

Now let's see



# THE ALKAN SOCIETY

(Registered Charity No. 276199)

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## BULLETIN 86 November 2011

### *The Esquisses Opus 63 The Fifth Colloquium*

Julian Haxby invites the Society to a Colloquium at his home,  
on **Saturday 3rd December, 2 to 6 pm.**

Richard Murphy will once more lead the proceedings.

The following pieces will be discussed: Nos. 7, 13, 20, 25, 27, 28, 36, 42 & 47.

Members are invited to prepare any of these, though Nos. 13 & 20 are already claimed. *Esquisses* previously played may be revisited or other works prepared.

Please notify Richard Murphy (020 7582 2630) of your choices.

Members may bring guests (particularly if they play.)

All attending are invited to join the discussion.

Please bring any scores you may have.

The address, 42, Felstead Road, Wanstead, London E11 2QJ, can be reached by buses 66 or 145 from Leytonstone, W12 from Walthamstow or W14 from Leyton or by underground to Wanstead Station on the Central Line.

Please inform the Treasurer ([treasureralksoc@btinternet.com](mailto:treasureralksoc@btinternet.com)) at least a week in advance if you intend to come and if you are bringing any guests.

### FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

2011 December 3rd The Fifth Colloquium on the *Esquisses Opus 63*

2012 June 26th President's Concert at Steinway's

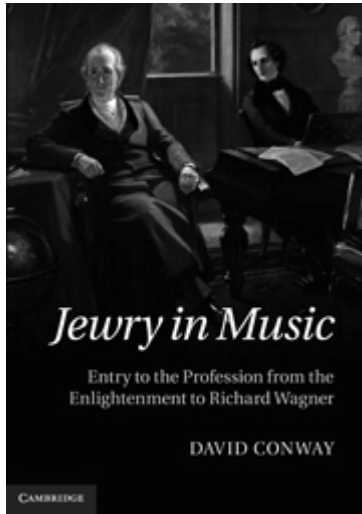
Events marking the Alkan Bicentenary will include:

2013 November 25th Nicholas King, music by Alkan at St. Michael's, Cornhill

2013 November 28th A triple-concert major event at St. James's Church, Piccadilly, which will include the three chamber works.

# *Jews, Music, and Wagner (and Alkan)*

David Conway



My book ‘Jewry and Music’<sup>1</sup> has had a long gestation. When as a child I began to attend classical music concerts, during boring moments, when I had given up counting organ pipes, I would browse through the programme and note with bemusement the surprising number of Jewish names amongst orchestral musicians and patrons of the orchestra. And indeed glancing around the auditorium was enough to confirm a disproportionate representation of my fellow-Jews. In fact, the organisation responsible for my attendance at many of these concerts, ‘Youth And Music’, was founded (and funded) by a Jew, Sir Robert Mayer (who once told me of

the time when, as a schoolchild himself in Hamburg, he had been patted on the head by Brahms – can this have been true?). My history teacher at secondary school taught me always to seek out the links between people and events - what could be the link which brought together Jews and classical music, which did not seem to have any obvious origin in Jewish culture itself?

It was nearly forty years before I had the opportunity to research this question and attempt to answer it. An important staging post on this journey was my membership of the Alkan Society, and my involvement with the Society’s Bulletin. The character and music of Alkan had long fascinated me (and, yes, I’m afraid to say that the bookcase legend must have been part of that, originally). But my encounter with Alkanistes, and particularly with Ronald Smith who kindly took an interest in my ideas, encouraged me to start to look further into Alkan’s Jewish associations and background. Gradually, and with the encouragement of my wife, my idea of studying the whole concept of Jews and music was resurrected. Here I had a great stroke of luck. A friend suggested I contact John Klier, at the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies of University College, London. I telephoned John out of the blue and explained that I was interested in the possibility of doing post-graduate study, and outlined the topic which interested me; could I come and chat to him? John replied, politely, that he would be delighted to meet me, but that he was just leaving his office as he was going to be in Vilnius for two weeks. To which I was able to counter, truthfully, ‘That’s fine, because I have to be in Vilnius for two weeks from Monday, as well’. (I was carrying out monitoring work for the European Commission). Poor John was therefore scarcely able to refuse my invitation to buy him dinner in Vilnius. Over the meal I discoursed at large to my victim; at the end I asked him, ‘So do you think it might be possible to enrol at UCL as a post-graduate?’ John’s response was simply, ‘Sure, just tell me when you’re ready to start’. I was surprised: ‘John, how can you say that? You’ve only just met me, and my academic experience, apart from being from over twenty years ago, has no relation to music, history or Jews’.

