



The Alkan Society

Registered Charity no. 276199

www.alkansociety.org

President: Stephanie McCallum

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

Honorary Officers: Mark Viner *Chairman*, Nick Hammond *Treasurer*, José López *Secretary*

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Stephanie McCallum appointed Society President



Following the retirement of Leslie Howard from the Presidency, who has served in this role since 2009, we are delighted and honoured that Stephanie McCallum has agreed to become President of the Alkan Society. She is pictured on the left recording last year at the Maison Erard in Amsterdam.

Stephanie writes:

“Hanging near my desk here is a Sydney concert program from 1986, sent to me quite recently by a past audience member. The program was the Weber C major Sonata and the *Trois Grandes Etudes* Op. 76 of Alkan, performed on my final return to Australia after performances I gave in London and Paris which seem to have been the first complete performances of the work. The actual premiere was hosted by the Alkan Society in

the Barbican and the Society had already been very welcoming to me as a young performer on many occasions.

“I first encountered Alkan through preparing *Le Tambour bats aux champs* by way of a surprise for Ronald Smith who visited the Conservatorium in Sydney to give masterclasses and concerts while I was a student in the 70s. My then teacher, Gordon Watson (a pupil of another Alkanist, Egon Petri), had performed and introduced a number of Alkan works, including the *Ouverture* from Op. 39 during his years in London in the 60s, so he was knowledgeable in selecting this concentrated gem for me to play. After hearing astonishing performances in Sydney from Ronald Smith, and after my farewell recital including *le Festin d'Esope*, it inevitably followed that in 1978, with husband Peter and baby son Rupert, I moved to Lyminge in Kent to work on my playing with Ronald. Over the next few years my Alkan repertoire grew and incorporated what we believed to be the first modern performance of the *Chants* Op. 70 for my Wigmore Hall debut in 1982.

“Those two premieres, Op. 70 and Op. 76, opened my eyes to the fascination of creating a performance of a work without a prior performance history, and I came to understand that to work in the area of unknown music of the very highest quality is a rare privilege, challenge and of course, responsibility.

“More recently, my understanding of Alkan’s writing and sound world was opened up again by an opportunity to work on an 1869 Parisian Erard owned by a colleague here in Sydney. Playing the Symphony and *La Chanson de la folle* on this instrument brought into focus how much the straight stringing of the Erard had influenced the heavy bass writing so common in Alkan’s work and made sense of how to use pedal in this repertoire. That led to recording at the Maison Erard in Amsterdam, with early keyboard expert Erin Helyard joining me in four-hands Alkan.

“I now find enormous satisfaction in seeing a younger generation build on these past efforts. Mark Viner, whom I first encountered in 2006 as a young enthusiast carrying a pile of Alkan scores when I was visiting the Purcell School as lecture recitalist on Alkan, has given us wonderful new recordings of the Op. 35 Etudes. Many of my students, past and present, are asking to learn and perform Alkan, including the amazing Cowley Fu who performed the solo Symphony for the Society a couple of years ago. A young student starting out today has a range of first rate role models and recordings with which to become acquainted with the compelling and elusive world of Alkan’s music and we owe this entirely to the admirable work of the Alkan Society and the energy and enthusiasm of its supporters. Alkan’s music continues to fascinate for its individuality and strangeness of personality, but also for its genius, soaring imagination, humour and moments of touching beauty.

“This is a great opportunity to fondly remember my teacher, Ronald Smith, and to thank all at the Alkan Society, but in particular Anne Smith, Richard Shaw, Hugh Macdonald, François Luguenot and Martin Anderson who have contributed in so many ways to my work on Alkan over the decades. I am indeed honoured to take on this role.”

Stephanie McCallum November 27, 2018 www.stephaniemccallum.com

José López elected as the Society’s Honorary Secretary



We are also delighted to welcome Dr José López as our new Honorary Secretary (pictured left with appreciative audience). José is based in Miami, Florida and is currently Associate Professor and Coordinator of Keyboard Studies at Florida International University as well as President of the South Florida Chapter of the American Liszt Society. Born in Cuba into an immigrant family of Spanish, Basque and Sephardic ancestry, José emigrated to the United States at a young age. His interest in Alkan includes frequent performances of solo and chamber music works and his discography features a release of the Alkan Mozart transcriptions for Toccata Classics. Recently, he has researched, performed and recorded obscure works written by 19th century Cuban-born composer José Comellas (1842-1888) and plans to release selected opera transcriptions and original works of Nicolás Ruíz Espadero (1832-1890). Currently José is involved in rescuing the unpublished Transcendental Etudes of Espadero, scheduled for publication on the Cuban Musical Patrimony series in fall 2019.

Society concert: Mark Viner and Tyler Hay (piano duo)

St Mary's Church, Ealing, London on 12th October 2018



Mark Viner



Tyler Hay

This recital, immediately following on from the Society's 2018 Annual General Meeting, was jointly sponsored by the Alkan and Liszt Societies. This joint venture was particularly apt as Mark Viner is Chairman of both societies and Tyler Hay won the first prize in the Liszt Society Competition in November 2017.

Their programme opened with Liszt's symphonic poem, *Les Préludes*, arranged by the composer for two pianos (S.638). This was followed by Alkan's *Impromptu sur le*

choral de Luther "Un fort rempart est notre Dieu" (op. 69) in the arrangement for two pianos (from the original pedal-piano version) by Roger Smalley.

After the interval, we heard Alkan's *Benedictus*, op. 54, also written for pedal-piano, and this time with the pedal part played on the second piano. Although Roger Smalley has also made an arrangement for piano duo, the score could not be located in time for the concert. Finally, we were treated to a barnstorming performance of Liszt's Symphonic Poem *Mazeppa*, again in the two-piano arrangement made by Liszt himself (S.640).

Members of the audience who had made their way out to Ealing were highly appreciative of the magnificent and charismatic display of pianistic brilliance. Bravo Mark and Tyler!

Forthcoming event: Joint societies dinner-recital

Lancaster Hall Hotel, London on Tuesday 15th January 2019 (17:15 for 18:00)

Our annual dinner-recital, held in conjunction with related music societies, is presented in 2019 by the Richard Strauss Society, in collaboration with the Alkan, Liszt, Mahler, Schubert and Wagner Societies. Works by all of these composers will be included. The Alkan contribution will be performed by Mark Viner who will play the second movement (*Quasi-Faust*) from the *Grande Sonate* (op.33).

Attendance is restricted to members of the participating societies and their guests. Tickets (£45 per person, including dinner and wine) may be purchased through the Strauss Society. Further details are provided on the Society website at:

www.alkansociety.org/Recitals/Alkan-Society-Recitals/alkan-society-recitals.html

Enquiries can be made to Nigel Coles, Treasurer of the Richard Strauss Society at: nc64rss@outlook.com

The Society Bulletin can only flourish with a steady flow of input from its members. All members are encouraged to send articles, letters or comments to the Editor (Nick Hammond, email: treasurer@alkansociety.org, or by post to: Woodend House, High Stittenham, York YO60 7TW, UK)

Write your own *Esquisse*¹...

All members are invited to compose a short piano piece inspired by Alkan's *Esquisses*, op. 63. The pieces will be compiled into a volume to be published as a supplement to a future Bulletin.

Apart from a handful of globally little-known instances, Alkan's music has been widely ignored as a stimulus and model for composers. What is it about the music itself that appears to quench the spark of imaginative compositional response? And who can answer that question? This is our chance to be the first group of musicians since Alkan's death to answer by **overtly permitting his influence on our composing** by each of us writing a short *Esquisse* **lasting no more than 150 seconds**.

The project can be imagined either as a tribute to Alkan and his op. 63, or more broadly as an opportunity for a composer – whether professional or amateur – to be stimulated and influenced by Alkan. The following are merely suggestions to stimulate ideas:

- A parody, pastiche or tribute (according to your personal definition), in any pre-1861 style as variously found throughout op. 63 – or in a post-1861 style
- Piece that sounds like “the music that Alkan forgot to write”
- A new piece using a title from op. 63
- A new piece of ‘updating’, such as Mussorgsky's *Schmuyle and Goldberg* (1874) as an updating of Alkan's *Héraclite et Démocrite* (1861)
- A prequel or sequel to any of op. 63
- A variation based on any of op. 63
- A short piece, independent of the above, perhaps with a purely conceptual influence of Alkan.

This project conveniently coincides with the 100th Bulletin, due to be published early in 2020. Anonymous publication as a supplement to the Bulletin will allow the contributions to be appreciated free from bias. Bulletin 101 will provide contributors' names – with their permission.

