ces nouveaux ouvrages auront la même vogue que la *Saltarelle*, *Air de ballet* et ses autres compositions. Mais Alkan ne se bornera pas à faire entendre des œuvres pour le piano. Il a aussi une symphonie à grand orchestre, sur le succès de laquelle il compte beaucoup, et l'hiver ne se passera pas sans qu'il trouve l'occasion de la faire exécuter.

Figure 2: Reference to Alkan's Symphony (*La France Musicale*, 3 Nov 1844)¹¹

⁶ Macdonald, 378.

⁷ Eddie, 7.

⁸ Eddie, 8.

⁹ Eddie, 96.

¹⁰ Blatter, 28, Keller, Eddie, 96.

¹¹ Julian Haxby has kindly provided the following translation: C-V Alkan's *Don Juan* Fantaisie for piano, four hands, and his two studies, *Le Preux* and *Chemin de Fer*, are due to appear in the next few days. Next to be published, very soon after, is his magnificent Concerto, excerpts of which he performed sensationally last winter. This winter these works will enjoy the same popularity as his *Saltarelle*, *Air de Ballet* and other compositions. But Alkan will not confine himself to presenting piano works. He also has a symphony for large orchestra, on whose success he pins great hopes and which he will certainly find an opportunity to have performed this winter.

The lack of romantic feeling did not help sweeten the opening salvo of criticism against Alkan. The *Revue et Gazette* wrote a long article pleading Alkan to rethink some of his artistic considerations to be more in line with mainstream music¹².

Frustrated by the lack of warmth with which Alkan's orchestral concert was received, he spent 1846 through 1848 away from concert halls composing. Some of his best pianistic compositions were written during this period: *Douze Etudes dans tous les tons majeurs* Op. 35, and his *Grande sonate* Op. 33¹³. By 1847 Alkan became an esteemed composer, having his *Vaghezza* published alongside a Chopin nocturne and Liszt's *Andante amoroso* in the same issue of the *Revue et Gazette*¹⁴.

With the outbreak of a Revolution in Paris, Alkan failed to have even his progressively technical and more romantic *Grande sonate* recognized. This sonata was condemned to oblivion, as political instability was taking a toll on arts and prominent Parisian artists were evacuating to London. As a result, Alkan felt it necessary to help his financial position and resort to a more academic setting in order to acquire stability and affirmation of his publications. Zimmerman, the Head of the Piano Department, and Alkan's long-time teacher and friend, had relinquished his position at the Conservatory in light of "sensing a mounting hostility from the establishment"¹⁵. Alkan was Zimmerman's favorite pupil, being the most talented and capable, "and by common consent, the 'heir apparent' to this important post"¹⁶. However, despite his esteemed virtuosic playing and compositional capabilities, Alkan was losing political ground for his interesting concert choices, inclusive of the earlier baroque works. It did not help that Zimmerman was not allowed to comment in the choosing of his successor, even though he had taught not only Alkan, but the other four candidates, including Antoine François Marmontel¹⁷.

Marmontel was incomparable to Alkan in terms of teaching and performing. Alkan was severely critical of Marmontel for his sly plagiarism, lazily taking credit for classic works "he does not understand, and only release it decked out with a feather, dressed up in riding boots and adorned with spurs"¹⁸. In all likelihood, Alkan did not see Marmontel worthy of the post.

Nevertheless, Marmontel had a superior relationship to the Head of the Conservatoire, Daniel Auber. Alkan wrote to George Sand, a great friend and admirer much like her past partner Chopin, "to write on his behalf to Charles Blanc, the director in The Department of Fine Arts"¹⁹. Alkan understood that he would need political support in order to have any shot at the position, regardless of his immense qualifications. Yet, even with the support of Sand, a noted writer and prestigious figure, Alkan could not sway Blanc. Marmontel's resorted to *ad hominem* attacks against Alkan criticizing his "reclusive nature" and his unusual clothing.

