



THE ALKAN SOCIETY

(Registered Charity number 276199)

<http://www.alkansociety.org>

President: Ronald Smith

Vice-Presidents: Nicholas King, Hugh MacDonald, Richard Shaw

Secretary: Nicholas King, 42 St. Alban's Hill, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP3 9NG
e-mail : secretary@alkansociety.org

Chairman: Eliot Levin

Treasurer: Averil Kovacs *Archivist:* Brian Doyle *Bulletin Editor/Webmaster:* David Conway

Bulletin e-mail: info@alkansociety.org

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BULLETIN no. 63 September 2003

Editor's notes

- **The correction of errors** from last issue will clearly develop into a regular spot in these notes. To those (if any) who booked a trip to Husum based on the 'forthcoming events' in the printed version of the Bulletin, my apologies and my hopeful advice not to bother suing me, given my limited resources. Unfortunately there were included in this item some events from last year's festival. Members who take the Bulletin in its electronic version however were more accurately informed via an updated version: let me take this opportunity to remind – indeed encourage – members to opt if they wish for e-mail delivery, which gets you the Bulletin more quickly and saves the Society on postage (let me know at the e-mail address below).
- **The present issue** however includes a feast of information and opinion which I hope I have rendered accurately. This includes reviews of Steven Osborne's recent recording of the op. 63 'Esquisses' and his Wigmore Hall recital in June, and an interview with the pianist; a proposed reconstruction of part of the Morhange/Alkan family tree; and comments from Gregor Brand, a descendant of the German Alkan family and a formidable researcher of its history, on the article 'Alkan and His Jewish Roots' which appeared in Bulletins nos. 61 and 62. I regret that the resulting pressure on space has meant holding over the promised extract on Alkan from Bernard van Dieren's 'Down Among the Dead Men' until the December issue
- **New recordings:** recent recordings of interest to members include a Schubert recital by Ronald Smith on APR (APR 5568) – a re-issue of the 1986 Nimbus recordings of the sonatas D537 and D784, with a new recording of the Wanderer Fantasy. Meanwhile the Dutch company Brilliant Classics has released a budget-price CD by Stanley Hoogland of Alkan Miniatures, including extracts from opp. 31, 63, 65, 67 and 74, played on an 1858 Pleyel

piano. Our web-site gives a link to one of the German companies offering this disc, which we hope to review in a future issue.

- Our Australian member Patrick Spillane, who notified us (issue 61) of the pamphlet by (Alphonse) **Alkan aîné**, has now very kindly sent the society the pamphlet itself. Unfortunately the booklet mentions nothing of Alphonse's background, leaving it as difficult as ever to assess his relationship (if any) with our Alkan. Nonetheless as the following article and Gregor Brand's comments later in this issue confirm, gradually the picture is building up.
- **The Society's web-site** continues to attract attention. We are well listed in the popular search engines, and regularly receive an average of 10 hits or more per day from all over the world – no mean feat for a 'specialty' site. Don't forget you can order all your records and books (not only Alkania!) through the Virtual Shop and the Amazon links on our website – you get all the advantages of Amazon's prices, plus the Society gets a small commission towards its costs. The list of past Bulletins available to members online now extends back to issue 40 (1990) and we continue to add to it. The Society's membership by the way has once again passed the 100 mark and continues growing!
- **I repeat my regular appeal** - The Bulletin can only be as lively as the Society's members – so please feel free to contribute your opinions, be they full-scale essays or brief queries; they will all be greeted warmly.

Editor (e-mail: info@alkansociety.org)

Forthcoming events

Upcoming events we have noted related to Alkan include:

Tuesday September 9th 2003 *The Warehouse, 13 Theed St., London SE1 at 7.00 pm* Recital by **Katharina Wolpe** to include Mozart, Mussorgsky and **Alkan pieces from opp. 31, 63, 65 and 70**

Sunday October 12th 2003 *Wigmore Hall, London at 7.00 pm* The Purcell School Soloists Concert - includes Alkan Etude op. 35 no. 10

Alkan at the Cambridge Music Festival 2003 – we hope that as many members as possible will participate in these events -

- **Friday November 7th 2003** *The Chapel, Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, at 16.30* **2003-4 Alkan Society Piano Scholarship Competition**. See also November 20th.
- **Saturday November 8th 2003** *The Chapel, St. John's College, Cambridge at 13.10*. Cambridge Music Festival. **The Alkan Society presents** an organ recital by Kendrick Partington, to include his transcription of 'Le Festin d'Esopé'. Event supported by the Alkan Society. Free (retiring collection).
- **Saturday November 8th 2003** *Dining Hall, Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, at 20.00*. Piano recital by **Ronald Smith**, to include Beethoven (Appassionata), Liszt, Chopin and Alkan's 'Festin d'Esopé', Allegro Barbaro, and others. Tickets £10 (£5), available from September from the College.
- **Thursday November 20th 2003** *Emmanuel United Reformed Church, Trumpington St., Cambridge at 13.10*. Cambridge Music Festival. 'French Music 1870-1925' - piano recital

by **winner of this year's Alkan Society Piano Scholarship**, to include music by Alkan. Free (retiring collection).

