



The Alkan Society

Registered Charity no. 276199

www.alkansociety.org

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Posing an explanation?

Roger Murphy (London, UK)

I have often wondered about the strangeness of Alkan's pose in the well-known photograph of him standing, with his back towards the camera and his face only slightly visible over his shoulder. He is looking away from the camera. While this gives us a great shot of his back it tells us nothing about his appearance – that is, his face.

Of course we do have a photograph of his face, but there is nothing else that can photographically be claimed to be Alkan. And so this very odd photograph has only served to deepen the idea of Alkan as a mystery man. Why on earth would Alkan enter a photographic studio and have a picture taken of his back? Well...he was Alkan we might say. What might be strange behaviour for others, just might be Alkan being himself. And we kind of fall into that way of thinking. It adds to the legend.



In fact, I propose that this famous portrait of his back is more revealing than we might imagine. And much of the idea depends on the reason why he is turned away. He isn't. I propose he is turned towards someone and this pose is the result.

Recently, when idly watching a BBC documentary (*Britain in Focus: a Photographic History*) I was startled to see a photograph (from 1860) of Prince Albert and Queen Victoria in which Prince Albert takes a pose almost identical to that of Alkan, that is, where the back and shoulder are prominent, and the face mostly obscured.

The similarity of Alkan's and Prince Albert's angled stance to the camera suggests an answer to the question: why is Alkan turned away from the camera? I suggest it is because he is looking at another person – and that this other person has been removed or cropped out of the photograph (or that he, Alkan, has been removed from the picture). Prince Albert's pose is seen as natural, because he is looking at his wife, Queen Victoria. See the full photograph here:

<https://www.rct.uk/collection/2105657/queen-victoria-1819-1901-and-prince-albert-1819-61>



Alkan's is seen as odd because he is looking at nothing.

The Prince Albert picture shows him in full upper middle-class gentleman's attire – top hat, cane (or in Alkan's case, umbrella) and dress coat. Both gentlemen are dressed as for a proper studio photograph, typically celebrating an anniversary or some special reason why they entered a photographer's studio. And there is no doubt in the Alkan picture that this is where the picture has been taken. At the foot of the Alkan background you can clearly see it is printed on a roll-up background common in photographer's studios at the time – indeed still present in some today.

For me this suggests a likelihood, or rather, an unlikelihood. Who would enter a photographer's studio dressed to the nines for a celebratory photograph and have an image taken only of their back? To suggest that that this is half of a celebratory photograph marking an event is, I think, more likely than imagining that Alkan got dressed up one day in top hat and dress-coat, entered a studio and had a special photograph taken of his back. Alkan's pose suggests that he is looking at someone, and the Prince Albert/Queen Victoria shot which results in a similar pose from Prince Albert, dated to 1860, serves to confirm this. At least it raises a significant possibility.

Where is the other half of the picture that would makes sense of Alkan's pose then?

Photographic events were not just marked by marriage unions. Birth, deaths, significant birthdays of loved ones were all marked by a studio photograph, to say nothing of *Cartes de visites* (which are what the pictures of Albert and Victoria were). How one looked at a certain moment in time – a young soldier going off to war, emigration, or any event of significance could be the excuse for a photograph. But the fact remains that Alkan's pose, half turned away from the camera, strongly suggests he is looking at someone. Who could it be?

Sadly, at this point, the very speculation which gives us a good explanation for Alkan's seemingly odd pose, doesn't really get us any further. It seems we must wait for a moment when someone will realise that Alkan's is the figure which has been removed from an existing image of another person or event to make full sense of his pose.

In the meantime, we must be content with the back. But I feel we cannot any longer believe it is an odd pose. It was a normal pose in the context. But the context has been removed from the image making it appear odd.

Photo of Albert and Victoria by John Jabez Edwin Mayall



Society news

Publication of Alkan's *Concerti da Camera*

We are pleased to announce that the work on this enormous project is drawing to a close. We have secured a distributor, the critical commentary is finalised, while the last proofs of the scores are awaiting final corrections. Cover proofs are underway and members can expect to be able to preorder their copies within the coming months.

Alkan Society on Facebook

Members' attention is drawn to the Society's growing posts on Facebook, which include several interviews with Mark Viner on his Herculean recording of the complete Alkan piano works, links to other Alkan performances, and much more to come in the near future. Search for "The Alkan Society" on Facebook and be sure to click the *Follow* button.

Membership news

Our membership currently stands at 130, although this does include a number of members who have not yet paid their 2024 dues. We are an international bunch, with 16 countries represented. About half our members are based in the UK, followed by USA (27 members), Germany (9), Australia (7), Netherlands (4), Japan, Norway and Belgium (3 each) and the remainder from Austria, China, Macao, France, Ireland, Italy and Switzerland. We have only one new member so far this year, so please encourage your friends and colleagues to join us!

Alkan's *Tropical Dream Fever*

Bradley Berg, the Society's Social Media Editor, recently arranged the *Sérénade* from *Les Mois*, op. 74, in a Brazilian style for piano four hands. Because of its significant stylistic departure from Alkan's original, Bradley titled the arrangement *Alkan's Tropical Fever Dream*. "I played Milhaud's *Scaramouche* for two pianos several years ago," Bradley wrote, "At some point since then, I thought that its Brazilian finale (itself inspired by Ernesto Nazareth's music) would mesh very nicely with the charming melody from Alkan's *Sérénade*." The structure and harmonies of the piece remain mostly identical to the original, but it has been reshaped with a characteristic Brazilian *tresillo* rhythm throughout with several improvisatory variations. A virtual performance is available on YouTube here: <https://youtu.be/9JiT1J-zU2Q?si=7BE43J-dSOdJdzl9>

Premio Alkan per il virtuosissimo pianistico romantico 2023

Mark Viner (London, UK)

Your Chairman was fortunate enough to be invited on the jury of the last Premio Alkan held on the 28th and 29th April 2023 at the Griffa & Figli Showroom, via San Rocco 5, Milan. Fellow jurors included the Italian pianist and native Milanese, Luca Ciammarughi, the Italian pianist and Vice-Director faculty member of the Imola Piano Academy, André Gallo, the Argentine pianist and professor, Daniel Rivera, and the Italian pianist and head of the jury, Vincenzo Maltempo.

The competition initially included a total of fifteen pianists, of which two withdrew, leaving thirteen in total. All candidates were heard in the marble walled auditorium of the above-mentioned piano showroom which boasts a fine Steinway. These initial stages were, regrettably, heard without audience but live-streamed and the open courtyard gardens and convivial atmosphere of the location proved a welcome tonic to the venue's inward austerity for both jury and competitor alike. As is usually the case with many such competitions requiring a compulsory work of a certain composer, the majority of candidates will 'tick the box' while only a few will reveal themselves to be advocates with a genuine interest and understanding of the composer in question. As such, we had no less than five performances of the *1er Nocturne*, op.22 (1844) though this frequency was balanced out by some rarities presented by the rest of the candidates, some of whom made one eager to hear more.

