



# The Alkan Society

Registered Charity no. 276199

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## Bulletin 98: May 2019

### Concert reports

#### Joint societies dinner-recital

*Held at Lancaster Hall Hotel, London on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019*

*Society member Roderick Munday reports on the evening*

On 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019 the Richard Strauss Society, along with the Alkan, Liszt, Gustav Mahler, Schubert and Wagner Societies, hosted the annual Joint Societies Dinner Recital at a packed Lancaster Hall Hotel. The customary format was observed, each society being represented in turn by brief musical offerings, setting out their stalls, so to say. Dinner then followed.



Caroline Taylor (rightmost in picture), an accomplished young soprano who has already won a hatful of awards and attracts rave reviews, opened proceedings with expressive renderings of two Schubert songs. First, we had a setting of Goethe's *Mignons Gesang: Kennst du das Land?* (Mignon's song: Do you know the land?), which derives from his novel *Wilhelm Meister*, and embodies Goethe's attachment to things Italian. (It has to be imagined, for example, that Mignon is singing to Wilhelm in Italian, not

German!) Then, the singer performed a deceptively uncomplicated setting of Friedrich Rückert's poem *Du bist die Ruh* (You are rest and peace), which the poet later renamed, more aptly perhaps, *Kehr ein bei mir* (Stay with me). Coincidentally, both songs are also to be found in arrangements by Liszt, to whom the singer next turned. She performed a setting of lines excerpted from Goethe's *Egmont, Freudvoll und Leidvoll* (Joyful and grief-laden) in its reined-in second version, following up with a dramatic but beautifully controlled rendering of Liszt's fourth and final arrangement of Heine's poem, *Die Lorelei*.

Gustav Mahler next occupied the stage. Gabriella Noble (second from right), another fine soprano, sang, with great poise, two haunting songs: *Ich ging mit Lust durch einem grünen Wald* (I went joyfully through a green wood) and *Frühlingsmorgen* (Spring morning), having before treated us to a brace of *lieder* composed by Gustav's 'marmite' wife, Alma, best known to a number of us via Tom Lehrer's stinging, eponymous song. Alma has been portrayed in Oliver Hilmes' recently translated biography as 'Malevolent Muse'. She was described by one contemporary as 'a *grande dame* and at the same time a cesspool', whilst the poet Siegfried Lipiner considered her 'spiteful, vain and overbearing ... lacking in warmth, devoid of naturalness, sincerity and good sense'. Alma's melodious, even wistful, settings of the poems of Rilke, *Bei dir ist es traut* (With you it is pleasant), and especially of Bierbaum's brief *Laue*

*Sommersnacht* (Balmy summer's night), are occasionally heard; *they*, at least, are far from lacking in warmth. It is reported that Gustav Mahler, who upon marrying her had persuaded Alma to abandon musical composition, upon discovering her infidelity with the architect and future founding member of the Bauhaus movement, Walter Gropius, in 1910 had a change of heart concluding that he perhaps ought to take Alma's compositions seriously. Having cancelled three prior appointments, Gustav eventually consulted Sigmund Freud, who was poised to leave for Sicily. The pair took a well-documented, four-hour walk through the streets of Leiden discussing Gustav's 'issues', and, apparently on the psychoanalyst's advice, Gustav finally set about editing and publishing Alma's compositions. The songs, to my ear, owe just a little to Gustav Mahler.

The baritone, Christian Andreas Adolph (middle in the picture), sang the next three items on the programme: Wagner's celebrated Italianate aria, *O du, mein holder Abendstern*, the hymn to the Evening Star from *Tannhauser*, which opens in *arioso* — somewhere between recitative and aria, and closes in sweetest *pianissimo*; Richard Strauss's well-known early composition, *Schön sind, doch kalt die Himmelssterne* (Glorious, but cold are the stars above me); and Mahler's ever-popular *Rheinlegendchen* (Little Rhine legend), a charming tale in which a fish is destined to swallow a ring a lovelorn farm boy is considering casting into the river Neckar only for his sweetheart to lay claim to it when the fish is caught and served up at the king's banquet, at which she will naturally be present — a tissue of improbabilities, which incidentally requires the accompanist to interweave the verses with passages evoking a folk-fiddler's improvisations.

To end the sung part of the programme, Caroline Taylor returned to perform Richard Strauss's delicate arrangement of Heine's poem *Schlechtes Wetter* (Foul weather), which recounts an old woman fighting her way home through the elements with a basket of ingredients to bake her daughter a cake. The ingenious left hand accompaniment replicates persistent rainfall. The performer followed this with Strauss's tender cradle song *Meinem kinde* (To my child) and the lush *Heimliche Aufforderung* (Secret invitation), which sets to music a sweet love poem by John Henry Mackay, whom his biographer subsequently dubbed the 'Anarchist of Love', and who is best remembered these days for his prose writings on Berlin's sexual underbelly, actively championed by Christopher Isherwood, and for his unsavoury advocacy of pæderasty. Although Strauss presented this comely song, along with three others, to his wife as a wedding gift, knowing what we do of 'Sagitta' Mackay we can be pretty confident that the poet was actually addressing these amorous lyrics to a young boy.

Leslie Howard (leftmost in picture), who had flown in from Italy especially for the occasion, accompanied all three singers in the accomplished manner that one now takes for granted from this outstanding artist.

The evening's music was brought to a conclusion with an abrupt change of mood and tempo when our Chairman, Mark Viner, performed the second movement from the Alkan *Grande Sonate* (op. 33), a work he was to perform, if anything with even greater *brio* a few weeks later, in its full four-movement setting, at St Mary's Perivale. This work, which was restored to life by our former President, Ronald Smith, in the 1970s after languishing forgotten for a century and more, will be well-known to all members of the Alkan Society. The *Quasi-Faust* certainly took many of the audience, unfamiliar with Alkan's work, by complete surprise, and at dinner and over drinks members of other societies admitted to me that Mark's masterly performance of this bifurcated and demanding composition had seriously piqued their curiosity. It also completely affirmed Raymond Lewenthal's opinion that the second movement "stands very well by itself and no one performing it without the other movements need fear being criticised for serving up a bleeding chunk."

The Joint Societies Recital Dinner provides a convivial, instructive evening at which *mélomanes* of differing persuasions can converge and sample one another's tastes, united in a love of music. Exceptional music, exceptional performers. As Kenneth Clark never tired of exclaiming in his television broadcasts on the arts, 'What could be more agreeable?'

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**Advance notice** *The 2020 Joint Societies Dinner-Recital will be held at the Lancaster Hall Hotel, London on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2020*

## A performance of Alkan's second *Concerto da Camera*

*Choral Favourites and Instrumental Rarities: Middlesex University Choir and London Firebird Orchestra, at St Pancras Church, London, on Thursday 28th March*

Report by Alan Mills, Visiting lecturer at Middlesex University

The music department of Middlesex University has a well-established tradition of organising concert performances at prominent venues in and around London. Students gain useful experience from participating in these concerts, in which a high professional standard is generally maintained; and so, on Thursday 28th March, a large group of Middlesex undergraduates joined forces with the London Firebird Orchestra to present a varied and unusual programme at St Pancras Church in central London. The second half of this programme featured the University Choir in a selection of choruses from Handel's *Messiah*, flanked by Monteverdi's *Beatus Vir* and Fauré's *Cantique de Jean Racine* – all tried and tested favourites, and conducted by the University's regular choirmaster, the composer and arranger Jonathan Rathbone.

The instrumental first half, however, consisted of three concertante works – all of them rarities – separated by a couple of prize-winning student pieces by Pranav Nigam and Clara Fiedler, both of them obviously composers of real promise and imagination. The evening began with a performance of Walter Piston's *Concertino for Piano and Chamber Orchestra*. Dating from 1937, this enjoyable piece of American neo-classicism rolls three movements into one; clearly reminiscent of Stavinsky's *Capriccio*, it nevertheless has some distinctive touches that give it a subtly American flavour. Pianist Padmavathy Divakaran performed it with stylish ease, and one could only be grateful for the chance to hear this interesting work, so far outside the pianists' standard repertoire.

