

THE ALKAN SOCIETY

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I am sorry that this bulletin has been so long delayed: the life of a teacher does not become easier, though I expect that this is true for most other occupations too.

HAROLD TRUSCOTT

We are sorry to record the death last October of the composer and critic Harold Truscott. His range of interests was formidable: the Guardian obituary mentioned Busoni, Clementi, Dussek, Medtner, Franz Schmidt and Tovey, to which the Independent (written by our member Martin Anderson) added Reger, Bantock, Brun, Burkhard, Korngold, Kipinen, Pfitzner and Rubbra. He spoke to the Alkan Society on more than one occasion, including a fascinating analysis of the Concerto for solo piano. He wrote for many publications and was the author of books on Beethoven's late quartets and Schmidt's orchestral music. His compositions included seventeen piano sonatas, eight of which were recorded by Peter Jacobs for Altarus Records. A CD of five chamber works is in preparation. It was Truscott who introduced the BBC producer Robert Simpson to the music of Havergal Brian, and the Brian Society arranged two 75th birthday concerts for him in 1989.

Ronald Smith tells a splendid story of the occasion when Robert Simpson persuaded him to take his ARCM, accompanying him to the RCM to ensure that he did. "After being incarcerated with the examiners for what seemed an eternity, an incredulous young woman rushed out saying 'They've got a candidate in there for whom they cannot find a sight-reading test he doesn't already know by heart - including all the Algernon Ashton sonatas!'"

BROADCASTS

There have been a few Alkan broadcasts this year; unfortunately it is hard to obtain information in advance and one has to keep a keen eye on the Radio Times. Our member Averil Kovacs persuaded Brian Kay to play one of the three Marches for piano duet on his Sunday morning programme, though not the one she recommended. Ian Lake included one Impromptu in 5-4 time from Op. 32 in a recital of impromptus by Vorisek, Fauré, Glazunov,

Berkeley and others. Although it is a short piece, it is quite a rarity which I had neither heard before nor seen in print.

Anthony Goldstone and Caroline Clemmow will soon be heard playing the Benedictus in Roger Smalley's arrangement for two pianos in a broadcast from Manchester.

Marc-André Hamelin was heard in a programme of Haydn and Liszt from St John's. In his programme there with the cellist Sophie Rolland a few days later, it was mentioned that he was to record Alkan's Grande Sonate for the BBC in Birmingham. This was broadcast several months later, unfortunately at 2 p.m. mid-week. As might be expected, it was a sensational performance: the first two movements were extremely fast and accurate, and he chose excellent tempi for the next two. The Sonata is quite well represented on record, but a version from Hamelin would certainly be welcome: he has a deep understanding of the music and a technique which makes light work of anything Alkan can produce.

Music by our member Dave Smith was heard in a late-night broadcast. "Al Contrario", played with great intensity by John Tilbury, is a massive, slow piece which draws extensively on three movements in G sharp minor by Alkan: notably the last movement of the Sonata and "Morituri salutant" from the Esquisses.

CONCERTS

There have been a small number of Alkan works heard in public. Ronald Smith included some pieces in his recital in Maidstone which was to be recorded by the BBC. The date was postponed because of a bomb scare, a frustrating sign of the times.

Nikolai Demidenko has given a major series of six concerts at the Wigmore Hall, devised by Ates Orga and entitled "Piano Masterworks". The fourth recital included the two Caprices Op. 50, "Capriccio alla soldatesca" and "Le tambour bat aux champs". The concerts were sold out long in advance but perhaps some members were fortunate.

Thomas Wakefield, a player well known to our members, gave a recital at St John's in March which included his own transcription of Tchaikovsky's fifth symphony.

Jack Gibbons's Gershwin recital mentioned in the last Bulletin was greeted with great enthusiasm. Since then he has been heard on the radio and featured in a Times article, and two CDs on the ASV label, entitled "The Authentic George Gershwin" have appeared. Jack has also received excellent reviews for his playing in Constant Lambert's "Rio Grande" and in Milhaud's "Le Carnaval d'Aix", both on Hyperion. There is to be another Gershwin evening in the Queen Elizabeth Hall on Sunday 15th August at 7.45 p.m. He is also playing an all-Chopin programme at the Wigmore Hall in July.

RECORDINGS

Laurent Martin's CD of the complete Esquisses has appeared at last on the Marco Polo label. With forty-nine pieces to hear, it is doubtful whether any single performer will satisfy everyone, but this is a well-played set, and Martin has the necessary technique for the more demanding pieces. The sound is a little disappointing, but tolerable. The CD can be obtained from Brian Doyle, using the new order form enclosed with this Bulletin.