The first day began with the twenty-five year old Italian pianist, **Tommaso Boggian** (b.1998), who presented a clever programme, demonstrating shapely execution in the *Danza del terror* (1922) of Manuel de Falla (1876-1946), a great sense of layering and wonderful sense of line in the first of the *Etudes-Tableaux*, op.39 (1917) of Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943). *Scarbo*, from Maurice Ravel's (1875-1837) *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908) showed especially how Boggian knows how to play within the sound he has made but might have benefitted from a little more abandon in *fiorature* and *tremolo* passages. This was followed by an especially fine *Ondine* from Claude Debussy's (1862-1918) *2e Livre de preludes* (1913). Alkan's *Comme le vent*, the first from his *Douze Etudes dans tous les tons mineurs*, op.39 (1857) was dispatched with enviable aplomb but was subject to a regrettable compensation for the (Sic.) chords which are evidenced "as though at the sadistic crack of a whip", as Smith has it. His programme was rounded off

with a punchy and brilliant performance of the second of Nikolai Kapustin's (1937-2020) *Eight concert études*, op.40 (1984), *Toccatina*.



Members of the jury, the production team and sponsors. Back row from left: Luca Ciammarughi and André Gallo. Front row from left: Vincenzo Maltempo; Mark Viner; Eric Veron and his daughter; Daniel Rivera. Others are members of the production team or representatives of sponsoring bodies.

The second performance we heard was given by the American pianist, **Rachel Breen** (b.1996), who gave a performance of Johann-Sebastian Bach's (1685-1750) *Contrapunctus I* from his *Kunst der Fuge*, BWV 1080 (1751), Niccolai Medtner's (1880-1951), *Sonata*, op.22 (1910) and Alkan's *1er Nocturne*, op.22. A clear indebtedness to the style of Glenn Gould (1932-1982) was evidenced in the Bach while a clearer sense of the rhetoric of the Medtner would have put things into bolder relief. The Alkan might have benefitted from the sort of approach allied to John Field (1782-1837), as the tempo was somewhat wayward and, like the Medtner, suffered from occasional misjudgement of pedalling. Nonetheless, the delivery had a boldness and seriousness of purpose about it which was admirable.

The Italian pianist, **Pierpaolo Buggiani** (b.2006), was our third candidate and the youngest of the competition. He presented a programme of Alkan's *1er Nocturne*, op.22 and the *Sonata* no.2, op.14 (1913) of Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953). The Alkan, while on the fast side, had some magical sounds. The Prokofiev was stylishly conceived though a greater sense of rhetorical narrative would have made for more vivid communication. A most promising musician and one anticipates what is to come though it would be advisable that he should dispense with a few youthful habits *viz.* attacking the pedal from *above*.

The Malaysian pianist, **Julian Chan** (b.2000), was our fourth candidate and proffered an uncompromising programme of Alkan's *Ouverture de l'opéra Le Prophète de Meyerbeer* (1850) and the second movement, *Quasi-Faust*, from the *Grande Sonate*, op.33 (1847). The *Ouverture* benefitted from an aptly orchestral approach which took no prisoners! An occasional loosening of the metre in more lyrical moments, however, might have made for a more balanced conception overall. *Quasi-Faust* was treated to

a hair-raising reading which really proclaimed the mightier aspects of the work. Playing subsequent vibrations within principal chords might have mitigated the sound from superseding itself occasionally and a similar treatment of long lines might have been enhanced by a similar approach but otherwise, most engaging.

The Russian pianist, **Ekaterina Chebotareva** (b.1997), was our next performer who opened the afternoon session and gave a dignified reading of nos.4 & 7 from Rachmaninoff's *Etudes-tableaux*, op.33 (1914) followed by *Esprits-follets* from Alkan's *3e Recueil de chants*, op.65 (1864), both fine performances which might have benefitted from an occasional thinning out of textures which were occasionally overcrowded. This was followed by an impressive account of Ravel's *La valse* where she did an especially fine job of navigating the work's opening textures and later demonstrated an admirable transparency of tone and shrewd deployment of the middle pedal. A very fine performance, indeed.

The sixth candidate was the Italian pianist, **Martina Consonni** (b.1997), who opened with Felix Mendelssohn's (1809-1847) *Rondo capriccioso*, op.14 (1830), demonstrating a beautiful sense of line in the opening. This was followed by a fiery reading of one of only two works of Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) we heard during the competition, the *Scherzo*, op.31 (1837) which evidenced a clear sense of structure. This was followed by the third performance, so far, of Alkan's *1er Nocturne*, op.22. Again, a greater understanding of this music's kinship with Field - a private rather than public expression of sentiment - is the key to such pieces and *tempi* were somewhat on the fast side. The closing work we heard was *Rigoletto de Verdi*, the third of Liszt's *Trois Paraphrases de concert*, S.434 (1860) which, though very fine, might have benefitted from a more enhanced sense of harmonic awareness.

The Taiwanese pianist, **Chia-Yang Hsu** (b.1999), was the seventh and penultimate candidate of the first day who opened with an engaging and stylish account of Bach's *Chromatische fantasie und fuge*, BWV 903 (first published in 1802) demonstrating a clear personal response to the score though the fugue, with his octave couplings *alla-Busoni* might have divided opinions in some quarters (!). This was followed by the third, *Andantino*, from the *Douze Etudes dans tous les tons majeurs*, op.35 (1847) which, while a sensitive reading of the piece, was occasionally marred by some messy pedalling where bass notes were often not caught. A greater emphasis of the *sospirato* left hand gestures at the reprise would also have been welcomed but it was encouraging to see this piece being taken by someone who is clearly a discerning musician. His programme concluded with the sixth and final number of Liszt's *Grandes Etudes de Paganini*, S.141 (1851) marred only by extraneous noises incurred by the youthful habit of tapping on the pedal from above.

Our eighth and final candidate for the day was the Taiwanese pianist, **Yi-Chung Huang** (b.2002) who gave a musically chaotic account of Liszt's *Réminiscences de Lucrezia Borgia*, S.400 (1849). This was followed by a simply astonishing performance of Alkan's *Le preux, étude de concert*, op.17 (1844). Every single difficulty in this work was tackled head-on and dispatched with beguiling aplomb and the verve he generated by the end was overwhelming. That said, the Alkan isn't in any way a musically challenging work and, were it not for the many reservations to be had in the Liszt, the outcome of the competition might have been different.

The second day of the competition opened with our eighth candidate, the Chinese pianist, **Yiheng Li** (b.1996). Despite the programme listing Liszt's *Rigoletto de Verdi*, S.434/3 we only heard Alkan's *1er Nocturne*, op.22 (in its fourth rendition) and the Ludwig van Beethoven's *Grande Sonate pathétique*, op.13 (1799) despite only the first movement being indicated. The Alkan, like many other performances we heard, lacked requisite simplicity and the middle section was overly blustery. The bass C sharp variant present in b.73 of the Schott pressing was happily observed, however. The Beethoven fared better, though generally, might have benefitted from a greater sense of integrity in terms of orchestration while the first movement required a tighter structural cohesion commanded by the *grave* passages which interpolate and bookend the movement.

The ninth candidate was the Vietnamese pianist, **Duc Anh Luu** (1993). He opened with the first of the *48 Motifs*, op.63 (1861), *La vision*, followed by the closing *Barcarolle* from the *3e Recueil de chants*, op.65 (1864). *La vision* was regrettably beset with memory problems throughout - and here the present writer knows just how un-straightforward this very straightforward-sounding piece can be in performance -

though this was no doubt down to nerves. The *Barcarolle* fared better though its ending was subjected to a strange rewrite. The *Sonetto 104 del Petrarca*, the fifth piece from Liszt's *Deuxième Année de Pèlerinage*, S.161 (1858), contained some beautiful sounds though I questioned the necessity of a bass B flat at b.43. The ninth of Rachmaninoff's *Études-Tableaux*, op.33 was one of the most impressive things of the programme, boasting a tremendous sound before closing with Ravel's *La valse* in which he seemed fully settled and especially adept; the only minor quibble being the (clearly) not uncommon habit of tapping on the pedal in moments of overexcitement.

