



The Alkan Society

Registered Charity no. 276199

www.alkansociety.org

President: Stephanie McCallum

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

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Bulletin 104: January 2023

Anne Smith (20th May 1934 – 9th August 2022)

We are sorry to report the passing of Anne Smith, widow of the late Ronald Smith and a Vice-President of the Society, pictured on the right in her regalia. Here are three tributes.

Allegro Barbaro by Beka Smith

Anne had recently come back from an adventure to Canada where she had been invited by a potential suitor. Apparently this man was a priest and soon after she arrived there, she realised that this rather barren existence was something she couldn't adhere to. It appeared that romance and indeed marriage was off the cards and so she decided to come back to the UK and concentrate on her cello studies.

Meanwhile her parents had become friends with a lady who ran a jeweller's in the same area as their shop in Canterbury. They had colluded that she should attend an evening where Ronald Smith would be running through some of some piano works he was to perform for a radio broadcast.

The Cousins (that's their name) had a good grand in their house and it was arranged that a few friends would attend the concert.

Mum recalled the story of arriving at the house, and Auntie Betty (as she later became known) was dragged to the door by their eager bull terrier, whose strength didn't match that of the slight Betty. Anne was let into the house and sat down amongst the other guests on the allocated sofa. She was under the impression that the pianist, who mysteriously had his back to her, was a fair bit older. After the usual applause, he started playing Alkan's *Allegro Barbaro* and Mum almost 'shot out of her seat'.

At the end of the piece, he then turned round and said "I don't think that was very good, so if you don't mind, I'm going to play it again!" Anne was absolutely flabbergasted.

After this second performance he sat down next to her on the sofa, so close that his leg was touching hers, "...and he never took it away...". This was her introduction to Dad and indeed to Alkan.

Ronald and Anne were married on 6th September 1969. Over the course of the next 35 years, they were key to the teaching of many professional musicians. They lived, as Dad would put it, in symbiosis. What



one lacked, the other balanced. Dad grew the vegetables, and Mum cooked beautiful meals. They were indeed a partnership. Any student staying in Tanners House would experience these impeccable meals. Dad was not a fussy man. He used to joke, "I'm not fussy. I'm specific!"

Despite lacking any formal skills, Anne typed the first of his books on Alkan, entitled 'Alkan the Enigma', on an old Bluebird typewriter whilst expecting Beka. It was a colossal task!

Anne was first spotted for having cellist's hands at the age of six. She went on to study with Effie Richardson and later with William Pleeth. On recommendation, she also had some lessons with the cellist Paul Tortelier.

Anne held many teaching posts and gave several recitals in and around the country. She taught in schools, colleges, and privately at the house. She was instrumental for tutoring several students who have become professional musicians.

"...Those first few lessons gave me such a great energy to pursue the cello as Anne had such a passion for it, which she passed straight onto me", said Molly Oldland.

There aren't many people who can say that they had good parents, parents who stay together, let alone parents who were both outstanding in their different ways but also were like two pillars. I am very fortunate to say I had all of these as their daughter, growing up in a beautiful house, surrounded with good people. I am truly grateful to my Mother for being a driving force and believing in me as an artist and to embark on a difficult career in the arts.

Anne was laid to rest with her beloved Ronald at the church in Saltwood on the 25th of August. Nicholas King played the organ as he had done at their wedding and at the thanksgiving for Ronald's life. Former pupils Richard Shaw, William Fong, Stephen Hope, Kirsten Johnson and Jianing Kong were all present amongst the congregation.

So their legacy continues...

Tribute by Stephanie McCallum

We first heard Anne Smith (née Norman) as a cellist in a recital she generously agreed to give at Sibton Park Preparatory School for Girls, where we both worked while Stephanie was studying with Ronald – Peter as Director of Music and Stephanie as visiting piano tutor. The concert was an intimate affair, given in the ornately draped, richly furnished manorial drawing room, with guests seated and pupils scattered around the floor. The dark colours and varied studies in concentration would have made an excellent nineteenth century salon scene. Anne started with a Bach solo suite – I think the G major – which I recall as dignified, engaged and focussed, eschewing any hint of self-indulgence or waywardness with tempo. I remember being delighted to be asked play with her the Brahms E minor cello sonata, whose last movement, of course made the connection with Bach. There were other items on the programme which are less certain in my mind although I think Beethoven's Variations on 'See the conquering hero comes' from Handel's Judas Maccabeus was also played. It finished with Anne playing a cello piece by Ronald which he had written for her and she had included on the condition that he play the piano part. This was clearly a special piece for them both. My memory is of a substantial rhapsodic work bound together by motivic interplay and transformation.

The first time we met Anne was on our first visit to Hythe, a trip that we remember with some embarrassment and which gave us our first experience into the Smith household's disciplined schedule. Peter had rung Ronald from a public phone box in London and hadn't had a pen handy when he said to get off at Sandling. When we saw Sandwich on the destination board he said "yes that's it", the confidence concealing inner doubts. As we flew past Dover we began to realise Peter's mistake and eventually arrived a good two hours after the appointed time, but Anne was at Sandling with her quiet smile when we alighted, having calculated the train times.

On an earlier trip to Australia, Ronald had proudly showed off photos of Rebecca – "Opus 1" as he called her – and took a great interest in our son Rupert who was the same age. When we moved to Lyminge, near Hythe in 1978, Anne kindly invited Rupert round to play with Becca in the wonderful garden at Tanners House. She was always finding small presents for us. However, when we reciprocated

with a copy for Becca of the classic Australian children's story *The Magic Pudding* by artist Norman Lindsay, with its rough-and-tumble, plain-talking eponymous anti-hero ("Politeness be sugared, politeness be hanged, politeness be jumbled and tumbled and banged"), we sensed, from the glint of alarmed astonishment in Anne's brow, we had made a faux-pas. But if that was indeed so, she never let on, and accepted with grace and gratitude.

Although not one to talk about herself she did once describe Ronald as "the only one for her". Although his work ethic shaped her own daily life (not least as driver), it was clear she found meaning in the seriousness and importance of his projects, saying once that Alkan's Concerto for Solo Piano would be her desert-island disc. She once related that she eventually lost patience with his agent and had torn strips off them for the way they had neglected promoting his musical uniqueness and his specialities. It was clear in the way that Anne spoke of her work with Ronald on the two volumes of Alkan that her engagement had been detailed and extensive, both in the practicalities and as a critical sounding board. As Ronald notes in the acknowledgements it was she who prepared for publication the manuscript of the two volumes of Alkan, transcribing Ronald's "illegible handwriting into impeccable typescript ... with tact, patience, fortitude – even enthusiasm."