Even more unusual was the *Concerto for Vibraphone and String Orchestra* by contemporary French composer Emmanuel Séjourné. This one-movement work – in a basically tonal, slightly minimalist idiom – featured a skilful performance by soloist Euan Lloyd-Taylor, who had to deal with some rather unorthodox ways of playing the vibraphone in order to obtain a wide range of coloristic effects. As in the Piston *Concertino*, the players of the London Firebird Orchestra, conducted by Michael Thrift, responded well to the demands of this very unfamiliar piece.

Lastly (for this first part of the programme) we heard a performance of Alkan's second *Concerto da Camera in C sharp minor* – less unusual, perhaps, than the preceding works, but still something of a rarity on the concert platform. Composed in 1833, this chamber concerto is an early work in Alkan's output, and dates from the time when the composer was starting to consolidate his highly personal style; it was given a successful première by its dedicatee, Henry Field, in Bath in 1834, and was published shortly afterwards in London. The composer himself seems to have retained a fondness for this early piece, performing it regularly throughout his career. Formally the *Concerto da Camera* is quite different from any of the standard early romantic concertos by Chopin, Schumann, Mendelssohn or Liszt. In one continuous movement, it typically plays for less than 10 minutes, and is accompanied only by strings. In other ways, however, it is a typical work of its time, with a showy and demanding solo part (which may or may not have been influenced by Liszt) and some clear echoes of other early romantic composers (such as John Field in the slower central section – specifically his popular Fifth Nocturne in B flat). The highly truncated recapitulation of the opening that concludes the piece may be too short to satisfy some



listeners, but such a structural novelty is surely typical of Alkan's approach to all aspects of composition – and when we consider a work like the later *Grande Sonate*, quite a mild foretaste!

The young Malaysian pianist Wilfred Ch'ng (pictured left following his performance, with conductor Michael Thrift and members of the London Firebird Orchestra) was the soloist, and he dealt very successfully with the work's considerable difficulties. Although his playing

occasionally lacked force – in the piano’s first solo entry, for instance – nevertheless he had an excellent sense of the music’s character, and managed to highlight its playful qualities as well as its sensitivity. The string section of the Firebird players also coped well. It was very rewarding to hear this work in a live performance – and to wonder once again at its enduring and unjustified neglect.

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## Second call: Write your own *Esquisse*

A repeat of the call for members to compose a short piece inspired by Alkan’s *Esquisses*. A number of submissions have already been received and many more are welcome by the deadline of 30<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

All members are invited to compose a short piano piece inspired by Alkan’s *Esquisses*, op. 63. The pieces will be compiled into a volume to be published as a supplement to a future Bulletin.

Apart from a handful of globally little-known instances, Alkan’s music has been widely ignored as a stimulus and model for composers. What is it about the music itself that appears to quench the spark of imaginative compositional response? And who can answer that question? This is our chance to be one of the first group of musicians<sup>1</sup> since Alkan’s death to answer by **overtly permitting his influence on our composing for piano** by each of us writing a short *Esquisse* **lasting no more than 150 seconds**.

The project can be imagined either as a tribute to Alkan and his op. 63, or more broadly as an opportunity for a composer – whether professional or amateur – to be stimulated and influenced by Alkan. The following are merely suggestions to stimulate ideas:

- A parody, pastiche or tribute (according to your personal definition), in any pre-1861 style as variously found throughout op. 63 – or in a post-1861 style
- Piece that sounds like “the music that Alkan forgot to write”
- A new piece using a title from op. 63
- A new piece of ‘updating’, such as Mussorgsky’s *Schmuyle and Goldberg* (1874) as an updating of Alkan’s *Héraclite et Démocrite* (1861)
- A prequel or sequel to any of op. 63
- A variation based on any of op. 63
- A short piece, independent of the above, perhaps with a purely conceptual influence of Alkan.

This project conveniently coincides with the 100<sup>th</sup> Bulletin, due to be published early in 2020. Anonymous publication as a supplement to the Bulletin will allow the contributions to be appreciated free from bias. Bulletin 101 will provide contributors’ names – with their permission.

The submissions should preferably be typeset on computer and submitted as a pdf on A4-sized pages (portrait), but neat hand-written scores (also A4 portrait) will also be accepted. It’s up to the composer to design the layout with regard to title font, page turns, additional text or illustrations (minimal please).

You may also submit an audio performance of your score, as an MP3 (or equivalent) recording, and the recordings will, with permission, be made available to members for download.

Please address queries to the Bulletin editor (Nick Hammond, email: [treasurer@alkansociety.org](mailto:treasurer@alkansociety.org), or by post to: Woodend House, High Stittenham, York YO60 7TW, UK), to whom final submissions should be sent by **30<sup>th</sup> November 2019** (Alkan’s 206<sup>th</sup> birthday).

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<sup>1</sup> But not *the* first: see letter from Brian Inglis on page 16 of this issue.

## The renaissance of Alkan in Japan: behind the scene

Takio Hosoya<sup>1</sup>, Kanagawa (Japan)

In the 1980s, eight volumes of selected works of Alkan were released in Japan by a sister label of Sony Music. The pianist was Osamu Nakamura, who now calls himself Osamu Kanazawa. Undoubtedly the albums were the first considerable volume of recordings after Ronald Smith. They received critical acclaim, but the boom was fast to fade away; Nakamura stopped his public activity for a while. By then listeners had forgotten Alkan, except for some enthusiasts... And now, after about two decades, a Japanese pianist is attracting younger listeners. With his technical perfection, he shows to Japanese audiences new aspects of the romantic music of the French composer. Why are Japanese people now excited in the twice forgotten composer? Here's the story behind the scene.

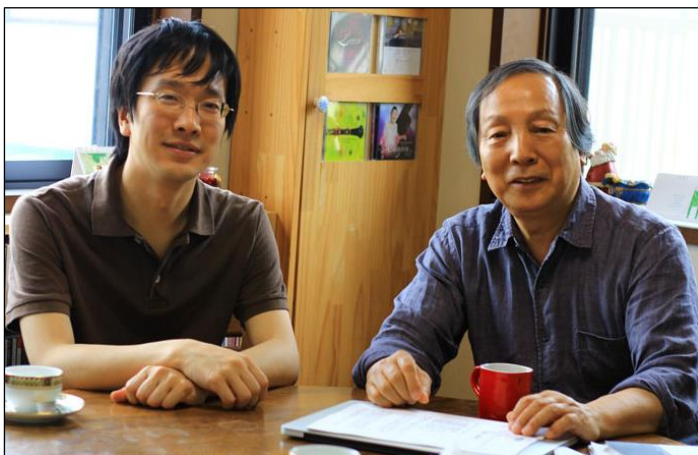
### From oblivion

“Alkan? No thank you!” said a famous Japanese critic, recalls Motoiwa Yato, ex-producer of a record company. The episode happened when he offered sample copies to the critic. In the pre-internet era, people rarely had access to unknown repertoire. Many people were prejudiced against unfamiliar repertoire because they considered such music was unknown on account of its unattractiveness or poor quality. But Yato was one exception. He was blown away by the overwhelming *Le vent* (from Alkan's op. 15), and he started to seek neglected works which could be re-estimated. He hosted several concerts dedicated to underestimated composers. One day, he happened to meet a new talent.

Yui Morishita (pictured below, on the left), who had studied at the Tokyo University of the Arts, had been an admirer of the music of Beethoven. His colleague, Masato Suzuki, conductor-pianist and one of the main figures of Bach Collegium Japan, advised Morishita “you would like the music of Alkan”. Suzuki's advice was right. Morishita was in his heart attracted by the enigmatic composer. His restless curiosity led him to submit a paper dedicated to Alkan. And at one of his graduate concerts, he played all movements of *Symphonie* from *12 études dans tous les tons mineurs*. Morishita's performance fixed the eyes and ears of Yato. He was deeply impressed that the young musician played brilliantly these forgotten works. With his recommendation, Yukio Kojima (on the right in the picture), founder of ALM records and its chief engineer, got to know Morishita and the music of Alkan.