The submissions should preferably be typeset on computer and submitted as a pdf on A4-sized pages (portrait), but neat hand-written scores (also A4 portrait) will also be accepted. It's up to the composer to design the layout with regard to title font, page turns, additional text or illustrations (minimal please).

You may also submit an audio performance of your score, as an MP3 (or equivalent) recording, and the recordings will, with permission, be made available to members for download.

Please address queries to the Bulletin editor (Nick Hammond, email: treasurer@alkansociety.org, or by post to: Woodend House, High Stittenham, York YO60 7TW, UK), to whom final submissions should be sent by **30th November 2019** (Alkan's 206th birthday).

Membership news

As of November 2018, there are 98 paid-up members of the Society (including Honorary members); of these, eight are student members.

Whilst the majority of members are from the UK (56), 11 other countries are represented: USA (13 members), Australia and Germany (6 each), Netherlands (4), Japan (3), France, Norway, Ireland and Austria (2 each), and Belgium and Italy (1 each). Six new members have joined us in 2018 to date.

¹ The project was proposed by Society member Richard Murphy and enthusiastically endorsed by the Committee.

First UK performance in modern times: Alkan's *Andante avec Sourdines* and *Deuxième Concerto da Camera*

Peter Hick, Stockport (UK)

This enterprising concert, kindly supported by The Keyboard Trust and promoted by Manchester Camerata, was well received by a good audience at The Anthony Burgess Foundation in Manchester on 4th May 2018. A rather unusual venue perhaps, but one which proved ideal as the Engine Room for the former Mill, in which the Foundation is housed and now forms the Concert Hall, has a very sympathetic acoustic for chamber music. The setting is an intimate one, the audience sitting at square tables adorned with bright red tablecloths. 4

Anthony Burgess had great musical aspirations himself and his fine Bosendorfer Grand, which sits near the far end of the room, was used for the concert. His harpsichord could be seen downstairs along with interesting items from his correspondence and published works including, of course, his most famous book *A Clockwork Orange*.

The programme was an interesting one to any Alkan lover:

Schubert *Adagio and Rondo Concertante* in F major (D487)

Alkan *Andante avec Sourdines* (op. 13, no 2)
Deuxième Concerto da Camera (op. 10, no 2)

Interval

Schubert *Piano Quintet* in A major (*Trout*, D667)

The performers were our own Chairman, Mark Viner, with members of the Camerata strings, Caroline Pether (first violin), Eva Thorarinsdottir (second violin), Kay Stephen (viola), Hannah Roberts (cello) and, after the interval, the double bassist Dan Storer.

No printed programmes were available. In fact, it is worth noting that the concert was not advertised at all in the Camerata printed brochure for the seasons concerts, but only on their website where it appears under the title "*Up Close*" - *the next generation with Mark Viner*. Details of the string personnel are taken from that source.

Mark introduced the programme to the audience, briefly sketching Alkan's early life but later obscurity before talking more extensively about the two Alkan works. He highlighted the special thrill of being able to present the *Andante avec sourdines* in what was possibly a UK premiere although he could not be sure of this. He touched on the elusive history of the piece and reference to performance of a work "played with muted strings accompaniment" in a concert reviewed in 1833 which also existed as a solo piano etude in C sharp major. A photocopy of the string parts had been sent to him after they had come to light in a Paris Library, making the evening's performance possible.

Whether or not it had previously existed as the slow movement of an otherwise lost *Troisième Concerto da Camera* one can only speculate. Although the op.10 no 2 Concerto in C sharp minor does have a major key section, this *Andante* would not fit there and the position is complicated by this final section itself quoting from the *Siciliano* which forms its own slow movement. In any event, it was a joy to hear this elusive piece beautifully played by Mark (from memory) with the partnership of music eloquently played by the string quartet. "A simple, gracious muted song for strings is accompanied by a series of chords which, passing from octave to octave, sustains the melody and produces an effect as original as it is ravishing" as the *Le pianiste* review has it from 1833. It was a real treat and indeed something of a Red Letter Day to finally hear this very beautiful piece so expertly presented. Mark prefaced his performance with a few introductory bars to the printed score which have also recently come to light. Quite the highlight of the evening, despite its relative brevity, and I for one would have loved to hear it again.

There followed the much more familiar *Deuxième Concerto da Camera*, at least from CD recordings, although I had not heard it with string quartet before. The performance was certainly on the fast side I thought, but maybe that was the tempo best judged by the strings. Mark (again playing from memory) gave a fine rendition of the piano part, the central calm of the *Siciliano* being particularly memorable. The players all seemed to be enjoying themselves I must say, and this was echoed by warm applause.

Perhaps this was a second UK performance since one Henry Field played it in Bath in 1834 . During the interval, I had a look at the music still on the violinists music desks and it was a thrill to see the hand written parts with “Ch v Alkan” in the top right hand corner, even if in a copyists hand and not the composer’s.

Playing from the score, Mark clearly enjoyed his own role in the Schubert items. The *Adagio and Rondo* was new to me but proved to be a substantial work of about 16 minutes and one I shall look out for in the future. A peaceful reflective *Adagio* is followed by a lively and memorable *Rondo*, truly Schubertian. The *Trout Quintet* was played with great style and received a well-deserved ovation to round off a very memorable evening.

Thanks must go to The Keyboard Trust for their role in presenting the concert, and I hope they will look fondly on the A minor op. 10 no 1 *Concerto da Camera*, although this would be a much bigger undertaking. Perhaps the Camerata in the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, could consider it!

Something fishy on the seashore...

Mark Viner, London

Your Chairman happens to be recording the complete *25 Préludes dans tous les tons majeurs et mineurs*, op.31 this December so, naturally, these pieces have been very much in my thoughts the last few months. Going back to perhaps the most famous of the set, *La Chanson de la folle au bord de la mer*, reminded me of a couple of curious instances when I’d heard the piece on two separate occasions, from two different pianists, on record and in live performance. The first occurred while listening to Stephen Hough’s wonderful French Album on Hyperion (CDA67890) in which he felicitously includes the prelude in question. On the first page I was suddenly aware of some very different notes to those in the score: to put it simply, the F flat in b.7 had become an A flat while each G flat in the melody line in bb.12 & 39 was played as an F flat, robbing the theme of the folk inflection bestowed by those flattened sevenths. I’ll admit, I didn’t go rushing for the score – I knew perfectly well what the notes were, I thought to myself – and instead just put it down to a careless misreading which can happen all too easily in unfamiliar repertoire. Nonetheless, I was a little troubled: how could a pianist of Hough’s calibre make such a careless blunder? Then, a year or so later, at a most excellent recital of Jan Hugo put on by the Society, the exact same thing: those same foreign notes. By this point I thought something’s seriously up: to have one pianist supposedly misread something is one thing, but to have another commit the exact same error is just plain extraordinary – lightening striking twice and all that. After Jan’s recital I asked

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Op. 31.

CHANSON DE LA FOLLE AU BORD DE LA MER.
Gesang der Wahnsinnigen am Meeresgestade.

Lento. Tristo.

PIANO
ou
ORGUE

Ped. sostenuto.

p

Pedale sempre molto sostenuto.

(F flat)

(G flat)

C. V. ALKAN. 25 PRÉLUDES. N° 8. 17

LA CHANSON DE LA FOLLE AU BORD DE LA MER.

Lentement.

PIANO
ou
ORGUE.

Ped: *soutenu.*

Tristement

legato.
Pedale sempre.
très soutenu.

centres so, *a prima vista*, even the most practised eye would read them as F flats.

Part of the problem here isn't necessarily these engravings themselves but the reproductions made of them: scanners are known to sometimes do very peculiar things to scores, staves and ledger lines especially, and this might account for the supposed absence of those ledger lines in the Schlesinger edition. I haven't seen an actual copy of the original so am unable to comment in this respect. Similarly, the subsequent reprints of the reliable Brandus edition (Paris, 1847, shown left) are by no means foolproof. Olli Mustonen in his recording of the set (Decca 433 055 2), while safe from those F flats in *La Folle*, unwittingly falls prey to other perils,

none personified more than the missionary zeal he applies to sounding out a jarring B natural in b.21 of the closing *Prière* when, in reality, the chord is nothing more than a dominant seventh chord, the B flat of which has flaked off over time and remained absent in subsequent reprints (Billaudot, Masters Music). This I can confirm in absolute certainty as the first edition in my possession, same engraving, same plate numbers, contains this missing accidental.