Extract from funeral eulogy by John Ingleton (adapted by Nicholas King)

Anne Norman, as she then was, married Ronald in September 1969. Over the following 35 years she adopted multiple roles as housewife, mother of Beka, chef, chauffeur, valet, travel agent and outstanding host to generations of Ronald's piano pupils, including a succession of live-in students from Australia, often resident for months at a time – well beyond the call of duty.

She was Ronald's respected career advisor – a professional musician in her own right, and the equal partner in a remarkable double act. Away from music, they shared many passions, including walking holidays accompanied by an energetic Jack Russell terrier, and weekends at their tucked-away Hastings cottage where they re-charged their batteries and savoured the gastronomic delights of George Street.

How Anne survived such a lifestyle with resilience and good humour and without complaint is a miracle. Indeed, she seemed to thrive on it, whilst ensuring that it was never at the expense of her own career as cellist and inspirational teacher. Nor did she allow it to interfere with her equally important role as a proud and loving mother to Beka through infancy, school and university and on to the launch and development of her career as a uniquely-talented portrait artist.

Our condolences are extended to Beka, who gave up so much of her own professional life to support and care for Anne during her final illnesses.

Anne was laid to rest beside her beloved Ronald in the graveyard at Saltwood church following her funeral service on 25th August. May she rest in peace, and rise in glory.

Society news

Notice of revision of an article in Bulletin 102

The article by Bradley Berg, published in Bulletin No. 102 (Oct. 2021), *Encyclopedic Études: Alkan's Op. 39 Studies and the French Pianist-Composer Archetype*, has been corrected to include the original footnotes with the text. The revised version can be accessed on the Society Bulletins webpage.

Membership report

At the end of 2022, the number of members of the Society was 133 – although this does include some defaulting members who I have every hope will rejoin us and pay any membership fees owing. The total number of “up-to-date” members is 93.

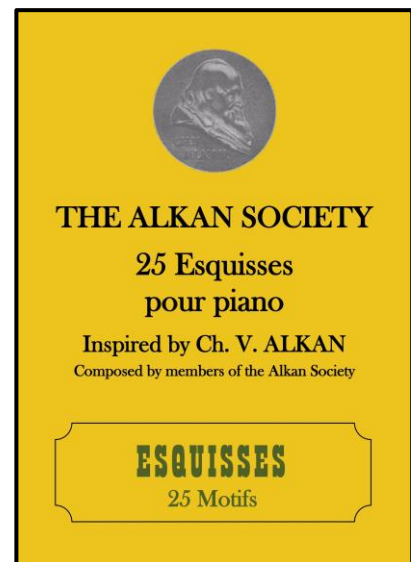
The membership count has stayed reasonably stable over the past eight years, with a total of 65 new members over that time more than balancing the numbers leaving us. In 2022, we welcomed nine new members, four from the USA, four from the UK and one from Switzerland.

Of the full membership, the majority (66) are UK-based. Twenty-seven members are from the USA, and the remainder are from 14 other countries: Germany (9), Australia (7), Netherlands (5), Japan and Norway (3 each), Austria, Belgium, France and Ireland with two each, and China, Italy, Macao, New Zealand and Switzerland with one member each.

Concert performance of a selection from 25 Esquisses pour piano, composed by members of the Alkan Society

In 2019, members of the Alkan Society were invited to compose short piano pieces inspired by Alkan's *Esquisses*, op. 63. Twenty-five submissions were received by the deadline (Alkan's 206th birthday), and the Volume was published to coincide with the 100th issue of our Bulletin, in April 2020¹.

The first public performance of a selection from the *25 Esquisses* will take place at Middlesex University, London, on 21 March 2023. Society Vice-President Richard Shaw together with students from Middlesex University will perform a selection of both Alkan's *Esquisses* and those composed by Society members. The programme will also include *Paix à la paix, hymne pour voix seule* (in a new edition by Brian Inglis, Director of Music at Middlesex University) and *Stances de Millevoye pour 3 voix de femmes et piano*, performed by Middlesex University Singers' Ensemble directed by Mark Oldfield.²



¹ Further details are available at www.alkansociety.org/Publications/Music-publications/music-publications.html, including audio recordings of most of the compositions.

² Details of the event are available at: www.mdx.ac.uk/2023/feb/richard-shaw-piano-and-ba-music-students

Alkan's 'The Wind' – The Aeolian Company, Ltd 'Duo-Art' & 'Pianola' roll played by Hilda Salvington

Mark Viner (London)

Your Chairman was recently lucky enough to acquire this intriguing piano roll of *Le vent* from Charles-Valentin Alkan's *Trois morceaux dans le genre pathétique*, op.15 cut by a pianist named Hilda Salvington. It states merely that she was an 'Associate of the Royal College of Music' and while I haven't yet had the opportunity to delve into the archives of my *alma mater*, not a single detail about this elusive artist seems to be available online, not even dates of birth and death. The roll is copyrighted 1927 so we might safely assume it was cut then or just before. While I haven't been able to play the thing on a reproducing piano, it is immediately of interest in that various passages throughout the piece are complete with fascinating, occasionally insightful, often whimsical and sometimes sentimental descriptions of the music as the roll passes across the aperture in front of the operator, offering a further perspective to the reception of Alkan's music in the early twentieth century; a period when his embers were very wan, indeed. Though unable to hear it, it isn't too difficult to following what's going on once the roll is unravelled – especially if one is familiar with the work – and as such, I assiduously listed Salvington's descriptions with the keen anticipation and bated breath the Victorians must have felt at the unrolling of a mummy. I was also able to spy that she made the same cuts as Harold Bauer (1873-1951) in his roll of the piece, namely bb.59-66 and 78-89.

The title of the roll is given simply as ALKAN'S 'THE WIND' | PIANOLA EDITION – D-708 together with a whimsical illustration entitled 'The Wind' of two travellers in a windswept landscape facing the gale head on.