Sunday December 14th 2003 *New North London Synagogue, 80 East End Road, London N3 at 19.30.* 'Hebrew Melodies' -talk by David Conway on Jewish composers of the early 19th Century, with sung illustrations by Claudia Conway (soprano). Will include Alkan's 'Trois anciennes mélodies juives', as well as music by Nathan and Meyerbeer. For details phone 020 8360 5127

Tuesday January 27th 2004 *Seoul Arts Center Concert Hall, Seoul, Korea.* Piano recital by **Marc-André Hamelin** to include '**Le Festin d'Esopo**' and also possibly **Alkan's 'Symphonie'**.

The Op. 63 Esquisses – Steven Osborne's New Recording

Steven Osborne's complete recording (49 pieces including the final 'Laus Deo') has received very widespread and favourable reviews, as the following quotes demonstrate:

'This disc is a big boon for the Alkan discography [...] Osborne's interpretations, wide in varieties of touch, (sometimes magically superfine), in contrasts of rhetorical declamation, amount to a revelation. While Alkan's sketchbook may not encompass the full flight of bravura evidenced in his large pianistic ventures, it displays some of his more startling explorations – for instance, no. 45 'Les diabolotins' with its biting march rhythm, ferocious interjections and tone of bizarre mockery – alongside paragraphs of extreme simplicity, gentleness and sobriety; and the pianist embraces Alkan's extremes with sovereign technical control. [...] At moments I found myself fantasising about an even greater degree of Berliozian *diablerie* in the delivery, yet I would not willingly relinquish for it the overall command that Osborne so compellingly demonstrates'

*Max Loppert, BBC Music Magazine, June 2003 (***** for both performance and sound)*

'Here is a superlative record of music to confound the sceptics [...] These 48 fragments [...] (could not) be by any other composer. Gnostic, introspective, full of odd twists and turns of phrase and expression, they invariably catch you unawares. [...] Laurent Martin's able but limited Naxos recording [...] is quite surpassed by Osborne, whose performances are of a sensitivity, radiance and finesses rarely encountered form even the finest pianists [...] An invaluable disc'.

Bryce Morrison, Gramophone, September 2003. (The recording was selected as 'Editor's Choice').

'Osborne certainly plays like a man converted. In his notes he stresses what he sees as the 'humility' of Alkan's approach, the very opposite of a self-aggrandizing bravura; by which I think he is responding to the co positional discipline and psychological penetration that Alkan [...] brought even to the smallest pieces he wrote. [...] Altogether a sterling achievement, this disc could make the easiest and one of the most effective of introductions to one of the great originals in the history of piano music'.

Calum MacDonald, International Record Review, April 2003.

A more controversial review is that of Adrian Corleonis, published in the American 'Fanfare' magazine in its September/October 2003 edition, and reprinted below with the very kind permission of the publisher (and of the author). If readers are prompted or provoked by Mr. Corleonis's opinions on the composer and/or on the pianist, the 'Bulletin' will be delighted to receive their comments!

'Despite Busoni's oft-quoted 1909 encomium—his inclusion of Alkan with Liszt, Chopin, Schumann, and Brahms as "the greatest composers for the piano since Beethoven"—and a series of splendid, superb, heroic recorded performances of Alkan's works, major and minor, by Raymond Lewenthal, Ronald Smith, and Marc-André Hamelin (to name only the most prominent) cropping up over the last forty years, to most classical enthusiasts Alkan remains a dubious case. And they may be right. Those who know Alkan and care for him often protest too much against his neglect, his obscurity, his equivocal status as a forgotten great composer, and plead for his inclusion, with Liszt, Chopin, Schumann, and Brahms, in concert programs, as if the audience for "classical" were a great sponge capable of soaking up anything and everything if only one will beat the Alkan (or Busoni, or Sorabji, or Godowsky) drum long enough and loud enough. This simplemindedly charitable notion is fundamentally mistaken, and the album at hand demonstrates admirably why it is wrong and why Alkan must always remain "caviar to the general," that is, the preserve of connoisseurs.