The Italian pianist, **Riccardo Martinelli** (b.2003) was our tenth and second youngest candidate and clearly a very sensitive musician. He treated us to a fifth and final rendition of Alkan's *1er Nocturne*, op.22 and, undoubtedly, was the finest he heard during the competition. It was played with warmth and sensitivity even if he couldn't quite muster the courage to observe Alkan's long pedal marking towards the end. Here followed a performance of Liszt's *Rapsodie espagnole*, S.254 (1867) which was full of sensitivity if occasionally over controlled and marred by some mis-peddallings which would be mitigated if, yet again, the pedal wasn't attacked from a great height! He seemed to find his feet in the final item on the programme, Medtner's *Sonata tragica* - the last piece from the second cycle of *Forgotten melodies*, op.39 (1922) with a sensitive and impassioned reading which might have been enhanced only by a greater sense of abandon - not always an easy thing to conjure in such a clinical setting, of course.

The twelfth and penultimate candidate was the Japanese pianist, **Mayaka Nakagawa** (b.1993), who opened with an exceptional performance of *Vivante* and *Esprits-follets* from Alkan's *3e Recueil de chants*, op.65 - beautiful sound and enviable control, this was music making of the highest order. This was followed by an excellent *Étude* no.6 from Chopin's *Études*, op.25 (1837) and closed by a fabulous performance of Prokofiev's *Sonata* no.2, op.14 which exhibited a broad palette of colour and dispatched with enviable control and aplomb.

The thirteenth, final, and only British candidate of the competition was pianist **Max Pemberton** (b.2000) who, in complete contrast, proffered Alkan's *2e Nocturne*, op.57 no.1 (1859) followed by *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este*, the fourth piece from Liszt's *Troisième Année de Pèlerinage*, S.161 (1883) and Aleksandr Scriabin's (1872-1915) *Sonata* no.5, op.53 (1910). It was here that I wondered whether a reordering of programme might have facilitated matters as nerves seemed to impede somewhat and the Alkan didn't seem to be adequately prepared. The Liszt fared better but would have benefitted from a more discerning use of the pedal as was the case with much of the Scriabin though in this final piece, he really captured the spirit of the work despite an overcrowding of textures occasionally convoluting the work's dramatic narrative.

Jury deliberation was, mercifully, short and, despite some difficult decisions, it wasn't long before we reached the unanimous decision that the prize should go to Mayaka Nakagawa¹ who later appeared alongside Vincenzo Maltempo at the gala concert of the competition held on the 29th May in Milan. Mr. Maltempo opened the event with a performance of the *Introduction au no.5 des caprices* [op.13/3] (written in 1843) followed by the aforementioned *Andante romantique* (1837), the solo transcription of the *2e Concerto da camera* (1859), the second movement of the Concerto for solo piano, the ninth of the *Douze Études dans tous les tons mineurs*, op.39 (1857), followed by the twelfth, *Le festin d'Esopé*, of the same set. Ms. Nakagawa happily added the *Barcarolle* to the selection of pieces she presented from op.65, followed by the second *Sonata*, K.280 of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) and ended with the *Nocturne*, op.27 no.2 and *Barcarolle*, op.60 of Chopin before joining Mr. Maltempo in a performance of the first of Alkan's *Trois Marches*, op.40 (1857).

¹ Mayaka Nakagawa's performance can be heard at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfQ9O5Nq7cw

Brave Bracey

Richard Murphy (London, UK)

Subject – the first-ever record platter of Alkan’s *Symphonie*, made in a studio in San Francisco in April 1963, published by VLR Records, and performed by Jean-Paul Bracey (J-P B) (born about 1942).

I asked Ronald Smith if he could send me a copy of this recording, which he did, on a cassette. What he sent included the sound of the needle being placed on the LP and the run-in groove before the music starts. The same mechanisms are heard at the end of Side A after the Minuet and Trio, and at the start of Side B. He lifts the needle before the Kabalevsky starts. From start to finish, I detect no element of pitch variation which would be expected from a record damaged by weather – heat or damp. It’s not a noiseless surface, with minor elements of distortion appearing in the loudest passages (possibly through use) but nothing disrupts the flow. Smith’s LP is an eminently playable vehicle for the performance.

Neither in the LP notes nor in J-P B’s correspondence in later years is there any acknowledgement of abridgement or cuts to the music text. Given their disfiguring character, perhaps it’s not something to advertise. Also, as this is the first recording, who would know.

Cuts list:

I use the Morishita edition of the piece because it has bar numbers. Timings are from iTunes.

1st Movt

- Bars 1-109 – this repeat is omitted, as other performers have.
- Bars 279 – 314 (7:14) – missing. *Why those 35 bars?*
- No studio engineer editing
- Bars 342 – 354 (7:45) – missing. *Why those 12 bars?*
- This is poorly edited at the entry of the ‘military’ variation

2nd Movt

- Bars 75 – 103 (13:07). *Why those 28 bars?*
- No studio engineer editing

3rd Movt

- 148 bars of repeats are missing. *Why?*

4th Movt

- Bars 81 – 93 (Track 2 @ 1:22) are missing. *Why those 12 bars?*
- Engineered edit
- Bars 262 – 394 (Track 2 @ 3:58) are missing. *Why those 132 bars?*
- Engineered edit

In 1963, it may have been acceptable to ignore repeat signs within double bars – after all, those notes have already been heard once. That explains the missing 257 bars from Movts 1 and 3.

But who applied the pressure and made the decisions to delete 219 bars completely from this composition? In the light of no musical explanation for the cuts, the scenario could be as follows

The producers looked at the metronome marks which gives the number of beats per minute and added them together to get to the total length for the performance, and decided that it would fit on the LP with the Kabalevsky (c. 16 mins). Giving the go-ahead for the project they didn’t know that the tempos used by J-P B were to be somewhat slower, especially in outer movements.

I can imagine panic in the studio as cut after cut was asked for from J-P B, leading in the end to the completely desperate slashing of the last movement. Alkan asks for 410 bars – we are left with 266.

J-P B had won VLR’s recording competition, the producers asking for pieces that had never been recorded. At just 19, J-P B had been given the piece to learn, and this recording was made in late 1962(?).

He mentions having played the piece about 16 times after the recording, but not before it, so this could have been his first performance. I'd like to hear an unofficial recording of his later performances.

I wonder how much help J-PB received from his teachers, or supervision from his record producer. They didn't seem to take into account Alkan's tempo directions. The outer movements are given 108 and 96 bpm and he plays at 66 and 69. Neither did they notice a good number of misreadings. A couple really stand out – in Movt 2, bars 21 and 22 (10:05 – 10:16) where new rhythms are invented, and most gloriously a few minutes later at bar 122 (14:05) when 11 B flats are played as naturals in a bar of written B flat chords. The B diminished chord substitutions are a shock, and yet still work harmonically with the next bar. But they're not what Alkan wrote.

Performance

1st Movt

The already slowish pulse often bends to very slow under the pressure from J-P B's personal rubato, lingering over tops of phrases and cadences in a way that sounds very old fashioned these days. At 2:01 the bass note doesn't change as it should each half bar. From bar 140 (3:49) the piece starts to get into its stride with J-P B responding well to the drama inherent in the writing. At 7:35 there's more of a sprint happening, almost reaching the directed marking, and the last couple of pages are clangorously played with great spirit.