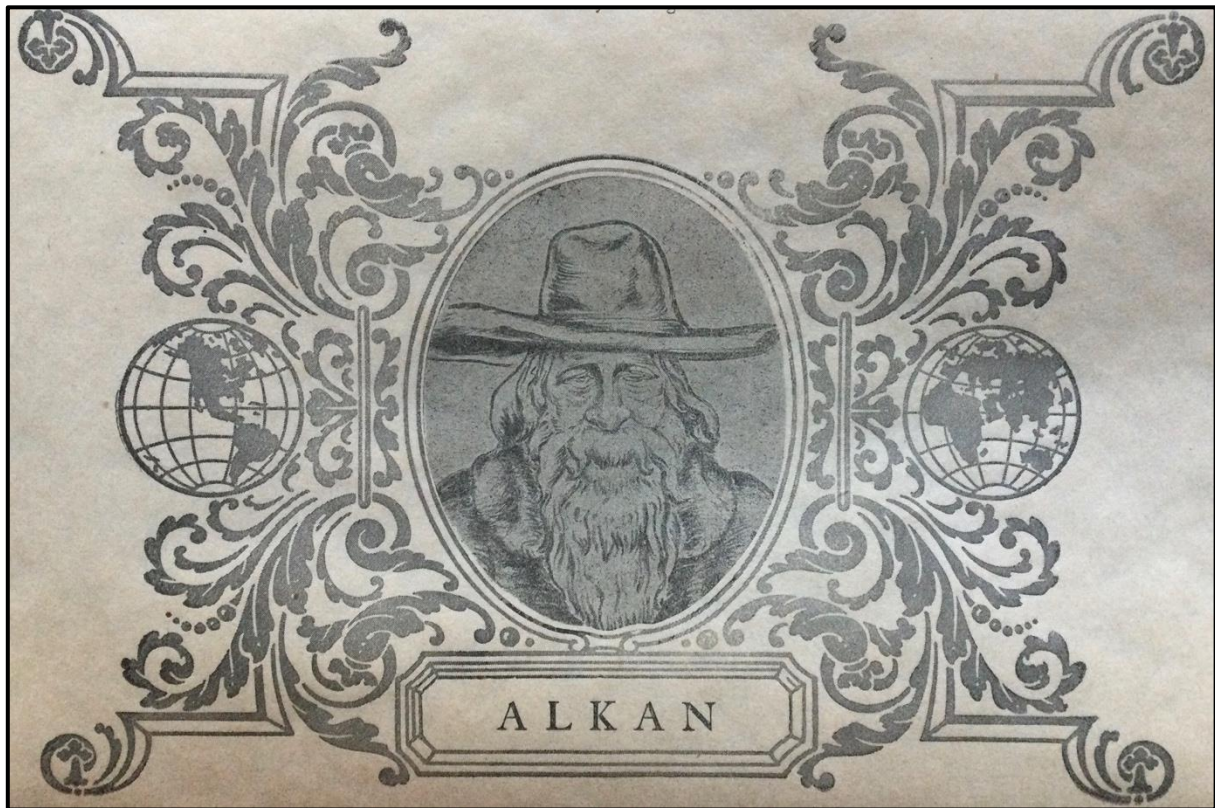
And below is given the following signed testimony from the executant:

*The annotations for this Roll have been personally
written by me for the 'Duo-Art' & 'Pianola' and
I hereby authorise their use with those instruments.*

Hilda Salvington.

After a roll call of dignitaries and coats of arms which lists the names and nationalities of the 'HONORARY | INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE | for the | PROMOTION OF MUSIC STUDY | by | MEANS OF THE | 'DUO-ART' & 'PIANOLA' approving what is stated above as 'THE WORLD'S MUSIC SERIES', a further escutcheon contains the words 'THE WORLD'S MUSIC | An AEOLIAN LIBRARY of | DESCRIPTIVE and ILLUSTRATED | 'DUO-ART' & 'PIANOLA'

ROLLS | Edited by PERCY A. SCHOLLES | in collaboration with CHARLES H. FARNSWORTH, Columbia University' A further solitary cartouche within states, tellingly, 'AUDIOGRAPHIC MUSIC' before the closing words' 'This Roll Embodies | a Listener's Introduction and Running Commentary | by | HILDA SALVINGTON | Associate of the Royal College of Music.', the bottom adorned with one of the more lesser known portraits of Alkan:¹



After some generic operational instructions follows a brief description of the composer reproduced here:

ALKAN'S 'THE WIND'

Here is a strange and impressive piece by one of the world's most ingenious and most eccentric composers. Alkan was essentially a pianist and a pianist's composer. He revelled in difficulties. The kind of music he liked was that which gives the listener the impression that the player has four or five hands, all of them supplied with eight or ten fingers and capable of moving over the keyboard at the rate of a mile a minute.

One of his pieces is actually called 'The Railway', and this title and the title of the present piece gives us a clue to the general point of his musical mind – he loved to compose and play music of the 'descriptive' kind.

In 'The Wind' we have the effort of no zephyr, 'producing flowers and fruits by the sweetness of his breath', as the Classical Dictionaries put it, but rather bold Boreas 'with wings and white hair and distended mouth, blowing snow, storms, cold hail and all the inclement blasts of a northern clime.' Here indeed is no gentle breeze, but a devastating cyclone.

Charles Valentine [sic.] Alkan (alias C. H. V. Morhange) [sic.] was born in Paris in the year of Wagner's birth, 1813. He was a 'wonder-child', being perhaps the only pianist ever admitted to the Paris Conservatoire at the age of six.

(At the end of the Roll are given a few notes for Students, including and interestingly candid contemporary criticism of the piece by Schumann.)²

¹ This series of rolls was doubtless the source from which the late Eliot Levin, erstwhile Chairman of the Alkan Society, obtained the image which he used for the cover art of a recording of Alkan's music released on his label Symposium Records.

² Here we go again (!)

The text ends with the following whimsical illustration:



Some brief remarks on various markings on the roll then follow together with a Tempo 90 indication before the piece begins. The running commentary is as follows:

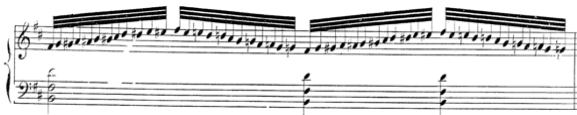
Bar 1:

A rumble of thunder and the rising howl of the wind tell us that nature's wildest elements are unloosed.



Bar 2:

The melancholy whistling of the wind finds its counterpart in some sad human heart.



Bar 11:

The sadness haunts; the thought repeats itself.



Bar 19:

The wind, more distant, sinks in pitch, the human mood, more passionate, rises to a greater poignancy.