To return to *La Folle*: why this much fuss over a few notes, one might ask? Well, they are very important notes, crucial to the atmosphere of the work and are one of those subtle turns of phrase which puts otherwise fairly commonplace material in an entirely different light. More importantly, in an age where, more often than not, online sources are consulted before purchasing a score, if a score is indeed ever purchased, let this observation serve as a heads up!

Alkan's concerts in the 1840s

Nick Hammond, York (UK) and Frederik Keygnaert, Leiden (The Netherlands)

Alkan's brilliance as a pianist was forged in the 1830s. At his public appearance on 3rd March 1838, "the large audience who flocked to hear him were unanimous in their enthusiasm" (*Revue et Gazette de Paris*, 11 Mar 1838, p. 107). But this appears to have been his last public appearance until 1844: as Smith states, "his name vanishes from the pages of French musical periodicals and does not re-appear until he is over 30" (Smith, 1976, p. 31). Indeed, Smith goes further, suggesting "This large, enthusiastic audience (...) had just witnessed the end of Alkan's career as a virtuoso".

This article explores Alkan's subsequent return to the concert stage in the 1840s as reported through two of the weekly Parisian music periodicals of the time, *La France Musicale* (abbreviated hereafter to FM) and *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris* (abbreviated to RGM). We have scanned both these periodicals for references to Alkan over the 1840-1849 decade¹. As well as allowing us to identify Alkan's public (and, where reported, private) appearances and the repertoire he played, the periodicals give us some insight into the reception of his works, his performances and his playing, and even into his motivations and personality. Of course there may have been other concerts at which he appeared, and there are certainly other sources that throw light on his works and his playing. However we restrict our inquiry to the public announcements, which are likely to be a reasonably factually accurate subset of his appearances and reception, and to some degree a considered analysis by reviewers and critics. We stress "reasonably" and "to some degree" in view of the occasional inconsistencies between the two periodicals.

We start by listing Alkan's concert appearances and his repertoire, followed by reports of public performances of his works by others. We then highlight the descriptions of individual works by reviewers. This is followed by consideration of the reception to his playing and reflections published in the two periodicals on Alkan's approach, motivation and personality.

Concert appearances and repertoire

Alkan's appearances, as reported in the periodicals, can be categorised as either closed (i.e., for a private audience), restricted or public. Thus in late December 1843 he played at a "meeting of enlightened judges" which we presume to be "closed". His previous appearance at an event in the Paris Conservatoire, in November, probably had a restricted audience, not open to the general public. Finally an example of a public appearance is his concert of 27th February 1844 in *la salle de la rue Vivienne*. Table 1 summarises the appearances we have identified. The number in the first column is used to refer to the event later in this article, whilst the letter in the third column (C, R or P, for Closed, Restricted or Public) is our suggested categorisation.

A number of points emerge from this compilation. First, there were no reports of performances in 1840, 1841, 1842 or 1847, with the greatest numbers of public performances in 1844, 1845 and 1846. This accords with the general pattern of his appearances described elsewhere (Eddie, 2007; Smith, 1976). For most of 1848, during the February revolution and its aftermath, artist life in Paris was at a standstill, and many artists and musicians fled the capital. Nevertheless, Alkan did perform a couple of times in December 1848, although the periodicals give few details. Second, whilst in some of the earlier concerts he plays only his own works (possibly concerts 3, 4, 5 & 8), he increasingly includes works by other composers, particularly from the classical or baroque repertoire. Third, many of his concerts include performances with others, whether with other pianists in four-hand or eight-hand arrangements (e.g., concerts 2, 6, 10, 12) or with instrumentalists and singers. These frequent collaborations somewhat belie the characterisation of Alkan as a misanthropic loner.

It is interesting to look at which of his own works Alkan played. Whilst for some concerts either no programme or only a selection of the programme is reported, we can itemise the works that he definitely did play. Table 2 summarises these (in opus number order), on how many occasions each was played and in which concert. In some cases, he played works which had been composed some years before (although may have been unknown to his audience), such as the 2nd *Concerto da Camera*, the *Étude*

¹ *La France Musicale* last publication in 1848 was the 9th April issue, and restarted publication on 7 January 1849, and the title changed to *La Musique: Gazette de la France Musicale* in that year.

Table 1: Summary of concert appearances by Alkan in the 1840s

Date	Venue	Programme
1 May 43	C? Chez Zimmerman	Own compositions
2 Nov 43	R Conservatoire	Piano duet or duo with Mlle Woislin ² : <i>Ravina</i> , <i>Motifs d'Eurianthe</i> ³
3 Dec 43	C Unknown	Own compositions "both published and unpublished", including <i>Études</i> (unspecified); <i>La Pâque</i> ⁴ ; <i>Nocturne</i> (op. 22); <i>L'Idylle</i> ⁵ ; <i>Alleluia</i> (op.25)
4 27 Feb 44	P Salle de la rue Vivienne (Subscribers' concert of <i>La France Musicale</i>)	<i>Étude in C#</i> (op. 13/2); <i>Air de ballet, étude dans le style ancien</i> (op.24/2); <i>Étude in B minor</i> ⁶ ; <i>Nocturne</i> (op. 22); <i>Saltarelle</i> (op. 23)
5 12 Mar 44	R Salons Zimmerman (the concert included sung sacred music)	<i>Air de ballet, étude dans le style ancien</i> (op. 24/2); <i>Nocturne</i> (op. 22); <i>Saltarelle</i> (op. 23); A second étude (not specified)
6 Early Apr 44	R Salle Pape	Pixis: <i>Grand morceau de concert sur le choral des Huguenots</i> (with Cavallo, Pixis and Wolff). Perhaps 8-hand arr. of <i>Fantaisie dramatique sur des motifs des Huguenots de Meyerbeer</i> , op. 131.
7 20 Apr 44	P Salons Érard	The 1 st two parts of 2 nd <i>concertino</i> (with string quartet) ⁷ ; <i>Air de ballet, étude dans le style ancien</i> (op. 24/2); <i>Nocturne</i> (op. 22); <i>Saltarelle</i> (op. 23); <i>Alleluia</i> (op. 25) Bach: <i>Gavotte</i> ; Scarlatti: <i>Allegro</i> ; Mozart: <i>Minuet</i> from <i>Symphony in G mi</i> ; Beethoven: <i>Rondo</i> from op. 31 ⁸ ; Weber: <i>Rondo (mouvement perpetual)</i> from op. 24
8 Oct 44	C? Unknown	<i>Marche Héroïque</i> (op. 27 – renamed <i>Marche Triomphale</i>); <i>Le Preux</i> (op. 17); <i>Le Chemin de Fer</i> (op. 27)
9 1 Mar 45	P Salons Érard	<i>Marche funèbre</i> (op. 26); <i>Marche triomphale</i> (op. 27); <i>La romance du Phare d'Eddystone</i> ⁹ (with Mlle Masson ¹⁰) Hummel: <i>Adagio</i> from B mi Concerto ¹¹ (with four horns, cello & double-bass); Schubert: <i>Minuet</i> ; Mendelssohn: <i>Fugue</i>
10 30 Apr 45	P Salons Érard	<i>Trois morceaux dans le genre pathétique</i> (op. 15) <i>Étude in C#</i> (with double string quartet) with <i>Introduction</i> ¹² ; <i>Marche Triomphale</i> (op. 27); <i>Saltarelle</i> (op. 23) Spohr: <i>Quintet for wind</i> (op. 52) (1 st movt & minuet); Zimmerman: <i>Allegro</i> from <i>Concerto for two pianos</i> (with N. Alkan); Mozart: <i>Andante</i> from <i>Sonata for piano 4-hands</i> (K521); Beethoven: <i>Allegretto</i> from 7 th <i>Symphony</i> , arr. Alkan for 8 hands (with N. Alkan, Pixis and Zimmerman)
11 6 Mar 46	P Salons Érard	Unknown. Performers included: "Schulhoff, Hallé, Alkan, Rosenhain, Gerlady, Mme Iweins-d'Hennin etc"

² Mlle Woislin was a pupil of L. Adam and H. Herz (FM, 12 Aug 1843, p. 263) and won the Conservatoire 1st prize in Piano in 1843 (FM 27 Oct 1844, p. 310). Following her marriage she used the name Gruber-Woislin.

³ Probably Ravina's *Grande Fantaisie sur Weber's Euryanthe* (op. 9) published by Simrock, 1843/44. According to available sources (IMSLP), the piece was published in an arrangement for two pianos in 1852; this may have been an early performance of the two-piano version.

⁴ Originally published in *Six Morceaux caractéristiques* and re-published as the 4th piece of *Les Mois*.

⁵ Perhaps a lost work, or an extant piece which was subsequently renamed, or possibly even the *Nocturne* (op. 22) (Luguenot, personal communication).