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<sup>1</sup> David Conway, 2011. *Jewry in Music: Entry to the Profession from the Enlightenment to Richard Wagner*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

To which John replied: ‘Yes, but, on the one hand, you seem to know what you’re talking about; and on the other hand, I’m the Head of the Department’.

And so it came about a couple of years later, when I had the opportunity to change to working on short-term missions for the Commission, I was able to phone John again and say ‘I’m ready’. I enrolled as a part-time BPhil, but this was soon converted, and my PhD dissertation on ‘Jewry in Music’ was accepted in 2008. Tragically, shortly before this John died of a sudden and unexpected illness – the world lost a great scholar and a great human being, and of course I was personally deeply sad that he had not been able to see the vindication of his decision over the dinner table.

The six years during which I wrote my thesis, which became the basis for my book, were for me a period of great discovery, both intellectual and personal. Anyone who knows the outlines of the many legends about Alkan – the book-case story for example – will realise the dangers which arise for one writer merely copying the statements of others without undertaking research of the sources. Ronald Smith’s book on Alkan is exemplary in trying to get to the roots. I had naively assumed that all academic writing would be up to this standard. After I had been disabused of this belief on a number of occasions when I had looked up, out of interest, original sources, I resolved to take nothing significant on trust, if I could help it, from any secondary sources. This led to a painful period of brushing up my French and reacquainting myself with German, and my discovery of the wonderful world of archives. I was once more surprised, this time at how much still remained to be discovered. One of my early triumphs was asking at the Archives Nationales in Paris to see the early records of the Conservatoire. I was informed that these were in too disorganised a state for anyone to be allowed to look at them. After some intense pleading in my fractured French with a senior Librarian I was eventually presented with a pile of dusty folders and *cahiers* with leaves turning out of their bindings. In these I discovered, amongst other things, the remarkable records of Alkan’s auditions (at the ages of 6 and 7) for the Conservatoire, on which I reported in *Alkan Society Bulletin* 62 (June 2003). In other archive trawls, from Taunton to Moscow, I have been amazed to find how much material has in fact survived 200 years of European turmoil (and of course things are still turning up, like the extensive Alkan-Masarnau correspondence in Madrid – maybe even Alkan’s orchestral symphony and string sextets are not lost to posterity!).

The result of all this has been an attempt to answer what, on the surface, appears to be a simple question. At the start of the nineteenth century, there were virtually no Jews active as musicians in the world of *musique savante*. Moreover the Jews were held to be totally without knowledge of, and without the ability to learn or appreciate, European culture. (Hence the intellectual celebrity status of Moses Mendelssohn, the ‘Jewish Socrates’ who appeared to be the exception that broke the rule). By the end of the century, however, the conventional wisdom was that Jews were a musical people, and they held leading positions within almost all branches of the musical profession – and in associated areas including management, publishing and patronage. Jews, who formed something less than 1% of Europe’s population, were clearly punching above their weight in the world of music. Something had happened – but what, exactly?

Until now, there has been scarcely anything written on this topic. The general attitude of historians is characterised by the throwaway remark of the historian Léon Poliakov in his *History of Anti-Semitism*: ‘Whatever the reasons, in the realms of the fine arts, it was primarily as musicians that the emancipated Jews excelled.’<sup>2</sup> I have sought to elucidate these reasons, and my survey extends from more or less the middle of the eighteenth century until 1850.

Not the least important rationale in choosing this date as a *terminus ad quem* was that if I were to cover the whole of the nineteenth century I would have to run to three or four volumes (and indeed a sequel or sequels may yet follow). But 1850 also marks, more or less, the end of the era of musical romanticism, in which Jews first came to prominence in the art. By 1850, Mendelssohn and Chopin were dead; Liszt had quit the concert platform; Schumann would shortly enter his descent to madness and death. Moreover, amongst Jews associated with music, Alkan had retired hurt after his attempt at the professorship at the Conservatoire; Moscheles had left performance for teaching; the paralysed Heine had begun his terminal decline; Halévy had become more of an administrator than a composer; and Meyerbeer’s last grand opera (*L’Africaine*) would not have its premiere until after his death in 1864.

