

THE ALKAN SOCIETY

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New members must be wondering what they are receiving for their subscription. Please accept my apologies for the longer than usual delay in finishing this bulletin. It has been possible to incorporate some late items of news, but some of the "forthcoming" events have unfortunately already come and gone forth. I think that most of them were probably inaccessible to most of our members, but all the same I regret keeping the information from you. A recent change of career has left me far less under stress than I had been as a teacher, but life has been pleasantly busy and I need to take what paid work I can find... But enough of excuses.

Concerts

The biggest event this year was obviously Jack Gibbons's recital in February of the complete set of Opus 39 minor-key Etudes, previewed in the last Bulletin. The Queen Elizabeth Hall was well filled, if not to capacity, and several members made long journeys to be there. In particular, it was good to see David Armitage from New Zealand, Mark Morrison from the USA and Bård Dahle from Norway, besides many others from Britain. Many of our leaflets were picked up and we gained a healthy number of new members over the next few weeks.

The recital, like Jack's first effort a year earlier in Oxford, was a triumph of endurance and memory, and the audience responded very positively. Such a large number must have contained several newcomers to Alkan, attracted perhaps by his Gershwin recitals or his appearances on radio. His informal approach, with some brief spoken introductions, is quite refreshing, though there was no time to give any detailed insight into the music in the way we have heard over the years from Ronald Smith.

As for the performance itself, it was impressive as a display of technique, though he does occasionally rush. There was not much real pianissimo playing, for example in *Comme le vent* - a criticism already made of his recording. Some members also commented on a tendency to shorten rests or long notes, as in the trio section of *Scherzo diabolico*. But these must not detract from the general impression of a highly assured performance. Perhaps it must be seen in the end as a brave experiment for the record-books. Since the recital, Jack has continued to incorporate some Alkan into his recitals, but in more manageable doses, and I think that that is the best policy.

The press reviews mostly suffered from a prejudice against the music, and need not be dwelt on at great length. Hilary Finch of the Times confessed to hearing only two-thirds of the recital. Andrew Clements of the Guardian, with remarks such as "Alkan. ..wasn't good at writing tunes", provoked several letters of protest from members. Adrian Jack in the Independent made some fair points about the music and the playing, but revealed his true opinion in his final phrase, "...his music had no soul". Paul Driver in the Sunday Times devoted a good part of a long article to the recital, but was rather dismissive in the end: "Cheerfully he beat the demanding composer into submission, and good cheer spread throughout the hall as he won over the large audience with matey spoken introductions to

some of the pieces. But this only made it harder to give Alkan's music - still essentially an unknown quantity - a serious hearing." Still an unknown quantity, after all this time?

David Murray of the Financial Times, one of the most perceptive critics and the first to recognise Marc-Andre Hamelin as a major artist, got the nearest to a balanced review: at least he has some respect for the music. He contrasted the good reviews for the recording with the live performance: "Gibbons's fingers are super-fleet, and one way or another he managed to keep things frantically going. On the other hand, his dynamic range seems limited to three or four levels, with a minimal expressive range, and his rhythm is too anxiously metronomic to allow room for Alkan's structural nodes to register properly.....Alkan's long, grandiose movements were reduced to noisy wallpaper. Has Gibbons really taken stock of the competition, with Marc-Andre Hamelin far ahead at the virtuoso forefront?"

In conclusion, this was a very worthwhile event with many good things far outweighing any criticisms. It was a young man's performance, after all, and was excellent publicity for Alkan, with support from Classic FM, a radio station whose success has astounded the sceptics. The long queues for autographs on the CDs and the prolonged applause were well deserved. It was particularly touching that at the end of a mentally and physically exhausting recital, Jack could have the presence of mind to devote one encore, the Prelude *Le temps qui n'est plus*, to the memory of our late Vice-President and founder, Dr John White, who had died in January.

Since February, Jack has continued to include some Alkan in his Oxford recitals. On March 14th, in the Sheldonian Theatre, he gave what was probably the first Oxford performance of the *Marche funèbre* and *Marche triomphale*. We were pleased to be of help in supplying the out-of-print scores from our collection in the Guildhall School.. Jack gave a series of seven weekly concerts in the Holywell Music Room in July and August, including three devoted to Chopin and two to Gershwin. The first recital, entitled "The Romantic Virtuoso", included Alkan's *Symphony for solo piano* and the *Marche triomphale*.

On September 22nd, Marc-Andre Hamelin played Alkan's *Grande Sonate* and pieces by Liszt in the Jersey Festival. Lucky Jersey! In spite of his immensely successful recording, it was only his second public performance of the work, the first having been in the Newport Festival in the USA earlier this year. Our one Jersey member was informed of the performance in advance. Reports are of a standing ovation, which counts as total hysteria in Jersey.

In October, Hamelin played four recitals in Sweden, each including Alkan's transcription of the first movement of Beethoven's 3rd piano concerto, with cadenza. Future performances which include some Alkan will be on 25th January 1997 in Luxembourg (the *Sonatine* and *Le festin d'Esopo*) and the Beethoven/Alkan at the Paris Conservatoire on 8th February - a fascinating programme also containing works by Dussek (*Le Retour à Paris*), Liszt (Fantasy on *Les Huguenots*) and Moscheles. He is to give a recital at the University of Essex in Colchester on 11th February; programme to be confirmed. For Hamelin fans as opposed to Alkanians, he will be appearing in the Queen Elizabeth Hall in the International Piano Series on 18th April, playing Charles Ives's "Concord" Sonata, the Bach-Busoni Prelude and Fugue in D, and Reger's Prelude and Double Fugue on a theme of Bach, Op. 81.

Ronald Smith has included a little Alkan in recitals this year. He played *Le tambour bat aux champs* and *Chant in E*, Op. 38 No.1, in a lunchtime recital in the Fairfield Hall, Croydon, on 30th April. On October 1st, Croydon produced its answer to the Three Tenors in a spectacular lunchtime recital to mark fifty years of the series, with James Gibb, Yonty Solomon and Ronald Smith each playing a short group before joining in a six-hand version on two pianos of Liszt's *Grand Galop Chromatique*. Ronald was applauded at length for his

stunning performances of Alkan's *Allegro barbaro* and the second *Hungarian Rhapsody* of Liszt, with his own cadenza, besides a Chopin Nocturne.

Ronald Smith was also heard on BBC Radio 3 on October 28th, in the rather curiously entitled series "Ensemble", playing the Balakirev Sonata in B flat minor and Liszt's sixth Hungarian Rhapsody, two demanding pieces which he played superbly.

Other broadcasts

Jack Gibbons's CDs of Alkan (ASV CD DCS 227) were chosen by Brian Kay for his "Starter Collection" in the May issue of the BBC Music Magazine. This was a welcome choice from a presenter who tends to concentrate on the "core repertoire". In his article, Kay says ". . . I am adding the name of Charles-Valentin Alkan in an attempt to satisfy those who often ask me to trawl the musical by-ways. Here is a truly remarkable recording that brings together an astonishing array of pianistic pyrotechnics that worthily reflect their extraordinary composer. Liszt described Alkan as having the finest technique of any pianist he knew (not a bad recommendation!) and Alkan would have needed it to master even his own music. The sheer quantity of notes alone in each of these pieces is mind-boggling, as is the concept behind them. Four of the 12 Studies in a Minor Key make up a complete symphony, and another three a concerto. Added to the Studies on this collection are sketches, preludes and songs without words which form a fascinating introduction to a complex and compelling composer".