Even with the support of esteemed artists, Alkan was becoming exceedingly worried, as his prestige as a pianist was becoming less relevant in the politically unstable Paris. Taking matters into his own hands, Alkan wrote to the Ministry of Interior "informing them that Auber was about to appoint a man with little musical status"²⁰. He then sent letters informing Blanc of the lies Marmontel was spreading about teaching certain pupils, who had been actually taught by Chopin, Herz, and himself. Alkan proved this by sending a testimonial of one of his pupil's fathers stating that his daughter had finished second at a competition held at the Conservatoire "helped by the tuition of Alkan" that year²¹. He then wrote a poignant brief justifying his appointment. The letter underscores the strong support he had from Liszt, Chopin, Thalberg, and Berlioz.

If you uphold the administrator of the Department of Fine Arts, I will be elected. If you discover public opinion instead of a small faction, I will be elected. If you gather the votes of all the leading musicians of Europe, I will be elected. If you judge the competition on three aspects – performance, composition and teaching – I will be elected. If you would postpone your decision until the new plan for adjustment

¹² Smith, 38.

¹³ Smith, 40.

¹⁴ Eddie, 9.

¹⁵ Smith, 42.

¹⁶ Smith, 42.

¹⁷ Smith, 42.

¹⁸ Eddie, 13.

¹⁹ Eddie, 10.

²⁰ Eddie, 10.

²¹ Eddie, 10.

*takes place despite the influence exercised over a significant portion of teachers, I would still be elected by a large majority and would very likely inspire the unanimous vote of students*²².

Despite the fortitude of loyalty and support Alkan had endeared from well-established artists, Auber took advantage of the political bias in the midst of the upheaval and allowed the arguably lesser candidate to take prestige. It is likely that Alkan's isolation following the scandal reduced his fame, appreciation for his contributions and his status to that of an eccentric recluse with intriguing "music that is seldom heard"²³. Evidence is there to suggest that Alkan was not properly acknowledged as an important force in the emerging classicism of a new century due to resentment stemming from not only certain preferences in artistic taste, but also political and religious considerations. But this is a separate subject altogether.

Nevertheless, Alkan is not forgotten, due to some key contemporaries who regarded him quite highly. For instance, Debussy upon hearing minatures from the Op. 63 *Esquisses* in the 1870s at the Paris Conservatoire would later write his own piano works inclusive of rhythmic functions of Couperin and Rameau, utilized by Alkan²⁴. César Franck transcribed Alkan's pedal piano Prieres Op. 64. Vincent d'Indy, the leading force behind the *Schola Cantorum*, was highly impressed by Alkan's performances of baroque literature on pedal piano, which d'Indy would later promote at the school. Among other important musicologists and prominent pianists, Busoni²⁵ helped to signify Alkan's contributions to nineteenth century Parisian music as very significant. Busoni, himself a pioneer of the Neoclassical movement and a huge advocate of early music – specifically J.S. Bach – insisted that, since Beethoven, Alkan was one of the five greatest composers for the piano who influenced the musical world well past his time²⁶.

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²² Eddie, 10.

²³ Schonberg.

²⁴ Messing, 43-48.

²⁵ Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) was an Italian composer, pianist, teacher, conductor and writer. Busoni was known for his contrapuntal works, much of his works based on the writings of J.S. Bach (Beaumont).

²⁶ Sylvain Chosson, Beaumont, Nicholas.

Rimm, Robert. "Notes- Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association." *Music Library Association*. 60.1 (2003): 290-295. Web. 6 Oct. 2013.
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Letters to the editor

Sir,

I really enjoyed the November Bulletin which is full of fascinating articles, well done all!

I just wanted to add something if I may, to Richard Murphy's very interesting interview with Ronald Stevenson¹.