'Osborne is a nimble-fingered gentleman and far better equipped than his predecessor, Laurent Martin (Naxos 8.555496, *Fanfare* 26:3), to meet the often excruciating digital demands of this curious fare with fleet flair. In executive matters he may hardly be faulted. And, as his frank, honest preface to this offering attests, he has met Alkan with considered and deepening sympathy—some of it a bit misplaced. "It is with an element of bemusement that I find myself writing this introduction... because two years ago I would have thought myself as likely to be selling baseball cards on the Shopping Channel. I had distrusted Alkan's music since hearing parts of his *Symphonie* for solo piano while at college—I just didn't 'get it' at all..." But on looking into the *Esquisses*, "...I was amazed to find music of great character, integrity, humour, and even beauty. Instead of the virtuosic monstrosities I had expected, there were simple dances, airs, touching fragments, brilliant (but concise) etudes, and an extraordinary variety of character pieces." That's apt, as far as it goes, and certainly one way of hearing—and playing—the *Esquisses*. "As I got to know more about Alkan's life and music, it became obvious that he was really the antithesis of a showman—reclusive, sober as a performer, and almost puritanically pure as a composer. Despite its undeniable virtuosity, his music is almost completely devoid of Lisztian hyperbole." Hyperbole? Osborne has reservations about Berlioz, too—"another composer not averse to flirting with the borders of musical absurdity." Alkan and Berlioz share (with Bach and Beethoven) a penchant for extra-musical allusions, though Alkan goes much further, reproducing, for instance, the gestures of abnormal psychology, the best known instance being the distracted madness (mirrored in the wide—dissociated—separation of the hands) of *La Chanson de la folle au bord de la mer* (from the *Préludes*), or the almost wholly unknown *Trois Menuets*, which mimic the feints, dislocations, and failing memory of dementia or Alzheimer's. "To my mind," Osborne notes, "there is one particularly amazing moment—the fortissimo final chord of *En Songe*. This is so odd that initially I could not bring myself to play it. Here Alkan conveys the shock of being suddenly jolted out of a daydream, this chord having virtually the same effect as the performer playing a tone cluster, slamming down the keyboard lid or screaming at the audience.... According to taste, this is a moment of genius or idiocy." There, there, now. To Osborne, *Héraclite et Démocrite*—the comedic dialogue of the

“dark philosopher” and the “laughing philosopher” of antiquity—is “schizophrenic,” and Alkan’s prankish imps, *Les Diablotins*, seem to him “exceedingly bizarre.” Well, *yes*. But, such *bizarrierie* aside, in the end Alkan’s craft and sense of proportion, his “unerring sense of musical logic,” absolve him and he is found fit, after all, to be counted in company with those other great composers of his era—“a singularly unusual musical mind in which the radical and the humble coexisted in perfect sympathy.”

‘If I have dwelt perhaps overlong on Osborne’s verbal reactions, it is to convey just how problematic Alkan can seem even to a sensitive, gifted, and highly cultivated musician. And, evidently, to a mainstream audience, as well. One leaves both Osborne’s preface and his album feeling that he still doesn’t quite “get it.” For to animate Alkan’s music, miniatures and monsterpieces alike, one must not only recognize his fondness for the bizarre, grotesque, macabre, and, above all, the satirical, one must also *relish* it. Osborne is simply too genteel to bring himself to do that. Or, as he writes, “There are times when his music sounds frankly odd due to compositional gambits which teeter on the edge of sanity (or at least good manners). . . .” Alkan’s utterance is nearly always tongue-in-cheek and, quite often, the notorious hissing of a forked tongue in both cheeks. Indeed, after the atypical *Sturm und Drang* pieces of the 1830s, for instance, the *Trois Morceaux dans le genre pathétique* (of which Marc-André Hamelin has given such magnificent accounts, Hyperion CDA67218, *Fanfare* 25:3), there is hardly a bar in the mature works which does not harbor some allusion, inside joke, or sly send up, and to miss this is to miss the point of the piece, to allow the salt to lose its savor. Osborne remarks that “there is a basic simplicity to his approach which I find both touching and compelling. . . and so when the basic material is uncomplicated (e.g., *Petit air à 5 voix*, *Innocenzia*), the results are unassuming almost to the point of naivety. (It is worth considering how many composers in the middle of the nineteenth century were capable of such extreme self-effacement.)” And it is also worth considering that Alkan gave the game away in the title of the eighth piece, *Pseudo-naï veté*, indicating a vein he mines often.