And, of course, 1850 saw the publication of Richard Wagner’s anti-Jewish tract, *Das Judentum in der Musik*, traditionally (mis-)translated as *Judaism in Music*, but which I render, for reasons given below, *Jewry in Music*, borrowing the title for my own book.

At the outset of any considerations of my topic is a thorny question - what exactly is ‘Jewish music’? For if at the beginning of the period the term might be used to describe simply the music, both religious and secular, of Jewish communities in Europe, by the end of the nineteenth century this had become confused with the concept of ‘music written by Jews’, a quite different corpus. The ‘purist’ view of some writers has militated against the study of much of the latter in a Jewish context. ‘Does the fact of Jewish parentage fasten one’s creativity to Judaism, despite a lifetime of Christian affiliation?’ asks Irene Heskes. ‘If so, the following can be considered Jewish composers’ and she lists, with some evident disdain, Mendelssohn, Moscheles, Goldmark, Rubinstein and others, enquiring. ‘Is it the paucity of numbers rather than the specific ethnic inspiration that prompts some Jewish writers to include these composers among their Judaic listings?’<sup>3</sup> I do not accept Heskes’s dubious criterion of ‘ethnic inspiration’, ironically so closely allied to the notions of the detractors of Jewish music and musicality (and of Jews in general) - such as Wagner’s supposed ‘*hebräisches Kunstgeschmack*’ (‘Hebraic art-taste’). Nor do I feel constrained to accept the implicit concept that Jewish origins cannot affect any creative actions (or actions bearing on creative lives) that are not explicitly ‘fastened’ to Judaism, and in my book I provide counter-examples from amongst those listed above. All of the musicians listed by Heskes, and very many that are not, at some point or other in their lives found their Jewishness impinging on their careers, and all of them would have been able to echo the words of the

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<sup>2</sup> Léon Poliakov, tr. Miriam Kochan 1975. *The History of Anti-Semitism: vol. III From Voltaire to Wagner* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul: p. 440.

<sup>3</sup> Irene Heskes, 1994. *Passport to Jewish Music: Its History Traditions and Culture*. Westport CO: Greenwood Press: p.269

writer and convert Ludwig Börne (born Juda Loew Baruch) written in 1832: ‘Some people criticize me for being a Jew; others forgive me for being one; a third even praises me for it; but all are thinking about it’. At the opposite end of the spectrum to Heskies, the present fashion is to indeed include within the fold of ‘Jewish music’ many musicians who perished in the *Shoah* who were of Jewish parentage, but who evinced not the slightest interest in these origins or the culture attached to them – I instance for example the fine composers Erwin Schulhoff and Viktor Ullman, who are ranked amongst the secular saints of ‘*Entartete Musik*’. Fortunately, perhaps, this aspect of the debate is outside the timelines I have set for my book.

Although it is not the main objective of my book, which seeks more to set out the ground for further investigations than to introduce new elements of musico-historiographic theory, I seek implicitly to reconcile ‘Jewish music’ and ‘music written by Jews’ by placing both within the context of the enormous economic, social, political and technological changes of the era, of which I try to give some compact account. ‘Music’ does not exist in some vacuum of technical rules and analytical procedures – it is integrally and viscerally bound to the society in which it manifests itself, as Wagner was one of the first moderns to articulate, more or less clearly, (and as even I myself dimly began to perceive in the concert halls of my childhood). The fact that particular changes in the spheres I have denoted were taking place in the same era in which, as a consequence of the campaigns of Napoleon, Jews were released from their quasi-feudal status in most of Europe to something equating more or less to citizenship, is inevitably of consequence in understanding the ‘sudden’ appearance of Jews in the world of music. For if, as I outline, Jews had, through their own cultural traditions, certain ‘transferable skills’ which could be applied both to music itself, and to the new and expanding ‘music industry’ freed from its traditional aristocratic and ecclesiastic patronage; nonetheless it was the changing of social boundaries, the abolition of ‘glass ceilings’, the development of new traditions of bourgeois taste and patronage, the invention of new musical instruments and techniques, and new architecture and technologies for the theatre and concert-hall, which provided enormous, and novel, opportunities, waiting to be seized.