Readers of that article would have known about the broadcast of an excerpt from the recording on "Brian Kay's Sunday Morning" on 12th May, though it was not billed in *Radio Times*. Fortunately it came early in the programme, and was *Comme le vent*. Listeners in turn to that programme would have known – but again not from the *Radio Times* – that Jack was one of the guests the following week in a live relay from the new Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, when he played short pieces by Gershwin and Alkan.

While "knocking" the BBC yet again, there is one welcome piece of news in the departure of Paul Gambaccini at the end of his contract, which had lasted far too long already. It was not prejudice against transatlantic accents or homophobia which caused "Middle England" to protest about his style: as Tom Sutcliffe wrote in *The Independent*, he was simply the wrong man for the job. His place in "Morning Collection" has been taken by the excellent Catriona Young, and recently by Peter Hobday, an experienced broadcaster who has been concentrating on Haydn's "London" Symphonies and a good selection of unusual repertoire, with particular emphasis on the Russian schools of composition and performance. The aim of the programme remains the same, to attract new listeners and perhaps lure them back from Classic FM. Whether a subsidised service really needs to do that is questionable. However, there are still plenty of good programmes about new music, and "Composer of the Week" has had some particularly stimulating editions in recent weeks.

Hamish Milne's studio recording of Alkan's Symphony has had a second broadcast, as has Hamelin's performance of the first *Concerto da Camera*. For real night-owls, most of his Birmingham recital from 1994 was re-broadcast at about 2.30 a.m., including some Chopin Mazurkas and the Alkan *Concerto for solo piano*. In May, Averil Kovacs succeeded in her request to "Midweek Choice" for the first broadcast of Ronald Smith's recording of *Les regrets de la nonnette*, dedicated to all members of the Alkan Society. More recently, Brian Kay played Bernard Ringeissen's recording of *Scherzo diabolico* in a "devilish" section of his Sunday morning programme. Roger Smalley's piano piece, *Variations on a theme of Chopin*, was heard in a lunchtime recital given by Douglas Finch in St David's Hall, Cardiff, preceded by the Mazurka in B flat minor Op. 24 No.4 which inspired it. One of our Vice-Presidents, Roger is still attached to the University of Western Australia, and his current project is a concerto for contrabassoon, dedicated to his colleague in the local symphony orchestra in Perth. He maintains his interest in Alkan and when he visited his

brother in Salisbury recently, an unrehearsed performance of the Three Marches took place with the Secretary providing the other pair of hands.

Record reviews

More excellent reviews of Hamelin's recording of the *Grande Sonate* (Hyperion CDA 66794) continue to appear, in particular two in the American journal *Fanfare*. In the November/December 1995 edition, our member Martin Anderson did not hold back the superlatives: "It's phenomenal. Staggering. Bring me some extra exclamation marks. I don't think I have ever come across a release where the conventional expressions of amazement fall so far below what is required to do the playing justice." He sees beyond the virtuosity, however: "Since Hamelin can tackle the torrents of notes with all the ease of someone scratching the back of his head, he has ample resource left to make Alkan's rhythmic figures tell, to highlight odd phrases, to sculpt the accentuation in ways that no previous pianist has been able to do. " Of Jack Gibbons's recording of Op. 39, Anderson is also enthusiastic, with a few reservations:

"His playing is almost always breathtakingly good, and he shows a rare sympathy with the idiom of this elusive music. Only now and then he reminds me that most pianists are human, as there is the tiniest fluff or hesitation in a phrase that Hamelin would probably not have noticed.. But making this kind of criticism is a bit like being offered a night with Kim Basinger and holding out for Helen of Troy: it simply isn't realistic. Gibbons does command a marvellous sweep even when Alkan is throwing the more unreasonable textural challenges at him, though sometimes I feel he doesn't make quite enough of the possibilities of contrast that the music allows, particularly in Alkan's weirder moments: for instance, the *Chanson de la folle au bord de la plage* (sic) - a loving miniature of unholy psychological insight - doesn't quite attain that eldritch, spooky quality that, say, Ronald Smith manages to bring to it." He welcomes the twelve shorter pieces which fill out the second disc, and concludes : " A very strong recommendation for an outstanding achievement . "

Nothing if not thorough, the following issue of *Fanfare* (January/February 1996) carries another review of both recordings by our former member, Paul Rapoport. He has a few reservations about Hamelin's performance of the *Grande Sonate*, but finds nothing "mannered, labored, distorted or arbitrary. ..Some will want more attention to certain markings and parts of phrases. But the performance remains remarkable for its sweep and style, its individuality becoming part of the music instead of being imposed on it." He is very impressed with the *Sonatine*, hearing in the finale a "precarious balance of the lyrical and the mad which is on the other side of astounding. He plays the deceptively simple second movement exquisitely, never trivialising it into bathos. The scherzo third movement, like the others, he takes up to Alkan's metronome marking. Nothing remarkable in that? Oh yes there is; no one else does it. You'd get a fright looking at the numbers. " Of *Le Festin d'Esope*, he says "Variation 20 is so forceful you'd think there are two or three pianos involved. The speed of variations 17 and 18 is so alarming that only Bugs Bunny and his pals could ever match it.. That someone could play this way is certainly imaginable. That someone is *actually* playing this way is unbelievable. ..The sound is excellent, and so are the notes by Fran9ois Luguenois. "

Turning to Jack Gibbons, Rapoport notes "his observance of Alkan's dynamics and phrase markings, more accurate perhaps than anyone else's. ..There is some truly fine playing here, with technique, bite, and grandeur to suit the style - often. That is the problem. If Gibbons played consistently as well as he does in selected places, this would be a set to treasure." He has criticisms too, noting "faulty tempos, troublesome arpeggios, lack of continuity, buried lines, missed climaxes, etc., as well as excellent tempos, fine technique, marvellous phrasing, etc.; but unfortunately the former group, though far less common, outweighs the latter, especially given the competition." He likes the shorter pieces: ". they contain some

of the best playing here, especially *Le staccatissimo* and *Les cloches*." Unlike the London newspaper critics, he has great respect for the music: "These are essential parts of later nineteenth-century piano music, as much as anything by Liszt or Brahms." In conclusion, he states: "In the meantime, Lewenthal, Smith, Ogdon and Hamelin are the best. Gibbons may join them some day, but not yet. "

New recordings are rather sparse this year. The latest instalment in the French Alkan series, now on the 2e2m label (number 1005) instead of Adda, contains some first recordings and the remaining two books of *Chants*, the first two sets Op.38, again played by Jacqueline Méfano. Her performances are quite an improvement on those of the last three books which appeared on Vol. 2 (2e2m 1002). There is some refinement in the playing and some sincerity in the playing. All the same, her tempi in the faster pieces are still well below Alkan's metronome marks, and while Alkan's requirements can seem ambitious, his tempi do work and the pieces seem very laboured if taken at too safe a speed. Similar reservations apply to the two Op. 60 pieces, *Ma chère liberté* and *Ma chère servitude*, while welcoming their appearance on record for the first time (apart, that is, from the dreaded Nakamura's Japanese recordings). Best of all are the vocal pieces, several taken from copies only available in manuscript: the *Trois ancienne melodies juives* and the *Deuxième verset du 41e Psaume*. The two choral pieces from Samuel Naumbourg's Jewish hymnals, the only ones published in Alkan's lifetime, are also on the disc: *Es haim* and *Halleluyah*. These have been recorded previously for the Symposium disc no.1062.