Marc-André Hamelin's recording of the Concerto is now available on the Music and Arts label (CD-724), and will need no further recommendation. This CD is also on the new order form.

Olli Mustonen's CD of the Alkan and Shostakovich Preludes was chosen as the Best Instrumental Recording by the "Gramophone". Our French colleagues continue to dislike this version of the Preludes, but this award carries great prestige in Britain and will have given some welcome publicity to the music. To quote from the magazine, "The Alkan is rich in quirky detail. This is a disc that goes a long way towards explaining the remarkable following this composer has: Mustonen convinces in nearly everything he does that this is music to pay attention to and explore. His readings abound with insights and the recording captures it all with great clarity and immediacy." This item is also on the order form. Please make use of this convenient and money-saving service!

The chamber music is becoming almost a commonplace item on recent recordings, though alas the Nimbus set by Ronald Smith remains unreleased. The Trio Alkan claimed a narrow first place for their recording on Marco Polo 8.223383. It was well reviewed by Graham Lock in the BBC Music Magazine. He admitted to being unfamiliar with the music but described it as "boldly original...dynamic music, full of furious energy and startling leaps of mood". He even compared Alkan with Schnittke today as "a master of fragmentary form, superbly knitting together a whirl of exclamatory passions and intimate sighs." I have my reservations about the performances: some of the tempi are on the careful side (the Scherzo of the Trio particularly so), and the single CD forces the omission of most repeats. The Cello Sonata probably has the most satisfying performance, by Bernhard Schwarz (cello) and Rainer Klaas, but Kolja Lessing contributes well to the works with violin. There are good notes by Rainer Klaas, who has long been an Alkan enthusiast, and the recording should be easily obtainable in Britain. Klaas was working on further Alkan projects for his current concert season in Germany.

Another set of the chamber music appears on the French "Timpani" label no. 1C1013. The players are Dong-Suk Kang (violin), Yvan Chiffolleau (cello) and Olivier Gardon (piano). Their playing has great flair and in many ways this is a recording to be recommended. It may well be harder to obtain in Britain, however. The speeds are generally lively, enabling the inclusion of some, though not all, repeats: the first movements of the Violin Duo and the Sonate de Concert have repeats not on the Marco Polo recording, as well as all the repeats in the Trio. The lengthy repeat in the finale of the Duo, however, is not included.

Marc-André Hamelin has also released some more "mainstream" repertoire on the Music and Arts label (CD-723) entitled "Franz Liszt: Grand Romantic Virtuoso". It includes the large operatic fantasies on Bellini's "Norma" and Mozart's "Don Giovanni" both splendidly played. He also plays the Polonaise No. 2, the two concert studies "La Leggerezza" and "Un Sospiro" (with a harmonically more unusual ending than the normally published version) and the "Bénédiction de Dieu dans la Solitude".

Everything Hamelin plays seems to be worth hearing and anyone searching for unusual repertoire will be intrigued by the six sonatas of Sophie-Carmen Eckhardt-Gramatté on Altarus Records (two CDs AIR-CD-9052).

He played the third sonata (1924) in his recital in Husum, an attractive work with both Spanish and Russian flavours. Her style is difficult to pin down, but the music is full of vigour, tonal in a fairly free way, and pianistically brilliant.

Another Alkan recording which has appeared recently is the performance of the Symphonie by Egon Petri, made at Mills College in 1952 or 1953. It appears on Pearl (GEMM9966) together with short pieces by Bach Bach/Busoni, Schubert/Liszt, Chopin, Liszt, Wagner/Liszt and Verdi/Liszt. By most accounts the quality of the sound is very poor, but the historic interest of the recording will recommend it to some.

More recordings of the violin and cello sonatas have recently appeared. Husevin Sermet's recording of the cello sonata with Christoph Henkel receives much more favourable comments from our French colleagues than his solo record for Valois, reviewed in our last Bulletin: indeed it is said to be the best account of the work so far. The disc also contains the violin Duo with Tedi Papavrami: his performance is, however, of a lesser standard, with too much use of glissando, vibrato and ritardando to be taken as a sympathetic view of the work. The Trio is not included on the disc.

A further account of the violin duo, and a much more convincing one, appears on the Adda label, played by Pierre Hommage (violin) and Danielle Renaud-Chastel (piano). The other works on the disc are sonatas by Vincent d'Indy and Roussel. Unfortunately the piano sound is described as being as if recorded in an aquarium!