2nd Movt

The accented first note in each bar of the opening is melody is unusual, ignoring the two-bar phrase marks, as is the lack of left hand accents on its return. Overall, I find this performance somewhat anaemic when I usually look forward to a tableau with perspectives in timbre and character. These are not given a chance to appear with the cuts.

3rd Movt

Technically very sound in both sections, but with that personal rubato that holds up the action of the movement. He manages to bring out the lower line melody in the Trio.

4th Movt

The opening is very limply presented but picks up some backbone along the way, though still feeling quite pedestrian. The slow tempo is a big drawback. At 3:02, the excitement is there but it's not a whirlwind, and then the savage cut happens.

What was it like for John-Paul Bracey at 19?

He was going to study with one of the greats – Egon Petri with his enormous experience, and who then dies. Petri's two pupils who know the piece encourage him to learn it. He wins a local competition to record. He remembers what a tough undertaking it was to learn the piece, and he had no performance history of it at all. We presume he played the work in its entirety for the record people, but we don't know how new to him it still was. And then swingeing cuts were asked for.

If the scenario outlined holds any water, then it was an unusually testing recording debut.

Perhaps a vocal version of one of Alkan's Préludes?

The editors recently received an email from Society member Seth Blacklock as follows:

I was perusing historical Viennese newspapers yesterday (curious about Viennese performances of Alkan) and came across an intriguing note of an *a cappella* performance of a piece by Alkan I had not previously known. Now, there's a slight possibility that it is not the same Alkan, but I find it hard to believe.

The piece in question, which, incidentally, was programmed alongside a piece by Hiller, is called *Aus dem hohen Liede Salomons* and it was performed by a female vocal quartet called the *Damen-Vocal-quartett*, led by Anna Regan-Schimon.

Maybe this is an arrangement of the piano prelude *J'étais endormie...* but it could well be a previously unknown work altogether.

The concert took place on 8th January 1882, and the source is from *Deutsche Kunst und Musik-Zeitung*¹. The notion that the piece was based on an Alkan prelude is quite plausible. We know that some of Alkan's preludes were arranged for voice from a review in the *Paris Revue & Gazette* of 29 August 1847 (p288) of a Léon Honoré concert in Moscow:

“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.” (reported in Hammond & Keygnaert, *Alkan Society Bulletin*, 97, 2017, 8-17).

However, there is no indication of which preludes were arranged, or indeed by whom. As Mark Viner states in his sleeve notes for his CD of the 25 Préludes (Piano Classics PCL 10189), the mention of the arrangements is tantalising, but no such arrangements have so far emerged. But perhaps the Vienna performance was indeed of a vocal arrangement of prelude 13, *J'étais endormie, mais mon Coeur veillait...* (*Cantique des Cantiques*. 5=2). *Cantique des Cantiques*, or the Song of Songs, is also known as the Song of Solomon, matching the German *Aus dem hohen Liede Salomons* in the Vienna programme.

There are some further clues. Anna Regan received training from, amongst others, Julius Stockhausen, who was a one-time pupil of Alkan. She married Adolf Schimon (21 years her senior) in 1872. From 1837, Adolf had studied piano and composition at the *Conservatoire de Paris* with Henri Montan Berton and Fromental Halévy, and so is likely to have known of, or even met, Alkan. Maybe he had some hand in the arrangements, but this is pure speculation. The fact that the Vienna concert took place some 35 years after mention of the vocal arrangements in the *Paris Revue & Gazette* is difficult to explain unless Schimon or someone else provided some kind of link.

At the end of the 1870s Anna Schimon-Regan moved to Munich, where she led a women's vocal quartet known as *Das münchener Damenquartett* (the Munich Women's Quartet), the performers at the Vienna concert. One can surmise from the contemporary picture of the quartet that they had quite a reputation. Anna's image is the one on the right.



¹ Link: <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno-plus?aid=dmz&datum=1882&page=22&size=45&qid=WASXYSEX1GVJFFY0I4LJ4VK89E5D80>

Music publication review

Alkan: Paix à la paix: Hymne, pour voix seule

Edited by Brian Inglis

Available from Composers Edition, published 2022

<https://composersedition.com/charles-valentin-alkan-edited-brian-inglis-paix-a-la-paix/>

Reviewed by David Conway

Our Bulletin no. 90 (January 2014) carried a report on this Alkan oddity – to call it an eccentricity would risk attributing some musical value to it, which the present writer cannot bring himself to do, although it may claim value in illuminating something of the composer’s character. It was written in response to a competition by the organizers of the 1867 Paris Exhibition for a choral anthem, that “will be written for a single voice line. Composers should seek to produce a grand and rhythmic chant, bringing together as far as possible the conditions that will make it popular.” Composers could choose one of

two texts entitled ‘*Hymne de la paix*’ (one by François Coppée, the other by Gustave Choquet). Alkan’s entry was completely lost (indeed unknown) until Hugh Macdonald discovered it by chance in the *Archive nationale* (where he was searching for the entry of Bizet).

This attempt to launch a new, if more pacific, *Marseillaise* was however doomed to failure. Just over 800 entries were received (a third of them, including Alkan’s, setting Coppée). All were rejected by the jury, which reported: “400 were written by brave amateurs lacking the rudiments of music [...] of the 400 remaining to be examined, we found about 200 that failed the laws of composition or prosody; 100 which, while not incorrect, offered no merit; 50 were more or less mediocre [...] a few revealed some real merit in composition, but they did not meet the proposed conditions. Not one fulfilled the conditions of the programme.”

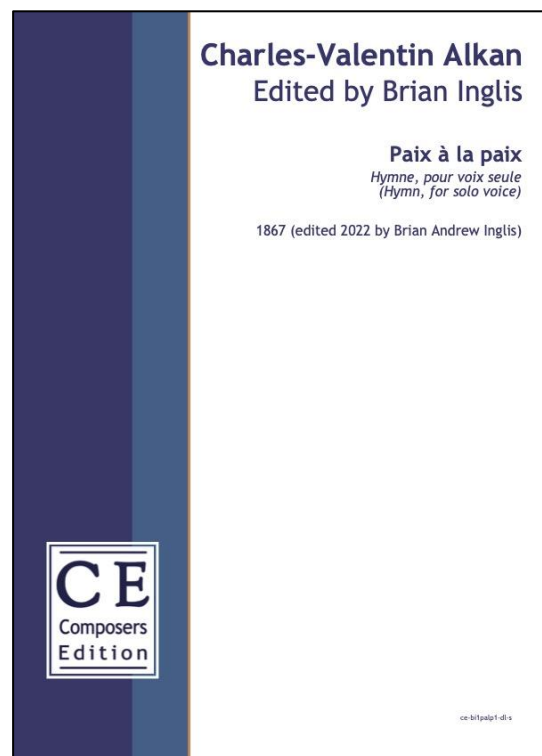
Doubtless Alkan’s submission was not assisted by his inexplicable decision to alter the title to ‘Paix à la paix’. But the notion that a mass unaccompanied choir would cope blithely with intervals of a diminished 7th or major 10th, or take kindly to the insertion of an occasional semitone passing note between supertonic and mediant, was surely overoptimistic on Alkan’s part, and would certainly have conflicted with any hope that the piece might become ‘popular’. Coppée, by the way, turned out in later years to be a militant *Dreyfusard*, which, had Alkan been alive at the time, would have doubtless aroused his indignation.

