



The Alkan Society

Registered Charity no. 276199

www.alkansociety.org

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Society concerts

Recital by Mark Viner

Participants at the Society's 2015 Annual General Meeting on 13th June were rewarded with a generous and substantial recital given by Mark Viner. It says much for Mark's sangfroid that he could slip seamlessly from chairing the AGM into such a sublime and unruffled performance of a technically demanding programme.

He started with the recently discovered *Introduction au no.5 des caprices*, followed by the number 2 of the *Trois Andantes Romantiques* (op.13 no 2), *Andante con moto*. This was followed by one of Alkan's gems, no 10 from 12 *études dans tous les tons majeurs* (op.35), *Chant d'amour - Chant de mort* (grimly headed by Alkan with the Latin *Et quando expectari lumen, venit caligo* – just when you expect light, darkness comes). Certainly it was hard to imagine a more convincing final *Chant de mort* death rattle, following the fervent passion of the preceding *Chant d'amour*.

These Alkan works were followed by Liszt's rarely performed *Marche Funèbre de Dom Sébastien de Donizetti* (S.402) and Thalberg's *Grande Fantaisie sur Don Pasquale* (op.67). Many members will know that the latter is included in Mark's recent (and well-received) CD of Thalberg's Opera Fantasies (Piano Classics PCL0092). As *The Gramophone* concludes, "this is a quite exceptional disc from a blazing young British talent" – which neatly sums up the sentiments of the enthusiastic audience at the AGM.



Forthcoming event: Dinner recital, jointly with the Berlioz, Liszt, Mahler and Wagner Societies

The annual Joint Societies event will be held at the Forge Music Venue (Delancey St, London NW1 7NL) on 19th January 2016, with the recital starting at 7:00pm, followed by a convivial dinner. The Joint Societies Dinner Recital is now a well-established annual tradition, and this year the Alkan Society is organising and hosting the event. The provisional programme is as follows:

Berlioz Liszt: *Danse des sylphes de la Damnation de Faust* de Hector Berlioz "Valse" S475
Liszt: *L'idée fixe - Andante amoroso d'après une mélodie de Berlioz* S395

Leslie Howard, piano
Selected songs

Laura Wolk-Lewanowicz, soprano & **Coady Green**, piano

Wagner Liszt: *Phantasiestück über motif aus 'Rienzi'* S439

- Mark Viner**, piano
Isolde's Liebestod
- Mahler** **Laura Wolk-Lewanowicz**, soprano & **Coady Green**, piano
Adagietto from Symphony No. 5, arranged for solo keyboard by Ian Flint
Coady Green, piano
Das irdische Leben; Um Mitternacht; Ich bin Der Welt abhanden gekommen
- Alkan** **Laura Wolk-Lewanowicz**, soprano & **Coady Green**, piano
Selection of duets from 11 *Grands Préludes* (op.66)
Leslie Howard & Mark Viner, piano 4-hands
- Liszt** *À la Chapelle Sixtine* S461
Christopher Wayne Smith, piano
Hungarian Rhapsodies for piano 4-hands: No. 2 S621/2 & No. 3 S621/3
Coady Green & Christopher Wayne Smith, piano 4-hands

Tickets (£48, for Recital and Dinner, with wine) are available to members of the five societies and their guests. Numbers are limited, and tickets are allocated on a first-come-first-served basis. For further information, contact the Treasurer of the Alkan Society, Nick Hammond at treasurer@alkansociety.org.

An extraordinary Alkan event

On 23rd June, a barrister from legal chambers in Gray's Inn, London, played Alkan's towering *Concerto for solo piano* (op.39 nos 8-10), in an evening recital at Gray's Inn chapel. Paul Wee is no ordinary barrister – nor any ordinary pianist. He moved to London from Australia when he was 11, studying piano with Angela Brownridge, and at the same age made his solo debut at the Royal Albert Hall with Mendelssohn's first piano concerto. He moved to New York aged 14 and studied under Nina Svetlanova. However Paul decided not to pursue a career as a concert artist, instead training in Jurisprudence, and was called to the Bar by Gray's Inn in 2010.



Paul Wee's recital was recorded and is available on Youtube (link from the Society members' Youtube links page – navigate from www.alkansociety.org).

The event was attended, and much enjoyed, by a number of members of the Society. Two of our active members – Seth Blacklock and Richard Murphy – were kind enough to jot down their thoughts on the event.

Seth Blacklock reports as follows:

Mr Wee-ous Alkan

I happened upon this concert almost by chance. I was due to travel to London with my family and checked the Alkan Society website shortly before leaving, fully expecting there to be no mention of any concerts including the composer's music during my visit. Imagine my delight, then, when the announcement of this concert met my eyes: not only was it being staged in London during my stay, but Alkan's stupendous *Concerto* was the offering, and totally free of charge (important for a mug like me)!

The day arrived and my wife diligently travelled with me to the city, leaving me to find my way to the Chapel at Gray's Inn. After a slight hiccup in my orientation, I arrived in plenty of time to the venue. Well, for a boy from the sticks (and in Ireland to boot), the company I entered into in the Chapel for the concert was well above my station and I spent my whole time there feeling painfully self-conscious in my civvies when everyone else was dressed in their finest evening gear and engaging in the kind of pleasantries and conversation that only people of a certain stature in life can enjoy and pull off convincingly. I'm still sure that the elderly gentleman who sat next to me did so begrudgingly, and kept a more than comfortable distance away from me. Did I smell or something?

In any case, whilst waiting for the Chapel to fill (and fill it did – it was very encouraging to see so many offering their support to a colleague and friend as he prepared to tackle the gargantuan task ahead of him), I read the carefully considered and thoughtful programme note. It was clear that the pianist was genuinely interested in the composer and the music he was playing. Despite entering an incorrect date

for the composer's birth (1812), it was a full and enthusiastic essay, even revealing detail other performers might omit (such as the fact that Alkan works were in Rachmaninov's repertoire); even the elusive composer-pedagogue Méreaux got a mention!