⁶ Probably the 3rd of the *Scherzi (Etudes de Bravoure)*, op. 16/3 (or possibly the *Allegro Marziale*, the 3rd of the 1^{er} *Livre de Caprices*, op. 12/3). See reviewer's description in the next section.

⁷ Presumably the first two movements of the 2nd *Concerto di Camera* (sometimes numbered as op. 10/2).

⁸ Which of the three op. 31 sonatas is not stated, but it is likely to be the first (the only one with a *rondo*).

⁹ Presumed lost.

¹⁰ Smith (1987, p. 211) identifies Mlle Masson as the mezzo-soprano Elizabeth Masson, born in Scotland in 1806. We have found no record of Elizabeth Masson spending time in Paris. However one Elisa (or Élise) Oscarine Masson (1820-1867) made her debut at the Opéra-Comique early in 1843 (FM 29 January 1843, p. 38) and subsequently had a successful operatic career (White, 2018). She is mentioned frequently in the two periodicals in the 1840s (e.g., 21 times in 1844). We consider it likely that the Mlle Masson who sang in this concert was the French Elisa rather than the British Elizabeth.

¹¹ Probably Piano Concerto no 3 (op. 89).

¹² "Introduction" probably refers to the piano solo introduction to the *Étude*, ms. dated 22 May 1843 (IMSLP).

12	Mar 46	P	Salles du Bazar Bonne-Nouvelle ("Loterie" series)	Weber: <i>Overture Jubel</i> (Jubilee), op. 59, with Schulhoff, Hallé & Rosenhain ¹³
13	29 Mar 46	P	Salles du Bazar Bonne-Nouvelle: ("Loterie" series)	Various of his own compositions Beethoven: " <i>Sonata in A minor</i> " ¹⁴ (with Massart ¹⁵); Spohr: <i>Quintet</i> ; Beethoven: <i>Andante</i> from Violin sonata op. 47 (Kreutzer), with Massart
14	11 Apr 46	P	Salles du Bazar Bonne-Nouvelle: "Loterie" series	"Andante of his concerto" ¹⁶ (with string quartet) Weber: Violin sonata ¹⁷ (with Massart); "Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart etc"
15	1 Dec 46	R	Rue de Ménars ("gentlemen's monthly gathering")	<i>Marche funèbre</i> (op. 26); <i>Marche triomphale</i> (op. 27)
16	13 Dec 48	?	?	Unknown ("Alkan played the piano the way Clementi must have played...")
17	5 May 49	P	Salons Erard	<i>Préludes</i> (op. 31), nos 11-14; <i>Partitions pour piano</i> (1 ^{er} série): nos 6 (Mozart, Minuet from Symphony 39), 4 (Haydn, <i>Andante</i> from Symphony 36), 3 (Gluck, <i>Chœur des Scythes de l'Iphigénie en Tauride</i>); <i>Air à cinq temps</i> (from op. 32); <i>Marche triomphale</i> (op. 27) Bach: <i>Allegro</i> from 1 st Concerto (with strings); Mozart: <i>Violin Sonata</i> in B flat ¹⁸ (with Jean-Delphin Alard); Stradella: <i>Air d'église</i> (sung by Louis Alphonse Révial); Allyre Bureau ¹⁹ : <i>Begli occhi</i> (sung by Révial); Schubert: <i>Sérénade</i> (sung by Révial)

in C# major (op. 13/2) (and its version with strings) or the *Trois morceaux dans le genre pathétique* (op. 15). In other cases, he introduces recently-composed works to his audience (e.g., *Nocturne*, *Saltarelle*, the two marches, selection from *Les Préludes*). A few works get repeat performances: he played the *Marche Triomphale* on five occasions, the *Nocturne* and *Saltarelle* on four, and one or other version of the *Étude in C#* on three. One might, therefore, take Smith's claim that the 1830s saw "the end of Alkan's career as a virtuoso" with a pinch of salt. Whilst his concerts in the 1840s were not the virtuosic crowd-pleasers of those of some of his contemporaries, and he increasingly favoured the inclusion of chamber works and the classics, there still remained a good sprinkling of virtuosity. His performances of the *Saltarelle* were evidently hugely popular (see the reports below), and one can but imagine his virtuosity in the swashbuckling *Marche Triomphale*.

Performances of Alkan's works by others in the 1840s

An indication of the popularity of Alkan's work is the extent to which they were played more widely. A short notice in *La France Musicale* of 10 Mar 1844 (p. 79) reports:

"The *Nocturne* and *Saltarelle* for piano, played by C. V. Alkan with such brilliant success at the latest concert of *La France Musicale*, have only just been published, but already their first print is sold out."

This enthusiasm may be tempered a little when one realises that the publisher of these works in Paris (*Bureau central de musique*) had as its music editors the Escudier brothers, one of whom (Léon) was also an editor and director of *La France Musicale*.

¹³ Presumably in a two-piano arrangement for eight hands. IMSLP list several 4-hand arrangements, but no 8-hander.

¹⁴ None of Beethoven's solo piano sonatas are listed as being in *A minor*. Given that Massart played at this concert, the listing probably refers to a violin sonata, perhaps no 4, op. 23.

¹⁵ Joseph Lambert Massart was a Belgian violinist who had played with Alkan in the 1830s. He was allegedly the favourite pupil and protégé of Kreutzer, dedicatee of the Beethoven sonata op. 47.

¹⁶ The slow movements of both *Concerti da Camera* are headed *Adagio* rather than *Andante*. From the reviewer's description (see last entry under *Étude in C#* below) it almost certainly refers to *Andante avec Sourdines*. In view of the theory that this *Andante* may be from a lost 3rd *Concerto da Camera* (e.g., Smith, 1987, pp. 13-14) the reference as "Andante from his concerto" is particularly germane.

¹⁷ Weber published 6 Violin Sonatas as op. 10. There is no indication of which one they played.

¹⁸ Likely candidates are the sonatas K378 or K454.

¹⁹ Allyre Bureau (1810-1859) was French politician and composer, said to have brought the first ever piano to Dallas, Texas.

Table 2: Frequency of performances by Alkan of his works

Work	No	Concerts
2 nd Concerto da Camera (op. 10/2)	1	7
Étude in C# (op. 13/2)/Andante avec Sourdines	3	4 10 14
Trois morceaux dans le genre pathétique (op. 15)	1	10
Étude in B minor (probably op. 16/3)	1	4
Le Preux (op. 17)	1	8
Nocturne (op. 22)	4	3 4 5 7
Saltarelle (op. 23)	4	4 5 7 10
Air de ballet (op. 24/2)	3	4 5 7
Alleluia (op. 25)	2	3 7
Marche funèbre (op. 26)	2	9 15
Le Chemin de Fer (op. 27)	1	8
Marche Triomphale (op. 27)	5	8 9 10 15 17
Préludes (op. 31, nos 11-14)	1	17
Air à cinq temps (from op. 32)	1	17
La Pâque	1	3
Beethoven: Allegretto from 7 th Symphony (tr. 8 hands)	1	10
Mozart: Minuet from Gmi symphony (tr.)	2	7 17
Haydn: Andante from Symphony 36 (tr.)	1	17
Gluck: Chœur des Scythes (tr.)	1	17
Idylle	1	3
La romance du Phare d'Eddystone	1	9

As described by Smith (1976, p. 34), Joséphine Martin²⁰ was an advocate of Alkan's works in 1844, when she is described as a student of Zimmerman (she was about 22 at the time). As well as performing the *Saltarelle* at a number of concerts, she also played the *Nocturne*, *Gigue* and *Air de Ballet* (e.g., in Toulouse, FM 26 May 1844, p. 168). Her performance earlier the same month in Montpellier seems to have attracted particular enthusiasm. After listing the composers represented (Beethoven, Thalberg, Herz, Chopin, Alkan, Prudent, Mendelssohn), the reviewer continues:

“But the pieces which have above all fired the enthusiasm of music lovers are Alkan's *Nocturne* and *Saltarelle*, which she played for the first time. Interrupted at each reprise by frenetic applause, they were followed by ovations for more than five minutes. Behold, a great triumph for the composer and his brilliant interpreter.” (FM 19 May 1844, p. 159)

The *Saltarelle* was also a favourite of the pianist Aglaé Masson²¹, who played it in Baden, Germany on 11 August 1844 (FM, 11 Aug 1844, p. 248), in Paris on 18 December 1844 (FM 15 Dec 1844, p. 361) and some years later on 25 March 1849 (RGM 1 Apr 1849, p. 103), where she also played *Une Nuit d'Été* (included as no 7 in *Les Mois*). She would have been only 17 or 18 at the time of the earlier performances. Alkan dedicated the fourth book of *Chants* (op. 67) to Aglaé Massart (as she was then known).

