



THE ALKAN SOCIETY

(Registered Charity number 276199)

<http://www.alkansociety.org>

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Introduction

The present edition is the first venture into bulletin compilation by the present editor, who hopes that the Society's members will prove indulgent as to its inevitable shortcomings. Please do not hesitate to let me know your opinions, criticisms, ideas for improvement (and praise would of course also be welcome if available).

The past few months have been eventful which makes the task of compilation that much easier. Two major landmarks, both of which receive detailed comment below, have been the 80th Birthday Concert of our President, Ronald Smith, and the launch of the Society's website.

We also have comments and contributions from Australia and the US, and are featuring the text of the first part of the Society's February 25th presentation on 'Alkan and his Jewish Roots' at which we gave the UK première of Alkan's 'Trois anciennes mélodies juives' – the rest will follow in Bulletin 62.

The Bulletin can only be as lively as the Society's members – so please feel free to contribute your opinions, be they full-scale essays or brief queries; they will all be greeted warmly.

- **Editor (e-mail: info@alkansociety.org)**

Annual General Meeting

The Society's Annual General Meeting will be on **Monday 31st March at 6.15 p.m. at the Meeting Room, St. James's Church, Piccadilly, London**. All paid-up members are entitled and encouraged to attend – the formal proceedings will be followed (c. 19.00) with an informal meeting with our President, Ronald Smith.

CDs and tapes from the Society's stock (including some rare and out-of-print items) will be available for sale at the meeting.

Ronald Smith 80th birthday concert : an appreciation

There cannot be many pianists of any age who would start a programme with Schubert's *Wanderer* Fantasia, continue with a complete set of Chopin *Études*, and then unveil Beethoven's *Sonata* op. 111. Only one pianist would follow these oaks of the repertoire with Alkan, leaving the most fearsome challenge until last. Step forward, as Crossbencher used to say, the remarkable and unique Ronald Smith.

Ronald's recital at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on 16th December 2002, bringing to an end a year-long series of concerts marking his 80th birthday last January, was billed as "celebratory". The dictionary defines this word as "praising publicly" and "rejoicing in a festivity". A meaty programme booklet, packed with ample tributes to Ronald's career, set the tone for those who had any chance to delve into it before the concert began. They certainly did not find any dull moments during the concert in which to read further; the standing ovation at the end¹ carried its own eloquent testimony to the respect and admiration with which the audience had assembled both to praise Ronald publicly and to rejoice in the festivity of the occasion.

Nor did Ronald himself seem to be standing back from the celebrations, or participating reluctantly. One has become used to the self-effacing platform entrances, the expressively surprised "*quelle, moi?*" spreading of the hands in acknowledging applause. Yet from the moment that his fingers touch the keys, one is aware of his rare gift of unwrapping the music almost like a Russian doll : always another subtly-different layer to explore, a new colour to illuminate, a fresh nuance to share. It is that sharing which is such a feature of Ronald's playing. Even in the most brilliant of repertoire, it is as if he is taking you with him into the music : "another marvel!", like Gerontius in the care of his guardian angel. Yet despite all the loving attention to detail, the scope of the whole is never lost. On the contrary, its stature is probably heightened, and certainly one's awareness is deepened, in the presence of a guided tour by Ronald.

One of Ronald's firmest dicta to his pupils is never to play the same thing in the same way twice. Suiting the action to the word, his *Wanderer* has evolved over the years. It still has its sinewy toughness and its craggy granite where required, not least in the punishing finale, yet there is also an increasing mellowness to the outer sections, tenderness bathed with poignancy in the *adagio*, and poised humour, verging at times on skittishness, in the *presto* (where suddenly that perfect cadence before the sub-dominant section has become an uncanny precursor of an Alkan fingerprint). Sitting on the keyboard side of the hall, one was reminded not only of Ronald's pianistic solutions to many of the problems of performing this piece, but also of those split-second delays to highlight a tenor thumb or a significant bass line, details which convert the prose into poetry.

Both sets of Chopin's *Études* assume - or should assume - a different character when performed as a whole rather than in extracts. On this occasion we were given op. 25. Ronald's perceptive insight showed how effectively these studies can fall into groups, closely related by key : the first three, from A flat into the relative F minor and then through the significantly-hanging dominant at the end into a boisterous F major; or a magical link from the G sharp minor into the C sharp minor, then into the D flat and the G flat, almost as a mini-

¹ There were, in fact, three separate standing ovations in the course of the recital – Ed.

sonata in its own right. Each of the twelve was coloured with character, ranging from the beguilingly mixed language of the C sharp minor through the mercurial lullaby of the F minor to the sonorous majesty of Ronald's C minor. In Ronald's hands, the technical challenges hardly obtrude themselves, though tyros will have noticed the trademark single-fingered ending of the E minor amongst many other practicalities. Even the B minor octave exercise, inevitably heavy going in most performances, was imbued with relaxed control as the anguished inner sixths fell to the fifths and the chromaticisms cascaded to their cataclysmic climax after the silky liquidity of the middle section.

A longer interval than usual was helpful before returning for the second half of this monumental programme. Rightly or wrongly, it is only in recent years that one has come to associate Ronald as much with Beethoven as with his successors. Op. 111, completed in the same year as Schubert's *Wanderer*, poses as many difficulties for the listener as for the performer, with its unusual structure and at times astringent (for the period) language. A modern Steinway perhaps brings additional dimensions, of which the composer would have approved, to the work. Tonight's performance was one in which we were wrapped into the concentrated mind of the composer, making the journey from defiance and assertiveness through assured irony into acquiescent serenity. It was good to experience ruggedness rather than roughness in the first movement, whilst the second movement was characterised even in its bleakest moments by an underlying warmth and sympathy.