Kojima recalls his first impression of the works of Alkan: “some works are truly remarkable and interesting”. His label, ALM was founded in the '70s in the period of Free Jazz and contemporary music which were regarded as edgy music: “a sort of cult label”, describes Kojima. In fact, early releases contain the works of Jo Kondo, then one of the most eminent young Japanese composers of the Avant-Garde era. Now the catalogue is comprehensive, spanning from medieval to contemporary music. The common factor of each title is that it does not rely on the celebrity of the repertoire. “There are works not well known but musically excellent”, said Kojima with confidence.

Why Alkan? I posed the question to Kojima. At first, he describes the character of the Japanese audience as “they are very eager to deepen their knowledge of music history” and he suggested to me one



example; when his label released a CD of the works of Carl Filtsch, a pupil of Chopin, a Japanese popular newspaper introduced it as an unknown jewel. Straightaway, Amazon and CD stores ordered a large number of CDs. People are now thirstier than ever for the work of unsung composers. If the pupil of Chopin commands considerable attention, the rival of Chopin and Liszt will be suitable for being rediscovered, that may be what Kojima thought.

And then, a new cycle of Alkan recordings began.

<sup>1</sup> The author may be contacted by email at: [takioh\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:takioh(at)gmail.com)

## **New audiences, from another interest**

On 30<sup>th</sup> November 2018, the 205<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of our hermit-like composer, Morishita gave an annual all-Alkan recital to coincide with the release of his fourth Alkan album “Quasi-Faust”. The program consisted of two sonatas; the Grande Sonate “Les quatre âges” (op.33) and Cello Sonata (op. 47) with the expert cellist, Yoko Hasegawa. Who was in the audience? Enthusiasts, residents of the city, and the younger generation were to be found. I even saw a six- or seven-year old girl request the autograph of the pianist.

The most interesting thing for me is that some of his young and loyal fans would originally not be familiar with classical music; Morishita already had his fan base before his Alkan concert series started. He is in a group of the earliest musicians gaining a good reputation from the internet; after his graduation from the university, he would upload his own arrangement of the music of Japanese anime (one of his passions along with science fiction) to a Japanese Youtube-like site. His arrangements are highly elaborated with the style of a virtuoso pianist-composer so that the viewers were thrilled with his performance and asked: “who is he?”. Morishita replied kiddingly: “I’m NEET” (Not in Education, Employment or Training) because he had not been in a particular profession. This conversation led him to be called under pseudonym “Pianeet” or “Duke of Pianeet”.

Some may think that anime songs should not be the works of serious composers. However, Morishita refuted this as follow: “Now composers who received academic musical education are not reluctant to work in then underestimated genres such as game music or anime soundtracks”. Nor do pianists. We can see today’s “authentic” pianists play the arrangements of popular music. Remember, Hamelin plays Weissenberg’s arrangements of Charles Trenet, and Alexandre Tharaud covered the works of a French chanson singer, Barbara. Jazzy pieces such as Kapustin’s are now favourites of younger pianists for encores. It is not surprising that Morishita’s fans treat the music of Alkan and anime or film music in parallel.

## **Sales, investment, and further exploration**

In April 2019 Morishita had a recording session for his forthcoming Alkan album. “How many volumes will his Alkan collection include?” I asked Kojima. “Not fixed”, he gently replied. “We want to continue as long as there is work worth to be recorded”. And record sales are good enough? According to him, the first volume was quite successful, because new listeners had an interest in it, and of course, some of them were anime fans. Although the record industry has lost the massive sales it once had, Kojima is not reluctant: “Our recordings may not make a lot of profit, but we want to keep them in the catalogue”. He hopes that his recordings will nurture new listeners and musicians. They would be an investment for the future.

I never questioned Morishita about which pieces his further Alkan album contains because I didn’t want to know the answer before the release. But I did ask whether he has an interest in the work of other romantic composers: “I know some people are looking for a romantic repertoire, but I want to devote myself to the music of Alkan because there’s not enough time to dig through”, he replied. His new fifth album will arrive in the autumn, and we will get to know how his exploration of the music of Alkan will continue.

## Marie Poitevin and her performance of Alkan in the 1870s

Nick Hammond, York (UK) and Frederik Keygnaert, Leiden (The Netherlands)

On Friday 24<sup>th</sup> July 1874, the piano section of the annual *Concours du Conservatoire* took place in Paris, with separate competitions for men and for women. The jury were Ambroise Thomas (then *directeur-président* of the Conservatoire), Georges Bizet, Jules Cohen<sup>1</sup>, Léo Delibes, Charles Delioux<sup>2</sup>, Henri Fissot<sup>3</sup>, Émile Paladilhe<sup>4</sup>, Théodore Ritter<sup>5</sup> and Camille Saint-Saëns. Fifteen men participated, and their set piece was Chopin's *second piano concerto*. The 27 women competitors were set *Concerto de Ch.-V. Alkan, op. 39, en sol# mineur*. The first prize winner for men was Paul Chabeaux (a student of M. G. Mathias and later a respected composer) and the first prize for the women was shared between Mlle Poitevin (a student of M. Delaborde), Mlle Manotte and Mlle Pressensé (both students of M. Le Couppey).

### Women musicians in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century France

Before turning to the main topic of this article, the career of Delaborde's student Marie Poitevin and her performances of Alkan's works, we consider the startling selection of the first movement of Alkan's solo concerto as the women's set piece, and more generally the contemporary role of women pianists.

The choice of the solo concerto implies that the professors of piano at the Conservatoire were familiar with the work and held it in high esteem. In the previous year, Alkan himself had played sections of the first movement in the last of his *Petits Concerts* on 26 April<sup>6</sup>. It may also be significant that Delaborde had been appointed professor at the Conservatoire in 1873 and perhaps was championing Alkan's music. The choice of set piece certainly counters the belief that the op. 39 studies were neglected masterpieces from their time of publication onwards. Selection of a piece for the *Concours* seems to have been no trivial matter: in 1876, the *Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris* (henceforth RGM) reflected on the choice of Saint-Saëns' *second piano concerto* as the women's set piece as follows:

“For the women's competition, the professors had chosen the first part of the second concerto of M. Camille Saint-Saëns (in G minor). The concertos of M. Henri Herz and M. V. Alkan are hitherto, we believe, the only ones which have been nominated for piano competitions during their author's lifetime; in particular, this is the first time that a composer as young as M. Saint-Saëns will have had the honour of seeing his work at such an occasion<sup>7</sup>.” (RGM, 1876, 30 Jul., p. 242)

Competitors must have been required to play only short selections from the solo concerto: it would have been completely impractical for 27 competitors to play the whole movement even with Alkan's authorised cuts, whether or not they could actually get their fingers around the work's “most cruelly taxing demands”<sup>8</sup>. One can only speculate on whether the sections to be played were specified in advance or were requested by the jurors at the time of performance.

The choice also reflects on the approach taken by the Conservatoire to women players. It would appear that no concessions were made for women at least in terms of the difficulty of set pieces. In the period 1870 to 1880 (there was no *concours* in 1871), both men and women were set Chopin's *2<sup>nd</sup> Concerto* and *Allegro de Concert* (op. 46) (the latter for the women on two occasions), and the women were usually set concerti (Herz *6<sup>th</sup> Concerto* (twice), Hummel *Concerto in B minor*, Saint-Saëns *Concerto in G minor*), whilst the men were more often set sonatas (Beethoven op. 57 and op. 111; Hummel op. 81; Schumann *2<sup>nd</sup> Sonata*; Weber *Sonata in A flat*) or shorter pieces (Chopin *1<sup>st</sup> Ballade* and *Polonaise* op. 22). It is also striking

<sup>1</sup> Born 1839 and studied at the Paris Conservatoire where he received first prizes in *soflège*, piano, organ and counterpoint. In 1874 he was organist at Saint-Merri and from 1877 was choir-master at the Paris Opera.