‘Take, for instance, *Le Premier billet doux*, marked *Amorosamente*. Osborne plays it straight, that is, impeccably, slowly, with feeling, as if it were misplaced from one of Schumann’s children’s albums, thus losing the sophisticated effect—worked in a compact 21 bars—of an effusive confusion of eager shyness ending with the musical equivalent of hands clasped against the breast and eyes raised to heaven, to be heard in Ronald Smith’s account (*Arabesque* Z6523). Osborne, in fact, sets the tone from the first piece, *La Vision*, which he milks as a conventional essay in the exquisite. Raymond Lewenthal (Élan CD 82284) played it even more slowly but also conveyed its almost surreal ambience—“On a dark stage a Giselle-like figure appears, moves about slowly and sadly, and in a few seconds the wraith dissolves before our very eyes. The orchestra plays a few quiet solemn chords—the curtain falls.” That is, if one takes Alkan at face value and plays no more than the notes, many of these miniatures make passable, even charming, music but remain rather small beer. Alkan’s titles (see above), alone, indicate that there is much more in score to be voiced than meets the innocent eye. An aware performance, on the other hand, brings out a pungency, a piquancy, a power, an emotional complexity, which increases the impact of these “sketches” exponentially. It’s indicative that Osborne responds to, and comments upon, Alkan’s paper audacities, such as “the harmonically baffling” *Les Enharmoniques*, which he calls his “radically experimental aspect,” but misses Alkan’s proto-Modern spirit of irony (in the *faux-naïf* numbers), satire (e.g., *L’Homme aux sabots*—“man in clogs”—guying a rustic clodhopper hilariously and unforgettably), and allusion (*Petite Marche villageoise*, *Début de quatuor*, *Musique militaire*, or to music of the past—*Contredanse*, *Rigaudon*, *Minuetto*),

stances and techniques which would be replicated in *The Waste Land*, Pound's early *Cantos*, and *Ulysses*, as well as in the music of Busoni, Stravinsky, Sorabji, et al. Too often, Osborne plays with too little bite—too many of these cluelessly fine readings amount to a falsification. Alkan requires not merely the sort of technique which can take Lisztian “hyperbole” easily in stride, but stylistically aware interpretation. With those in hand, he emerges as less the humble, self-effacing worker of Osborne's fancy and more as an often subtle but incorrigible joker. At this point, the artist, the producer, the firm, and very likely the audience as well, throw up their hands and abandon Alkan as rather too special, too particular, a case. The audience, after all, expects a Romantic composer to wear his heart on his sleeve in a way with which they can readily, heedlessly identify and not to be poking subversive fun at the genres in which he works. In sum, not only is Alkan difficult to bring off, but when the feat is managed, the upshot is rather more than likely to be something unexpected and disconcerting.

‘Finally, there is the matter of touch. His contemporaries found Alkan's playing glittering but cold, and if we were to be confronted by the *sec*, rhythmically precise *style sévère*, of which Alkan was a leading exponent, and which (incredibly to our ears) the music of Mendelssohn, Fauré, and Saint-Saëns takes as given, we would probably find it dry, stiff, rattling, an uncomfortable departure from the generic mellow creamo *rubato*-relieved and pedal-warmed legato in which nearly every pianist of our time has drowned. Traces of the *style sévère* remained in the playing of Yvonne Lefébure and Jean Doyen—to set their accounts of Fauré aristocratically apart. And the young Ronald Smith gave us an aural glimpse of Alkan played on the lighter instruments of his era—with an astounding clarity in the bass after which his frequent full, low chords on a modern Steinway can seem muffled detonations—on long-playing Oryx 1803, long gone but well worth tracking down. The closest approach to Alkan's peculiar soundscape, however, was rendered on a Steinway in the brisk, unsentimentally crackling, staccato-based accounts of Osamu Nakamura, who performed the *Esquisses*, complete, a dozen years ago on Escalier 8017, a Japanese label affiliated with Sony/Epic, which enjoyed a brief, clandestine distribution in this country through the good offices of Records International. The Japanese had *no* interest in importing this, and the disc seems to be long out of print. One can only hope that some adventurous small firm will secure the rights and reissue it for domestic consumption, for it is a revelation—in the scintillations, percolations, and coruscations of Nakamura's light, lightning-like handiwork Alkan's wry asperity and dry humor foam forth (after one becomes accustomed to the close studio sound) like bubbles in champagne to make an amazing, uniquely effervescent hour. It is only fair to add that Nakamura can be spontaneously sloppy where Osborne is punctiliously polished. But no one who has heard Nakamura's album can be quite happy with Osborne's.

‘The Nakamura is, however, unavailable, and Osborne's is, in its earnest hit-or-miss way, quite good. Hyperion's production values are, as usual, deluxe, with extensive annotations by Misha Donat which seem, at times, more attuned to Alkan than the pianist. The sound is occasionally a bit recessed in large hall ambience, which deprives it of some edge, though, over all, it is warm and adequately detailed. Recommendation may not be withheld, even if it is less than wholeheartedly enthusiastic’.