Moreover, the status of Jews, as simultaneously ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ in Europe’s new society, chimed fortuitously with the ambivalent spirit of Romanticism, for which life was the dream but dreaming was reality, and in which the artist was the mediator between two worlds. The very exoticness of these newcomers to society made, for example, the Jewish salons of Berlin highly fashionable in the early nineteenth century until a more reactionary nationalism set in. Heine’s lyrics (a major source for lieder composers), which often freely refer to his Jewish background, epitomise the ironies and equivocations of the Romantic ethos. Alkan, perhaps the most ‘Jewish’ of the composers of this period, continued his studies of the Bible whilst composing some of the most advanced keyboard works of his era. And of course, whilst Judaism can be shed in favour of Christianity, the elements of *Yiddishkeit* - Jewish social attitudes, behaviour, speech, even Jewish jokes – don’t transfer so easily into their German equivalents. Even the Lutheran Felix Mendelssohn continued to use yiddishisms in his letters to

his family. Furthermore, those who converted were aware that they were still regarded as a separate caste. An anonymous writer of 1804 asked: ‘What would I gain by [conversion]? I would not lose the name of Jew, but would be called X, the baptised Jew’. Visit the Dreifaltigkeit Cemetery in Berlin today, and find the Mendelssohn family buried close to other apostates, including the *salonnières* Henriette Herz and Rahel Levin Varnhagen – the *Neuchristen* remain classed together in death as in life. Thus acculturating Jews, between two worlds, were perhaps equipped spiritually, as well as intellectually and commercially, to become mediators and activists within the Western European culture of the time.

Using these perspectives, my book examines the progress of Jews within the emerging music industry in five European states - the Netherlands, Britain, Austria, Germany and France – examining the careers of the famous, the neglected and the forgotten, with particular studies of (amongst the known) Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, Alkan and Halévy, and (amongst the forgotten) Isaac Nathan and Joseph Gusikov. Alkan, the only musician of his time who was to be able successfully to merge the streams of Jewish and romantic music, is indeed one the book’s true heroes. The book examines the parallel development of synagogue music in the period and Jewish involvement in popular (and even nationalist) music. And it also looks at the reaction to the emergence of Jewry in music by commentators from Burney to Wagner, by way of Forkel, Goethe, Schumann and others.

And so we come to Wagner. Forests have already been decimated to print literature and comments on Wagner’s nasty exercise in Jew-hatred, *Das Judentum in der Musik*. For every person who has actually read the thing, either in German or translation, there are probably thousands who ‘know’ that Wagner was an ‘anti-Semite’ – indeed the number of people who ‘know’ this, I am sure, far exceeds the number who would recognise a note of his music. Whether or not we believe, as Alkan maintained to Hiller, that ‘Wagner is not music, he is a disease’, we should recall that the Wagner who wrote *Das Judentum* in 1850, and published it in a music journal under the feeble pseudonym ‘K. Freigedank’ (‘K. Freethought’), was not seeking thereby to initiate an activist political movement, but was a musician attempting (albeit crudely and, to the modern reader, grossly offensively) to make some point about his trade and its status. The clue to making an understanding of the first version of *Das Judentum in der Musik* must therefore lie, not in ‘jobbing backwards’ from our knowledge of twentieth-century Hitlerism, but in comprehending what was, at the time of its writing, the status of music in society, the status of Jews in society, the status of Jews in music, and indeed the status of its impoverished, exiled, resentful and emotionally-damaged author, whose musical career in 1850 appeared to be at an end. (The second version of nearly twenty years later, doubled in size by an even more venomous preface and afterthoughts, is in some ways a different story – but that is a matter perhaps for my putative next volume).