Nonetheless it is good to see the piece in a scholarly edition edited by Brian Inglis, with full text and notation in both the original A major and a transposition to G major for those who might find that more comfortable. The English première of *Paix à la paix* was given at Middlesex University in March 2023, at a concert which also featured other Alkan works and world premières of some of the *Esquisses* inspired by Alkan encouraged by the Alkan society and performed by Richard Shaw. A video of verses 2-4 of ‘Paix à la paix’ from this performance can be found on YouTube at

<https://youtu.be/GvtvIKVqm4Y>

while a mellifluous version of a verse for solo bassoon by Robert Rønnes can be found at

<https://youtu.be/d2hAT8fU7qA>.



CD reviews

Alkan: Complete piano music Vol.6

Character pieces & Grotesqueries

Mark Viner, piano

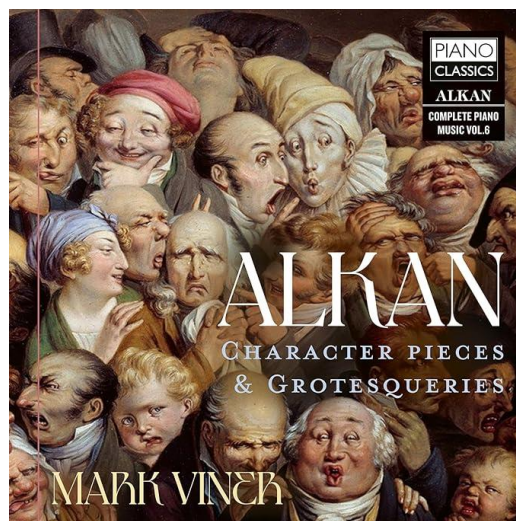
Piano Classics PCL10275, released December 2023, length 78 minutes

Recording: June 2018, November 2021 and October 2022

Contents

1	Petit Conte	4:02
2	Pour Monsieur Gurkhaus	1:11*
3&4	Jean qui pleure et Jean qui rit, due fughe da camera:	
	No 1 Jean Qui Pleure	3:22
	No 2 Jean Qui Rit	4:41*
5	Toccatina, Op.75	1:48
6	Désir. Fantaisie	4:02
7	Capriccio Alla-soldatesca, Op.50	6:47
8	Le Tambour Bat Aux Champs, esquisse Op.50bis	4:03
9	Fantasticheria	3:47
10	Chapeau Bas! Seconda Fantasticheria	8:01
11	2 Petites pièces, Op.60: 1 Ma Chère Liberté!	4:10
12	2 Petites pièces, Op.60: 2 Ma Chère Servitude!	4:58
13	Quasi-caccia, caprice Op.53	5:30
14	Le Chemin De Fer, Op.27	5:02
15	Trois petites fantasies, Op.41:I. Assez gravement	5:04
16	Trois petites fantasies, Op.41:II. Andantino	5:33
17	Trois petites fantasies, Op.41:III. Presto	6:09

* = First recordings



Reviewed by Jonathan Welsh

I have to say that I decided to listen to this disc in the wrong order! It's not usually something that I do however, I am inordinately fond of "Le Chemin De Fer" so it seemed like a good place to start. It's also one of the most treacherously difficult piano works that I've ever attempted to play. Quite how Mr Viner manages to maintain the incredible speeds that Alkan asks for is beyond me. It's also good to note that he actually observes the *smorzando* on the final page – Alkan doesn't want this particular train to suddenly screech to a halt, he wants it to gently glide to a stop, safely. The clarity in the recording also shows all of Alkan's little harmonic quirks and, especially with headphones on, the detail is incredible. This is a magnificent recording of a supremely difficult work.

I then played the rest of the disc in the correct order!

The disc begins with the rather charming and naïve sounding "Petit Conte" (Little Tale). This is a pretty little work, played magnificently here with plenty of feeling and imagination and in a way that belies its difficulty. Next follows a rarity – the first recording of a single page piece called "Pour Monsieur Gurkhaus" which is notated to be played repeatedly but here, Mr Viner wisely winds it up after 3 repeats. It's full of strange harmonic turns but is, basically, a canon and a rather sprightly and fun one at that. Quite who Mr. Gurkhaus was, we'll probably never know.

With the next two pieces, we move into two linked 'Fugues de camera' – depicting a man's journey from misery in the morning to jollity in the evening, based on a poem by Voltaire. The first piece is complex, sad and lilting and contains some very strange harmonic touches, hinting at angst and sadness. However, this doesn't last long as the second piece (here given its first recording, probably due to its extreme difficulty) is a joyous and completely bonkers re-treatment of the "Champagne" aria from Mozart's "Don Giovanni". It starts innocuously enough before cleverly integrating numerous lines and causing the pianist considerable difficulties along the way. The piece gently winds down to a false ending before

setting off in a new direction with a clever and typically Alkanian fugue (which in some places reminds me of the closing pages of the Concerto for solo piano (Op.39 no.8)). Again, the performance is absolutely flawless. Next follows a more well-known work, the tiny, late “Toccatina” which zips along at a phenomenal rate. It’s a strange little piece, full of odd key changes and some unbelievably fast and difficult piano writing. Again, this clearly presents no difficulties for Mr Viner whatsoever. Next is something a little more restrained, a little fantasy “Désir”. This is a super example of Alkan telling a story in music, the work starts with a “once upon a time” theme before evolving into a more impassioned central section which is beautiful and played with a deep sense of yearning. The opening music then returns, slightly varied to provide a rather fitting conclusion to this wonderful little creation.

I’ve long known and admired the odd structure and grotesqueness of the next piece, the “Capriccio Allasoldatesca”, published as Op.50. Here, as elsewhere, the clarity of the recording is amazing and allows the listener to appreciate the complete originality of Alkan’s writing – especially in the transition to the bouncy theme about 1’30”. It also allows you to marvel at the jaw dropping virtuosity required in this piece (and also elsewhere on the disc). The work itself is based on a poem about Napoleon’s disastrous military campaigns (thank you to the fascinating and detailed cover notes for this tidbit of information!) I think this is the best rendition I’ve ever heard of this piece, it’s by turns macabre and mocking and, in the final section, suitably religious sounding. The following work (also confusingly published as Op.50, hence the “bis” appellation added to the opus number) is another slightly mad little work, “Le Tambour Bat Aux Champs” – another piece I’ve long admired. In common with the previous piece, this also includes drum beats however here, the atmosphere is subtly different although perhaps the background inspiration is related to the previous work. It’s a strange piece, the opening is played with a sense of purpose before the crazy bugle calls and music that depicts the gradual collapse of a battle slowly unfolds. It’s a work that grows on the listener and the more you hear it, the more it fits the very apt description given in the excellent cover notes. The ending is suitably chilling and fits well with the programmatic nature of the work. It goes without saying that the playing here is marvellous and very evocative.

I’ve always liked “Fantasticheria” and its abrupt and crazy changes in mood. Its title translates as “Daydream” and this seems to fit the slightly hallucinogenic nature to some of the music here. It’s exceptionally well played and the mock heroic opening theme (which reoccurs several times) acts as a useful bridge to guide us through the piece as it develops. The last minute or so is particularly odd, some typically Alkanian pyrotechnics followed by a strange canon which provides a suitably defiant conclusion to the piece. This is sensibly followed by the even madder “Fantasticheria no.2” – with the subtitle “Chapeau Bas!” (Hats off – the epithet that Schumann applied to Chopin upon hearing his Op.2 “Variations on Mozart’s La ci darem”). This piece contains the sort of fun bounciness that is bound to put a smile on your face. The opening theme flies around the keyboard including some horribly difficult sounding octave passages in the left hand before a more settled and strange middle section, punctuated with some diversions in the high and low registers. It’s one of those pieces that you can almost feel the tune from the opening wanting to come back which it does acting as a bridging passage to a very finger twisting section which forms a rather unexpected conclusion to this piece. As the remainder of this superb disc, it’s impeccably played.