Introducing the final group of three Alkan pieces from the platform, Ronald gave us *Le tambour bat aux champs* and *La chanson de la folle au bord de la mer* before conducting a snap audience survey to confirm (as if there could ever have been any doubt) that he should proceed to the hairiest challenge of the evening, the breathtaking 10/16 octave study in E. Having rattled this off with diffident aplomb and so few smudges as to seem almost superhuman, he received a massive bouquet of flowers, which he momentarily rested across the bass strings of the piano before deciding to place it on the floor in order to give us his encores : an Alkan prelude and the G flat black key study from Chopin's op. 10.



The last of the tributes in the programme book, written by Ronald Stevenson, mentioned Percy Grainger's belief that a pianist who is also a composer plays differently from one who is not, and went on to suggest that this tradition is now largely moribund. Tonight's concert showed us clearly that so long as Ronald Smith is on the scene, it is certainly not extinct.

- David Goodrum

More pictures, with links to web-based reviews of the concert, can be seen on the Society's website at <http://www.alkansociety.org/rsmith80.htm> - Ed.

Forthcoming Events

The following are some of the forthcoming Alkan events of which we have news – but please check our website regularly for updates (and let us know of any events you come across):

- March 6th 2003 *Wigmore Hall, London, at 19.30.* Recital by pupils of the Purcell School to include the Alkan Piano Trio and music by Franck and Hindemith
- March 27th 2003 *Ripley Arts Centre, 24 Sundridge Avenue, Bromley BR1 2PX.* Piano recital by Nigel Clayton to include five of Alkan's op. 31 Préludes. Tel: 0208 467 6021 or 0208 464 5816
- April 13th 2003 *The Warehouse, 13 Theed St., Southbank, London SE1, at 3 p.m.* 'Conversational Concert' introduced and played by Karl Lutchmayer and friends, to include Alkan's Concerto from op. 39, and music by Beethoven, Hindemith Enescu, Philip Neil Martin, and Strauss. Tickets £15 (conc. £12). Phone 020 7728 8854 or e-mail pianorecitals@hotmail.com
- June 14th 2003 *Wigmore Hall, London, at 19.30.* Piano recital by Steven Osborne, to include Beethoven's Sonata op. 90, Alkan's 'Esquisses', op. 63, book 4, Medtner (2 Contes op. 20) and extracts from Liszt's 'Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses'.

The Alkan Society Piano Scholarship 2002

The second annual Piano Scholarship Competition was held on Thursday 24 October 2002 in the Chapel of Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge.. There were six candidates competing for the scholarship, which this year carried a cash value of £100. For the set work by Alkan the examiners had selected 'La Vision', No.1, Esquisses Op.63. The judges were: Mr Ronald Smith (Alkan Society Nominee), Mr Barry Landy (Fellow) and Dr Peter Tregear (Director of Music).

The free-choice pieces chosen by the candidates were:

Robin Davis	Liszt, Liebestraum No.3
David Bissell	John Ireland, The Cherry Tree
Eugene Leung	Gyorgy Ligeti, Automne à Warsovie (Etude No.6)
John Gradwell	JS Bach/Busoni "Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ" BWV 639
Benjamin Arnold	Messiaen, Rondeau (1943)
Gary Bhumbra	Chopin, 4 th Ballade in F minor, Op.52

The winner, as last year, was Robin Davis (Organ Scholar). Eugene Leung and John Gradwell each received a Merit Award, a double CD of Alkan works featuring Ronald Smith.

Recital and Reception

The following evening the Fitzwilliam Music Society in association with the Alkan Society presented a piano recital in the Chapel by Ronald Smith to celebrate his 80th birthday. The programme consisted of the following works:

Franz Schubert: *Wanderer Fantasy, D.760*

Charles-Valentin Alkan – a selection of piano miniatures: *Ancienne Mélodie de la Synagogue, Op.31, No.6, La Vision; Op.63, No.1; Two Military Caprices, Op.50*

Frédéric Chopin: *12 Etudes, Op.10*

Franz Liszt: *Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este, S.163/4; Hungarian Rhapsody No.2, S244*

The first two of the pieces by Alkan were those set for the piano scholarship competition respectively last year and this year.

The recital was followed by a reception at which the results of the Scholarship Competition were announced. The Master also presented a College scarf to Ronald Smith as a token of appreciation, and to mark his 80th birthday.

Among the guests present was Elisabeth Pearce, a descendent of the Alkan family, and the pianist-composer Ronald Stevenson who has composed a major piano work, *Le Festin d'Alkan*, dedicated to Alkan.

- *Peter Tregear*

Alkan's Flute

We were delighted to receive this unusual sidelight on the Morhange family from one of the Society's American members, the Alkan activist Mark Starr.