In August 1989, shortly after Ogdon's passing, Ronald Stevenson was interviewed by BBC Radio 3 as part of a tribute to the pianist. During his recollections, he repeated the same, or virtually the same story he told Richard Murphy. Here is transcript of part of that interview.

RS: I remember one night, when he said to me, "You know Ronald, there is very little in the piano repertoire that I want to play", (great laughter from Stevenson!). Now this is an amazing thing to say from somebody who played everything! And I said to him, well tell me John, what do you think is really worth playing, for you? He said, "The Goldberg Variations, the Hammerklavier, the Chopin fourth Ballade in F minor, the Schumann Fantasy, Busoni's Fantasia Contrappuntistica and Sorabji's Opus Clavicembalisticum".

Whether Alkan's *Concerto for Solo Piano*, was actually one of the few pieces in the repertoire he thought worth playing, we may never know but, Alkan's music was undoubtedly important and central to his regular performing repertoire.

Ogdon probably discovered Alkan through his lessons with Egon Petri who had been a pupil of Busoni, and it was Busoni of course, who introduced the Etude op 76 number 1 for left hand to a Berlin audience in 1908.

Ogdon performed this particular work, (which was a great favourite of his), regularly throughout his professional life. From the first round of the Queen Elizabeth competition in 1957, to the very final year of his life when he recorded it live in concert for BBC Radio 3, along with the last movement of the *Concerto for Solo Piano*.

Yours faithfully,

Robert Warwick, Bath

¹ Bulletin no 92 (November 2015), pp 17-19, available at www.alkansociety.org/Bulletin92.pdf

CD reviews

Alkan: Piano Collection 1 (Symphonie)

Yui Morishita, piano

ALM Records ALCD-7193, released (in Japan) October 2015, length 70 minutes

Sonatine, op. 61	18'25
Capriccio alla soldatesco, op. 50	6'58
Le Tambour bat aux champs, op. 50bis	4'21
Études dans tous les tons mineurs 4-7 (Symphonie), op.39	26'47
Nocturne no 1, op. 22	6'02
Scherzo-Focoso, op. 34	7'54



Reviewed by Mark Viner

It was with much anticipation that we awaited the release of this début recording following the YouTube sensation this emerging young artist created with his impressive rendition of the notorious *Scherzo-Focoso*, op.34.

For many years, this work remained a tantalising gap in the composer's discography as early exponents, such as Raymond Lewenthal, passed it by while Ronald Smith concluded that the work's musical substance did not justify its elaboration. In more recent times, it has remained absent from the discographies of even the most prolific Alkan interpreters for, presumably, similar reasons while the present writer has long remained undecided on the matter.

However, with the advance of YouTube, a host of digital renditions of the work, some more tolerable than others, gave one a glimpse of how it might come off in the right hands. It wasn't long, however, before a human performance appeared. Lloyd Buck's fearless live performance, recorded in a single unedited take, appeared on the Amemptos label in 2012 and is a valiant testament in many respects.

Morishita's recording of the work appears alongside the *Symphonie*, op.39, the *Sonatine*, op.61, and a selection of miscellaneous works including the military *Capriccii*, op.50, and the *Nocturne*, op.22, in which, happily, Morishita observes the octave C# in the bass at the beginning of b.73 as engraved in the 1844 Mainz edition of Schott¹. Regarding the *Scherzo-Focoso*, op.34, Morishita has, in many respects, set the benchmark with this recording which displays a technical prowess well beyond all we have previously encountered.

The rest of the disk lives up to the same standard and, while we may have some misgivings for want of letting the music breathe which, at times, denies climactic moments the impact they require, this is surely made up for in admiration of the sheer technical ability displayed which, at times, leaves even the most seasoned listener feeling incredulous. An absolute must for all Alkanists and record collectors alike.