The last three books of "Chants", as well as "Réconciliation" Op. 42 and "Ma chère liberté / Ma chère servitude" Op. 60, are being recorded by Jacqueline Méfano, also for Adda. A disc by Laurent Martin including the Op. 76 Etudes is expected this summer from Marco Polo.

Osamu Nakamura continues to serve the Japanese market with Vols. 5 and 6 of his Alkan series for Sony. Vol. 5 contains the Op. 50 Caprices, the 3 Minuets Op. 51, Petit Conte, Quasi-Caccia Op. 53, the two Op. 60 pieces (Ma chère liberté / servitude) and Le Grillon, Op. 60bis. Vol. 6 has the 48 Esquisses Op. 63. He has recorded works by Cui, Ravina, Silas, Rubinstein and Reinecke and also plans to record the complete Saint-Saëns, including unpublished pieces, and possibly Henselt and Moszkowski.

MORE ON ALKAN'S DEATH - Hugh Macdonald

The following article first appeared in the Musical Times of March 1988 and is reprinted by kind permission of the author and the Editor.

In an earlier article in these pages (MT Jan. 1973 p. 25) I ventured to question the truth of the well-known story that Alkan died beneath a falling bookcase after reaching up for the Talmud. a story which became generally current after Humphrey Searle's 'Alkan' article appeared in "Grove 5" in 1954. My doubts were prompted by an account of Alkan's death published by Alkan's pupil Alexandre de Bertha in 1909. This reported merely that Alkan was found dead in his kitchen 'in front of his stove which he was probably going to light to cook his evening meal'. Since de Bertha's story gave no hint of an accident, it had to be preferred, I argued, to the later, more sensational account. Searle had his story from Robert Collet who in turn was told it by Isidore Philipp. I offered the guess that Philipp had been sold the tall story of the bookcase by Delaborde. Alkan's natural son.

The centenary of that melancholy death is an apt moment to review the evidence including a number of additional testimonies brought to light since my article by the researches of Richard Shaw. Ronald Smith and Jean-Yves Bras, to all of whom I am indebted for information.

The first record of Alkan's death is the official certificate of death to be found in the archives of the Mairie of Paris's 8th Arrondissement, in which Alkan resided. It reads as follows:

Charles Morhange ALKAN, unmarried, born 30 November 1813 in Paris, son of Morhange and Julie Abraham his wife (both deceased), died at his domicile 29 rue Daru on 29 March 1888 at 8 p.m. Notification was given at 3 p.m. the following day at the Mairie by Isidore Pohl, aged 47 employee, residing in Paris, 13 rue Jean Beausire, and by Jules Damlincourt, aged 37, employee, residing at 48 rue Lafitte, neither related to the deceased.

The straightforward style of entry suggests a 'natural' death, since any suspicion of an accident or foul play would require notification to have been given by the police. not by two ordinary citizens Pohl and Damlincourt (whose identities are otherwise unknown). There was no inquest.

The few obituary notices that appeared in the French press (for example the Journal des débats and Le ménestrel) make no mention of the matter of his death. The first suggestion of an accident was made by José Vianna da Motta, the Portuguese pianist. Da Motta had not known Alkan, although he was an admirer of his music and published several transcriptions of it. In an article in Der Klavierlehrer in 1900 he wrote:

Alkan's death in 1888 was especially tragic: a cupboard from which he had been about to take something fell on top of him, and since he had no-one in the house he died of exhaustion. The concierge, wondering why she had not seen him going out for several days, opened the door and found him stretched out on the floor, dead.

At the end he adds: 'I would like to take this opportunity of thanking Alkan's pupils and also Herr Philipp, who have given me the material for this sketch'. It is in fact clear that Isidore Philipp was the main, if not sole, informant.

Da Motta's story appeared twice more, significantly altered each time. In the Allgemeine Musik-Zeitung of 15 February 1901 we read:

The concierge, alarmed at not seeing Alkan going out for several days, went into his apartment and found him dead, stretched out beneath his pedal-piano: while he was reaching for an object from a cupboard the object fell on the old man and he could not get up with assistance.

In Le monde musical of 30 October 1903, this version became:

The concierge, astonished at not seeing the old maître going out, went into the apartment and found him dead on his pedal-piano: as he was looking for an object in his cupboard, the cupboard fell on the old man and crushed him.