<sup>2</sup> Born 1825, ex-pupil of Chopin and professor of piano and composition.

<sup>3</sup> Born 1843, a child prodigy who entered the Conservatory at the age of eight, winning many prizes. In 1874 he became organist of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul.

<sup>4</sup> Born 1844 and also a child prodigy, entering the Conservatoire at ten and a prolific composer.

<sup>5</sup> Confusingly, a pseudonym for Toussaint Prévost (1840-1886), who was a student of Berlioz (as a baritone) and later as a pianist with Liszt. He taught Isidore Philipp.

<sup>6</sup> “...des fragments de la brillante étude mineure n° 8 (op. 39), qui est aussi un concerto et la 1<sup>re</sup> des 12 études majeures [i.e., op 35/1], d'un effet ravissant” (RGM, 1873, 4 May, p. 141)

<sup>7</sup> The reviewer is incorrect: Alkan's first *Concerto da Camera* was the set piece for the male candidates in the *concours de piano* in 1832, when Alkan was only 18 – less than half Saint-Saëns' age in 1876. Alkan had introduced the piece to the Parisian public only in April 1832 with considerable success.

<sup>8</sup> See article by Adrian Corleoni for *AllMusic*: [www.allmusic.com/composition/concerto-for-solo-piano-in-g-sharp-minor-%C3tudes-dans-tous-les-tons-mineurs-nos-8-10-op-39-8-10-mc0002510013](http://www.allmusic.com/composition/concerto-for-solo-piano-in-g-sharp-minor-%C3tudes-dans-tous-les-tons-mineurs-nos-8-10-op-39-8-10-mc0002510013) (accessed 23 March 2019)

how many more female candidates there were than men in the 1870s, with more women than men every year<sup>9</sup>, perhaps reflecting the social cachet of competent performance by women pianists.

Indeed, it was not unusual for French women pianists to perform in public to great acclaim<sup>10</sup>. This reflected the important role music was given in the education of girls in France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of all the instruments, the piano was deemed the most suited to the ‘feminine nature’. Unlike the cello (deemed wholly inappropriate for women to handle) and all wind instruments (involving too much facial contortion), the piano could be played by women without compromising their ‘modest’ posture (facing away from the public, feet and hands neatly together). A career as a musician was seen as an extension of that education, as can be gleaned from a French guide on choosing a profession, published in 1842:

“A woman’s education remains incomplete without music. We should add that music, of all the arts, is something a woman can learn, cultivate, and even professionally perform with the least of inconveniences and the most of advantages. The fate of women who have to work to survive is so deplorable that we ought not overlook this observation...”<sup>11</sup> (*Guide pour le choix d’un état ou Dictionnaire des professions*)

In line with the importance attributed to music in female education, the Music Conservatory in Paris opened its doors to pupils of both sexes upon its establishment in 1795 (a century earlier than the School for Fine Arts would). Moreover, its education programme was entirely free, thus providing men and women with similar opportunities, not only to obtain a musical degree but to also start building a career path as a soloist. Indeed, while the male establishment drew a line when it came to granting women access to the realm of composers and conductors, for women to perform as soloists or as members of a small ensemble was acceptable. Creating and directing was thought ‘counternatural’, but performing (a man’s) music respectfully and demurely was commendable.



Like Poitevin, most of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century female musicians who garnered public acclaim are now forgotten. The lack of modern scholarly interest both stems from and perpetuates the classic image of a young woman playing piano in a private, domestic setting, a cliché that obscures the careers that female musicians could and did have in the public eye (the picture on the left typifies the cliché – but it is not of Poitevin herself). This sets the context for Marie Poitevin’s subsequent career.

## Marie Poitevin

Marie was aged 19 when she won first prize at the *Concours*. According to the Conservatoire’s *Dictionnaire des Lauréats*, which lists all graduates of the

**Poitevin (Marie-Adélaïde-Augustine)**, née à Belleville, 15 mars 1855. *Solfège* : 3<sup>e</sup> méd. 1870, 2<sup>e</sup> méd. 1873; *Piano* : 2<sup>d</sup> prix 1873, 1<sup>er</sup> prix 1874. Paris. 🌿 A., 1886. M<sup>me</sup> G. HAINL, 9 sept. 1889.

Conservatoire, her full name was Marie Adélaïde Augustine Poitevin and she was born in the Belleville neighbourhood of Paris on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 1855: her entry is shown above. The symbol 🌿 A. refers to the fact that she was honoured as an *Officier d’Académie* in 1886, and the final part of the entry suggests she married a Monsieur G. Hainl on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1889. A short entry in *Dictionnaire de la musique en France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Fauquet, 2003) confirms her date and place of birth and also that she married the son of the “chef d’orchestre G. Hainl”. The father, François George Hainl (1807-1873), served as head conductor of the *Paris Opéra* for ten years from 1863 and for much the same period was conductor of the *Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire*. We have found no information about the son, also George Hainl<sup>12</sup>. The only other scrap of biographical information from Fauquet (2003) is that her father was the

<sup>9</sup> For 1870 to 1880, the average number of male candidates was 15 and the average number of female candidates was 30.

<sup>10</sup> See Florence Launay, *Les musiciennes: de la pionnière adulée à la concurrente redoutée. Bref historique d’une longue professionnalisation*, in *Travail, Genre et Sociétés*, 19:1 (2008), pp. 41-63.

<sup>11</sup> *L’éducation d’une femme n’est pas complète sans la musique ; ajoutons que la musique est, de tous les arts, celui qu’une femme peut apprendre, cultiver et même exercer comme profession avec le moins d’inconvénients, avec le plus d’avantages. Le sort des femmes obligées de travailler pour vivre est si déplorable que nous ne devons pas négliger cette observation...* (cited *Ibidem*).

<sup>12</sup> The fact that father and son shared, in part, the same name has caused confusion about Marie’s husband. For example Holoman (2004) writes of George senior: “His wife, the pianist Marie Poitevin, was also popular with the *sociétaires*...”. Since

sculptor G. Poitevin<sup>13</sup>. None of the references mention details of her mother or her place or date of death.

Despite a stellar billing in the French press in the 1870s and 1880s, very little information on her career is now available: she appears to have largely bypassed historians of 19<sup>th</sup>-Century pianism other than the very brief entry in Fauquet (2003); she is not mentioned in current lists of French pianists or illustrious Parisian musicians<sup>14</sup>. She is mainly remembered as the dedicatee of César Franck's *Prélude, Choral et Fugue*, which she premièred on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1885, and for the first complete public performance of Alkan's *Symphonie for solo piano*. Less well-known is that she was the dedicatee of a number of other works, including Saint-Saëns' *Souvenir d'Italie* (op. 80) (Ratner, 2002), Delaborde's 1878 cadenza for Beethoven's *fourth piano concerto*, Edouard Chavagnat's *Le capriciose: trois valse*s and *Les naïades*, as well as some minor pieces by René Baillot. She also premièred works by Chabrier (Howat, 2009).

### Marie Poitevin's performances of Alkan

She first features in the Parisian press for success in *Solfège* competitions of 1870 and 1873, and then as a second-prize winners in the 1873 *Concours du Conservatoire*. In that year, 23 women competitors played Chopin's *Allegro de Concert* as the set piece. In May 1874, she is listed as performing the *Scherzo* and *Trio* from Mendelssohn's 1<sup>st</sup> piano trio (with MM. Brindis and Loeb) in *La reprise des exercices publics d'élèves au Conservatoire*. Following her first prize at the 1874 *Concours*, the RGM (1874, 2 Aug, p. 243) found space for a paragraph extolling Delaborde's skill as a teacher, citing Poitevin as an example:

“With regard to M. Delaborde, to us it always seems he would be a teacher who is one of a kind; but every time he gets his hands on a student of truly artistic nature, he will achieve a most brilliant success: the first prize that he won, hands down, with Mlle Poitevin bears witness to that.”