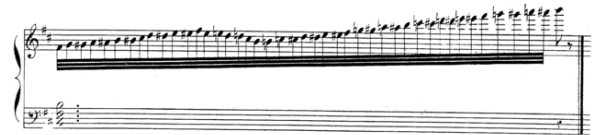
Bar 27:

The wind again approaches nearer, and the human mood sinks to its old dull gloom.



Bar 34:

With a dying shriek the wind ceases.



Bar 35:

Brighter thoughts – is there not some lighter tint showing itself upon the horizon?



Bar 36:

The cheerfulness is perhaps
a little forced.



Bar 38:

Is the heart not so much hap-
pier as trying to be happier?



Bar 42:

In odd gusts, now and again,
the sinister hint of storm.



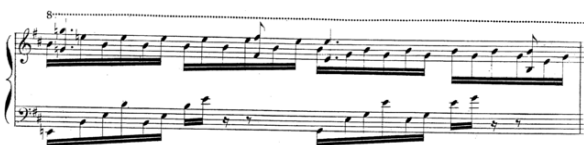
Bar 50:

A moment of greater cheer –
at once followed by stern
nature's reminder.



Bar 51:

The moods rise and fall –
from a dull half-hope to
a brief passing courage.



Bar 67:

Again the wind – again
a growing despair!



Bar 76:

The wind reaches its
highest and the mind
becomes desperate.



Bar 88:

The first dull hopelessness
returns – a sort of resigna-
tion to the sad inevitable.



Bar 96:

Not returning joy,
but a sort of vague,
plaintive resignation –



Bar 97:

and the wayfarer and the wind gradu-
ally pass together out of our ken.

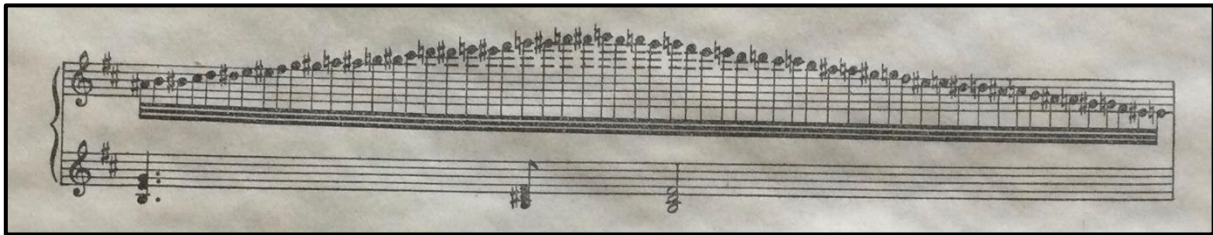


Once the piece is ended, the notes we were promised at the beginning of the roll follow which are well worth producing here. They run as follows:

SOME REMARKS ON SCHUMANN'S CRITICISM

Was Schumann too severe? Probably most listeners will feel that he was. There is a certain power about The Wind that entitles it to some respect, and its ingenuity merits a word of favour. Surely the chromatic scale, that greatest of all the conventional musical means of inspiring terror, has rarely been more effectively used. The weakness of the piece lies, perhaps, not in what Schumann calls its 'chromatic howl' but rather in what he calls the 'idea borrowed from Beethoven's A-major symphony'; neither melody nor harmony of this is particularly distinguished, yet it serves its purpose of introducing the human element of conflict with one of the elements of nature.

In appearance the score of The Wind (an appearance reproduced in another form by the perforations of this Roll) is one of the curiosities of musical notation. There are pages and pages, one bar to a line, like the following –



(NOTE. – Students who wish to follow the performance with score may care to know that Bauer has slightly shortened to piece by the omission of measures 59 to 66 and 80 to 89).

ROBERT SCHUMANN'S CRITICISM OF 'THE WIND'

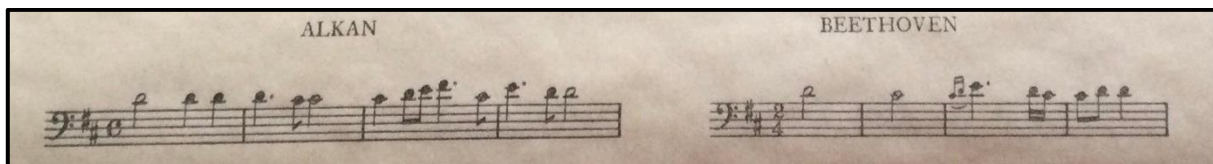
(Review of Alkan's Three Grand Studies, in the 'Neue Zeitschrift'.)

"A glance at the contents of this collection gives us a fair idea of the taste of this disciple of young France; it has a considerable flavour of Sue and Sand. One is startled by such false, unnatural art. Liszt caricatures is intellectually; in spite of his occasional aberrations, Berlioz has a human heart; he is a voluptuary full of strength and daring; But here we find little more than weakness and unimaginative triviality. The Etudes are entitled Aime Moi ('Love me'), Le Vent ('The Wind') and Morte ('Dead'), and their fifty pages are distinguished by the fact that they are filled with notes without any marks of expression. This Caprice is not altogether blameable, though even without it we know how such music is best performed; but its inward emptiness is too visible. And with outward nothingness added to it, what remains? In Aime Moi we have a watery French melody with a middle section that is not suited to the title; in Le Vent there is a chromatic howl over an idea from Beethoven's A-major symphony; in the last we have a crabbed waste, overgrown with brushwood and weeds, and the best of it is even borrowed from Berlioz; We always make allowances for erring talent, provided only that talent exists, and a little music besides; but when the former is doubtful, and nothing of the latter is to be found but black on black, we turn away in discouragement."

(Fanny Raymond Ritter's translation of Schumann's writings, 2nd Series, published by Wm. Reeves, 1880.)

AN IDEA FROM BEETHOVEN?

(The following appear to be the passages alluded to by Schumann).



Beethoven – transposed into same key for purposes of comparison

All in all, it is a most fascinating roll and one which, when one takes into consideration the advocacy of Harold Bauer and Adela Verne (1877-1952), further compounds Kaikhosru Sorabji's (1892-1988) postulation that "most people think of Alkan, indeed only know him, as the composer of 'Le Vent'.¹

Alkan in Macau

Igor Do Amaral (Macau)

Charles-Valentin Alkan is one of my favourite composers, whom I discovered during my teenage years. I remember listening to Alkan's piano music for the first time in Marc-André Hamelin's recordings, and ever since then Alkan has been part of my life.