My wife, who is French, is flute soloist Isabelle Chapuis. A few years ago, while visiting her native Marsannay-la-Côte near Dijon, Isabelle rummaged through a small antique shop to find a 19th Century wooden flute, which she purchased and brought back with her to California. Although Isabelle plays only modern flutes in concerts, she enjoys playing early flutes at home for some 19th Century repertoire – and consequently she has acquired four or five 19th Century flutes over the years. At first examination, there was nothing particularly striking about this flute: 10 keys, dark boxwood, excellent condition despite obvious considerable wear around the blowhole and finger holes, old pads and corks (and consequently some leaks), a lovely warm sound. Nothing striking, that is until Isabelle began examining a medallion pressed into the head joint "Who," she asked me, "was A. Morhange, Paris?" Now that name, of course, means nothing to virtually any and all flutists, and Isabelle thought it must be the mark of the flute maker. But my alarm bell went off. A. Morhange was Alkan Morhange, the father of Charles-Valentin Alkan.

Only a little is known today about Alkan Morhange, but I've never seen any indication that he was ever a flute maker. Born in 1780, he was an Ashkenazi Jew who ran a boarding school in the Marais, the Jewish section of Paris. In the words of the pianist Marmontel, the school was "a juvenile annex to the Conservatoire." He taught music and French grammar. Undoubtedly, Alkan Morhange trained all six of his children in the mastery of solfège. Céleste, Ernest, Maxime, Napoléon and Charles-Valentin each won a Premier Prix du Solfège at the Conservatoire (Charles-Valentin won his First Prize in Solfège at the age of six). From an advertisement that appeared in *La France Musicale*, we know that Alkan Morhange's school was still running strong in 1844 when he was 64 years old. Alkan Morhange died in 1855 at the age of 75 when Charles-Valentin was 42 years old.

So how to explain the name Alkan Morhange on the medallion on my wife's flute? Alkan Morhange's daughter Céleste and her husband Mayer Marix ran a flourishing musical instrument shop in Paris for many years. It is possible that this shop was founded by Alkan Morhange and later run by the couple; or it is possible the couple founded the shop and, for several years at least, named it after the family patriarch, Alkan Morhange. In either case, the shop was indeed at one time named Alkan Morhange, Musical Instruments, Paris. The most likely explanation, it seems to me, is this: Isabelle's flute was one of several, or perhaps even many, made by an anonymous French flute maker, not by Alkan Morhange. It was sold at the musical instrument store run by Céleste Alkan and Mayer Marix during the period that

the store was named Alkan Morhange, Paris - and thus it was branded with the name of the store.

There is one other possibility that certainly needs stating. One of Alkan Morhange's six children was Ernest Alkan - and he was a professional flutist (indeed he was an exceptional flutist). Born in 1816, Ernest was admitted at the age of 12 into the flute class at the Conservatoire supérieure de musique de Paris then held by Jean-Louis Tulou, one of the greatest flute virtuosi and flute teachers in music history. At the age of 16, Ernest was awarded the Conservatory's Premier Prix de Flûte. (I cannot resist adding that my wife won exactly the same prize at the Conservatoire de Paris in 1970 when she was 18). The list of flutists who have won this annual prize over two centuries is like a Flutists' Hall of Fame. Ernest Alkan went on to hold principal positions with several important French orchestras over a long professional career. So, while there is no hard evidence that this particular flute ever belonged to Ernest, that is indeed a possibility to throw into the pot. Where else would Ernest have obtained his flutes?

I've often wondered why Charles-Valentin composed no flute music. He must have heard Ernest practicing in his room for hours on end all throughout his youth. Is it possible that Charles-Valentin never accompanied his younger brother? To rectify this glaring lacuna in Alkan's output, I have over the years transcribed a number of Alkan's piano pieces for flute and piano (and one, *The Song of The Mad Woman*, for flute and chamber orchestra). Naturally, I derive great pleasure from hearing my wife play them on Alkan's flute. Well, Alkan Morhange's flute.

The Alkan Society on the Internet

The Society has launched itself on the World-Wide Web with an official web site. The site has many features which we believe will be useful to members, and of course to the Society itself in its objectives to 'promote the knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the life and work' of Alkan.

The site can be found at <http://www.alkansociety.org> . We have tried to design it so as to make it as 'user-friendly' as possible. At the top of the front page (and on all other pages) you will see a listing of the other pages on the site – a click on the heading will take you to the page. There are four features of particular importance on the front page:

1. A **link to amazon.co.uk**, the internet retailer of books and records (logo at top right-hand corner of page). The Society is an Associate of amazon.com. which means that **all** purchases from amazon made through our web-site reap a commission for the Society, at no extra cost to you as purchaser. (Furthermore, Alkan discs can be purchased from amazon directly via the site's discography, as described below). **We urge all members to employ this facility for all their book and CD purchases; it is convenient for you and helps to defray the costs of running the website.**
2. A **guest-book** (middle of left-hand column). Click on this to see comments made by members and visitors, and add your own comments too! As you will see, we have already had 'virtual visitors' from all over the world – some extracts are printed on p. 15 of this Bulletin.

3. A password gate to the **Members' Area**. To access this you will need to enter **marix** as 'User Name' and **celeste** as password.
4. **Update indicator** (bottom left-hand corner) shows how recently the site has been revised. This should be more or less weekly (sometimes more often), except when the webmaster is abroad.

The Members' Area

On entering the Members' Area, don't forget to click on the link 'click here' in the bottom left-hand corner, to expand the frame to your screen-size.

This area presently contains two features and is in process of development. On the **bulletins** page we will be making available for members to read or download all copies of the Alkan Society bulletins. It will take some time to complete the process of conversion for the web; we expect to have all bulletins available within a year.

We are also making arrangements to place the bulletins of the French Société Alkan in this section (and we will be making the entry password available to the French Society members of course as a quid pro quo). We hope that this will represent just the start of many ways in which the two Societies can develop formal co-operation through the website, although of course our relations have always been close.