The final person appearing in the periodicals as a performer of Alkan's works is the dedicatee of the first book of *Chants* (op. 38), Léon Honoré (1818-1874). Both of the listings are for performances in Russia: he played “an unpublished march” in St Petersburg in October 1846 (probably either *Marche funèbre* or *Marche triomphale*, which were not published until 1846), and several of the *Préludes* in Moscow in August 1847. The reviewer reports that:

“Mr Honoré, talented pianist, has given several concerts here, with ever increasing success. The pieces that received the most votes, of those he performed, were several preludes by Mr Alkan, which were asked to be repeated several times, and that have already even been arranged for voice.”

As far as we know, no vocal arrangements of the preludes have survived. Honoré seems to have had a strong Russian link, as he emigrated to Moscow where he taught Nikolai Zverev (1832-1893),

²⁰ Joséphine Martin (1822-1905) had a successful career as a pianist, teacher and composer. The most detailed biography we have found (in German) is at: www.sophie-drinker-institut.de/martin-josephine (accessed November 2018).

²¹ Aglaé Masson (1827-1887) was a pupil of Louis Adam at the Paris Conservatoire. Like Joséphine, she had success as a pianist, teacher and composer, directing piano classes at the Conservatoire. In 1849 she married the violinist Joseph Lambert Massart, with whom Alkan had performed in the 1830s as well as in some of the concerts listed here (13 & 14). Following her marriage she was known as Louise Aglaé Massart. While it may be a coincidence that Aglaé shared a surname with Elisa Masson, who we consider sang *La Romance du Phare d'Eddystone*, it is possible that the two were related and part of musical Parisian family.

Rachmaninoff's teacher from 1885 (Martyn, 1990, p. 363). It is of interest that Rachmaninoff played Alkan in public, including the *Marche funèbre*²².

Descriptions or reviews of specific works

Some, but not all, of Alkan's performances were reviewed in the two periodicals. In this section we extract descriptions and appraisals of the works played. As far as possible, we have separated these from more general reviews of Alkan's *playing* (summarised in the following section). We have not included here reviews of Alkan's works which were published independent of a particular concert²³. The works are ordered by opus number.

2nd Concerto da Camera [first two movements]. "This composition, full of taste and distinction, produced the effect of a charming dream; the richest of inspiration, the most delicate of grace, the most brilliant effects, the most coquettish sensibility, all of this was brought together. Hence, this was applauded three to four times with an uncommon warmth." (FM 28 Apr 1844, pp. 131-132)

Étude in C#, op. 13/2. "The étude in C sharp is a pretty and simple melody that is varied upon in a most ingenious way. In one of these variations, the hands go up and down the keyboard from flat to sharp and inversely from sharp to flat, while playing clustered chords, and one does not quite understand at first by which trick the notes of the melody seem to depart from the chord and then meet again and join up in forming among each other this movement of going and coming. Behold a new form, one which gives rise to charming effects." (FM 3 Mar 1844, p. 66)

"Alkan was asked to repeat a sumptuous étude in C sharp, accompanied by a double quartet. This was a true masterpiece" (FM 4 May 1845, pp. 138-9)

"The *andante* of his concerto is ravishing. Is this Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* that Alkan wanted to paint for us? One would gladly believe it when listening to these misty harmonies, these mild and, in a manner of speaking, transparent chords, spread nonchalantly across the keyboard: like pearls which Dew shakes from her hair and scatters onto the blades of grass and the fresh flowers." (RGM 19 April 1846, p. 124)

Scherzo no 3 (études de bravoure), op. 16/3. "The étude in B minor is of much inferior quality, even if its introduction is charming; but in the middle of the second movement there is a phrasing that is too common and that brings it down." (FM 3 Mar 1844, p.66)

Le Preux, op. 17. "We have heard three new compositions of Alkan, *la Marche héroïque* [trionphale], *le Preux*, and *le Chemin de fer*, Since Weber, probably nothing more beautiful or more original has been produced." (FM 20 Oct 1844, p. 300)

Nocturne, op. 22. "The *Nocturne* is a poetic reverie, melancholic, suave. It strolls through exquisite modulations, bringing forth a melody from which arises a passion full of gentleness and tenderness. There are here infinite delicacies that, fortunately enough, escape the confines of dreary critical analysis. When the composer repeats his first motif, the melody of which I speak reappears and serves it as sort of countersubject. The two melodies interlace sensuously and balance each other in their graceful contours and their free and flexible rhythms." (FM 3 Mar 1844, p. 66)

"The *Nocturne* – of a calm and melancholic character – brought infinite pleasure (FM 28 Apr 1844, pp. 131-132)

Saltarelle, op. 23. "The *Saltarelle* has the immense merit that it is lively, moving, spirited, full of a coquettish and spiritual fantasy, without ever losing its essentially musical character. The charm of this sort of caprice is all too often born not out of its idea but out of the quickness of its rhythm, that moves you through its recurring leaps despite yourself. Here, however, the idea always dominates; it always has its intrinsic value, and it is always distinguished." (FM 3 Mar 1844, p. 66)

"Two of these pieces he was asked unanimously to play again, so the pianist had to start again his *Saltarelle*, which is the most original and most poetic composition we have ever heard" (FM 17 Mar 1844, p. 84)

"With regards to the *Saltarelle*, it provoked such enthusiasm that the public jumped to their feet and with loud cries demanded it to be played again. The second time it had the same success. This *Salterelle* is definitely the most ravishing fantasy which a pianist's imagination can come up with." (FM 28 Apr 1844, pp. 131-132)

²² See *Alkan Society Bulletin*, 91 (2015), p. 7

²³ These include a review by Léon Kreutzer (RGM 11 Jan 1846, pp 13-14), focussing mainly on the *Duo pour piano et violon* (op. 21) and the lost orchestral symphony and a review by Fétis (RGM 25 Jul 1847, pp 244-246) of the *Marche funèbre*, the *Marche triomphale* and the *Préludes*.

“The Saltarelle, which nowadays all pianists perform (with varying ability), provoked unanimous applause” (FM 4 May 1845, pp. 138-9)

Air de ballet, étude dans le style ancien, op. 24/2. “The étude in the ancient style is of a forthright pace and a marked rhythm. It presents a sort of mélange of the magisterial genre of the minuets of yore and of some more modern developments. This piece is interrupted by an episode of lighter character, one that brings to mind the old *airs de ballet* of Gluck. This splendid piece contains, in sum, traditions of old Christmases and of character dances – which is both solemn and naïve.” (FM 3 Mar 1844, p. 66)

“...he also repeated his *Air de ballet* ... and indeed, the effect of these two pieces [*Saltarelle* & *Air de ballet*] was colossal.” (FM 3 Mar 1844, p. 66)

“Nothing is as original, graceful and moving as these delicious pieces (opp. 22, 24/2, 25). The *Air de ballet* produced a great effect” (FM 28 Apr 1844, pp. 131-132)

Alleluia, op. 25. “The *Alleluia* is a piece of a more strict style; it has a remarkable religious character; the form of this music pleases us in that it cuts through the high level of trivia that overwhelms our ears daily.” (FM 28 Apr 1844, pp. 131-132)

Marche funèbre, op. 26. “The *Marche funèbre* (...) is a piece in a clear style, well written, but a bit cold” (RGM 9 Mar 1845, p.77)

“We liked especially the *Marche funèbre* and the *Marche triomphale*, both of the most beautiful effect” (FM 4 May 1845, pp. 138-139)

Le Chemin de Fer, op. 27. See comments on *Le Preux*

Marche Triomphale, op. 27. See comments on *Le Preux* and on *Marche Funèbre*

“A piece that we know already, [in which] he threw all his treasures, all the pomp of a rich and grandiose harmony, and all the effects and contrasts of a brilliant sonority” (RGM 13 May 1849, p. 147)

Préludes, op. 31, nos 11-14. “The pieces that he [Alkan] performs for his listeners always exhale a retrospective scent, even those composed by him. *Le temps qui n’est plus, J’étais endormie, mais mon cœur veillait*, and *Dans le genre gothique*, are little études or preludes that are ravishing in terms of form, style and colour.” (RGM 13 May 1849, p. 147)

Air à cinq temps (from op. 32). “There is a kind of naïve colour and ingenious rhythm to the *Air à cinq temps*” (RGM 13 May 1849, p. 147)

La Romance du Phare d’Eddystone. “The *Romance* (...) was very well sung by Mlle Masson, and is a pretty and modest flower of a melody” (RGM 9 Mar 1845, p. 77)

From Partitions pour piano, 1er série (Mozart: Minuet from Gmi symphony; Haydn: Andante Symphony 36; Gluck: Chœur des Scythes). “His arrangements of symphonies of Haydn and Mozart, and *le chœur des Scythes de l’Iphénie en Tauride* by Gluck, are model summaries of our old musical scores.” (RGM 13 May 1849, p. 147)

Reception to Alkan’s performances

A few of the comments on specific works, listed above, include reactions by the audience to his performances. In most cases both the reactions and the descriptions are extremely positive. In addition, performances of his works by others seem to have been very well received. In this section we look in more depth at the evidence from the two periodicals on reactions to Alkan’s playing.