One other new CD contains just one piece of Alkan, but has much else to interest students of rare piano repertoire. It is the latest in the series from the festival of rarities given in Husum each year, and comes from Danacord, DACOCD 449. Ronald Smith plays *Les regrets de la nonnette* and two Chopin Mazurkas, the first and last to be published, using Ronald's own edition of the last mazurka, which he proved to have been left in a much more complete state than previously published versions. The rest of the disc is more coherent than many in the series, mainly containing works by Liszt and his associates: a movement from his teacher Czerny's remarkable first piano sonata, a Strauss paraphrase by his pupil Carl Tausig and Liszt's own Canzona Napolitana and 19th Hungarian Rhapsody. In the latter piece, Daniel Berman reconstructed Horowitz's version, never written down, and gave a stunning performance. With the added benefit of modern recorded sound, it is a rarity in every way.

The other short pieces on the disc are the C major Rhapsody by Dohnányi and a witty transcription of Tchaikowsky's *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*, both played by Philip Fowke. Finally, the hugely impressive Sonata in E minor by Franck's pupil Vincent d'Indy is given a fine performance by Marie-Catherine Girod. Students of the French repertoire will find here a work worthy of comparison with those of Alkan or Dukas. It is the only available version on CD, and the disc is worth finding for that reason alone. Considering that the performance is completely unedited, and that Mme Girod had only given two other public performances in ten years, the quality is all the more remarkable.

I should perhaps mention that the essay with the CD was written for the first time in English by a regular at tender of the festival, namely the secretary of the Alkan Society. There are a couple of minor misprints, and the German translation shows several signs of haste, but in general it is a well-produced issue, with good piano sound and uniformly good performances. The other pianists are Anton Kuerti (in the Czerny) and Roberto Cappello (the Tausig).

Two discs which were previewed in earlier Bulletins are worth mentioning. The Naxos compilation made from Marco Polo recordings by Bernard Ringeissen and Laurent Martin has appeared as promised, and would be a useful and cheap purchase for newcomers to Alkan. One interesting point is that there are three essays in the booklet in French, German

and English, by three different authors rather than translations of the same text: a small sign of the serious intention and good presentation characteristic of this surprising success in the record industry.

The "Rarities of Piano Music at Schloss vor Husum" 1994 (Danacord DACOCD 429) eventually reached the review pages of "Classic CD" in May 1996, with Jeremy Nicholas bringing his wide interests to bear on its varied content. "Those whose palettes are jaded by the academic uniformity of most of today's recitals will relish the chance to hear 15 obscurities played by seven pianists with the sort of panache, musicality and persuasive zeal which makes you realise what a vast reservoir of good piano music lies untapped. Here is Igor Zhukov in his beguiling transcription of Franck's Organ *Prelude, Fugue et Variation*; Hamish Milne (a Husum regular) in Medtner and Grainger; Stephen Hough (just the man for this sort of occasion) offering *Two Poems in Homage to Delius* by the English pianist and composer Stephen Reynolds. Among others, Badura-Skoda offers Frank Martin's *Fantasy on Flamenco Rhythms*, but it is another Husum regular, Marc-Andre Hamelin, who steals the show with Thalberg's *Don Pasquale Fantasy*, Oaken's (*sic*) *Barcarolle*, Op. 65 and a cheeky, newly-unearthed *Foxtrot* by who? Walter Giesecking, no less. The misprint of "Oaken" for Alkan is certainly not Mr Nicholas's mistake: he is one of our keenest supporters.

Finally, rewrite those Christmas present lists: the reissue of Ronald Smith's Op. 39 has appeared at last on APR 7031, as described on the enclosed "flier". The two CDs contain everything which was on the original EMI LPs: as well as the minor-key studies in a definitive performance, there are the *Trois petites fantaisies*, Op. 41 -wonderful pieces not heard often enough -and the *Allegro barbaro* from Op. 35 and the *Song of the mad woman*. This is the recording always compared with newer rivals and will need no further recommendation as *the* essential Alkan recording.

The transfer to CD has been very well done: a comparison with the LP suggests that the sound is slightly more brilliant, though different systems may well give another impression. The LPs always did sound particularly good, but since most owners will have worn theirs out by now, the new format will be a welcome replacement. Any newer members who have so far failed to find the LPs will need little persuasion to order the discs forthwith. As the publicity material shows, they can be obtained directly from APR in case of difficulty. The whole catalogue is well worth study by any students of historic recordings. *It* may seem strange to include a recording as young as twenty years, by a pianist who is very much alive and active, but "historic" is not too strong a word for this remarkable performance.

Jeremy Nicholas gave it an enthusiastic welcome in the December "Classic CD", quoting Ian MacDonald's description as "a series of astonishing recordings: one of the milestones of the gramophone". He continues: "It takes a particular sort of pianist to play this music, one with lightning reflexes, great endurance and exceptional fingers. ..Alkan's harmonic language, huge structures and unique demands also require imaginative musicianship of the highest order to succeed. Ronald Smith has all the necessary qualities and has done more than anyone to promote this extraordinary music. Slowly, thanks to these recordings and those by a few others, Alkan is gradually being revealed as one of that rare breed of composers, the forgotten genius -truly, as Hans von Bülow described him, "the Berlioz of the piano". Mr Nicholas intends to include an example from the CDs in his early evening programme, "In Tune", in mid-December, possibly on the 11th. Anyone still in doubt about investing in the discs should keep an eye on *Radio Times*.

Edwin Alan at APR has intimated that if the Op. 39 discs sell well, the company may well be encouraged to issue other EMI recordings which have been unavailable for several years. So tell all your friends and we may well see a "Ronald Smith revival" before long.

Of the recording of the chamber music in the vaults of Nimbus, there is still little to report. All I can suggest is that members could write to Nimbus Records at Wyastone Leys, Monmouth, Gwent NP5 3SR, tel. 01600-890682, fax 01600-890779, and innocently ask when the recording is expected to be issued. The chairman is Gerald Reynolds, deputy chairman Adrian Farmer, sales and marketing manager Antony Smith. However, please do not all write immediately, lest they suspect an orchestrated campaign!

I am informed that Raymond Lewenthal's recordings of Alkan's *Symphonie*, *Quasi-Faust*, *Barcarolle* Op. 65 and *Le Festin d'Esopé* are to be reissued by Elan records, as well as the *Hexameron* Variations by Liszt and others. I imagine that the last work, originally issued on RCA Victor with Liszt's *Norma* Fantasy (*Reminiscences de "Norma"*) will be on the same CD, given the longer playing time available.