Adrian Corleonis

Steven Osborne in interview with The Alkan Society Bulletin



Steven Osborne, born in Scotland in 1971, is one of Britain's most sought-after young pianists with a repertoire ranging from Bach to George Crumb and the contemporary Ukrainian, Nikolai Kapustin. But his recordings and recitals indicate a significant commitment to the Romantic tradition, featuring amongst others Alkan, Liszt, Medtner, Rachmaninov, and, from this country, Tovey and Mackenzie. A finalist in the piano section of the BBC Young Musician of the Year Competition in 1988, he has subsequently won the first prizes in the Clara Haskil Competition (1991) and the New York Naumburg International Competition (1997). He has played all over the UK (including in the Proms Seasons of 1998, 2000 and 2001), throughout Europe and the USA and in Japan. His recital at the Wigmore Hall on June 14th, which included Book IV of Alkan's 'Esquisses' was one of a short series of four, the others of which included chamber music played with Alban Gerhardt, Paul Lewis and Lisa Batiashvili. This summer will see him visiting, among other venues, the US, Canada, Cheltenham and the Edinburgh Festival. However he kindly spared some time to chat to ASB:

ASB: You write in the programme notes to your recent CD of the '48 Esquisses' that 'it is with an element of bemusement that I find myself writing this introduction to an album of Alkan piano music, because two years ago I would have thought myself to be as likely selling baseball cards on the Shopping Channel'.

SO: When I first heard Alkan's music I felt it to be rather inhuman – I couldn't connect with it. I listened to parts of the 'Symphonie' and the 'Concerto' and found them very impressive – but weird. It was almost as if there was too much virtuosity to allow for display of personality. What impressed me most on coming to the 'Esquisses' were their inherent musical qualities, and that's what convinced me to work on them. I only like to do music that I really identify with strongly, and to prepare pieces for a recital or a recording is a serious commitment.

ASB: How did you feel the audience reacted to the 'Esquisses'?

SO: I felt I got a very good reaction – though it was clear that some of the audience were surprised, or even shocked at some places.

ASB: Are you planning working on any more Alkan in the future?

SO: If I do any more it won't be for a while. I like to move in different directions. At present the Tippett sonatas are among my main projects, though I don't have any dates yet for performances.

ASB: You gave an extremely dramatic performance of the Liszt 'Funérailles'. Do you think that a knowledge of the historical context of a piece is necessary for a good performance?

SO: Well, generally, I'm pretty ignorant of the detailed historical context and prefer to try and get as deeply as I can into the emotions of a piece. Historical considerations can certainly give you another perspective; I'm not against it. It's more a question of time restrictions and having to choose what I concentrate on.

ASB: How do you enjoy playing in the Wigmore Hall?

SO: It's undoubtedly my favourite place, with a great acoustic and many happy memories for me. The first time I ever played a great piano was in that hall; quite an experience!

Steven Osborne at the Wigmore Hall, 14th June 2003

Once again we are indebted to the editors of 'Electric Review', (www.electricreview.com) for permission to print the following review of Steven Osborne's recital, which included Book IV of Alkan's '48 Esquisses'. We reprint **Allen Buchler's** article in full, despite its various eccentricities.

Synaesthesia is not generally my bag, but I have rarely experienced such a concrete and powerful evocation of memory by music as when listening last Saturday to Steven Osborne playing Liszt's *Funérailles*. There before me, almost as if I were walking through it once again, was one of the most magnificent architectural monuments in Budapest, the Kerepesi Cemetery. Indeed I am now convinced that this stunning memorial to Hungarian history was itself a result of the spirit stirred by the patriotic Liszt in his tribute to the revolution of 1848.

To those who do not know it, Kerepesi is a glorious open-air museum of Hungarian history, sculpture and architecture. From the time of the burial of the poet Vörösmarty in 1855, attended by tens of thousands, it has been the Valhalla of the country's greatest artists, writers, musicians, doctors, scientists, and, of course, not least, politicians. Dominated by the gigantic temple containing the body of the revolutionary leader **Kossuth**, (later the subject of the first symphonic poem written by Bartók), you will find there **actresses, engineers, atomic physicists, composers** and **non-persons from the days of Communism**. And also the grave of the man in whose memory Liszt composed *Funérailles*, **Count Lajos Batthyány**, executed by the Austrians in 1849 for his support of the Hungarian nationalists. Osborne conjured up the lot – the pathos and grief, the grandeur and the apotheosis. His phrasing, pedalling and handling of line was laudable, whether in haunting passages in double octaves or in fortissimo turmoil. Anyone listening who did not feel by the end a thorough Hungarian patriot has no heart. Mrs. Buchler of course approved, although I noticed her on the nod during the blandly serene (or is it serenely bland? – anyway, it goes on for ages) *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude* which followed. The programme notes call the piece 'wonderfully contemplative' and quite a few of the audience were in deepest contemplation by its end.