In the autumn she announces the launch of her career with four concerts early in 1875 (RGM, 1874, 8 Nov, p. 359). That same year, 1875, was also the third year of Alkan's *Petits Concerts*. In the previous year he had played many of his own works, including the 1<sup>st</sup> *Nocturne*, several of the *Chants* and *Prières*, the *Adagio* and *Saltarelle* from the *Sonate de Concert*, the *Duo pour piano et violon*, the first major-key *étude* (op. 35/1), the *Marche Funèbre* and the *Marche Triomphale*, the 1<sup>st</sup> movement of the 2<sup>e</sup> *Concerto da Camera*, and some or all of *Les Anciennes Mélodies Juives*. Poitevin may well have attended these events, but in her first concert of the 1875 season (13 February in Salle Erard) she avoided any direct comparisons with Alkan's recent performances. However she did play the finale of his transcription of Mozart's D minor piano concerto (with cadenza) and *La Voix de l'instrument*, no. 4 from 5<sup>e</sup> *Recueil de Chants* (op. 70). She played no further Alkan in her 1875 season: her programming was broad, including Bach, Beethoven, Weber, Schumann, Heller, Chopin and Liszt (including the 6<sup>th</sup> Paganini study). She played duets or duos with her teacher Delaborde in several of the concerts. Delaborde's dominating approach is perhaps typified by the concert on 15<sup>th</sup> March, which concluded with a performance of a Bach organ *Fantasia & Fugue* on the piano with Poitevin relegated to the pedal part and Delaborde playing the manuals, much to the disapproval of the reviewer in RGM (1875, 21 Mar, p. 94), who argued it was, after all, the student's concert<sup>15</sup>. Following her final concert, RGM (1875, 23 May, p. 166) concluded that “the young virtuoso continues to merit the praise we have accorded her in reporting on her three previous concerts”.

In her 1876 concert season she took on the challenge of some of Alkan's more substantial works. In her first concert, on 17<sup>th</sup> February, she played the first *Chant* from book 1 (which Alkan himself had played several times in 1875) and, with Delaborde, the *Impromptu sur le Choral de Luther* (op. 69), written for pedal piano but played on a conventional piano. Although not stated by the reviewer, we can perhaps

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George died in 1873, when Marie was about 18, this is clearly wrong. Fauquet (1999a, p. 158) makes the same error, as does Gallois (2004, p. 272).

<sup>13</sup> We have found nothing further about Marie's father, although a casual Google search shows that various vases (in the Sèvres style) signed by G Poitevin are still available from well-known auction houses.

<sup>14</sup> She is not entirely ignored in more recent times however. Adrian Corleoni, in a blog on Franck's *Prélude, choral, et fugue*, writes: “In 1874 a new pianistic star, the 19-year-old Marie Poitevin, blazed into the pianistic firmament, taking first prize at the Paris Conservatoire. A pupil of Elie Miriam Delaborde, she was praised not only for her transcendental *mécanisme* and her powerful, richly colored sonority, but for ‘an all too rare artistic conscience, which makes it a duty to sacrifice nothing to effect and lends her playing a remarkable purity of style’ (Le Ménestral, March 12, 1882)”.

[www.allmusic.com/composition/prélude-choral-et-fugue-for-piano-fwv-21-mc0002362915](http://www.allmusic.com/composition/prélude-choral-et-fugue-for-piano-fwv-21-mc0002362915) (accessed 16 Mar 2019)

<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Alkan “placed himself modestly in the bass” (RGM 1875, 2 May, p. 142) in a performance with M Fissot of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of his three marches for piano duet (op 40) in the 5<sup>th</sup> of his *Petit Concerts* in April 1875.

assume that Delaborde allowed his pupil to play the keyboard part. This may well have been the first public performance of the *Impromptu*. It passed with little comment from the reviewer.

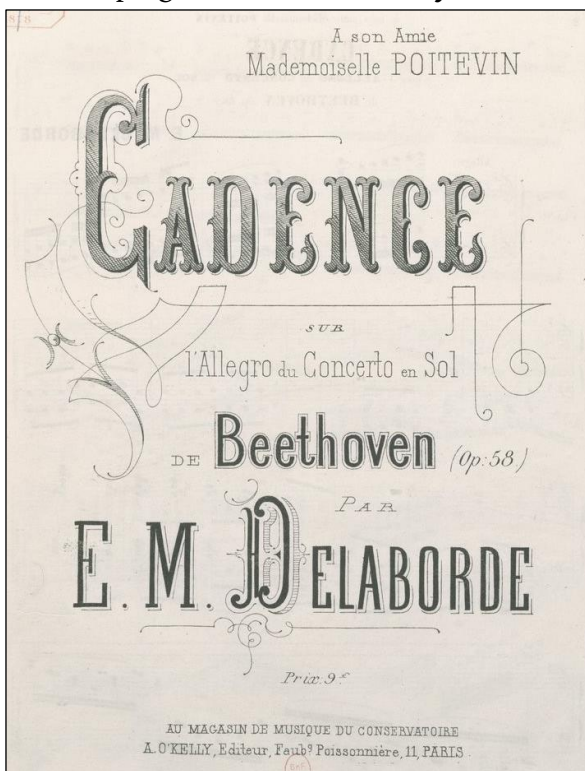
In her second concert, on 9<sup>th</sup> March, she played Alkan's *Petit Conte* and a selection from the 3<sup>e</sup> *Recueil de Chants* (op. 65), and in the third (30<sup>th</sup> March) *Super flumina Babylonis* (op. 52) and *Ouverture* (op. 39/11). Again, these last two performances may well be public premières: neither of the works had featured in Alkan's *Petit Concerts* to date. The RGM reviewer (1876, 2 Apr, p. 110) notes they are "*deux morceaux de grande valeur*". One wonders whether, to tackle these works, Poitevin had received a little extra tuition or advice from Alkan<sup>16</sup>. At the conclusion of her concert series, RGM continued to enthuse: "Each concert confirms and even strengthens the high opinion that we have formed with regard to – first and foremost – this beautiful talent, which is manifested through its sincerity, its nobleness, its complete lack of affectation." Later in the year, on 28 October, Poitevin performed in an additional benefit concert and included works of Alkan in her programme, but no details are given.

Her 1877 season started with a concert on 19<sup>th</sup> March at which she played a complete performance of the *Symphonie* (op. 39/4-7), "of which the Funeral March and Minuet are two small masterpieces" according to the RGM reviewer (RGM 1877, 25 Mar, p. 93). Alkan may have noted this comment as he played the same two movements in his *Petit Concerts* on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1877. It was not until some time later that Alkan played the other movements in public (the minuet and finale on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1878, and the complete work on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of April 1880). In Poitevin's next concert (5<sup>th</sup> April), she and Delaborde again played the *Impromptu sur le Choral de Luther*. The RGM reviewer spared a few more words on the piece: "In Alkan's *impromptu* for pedal piano or three hands, it is particularly the aspects of counterpoint and polyphony that demand our attention: the composition is perhaps a bit too long". These are the only two concerts by Poitevin in 1877 reported in either RGM or *Le Ménestrel*.

Poitevin continues to play Alkan in 1878, at her concert on 23<sup>rd</sup> April: the first of the major key studies (op. 35/1) and, with Delaborde, two of the marches for piano duet (op. 40). Interestingly, Alkan had played the same study back in 1874 (2<sup>nd</sup> April) and would do so again just a few days after Poitevin's concert (on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1878). He also plays, again with Fissot, two of the op. 40 marches on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1878. These repetitions may be a coincidence, but one can certainly speculate on whether Poitevin's and Alkan's programme selections may have been related. Another instance, though a little further apart, is

that following Poitevin's performance of *Super flumina Babylonis* (on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1876), Alkan played the work twice, on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1877 and on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1878.