I have made enquiries about Stephanie McCallum's recording of the *Symphonie* along with Alberic Magnard's *Promenades*, on Tall Poppies TP 081. I was hoping to receive a quote for a bulk order to save our members trouble with international money orders, etc. Unfortunately no reply has been received after a considerable time, and the most I can tell you is that Tall Poppies no longer has a distributor in the UK. Belinda Webster at Tall Poppies wrote that mail order is possible at \$25 (Australian) per disc, plus \$6 air mail postage. Payment can be in Australian dollars, or Mastercard or Visa. The address is PO Box 373, Glebe, NSW 2037, Australia. Phone +61-2-552-4020, fax +61-2-552-4395, E-mail tallpoppies@dragon.net.au

Our French counterpart has published a new edition of the discography (correct up to July 1996) and we have permission to use it. I am not proposing to send a copy to all our members because several are already members of the Société Alkan, and you all should have the previous edition, with all the information needed to update it in subsequent Bulletins. However, anyone who is keen to have a copy of the new edition is welcome to write and ask for one, and I suggest you could add a contribution to the printing costs to next year's subscription. It is fifteen pages in length.

Other news

Ronald Smith's two books about Alkan are now out-of-print. However, a new single-volume edition is in preparation, and the publishers have invited us to help with any advice, corrections and suggestions. I have already sent some ideas, including a selective discography, but any further points would be most welcome. You can either send them to me, or in the case of more detailed items, directly to the publisher, Mr Morris Kahn, at Kahn & Averill, 21 Pennard Mansions, Goldhawk Road, London W12 8DL. A substantial amount of new material has come to light since the publication of the two books, and it will be excellent to see a new edition. For the moment, the only substantial book in print is the French symposium published by Fayard.

As you may have noticed at the head of the Bulletin, the Secretary is now equipped with a combined answering-machine and facsimile, on the same telephone number as before. I hope that it will make me a little easier to contact, though I cannot guarantee a substantial increase in efficiency. ..

Still on technological matters, a new American member, Jonathan Judge, is compiling an Alkan site on the Internet. Most of the downloaded material I have seen so far from other pages has been somewhat jokey and trivial, and it is good to know that a real enthusiast who is knowledgeable about the subject is turning his attention to this, as part of his academic studies. It could prove to be a valuable link with other Alkanians around the world, in

particular the many who may not know that there is an Alkan Society. I wish Mr Judge well with his work and am pleased to publish his details below for anyone who would like to be involved.

Here we go:

Dear Fellow Members,

After months of planning, I am ready to announce that, by the time you receive this Bulletin, the Alkan Archive, will have been established, the first site on the Internet dedicated solely to Alkan.

The intent of this project is threefold. First, to make information on Alkan free and easily accessible to anyone in the world today. Internet users everywhere, whether in Salisbury or New Delhi, will be able to type "Alkan" into any Internet search engine, and they will be referred to this page. Second, is to make it easy for everyone to obtain Alkan music. I intend to provide a list of Billaudot distributors the world over so that everyone will have a distributor close to them. Finally, I want to increase awareness of the Alkan societies and the work that they are doing. I hope that a mild request for donations and memberships will provide increased funds to support crucial research on Alkan that is being done right now.

If you are already on the Internet, either via an Internet Service Provider or a commercial service like Compuserve or AOL, skip to the next paragraph to find the address for the Alkan Archive. If you are not, I would suggest finding a friend who is. Alternatively, you can take advantage of the growing numbers of "Cybercafes" popping up around the world at which you can access the Internet for a half hour at a time. I was affiliated with Cyberia Cybercafé during my stay in England, and I recommend them highly. They have outlets in both London (Goodge Street stop) and Paris.

Once you have Internet access, open your web browser, which is likely to be Netscape Navigator or Internet Explorer. Click on "Open" and enter <http://www.lawrence.edu/~judgej/alkan.html> when prompted. Seeing as many of you will be accessing the site from overseas, please be patient and give the page time to load.

At the bottom of the web page, you will find my email address. I encourage you to share your comments with me.

Jonathan Judge Jonathan.M.Judge@lawrence.edu

A more mundane piece of news: since mid-October, most French telephone numbers have changed to accommodate the greater demand for faxes, modems and the like. There are now five regions, each with its own prefix: 01- for Paris and Ile de France, 05- for the south-west and so on. This has removed the need for the prefix 16- when dialling between Paris and the provinces. France has also adopted the prefix 00- for international calls, as used in the rest of the EU: thus to call Britain now requires 00-44- instead of 19-44-. Calling France will therefore involve no change for the Paris region, but will involve an extra digit for all other regions after omitting the initial zero. For mobile phones, the current eight-digit number is

preceded by 6. From February 1997 the emergency number will be 112. Anyone who is still confused can dial a helpline: in France the number is 5211.

The change seems to have been better thought-out than the British system. Having already inserted an extra 1 last year -and before that changing London numbers into two regions - we are now told that another change may be needed quite soon, with London once again coming under a single prefix, possibly 02-. If France can manage with nine-digit numbers, it does seem strange that Britain already needs eleven, which if sensibly shared out, would provide every man, woman, child and dog with well over a thousand numbers each! Suffice it to say that my mother has already had five different numbers at the same address over the last twenty-five years. ..

La Société Alkan: The first compilation of articles, expanded and corrected, from earlier Bulletins has been published, and looks very handsome, thanks to substantial help from the publishers Billaudot. We have been promised that future issues of "Piano et Romantisme" will not be advertised for sale until they have been published, since some subscribers had complained about paying so far in advance. The contents of Volume I differ somewhat from those planned, but are as follows:

"Charles-Valentin Alkan, composer betrayed by posterity", by Britta Schilling-Wang

"Critical review of 12 Studies in major keys, Op. 35", by Hans von Bülow

"Critical review of Trois Morceaux dans le genre pathétique" by Franz Liszt

"Robert Schumann reviews Alkan" (3 Etudes, Op. 15 and 6 Pieces caractéristiques Op. 16)

"Why is Alkan's writing so pianistic?" by Harold Truscott (a translation of his article for our Bulletin)

"Charles-Valentin Alkan" by Antoine Marmontel.

There is also a good two-page index, a preface by Laurent Martin and an introduction by the editor, François Luguenot. Details can be obtained from M. Luguenot at Société Alkan, 145 rue de Saussure, 75017 Paris.

Other French projects, also undertaken with friendly co-operation from M. Derveaux at Editions Billaudot, include a substantial catalogue of Alkan's works, the publication of a newly-discovered piece, the *Alla-barbaro*, found in the USA by Marc-Andre Hamelin, and possibly some other works which have been out-of-print for a long time, or indeed never published at all. The *Impromptus* would be excellent candidates, since they are good pieces and would be playable by a substantial number of pianists of modest abilities.

Billaudot is engaged in the production of a definitive edition of Rameau's works, *Jean-Philippe Rameau, Opera omnia*. This enormous project will continue at the rate of two volumes per year and is due to be completed in the year 2014, the 250th anniversary of the composer's death. It is supported by the Ministry of Culture and an impressive team of academic researchers and performers. The first published volumes are beautifully produced. Since some 40% of Rameau's output has so far remained unpublished, the series is going to be a great asset to all who have any interest in the French musical tradition.

The Société Alkan had its annual meeting in April this year, delayed by several months because of transport strikes and attended only by the committee and two British members. Laurent Martin played some short pieces by Maxime and Napoléon Alkan: Maxime's work was little more than a pot-pourri of themes from Chopin, but Napoléon's pieces were well worth hearing, especially a Marche religieuse Op. 9. This year's meeting takes place in early December and will again include an excursion into the musical output of Alkan's siblings. They will have to manage without my presence on this occasion. Apart from the fire in the Channel Tunnel making travel to Paris less easy, the outrageous fare on Eurostar had already persuaded me not to go. It does seem bizarre to assume that everyone travelling on a Monday is a businessperson on expenses and can afford £96 more than the paupers who pay £59 to travel on the preceding Saturday. I received a sympathetic letter from Mrs Jan Cole

at Eurostar (written before the fire), who had not only heard of Alkan but had attended several concerts given by Ronald Smith; however, she gave no hope of a revision of the fares policy.