After my graduation from Michigan State University and Mannes School of Music, I returned to my hometown, Macau, wanting to promote Alkan's music in this region as this composer is basically unknown here. On July 5th 2019 and July 4th 2020 I gave two full recitals with music by Alkan, including the *Symphony for Solo Piano* and *Les Mois*. This is probably the first time that Alkan has ever been performed in Macau. The two recitals were received with great applause, and many younger students and artists were very interested in both the



works and the composer. A lecture about the composer and his music was also presented in Macao Polytechnic University in April 2019.

I will continue to promote Alkan's music and share this wonderful composer with everyone.

Dr. Igor Do Amaral is Assistant Professor at UIC Zhuhai, Lecturer at Macao Polytechnic University, and visiting Professor at the University of Saint Joseph Macau. He can be contacted by email at: if_amaral@hotmail.com

¹ Kaikhosru Sorabji, *Around Music*, Unicorn Press, (1932) p.214

Book review

Robert Adelson

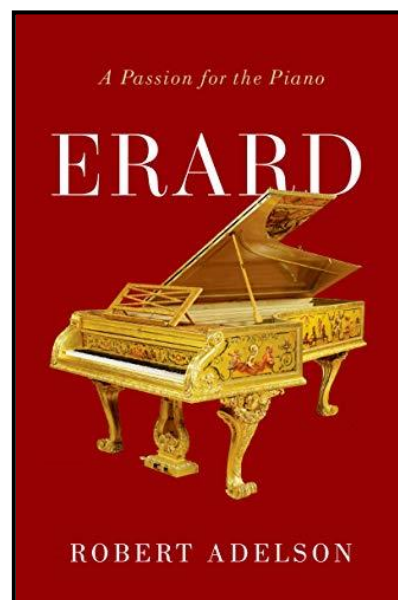
Érard. A Passion for the Piano

Oxford University Press, 2021

ISBN 978-0-19-756531-5

Reviewed by Frederik Keygnaert (The Netherlands)

This book narrates the history of the French harp- and piano-building firm *Érard* from its establishment in Paris at the end of the 18th century by Sébastien Érard (1752-1831), down to its demise in the middle of the 20th century. Robert Adelson is perfectly placed to write this history. He is currently Professor of Organology and Music History at the *Conservatoire de Nice-Université Côte d'Azur* and curator of the *Camac* collection of historical harps (since 2017). From 2005 to 2016, he was also the curator of the collection of historical musical instruments at the *Musée du Palais Lascaris* in Nice, where he secured the long-term loan of the *Érard* archives (partially edited and translated into English by a group of editors under Adelson's leadership).¹ The current book draws not only on the sources found within these archives – financial ledgers of sales and expenses, and a vast body of correspondence with customers, intermediaries, pianists and composers – but also on the private archives of the *Érard* family, discovered by the author in 2016 amongst the papers of the descendants of the piano makers.² Together, these archives form the basis for Adelson's excellent history of the piano-building side of the *Érard* company (the author promises a second instalment devoted to *Érard's* harps).



There is much to be gained from this book by Alkan *aficionados*, even if the composer's name is only mentioned twice. A first mentioning is in the context of the *pédalier* or so-called pedal piano that Sébastien's nephew Pierre Érard (1794-1855) built for the composer in 1853. The pedal piano is an organ-like instrument with a pedal board for which Alkan wrote a number of pieces. Alkan's own *Érard pédalier* is still preserved today in the *Musée de la Musique* in Paris. Our composer gets a second mentioning in the context of Pierre's death, two years later. Alkan is quoted from a touching letter he sent to Pierre's wife, Camille (1813-1889) (found in the family archives) to commiserate the loss of her husband: "I need not mention his love for all that was great, beautiful and true; nor of the singular nobility and the rare refinement of his instincts. Allow me to express to you, Madame [...] how deeply I felt in my heart the admiration, I would almost say the veneration, that the union of all these magnificent qualities in a single intelligence inspired in me." To this, Alkan added that he considered Camille, who was now taking over the *Érard* business herself, to be "so worthy of such a name, of such an illustrious heritage (p. 143)."³

Of further interest is Adelson's discussion on the merits of the *Érard* pianos in comparison with those of another well-known Parisian piano builder, *Pleyel*. *Pleyel* pianos are typically associated with Frederic Chopin, who is alleged to have said that he found his own individual sound more easily on a *Pleyel*, and therefore preferred it to an *Érard* piano that produced a more ready-made tone (p. 134). However, with their quick repetition and their bigger sound (both owing to Sébastien's invention of the double escapement action in 1822), *Érard* pianos were deemed more suitable to the virtuoso of the concert hall, whereas *Pleyel* pianos, with their single escapement, thinner soundboard, and more cushioned hammers, sounded better in the salons. According to Hector Berlioz, *Érard* grands were the only instruments with "a volume of sound that allows them to compete advantageously with an orchestra".⁴ This, along with

¹ R. Adelson et al. (eds), *The History of the Érard Piano and Harp in Letters and Documents, 1785-1959*, 2 vols, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

² *Archives de la famille Érard*, Château de Bourbilly (Côte d'Or).

³ "Je n'ai point à parler de son amour pour tout ce qui était grand, beau et vrai; non plus que de la singulière noblesse et de l'élévation toute particulière de ses instincts. Qu'il me soit permis cependant de vous dire, Madame [...] combien profondément s'était ancrée en mon cœur l'admiration, je dirais presque la vénération, que m'inspirais la réunion de toutes ces qualités magnifiques en une seule intelligence [...] si digne d'un nom, d'un héritage aussi illustres." Letter of 26 August 1855.

⁴ H. Berlioz, 'Instruments de musique: Exposition des produits de l'industrie', in *Hector Berlioz: Critique musicale, 1823-1863*, A. Bongrain and M.-H. Coudroy-Saghai (eds), Société française de musicologie, Paris, 2003, (written in May 1839).

the potential for virtuoso play, must have appealed to Alkan, who liked to experiment with the concept of the ‘orchestral piano’ in compositions such as his *Symphony for solo piano*. Indeed, Adelson’s exposé explains to an extent the composer’s life-long support for *Érard* over *Pleyel*, even when, after Pierre’s death, the firm failed to adapt to new innovations in the field of piano building that eventually led to *Érard*’s demise towards the middle of the 20th century.