For 1879 and 1880 we see a step change in Poitevin's career: no longer is she playing only solo recitals, but she appears with increasing frequency as a concerto soloist in orchestral concerts. Thus on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1879 she plays both the Schumann concerto and Beethoven's *Emperor* (op. 73) to much critical acclaim. No Alkan works feature in her programmes in either year, and it may be no coincidence that in 1879 Alkan had to cancel his *Petit Concerts*. Nor does she play Alkan in public in the following year. On the 8<sup>th</sup> April 1880 she performs Beethoven's 4<sup>th</sup> Concerto (with cadenza by Delaborde: title page pictured left) as well as Saint-Saëns 4<sup>th</sup> Concerto. Not content with a couple of concerti, in the same concert she plays Beethoven's 32 variations in C minor (WoO 08), a group of works by Chopin (three *impromptus*, a nocturne and a prelude), two of Schumann's *Novelletten* and, to round things off, one of Liszt's *Paganini studies*. This concert gets a stellar review in the *Journal Officiel de la République Française*



<sup>16</sup> Strangely, Fauquet (1999b, p. 522) refers to Poitevin as a pupil of Alkan, and this is repeated by Ernst-Günter Heinemann in his Preface to the Henle edition of Franck's piano quintet. We have found no other evidence to suggest Marie was a pupil of Alkan (in 2003, Fauquet correctly lists Delaborde as Marie's teacher), and while an intriguing possibility we feel it is likely to be another father-son confusion!

(1880, 27 Apr, p. 4560).

We can trace her continuing career over the next few years, including concerti and chamber performances as well as solo recitals. Alkan has disappeared entirely from her concert repertoire (although Delaborde still plays short Alkan pieces in his public recitals). As noted above, she was awarded the honorary title of *Officière d'Académie* in 1886.

Following her wedding in 1889, she does continue to play in public concerts for almost two years, listed in *Le Ménestrel* as “Mme George Hainl” (1890, 6 Apr, p. 112) or as “Mme Poitevin-Hainl” (1890, 28 Dec, p. 412) and in 1891 as “Mme George Hainl (Marie Poitevin)”. Her last reported concert in *Le Ménestrel* is in April 1891 when she plays the Mozart concerto for two pianos with Clotilde Kleeberg. Thereafter her name disappears almost entirely from concert listings and reports, although we have found a passing reference to her playing in an accompanying role in 1894 (Augé de Lassus, 1911, p. 120). It is likely that the demands or expectations of married life ruled out further concert appearances; maybe she and George started a family. However the legacy of Alkan performances by this remarkable pianist remains.

The appendix below summarises Marie Poitevin’s known performances of Alkan works, together with some notes on première performances.

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## Appendix: Summary of Marie Poitevin's known performances of Alkan works

Occasion	Work	Notes
Jul 1874 Paris Conservatoire	<i>Concerto</i> (op. 39 no. 8) (parts)	<i>Concours</i> set piece for women competitors; parts of op. 39 no. 8 were played by Alkan on 26 Apr 1873
13 Feb 1875 Salle Erard	Mozart (tr. Alkan), Piano Concerto in D minor (finale, with cadenza) <i>La Voix de l'instrument</i> (5 <sup>e</sup> Recueil de Chants, op. 70 no. 4)	Not played by Alkan in the <i>Petits Concerts</i> ; possibly a première by Poitevin Alkan played selections of <i>Chants</i> in his concerts
17 Feb 1876 Salle Erard	<i>Assez Vivement</i> (1 <sup>er</sup> Recueil de Chants, op. 38 no. 1) <i>Impromptu sur le Choral de Luther</i> (op. 69) (with Delaborde)	Played by Alkan several times in 1873 & 1875 Not played by Alkan in the <i>Petits Concerts</i> ; possibly a première by Poitevin & Delaborde
9 Mar 1876 Salle Erard	<i>Petit Conte</i> (WoO) Selection from 3 <sup>e</sup> Recueil de Chants (op. 65)	Not played by Alkan in the <i>Petits Concerts</i> ; possibly a première by Poitevin Some played by Alkan in earlier <i>Petits Concerts</i>
30 Mar 1876 Salle Erard	<i>Super flumina Babylonis</i> (op. 52) <i>Ouverture</i> (op. 39 no. 11)	Played by Alkan in the <i>Petits Concerts</i> in 1877 & 1878 but not before; probably a première by Poitevin Not played by Alkan in the <i>Petits Concerts</i> ; probably a première by Poitevin
19 Mar 1877 Salle Erard	<i>Symphonie</i> (op. 39, nos 4-7)	Probably a première of complete work by Poitevin
5 Apr 1877 Salle Erard	<i>Impromptu sur le Choral de Luther</i> (op. 69) (with Delaborde)	Repeat of performance on 17 Feb 1876
23 Apr 1878 Salle Erard	<i>Allegretto</i> (op. 35 no. 1) Two of <i>Trois Marches</i> (op. 40) (with Delaborde)	Played by Alkan on 26 Apr 1873 At least two of the <i>Marches</i> played by Alkan 15 Feb 1873, 16 Apr 1875 & 6 Apr 1878

## CD review

### Alkan: Piano collection 4: *Quasi-Faust*

Yui Morishita, piano

ALCD-7225, released (in Japan) November 2018, length 67 minutes

#### Grande sonate (op. 33)

1	20 ans – très vite	5'41
2	30 ans – quasi-Faust	12'54
3	40 ans – un ménage heureux	11'18
4	50 ans – Prométhée enchaîné	9'24

#### Trois minuets (op. 51)

5	Tempo giusto	4'14
6	Tempo debole	5'11
7	Tempo nobile	6'22

8 Réconciliation – Petit caprice (op. 42) 7'35

9 Saltarelle (op. 23) 3'34



Reviewed by Laura Snyderman

Unsurprisingly, Morishita provides a pinnacle performance of the pivotal *Grande Sonate* (op. 33), along with Alkan’s *Trois Minuets* (op. 51), *Réconciliation – Petit caprice* (op 42), and *Saltarelle* (op. 23), historically popular but rarely performed nowadays.

**The *Grande Sonate*** contains four movements: *20 ans – très vite*, *30 ans – quasi-Faust*, *40 ans – un ménage heureux*, and *50 ans – Prométhée enchaîné*. Each movement depicts a semi-autobiographical portrayal of his manhood at twenty, thirty, forty, and fifty years of age. Unlike the stereotypical sonata, Alkan’s movements progressively decelerate between movements, lending itself to a morbid finale.

*20 ans très vite* begins with a whimsical speedy passage in D major – Morishita dazzles through the quirky passagework with sheer technical force. His lyricism creates an incredulous contrasting color through an expansive dynamic palate, particularly in the brief B minor section, concluding with a passionate whirlwind of challenging chordal jumps in a triumphant B major.

*30 ans quasi-Faust* can stand alone on its own merit; Raymond Lewenthal reflects, “[it] is a tone poem within a tone poem... it forms the apex of the sonata and it is the longest and most difficult movement”.<sup>1</sup> A lengthy movement with bountiful octave leaps and incredulous technical acrobatics, Morishita paves a daring interpretation with a technical perfection that is rather remarkable. Sections of intensive pianistic trials, Morishita tackles fiery passages with such ease and candor. Of minor concern, this performance occasionally lacks flexibility in pacing, losing some impact in the impressive passionate outbursts. Given the insurmountable leaps and challenges warranted in this movement, Morishita’s performance is nothing short of superior.

*40 ans un ménage heureux* (a happy household) depicts a light and lovely scene in the simplistic G major. Morishita brings a sparkle to this simpler movement with fluttery passagework and beautiful lines.

*50 ans Prométhée enchaîné* (Prometheus bound) illustrates a man portending death. In some ways the least fulfilling of the movements, this finale decays in a fittingly morbid fashion. This performance colors the stark octave passage quite justly following an impressive display of semi-quavers.