The next two works were published as a set, the first being “Ma Chère Liberté!...” with the second being “Ma Chère Servitude!...” These are two linked works which, as the notes state, show Alkan’s fondness for opposites. I really like the first of these, the opening is jolly and cheerful and then there is a complete change of mood as runs create a very strange effect. The opening theme then returns to provide some stability – and some wonderfully romantic sounding music and a beautifully judged little passage before an unexpectedly loud ending. The following work is utterly different in nature, beginning with a tune that is a sad, reflective lament in A minor. This slowly brightens in nature and then at around a minute and a half, a different, more questing theme emerges which hints at happier times. The melancholic theme returns, varied and with more background accompaniment before joyously breaking out into something different, providing a more up-beat and really rather poignant ending to this superb little work. This is one of those pieces of music that it’s possible to lose yourself in while you listen.

The thirteenth track on the disc is the “Quasi-caccia, caprice”, a very rarely recorded work (I know of only one other rendition on disc). This is another strange utterance, hinting at allusions to the Hunt and

filled with Alkan's trademark difficulties. It's broken up into several sections, perhaps the maddest of which is about 2 minutes in where there are lots of slides from one key to another and plenty of harmonic interest. The last two minutes or so are chock full of scurrying passages, fingers flying all over the keyboard and crazy modulations – this is great fun to listen to and certainly puts the pianist through their paces – full marks again to Mr Viner who plays this marvellously capriciously!

The disc ends with another of Alkan's better-known works – the *Trois petites fantasies*. I do wonder if Alkan was having a little joke here as none of them is especially little! These have been recorded several times before but I don't think I've heard quite such a jokey performance of the first of these anywhere else – the attack on the frequent *acciaccaturas* which occur frequently in the first section of the work is incredible. This soon gives way to a more peaceful settled section with a lovely melody. However, this doesn't persist for long and the bouncy opening music returns and develops into something more elegant and restrained. The difference is striking but here, the playing is so refined that the later music seems to grow organically out of what preceded it. Then follows one of Alkan's strangest utterances, a hushed almost religious sounding tune that occupies opposite ends of the keyboard and unexpectedly ends the piece in a hushed, reverential way. The second of the set ('Andantino') is another exercise with plenty of bouncy playing going on. It's a genial work however this belies the many difficulties that lurk on the page. The pace picks up after the opening theme and presents us with a strange galloping section, complete with lots of repeated notes, runs and changes of direction. Another key changes ushers in a variation of the opening theme and then a weird passage which reminds me very much of part of the 'Arietta' second movement from Beethoven's 32nd and final piano sonata (Op.111). This bounces along nicely for a while, cheerfully, before the opening theme is inverted and made into something far crazier sounding before it explodes at about 4 minutes into a melange of the theme but with interludes which seem to come from nowhere. This slowly winds down to a rather touching ending. The third of the set ('Presto') is the longest of the three and contains plenty of interesting harmonies, mainly in the form of crushed seconds. Of the three, this is my favourite due to its extreme craziness and leaping about all over the keyboard. The opening is suitably portentous and soon after, an angular theme emerges only to be developed into something far more fantastic. There are plenty of other things going on but I suggest that you just sit back and listen – it's a brilliant work with an underlying energy and power to it and is played here with the kind of thrilling edge of the seat virtuosity that makes you want to leap out of your seat. Tempi here are on the fast side (in comparison to the other recordings I have) and they are absolutely spot on. Stupendous stuff!

The cover notes are superb, well researched and full of plenty of fascinating details about the works. The recorded sound likewise is excellent and ensures that all of the notes are clearly heard. The long playing time is also of note – there is plenty of absolutely magnificent music here to investigate and stacks of equally marvellous pianism to be amazed by. Full marks again to Mark Viner for a magnificent recording and one that I shall be returning to often. I look forward to further instalments in this ongoing series!

Alkan in a Jewish context

A Pianist Explores Her Jewish Heritage

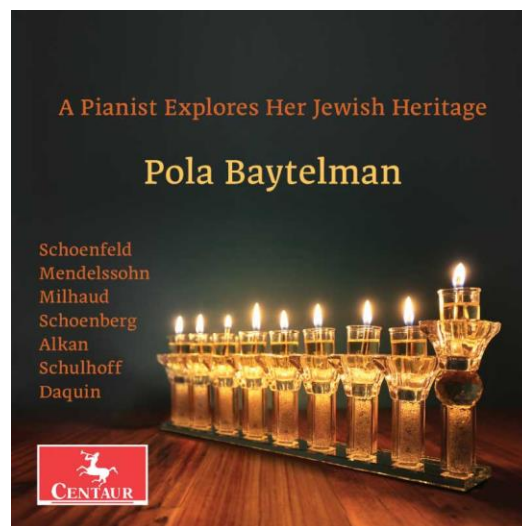
Pola Baytelman, piano

Centaur Records CRC4005, released March 2023, length 77 minutes

Contents

Paul Schoenfeld: Six Improvisations on Hassidic melodies
Felix Mendelssohn: Variations Sérieuses (Op.54)
Darius Milhaud: Saudades do Brasil (Op.67)
Arnold Schoenberg: Zwei Klaviertücke (Op.33)
Charles-Valentin Alkan: Esquisses (Op.63) nos 30, 16, 26, 10
Charles-Valentin Alkan: Préludes (Op.31) nos 6, 11, 8
Erwin Schulhoff: Cinq Études de Jazz (ca. 1920)
Louis-Claude Daquin: Pièces de Clavecin (ca. 1735)

Reviewed by David Conway (London, UK)



Pola Baytelman, born in Chile and now based in the USA, explains that her previous two CDs have explored the works of Latin American and US composers, so that ‘this third project consisting of music by Jewish composers seemed the natural next step’ in exploring her musical roots.

‘It was no simple task to choose’, she comments, but selecting pieces she personally feels strongest about has resulted in this recital of music by Paul Schoenfeld, Mendelssohn, Milhaud, Schoenberg, Schulhoff, Daquin and Alkan. There are I think two aspects of this recording which will be of interest to readers of the Bulletin – one of course is the quality of the Alkan performances, the other is the nature of their context.

Baytelman has selected seven Alkan pieces, three from the *Préludes* op. 31 (*Ancienne mélodie de la Synagogue*, *Dans le style fugué*, *Chanson de la fille au bord de la mer*), and four from the *Esquisses* op. 63 (*Petit air dolent*, *Fantaisie*, *Petit air - genre ancien*, and *Increpatio*). The performances – as of the other works on this recording – are accomplished, intelligent and informed by both wit and emotion as appropriate. Anyone new to Alkan would I think be both impressed and intrigued, not least by the climaxes of the *Chanson* and *Increpatio*. Those who already have recordings of these works will enjoy Baytelman, but may not feel any impulse to refurbish their collection.