The other present feature of the Members' Area is the **forum**, in which members can set out their comments, queries, or criticisms and invite responses – we hope this may develop into a lively exchange of ideas and information.

The Public Area

All other parts of the site are open and available to the world at large.

About the Alkan Society explains who we are and what are our aims.

An Alkan Discography is an ongoing resource maintained by the Society which aims to provide a complete account of all recordings of Alkan's music. If you are aware of any items not included, please let us know! You can purchase items in blue directly by clicking on them, which takes you straight to amazon.co.uk. The Society gets a commission on such purchases, as explained above.

Some Alkan Links is a guide to Alkan and Alkan-related (some very distantly related!) sites on the internet. Again, please let us know if there are sites we should include.

Forthcoming Events lists all upcoming Alkan or Alkan-related events in the UK of which we are aware. We should be keen to expand this service to include overseas events – once again, let us know if you have information.

Past Events serves as a record of Alkan events and retains, where appropriate, relevant web-links.

We will put up pages from time to time for special events, such as the present page covering **Ronald Smith's 80th Birthday Concert**.

Last, but by no means least, there is a page for those interested in **Joining the Society**.

Please do visit and use the site and tell all your friends about it – and please let us have your opinions about its contents and how you would like to see it improved – e-mail us at **webmaster@alkansociety.org**

Alkan and his Jewish Roots (Part 1 – The Background)

The following is the first part of a talk given by David Conway at the Alkan Society meeting of February 25th at University College London. The talk was illustrated with musical excerpts (as indicated in the text). The musicians were Richard Shaw (piano), Claudia Conway (soprano) and Maria Zachariadou (cello). The rest of the talk will be published over the next issue or two of the Bulletin.

The official literature of the Alkan Society describes Alkan as a ‘French-Jewish composer and pianist’. But what exactly do the descriptions ‘French-Jewish’, or for that matter its cognates ‘German-Jewish’ or ‘Anglo-Jewish’ imply? This is no facile question – it has been exercising European intellectuals, politicians and indeed practitioners of the arts ever since the idea of nationalism arose in its modern form in the eighteenth-century; and the consequences of this deliberation during this period have more than once been extensive and even catastrophic. It is a constant background to the research I am undertaking here at University College which looks at the entry of Jews into the musical professions in the period 1780-1850.

I want this evening to try and place both the life and the work of Charles-Valentin Alkan, né Morhange, in the context of this question, in the belief that this may give us some valuable new perspectives of his remarkable spirit and artistic genius; and I am grateful to both the Alkan Society and the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at UCL for their support in enabling me to give this talk this evening. Should I fail in my objectives, then at least I, and you, will have the more than adequate consolation of the performance of some of his most characteristic music by Maria Zachariadou, Claudia Conway and Richard Shaw, to whom I am most especially grateful. I want also to thank most particularly Richard Shaw and François Luguenot of the French Société Alkan for their great help to me in preparing this talk, both in terms of information and of pointing me in the right direction.

Up until the end of the eighteenth century, Jews were not, and could not be, full citizens of any European country. In many countries indeed, including France, they were, technically, forbidden by law to reside. In Western Europe, the greatest concentrations of Jews were to be found throughout the patchwork principalities and kingdoms that covered present-day Germany and the Rhineland, including the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine which fell to the possession of France in the years 1633-1648. Many Jewish families had lived in this region for centuries, but after about 1650 their numbers had been increased by those fleeing from persecutions in Ukraine and Poland.

For these German Jews, the Ashkenazim, from whose stock Alkan descended, music was important in at least three aspects of their lives.

In the synagogue there continued, albeit at a debased level, the ancestral monodic chants. Instrumental music was banned from the synagogue by the Rabbis of the Talmud, in mourning for the destroyed Temple. Many synagogue hymn-melodies had become contaminated over the centuries with folk-tunes of the country, and even, during the eighteenth century, with popular airs from operas and the theatre; but some, such as the Day of Atonement hymn ‘Kol Nidre,’ which was to be set famously by Max Bruch, survived in their splendour. Many of these prayer melodies were informally categorized in modes, each named after a prayer which utilised the mode. These modes, or ‘steiger’, are not exactly scales but denote common characteristics or tropes of melody and interval relationships – they are suggestive rather than directive.

One of the most famous, which has become closely associated with Jewish music, is named after the prayer '*Ahavah Raboh*' – ('with great love') – and is characterised by a flattened supertonic followed by a major third. It is the mode used by Alkan in his '*Ancienne mélodie de la synagogue*' from his opus 31 Préludes, which I will ask Richard to play for us shortly.

This piece as far as I have discovered marks the very first entry of Jewish music style into what we might call the great European music tradition. I exclude the very crude transcriptions made by the musical adventurer Isaac Nathan to fit the words of Byron's 'Hebrew Melodies'. It does not however mark the introduction of such music to musical cognoscenti. In 1836 and 37 the klezmer musician Joseph Gusikow electrified audiences across Europe with his virtuoso performances on a kind of xylophone he invented and which he called, after its components, the 'wood-and-straw instrument'. He performed both variations on popular opera melodies, as was typical for virtuosi of the period, but also pieces of Jewish traditional music – we do not know any details, alas, of his repertoire. Mendelssohn was ecstatic, not only about Gusikow's virtuosity but about his real musicianship. Liszt, reviewing Gusikow's performance in Paris, called him 'the musical juggler who plays an infinite number of notes in an infinitely short time', a clear case of the pot calling the kettle black. It is impossible that Alkan was not aware of Gusikow's performances in Paris, and he very possibly attended them. Although Alkan's op. 31 was published in 1847, it is probable that the pieces it contains were written at various times over the preceding decade.