When Alkan re-emerged onto the concert scene in spring of 1843, the RGM welcomed him back with mixed feelings. While the compositions Alkan played at a concert in May [1]²⁴ were said to be “very pretty, even very good”, Alkan was said to have lost the spark of his precocious childhood, the passion, the juvenile ardour, and the desire to become a star (RGM 7 May 1843, pp. 157-8). However it would not take long for Alkan to impress the reviewers on his return. By late 1843 and early 1844, FM had enthusiastically taken up the composer’s endorsement. A remarkable concert [3] review published on New Year’s Eve oozed excitement. It was written “in haste, still under the impression that [Alkan] left upon us after an audition which lasted no less than two hours”. Alkan was unreservedly placed at the head of a French “reactionary movement” that opposed the German school of pianistic bombast. He was presented to the readers as “a talent full of youth”, “a pianist of superior rank”, even “a genius”, who,

²⁴ Numbers in square brackets in this section refer to the number allocated to each concert in Table 1.

with his admirable manner of executing sung passages, arpeggios and chords “opens up a new road into composition and performing.” The reviewer further praised Alkan’s originality:

“...this intelligent blend of notes, harmonised by his play, has an exquisite effect. His melodies are happy and varied, with infinite grace; yes, there is some singularity, but never does it degenerate into the bizarre. If we were to compare Alkan’s music to that of other pianists, we would recognise a powerful individuality. As a performer, he is so original that we should not compare him to any of our great artists, for he resembles none of them.” (FM 31 Dec 1843, pp. 425-426)

At this point, the FM’s reviewer certainly considered that Alkan had “a future to come”, even if he apparently was willing to play only for connoisseurs. Two months later, FM took on the challenge to introduce Alkan to the wider public, as they chose him to headline a concert offered to the periodical’s subscribers on 27 February 1844 [4]. Alkan was said to have refused to make an appearance in public up to that point, but nevertheless belonged “amongst today’s celebrities in terms of performance and composition” (FM 25 Feb 1844, p. 57). Afterwards, the influential critic Joseph d’Ortigue²⁵ took it upon himself to review the concert in the most positive of terms. “There are here”, he concluded after analysing several of Alkan’s pieces individually, “infinite delicacies that, fortunately enough, escape the confines of dreary critical analysis (...). I say it loudly, it is a great talent, that of Mr Charles-Valentin Alkan, it is an eminent talent, in a class of its own” (FM 3 Mar 1844, p. 66).

The faith shown by *Le France Musicale* in Alkan seems to have been amply justified. Soon after Alkan performed his *Nocturne* and *Saltarelle* for the first time to the public, their first print sold out in no time. The periodical editors were proud to say that “this extraordinary popularity, which can only be compared with that of the *Étude in A* by Thalberg when it appeared, proves that the admirable talent of Alkan has aroused a great deal of enthusiasm.” Once more, Alkan’s talent was “guaranteed to remain in fashion” (FM 10 Mar 1844, p. 79). Alkan’s success among his peers continued at a soirée at Zimmerman’s the following week [5]. Here, he was lauded as a “great pianist, an admirable composer, to whom fell the honours of the soirée.” The reviewer had “rarely witnessed such a complete triumph”, during which Alkan was asked to repeat both the *Saltarelle* (“the most original and most poetic composition we have ever heard”) and the *Air de ballet*. The effect of both pieces was described as “colossal”, and Alkan’s style was praised for an originality that resembled “neither Thalberg, Chopin, Liszt, Prudent nor Döhler – all these princes of the piano.” The conviction that Alkan was achieving his breakthrough remained unwavering. His music was believed to “reunite elements that are and will remain in high fashion: the purity, the noble style, the melodic grace, the energy, in one word, everything that moves, charms, and impassions” (FM 17 March 1844, p. 84). In commenting on the same soirée, the reviewer for the RGM agreed that Alkan was “a skilled pianist”, whose compositions “reveal the hand of the master” (RGM 17 March 1844, p. 96).

Alkan’s performance at Érard’s [7], one month later, captured the hearts of “a large, but elegant and selected audience”, including Alexandre Dumas, Liszt, Chopin and Georges Sand. Afterwards, Escudier, writing for FM, announced that a star was born:

“This musician, who, until then, had remained more or less unknown to the musical world, suddenly revealed himself to have such brilliant qualities that one cannot hesitate in pronouncing his superiority. (...) Alkan is nothing more or less than an artist of genius. (...) Alkan’s talent has burst on the scene. (...) We all listened with true interest, and several times the performer was interrupted by unanimous bravos. (...) Behold a success, a great success, that places as of now Alkan among the first rank of pianists and composers.” (FM 28 Apr 1844, pp. 131-132)

There is no doubt that Alkan, during those first months of 1844, found himself on the verge of something special, both as a composer and a player. The editors of FM continued to heap praise on him (“a composer of the first rank”, “a splendid performer who astonishes you with his elegance, his ease of playing, his passion and his unbelievable verve”; FM 20 Oct 1844, p. 300). In October 1844, after Alkan’s latest compositions were said to have had an “immense and well-deserved success”, the music critics were eagerly looking forward to the next concert season: “Encouraged by a reception full of enthusiasm that the concert public gave him last year, the great artist has understood that he must present himself this winter with new masterpieces.” One reviewer at the private event in October [8] assured readers after hearing the two marches (*Héroïque* and *Funèbre*) that he had “never heard anything written for the

²⁵ D’Ortigue (1802-1866) was a French musicologist, critic and journalist who wrote for several of the Parisian periodicals, edited *Le Ménestrel* from 1863 and published early biographies of Berlioz and Liszt.

piano that is more beautiful.” These new compositions were of “a nature to stir the masses and to satisfy at the same time the more demanding experts” (FM 27 Oct 1844, p. 310). At this point, Alkan seems to have been full of energy and planning for the next year. In November, FM announced the upcoming publication of his four-handed *Fantaisie sur Don Juan* (op. 26) as well as his two studies *Le Preux* (op. 17) and *Le Chemin de Fer* (op. 27). He was also reported to have finished his orchestral symphony, “which he very much hopes will draw success, and which he hopes to find the opportunity to play before winter is over.” (FM 3 Nov 1844, p. 318).

Alkan continued to perform in early 1845 [9 & 10] (though, sadly, not the symphony) and reviews continued to be overwhelmingly positive. Even the RGM – typically less extravagant in singing Alkan’s praises in 1843 and 1844 – lauded his accomplishments as “one of the best pianists of the *École française*” (RGM 9 Mar 1845, p. 77), who had “such a marked individuality” and was “always a pleasure to listen to, even after having heard all the other pianists” (RGM 27 Apr 1845, p. 135). Looking back at the musical winter season of 1845, FM listed 74 recitals in total, two of which were Alkan’s concerts and which were singled out for critical review. The concerts were said “to have produced their usual excitement”, during which Alkan was asked to repeat both his “sumptuous” *Étude in C sharp* and his *Saltarelle*. The audience “did not spare its applause”, with people “clapping their hands with Italian fervour” (FM 4 May 1845, pp. 138-139). A concert in April of the next year [15] was described in similar terms, with the audience “showering him with applause” (RGM 5 April 1846, p. 109) for compositions that were “infinitely remarkable” (RGM 19 April 1846, p. 124). At the close of 1846, the music critic Henri Blanchard added his tribute, acknowledging his “high opinion of this composer and performer” (RGM 5 Dec 1846, p. 390).