This was all in the second half of Osborne's recital and by that time I am afraid that some who had come for the rarities of the first part had bunked off. My friend M., for example, decided he could not share my admiration for the pianist. When I gave my opinion of his performance, at the start of the recital, of Beethoven's op. 90 Sonata as 'limpid', he countered with 'brackish'. When I said that Osborne's style reminded me in many ways of Brendel, M. agreed, but meant it as a put-down. I have great respect for M., but this time he was just wrong. Osborne does not need to wear his heart on his sleeve – he is content to let the feelings emerge through his careful and thoughtful handling of musical technique, and to credit the emotional and analytical intelligence of his audience. This should be taken as a compliment, not a fault.

Where M. and I were in complete agreement was in applauding Osborne's rendition of the two *Contes* op. 20 by Medtner (born Moscow 1880, died Golders Green 1951). This intense, powerful music is what Rachmaninov might have written had he any real ability as a composer. The second *conte*, in B minor, marked 'menacingly', and required by the composer

to be played strictly in tempo throughout, is utterly terrifying in every respect. I hope that Osborne may be putting these interpretations on record soon.

His most recent recording includes the other item on Saturday's programme, Book IV of the Esquisses of Charles-Valentin Alkan. These 49 miniatures (twice round the gamut and back to C major again) are a mini-encyclopaedia of this incredible composer's world of sound and technique. The twelve items of Book IV (nos. 37-48) must however still be rather startling to any newcomer to this music. Some pieces radiate a Mendelssohnian innocence. Others are rather more disturbing: *Les diabolins*, in which fiendish note-clusters chew up the keyboard, anticipating Ives or Cowell; *Héraclite et Démocrite*, in which the gloomy and the laughing philosophers alternate and argue, with the latter obtaining a Pyrrhic victory; *L'enharmonique* in which we flail to grab hold of a defining key-note. The last piece, the serene and hypnotic *En songe*, quiet throughout, ends with an entirely unprepared-for fortissimo chord. Osborne writes of this as being 'the shock of being suddenly jolted out of a daydream... According to taste, this is a moment of genius or idiocy'. In Osborne's performance it was a moment of genius, albeit very eccentric genius. Listen to his recording and judge for yourself. Osborne is a most persuasive advocate.

I know I go on only too often about Alkan, but the fact that he is at last gaining a toe-hold in concert repertoires goes to show that maybe I am on to something, after all. As Osborne himself writes 'two years ago I would have thought myself as likely to be selling baseball cards on the Shopping Channel' as playing the music of Alkan; things change! A rap on the knuckles, by the way, of the writer of the programme-notes, Misha Donat: Alkan was not a 'close friend' of Georges Bizet – indeed, there is no evidence that they ever even met, although Alkan's bastard, Delaborde, was only too close a friend of Bizet's wife. But that is another story.

On the evidence of this recital Steven Osborne is developing an exceptional mastery; I hope that he will extend this mastery in continuing to explore the repertoire, and also gain the audiences he deserves. I look forward to his future recitals.

The German Alkans

*Our article on 'Alkan and his Jewish Roots' (Bulletins 61/62) has evoked an interesting response from **Gregor Brand**, whose web site <http://www.angelfire.com/art/gregorbrand> contains a host of information about the German Alkan family, from which he himself is descended. His research in unravelling this complex web is outstanding, although the connection between the German Alkans and C.-V. Alkan Morhange remains at present elusive. Mr. Brand makes some valuable comments and corrections to my paper, as well as proposing a remarkable Rothschild connection:*

'Launstroff was not "on the border with what was then the Kingdom of Westphalia". From 1815 until 1945 it was on the border with Prussia (Prussia was from 1871 on a part of the German Reich). This Prussian region belonged before 1815 (from 1794 on) to France. So in 1808, when Herz Leib chose the name ALKAN, there was no state-border at all near Launstroff. Dillingen, only some kilometres from Launstroff, never belonged to Westphalia. From 1794 to 1815 it was part of France, from then on part of Prussia.