Members are reminded that we have a collection of scores at the Guildhall School of Music, which can be consulted simply by signing in at the front desk and asking for Paul Holden at the music library. We do not have everything Alkan wrote, but do have several out-of-print works and are doing our best to add to the collection. Unfortunately obtaining copies from the British Library, which has several works we do not have, is prohibitively expensive, but we might consider using them if there were a real demand and funds to support it.

For members within reach of Cambridge whose diaries are not too full, there will be a performance by David Christophersen of Alkan's transcription of the Mozart D minor Piano Concerto on Saturday 14th December at 1 p.m. in the Howard Building, Downing College. His recital will also contain Ginastera's Sonata No.1 and Ligeti's "White on White" (1995). Tickets are £6 (concessions £3) at the door and from the Cambridge Music Shop, All Saints Passage. Mr Christophersen intends to play the Mozart/Alkan work in future recitals in the area, and he hopes to include *Le Festin d'Esopo* in a recital later in the Howard Building series next year.

The second Alkan Day, 20th April 1996

Our second all-day meeting in the Barbican attracted excellent support from nearly fifty members. After a brief business meeting, the day began with a lecture by Alex Knapp. Mr Knapp is the Joe Loss Research Fellow at City University, London, and as such is one of the few specialists in Jewish music outside Israel. He was heard earlier this year on Radio 3 in a most interesting Sunday morning series, entitled "Shalom!", in which he played and spoke about Jewish religious music. His talk dealt with "The Influence of traditional Jewish elements upon selected works by Alkan", and included copious musical illustrations both from Alkan's output and from traditional synagogue chants. It was a fascinating introduction to a subject not widely appreciated, and I noticed several direct links with his examples in the organ recital later in the day. Mr Knapp is preparing a printed version of his lecture, with musical examples, for publication in a future Bulletin, and so the curious will have to wait until then to read it.

A less serious, though equally well-researched, talk followed in which Dr Roderick Munday of Peterhouse, Cambridge considered a recently discovered work by Jules Verne and speculated on his possible knowledge of the work of Alkan. A summary of the talk appears later. Musical illustrations were provided by Thomas Wakefield, all on the theme of machines and transport: *Les omnibus Variations*, Op. 2, *Le chemin de fer*, Op. 27, *Une fusée*, Op. 55, and *L'incendie au village voisin*, No.7 of the Op. 35 Etudes in major keys. All are very seldom heard in performance and the first and third remain unrecorded.

Thomas's performances were, as always, outstanding. The sole regret is that he had to play on a less than adequate instrument. It has become very difficult to hire the recital room in the Guildhall School, even during the vacations, and we were using a music room at the nearby City of London Girls' School, where a previous booking had already accounted for the main hall with its better piano. I apologise again to Thomas for doing such a disservice to his playing, and will do my best to ensure a good piano if he ever offers to play for us again. In spite of that problem, his performances were greatly enjoyed and he was remarkable tolerant of the shortcomings of the instrument.

After lunch, Bridget Marshall played the Onze Grands Preludes, Op. 66, on the organ of St Giles Cripplegate. Her performance in the French Church last November had been heard by only a small number of members, and it was a very welcome repeat of an outstanding

performance. Again an apology is in order: because of another rehearsal in the church, the time for Bridget to set up the organ had been limited, and she was obliged to omit the Couperin work, *Offertoire sur les Grands Jeux*, which she had intended to play in order to put Alkan's work in a historical context. I had not appreciated the complexity of preparing for the recital and had not insisted firmly enough on adequate rehearsal time in the morning. However, these problems were certainly not obvious in Bridget's performance: turning pages for her, I was well able to see the horrendous technical difficulties posed by Alkan, not least in some fiendish pedal lines in two parts, sometimes with the feet two octaves apart. These, and the frequent changes of registration were admirably mastered, and the quality of the music was clear to all. Most of the pieces work well on the organ. Perhaps one day our French colleagues will achieve their aim of restoring Alkan's pedalier and find a musician able to do justice to the pieces on the original instrument for which they were probably intended.

The final session again featured Thomas Wakefield, playing more works rarely heard and all unrecorded. They were *Variations a la vielle* (1840), based on an aria from Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*; a transcription of the overture to Meyerbeer's *Le prophete* (1850) -a work given in most lists as a four-hand version, but here most definitely for two hard-working hands; and finally the Mozart D minor Piano Concerto, No.20 (K. 466), arranged for piano solo with cadenzas (1860).

I know only of Roger Smalley's performance of the cadenzas in a performance with orchestra in Cambridge many years ago, so this was a real rarity, if not a first performance. I had studied the score in the British Library and knew a little of what to expect. The transcription of the sections with orchestra is an ingenious one, perhaps a little more restrained than the first movement from Beethoven's 3rd concerto, and retaining a distinct Mozartian character. However, the cadenzas are long and much more Alkanian than Mozartian. At one point, the cadenza for the first movement transforms the opening bass figure into the opening theme of the "Jupiter" Symphony, a work only written three years after the concerto. (This recalls a similar passage in Alkan's Beethoven cadenza, quoting from the 5th symphony, which was again written several years after the 3rd concerto.) The cadenza to the finale again shows little regard for the proportions of the movement, and contrives audaciously to combine themes from all three movements in counterpoint, something not attempted in any other cadenza I have seen. (I have looked at several in preparing for a performance in Salisbury on March 8th next year. Having ruled out Alkan's as too long, unstylish and difficult, I will probably use Clara Schumann's, more in honour of her centenary this year than for their Mozartian qualities. ..)

The caretaking staff of the school were very co-operative, and in spite of some shortcomings, the day was judged to be very successful and we hope to retain the formula for our next meeting. It is not too early to be thinking of ideas for Alkan Day 3, and if anyone knows of a possible speaker or performer, or has any other ideas for topics, do please let me know. Recorded or live musical illustrations are both possible.

There now follows a summary of Roderick Munday's talk, based on a preliminary version prepared for the Jules Verne Society: errors and simplifications are the responsibility of the Editor.

"Paris in the 20th Century":

Jules Verne and the Piano Music of Alkan and his Contemporaries

In 1994 Jules Verne's novel, *Paris in the 20th Century*, was published for the first time. The manuscript was thought to have been lost and turned up in the safe of Verne's son Michel. The novel, rejected by Verne's publisher, was probably written in 1863 and is set in Paris in 1960. It speculates about many technological developments - electric lighting, railway

systems and silent automobiles, but its principal interest to us lies in Chapter VIII, which is entitled "Which treats of ancient and modern music and of the practical employment of certain instruments". Verne gives an account of modern music of the future as compared with music, particularly piano music, of the mid-nineteenth century.