Alexandre de Bertha's account in the Bulletin français de la S.I.M. of 15 February 1909 makes no reference to Vianna da Motta's. It runs as follows:

He was found stretched lifeless in his kitchen in front of his stove which he was probably going to light to cook his evening meal, having spent the afternoon, as he usually did, at Erard's.

Four years later, in 1913, Theodor Bolte wrote in the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik (p. 665): 'a falling bookcase in his study put an end to the helpless old man's industrious life'. Bolte did not know Alkan, but he was familiar with da Motta's article(s) and borrowed from them. His discussion of Alkan's will suggests an informant in Paris also. In 1924 H.H. Bellamann, who knew Philipp, stated simply in his article in Music & Letters (p. 251) that 'an accident in his apartment caused his death'.

So already by 1913 there was confusion and contradiction about the manner of his death. The official record implies nothing untoward but gives a fixed time of death. Da Motta and Bolte say he died in his music room (where the pedal-piano would have been): Bertha says he died in the kitchen. Da Motta says in one account that 'an object' fell on him, in another that it was the cupboard containing the object. In Bolte's account the cupboard (armoire) has become a bookcase. In one of da Motta's accounts he fell under the pedal-piano, in another he was found on top of it. Da Motta says he had not been out for several days, de Bertha says he had been to Erard's 'as usual'. De Bertha gave the date of death as 30 March, while the official certificate has the 29th.

Da Motta's accounts, second-hand from Philipp and self-contradictory in several details, are scarcely reliable testimony. Is de Bertha's any better? His, too, must be second-hand, for although he was resident in Paris and had known Alkan for many years it was evidently not he who found the body. Along with Philipp and two others, he was a pall-bearer at the funeral the following Sunday (Easter Day, 1 April) when Alkan was buried in the Jewish section of the Cimetière Montmartre. On that Sunday afternoon (it was bleak and wet, according to Ronald Smith) de Bertha and Philipp, both Hungarians, both Alkan's disciples, could scarcely have failed to discuss the manner of his death if it had been dramatic or mysterious. Yet de Bertha's account lacks all hint of sensation, which compels us to regard it as the most credible version available at that time.

Robert Collet's version was derived like da Motta's from Isidore Philipp although he heard it 40 years later. As reported by Humphrey Searle in Grove 5. it runs as follows:

He was attempting to reach for a Hebrew religious book on the top of a bookshelf when the entire bookcase fell on him and crushed him to death.

Philipp had also told Collet that he, Philipp, was one of the party who dragged Alkan's body from beneath the bookcase.

Sacheverell Sitwell, in the revised version of his "Liszt", published in 1955, reported that 'Alkan, a Rabbinical scholar, died through falling from a ladder in his library while looking for a lost Rabbinical volume'. No mention of a toppling bookcase here, it should be noted. This version of the story came from Gordon Watson, who learnt it from Egon Petri, another member, like da Motta and Philipp, of the Busoni circle.

But the most recent evidence to be published is also, happily, the most authentic. In an article entitled 'De la mort d'Alkan' in the Société Alkan's Bulletin no. 2 (February 1986), Jean-Yves Bras has published a letter written by Marie-Antoinette Colas to Louis Colas and dated 4 April 1888, six days after Alkan's death. M.-A. Colas was born in 1834. After hearing Alkan play on 27 April 1857 she decided to study with him, but did not do so until 1866-7. She played the Cello Sonata with Franchomme, and its autograph (one of very few Alkan autographs known to have survived) remains in the possession of the Colas family, along with the letter whose text is as follows:

Wednesday, 4 April 1888. Yesterday after my class I went to the music shop in the hope that Mme. Bordes, the cashier, could give me some information about Alkan's death. In truth, these are sad details, which have distressed me deeply. He died by an accident, living alone.

It was his custom to go downstairs each morning about eleven o'clock to see the concierge and get his lunch, or something to make lunch with. That day, which was, I believe, Good Friday, the concierge became anxious at not seeing him come down. She went upstairs and heard groans. He had fallen face down in the kitchen, and a very heavy umbrella-stand had fallen on top of him. He had not been able to free himself. It was supposed that he had had one of the frequent dizzy spells to which he had long been prone, and had tried to support himself on that piece of furniture.

He was picked up and carried to his bed, but he died about eight o'clock that evening. No-one knew how long he had been underneath it. Several people then came to talk to Mme. Bordes, so I left without learning anything further. Poor great toiler, who suffered so and whose heroic courage has been so little rewarded...