Contrary to the assertions of many writers of recent years, the 1850 version of *Das Judentum* in its content contains very little that had not been written by others before Wagner; it is no break-through in the annals of Jew-hatred. (And it is, as I

discuss, an example of old-fashioned Jew-hatred, not of anti-Semitism, which was a political movement beginning in the 1870s, christened with this neologism by Jew-haters who wished to camouflage their prejudices with this quasi-scientific term). Based very closely on articles by his disciple the Dresden musician Theodor Uhlig, from whom Wagner borrowed his relative assessments of Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn, and liberally laced with standard anti-Jewish slurs of the sort to be found in Voltaire and the German eighteenth century musicologists Forkel and Matthesson, *Das Judentum* is an old-fashioned smear-job in the established German tradition of J. A. Eisenmenger's *Entdecktes Judentum* of 1700. Indeed, like Eisenmenger, who published his work claiming to wish to convert 'honest Jews' to Christianity, Wagner also rounds off his tirade with a call for Jews of goodwill to accept '*Untergang*' (going under') – the implications of which term I examine in the book – and become good German musicians and writers. There is nothing in this pamphlet that needed to be taken from German nationalist philosophers such as Fichte and Fries, and there is therefore a negligible evidence base for the claims made by some that this diatribe makes Wagner some sort of missing link between the nationalists of the 1820s and the National Socialists of the next century.

Where a debt to a philosopher can indeed be discerned, it is fact to Karl Marx, and his 1843 essay 'On the Jewish Question'. Marx, who treats of the Jews in this essay only as an underclass constrained by history to petty trade, not as a religion or an ethnic group, in particular anticipates Wagner's telling use of the word '*Judentum*', which in nineteenth-century German had not only the meaning 'the Jewish community' but also 'petty haggling' or even 'cheating' (compare the Victorian English usage, 'to jew'). It did not however mean 'Judaism', the religious practices of the Jews, of which Wagner knew little and cared less; hence my contention that the usual English translation 'Judaism in Music' is misleading. Moreover, the peroration of Marx's essay is remarkably similar in character to Wagner's. He writes: 'The social emancipation of the Jew is the emancipation of society from *Judentum*' (using the word of course in its sense of commercialism), prefiguring Wagner's call for cultural *Untergang* with a vision of social and economic change.

It is precisely this pun on the word '*Judentum*', which does not appear anywhere in the original materials by Uhlig, which Wagner uses to excoriating effect in his essay. Wagner starts with traditional insults about Jews - we don't really like them, they can't talk properly, they pander to the basest tastes of their host community – and segues from this into an attack on the operas of Meyerbeer (whom, being living, he does not specifically name) and (again copying Uhlig) a damnation by faint praise of the dead Felix Mendelssohn. '*Judentum*' is thus identified with the commercialisation of the music industry – which of course was fuelled by social and economic changes that were not in the hand of Jews or any other section of the society, but was simply driven by the demands of the rising European urban middle-classes. Furthermore Wagner also treats equivocally Uhlig's phrase '*ein hebräisches Kunstgeschmack*', which could mean either (or both of) 'the art taste of Jews' or 'a Jewish tinge of Art (produced by Jews)', a supposed quality which he cannily avoids anywhere defining. But what it all boils down to is that Wagner does not want the bourgeoisie (or at any rate the German bourgeoisie) to listen to

the music that they happen to like; he wishes them, unrealistically, to commit to the social vision of music embodied in his post-*Lohengrin* concept for music-dramas and which underlay his support for the failed Dresden revolution of 1849, after which he had become a political refugee. (This wish somewhat anticipates the attitude of East German Government of 1956, which after social disturbances had expressed its disappointment at the behaviour of its people; perhaps, suggested Berthold Brecht, the government should dissolve its electorate and choose another).

Undoubtedly Wagner's experience in February 1850 of the 47<sup>th</sup> performance at the Paris Opéra of Meyerbeer's *Le prophète* precipitated his fury against the undoubted success of his former mentor and everything that Wagner perceived that he stood for. The letters he wrote after this epiphany verge on an incoherence that suggests a man on the edge of a nervous breakdown. Although in his much later account in his autobiography *Mein Leben* he claims he left in disgust in mid-performance, his letters of the time make it clear he remained to the bitter end. Ruefully, he wrote to Uhlig 'I was able to convince myself ... that the work has been accorded a great and lasting – and undeniable – success by the Paris Opera audience: the house is always full to overflowing and the applause more enthusiastic than anything I've otherwise found here'.<sup>4</sup> Uhlig's denunciation of the opera (following its German premiere) and of its composer began to be published in the Leipzig *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in April 1850, and Wagner's essay, ostensibly a spontaneous reflection on Uhlig's comments on '*ein hebräisches Kunstgeschmack*' (an Hebraic art-taste), followed in the same journal in September.