The musical material emerges at a dinner party attended by three young men, Michel Dufrenoy (who seems to champion the views of the young Verne), Quinsonnas and Jacques Aubaret. The piano in Quinsonnas's apartment is built by the Erard and Jeanselme companies, which have become amalgamated. (In Verne's time, Jeanselme was a cabinet maker.) "...He went over to the piano, pressed on a button, and out shot. ..a table complete with benches at which three diners could be seated in comfort." Verne is observing and extrapolating from a fad of his day, which led to ever-more ambitious instruments such as giraffe pianos, bookcase pianos and other multi-functional instruments. Jules Massenet's piano could be used as a writing table. The dottiest example was patented by Millward: "The piano. ..is supported by a frame which rests upon a hollow base; inside. ..is placed a couch, which is mounted upon rollers and can be drawn out in front of the piano. ..A hollow space is formed in the middle of the frame for rendering the pedals accessible to the performer's feet, and on one side of such a space is formed a closet, having doors opening in front of the piano, and which is designed to contain the bed clothes. On the other side of the space so formed, firstly a bureau with drawers, and secondly, another closet for containing a wash-hand basin, jug, towels and other articles of toilet. ..A music stool is so arranged that in addition it also contains a work-box, a looking-glass, a writing desk or table, and a small set of drawers. "

Conversation turns to music, comparing the music of 1960 with the tuneful pianistic virtuosity of the mid-nineteenth century:

"Right, " exclaimed Michel , "we shall now make some music. "

"Certainly not modern music," said Jacques, "it's too difficult..."

"To understand, yes," replied Quinsonnas. "To play, no."

"What do you mean? " asked Michel .

"Let me explain," said Quinsonnas, "I shall justify my comment with a striking example. Michel, be so good as to open the piano. "

The young man obeyed.

"Good. Now sit down on top of the keyboard. "

"What? You want me to. ..?"

"Sit down, I tell you."

Michel allowed himself to sink on to the instrument's keys, producing a harrowing discord.

"Do you know what you are doing there?" the pianist asked.

"I have a pretty good idea! "

"Innocent fellow, you are making a modern harmony. "

"Really?" said Jacques.

This is utterly uncanny. It was indeed in the 1960s that we witnessed the most foolish forms of piano composition and piano playing -strings smitten with violin bows, formless dollops of notes, dissonances brazenly supplanting harmony and melody. Verne's explanation for the modern style of music, where the scientists have succeeded in reconciling pairings and groupings of notes which in a former age would have been thought to clash impossibly, is even more intriguing. As Quinsonnas explains:

"In the last century, a certain Richard Wagner, a sort of messiah who has never been sufficiently crucified, founded the music of the future from which we now suffer. In his day, melody was already being suppressed. He thought it appropriate to throw harmony out of the window: the house of music has since remained empty. " This reaction to Wagner was far from unique in the early 1860s. Having attended one of the first three programmes of Wagner's music given in Paris in 1860, Hiller wrote a letter to Alkan, dated 31 January 1860. Thankfully, he began, he only treated himself to a cheap seat. The insults then fly thick and fast: for example, Wagner merely plagiarises Berlioz (whom Hiller does not like much anyway). Speaking of one of Wagner's pieces (probably *Tannhäuser*) which was played on that evening, Hiller writes: "In the second piece, after an initial jumble -in fact, a disgracefully transparent jumble, for this animal really isn't a musician, one hears a sort of song, horribly vulgar; this is the only concession which members of this school are capable of making to the old-fashioned prejudices; indeed, at this moment, Auber, who was in the next box to the critic, Ortigue, leans over to him and says: "That will doubtless be the polka of the future." Anyway, as far as I was concerned, after the four pieces which made up the first part of the programme, you could have beaten me to a pulp and I still would not have remained a moment longer. ..Wagner is not a musician, he is a disease."

[Editor's comment: Henselt was said to have made a similar gesture of sitting on the keyboard to illustrate his view of the discord which opens the finale of Beethoven's 9th symphony. Of the transcriptions made of the work, only Liszt's dares to use the chord in its full version. A more recent, and trivial, example occurred in Jimmy "Schnozzle" Durante's song "The guy who found the lost chord". "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to sit down on the keyboard of this piano until the chord is returned. ..That's it, the lost chord. I found it by sitting on the piano keyboard. Very strange - I usually play by ear." In fact, tone-clusters were exploited earlier than the 1960s in the "Concord" Sonata of Charles Ives (1915) and the piano pieces of Henry Cowell in the 1920s.]

Another telling passage is spoken by Quinsonnas:

"Pretexting new forms, a score nowadays is made up of only a single phrase, long, lingering}infinite. At the Opera, a piece begins at eight in the evening and ends at ten minutes to midnight. ."

"And no-one protests?"

"My boy, one does not savour music any more, one swallows it! ...Either we submit to the sickening *Melody of the Virgin Forest*, colourless, relentless, indeterminate, or they produce the sort of harmonious racket of which you gave us such a touching example by sitting down on the piano."

"That's sad," said Michel.

"Ghastly, " replied Jacques.

Once again, Verne has hit the bull's-eye: minimalist music probably did attain its zenith in the 1960s, with audiences, sometimes doubtless drug-assisted, listening in rapt attention to the repetitive phrases and cadences of John Cage and others of that ilk or to nigh-meaningless successions of deafening discords. [One might mention Terry Riley's "In C" (1964) here, or "Music in 12 Parts" (1971-4) by Philip Glass. Steve Reich represents the more tuneful and inspired aspects of the minimal style. Ed.] One can in fact be sure that Verne would have been tickled pink by Cage's compositions from the early 1960s. Thus, selecting virtually at random from his *oeuvre*:

Variations I (any number of players, any sound-producing means) 1958

Music for Amplified Toy Pianos (any number) 1960

Atlas Eclipticalis (86 instrumental parts to be played in whole or in part, any duration, any ensemble) 1961

Verne would have enjoyed Cage's notion of "an abandonment of intentionality" in composition and doubtless chuckled at the thought that the kind of music he had lampooned in 1863, by 1992 was claimed in all seriousness to be "anchored in a deeply focused aesthetic philosophy". (David Revell in B. Marton and P. Collins (eds.) *Contemporary Composers* (Chicago, 1992) p. 156)

Verne's grim humour shines through the text as his characters debate the music played in 1960 at the Opera:

"None the less," replied Michel, "they still play the old masterpieces at the opera. "

"I know, " responded Quinsonnas. "They are even debating whether to revive Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld* with the recitatives which Gounod added to this *chef d'oeuvre*. And it could make a bit of money thanks to the ballet!..."

The text has a typical Vernean ring when Quinsonnas blames the decline in music on "la finance et la machine", capitalism and mechanisation.

Thilorier and Alkan

Of course, even the most high-minded musician has to earn his daily crust. Quinsonnas is no exception. He is forced to compromise to keep body and soul together:

" ...do you refuse to play modern music?"

"Me? Good gracious! I play it just like everybody else! Look, I have just composed a piece suited to contemporary tastes, and I trust it will succeed, if it finds a publisher!"

"And what is it called?"