The '*Ancienne mélodie de la synagogue*' does not reproduce exactly any identified synagogue tune, but it contains clear indications of the synagogue tradition. We hear an antiphonal prayer, in which the congregation first sings a verse, and harmonises it in parallel; then the cantor, or '*chazan*' gives his solo answer, in a section marked '*plus lentement, très douce et très lié*'.

(Prélude op 31 no. 6)

A separate musical tradition of the synagogue, more carefully preserved because of its intense spiritual significance, is the cantillation of the Torah, or *leyanning*, the tunes used to chant each section of the Pentateuch as it is read in sequence each Sabbath throughout the Jewish year. I will be giving an example of the melody of *leyanning* a bit later, but I will point out here its significance in the ritual of *bar-mitzvah*, in which at the age of 13 a Jewish male marks his membership of the congregation by reading the weekly portion from the scroll in Hebrew. The text as written in the scroll is without vowels and without musical pointing, both of which have to be memorised. I believe it is not without significance for the Jewish entry into the musical professions of the nineteenth century that one's entry into the Jewish community is marked by a complex and lengthy musical performance in front of a highly knowledgeable and critical audience; this may develop the sorts of transferable skills which come to be highly useful for a concert soloist. There can be no doubt from what we know of him that Alkan will have undertaken a traditional *bar-mitzvah*.

A second type of music, was associated with communal festivities, especially weddings. Here guests would dance to the music of *badchans* or *klezmer* musicians. These *klezmerim* were obviously capable of playing to a very high standard – we have many examples over the centuries of guilds asking church officials to ban Christians from employing klezmer bands, as their popularity is driving Christian musicians out of work. Modern klezmer music is perhaps just a faint echo of the real thing – it represents a revival in America of a half-remembered Romanian-Jewish tradition – but we do have transcriptions of many klezmer

tunes. These are typically, but by no means always, in duple time and minor key, in moderate tempo, often featuring the augmented second interval of the '*Ahavah Raboh*' mode. Klezmer musicians would often follow other trades – butcher, baker or whatever – but pass the skills of the klezmer down within their families. I find it impossible not to associate at least one other of Alkan's preludes with the music of klezmer – the untitled op. 31 no. 20. We know incidentally from correspondence between Alkan and the critic Fétis that he was interested in varieties of folk-music and had even discussed this with Chopin; it is just one of the many distressing lacunae in his biography that we have no record of the content of these chats. What a pity that Chopin and Alkan were next-door neighbours in Paris, otherwise we might have had at least fragments of a fascinating correspondence.

Just before Richard plays Alkan's klezmeresque prelude, so that you can make your own comparisons, here is a piece of klezmer music recorded by the Abe Schwarz band, recorded around 1920. Schwarz incidentally was born in Romania in the 1880s and emigrated to the US about 1910.

(‘Noch der Havdoloh’ – Abe Schwarz Orchestra [on CD – recording accompanying ‘Jewish Instrumental Folk Music’, published by Syracuse University Press, 2001])

(Prélude op. 31/20)

You will notice that both the klezmer and the Alkan pieces might well have felt at home on the shores of the Mediterranean – and this reminds us that the Polish and Russian Jewish communities probably resulted from migrations from the Black Sea area over 1000 years ago; so the musical palaeo-geography here is complex!

Lastly I will mention an aspect of Jewish music which has gone almost completely unnoticed by musical historians, that associated with the *yeshivah* or rabbinic academy. Education has always had an important role in the Jewish community. In the more orthodox Jewish households, it was a sacred duty of the adult male as well to study the Torah and its exegesis, especially the Talmud. Training at the *yeshivah* involved – and still involves – profound and complex logical analysis of texts, together with the learning by heart of very lengthy passages, even complete books. Much of the teaching is carried out in a vocal style that, like *Sprechgesang* lies between speaking and singing – although the melodic tinge is more discernible than in Schoenberg. Once again, transferable skills of use to a musician. Another consequence of this was the tradition of the rabbinical *wunderkind*, the child genius who showed exceptional knowledge of the Torah and Talmud. Such prodigies were an honour to their families and communities and prefigure in their way the musical *wunderkinder* of the nineteenth century.

Despite these traditions the general poverty of the Jewish communities, and their isolation from developments in outside society, meant that by the eighteenth century synagogue music in particular was in a poor state. I cannot resist quoting the description of the English music historian Charles Burney visiting the synagogue of the wealthy community of Amsterdam in 1772:

‘At my first entrance, one of the priests was chanting part of the service in a kind of ancient canto fermo, and responses were made by the congregation, in a manner which resembled the hum of bees. After this three of the sweet singers of Israel began singing a kind of jolly modern melody, sometimes in unison and sometimes in parts, to a kind of *tol de rol*, instead of words, which to me, seemed very farcical [...] At the end of each strain, the whole congregation set up such a

kind of cry, as a pack of hounds when a fox breaks cover [...] It is impossible for me to divine what idea the Jews themselves annex to this vociferation.'