Why, then, did this undoubted critical success not lead to a further blossoming of his career? Following his appearance in the spring of 1846 he pretty much disappears from the Parisian periodicals (at least as a performer) other than his concert of May 1849²⁶. Earlier in the 1840s, some critics thought that Alkan’s career problems were merely down to the public hearing him perform too rarely (FM 3 Mar 1844, p. 66). They assured their readers that they would soon “share all our admiration for him (...) which he is already the subject of amongst connoisseurs” (FM 31 Dec 1843, pp. 425-426). By the late 1840s, however, there was a feeling that Alkan had let the opportunity slip. In March 1848, one reviewer wrote that Alkan was a pianist of great merit, but one “whom amateurs will always have to reproach themselves not to have known.” The aura of unfulfilled potential permeate the next few lines: “We remember having heard him in 1831, when he was but 18 years of age; already he had the *Conservatoire* applaud him in a concerto of his own composing. Since a few years, the public’s attention has been drawn again to him, but once again, only artists have been able to understand this pianist’s worth...” (FM 5 Mar 1848, p. 69)²⁷ While in December 1843, Alkan was “a name that is, perhaps, unknown to many of our readers” (FM 31 Dec 1843, pp. 425-6), half a decade later, it might have seemed to Alkan that precious little had changed.

Apart from the paucity of his public performances, how else might we explain Alkan’s struggle to establish his name? One reason might be Alkan’s individual musical style. While his originality made him stand out amongst his peers, it distanced him from popular taste. The composer’s struggles for popularity went hand in hand with the critical praise he received for not letting himself be guided by the whims of fashion, for resisting “the ever changing fantasies of the public”, and for “cutting through the high level of trivia that overwhelms our ears daily” (FM 28 Apr 1844, 131-132). Even his staunchest supporters in *La France Musicale* admitted that his music was of “some singularity”, and that “it is not easy to appreciate music that is so rich with difficulties of all natures” (FM 31 Dec 1843, pp. 425-426). According to Joseph d’Ortigue, Alkan’s compositions “are distinct from the styles of the day, brought into vogue by soloists. It follows from this that one or two concerts do not suffice, and that the public is confused and does not understand” (FM 3 Mar 1844, p. 66).

²⁶ The event was well reviewed: “Mr Alkan, a confident artist, classical pianist before anything else, is nevertheless also a progressive artist”. The audience included Giacomo Meyerbeer as well as three leading artists in Paris: Eugène Delacroix, Léon Cogniet and Ary Scheffer.

²⁷ The subsequent part is interesting as it confirms what Alkan’s most popular works were at the time: *...this artist’s value [is] nourished by strong études, of whom the compositions have a peculiar cachet. His concertos, his études, his Saltarelle – which one would be right to compare with Prudent’s Séguedille – and his Air de ballet dans le style ancien, are those of his works that are the most widely known. His Étude-fantaisie for the left hand only is perhaps the most remarkable piece ever written in its genre* (FM 5 Mar 1848, p. 69).

Another possible reason can be gleaned from comments on Alkan's personality. His reluctance to appear in public was at first put down to "excessive modesty" (FM 31 Dec 1843, pp. 425-426 and RGM 14 April 1844, p. 134) and shyness. Indeed, he reminded d'Ortigue of "the sort of exquisites which require silence and intimacy, which, so to speak, fade and vanish when drawn into the open, like those charming flowers, aptly called *belles de nuit*, that close in on themselves under bright light, but reveal their fresh calyx at night and turn the evening breeze heavy with their scent" (FM 3 Mar 1844, p. 66). Increasingly, Alkan was criticised for deliberately keeping his audience at a distance. When performing, d'Ortigue continued, he became too absorbed, losing himself in abstract thinking of an indecisive, obstinate nature that descended into cold, systematic monotony. He was preoccupied much more with his own impressions than with those of his audience. "While he possesses mechanical technique profoundly, Mr Alkan still has to learn (...) to communicate spirit and warmth through his performance" (RGM 4 May 1845, p. 140). D'Ortigue's final comments epitomise this aspect of Alkan's performance style:

"He looks down on that great art of making concessions; he looks down on easy success. He could obtain it but his artistic conscience would not rate it fully. His is a brusque and shy nature, timid on the one hand, too proud on the other hand to make advances towards the public. And in this he is wrong, terribly wrong. He must fight. When he performs, he must play with abandon, engage himself more. It is necessary to establish that mysterious communication that creates a bond between artist and audience, that ties the audience to the artist. It is necessary also to let flow that fluid, magnetic resonance through which everything that comes forth from the artist's soul finds an echo in the listener's own noble soul. Let Mr Alkan do this, and I for one will respond to him from the public." (FM 3 Mar 1844, p. 66)

D'Ortigue was not the only one to point to Alkan's personality to explain his career problems. In this, he was joined by two other influential music critics, the French composer Léon Kreutzer and the Belgian musicologist François-Joseph Fétis. Kreutzer reckoned Alkan among the "misanthropes of the musical world", those who are far superior to many of the more popular, less talented musicians, and who, in sadness and disgust, cut themselves off from the world, refusing to abase themselves to the whims of the mass. Kreutzer understood the problems that young composers faced in having their works performed and published in Paris (he referred specifically to Alkan's unpublished symphony), but he felt that Alkan was not doing enough to overcome adversity in the way that, for example, Berlioz had done (RGM 11 Jan 1846, pp. 13-14). In 1847, Fétis, with whom Alkan corresponded on occasion, similarly wrote an article in the RGM to warn Alkan of those talented composers who had never quite made it – such as Robert Cambert, Emanuel Bach, Johann Zumsteg and Alexandre Boëly – as they succumbed to their frustration of seeing mediocre musicians build a career on crowd pleasers. Instead of showing contempt for his times, while retiring from the world, Alkan was encouraged by Fétis to overcome the melancholy in his life and music. If he lacked appreciation, Fétis asked, was this not partly his own fault? Did he not waver in the face of obstacles, rather than attack them with vigour? Alkan's melancholy, Fétis argued, would never convince the populace: "[melancholy] is but appreciated by the souls of the elite, since most among them suffer, or have suffered, from it. But they are in small number compared to the mass. And so everywhere those with heart and instinct who play or listen to Alkan's music say: 'This is beautiful and sincere.' But the people, and especially the musical populace, do not understand a thing and they do not trouble to listen carefully." Fétis ended with a plea to Alkan to change his erroneous ways:

"Unfortunately, he hems in his thought in small frames; when he composes, he seems to abandon himself to reveries rather than endeavour to conquer success. May he forgive me for telling him that, in this, he is wrong. An artist is a missionary, he owes it to himself, and to his time and era, to allow his creative abilities to develop in any way they can. God does not bestow such talents without the obligation to make use of them." (RGM 25 Jul 1847, pp. 244-246)

Fétis condemned the musical "charlatanism" (he called it *la maladie de notre temps*) that was smothering true talent such as Alkan's. And while both he and Kreutzer criticised artists who shunned the limelight, their comments reveal that Alkan's "misanthropy" was not uncommon among young, under-appreciated musicians, who turned their back on the world in frustration and disappointment. Along with D'Ortigue, however, both Kreutzer and Fétis encouraged him to keep fighting for the recognition he deserved. Interestingly, Alkan replied to Fétis on the very same day that the latter's critical piece appeared in the RGM. Thanking Fétis profoundly for his positive review – "so much more meaningful than what is usually published in the vulgar musical press" – Alkan took notice of Fétis' well-meant admonition, admitting that he had not published much yet due to reasons "which you seem to have

guessed at already” (Wangermée, pp. 240-241). While thus admitting to his melancholy getting the better of him, Alkan’s bitterness at the world remained. In 1848, he was overlooked for the vacancy of Head of Piano at the *Conservatoire* by his own teacher, Zimmerman. Yet again, Alkan felt that an inferior musician, Antoine-François Marmontel, had received what should have befallen him. When he wrote to Fétis on 6 November 1852, his words exuded the glum melancholy that led the following year to his self-imposed virtual seclusion for two decades:

“I am burning up without light. I cannot even console myself with the thought that I got the best out of myself, that which nature perhaps bestowed on me. I find myself ill-served by fate.” (Wangermée pp. 315-316)

In conclusion, we have summarised evidence for the great acclaim that followed Alkan’s compositions and performances in the 1840s, and the views of contemporary critics and musicians on why he was unable, or unwilling, to sustain this success. The compositions that he (and others) played in public are ones that nowadays are considered almost to be pre-cursors to his later masterpieces. For instance, Smith (1976, p. 51) rather harshly states that in the mid-1850s “his reputation as a composer still rested on a shallow salon piece, the celebrated *Saltarelle*, which had by now become the inevitable concluding item in every other young French pianist’s repertoire and was quickly wearing itself to death”. The publication of both the *Grande Sonate* in 1847 and the major key études the following year had passed more or less unnoticed. Perhaps if circumstances, or the quirks of Alkan’s personality, had been different and he had sustained his stellar success, the direction of his future compositions would have taken a different – and perhaps more sunny – direction. But would the flood of magnificent works from the late 1850s onwards which we now know ever have been written?