"*La Thilorienne, Grande Fantaisie sur la Liquefaction de l'Acide Carbonique.*"

Although Verne's contemporaries would probably have recognised the allusion, it now needs to be explained that the incident depicted in this piece of music concerns the French chemist and physicist, Charles St-Ange Thilorier (b. 1797). Thilorier, about whom virtually nothing is known, is credited with having been the first scientist to design an experiment to liquefy carbon dioxide. Faraday was to describe it as "one of the most beautiful experimental results of modern times." Thilorier's achievement indeed prompted August Comte to commemorate him in his positivist calendar. In the fashion of the day, Thilorier's experiment was performed for public audiences, curious to witness the marvels of modern science. Then, one day, as he recounts in a surviving letter, disaster struck:

"A deplorable accident which occurred last Wednesday in the laboratory of the School of Pharmacy has just cost the life of a worthy and interesting young man, M. Hervy, a demonstrator at the School. During the preparation of liquid carbonic acid using M. Thilorier's method, the equipment exploded doing devastating damage to the laboratory. ..It is my personal opinion that these experiments can no longer be performed in public. ..It is essential that enlightened and skilful engineers should provide us with equipment which can withstand a pressure of at least two hundred atmospheres, and which are constructed in a metal like bronze or wrought iron, less susceptible than cast-iron to these explosions which suddenly occur without warning and which are a feature of cannons on board ship ."

At this point, is it unrealistic to imagine that Verne had Alkan in mind? More particularly, is Verne alluding to *Le chemin de fer* (Op. 27)? This piece, published in 1844, is generally thought to have been the earliest musical representation of a steam-train. It "narrates" a journey: the train clatters rhythmically along the tracks, with occasional bucolic moments, presumably as the passenger surveys the scene outside the carriage; we hear the whistle; we

hear the belching steam, the train sways and vibrates, the noise and jolting increasing as it picks up speed; but then, the music slows as the train enters the station, and we have the calm resolution of journey's end. As in *La Thiloriennne*, *Le chemin de fer* is said to communicate a sense of danger, reflecting the quite considerable risks run by those operating and by those travelling in steam-trains. The score, too, visually evokes the train not merely in the continuous, jolting lines of notes, but even in the printed railway lines of an almost uninterrupted flow of semiquavers. Certainly, both pieces of music would have provided audiences with a painful reminder of the precarious quality of, and the sense of adventure experienced by those who sampled, the technological and scientific marvels of the age. In *Le chemin de fer* the piano seeks to reproduce the technology of the day. It is a visual record of an event, but in melodic and rhythmic form. Now, compare *Le chemin de fer* with Quinsonnas's performance of *La Thiloriennne*:

The artist had the nerve to paint in music the final experiment which cost Thilorier his life.

"Eh! " he cried. "Do you hear? Do you understand? Do you not feel that you are watching the great chemist perform his experiment? Have you been sufficiently transported into his laboratory? Can you feel carbonic acid being released? We are at a pressure of four hundred and ninety-five atmospheres!

The cylinder is vibrating! Take care! Take care! The equipment is going to blow up! Every man for himself! "

And with a blow of his fist powerful enough to pulverise the ivories, Quinsonnas reproduced the explosion.

It is tempting to see a parallel between Verne's descriptive fantasy of Thilorier's disastrous experiment -admittedly in an imagined world, where Quinsonnas has the impression that "everyone is a chemist" and where the triumph of science and rationality has left a dismal legacy of brutish, grasping barbarism - and Alkan's portrayal of the nascent railway technology of his day.

Nor was *Le chemin de fer* Alkan's only foray into representations of mechanics and technology. One of his first compositions, *Les omnibus: variations dédiées aux dames blanches* (Op. 2), which appeared in 1829, evoked the white horse-drawn carriages which then plied their trade on the streets of Paris. As Ronald Smith notes, to make sure no-one was under any misapprehensions, towards its conclusion the piece included "a crude parody of the postillion's horn". [Alkan, Vol II, *The Music*, p. 1] Similarly, in *Une fusée*, Alkan in 1859 turned his attention to rockets; for Hugh Macdonald, this was evidence of compositional audacity ["La voix de l'instrument" in *C-V. Alkan*, ed. B. François-Sappey, p. 138], although for Ronald Smith the study does not particularly succeed [Alkan, Vol II, p.154]. The fact is that Alkan was unusual, and doubtless known for the fact that he used the piano not merely to evoke natural phenomena (*Le vent*, op. 15 no.2, *Comme le vent*, op. 39 no.1, *Neige et lave*, op. 67 no.1 and *Gros temps*, op. 74 no.10), the animal world (*Saltarelle*, op. 23 and *Le festin d'Esopé*) - a tradition which can be traced back in French music to Daquin (1694-1772) (*Le coucou*, *Les plaisirs de la chasse*) and beyond - or even to tell a little story (*L'incendie au village voisin* op. 35 no.7, *Le tambour bat aux champs* op. 60*bis* - again, very much in the French tradition: see, e.g. Michel Corrette's (1709-1795) *La victoire d'un combat naval*, which includes such helpful instructions to the harpsichordist as "seamen scratching their ears"!), but also to reproduce the more rasping sound of things mechanical, the engineering wonders of the day. It is not at all unlikely that this caught Verne's roving imagination that was to be 1960. Certainly Quinsonnas's manner of playing bears little relation to the style of Alkan or of other virtuosi of the 1860s. As Verne tells us:

"(Quinsonnas) sat down, or rather, flung himself down at the piano. Beneath his fingers, his hands and his elbows the instrument emitted impossible noises. The notes jarred with one another and crackled like a hailstorm. No melody! Nor rhythm! " (p. 100)

When eventually Michel tells him how marvellously he plays *La Thiloriennne*, Quinsonnas replies off-handedly:

"Come off it!" said the artist, shrugging his shoulders. "I don't even know the first note of the piece, yet I have been working on it for the last three years! "

If loose improvisation was the key to musical performance in Verne's future world, the amazing thing is that loose improvisation and free-form composition was indeed to be *le dernier cri* in 1960. The prediction is eerie.

The thought that Verne may have had Alkan in mind is reinforced by the next portion of Chapter VIII where Quinsonnas explains that if *La Thiloriennne* is to be a hit, he must win over the public with his technique.

"What more can you do?"

"That's my secret, my friends. Do not ask me about it. You would treat me like a madman, and that would cause me to lose heart. But I can assure you that the talents of the likes of Liszt and Thalberg, and of Prudent and Schulhoff will be surpassed by a long chalk. "

"Do you want to play three notes per second faster than them?" asked Jacques.

"No! but I expect to play the piano in a new style which will amaze the public ."

Verne's evocation of some of the great virtuosi of the day may not be without significance. All four have links with Alkan. At the time of his retreat from the concert platform in 1838, Liszt and Thalberg were the idols of a thronging concert-going public and Alkan was bidding at least to be their equal. Emile Prudent, who is now remembered, if at all, for a charming arrangement of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, was one of four candidates, including Alkan, who each hoped to succeed Zimmermann in 1848 as Principal Professor of Piano at the Paris Conservatoire. In the event, this post went to Marmontel, Alkan's former pupil. (It is difficult to imagine that Prudent can have been a serious candidate for the post, given that in 1835 his name was actually removed from the harmony class after four years of unsuccessful attempts to master the subject. He was not even entered for the *concours* in harmony.) Prudent died in 1863, the year in which *Paris in the 20th Century* was being written. Jules Schulhoff is perhaps a more enigmatic figure. Born in 1825, his concert debut in 1845 at the *Salle Erard* was directly attributable to his having once accosted Alkan's next-door neighbour, Chopin, in the Pleyel showroom. Chopin listened grumpily, but was slowly won over by the beauty of Schulhoff's playing. The critic, Blanchard, described Schulhoff's as "*un pianiste chanteur*". Alkan certainly knew Schulhoff : indeed , i t was to Schulhoff that he dedicated his second book of *Chants* (op. 38) in 1857. In keeping with the spirit of the times, both Prudent and Schulhoff were successful travelling virtuosi, who composed and arranged others' works as well as producing a few serious compositions of their own. Just as Quinsonnas intends to do, just as Alkan did for decades on end, both Prudent and Schulhoff spent reclusive years developing and polishing their distinctive concert techniques, the former when he discovered Thalberg's piano-playing, which took Paris by storm after 1836, and the latter in the later 1840s.