We have by the way in this account of the 'trio' a description of the accompaniment of the chazan by bass and counter-tenor which became a common practice in European synagogues in the early 18th century, and is perhaps echoed in the second part of Alkan's *'ancienne mélodie'*. That the congregation had a mixed view of this practice is shown by its nickname of *keleichomos*, an acronym of its three components *'chazan, meshorrer, singer'*, but meaning literally 'instruments of robbery'. (This is also a pun on the Hebrew *'kelei zmir'*, 'instruments of praise', hence the word 'klezmer').

It may be worth mentioning that Burney's experience can still be paralleled – in conversation with M. Luguenot, who is not Jewish, he mentioned to me his mystification at the apparent incoherence of a synagogue service and the way in which suddenly after a long quiet period there seemed to be a spontaneous explosion of sound from the congregation as a whole – which indeed paralleled, to him, the frequent sudden changes of mood and incident in Alkan's music.

Throughout the eighteenth century, there was a progressive trend for the chazanic style or *'chazanut'* to be marked by extended melismata, including runs, skips and passages in falsetto; this became ever more exaggerated, possibly influenced by the practices of opera-singers, and its excesses eventually hastened calls for the reform of the synagogue liturgy, in which as we shall hear Alkan became involved. Alkan's opinion of this florid and bombastic style is demonstrated by no. 7 of his 'Eleven Grand Préludes' op. 66 which we are now going to play, and which is headed by the composer *'alla giudesca'* and *'con divozione'*. I should explain at this point why I am down on the programme for this and some other pieces as *'pédalier'* hand. Alkan was a great virtuoso of the pedal piano or *pédalier* and wrote much of his music, including the op. 66, for this now rare instrument. I am just hoping that my third hand won't be too much of an impediment for Richard's two.

(*'Alla giudesca'* op. 66 no. 7)

The abysmal achievements and apparent incompetence of the Jews in music and the arts was taken by many Enlightenment thinkers as an indication of their extreme decadence and irrelevance. Many, such as Voltaire, took it for granted that the Jews must either assimilate or become extinguished – and indeed this became a theme in both European politics and Jewish religious reform over the next two hundred years.

Others, however, realised that if one believed in the Rights of Man, then the rights of Jews could not be excluded. When the question of nationality arose – as it did with some urgency in France after 1789, with the need to consider a new Constitution – Jews presented a problem. They did not seem to be exactly Frenchmen – many of them indeed spoke no French. They had never shown any allegiance – beyond cash payments – to the French crown, and they seemed to be rather suspiciously closely involved with Jews, some of them rich and influential, in other countries which might be the enemies of France. Were the Jews, perhaps, in the famous phrase, 'a state within the state?' – where did their loyalty reside? Hence Clermont-Tonnerre's famous speech at the *Assemblée Nationale*; 'We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation, and grant everything to the Jews as individuals'.

But let me first explain *why* this was a problem in France, given that I have said that Jews were forbidden to live there. In fact there were four different groups of Jews in France, three of which have a bearing on the life of Alkan. The one which we are not concerned with is the

small community of the Jews in the papal lands of Comtat-Venaissin around Carpentras. This unique community, 'the Pope's Jews' as they were known, always kept themselves to themselves, although they did emerge musically in the twentieth century with the most famous of their sons, the composer Darius Milhaud.

In the region of Bordeaux lived descendants of the Spanish and Portuguese, or Sephardic, Jews expelled following the Inquisition. Nominally they presented themselves as Catholics. In fact they preserved the *marrano* tradition of maintaining their old religion in secret, keeping their own places of worship and marrying only amongst themselves. Their religious tendencies were something of an open secret, but naturally they tempered their discretion according to the political climate in France. They became leaders in France's West Indies trade during the 17th and 18th centuries and many became extremely wealthy.

Alsace and Lorraine I have already mentioned. By the 1790s the Ashkenazic community in these provinces numbered about 30,000, making it easily the largest Jewish community in France. In many towns and villages Jews had a formal right to reside (although often in restricted ghetto-areas), to establish synagogues, and even to trade freely; although they were still forbidden, for example, to stay overnight in Strasbourg where they were ushered out every curfew, and were still often subject to specific 'Jew-taxes'.

Lastly there was a small but technically quite illegal group of Jews, perhaps numbering 500 or more in the eighteenth century, living in Paris in the Marais district which is still a Jewish centre today. Some of the Jews in Paris held official positions - one was the King's Librarian of Oriental Manuscripts - or were privileged financiers. Many others survived there largely by bribing the police.

Amongst these was Alkan's mysterious grandfather, known as Marix Morhange. Until now, Marix has only made one appearance in the records, in the birth registration of his grandson Gustave in 1827. From this we learn that he was an '*instituteur*', and was born in 1748 or 49. Brigitte François-Sappey supposes without any evidence that he was born in Paris; but I suggest that he probably arrived in Paris from Metz or its vicinity in the 1770s as a teacher for the Jewish community there, which from its size would have needed a '*melamed*', the Hebrew equivalent of '*instituteur*'. He may well have inherited this profession, as was traditional, from his father and this streak shows itself in his son, Alkan Morhange, in his grandson, 'our' Alkan, and indeed in Alkan's son, the pianist and teacher Elie Delaborde. It would appear that Alkan visited relatives in Metz in 1844, and this suggests that the departure from there of his ancestors is unlikely to have been more than three generations distant.

When the Assemblée Nationale made its Declaration on the Rights of Man in 1789, the issue of the Jews was bound to be raised as a consequence. Its extension to Jews was in fact gradual and grudging, but finally at the end of 1791 all Jews were admitted to French citizenship and all Jew-taxes and other penalties abolished. At last it was possible to be both Jewish and French.