Although the CD may be ordered through amazon.co.uk, the price is exorbitant. A better deal may be obtained through Amazon Japan (go to www.amazon.co.jp and type Yui Morishita into search box and follow links, using an automatic translate on your browser). Individual tracks are also available via iTunes:

<https://itunes.apple.com/album/alkan-piano-collection-1-symphonie/id1046459199>

¹ This variant is absent from the Paris edition of the Bureau central de musique which appeared the same year and which is currently issued by Billaudot and Masters Music Publications, Inc.

The Society website



Our website (www.alkansociety.org) is a major means for the Society to inform the wider public about Alkan and his works, and to publicise the Society and its activities. But how well is it used? Are we whistling in the dark?

The current version of the website was launched in September 2014, and we have been collecting usage statistics (with help from the *Google Analytics* facility), so we can, at least in part, address this question. A note of caution is that the statistics include some “automatic” visits by search engines and the like.

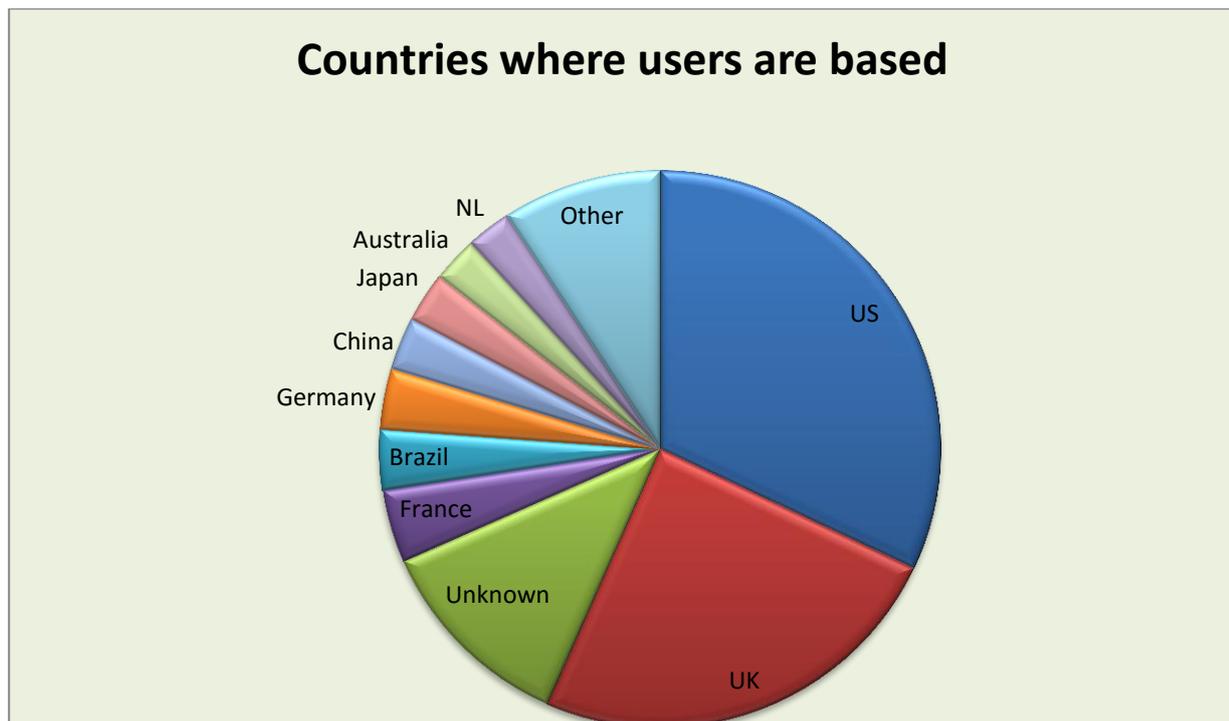
I have analysed usage for the whole of 2015. This will be a baseline for comparison in future years.

How much is the web site accessed overall?

There were a total of 27,282 web page views in 2015, by 6,989 different viewers (presumably as far as Google can tell) in a total of 9,436 sessions. However, in about 63% of the sessions the user looked at only a single page. The average session duration was a little over two minutes.