Adelson’s book is written in an engaging and accessible style. With its excellent use of both edited and unedited sources, such as letters to and from many leading composers of the 19th century, the book depicts a fascinating historical background to the *Érard* enterprise – including the French Revolution and its aftermath – as well as the musical scene in Paris. In illuminating the relationship between piano builders and composers, it is a must read for anyone interested in the practice of piano playing and building in Paris during Alkan’s lifetime.

CD review

Alkan: Complete piano music Vol.5

11 Pièces dans le style religieux et une transcription du *Messie de Haendel, Op.72*

Etude (from the *Encyclopédie du Pianiste Compositeur*)

Etude Alla-Barabaro

Mark Viner, piano

Piano Classics PCL10197, released 2022, length 61 minutes

Recording: Op. 72 in January 2019; Etudes on 18 November 2021

11 Pièces dans le style religieux et transcription, Op.72

1	Tempo giustissimo	2'53
2	Andante	5'16
3	Quasi-Adagio	3'57
4	Assez doucement	3'33
5	Lentement	3'23
6	Majestueusement	3'16
7	Molto moderato	4'50
8	Assez vite	3'59
9	Assez lentement	7'42
10	Modérément	4'06
11	Dolcemente	7'00
12	No. 13 du <i>Messiah</i> : Largehetto	3'57

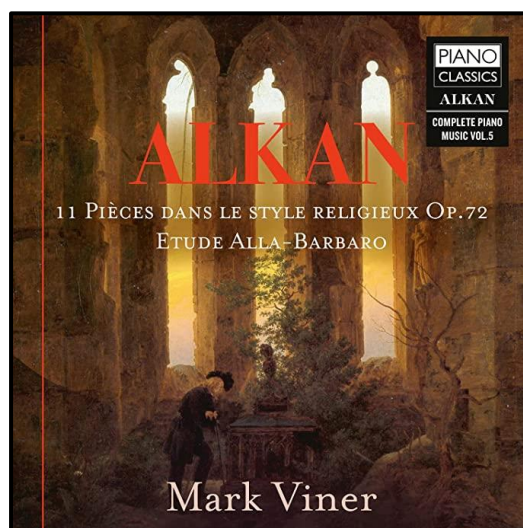
Etude (from the *Encyclopédie du Pianiste Compositeur*) 3'50

Etude Alla-Barbaro 2'41

Reviewed by Nick Hammond (York, UK)

The *Pièces dans le style religieux* are little known even by Alkan standards, so I was intrigued to explore the set, and indeed how Mark Viner would navigate these uncharted waters. This is the first piano recording of the set (it is scored “*pour orgue, harmonium ou piano sans pédalier*”) although Kevin Bowyer has recorded the complete set on the organ (on Nimbus, NI 5089) and Nicholas King most of the pieces (on Symposium 1059).

I had initial fears that op.72 would be dominated by the mood of the reflective prayers which intersperse the 25 *Préludes*, op.31 – fine within the varied context of op.31 but 11 in a row would be too much. How wrong could I be? Whilst the op.72 set is perhaps less virtuosic than the 13 *prières* (op.64) or the 11 *grands*



préludes (op.66), the pieces are highly varied and strongly characterised, spanning the range of emotions one might associate with a wider conception of religion. They are not so much religious pieces, rather pieces about religious experience, strongly coloured by the piquant harmonies and modulations which characterise Alkan's later works. They range from devotional contemplation (no. 2), through majestic heroism (no. 6), Beethovenian inner calm (no. 9), athletic striving (no. 10), to bleak melancholy, somewhat reminiscent of Schubert's *Winterreise* (no. 11) – and more.

The set opens with a sombre and dignified processional, and as such is one of the few in the set which I feel works a little better on the grander canvas of the organ. Nevertheless, it is a fine introduction to what follows. The set is capped by Alkan's transcription of the *Pastoral Symphony* from Handel's *Messiah*, an epitome of serenity, and, as Mark Viner states in his notes, to be played a great deal slower than the original is often heard nowadays. Alkan must surely have intended the transcription to be an integral part of the full set, as a tranquil valedictory statement. I will describe each of the remaining pieces very briefly: Mark Viner's excellent and comprehensive notes provide copious insights. Suffice it to say there are some real jewels here. No. 2 is a beautiful reflective *Andantino*, No. 3, *Quasi-Adagio*, a somewhat mournful and yearning fugue. The fourth, *Assez Doucement*, starts with a cheerful theme reminiscent of the 38th Esquisses (*Les Bons Souhais*: "Le ciel vous soit toujours prospère!"), but continues with a darker and slightly hypnotic middle section in which the left hand seems to be floundering around in search of the lost initial theme. Numbers 5 (*Lentement*) and 6 (*Majestusement*) are both of a more troubled and turbulent nature, the middle section of the latter reminiscent of those chattering thirds and sixths of *Contrapunctus* (op.35 no. 9). No. 7 (*Molto Moderato*) starts with a lilting beguiling melody, transformed in the central *Mineur* section with startling modulations and harmonic twists. In no. 8 (*Assez Vite*) a troubled melody rises above repeated chords, contrasting with, and eventually displacing, a more relaxed and flowing theme. In no. 9 (*Assez Vivement*), the opening, deeply-reflective chorale-like theme develops into a more troubled and drifting central section, with the two themes uniting in a serene close. Ronald Smith describes the 10th piece (*Modérément*) as "a lumbering carillon in the Dorian mode"; its more melodic central section is overwhelmed by a virtuosic and athletic return of the carillon. No. 11 (*Dolcemente*) leads us into, as Mark Viner aptly characterises it, "a bleak, twilight world", with a haunting fragmentary melody, contrasting with a strange chorale in quintuple time, the ghost of the opening melody bringing the piece to a desolate close.

Mark Viner seems to be particularly attuned to these pieces: his technical assurance is of course superb, but more his sense of space, timing and shape, his elegant but never overstated rubato, serve these forgotten gems magnificently. The music breathes, the wide gamut of emotion shines through unhindered, the subtleties of the pieces are closely felt and beautifully expressed. Alkan is getting his best shot at bewitching us.