'The Jewish population in the Rhineland as well as in Lorraine ("Lothringen" in German) and Alsace ("Elsaß") was not the result of a westward drift in the 17th century. [...] In the Middle

Ages there was a migration from Western Europe, especially from the German lands, to Eastern Europe, not otherwise. The Jews of Eastern Europe spoke Yiddish, which is a kind of German dialect, and many of them had German or Yiddish names. In many cases these surnames of East-European Jews bear witness to their German origin (family names like Landau, Oppenheim, Bacharach, Heilprin - from Heilbronn - , Ginsburg - from the German town Günzburg -, Weil, Frankfurter etc. etc.).

'In both regions [Alsace and Lorraine] Jews lived since Roman times, and certainly from the Middle Ages on. The rabbinical sages of Lorraine with its capital Metz were already famous in the time of Rashi (eleventh century).

'So we have to assume that the Alkans were in the first line descendants of Jews who lived since ancient times in these region between France and Germany. This does not mean that there were no families in the Metz region (to which Morhange belongs) who had familiar connections to Eastern Europe. But there were also many families in Metz and the surrounding area with roots in Sephardic Spain and Portugal.

'Most interesting I found the information in your article that Alkan Morhange was a '*Régleur de Papier de Musique*'. In 1757 in Dillingen there was founded a paper mill and a printing firm, in which Jews were also employed. Maybe Marix Morhange and Herz Leib were two brothers, who worked for some time in this paper business in Dillingen? In any case I think, like you, that the Alkan families of Paris and of Dillingen were related'.

In a subsequent e-mail., Mr. Brand comments:

'The surname Alcan appeared in Lorraine and the Metz region BEFORE the eighteenth century. In the middle of the seventeenth century you can find in Metz the rabbi "Alcan Rutshilt", who signs in Hebrew as "Elhanan". According to Pascal Faustini, one of the foremost authorities on the Metz Jewry (see his book: *La communauté juive de Metz et ses familles, 1565 - 1665. Thionville 2001*), this Alcan Rutshilt (who lived about 1615 - 1692) was identical with "Alcan Francfort", son of Isaac Rothschild from the famous Rothschild family. By the way: the first known Rothschild was Elhanan (the root form of Alkan), who died in 1546 in Frankfurt/Main.

'The descendants of Alcan Rothschild in Metz and other parts of Lorraine called themselves from the 18th century on with the surname "ALCAN". So we have a Lorraine Jewish family with the name Alcan/Alkan, which is descended from the world-famous Rothschild family of Frankfurt.

'I think it is not impossible that my ALKAN - as well as Alkan Morhange - are descendants of this Alcan Rothschild from Metz. But it is not proven'.

The Editor comments: *I will only take issue with Gregor Brand on the matter of East-West migration. He is unquestionably correct that the Jewish communities on the Rhine date back to ancient times, but, as I wrote "Many Jewish families had lived in this region for centuries, but after about 1650 their numbers had been increased by those fleeing from persecutions in Ukraine and Poland". But the information in Mr. Brand's latter communication about Alkan/Elchanan certainly induces me to change some of my earlier assumptions, and the possible link with the Rothschilds is fascinating. Now if we could only prove a link to the great Rabbi of Cracow, Moses Isserlis, from whom both Meyerbeer and Mendelsohn were descended.....*

Tending Alkan's Family Tree

Mark Starr's article (Alkan Society Bulletin 61) on 'Alkan's Flute' suggested that the 'A. Morhange' on the label of his wife's flute may have been Alkan Morhange, the father of the composer. But a further investigation now leads to some suggested restructuring of the Alkan family tree. François Luguenot's genealogy, published by the French Alkan Society in 1997, was able to get some way further than Ronald Smith's pioneering effort, and is packed with valuable supporting information, but it seems there is still further work to be done, particularly as regards the family of Alkan's sister Céleste.

The first clue came from William Waterhouse, who, on reading Mark's article, recalled an Alkan flute, and indeed a saxophone, being listed in the edition he prepared of 'The New Langwill Index: A Dictionary of Musical Wind-Instrument Makers and Inventors' (London, 1993). This lists 'A. Morhange' as being, in 1890, '*gendre et succr.* [i.e. son-in-law and successor] *de Mayer Marix*', and denotes him as *fl.* Paris 1890-1900' at the address of Passage des Panoramas 48¹. Mayer Marix is the instrument maker who married Céleste. Thus it would seem that the 'A. Morhange' of Mark's wife's flute is not Alkan Morhange, the composer's father, but an A. Morhange, apparently the husband of the composer's niece. In fact things turn out to be a bit more complex.