Perhaps more interesting to discuss, in these days of the mortal sin of ‘cultural appropriation’, is to what extent these and the other works on the disc can be felt to represent ‘Jewish Heritage’. Only one of the Alkan works, the *Ancienne mélodie*, is explicitly ‘Jewish music’ (although the writer senses some Jewish inflections in the *Petit air dolent*, and the violence of *Increpatio* recalls to him the legends of the ferocious temper of his great-grandfather recounted to him in childhood). Of the other tracks, only the *Six Improvisations on Hassidic Melodies* by the American composer Paul Schoenfeld (b. 1947) written in 1985 when he was living in Israel, are specifically Jewish. These brief transcriptions in a chatty, sometime jazzy, style, make pleasant listening, although the assessment of one critic that they will “do for Hassidic music what Astor Piazzola did for the Argentine tango” seems to me a bit over-optimistic.

The other works (Mendelssohn’s *Variations Sérieuses*, six of Milhaud’s *Saudades do Brazil*, Schoenberg’s *Klavierstücke* op. 33, Schulhoff’s *Cinq études de Jazz* and two pieces by Daquin, including his famous *Le coucou*), represent a different perspective of Jews in the world of music: their facility, once socially accepted, in adapting to the cultures of their host countries. I have blathered at length on this subject in my book *Jenny in Music* (CUP, 2012) where I attribute the attraction of this spirit of *Bildung* to the Jewish tradition of cultural devotion to its extensive written heritage, a tradition easily ‘translated’ to secular cultural traditions as they were established from the 18th century onwards.

All the works on this record (including those by Alkan and Schoenfeld) reflect this transfer of allegiance. They are all, of course, thereby gross transgressions of ‘cultural appropriation’ – either by playing Jewish traditional music in equal temperament on the non-Jewish instrument of the piano; or by recreating the

popular music of other cultures (the *Saudades*, the equivalent I suppose of English students wearing sombreros to a party, or the *Cinq études de Jazz*); or by seeking to undertake a ‘breakage and entry’ approach to European traditions (Schoenberg); or by having the *chutzpah* to seek to weld the traditions of Bach with the spirit of romanticism (Mendelssohn) or by usurping a place in French keyboard schools (Daquin, Alkan).

What this all exposes – and what Baytelman’s recital make clear – is the nonsense of the ‘crime’ of cultural appropriation. European culture has always grown and developed through the exploration of novelties, and has prospered as a consequence. What links all the Jewish composers in this record, Alkan not the least, is they have been enabled by this to explore their own, their hosts’, and other cultures, and thereby have been able to enrich all of us.



Alkan: Concerto for solo piano (from Op.39)

Gerard Bouwhuis, piano

Available from performer’s website: <https://gerardbouwhuis.nl/alkan-cd/>

Released December 2021

Reviewed by Richard Murphy (London, UK)



How very refreshing, and what a very successful experiment!

Verbal description of timbre is fraught; suffice it to say that this piano seduced my ears. From the first notes, the sound is resonant and clear, and there’s a marvellously pellucid timbral quality, with every layer of music exposed. The instrument is played very resourcefully by Gerard Bouwhuis with sometimes eye-opening musical results.

We get an orchestra of reduced forces with period instruments and their colours. Bouwhuis uses little pedal so we don’t get the full-throated orchestral sound we might expect and there’s nothing aggressive or *martellato*. I welcome this ‘human scale’ performance. I never realised how much of the last movement asks for quiet playing.

Though influenced by Alkan’s preference for Sébastien Érard’s instruments, Bouwhuis chose to record the Concerto on a new design of Straight Strung grand piano by *Chris Maene* who is based in Belgium – he had considered using an *Érard* but preferred the mechanical stability of a modern instrument. All previous Concerto recordings were played on Steinway pianos, Bouwhuis maintains, and thinks they become too bombastic in the middle and lower register. The *Maene* grand delivers power with clarity.

It’s unusual to be given the utilitarian motive behind the learning and recording of a 19th century piano piece. The academic course Bouwhuis attended offered a two-year artistic research programme; so having made his reputation as a player of complex music by Finissy and Ferneyhough, Bouwhuis thought he’d learn some Alkan who has also had a fearsome reputation as a composer of ‘the impossible’, and to whose music he had been introduced by Geoffrey Douglas Madge (another Everestian via the Chopin/Godowsky Etudes). ‘Many notes, few notes, it doesn’t matter to me. I just see music.’ says Bouwhuis.

I very highly recommend this disc. Instead of both hands pounding *ff* chords simultaneously, Bouwhuis applies a very musical restraint in letting either hand take the lead, so we don’t get that full-throated roar we’re so used to, and musical lines get their place in the sun. Many passages which have previously not caught my ear suddenly appear in different timbres (e.g., in the 3rd movement at 5:00). The opening couple

of pages of the 2nd movement highlight the control of colour between melody and accompaniment. The *bel canto* touch doesn't seem forced. In the early virtuoso passages in the 1st movement, the high register has a fabulously penetrating ring – real brilliance. Those quintessentially Alkanian eight bars towards the end of the piece, from bar 227(7:26), forces me to think that I've never heard it before with Alkan's dynamic markings. The performance is full of surprises.

Bouwhuis has all the technique to cope with the demands, and more, because he knows how to control them. A couple of little caveats – a slight tendency to apply some personal *rubato* might sound out of place, such as in the opening of the 3rd movement, and the drum beats in the 2nd movement veer towards incorrect rhythms although the sound is pretty bewitching.

There is so much to learn and enjoy in this performance that it will repay repeated listening because **so much is newly coloured**. It's worth every cent, if you're not expecting or wanting a Steinway. It's not so much the piano vibrating, as the air around it, like a massive Aeolian harp. Fabulous effect. Could this be closer to Alkan's sonic ideal? It wouldn't surprise me. Thank you GB, and Chris Maene, for the revelation.



Songs without words

An Extraordinary Response to October 7th

Igor Levit, piano

Sony Classical CD 19658818982, released Jan 2024, length 43 minutes

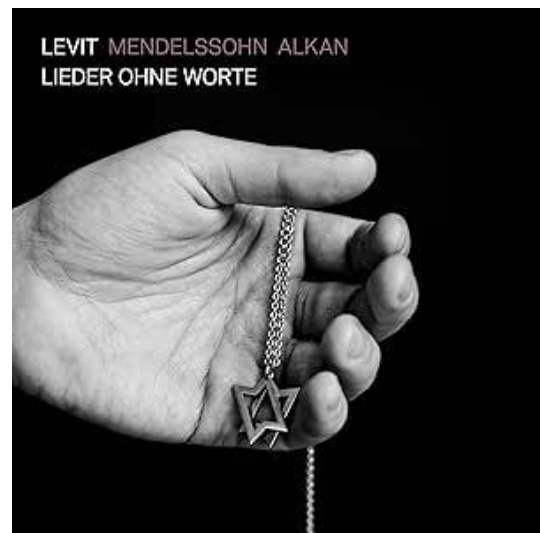
Contents

Mendelssohn: *Lieder ohne Worte*, selected from opp.19b, 30, 38, 53, 62 & 102

Alkan: *La chanson de la folle au bord de la mer*, op.31, no.8

Notes by David Conway (London, UK)

These notes are adapted from a review by David Conway published in *Jewish Renaissance*



When a well-meaning acquaintance suggested to Felix Mendelssohn that he would like to provide lyrics to the composer's *Lieder ohne Worte*, the composer protested that “what the music I love expresses to me, is not thought too *indefinite* to put into words, but, on the contrary, too *definite*.”