The performance of op. 72 makes this CD unmissable. But what follows is truly astonishing. The etude from the collection of Zimmerman's *Encyclopédie du Pianiste Compositeur* (see Viner's notes for more details), to paraphrase Hillaire Belloc, "makes one gasp and stretch one's eyes". Not only must it be one of Alkan's most outrageous creations, but it works so well musically. The rhythm almost throughout the piece is what drummers term *paradiddle*: a fast alternation of the hands in the pattern R-R-L-R-L-L-R-L, in this case within each bar. Perhaps this is the first use of paradiddle in piano literature: musicologists please investigate! At the crazy speed that Alkan requests (two beats of MM=144 per bar, which Viner comes close to despite the taxing chordal writing), the rhythmic effect is quirkily jazzy, to which Alkan adds a fine melody and bold chromatic harmonies. The motoric drive is similar to that of *Chemin de Fer*, but created in a quite different fashion. The result is not just way ahead of its time: Alkan has all but invented techno-rave! The demands of the rapidly repeating chords must have been as much a challenge for the instruments of the time as for the performers – no doubt Érard's double escapement action helped. Viner here is superb, bringing out the harmonic and dynamic subtleties beyond the astonishing technical demands of the etude. This CD would be worth purchasing just for this short piece.

The final etude, *Alla-Barbaro*, is another instance of bizarre Alkan inventiveness, bristling with immense chordal *acciaccature* and the theme distributed somehow between the flying hands, bringing to mind a herd of galumphing elephants (though in this performance, well-behaved ones). The etude then progresses into a series of wild arpeggios and broken octaves, reminiscent of the bravura sections of the *Scherzo*-

Focoso (op.34) or *Overture* (op.39/11), and with a coruscating return of the main theme comes to an uncompromising conclusion.

So, Mark Viner has done it again: this fifth volume of the Alkan's complete piano music is another triumph, both in bringing forgotten byways of the composer's music to our attention and for his superbly sympathetic and authoritative performances. His sleeve notes (in English only) are comprehensive, scholarly and will be of great interest to Alkan aficionados, and the quality of the recordings maintains the very high standards of the previous CDs in the series. Strongly recommended.



CD review

Beethoven, Symphony No. 3 Eroica (transcribed by Liszt)

Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K 466 (transcribed by Alkan)

Paul Wee, piano

BIS Records BIS-2615 (SACD), released 2022, length 83 minutes

Beethoven, Symphony no. 3 (transcr.Liszt)

1	Allegro con brio	16'18
2	Marcia funebre: Adagio assai	16'19
3	Scherzo: Allegro vivace	5'26
4	Finale: Allegro molto	12'04

Mozart, Piano concerto no. 20 (transcr.Alkan)

5	Allegro	14'49
6	Romanze	8'15
7	Rondo: Prestissimo	8'52

Reviewed by Mark Viner (London, UK)

Given the high praise this release has garnered in both national and international press in recent months, the words I am about to pen should come as no surprise. This album, also on the BIS label, is the third of what promises to be a series of exciting and distinguished releases from barrister Paul Wee. His first, a recording of the *Concerto* and *Symphonie* from the *Douze Etudes dans tous les tons mineurs*, op.39 (1857) (curiously, the first time these two works have ever been released in a single album) was arranged with the help of Bryce Morrison who, after hearing him in an astonishing performance of the concerto arranged by the Alkan Society (in July, 2016) insisted he record it. No less astonishing was the recording comprising the double bonus of the *Symphonie*. Wee's second album was, by contrast, a complete recording of Sigismond Thalberg's *L'Art du chant appliqué au piano*: a valuable addition to the Thalberg discography and, indeed, an important set of pieces deservedly receiving greater attention.

In this third release, Wee has focused his sights on pianistic terrain of an even sharper contrast in two colossal transcriptions, namely Franz Liszt's transcription of Beethoven's Symphony no.3, op.55 'Eroica' and Alkan's transcription Mozart's Piano Concerto no.20, K.466. The transcription of various Beethoven Symphonies was something that had occupied Liszt on and off for many years. He had completed transcriptions of the fifth and sixth symphonies by 1840 and transcribed the second movement of the 'Eroica', *Marcia funebre*, in 1843 but it wasn't until later in life that the cycle of *partitions de piano* as he named them came to full fruition at the behest of Breitkopf & Härtel while on retreat at the Madonna del



Rosario. They were brought to completion in April 1865 and it was, in all likelihood, in his suite of rooms at the Vatican that he checked the proofs after receiving minor orders in the Catholic Church. Wee's playing here is ideal – a truly symphonic breadth of tone and verve that is little short of breathtaking: the development of the first movement is especially galvanising. Alkan's transcription of Mozart's Piano Concerto no.20, K.466 was commissioned by the publisher, Richault, and published in 1861. Like the earlier transcription of Beethoven's Piano Concerto no.3, op.37 published in 1860, it is not only a masterclass in delegating both piano and orchestral textures effectively between two hands but is of greater interest still for the two cadenzas provided by Alkan to the outer movements, the first of which, much in the vein of that to the Beethoven transcription, witnesses Alkan unable to resist the urge to draw a parallel between the grim triplets underpinning the opening movement of the Concerto with those that abound with unbridled glee at the outset of the 'Jupiter' Symphony, K.551. Here, again, Wee's playing is ideal – his deft handling of *tutti* and *solo* textures clearly defined and the work's narrative sustained by playing of integrity and brio. This recording is also a welcome addition to a sparsely covered corner of the Alkan discography – the only other being José Lopez's no less remarkable reading on Toccata Classics label [TOCC 0240]. In short, another remarkable release and required listening for Alkanians and Lisztians alike!

Letter to the editor

Dear Alkan admirers,

Some two years ago, I discovered the music of Charles-Valentin Alkan, and now I am also an Alkan admirer and I love his music.

As I am a (retired) chemist, the name Alkan led me immediately to the simplest chemical class of organic compounds, the alkanes. So, finally, I have written a paper about Alkan and the alkanes, although it is clear that there is no relationship between the two fields besides the name. However, a German chemistry journal which is open for unorthodox contributions is publishing the article.

The reference is: Veronika R. Meyer (2022). Ein akustischer Spaziergang zu den Alkanen. *Chemie in Labor und Biotechnik CLB*, **73**, 540-543

The title translates as *An acoustic stroll to the alkanes*.



Maybe some members of the Alkan society understand German: the full paper is available at [www.clb.de/download/clb11-12-2022alkanweb%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.clb.de/download/clb11-12-2022alkanweb%20(1).pdf)

Your society does great work; I cannot understand why CV Alkan fell into a hole of oblivion.