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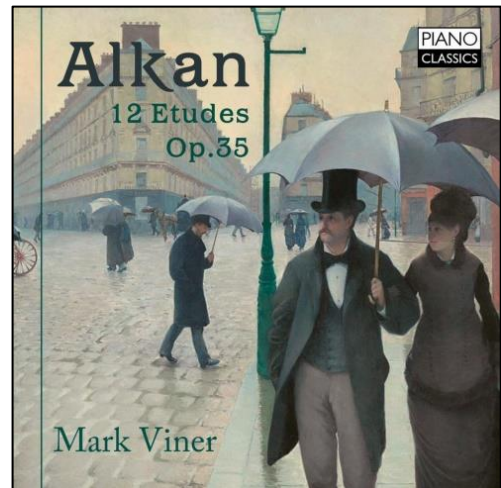
CD review

Alkan: Douze Etudes dans tous les tons majeurs (op. 35)

Mark Viner, piano

Piano classics PCL 10127, recorded December 2016, released November 2017

1	<i>Allegretto</i>	2'30
2	<i>Allegro</i>	2'37
3	<i>Andantino</i>	6'42
4	<i>Presto</i>	4'45
5	<i>Allegro barbaro</i>	2'45
6	<i>Allegramente</i>	1'59
7	L'incendie au village voisin <i>Adagio - Allegro moderato - Andante</i>	10'43
8	<i>Lento appassionato</i>	5'19
9	Contrapunctus <i>Amplement</i>	5'58
10	Chant d'amour - Chant de mort <i>Adagio</i>	10'46
11	<i>Posément</i>	8'47
12	<i>Andando</i>	5'30



Reviewed by Richard Shaw©

This time last year, I wrote briefly about Mark Viner's new CD of all twelve Op. 35 Etudes, strongly recommending it as a great Christmas present for all music lovers. A year on, I am every bit as dazzled and beguiled by this very special recording and once again strongly recommend readers to stock up on the CD (or download) for themselves and their kith and kin.

Commenting on even a small proportion of the fine points in each track could kill the magic of this wonderful CD stone dead (and make for a very lengthy essay). Suffice to say, listeners are in for many a treat in each track. Take just the *Allegro barbaro* on track 5, for example. This gets a barnstorming performance, thrilling for the sheer energy and momentum of the playing (and writing), for the dynamism and shock of the contrasting ideas and colours, and for the superb selection and portrayal of the various quasi-orchestral colours and textures. Under Mark Viner's hands (and guided by his conductor's mind) the opening theme (*ff*) in thunderous double octaves is driven forwards relentlessly, illuminated with dramatic stabbing accents. The colouring then changes in an instant; the left hand (marked '*piano*' and '*con una certa espressione*') takes on the octave idea, accompanied by *sostenuto* chords in the right hand. This is classic Alkan: something's going to happen – but what?... The opening music returns (without preparation, for maximum contrast). The next idea contrasts trombone-like chords in the left hand accompanied by delicate repeating octaves (hopping delicately from one register to another), beautifully coloured and balanced in this performance. After a relentless whirring of accented scales, the music closes '*furiosissimo*', the right hand adding a whirlwind of semiquavers to the stamped octaves of the left hand. Characteristically, there is no release for the great momentum generated throughout the piece: the music simply crashes out. Although the study is clearly written in F major, only white notes are used. Alkan relishes the oddity of the raised 4th (B natural) of the scale, with its pagan associations. This adds extra difficulty for the pianist: with the black-note scaffolding removed, even greater precision is required.

This is virtuoso playing (and etude writing) of the best kind. The considerable technical challenges posed in every etude are swept aside and we are treated to performances of real imagination and flair throughout the CD. A fine achievement!

Letter to the editor

Sir,

I'd like to put on record my gratitude to Mark Viner and Tyler Hay for their performance (in Ealing on 12th October, 2018) of Alkan's op. 69 *Luther Impromptu* in Roger Smalley's expert re-arrangement for two pianos of the pedalier score. The journey through some of Alkan's oddest and 'far-sighted' variations and most unbuttoned music on this occasion was very gratifying and exciting, as were the sharply drawn contrasts found in Alkan's shorter piece *Benedictus* which had been idiomatically re-configured by the duo from the pedalier score.

Congratulations and thank you.

I encourage other such duos to follow this example. Perhaps these are the two gentlemen most suited to tackle the re-arrangement of Nos 1 and 10 of the Opus 66 pedalier preludes omitted by Vianna da Motta. No 10 would have made a very characteristically Alkanian postscript to the Ealing concert.

Has the society yet reached an agreement with Roger Smalley's estate to publish these works?

Yours faithfully,

Richard Murphy, London

Distractions and diversions

Solution to Prize Crossword number 3 (in Bulletin 96)

C	O	M	M	E	L	E	V	E	N	T		O
O		A		E		I					O	N
M		D	O		A	L	L			R	U	E
A	D			S	P	E	L	L	S		V	
	I			C		A		O			E	
M	A	R	C	H	E	F	U	N	E	B	R	E
	B			E			E				T	
C	O	N	T	R	A	P	U	N	C	T	U	S
	L			Z		O		U			R	
	I			V	O	I	S	I	N		E	D
A	C	T			M	E	R			F	A	A
P	O				A		O			G		R
E		L	I	N	C	E	N	D	I	E	A	U

Congratulations to all members who sent in correct solutions.

Prize Crossword number 4 (Set by En Songe)

Notes: Solutions to clues marked * are names of the pictured deceased pianists, all performers of Alkan's works (either forename & surname, initial & surname or surname only). Not all pictured pianists feature in the crossword. Some pianists are referenced in the clues using the letters (a) to (p), from top left and working round clockwise.

All clues are cryptic, making use of double meanings, anagrams, follow-ons etc.

Send solutions to the editor to arrive by 1st Feb 2019. You may also submit names of the pictured pianists. The solution with the correct crossword and the most correctly named pianists will win a choice of either Volume 1 or Volume 2 of Kevin Bowyer's collection of Alkan's organ works.

Contact:
 treasurer@alkansociety.org,
 or Nick Hammond, Alkan Society, Woodend House, High Stittenham, York YO60 7TW, UK

Across

- 1 *Pianola king, hurled a boar? (6, 5)
- 9 Roman count of 1^{er} *Recueil d'Impromptus* (2)
- 10 What you're seeking for the pictures above (5)
- 12 *First concerto release, initially high definition, no, jog on (4, 5)
- 13, 26 *Cut a deal with *Around the World in 80 Days* creator played in Bechstein Hall (5, 5)
- 14 See 19 ac
- 16 Neither your, her nor his (2)
- 17 Alternative spelling of that studious feast (4)
- 19, 14 *Lethal new army don, caped keyboard wizard (7, 9)
- 20 Exhumed inside for Scottish philosopher (4)
- 22, 6 dn, 30 dn I a guru? ISO-speak for Guam, Ukraine, Iran (2, 2, 2)

- 24 *Inept ogre in early radio broadcasts (4, 5)
- 26 See 13 ac
- 27 *Stolen dog, renowned duettist (9)
- 29 Palindromic note (5)
- 32 That's Ireland (2)
- 33 *Alkan champion crazily shot mandril (6, 5)

Down

- 2 An ancestral oboe has maw (1, 5)
- 3 Just when you expect this, "*venit caligo*" in op.35/10 (5)
- 4 Alternate David storage based on 3 dn (3)
- 5 A year's record from Annaliese (5)
- 6 See 22 ac
- 7 Properties in op.35/7 reduced to these? (6)
- 8 Concerning the 2nd note? (2)

- 11 First initials of (b) and (a) grip (j)'s last for water therapy (3)
- 12 *Keep top and tail job, lotto cash: student of (d) (1, 5)
- 15 Optic holds (g)'s (or (l)'s, or (o)'s) first initial, for Jane who finally reaches Rochester (4)
- 17 Fringe: topless fugue (BWV548) (4)
- 18 Size of *Marche Villageoise* (6)
- 21 In more prized fleece (6)
- 23 Extreme, but mostly in (6)
- 24 Electroencephalogram, mother? (3, 2)
- 25 Confused dunes seen on naturist beach? (5)
- 26 Vigour, when reflected is a thousand more than 9 across (3)
- 28 Cover in validly (3)
- 30 See 22 ac
- 31 À la mode (2)

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The Alkan Society

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

Registered Charity
no. 276199



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

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



About Alkan

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

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

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As a member you:

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

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