Igor Levit's recital of fourteen of these underrated masterpieces, together with the eerie *Song of the Madwoman by the Seashore* by Mendelssohn's French contemporary and admirer, Charles-Valentin Alkan, proves this point. The music of these pieces, as played by Levit, and the circumstances in which he made this recording, reveals and provokes emotions which words would obscure and deface.

The only programme note accompanying the CD is Levit's statement that it was made out of a “very strong inner necessity. I spent the weeks after the attack on October 7th in a mixture of speechlessness and total paralysis. And, at some point, it became clear that I had no other way than to react as an artist. I have the piano. I have my music.” The recording is “my artistic reaction – as a person, as a musician, as a Jew – to what I have felt.” Levit's proceeds from the recording are donated to charities combatting Jew-hatred in what is his now home-town of Berlin.

The music thus has to speak for itself, but in a context which Levit has defined; inevitably his selection does not include Mendelssohn's more light-hearted pieces, and the Alkan piece is heartbreaking. This is a reflective session, beautifully played, of memory, passion, regret, rage and resignation. The recording

therefore presents itself to listeners in a different manner than if we were comfortably prepared for it as usual with liner-note dates, background, analyses of structure and so forth. We must take it 'as it is'. It may thus – it did with this listener – provoke thoughts about how we listen to music and what we 'expect' from it.

For the Jewish listener there is an additional perspective. Both composers, of course, were Jewish and were of the first generation which launched the very notion of Jews as musical wizards in Europe – Mendelssohn born in 1809, Alkan in 1813. As the violence of Hamas and its consequences paradoxically heralds a new incarnation of Jew-hatred from some quarters, this music, as well as being a sequence of regret and concern, may cause Jews like myself to reflect on the nature of our attachment to European culture, of which we are simultaneously participants and onlookers, across centuries of our sometimes equivocal reception. Perhaps Alkan himself might have been moved to similar reflection. The *chanson de la folle* may be a picture of a specific agony, but it also maps that blend of despair and exasperation (and absence of consoling resolution) common to conflicts throughout history.

Levit's performance of *La chanson de la folle au bord de la mer* is available on Youtube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r16YEB87Vic>



Letter to the editor

Sir,

Writing in an American music review journal in about 2003, Adrian Corleoni opined that Steven Osborne's lately released disc of Alkan's Esquisses Op 63 'was missing the point' by being too genteel, pointing a finger at 'the conventionally exquisite' *Le Premier Billet Doux*. Corleoni lamented the lack of Irony, Satire, and Illusion. We should be shown more than just Alkan the Joker, and the fact that there was 'little bite' produced a falsification of the music.

He recommended Osamu Nakamura's recording.

Please could a Society member direct me to a place where I can listen to this recording?

Thank you,

Richard Murphy.

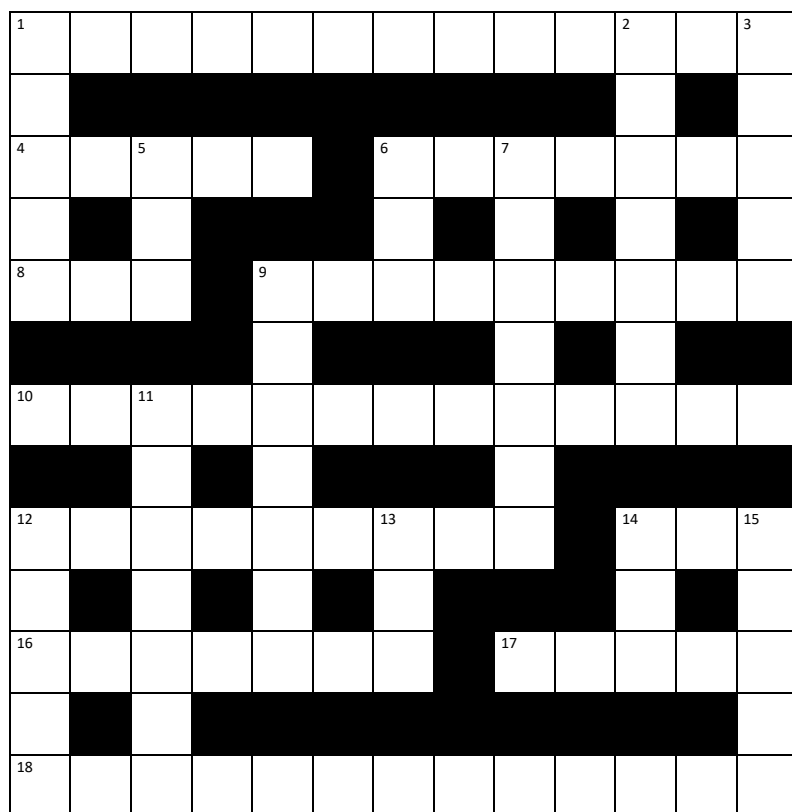
London, UK

Please send any comments to the Editors at treasurer@alkansociety.org

Distractions and diversions

Solution to Crossword number 11 (in Bulletin 104)

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

Crossword number 12 (Set by *En Songe*)**Notes:**

- Each across solution (except for *8ac*) is a performer or writer whose work has been reviewed in a recent edition of the *Bulletin* (vols 98 to 105).
- All these across clues are anagrams of the first name and surname of the individual, but the solution to be entered in the grid may be either the first and last name (indicated by [F&L] in the clue), only the last name (indicated by [L]) or the first initial and last name ([I&L]). The one exception is *10ac*, where the anagram is of the last name only.
- Other clues are cryptic in the usual manner.

Need a hint, or want to see the solution before vol 106 is issued? Send an email to *En Songe* at: EnSonge.Alkan@gmail.com

Across

- 1 Bloated snorer [F&L] (6, 7)
 4 I veto girl [L] (5)
 6 Josh greasing a hatch [L] (7)
 8 Churchyard tree in eyewash? (3)
 9 See 14 across
 10 Hinted charade [L] (6-7)
 12 Who, seabird guru? (I&L) (1, 8)
 14 & 9 Is Mr Haiti you? [F&L] (3, 9)
 16 We ale up [F&L] (4, 3)
 17 Mink raver [L] (5)
 18 Am not playable [F&L] (4, 9)

Down

- 1 A lyre race, passing the baton (5)
 2 Saint to laminate inside: often needed to perform Alkan! (7)
 3 Mixed rain a currency in Nigeria? (5)
 5 A solemn promise, musically linked to Jupiter? (3)
 6 Neither... (3)
 7 Oddly, soups as scoops: understand the lettuce, or grasp the trigonometric function (4, 3)
 9 I mew now: formal appearance, informal approval? (4, 3)
 11 Girl out, obtained web address for me (1, 3, 3)
 12 Balloons – and perhaps weasels – do this (2, 3)
 13 Headless ruse to function? (3)
 14 A craving, perhaps how paid by 14 & 9 ac (3)
 15 Even dimmer dawn for incarcerated Asian ex-cricketer and ex-prime minister (5)

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- Page 2 Society news: Publication of Alkan's *Concerti da Camera*; Alkan Society on Facebook; Membership news; Alkan's *Tropical Dream Fever*
- Page 3 Premio Alkan per il virtuosissimo pianistico romantico 2023 (Mark Viner)
- Page 7 Brave Bracey (Richard Murphy)
- Page 9 Perhaps a vocal version of one of Alkan's Préludes?
- Page 10 Music publication review. Alkan: *Paix à la paix: Hymne, pour voix seule*, edited Brian Inglis (reviewed by David Conway)
- Page 11 CD review: Alkan: Complete piano music Vol.6, played by Mark Viner (reviewed by Jonathan Welsh)
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