Seen in this light – the outpourings of a musician in extremis – the content of Wagner's *Jewry in Music*, whilst remaining unpalatable, takes in fact the form of an unconscious, indeed unwilling, confession of the tremendous achievements of musical Jews during Wagner's lifetime. They were not merely tolerated by the public – they were, at least in the cases of Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn, fêted and indeed idolized – laurels which Wagner fervently believed should be his own. And indeed, they indeed became his when he began to adopt Meyerbeer's methods of marketing<sup>5</sup>, and, having abandoned his purist philosophy of music drama, adopted not a few of Meyerbeer's grand opera trappings. As George Bernard Shaw jovially noted (using his own Englishing) of the last two operas of the Ring cycle,

'And now, O Nibelungen Spectator, pluck up; for all allegories come to an end somewhere ... The rest of what you are going to see is opera, and nothing but opera. Before many bars have been played, Siegfried and the wakened Brynhild, newly become tenor and soprano, will sing a concerted cadenza; plunge on from that to a magnificent love duet...The work which follows, entitled Night Falls On The Gods, is a thorough grand opera.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Letter of 24<sup>th</sup> February 1850. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (eds.), 1987. *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*; London; p. 185

<sup>5</sup> See in this context Nicholas Vazsonyi, 2010. *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand*, Cambridge, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> In *The Perfect Wagnerite*. See Bernard Shaw, ed. Dan Laurence, 1981. *Shaw's Music*, 3 vols. London; vol. II pp. 468-9.

To what extent, then, does Alkan fit within Wagner's critique of Jews as turning music into a business? Surprisingly, for a man so aloof from his society and contemporaries, there are quite a few connections that might support Wagner's analysis of music being a means of the social and economic entry to gentile European society (though not of course anything to support his nasty and gratuitous imputations to this process of the motivations of greed or sordidity). We can note that Alkan's father, Alkan Morhange, did indeed make a good career out of bringing up Jewish children in the culture of their host society – his school was, according to Alkan's one-time pupil and later nemesis Antoine Marmontel, 'a preparatory school, a juvenile annexe of the Conservatoire' –

'[Alkan's] father, an industrious and intelligent man, ran, when I first knew him in 1833, a little boarding-school in the rue des Blancs-Manteaux. Young children, mostly Jewish (*israélites*) were given elementary musical instruction and also learnt the first rudiments of French grammar'.<sup>7</sup>

We can further note that all of Charles-Valentin's siblings also attended the Conservatoire and made careers as musicians, 'high' (like Napoléon, a professor at the Conservatoire) or 'low' (like Maxim, composer of *galops*). Moreover his sister Célestine's husband, her cousin Mayer Marix, carried out business as a merchant and manufacturer of wind instruments, in which he was succeeded by his son-in-law, Adam Morhange.<sup>8</sup>

In fact the family as a whole may be considered as almost exemplary as purveyors of a wide range music and music products meeting new types of demand, both within the Jewish community and in society at large. Ranging from the harmoniums produced by M. Marix to the extraordinary and intense genius of Charles-Valentin Alkan, they present a microcosm of the entry of Jewry to the world of music. This entry, as Wagner dimly discerned, was indeed a facet of advent of Jews as (more or less) fully-fledged citizens to Western society as a whole. The new perspectives which they brought to music, and in many other fields, became a source both of admiration and vicious reaction, provoking a social drama on a scale more vast and more turbulent than anything which Wagner could have conceived – and which indeed is still playing itself out to this very day.

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<sup>7</sup> Antoine Marmontel, *Les pianistes célèbres*, Paris 1878, p.

<sup>8</sup> See David Conway, *Tending Alkan's Family Tree*, in *Alkan Society Bulletin* 63 (September 2003), pp. 11-2.