There is really no reason why this should not be accepted as the definitive version of Alkan's death. Yet a number of matters have still to be cleared up. First, the date of death: the official certificate can scarcely be wrong in giving the date of death as the 29th (Thursday) even though Colas said, only six days later, that it was 'I believe, last Friday'. She did at least express some doubt about it. De Bertha also gave the 30th even though he attended that funeral two days later. 21 years later, when he wrote his account, he could more easily have made the error were it not for

the curious remark 'having spent the afternoon, as he usually did, at Erard's'. Erard's was probably closed for Good Friday: in any case the last day he could have gone to Erard's is Wednesday 28 March. if Colas's account is correct. (In a sense Alkan could be said to have got the day wrong himself. Over 50 years earlier he had published a set of 12 piano pieces entitled "Les Mois". One of these, entitled "Le Mourant", is a macabre portrait of a dying man, indeed of the moment of death. The month it is ascribed to is November.)

Colas says quite clearly that the concierge became anxious on that day, suggesting that Alkan collapsed within the previous 24 hours. The 'several days' da Motta says he had not been seen must be gloss. Who found him? Colas's letter says 'on est monté, on a entendu...' which could have been the concierge alone or with help. If help it was probably Pohl and Damlincourt summoned to the concierge's aid. They had the task of notifying the authorities the following day. It was most unlikely that Philipp was at hand to drag him from under since we know Alkan had very few visitors at home, probably none.

What item of furniture fell on him? A 'very heavy umbrella-stand', says Colas. Umbrella-stands are not usually lethal! A tall hat-stand is perhaps meant. Or by 'porte-parapluie' did she mean 'armoire'? And why was it in the kitchen, next to the stove which, de Bertha tells us, Alkan was about to light? The other stories describe the lethal weapon as 'an object', 'a cupboard', 'a bookcase'. No source can be made to say it was the Talmud that crushed him, despite Ronald Smith's attribution of this theory to Raymond Lewenthal.

This is a classic case where the least fanciful story is likely to be the truth. Alkan most probably collapsed between noon on the 28th and noon on the 29th in his kitchen. In falling he clutched at a large piece of furniture which fell with him to the floor. He was unable to extricate himself until the arrival of the concierge and the rescue party. He died at 8 p.m. on the 29th.

The visit to Erard's, the bookcase, the pedal-piano, the study, the Rabbinical volume, the ladder, the several days without help, were all, I now believe, inventions, most of them emanating from Isidore Philipp, recounted over many years, with many variations, to Vianna da Motta, Theodor Bolte, H.H. Bellamann, Egon Petri, Robert Collet and, doubtless, others. Da Motta evidently had a share in the story-telling since his first version can be reconciled with Colas's without difficulty. It is far easier to embroider a fabrication than the truth: indeed fabrications are hard to repeat accurately. Ronald Smith has argued (in "Alkan: the Enigma", London, 1976, p. 74) that Philipp was incapable of such fiction, even in jest, drawing on the testimony of Phyllis Sellick and Robert Collet to support his belief. But the evidence points overwhelmingly at the more prosaic truth and at the errors of Philipp's confused if not actually mischievous memory.

It is still hard to explain why Philipp (if it was he) should need to invent any part of the story. In the bitterly anti-semitic atmosphere of the 1890s in France, it would be quite normal to tell a joke about the old recluse reaching up for the Talmud: even Izzv Philipp might be guilty of such a thing. Or was there a cover-up? Was Mme Bordes (at Erard's) instructed to circulate a dull kitchen version to suppress some bizarre and mysterious bookcase truth? Did he fall or was he pushed? Is this another of Salieri's misdeeds (after Gassmann and Mozart)? Was it a Bulgarian umbrella? Who stood to gain from his death? And just where was Delaborde during all this? Why was he not at his father's funeral? The Alkan file is evidently not yet closed.

Miscellaneous items

A supplement to Bulletin 46 was sent to members in the London area to notify them in time of some changes to the concert schedule, as well as to make a few corrections to the Bulletin. This is now enclosed for other members.

Nicholas Bell has kindly done some research on the series of Alkan recitals broadcast in 1948. On 28th July, Kvla Greenbaum played *Comme le vent*, *Scherzo diabolico* and *Le Festin d'Esopé* from Op. 39. On 2nd August, Colin Horslev played the *Symphonie*. On 13th August, Robert Collet played the major-key studies Nos. 7 in E flat (*L'incendie au village voisin*), 3 in G, 8 in A flat and 12 in E. On 18th August, Ronald Smith played the *Concerto* in a broadcast scheduled to last 35 minutes. Mr Bell thinks that he must have played the abridged version on his 1970 recording (39 minutes) and that the programme ran late...