Kind regards,

Veronika Meyer
St. Gallen, Switzerland

Distractions and diversions

Solution and notes to Prize Crossword number 10 (in Bulletin 103)

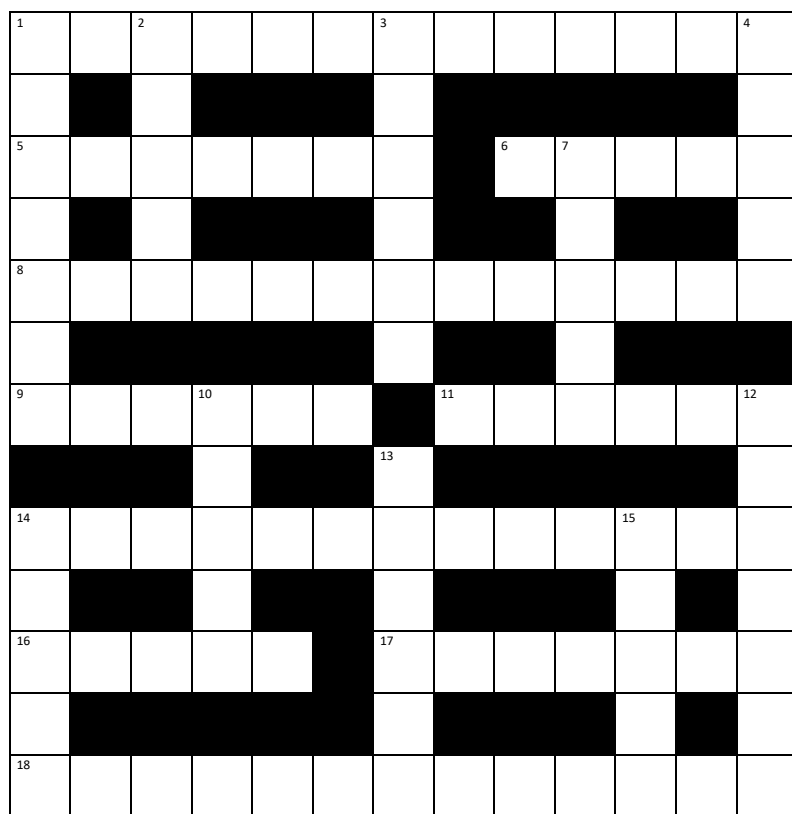
Across [all clues related to Ronald Smith]:

- 1 – Bach (Walter Emery’s book on Bach ornaments was always close to the piano in RS studio)
- 3 – Saltwood (NaCl = salt, and Henry Wood conducted RS at a Prom in 1942; RS final home was at Saltwood)
- 5 – Liszt (allusion to Piano Concerto no. 1, in which the triangle has a significant role)
- 7 – Fischer (Edwin Fischer and Dennis Matthews partnered RS in a performance of the Bach Triple Concerto)
- 9 – RBS (Ronald Bertram Smith, always so listed in student programmes at the RAM to distinguish him from his contemporary Ronald Aubrey Smith, an organist from Exeter - there were other Ronald Smiths in the musical world, too!)
- 11 – Kostanoff (RS took lessons in Paris from Pyotr Kostanoff)
- 13 – Durham (RS took an external BMus from the University of Durham)
- 15 – Norman (The maiden name of Anne, his wife)
- 17 – Alexandra (RS taught Princess Alexandra for a while; allusion to Alexandria in Egypt)
- 19 – RAM (RS was a student at, and later elected a Fellow of, the Royal Academy of Music)
- 21 – Shirley (Canon John Shirley (“Fred”), Headmaster of The King’s School, Canterbury, appointed RS there)
- 22 – Sauer (Martin Sauer was the soloist in a 1943 performance of RS Violin Concerto with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra - and never seems to have returned the only copy of the part)
- 24 – Paradies (RS gained an early award in a local music festival for a performance of the Toccata)
- 25 – Beka (the professional name as an artist and designer of his daughter, Rebecca).

Down

- 1 – Baler; 2 – Cos; 4 – Tuscano; 6 – Tuk; 7 – Fast; 8 – Ref; 10 – Serge (allusion to Serge Rachmaninoff); 12 – Ormer; 14 – Aailed; 16 – Edgy; 17 – ABS (Associated Board Scholars at the Royal conservatoires, and “ABS” became approved shorthand if a candidate was absent from an ABRSM examination, after an examiner once recorded such a candidate as “Ill” and the candidate subsequently received a certificate showing a result of 111 marks); 18 – Ass; 20 – Maria (allusion to Gounod Ave Maria being based on the first of Bach’s “48”); 23 - Use.

Prize Crossword number 11 (Set by En Songe)



Notes:

- Each across solution is a 4 down of a 6 across, with each across clue being an anagram of its solution (as is the clue for 6ac 4dn). As a further hint, the numbers 1, 7, 9, 15, 17, 28, 29 may help.
- Down clues are cryptic in the usual manner.
- Completed grids can be sent to the co-editor* to arrive by 1 April 2023.

* treasurer@alkansociety.org, or Nick Hammond, Woodend House, High Stittenham, York YO60 7TW, UK

Need a hint? Send an email to *En Songe* at: EnSonge.Alkan@gmail.com

Across

- 1 Massive zen vet (5, 8)
- 5, 11 Gerund teacher (5, 2, 6)
- 6, 4dn Latent itch (5, 5)
- 8 Reality echoed (6, 2, 5)
- 9, 14 A revolted sunlit minx (2, 4, 2, 1'10)
- 11 See 5 across
- 14 See 9 across
- 16 My hen (5)
- 17 None can (2, 5)
- 18 Scorch sore zoo (9, 4)

Down

- 1 All embracing most of cohort for intoxicant (7)
- 2 Herein, Mark, an enthusiast arranger of Alkan, also renowned drummer-singer (5)
- 3 Wild goats oddly imbue excess (6)
- 4 See 6 across
- 7 Holey House Speaker, or big-bang doubter (5)
- 10 Tear-jerking bulb? (5)
- 12 O tangle the dance (2, 5)
- 13 Tangled antipodean toes, patron of Verona (2, 4)
- 14 Lentil-based dishes belonging to the BFG's creator? (5)
- 15 Brief electronic intelligence found in return of niece (1-4)



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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Who we are

President: Stephanie McCallum; **Vice-presidents:** Anne Smith, Hugh Macdonald, Nicholas King, Richard Shaw
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