In 1792 this was followed by the administration of a '*serment civile*' or oath of allegiance by the Jews throughout the towns and villages of Alsace and Lorraine - which generally had to be translated for their benefit as they spoke Yiddish amongst themselves and German to their Gentile neighbours. Local records of these oaths are of interest to us. For example, in the town of Sarreguemines, amongst those swearing was one who wrote his name in both Hebrew and Latin scripts, Alcan Worms, who signed himself '*rabbîn*' (rabbi), and an Abraham Alcan. Many others of the names which occur in these records recur in the history and life of 'our'

Alkan. In the town of Lunéville, those affirming include David Morhange and Jacob Marix, and in Nancy we come across a Mayer Marix, the same name as the future husband of Alkan's sister Céleste.

In 1806, the issue of the Jews was again addressed, this time by Napoleon. Amongst other consequences, this had two important issues relevant to our story. One was the founding of a central Jewish organisation, the Consistoire, in charge of Jewish religious life, but under the aegis of the state, reporting to the Ministry of Religion. The other was that all Jews were required in 1807 to take a surname.

Up to this time, the Jews of Alsace, most of whom as we have seen did not speak French, would tend to use amongst themselves their Hebrew names, which consisted of a given name, a patronymic and perhaps a further name indicative of profession or tribe. For example, my own Hebrew name is Dovid ben-Yitzhak haCohen, David the son of Isaac the Cohen. For me this name has significance only in the synagogue; but two hundred years ago, it would have been my 'real' name, and 'David Conway' would have been the name of convenience used in my dealings with the outside world. The names given in the documents concerning the '*serment civile*' were therefore not necessarily the names that the subscribers would have used amongst each other. Some of them indeed are mere compounds of surnames such as Godchaux, Marix, and so on, suggesting a compilation of names attributed to the bearer's family or parents (which yet may have meant little or nothing to the bearer him- or her-self).

The law of 1807 had a powerful social import, as, with emancipation, the division between the Jewish world and the outside world began to dissolve; in such circumstances, it made sense that a Frenchman should have one invariable name. As was remarked at the time by one of Napoleon's commissioners, with the measures of the Consistoire and the uniformity of name styles, 'the Jews ceased to be a people and remained only a religion'. This was certainly more true in France, where emancipation preceded assimilation, than in its neighbouring countries.

The choice of name was left up to individuals. In Bacourt and Lunéville we have examples of the name Alkan being chosen: in Lunéville and Pont-a-Mousson, the name Marix; in these and other towns, the name Morhange. It is worthwhile noting that in towns outside the Moselle region these names occur scarcely at all.

At this stage I wish to point out that, contrary to what has often been stated, Alkan is not a common Jewish first name, although attempts have been made to extract it from the Biblical Elkhanan, the father of Samuel. I believe it to be in the nature of a nickname or surname, perhaps originating in Poland where in the late nineteenth century there were numerous examples of it in town censuses, especially in the area north of Warsaw. The people we know as 'Marix Morhange' and 'Alkan Morhange' may therefore have simply adopted these names of convenience from surnames or nicknames associated with their families. If so we may develop certain hypotheses, which I will presently expound.

(To be continued....)

Alkan in Moscow

Alkan himself never got to Moscow of course, but with a spare morning there in February I thought I would check out the library of the Moscow Conservatoire to see whether they held any of the master's works.

A search of the catalogue (still largely handwritten on cards) revealed a surprising number of items – including a copy of the first (Brandus) edition of the op. 33 *Grande Sonate*, an edition by Schlesinger (Berlin) of the opus 31 *Préludes*, an edition by Costallat of the op. 41 *Trois petites Fantaisies*, and the first edition of the *Onze Grandes Préludes* op. 66. These items may well have got there via Karl Klindworth (1830-1916), the pianist and teacher (and stepfather of Winifred Wagner, née Williams) who first arranged the first movement of Alkan's solo Concerto (from op. 39) for piano and orchestra whilst he was teaching at the Moscow Conservatoire in 1872. (Some 20 letters from Klindworth to Rubinstein and others are preserved in the archives of the Moscow Museum of Musical Culture). More surprisingly, there appears to have been some publication of Alkan's works in Russia during the Soviet period, including no. 3 of the *Trois grandes études* of 1839 (op. 76) published in Moscow in 1938 (and republished in a 'Collection of études by foreign composers' in 1963), the 'Festin d'Esope' (op. 39 no. 12) published in 1989, and 'L'amitié' (from the first *Recueil d'Impromptus* op. 31 no. 1) published in an 'Album for Pianists' for which no date is given.

Inspecting these items however proved to be rather complex. None of them were retained in the library, I was informed – they had all been transferred to 'the store'. I was given complex directions to reach this sanctum, which proved to be located deep beneath the Conservatoire's auditorium (one of the city's main symphonic venues), along a dark corridor and behind a small yellow iron door on which was painted the word 'Khraneniye' (stockroom). Opening this revealed a vast cavern in profound disorder, out of which a lady custodian loomed towards me. Fortunately I had taken the precaution to write down a list of what I sought with the references given on the cards. The lady shook her head mournfully over the list for some time – then told me to come back in half-an-hour to see what, if anything, she had been able to turn up.