Two publications by members:

Wilfrid Mellers has published an important account of the music of Percy Grainger, with 130 pages of text and 30 of musical illustrations. It is published by OUP at £25 hardback/ £10.95 paperback.

Marc-André Roberge's "Ferruccio Busoni: A Bio-Bibliography" has been published by Greenwood Press. ISBN 0-313-25587-3; price \$55.00 US. The book (400 pp.) contains a biographical sketch, a detailed list of works, a discography and an annotated bibliography of Busoni's writings and of the literature about him, comprising 1325 entries. There is also a guide to the contents of the editions of Busoni's writings and a list of dates, casts, and reviews of the performances of his operas.

The latest Newsletter of the Thalberg Society gives details of "Walls of Circumstance: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Music" by Eric Frederick Jensen (Scarecrow Press, 170 pp., ISBN 0-8108-2588-0, \$25.00). It contains essays on the lives and music of eleven composers: Arriaga, Burgmüller, Berwald, Pierson, Thalberg, Alkan, Monpou, Raimondi, Scambati, Goetz and Lekeu.

Frank Lioni in Holland has told me of a publication by Robert Dale Marler, "The role of the piano-etude in the works of C.V. Alkan" (University of Cincinnati, 1990, 136 pp.). Its four chapters contain (1) biographical data and examination of his other works, (2) a general discussion of the piano-etude before Alkan, with significant trends in its development, (3) the Op. 35 Etudes and (4) the Op. 39 Etudes.

Mr Lioni also mentions an article in the *Revue Internationale de Musique Française* No. 22 (Feb. 1987, pp. 71-80) which discusses a number of auto-graphs including Alkan: "Pro organo: Praeludium (?) à 4. en ut mineur, 34 bars, 16 February 1850" and wonders if it is an unknown piece. He has himself discovered, in an auto-graph album of a Dutch composer of the last century, a page inscribed by Alkan: an incomplete 32-bar Andante for piano, dated 22 May 1843 and signed "C.V. Alkan. Introduction du No. 5 des Caprices (inédit)", and thinks that this is also an unknown piece. He is writing an article for the Thalberg Society about this auto-graph book, which also contains a previously unknown drawing of Thalberg at the piano.

He mentions in connection with Rainer Klaas's article on the *Esquisses* that the melody of no. 46, *Le premier billet doux* (not 43 as in the article), could be based on Schubert's *Rosamunde - Hirtenmelodien*. He also points out that Steibelt's "Storm Rondo" is "*L'Orage précédé d'un Rondeau pastoral*", from his 3rd Piano Concerto Op. 35.

An article by Mr Lioni about Thalberg and Litolff in Holland is planned to be published in the first Thalberg Yearbook edited by Daniel Hitchcock. the Co-ordinator of the Thalberg Society.

John Wells. whose recording of Alkan organ works has been highly recommended. has sent a catalogue of publications by "newmusic/newzealand". 20 Alexis Avenue. Mt Albert. Auckland 1003. NZ (Tel. 09-849-5657). It includes four Alkan pieces for organ (Prières Op. 64. Nos. 1. 2 and 11 and the Grande Prélude Op. 66 No. 1) as well as pieces for organ. piano. cello and choir by John Wells himself. and works by other composers. mainly from New Zealand. Dr Wells has made two further recordings. of New Zealand works on RCD/RCS 1005 and of Preludes and Fugues 1-16 from Bach's "48" (played on the new Letourneau organ in Hamilton) on RCD 1006.

We end on the usual trivial note: Alkan has even reached Miles Kington's humorous column in the Independent. Headed "This story is dead. it is no more. it has ceased to be...". it begins:

I was listening to Radio 3 on Monday. and there was this thing about a giant carrot...
On Radio 3?
Yes.
Good Lord. One of Alkan's pieces. was it?
Who is Alkan?
French composer. They played a composition of his on Radio 3 the other day. It was called "Requiem for a Dead Parrot". [Close, Miles, but not close enough - Ed.]
Not dead carrot?
No.
Dead parrot? You mean as in Monty Python?
Yes.
When did Alkan live?
A hundred years ago.
So he thought of it before Monty Python?
Absolutely.
And then wrote a piece on a giant carrot?
No. though Erik Satie did write a piece in the shape of a pear...

Peter Grove
Salisbury. June/July 1993

Postscript: I believe that the "Petit Conte" has now been republished by Billaudot, as well as their edition of the Sonate de Concert for cello and piano.