Where do users live?

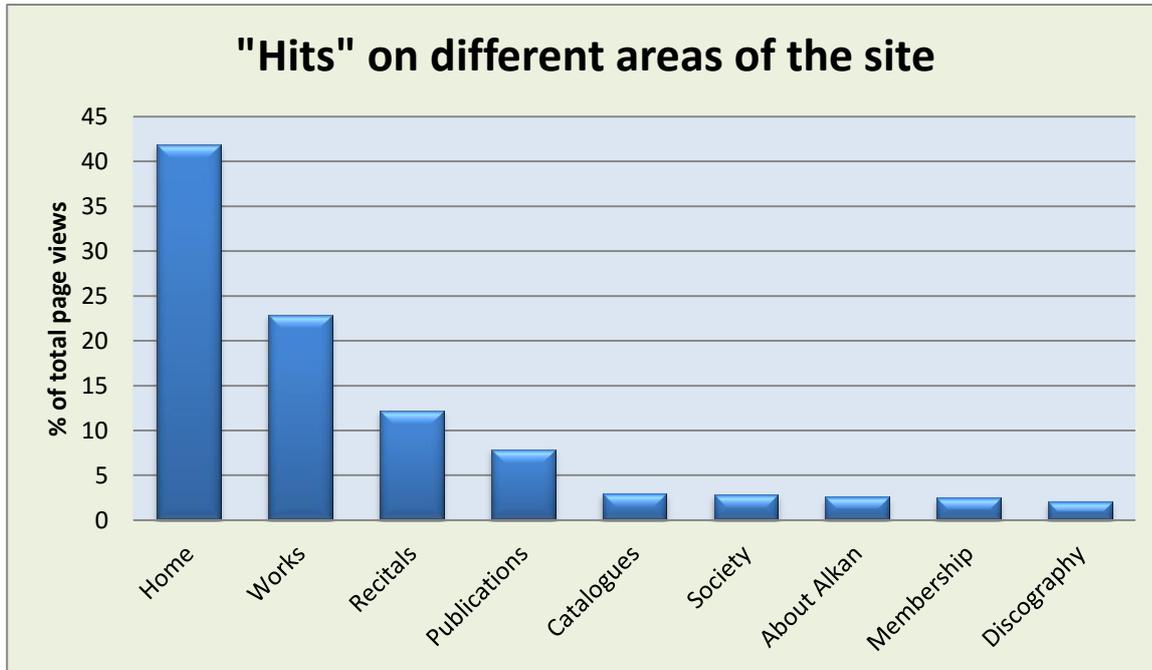
Most users were from the US or UK (see chart below):



The chart shows the proportion of users from each country, the “unknown” category presumably includes all cases where Google is unable to locate the user. The “other” category includes those countries each with less than 2% of all users (the next five in descending order being Italy, Russia, Spain, South Korea and Canada).

What are the most popular parts of the site?

Beneath the “home page”, the main areas are sets of pages on (in order of popularity): Alkan’s works (details of individual pieces); Recitals; Publications (including Bulletins); Catalogues (but excluding pages on individual works); the Society; About Alkan; Membership; and Discography. The chart below shows the percentage of page views. (There are also a number of housekeeping pages, such as Contact information, News archive, Information on photos and Update history, which received less views.



In summary

Whilst the sheer number of “hits” on the web site is relatively modest (averaging about 75 page views per day), it reflects a large number of individuals over the full year. The range of countries making use of the site is encouraging, reflecting a global interest in Alkan; the number of hits from South East Asia (China, Japan and South Korea) is particularly promising. The pattern of use of the site appears to reflect a desire to see details of Alkan’s works, and forthcoming recitals and our publications, with less interest in the Society itself. This is perhaps not surprising.

It will be interesting to see whether and how this pattern changes in 2016.

Nick Hammond