ADVENTURES WITH ALKAN – Lloyd Buck (Amemptos Music AM-I/P2)

Quasi Caccia – Caprice, Op.53  
Palpitemento  
Impromptu in F sharp  
Fantasticheria (first recording)  
Bourrée d’Auvergne, Op.29  
Esquisses, Op.63 Nos. 4, 5, 8, 20 & 21  
Trois Andantes Romantiques, Op.13  
Scherzo Focoso, Op.34 (first recording)

'Adventures with Alkan' is a well-chosen title for this enterprising collection from a small new company. Several of the works have appeared very rarely on CD, and at least two are receiving their first recordings. There is a good sequence of longer and shorter pieces whose contrasts in style and technical difficulty make a programme which is easy to hear without pause from start to finish.

Quasi Caccia makes a good upbeat start, with effective alternation of highly active passages and more restful sections. I have not heard this piece on record before. It may not be as melodically inspired as some of Alkan's other pieces, but it has a satisfying structure and an impressive number of technical challenges which Lloyd Buck meets in commanding style. What I particularly liked was his ability to cope with the hurdles without resorting to an all-purpose loud dynamic. Listeners may be reminded of some of the textures found in the Sonatine. It has some of Alkan's more advanced uses of harmony as well as whole-tone scales rare for the time.

Palpitemento is a short work which we have heard at a Society meeting, taken from an unpublished manuscript, and this might well be a first recording too, although the booklet does not claim it. The Impromptu in F sharp is a single piece from 1845 which again is unfamiliar to me, as the score is quite hard to find. Both pieces are well played. Fantasticheria is the first of two pieces with that name: the second carries the sub-title Chapeau bas! and is in print, but the first is another rarity to be welcomed on CD.

Bourrée d’Auvergne, dating from 1846, is a challenging piece which needs good playing to avoid a sense of monotony in some of the textures. Alkan's typical multiple grace-notes are played in good style, and the quieter, lyrical sections are well contrasted. The octave passages towards the end are well sustained, and this is another performance of a work which will not be familiar to many who think they know most of Alkan's output.

There is so much variety among the Esquisses that a brief selection can never be fully representative, but the five here will certainly encourage further investigation. No.20 – Morituri te salutant – is the darkest and most familiar of the five, and Lloyd Buck's interpretation is a convincing one. The other four – Les cloches, Quasi-coro, Pseudo-Naïveté and Innocenza – make a good contrast with the Bourrée and with the next four tracks.

The three Andantes Romantiques are fine pieces, especially the middle one with its "hidden melody", and receive some particularly sensitive performances. A

recording session of No.2 can be seen on YouTube, using either the usual search or a link from the Amemptos website ([www.amemptosmusic.co.uk](http://www.amemptosmusic.co.uk)), and shows Lloyd Buck to be a calm player with no unnecessary movement or mannerisms.

The Scherzo Focoso has long been a notorious piece, very rarely performed and never recorded for CD. Here the producers have made a daring decision: instead of using the studio recording, which was thought to lack spontaneity, they have used a live recording from the pianist's recital at the Royal Northern College of Music. The result is a less good recorded sound and a sprinkling of inaccuracies, especially towards the end as fatigue sets in. Whether the gain in excitement is worth it must be decided by each listener. I have listened to the track a few times and I can tolerate the imperfections, but I am not sure yet whether it will stand the test of time. However, it is excellent to hear this frighteningly difficult piece at last. You can find the sheet music on the Internet, as well as some rather horrid-sounding 'performances' from artificial non-human sources, and judge for yourself.

The name of the record company comes from the Greek for "free from fault" and while that might claim too much for this CD occasionally, I can recommend it both to seasoned Alkanians and to those less familiar with his music. Lloyd Buck is said to favour long takes in his recordings, as did Ronald Smith, and while some of the more difficult passages in the CD have the occasional slip, most of them will not be too disturbing. The eight-page booklet has some good notes by Buck and the producer, Jon Bell. Knowing that the booklet can represent a considerable part of production costs, I like the idea of adding further notes on the Internet, although they have yet to appear for this particular release. It would be a pity if printed booklets were abandoned altogether in these days of digital downloads, and this seemed to be a good compromise.