The result was puzzling – some things turned up that hadn't been on my list (or the cards) including a 19th century edition of the study for left hand solo (op 76. no. 1) and an undated '*Quadrille Anglais, Les Lanciers [...] tel qu'il a fait danser à l'Ambassade Anglais [...] arrangée par Maxime Alkan [Alkan's brother] chef d'orchestre de Bals [...] et pianiste des Cours Cellarius [a fashionable dancing master]*'. On the other hand, many things that were on the list, including the *Grande Sonate*, the opus 31 *Préludes* and the Soviet edition of '*Le Festin d'Esope*' – had not materialised. Whether they were lost, stolen or strayed must of course remain unsettled, but they could well still be somewhere within the general chaos.

I did see however the 1938 publication of the *Grande Etude*, which was edited by Evgeny Golubev (prolific composer and pianist, born 1910, died 1982 or after) in an edition of 750 copies (and priced at 1 rouble 90 kopecks). I have also since seen a copy, in Richard Shaw's possession, of the 1989 '*Le Festin d'Esope*' (edition of 1,000 copies), where the editor's name is given as A. Nemerovsky, about whom I have no further information.

These indeterminate results do however give me some hope that there might be something worth turning up in the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, founded by Alkan's colleague Anton Rubinstein (who dedicated to him his 4th Piano Concerto of 1874), and which retains Anton's extensive correspondence.....

- David Conway

From our Web-Site Guestbook

Just a few of the comments that have come in from all over the world.....

Name:	Michael McDowell
City/Country:	Federal Way, Washington (state) USA
Comments:	Have enjoyed Ronald Smith's recordings and writings for many years, he combines analysis of music's structural properties alongside its psychological import in a way that I have seldom if ever encountered and is a delight to read. Anyone ever noticed the similarities between CVA's Bombardo-Carrilon and Shostakovich's Fugue in B minor from the collection of 24? And one of Prokofiev's Visions Fugitives (I can't recall which) begins with a phrase that sounds almost identical from a section of the slow movement of the Sonatine? Comments and remarks welcome from other members.

Name:	Gregor Brand
Homepage:	http://www.angelfire.com/art/gregorbrand
City/Country:	Bargstedt, Germany
Comments:	The ALKAN of Paris with the composer-pianist genius C. V. ALKAN were not the only Jewish ALKAN family with a special devotion to music. For some information about my ALKAN family and the composer Siegfried ALKAN (1858 - 1940)see the genealogical sites of my homepage (in German). Greetings to all ALKAN friends

Name:	Jack Gibbons
Homepage:	http://www.JackGibbons.com
City/Country:	New York, USA
Comments:	A great looking and very tasteful web site. Well done all! Looking forward to its development. I was one of the founding members of the original Alkan Society back in 1977 when it was started up by the wonderful and sadly missed John White. And of course without the incredible dedication and enthusiasm of Ronald Smith where would Alkan be today? He is a one-off with no replacements alas! I continue to do my small bit for Alkan whenever I can, performing his music whenever I'm given the opportunity (in places as diverse as Zimbabwe and here at New York's Carnegie Hall) and the reception to his beautiful and imaginative music is, as it always has been, completely and overwhelmingly favourable.

Name:	Kristian Keller
City/Country:	Netherlands
Comments:	I treasure the 1977 EMI recordings by Ronald Smith which I came across some years ago. What interesting music this is, how little is it known. I think there is still a lot of work to be done to promote Alkan's music to the public as well as to the amateur and virtuoso pianist [...] keep up the good work!

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And here to end with is a query, from the Antipodes, about another Alkan.....

Alkan the Typographer

Hello there.

I have a pamphlet which contains the following information on its front page:

DISCOURS
Prononcé le 6 Avril 1856
Par M. ALKAN aîné
Membre correspondant de la Chambre des Imprimeurs de Paris
Lors de sa reception

COMME MEMBRE HONORAIRE DE LA SOCIETE FRATERNELLE DES IMPRIMERIES
TYPOGRAPHIQUES DE PARIS

Accompagné
DE NOTES TYPOGRAPHIQUES ET BIBLIOGRAPHIQUES
DEUXIEME EDITION
PARIS
MALLET -BACHELIER, IMPRIMEUR-LIBRAIRE
DU BUREAU DES LONGITUDES, DE L'ECOLE IMPERIALE POLYTECHNIQUE
Quai des Augustins 55
1856

It's only 16 pages. Unfortunately I don't read French and the pages have been folded and bound , but not cut. Could there be any connection with Ch. V.?

Cheers

Patrick Spillane, Melbourne, Australia.

Mr. Spillane adds:

I think the typographical Alkan may be Alphonse Alkan (b. 1809). An American I've been in touch with seems to be convinced that Ch. V. engraved his own works and argues that the first editions are eerily faultless, which may be due to Ch. V.'s perfectionism. I think it's unlikely. Perhaps Alphonse was a slightly older cousin who may have assisted Ch. V. in getting a first-class job done. My American contact says he can't understand how Ch. V. got a publisher to invest so heavily in producing sheet music that few would have bought and virtually no-one played!

Editor's comment: I share Mr. Spillane's scepticism that to Alkan's other skills, he added that of engraving and typography - though of course he may well have undertaken proof-reading. François Luguenot, in his Genealogy of Alkan, notes Mr. Spillane's typographer, Alphonse Alkan, who died in 1889, as one of the various Alkans hanging about Paris who have not yet been fitted into the family tree (if indeed they belong there). These include the composer S. Alkan (fl. c. 1890-1900) and the music publisher Henri Alkan, active between 1868 and 1902. If any readers have information or ideas about all or any of these, do contact the Society either by letter, e-mail or the website forum.

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