<sup>1</sup> Lewenthal, R. (1964). *The Piano Music of Alkan* (preface). Schirmer: New York. (Quoted in Eddie, W. (2007). *Charles Valentin Alkan: his life and his music*, p. 84. Ashgate Publishing: Aldershot.)

**The Trois Minuets (op. 51)** comprise three Viennese-style waltzes attuned to the more intimate salon concert.

*No. 1: Tempo giusto.* This minuet begins in E flat and contains the unusual harmonies typical of Alkan's compositional style, displaying an 8-7 suspension on the downbeat as soon as the first sixteen bars. The trio develops a quick harmonic progression through chromatic slipping into the Neapolitan key briefly, and back to the original home key. Morishita leans into the suspensions and colors each harmony with nuanced dynamic control. Alkan indicates *sempre dolce*, *dolicissimo* and even *con delicatezza* all within a twenty-eight measure section. Morishita has a refreshing take on this lovely minuet, maintaining the steady rhythmic pulse alive throughout the piece, while still producing a particularly light, sweet tone. This minuet particularly illustrates Morishita's blooming octave passages with each repetition.

*No.2: Tempo debole.* A lovely Schubert-esque G minor minuet, Alkan emphasizes weakness through one, two and sometimes three voice *appoggiaturas* at once. The trio is texturally interesting with high registered thirds and stark syncopated octaves in the bass. Morishita plays endearingly, leaning carefully into *appoggiaturas* and providing us a tonally and dynamically controlled performance. The lightness of Morishita's right hand contrasts his bold left hand octave attacks. The surprising *forte* parallel octave ending following a *smorzando* plays in a fittingly humorous and zany boldness akin to Alkan's style.

*No. 3: Tempo nobile.* Morishita plays with such delight and pleasant rendition of this elusive minuet in G major. The wide-spanning leaps and interesting F-sharp/G juxtaposition have clear Beethovenian influence. Morishita uses lovely dynamic contrasts to achieve a bell-like quality in the ringing F-sharps leading into and throughout the G minor trio. He uses the leaps and sudden harmonic changes with dynamic variation. A playful and refreshing interpretation, only lacking some flexibility and spacing between musical ideas.

**Réconciliation – Petit caprice (op. 42)** is a particularly unique piece from Alkan's compositions from the 1850s, involving a 5/4 Zorzico dance episode in preparation for the trio. He uses harmonic juxtapositions from C major to the Neapolitan briefly and into various harmonic pedal points for only a couple measures at time. Morishita's *Expressivo molto* is simply sublime – beautiful voicing and melodic consideration in his dynamics. The stark contrast in the Zorzico from the previous 6/8 section maintains the *dolce* and lightness, cohesively ramping up to the climactic trio.

The **Saltarelle (op. 23)** used to be one of Alkan's most performed pieces, highlighting especially the technical virtuosity displayed in many of Alkan's compositions. Morishita's *prestissimo* even surpasses Bernard Ringiessen's lovely recording, without losing sight of the line and quality in tonal production. While Igor Roma's performance provides an impressively speedier rendition in a style reminiscent of Cziffra, Roma's tempo is almost dangerous for any seasoned pianist, losing some of the tonal quality with his rapid attacks. Morishita maintains the lilt and whimsy more relatable to Alkan's style with considerable skill and accuracy. The pacing in Morishita's performance provides more attention and breath at cadences, allowing the various musical ideas to properly pan out, so to speak.

In short, Morishita's recording is a laudable achievement, reaching an insurmountable technical merit paired with a splendid finesse. A refreshing album, and a definite must for any Alkan enthusiast and piano enthusiast for that matter.

## Historic broadcast review

**Alkan: Symphonie (op. 39 nos 4-7)**

**Allan Sternfield, piano**

Broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on Thursday 11 December 1984, repeated Sunday 4 August 1985 (duration 27½ mins)

Reviewed by Richard Murphy

This is an audience-free studio broadcast (in one take I strongly suspect) which I've treasured ever since recording it off-air onto cassette in 1985.

***Allegro moderato (op. 39 no. 4)***

8'35

I find it emotionally coherent and I link this to his care for melody and his insistence that it is never buried by its surroundings – no matter what they are. Sternfield's shaping of phrases with dynamics, touch, and slightly unusual rubato I find entirely convincing. I'm delighted to point out that all the melody notes in the left hand in the opening 11 bars take precedence over the held notes in the right hand. This is very rarely heard, but surely vital for the first exposure of a sonata allegro (which he will not repeat!). Nearly the whole of this étude is based on it.

His somewhat flexible way with tempo I don't find troubling, as he's convinced me that it's alright for the music to breathe, and the symphonic process is never impaired by it. The last page's final chromatic descent goes the way of many live performances – but wait for his ending full stop...

This is an engrossing and gripping interpretation from start to finish.

***Marche funèbre: Andantino (op. 39 no. 5)***

8'05

The melody speaks with a beautiful and convincing eloquence, and with the warmth of a lyrical trombone tune in a Mahler symphony. All the slight and subtle changes added by Alkan on the repeat of this material are clearly to be heard. Towards the end, the 'clip-clop' of the funeral horses are wonderfully weighted, and the slender rising motif at the start of the coda is movingly tender – in fact the whole of the short coda is most beautifully judged. The pacing, the care in chordal voicing, the tonal lustre throughout this movement make for an outstanding performance.

***Menuet (op. 39 no. 6)***

6'10

A strong, punchy, and *non legato* touch gives bounce, while *staccato* is used when asked for. Different touches give different effects! Sternfield eschews the duplet mini-phrasing in the right hand preferring a straightforward message. Very effective too. I'm more troubled by the liberal use of *rubato* in the Trio, which is pretty, but not quite the contrast of style that really fits.

***Finale: Presto (op. 39 no. 7)***

4'35

Sternfield yields to no-one in his fearless virtuosity and sparkling clarity throughout this physically demanding étude. Neither is he a surface-of-the-key tickler – there's plenty of weight behind each note. Completely convincing playing. Hurrah!!!

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Members of the Society who wish to obtain a copy of Allan Sternfield's performance of the *Symphonie* should contact the Bulletin Editor ([treasurer@alkansociety.org](mailto:treasurer@alkansociety.org)).

## Letter to the editor

Sir,

The invitation to 'write your own Esquisse' in the last Bulletin (no 97, p. 4) sounds particularly intriguing! Congratulations to whoever came up with that idea. However, I should point out that this won't be "the first group of musicians since Alkan's death to answer [the question of why Alkan's music has been widely ignored as a stimulus for composers] by overtly permitting his influence on our composing". For the Stoke Newington Contemporary Music Festival 2013, the committee (of which I am a member) commissioned a group of composers – including no less a name than Michael Finnissy – to write their own 'completions' of Alkan's string quartet opening (anything from pastiche to abstract/personal responses – most opted for the latter). The new string quartets (14 miniatures in total) were premiered with great success at St Mary's Old Church Arts Centre in Stoke Newington, London, on 2nd November 2013. Some details may be seen at: [www.facebook.com/events/630912893616302/](http://www.facebook.com/events/630912893616302/)

Two of the performances are available on Youtube: the composition by Michael Finnissy (at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBN4YOjr9L8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBN4YOjr9L8)) and that by Alex Nikiporenko (at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=b\\_4AQvWVgQ4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_4AQvWVgQ4))

Yours faithfully,

*Brian Inglis, London*

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The Society Bulletin can only flourish with a steady flow of input from its members. All members are encouraged to send articles, letters or comments to the Editor (Nick Hammond, email: [treasurer@alkansociety.org](mailto:treasurer@alkansociety.org), or by post to: Woodend House, High Stittenham, York YO60 7TW, UK)

## Distractions and diversions

### Solution to Prize Crossword number 4 (in Bulletin 97)



**Ferruccio Busoni** (1866-1924)  
Champion of Alkan, ranking him as one of the five great piano composers since Beethoven.