Amemptos may have released only six discs so far, but their one other piano recording, also by Lloyd Buck, is of music by Sergei Bortkiewicz, played on the piano owned by Rachmaninov which is now in the Holborne Museum, Bath. It is clear that they have some bold ambitions, and I hope that the reviews and sales of their CDs will justify their enterprise. At the moment the CD can be ordered from their website, address as above. After the company has formally launched it, with, they hope, some good reviews, it should be available from the usual sources.

Peter Grove

MARK VINER & ALAN DEMIR Schott's Recital Room - 29th July 2011

The Alkan Society presented a concert by two young pianists which included two substantial works of Alkan: the *Sonatine Op.61* and the *Symphonie Op.39 Nos.4-7*. The first half featured Mark Viner, no stranger to Alkan Society members who witnessed his playing back in March when, amongst other things, he gave a memorably focused account of the *Marche Funèbre Op.26*. Viner's well-differentiated half-programme consisted of a suitably energised Chopin *Fantasia*, *In the Kraton* from Leopold Godowsky's *Java Suite* and the almost bizarrely prosaic *Assez vivement* (from *Premier Recueil de Chants*) before ending with the *Sonatine*. It was particularly refreshing to hear the rarely-performed Godowsky, a sophisticated study in multi-layered gamelan-inspired resonance. The *Sonatine* was

impressively delivered (although the ambitious tempo of the finale left some of us breathless) and the notion of “perverse classicism” was never far from the surface.

Alan Demir gave an assured account of Beethoven’s *Sonata No.4 in Eb Op.7* before the brief *Petit Conte* of Alkan and the *Symphonie*. Alkan’s music is (too?) often presented alongside that of Beethoven, Chopin and Mendelssohn. Unfortunately there is considerably less opportunity in concert to examine the relevance (direct, tangential or serendipitous) of less obvious figures such as Dussek, Chabrier, Gottschalk or even Villa-Lobos. Having said that, there seemed to be a couple of palpable connections between the first movements of the Beethoven and the *Sonatine* which caused some surprise. Demir’s slightly overweight reading of the *Symphonie* certainly didn’t disappoint, but this reviewer would have welcomed more incisive rhythm, more differentiation and less pedal.

Mark Viner can be heard on Youtube performing, amongst other things, the *Marche Funèbre*, *Symphonie* and Nos.10-12 of the *Études in the major keys Op.35*.

Dave Smith

Received from Brian Doyle: A new recording is of great interest to Alkan scholars as it is probably the first CD of performances on a pedal-piano, moreover, on Alkan's own pedal-piano. The Érard instrument was exhibited at the Paris Exhibition of 1855 and Alkan performed on it. He then played it in many of his "petits concerts" at the Salon Érard. When he ceased performing in public it found a home in his apartment. On his death in 1888 it was moved to Érard's, then, in 1971 it was donated to the Musée de la Musique. It was restored in 2009. There are only two works by Alkan on the recording, but at least it gives us the opportunity, for the first time, to hear these works on the instrument for which he intended them. The two Alkan works are from his *Onze grands préludes Op.66*: No.5 in E flat major and No.10 in B flat minor. The other composers on the CD are Boëly, Brahms, Liszt and Schumann. The performances are by Olivier Latry, organist of the Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris. On naïve/cité de la musique V 5278.

Received from Averil Kovacs: Olivier Latry's CD was reviewed on BBC Radio 3 “Building a Library” on 29 October 2011. Andrew McGregor described the pedal-piano which he claimed indicated why Liszt, himself an organist, might have wanted one. "...and it takes a *proper* organist I think to get the best out of it, which is why they dragged Olivier Latry from the console at Notre Dame in Paris to the Musée de la Musique to play this carefully restored Érard pedal-piano. . . it was demonstrated at the Paris Exposition in 1865 [sic] by Alkan, so here’s a Prelude *he* wrote for the instrument." He mentioned the pieces of the other composers and continued that several times he found Latry’s performances erring on the cautious side and the recording close, though not unpleasantly so.

Pédalier or pedal-piano: invented by Érard mid-19th cent, a piano with a pedal keyboard attached, the pedals acting by a connecting mechanism upon the hammers and strings proper to them. *Editor*