(Apart from musical clues in the text, there are other possible reasons for thinking that Verne is likely to have known of Alkan. Verne's publisher, Hetzel, was also George Sand's publisher. The relations between Verne and Sand were close enough for it to have been suggested that the idea for *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* came from George

Sand in a letter written in the 1860s. Indeed, *Paris in the 20th Century* contains an ingratiating eulogy of George Sand ("a marvellous genius, one of France's greatest writers, decorated at long last in 1859. ..") as well as an inept tribute to a certain Stahl (the pseudonym under which the publisher, Hetzel, wrote. Verne's relations with Sand, however, postdated Alkan's retirement from public life and society.)

Quinsonnas's friends are inclining towards the view that he is slightly off his head, obsessed as he is with the idea of developing in secret a piano technique - a task which, he himself admits, "demands a superhuman effort" .But casting aside the pretence of modernism and, with a repertoire which reads not unlike the programmes of Alkan's *Petits concerts* of 1873 and 1874, Quinsonnas reveals his genuine predilections:

"Quinsonnas was a great artist. He played with strong feeling. He knew what preceding centuries had bequeathed to the present, a bequest which the latter had rejected.. .He set out before his enchanted friends a musical history, moving from Rameau to Lully, to Mozart, to Beethoven, to Weber, the founders of this art, weeping over the sweet inspirations of Grétry and triumphing in the proud pages of Rossini and Meyerbeer. "

(The three last-named musicians all connect with Alkan. Rossini admired Alkan as a child prodigy, whilst we all know that Alkan expressed profound admiration for Rossini's work. For all his sentimentality, Alkan saw sufficient merit in Andre-Modeste Grétry (1741-1813), a prolific composer of lightweight *opéras-comiques*, to transcribe for the piano in 1857 the chorus from *Two Misers*. Similarly, in 1850 Alkan composed a piano arrangement for four hands of the over'ture f rom Giacomo Meyerbeer' s opera, *The Prophet*.)

The conversation resumes, Quinsonnas dismissing Berlioz but praising Victor Masse ("the last musician to have any feeling or heart"), Gounod, "the splendid composer of *Faust* who died shortly after being ordained into the priesthood of the Wagnerian Church" , and Verdi, "the man of harmonic noise, the hero of musical racket, who wrote great tunes in the way that one writes great literature, the author of the inexhaustible *Trovatore*, who contributed so much to his own age's loss of direction". "*Enfin Wagnerbe vint...*", Quinsonnas intones - a play on words in imitation of Boileau's "*Enfin Malherbe vint*", He then breaks into a piece, composed, we discover, by Michel's own father, comprising melodies to which Weber or Beethoven would have been proud to put their names. And thus the recital comes to an end:

So saying, he touched the instrument. The keyboard withdrew, allowing one to see a fully made bed complete with a dressing table and divers utensils. "Now there, " he said, "you have what our age is worthy of inventing. A piano-cum-bed-cum-commode-cum-dressing table! "

" And bedside table, " added Jacques .

"As you say, dear friend. It has everything! "

Jules Verne and contemporary taste

Paris in the 20th Century is significant in two ways, musically speaking. First, it elucidates Jules Verne's musical tastes, confirming to some degree what one might have expected. Professor Bailbe has observed that not until *Propeller Island* in 1895 did Verne express "judgments full of finesse" on the music of his century. Quinsonnas's comments in *Paris in the 20th Century* may not be of the highest sophistication, may reflect fads and squabbles of the day, but they do illuminate a period when Verne was thought not to be writing on musical themes. They confirm Verne's basically low-brow tastes: popular composers of light opera seem to have been his staple predilection. (It is to be noted that on arriving in

Paris from the provinces at the age of 24, between 1852 and 1855 Verne was employed as a secretary at the *Théâtre lyrique*.) They also reflect his interest in the piano - even when broke in the early years in Paris he still found a way to acquire a piano on which to play and to compose songs. More intriguing yet, chapter VIII of *Paris in the 20th Century* contains in one single, concentrated burst almost the entire Vernean pantheon of musicians. Professor Robert Pourvoyeur has listed the dozen composers referred to in Verne's earlier works, *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* (1868) and *The Children of Captain Grant* (1870), and has pointed out that six of these wrote scores which were played at one time or another at the *Théâtre Lyrique*. ("Jules Verne et le romantisme musical" in *Colloque d'Amiens*, Vol. II, Paris, 1980. Prof. Bailbe's remarks appear in the same publication.) The six include Rossini, Mozart, David, Herold and Auber. In Chapter VIII of *Paris in the 20th Century* we find references to Weber, Rossini, Mozart, David, Herold and Auber.

In short, as one might have anticipated, from the outset of his literary career (this was his second novel) Verne's universe was fixed upon the music he knew, loved and had contributed to, light opera. (In fact, of the twelve composers listed by Pourvoyeur, there is also coincidence in the cases of Masse, Gounod, Beethoven, Wagner and Meyerbeer. Only Haydn is omitted in *Paris in the 20th Century*. This brings home the restricted bounds of Verne's tastes.)

Paris in the 20th Century also fills in details on Verne's views about Wagner. There seems to be consensus that, at least between 1866 and 1870, Verne was pro-Wagnerian. What the earlier novel now reveals is that Verne must have undergone a conversion because in 1863, his dislike of Wagner and of the latter's deleterious effect on music is paraded openly. We have seen Hiller's reaction to Wagner's work, revealed in a letter to Alkan in 1860. (See F. Luguenot, "Coups de griffes et pattes de velours a travers la correspondance" in *Charles-Valen'in Alkan*, ed. B. François Sappey. In 1861 *Tannhauser* was put on for the first time in Paris and created a sensational scandal. The Jockey Club, who had control over the theatre in which the opera was presented, disrupted the second and third performances. Verne's negativity in 1863 simply mirrored one faction within public opinion. The warming, in the late 1860s, again reflects an opinion entertained by a significant proportion of the Parisian music-loving public. But by 1870 and the Siege of Paris, following the composition of *Eine Kapitulation*, opinion turned once more and Verne's reaction against Wagner's Teutonic compositions was virtually conventional wisdom. In short, Verne's newly discovered novel points up both Verne's adherence to the orthodoxies of his day and his known passionate fondness for the *opéra-comique*.

And Alkan?

As for Alkan, as in most things, tantalisingly at best we perceive his shadow. He himself remains concealed from view. Nevertheless, in *Paris in the 20th Century* we may have a unique, if oblique and not exactly complimentary literary allusion to this enigmatic character. In the case of Alkan, one may always have to accept gracefully that something is better than nothing.

Roderick Munday

My thanks again to Dr Munday for providing his original text, and for his entertaining presentation based on it which he gave, assisted by Thomas Wakefield, at our Alkan Day. And my best wishes to all our members, old and new, for Christmas and 1997.

Peter Grove