**Harold Bauer** (1873-1951)  
Recorded Alkan on piano roll, including *Le Vent*.



**John Ogdon** (1937-1989)  
Formidable performer of Alkan, including 1<sup>st</sup> recordings of *Solo Concerto* and the *Cello Sonata*.



**Egon Petri** (1881-1962)  
Frequent performer of Alkan (including *Allegro Barbaro* at the Bechstein Hall in 1903) and a series of BBC broadcasts in 1938



**Raymond Lewenthal** (1923-1988)  
Pioneering advocate, performer and editor of Alkan's music



**Aglaé Massart (née Masson)** (1827-87)  
Admired performer of Alkan in the 1840s and dedicatee of Alkan's 4<sup>th</sup> *Recueil de Chants*



**Kaikhosru Sorabji** (1892-1988)  
Pianist-composer who strongly championed Alkan's cause.

### Details of the pictured pianists



**Anthony Goldstone** (1944-2017)  
Recorded the complete Alkan piano duet repertoire with his partner Caroline Clemmow



**Sergei Rachmaninoff** (1873-1943)  
Included Alkan in his recitals, including *Comme le vent* (op. 39/1) and *Marche funèbre* (op. 26).



**Adela Verne** (1877-1952)  
Performed *Le Vent* in the Bechstein Hall, London, in 1911 (and no doubt elsewhere).



**Colin Horsely** (1920-2012)  
Pioneering New Zealand pianist who broadcast the *Symphonie for Solo Piano* on the BBC in 1946



**Roger Smalley** (1943-2015)  
Performer and arranger of Alkan's music, including *Benedictus* (op. 54) and *Impromptu* (op. 69) for two pianos.



**Ronald Smith** (1922-2004)  
Champion and scholar of Alkan and founder President of the Society



**William Murdoch** (1888-1942)  
An Australian pianist, he played *Allegro Barbaro* and *Le Festin d'Ésope* at the Bechstein Hall in 1915.

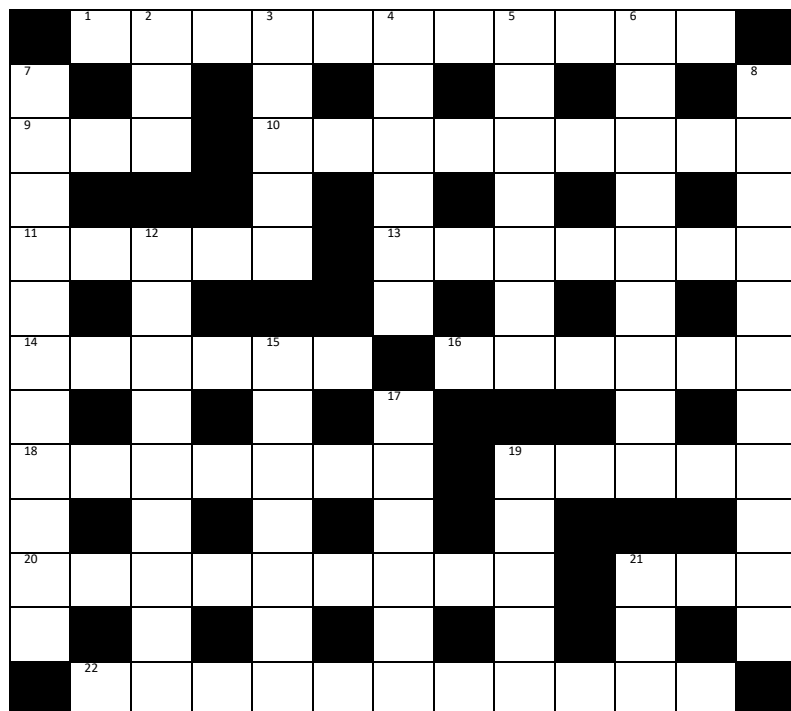


**Joseph Bloch** (1917-2009)  
Distinguished teacher, scholar and performer of Alkan



**Rudolph Ganz** (1877-1972)  
Champion of Alkan, performances included *Le Tambour bat aux champs* and a recording of *Le chemin de fer* on piano roll.

**Prize Crossword number 5: *Know your opus numbers*** (Set by *En Songe*)



**Notes:**

- Clues without asterisks are of a cryptic nature and solutions are entered into the grid in the usual manner
- The solutions to clues with an asterisk are the name (or part of the name) of Alkan works. The clues (mostly opus numbers) are given in the third column, and you must work out where the solutions best fit in the grid, with the word lengths matching those given.
- Solutions should be sent to the editor\* to arrive by 1 August 2019. The first correct solution (drawn randomly from a hat) will win a CD.

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

**Across**

- 1\* (3, 8)  
 9, 21\* (6)  
 10 Senile fun: sister takes own picture (3, 6)  
 11\* (5)  
 13 Parisian art gallery and its bank (6, 1)  
 14\* See 5 down  
 16\* (6)  
 18\* (7)  
 19 Circumference over diameter and so forth (2, 3)  
 20 Most prickly is not theirs (9)  
 21\* See 9 across  
 22 Nine tattoos? Perhaps Alkan thought Liszt showed this (11)

**Down**

- 2\* See 19 down (3)  
 3\* (5)  
 4, 8\* (4, 2, 5, 6)  
 5, 14ac\* (3, 4, 1, 5)  
 6\* (1, 8)  
 7 Brief first attempts, or perhaps a bit windy from Mrs Lad's flat (5, 6)  
 8\* See 4 down and 19 down  
 12 French black corvids: I scorn row? (4, 5)  
 15\* (2, 5)  
 17\* (2, 4)  
 19, 2, 8\* (5, 3, 5, 6)  
 21 Speak like a dove? (3)

**Alkan's works, to be placed in the grid where they fit**

- Op. 4 (1<sup>st</sup> word)  
 Op. 15/2  
 Common feature of op. 26 and op. 27  
 Common feature of op. 31/3 and op. 63/15  
 Op. 38/4  
 Op. 63/26  
 Op. 63/48  
 Op. 66 no. 11  
 Op. 74/1  
 Gluck's opera from which Alkan set a [9, 21] (WoO)  
 Just one part of Charles Millevoye setting, translated (WoO)  
 Uploads beer? Wind-based (WoO)

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# The Alkan Society

aiming to promote the education of the public in the knowledge,  
understanding and appreciation of the life and work of Alkan

Registered Charity  
no. 276199



The **Alkan Society**, founded in 1977, is an organization with members from across the globe. It is based in the UK and registered as an official Charity.

The Society promotes the life and work of the French composer and pianist Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813-1888). It supports regular recitals, produces publications (including a regular Bulletin) and is the definitive source of information on Alkan's life and works.



## About Alkan

Alkan was recognised by Liszt and Chopin as one of the outstanding musicians of their day. His music has been championed by such eminent performers as Claudio Arrau, Ferruccio Busoni, Jack Gibbons, Marc-André Hamelin, Raymond Lewenthal, John Ogdon, Egon Petri, Sergei Rachmaninoff and Ronald Smith.

His works cover a vast gamut of forms, moods and techniques, combining rigorous classicism with bold modernity. His individual use of harmony and rhythm, extraordinary imagination, and uncompromising keyboard writing guarantee his music a unique place in the repertoire, making him one of the great figures of the Romantic era.

## Join the Alkan Society

Annual membership fee: £20; Students £10

As a member you:

- ✓ Contribute to the aims of the Society
- ✓ Can purchase discounted tickets for our recitals
- ✓ Receive regular bulletins and other news
- ✓ Can contribute announcements and promotions to our website
- ✓ Can benefit from our expert query service on the life and music of Alkan

Join at:

**[www.alkansociety.org](http://www.alkansociety.org)**

Or contact: [membership@alkansociety.org](mailto:membership@alkansociety.org)

## Who we are

**President:** Stephanie McCallum; **Vice-presidents:** Anne Smith, Hugh Macdonald, Nicholas King, Richard Shaw  
**Chairman:** Mark Viner; **Secretary:** José López; **Treasurer:** Nick Hammond

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