It may be noted that in his will Charles-Valentin mentions a cousin, L. Morhange, *du Passage des Panoramas, qui me donnait par amitié le petit nom de mon oncle* [who from friendship gave me the nick-name 'uncle']². This L. Morhange has not to date been properly identified; the French Alkan Society genealogy gives his name as 'Louis'³ but this is not in the text of the will and may indeed be an error; a Lazare Morhange, '*négociant demeurant à Paris*', with the given address of Passage des Panoramas 48, *is* named as a relative ('*parent*') in the legal documents associated with the probate of Charles-Valentin's will in 1888⁴. More of Lazare a bit later.

The French Society's family tree shows Céleste's elder daughter Marie (b. 1836) as married to Adam Morhange (dates unknown), and gives as their children Marthe (d. 1996), Gustave and Yvonne. The dates of Marie's birth and of Marthe's death indicate clearly that there is something wrong here – although the Morhange clan seem generally to be long-lived, such life-spans would qualify for the Guinness Book of Records! I think that Adam is the 'A. Morhange' of the Starrs' flute, but I believe (as will be described) that he was Marie's son, not her husband.

The French Society's genealogy contains a further puzzle; a copy of a letter from an A. Morhange living in Paris, dated 1st July 1941, to the director of the Montmartre Cemetery, found in the cemetery's archives. In translation, it begins:

I refer to my unsuccessful visit of this morning and repeat my request to you. I am absolutely certain that my great-grand-parents Alkan Morhange and his wife née Julie Abraham were buried in the Montmartre Cemetery.....

¹ Waterhouse, p. 272

² see Luguenot, "Note sur la généalogie de la famille de Charles-Valentin Morhange", p. 27

³ Luguenot, p.19

⁴ Luguenot, p. 78

The genealogy assumes that this A. Morhange must be *'en toute logique'* a descendant of Alkan's younger brother Napoléon, but notes that Napoléon's son Alphonse died in 1906⁵. Who then is this mystery 'A. Morhange'?

In explanation, I propose that the 'L. Morhange' of Alkan's will is in fact identical with the Lazare of Alkan's probate; that this Lazare was the husband of Marie, and that they were the parents of Adam Morhange. This thesis is supported by the fact that in Alkan's will there is no specific mention of Marie, or indeed (by name) of her sister Albertine. But there is mention of Albertine's husband Charles Lehmann and *'sa femme, ma nièce'*. By analogy, the reference in the will to *'L. Morhange, [...] sa femme et son fils'* in fact therefore encompasses Marie's husband, Marie herself and their son Adam. It comes immediately before the reference to Lehmann – exactly as we would expect a reference to an older branch of the family to be placed (Marie was 14 years older than Albertine). Do not forget that Alkan had a very formal sense of family!

I further suggest that Lazare is old Alkan Morhange's nephew via an as yet unknown brother, and was hence the first cousin of Alkan the composer. Remember that 'L. Morhange' is referred to in Charles-Valentin's will as a cousin. As an actual cousin, but married to Charles-Valentin's niece, Lazare's joking reference to the composer as *'mon oncle'* makes sense. We may thus look on Marie Marix's marriage to Lazare as a further example of the 'arranged' marriages between Marixes and Morhanges which seem to be a feature of the two families. (See the talk on 'Alkan and his Jewish Roots' in Bulletins 61 and 62).

On this basis, the dates fit. Marie Marix, born 1824, marries Lazare Morhange, of a similar age (he was still alive in 1888!). Their son Adam, will have been born around 1860. He must be the author of the letter in the Montmartre cemetery archive, as Alkan Morhange was indeed, if my hypothesis is correct, his great-grandfather. Adam's age and the circumstances of 1941 perhaps explain the question raised by François Luguenot as to why any Jew at that time should be concerned about the resting places of their ancestors⁶.

Adam is therefore also the 'A. Morhange' of Mrs. Starr's flute; describing himself with pardonable flexibility as *'gendre'* of Marix Morhange, (although he was in fact a 'grandson-in-law' rather than son-in-law). He would have established his business in the premises of his father's (Lazare's) house in Passage des Panoramas, active between 1890 and 1900 (i.e. when Adam was between 30 and 40). Adam and his wife were the parents of Marthe, Gustave and Yvonne Morhange, who are represented on the French society's family tree.

This construction therefore has in its favour that it is consistent with all documentary evidence; that it rectifies the impossible mother-child relationship which otherwise exists between Marie Marix and Marthe Morhange-Motchane; and that it provides a satisfactory explanation for the letter in the Montmartre Cemetery archive. It not only clarifies the descendants of Céleste; it also suggests that other Parisian Morhanges may have descended from siblings of old Alkan Morhange and thus could provide the key to tying up some of the other loose ends remaining after the work of Ronald Smith and François Luguenot. Opinions, and additional information, would be eagerly welcomed by the Society.

DC

⁵ Luguenot pp. 11-12.

⁶ Luguenot, p. 12