The arrival of the pianist and the music shifted me out of my previous self-pity and, after a generous and warm introduction of the pianist, Paul Wee sat down and treated us to an hour of some of the finest music ever crafted. The terms *coruscating, soaring, stormy, blistering, tender, enthralling, awe-inspiring*, are all words that have been used before, but they are all descriptions that this music demands. The Concerto truly is a journey – it takes you somewhere else, to a better place for a relatively brief, sublime moment. Mr Wee traversed the difficulties of the music with aplomb – his virtuosity was at times ear-boggling, especially in the final movement where he even rivalled Hamelin's speed and level of excitement, but he treated the more gentle moments as they should be treated – giving space to breathe and for the audience to take in the majesty of the music. The audience indeed were completely bowled over from what I could see, and you could tell those who truly appreciated the music and music-making as they craned to see how exactly the pianist was pulling off such feats of virtuosity.

But for me, it was exactly that virtuosity that prohibits me from writing a truly glowing note about the concert.

Although I admire the pianist's belief in the music and his undoubted technical proficiency – and I of course love the music and the composer dearly – I couldn't help feeling that the music was more about note-spinning than substance. Maybe the hard, percussive treble of the piano contributes to my view. Would those in attendance miss the drama of the music, the depth of feeling, the range of emotions, the structure, the massiveness of the journey of which they were a part? For me, I had certainly been indulged. But my overarching feeling upon leaving was that this music needs the advocacy of a truly world-class pianist and, in equal measure if not more so, a world-class mind to conquer it and leave an audience with a lasting impression. This is far from being a slur on Mr Wee's valiant, triumphant playing – he is a pianist of prodigious talent and sincerity – but rather a more general, personal observation on the work itself and the lofty ideals I have in my own mind about its interpretation and the impact it should have on a listener.

But perhaps I'm just a bit of a perfectionist. After all, music is such a subjective art, as is the receptiveness of the listener.

I contacted the pianist after the concert to offer my thanks and congratulations, and he replied that, if nothing else, the audience were:

“willing to repeatedly subject themselves to my playing (which must surely be character-building, at the very least). I am pleased to say that many of them have told me how glad they were to be introduced to Alkan and his music.”

Mr Wee went on:

“I should also say that as delighted as I am to learn that such knowledgeable Alkan connoisseurs as yourself [I plead relative ignorance compared to my Society peers] and Richard were in the audience, I confess it is not entirely without trepidation, either – that recital was the first occasion on which I have played the Concerto in public, and I am afraid there were certainly moments at which that bled through into my execution. I think that is probably inevitable when giving one's first public performance of such a physical work, so I have not allowed myself too much disappointment at all of the blemishes and flaws that should not have been there. I know that future performances will be better. But now that I know the Society's (extremely kind) announcement did indeed tempt such discerning Alkanites to attend, I am left half-wondering whether I should only have informed the Society of a future performance instead, and allowed myself to commit the sins of first performance in the privacy of an uneducated audience!”

So perhaps my opinion is too harsh and too picky. The pianist is clearly self-aware, to his credit. And it must be said that his day job is being a barrister, so combining this with his love of music must provide many challenges. The pianist's biographical note for the concert (summarised above) gives interesting insight into his origins and journey as a musician.

Society members will perhaps make up their own minds, then, about the concert through the YouTube link available on the Society's website.

Richard Murphy has kindly provided us with his detailed analytical notes, as follows:

The concert was held in a small chapel in Gray's Inn. It was packed – about 150 – and the piano had been specially brought in. The programme notes dealt with the piece's title, the context of publication, its scale, and an answer to the question: "why write this sort of piece?" I wondered who wrote this freshly organised introduction to the evening. I enjoyed listening to the questioning audience members around me, and felt free to let them know what a fantastic work the Concerto was. 'Prepare for a great variety of experiences in this piece' was my main message. They were pleased to meet someone who knew the music.

After the performance, I introduced myself to Paul Wee whom I thanked profusely. He said it was his first public performance of the piece. I heard a number of folk there talking in wonder about it. I thought it would be a good place to hear it again – played by Paul Wee! It really was a stimulating occasion. I immediately wanted to look at the piece again – a very good sign.

I'll be referring to timings in the Paul Wee video throughout (linked from the Alkan Society website¹). Though this is not a review of the video, it must be said that its sound is more muffled than the sound I heard in the chapel, and that certain high notes were barely registered by the camera microphones. There's a good view of the hands though I'd have preferred a narrower closer view, say, up to the lid stick.

It's difficult with masterpieces: I'm not always in the mood to listen. My response may have gone stale through enthusiastic over-exposure. Shouldn't I keep the experience for a special occasion? Am I afraid of being disappointed by an under-par performance? I needn't have worried. I was, in fact, so stimulated that on reaching home I quickly made notes. What follows, therefore, is an idiosyncratic choice of some of the highlights I've come to anticipate in this great piece over the past 40-odd years on what was an extraordinary first public performance.

Allegro assai – A tempo, con brio

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|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 00.03 - 00.36 | Accuracy in the opening bars reassures me that the player will be able to cope with what comes. I think I can relax on that score.

Throughout, I was impressed with his Left Hand [LH] accuracy in stretched and leaping accompaniment figures. |
| 4.51 - 5.13 | I enjoyed the clarity of RH figures and of LH syncopations. |
| 5.35 - 5.54 | The extraordinary 192-note snaking trickle-down punctuated by three groups of jumping LH punches. Not enough is made of this effect which should lead the listener to wondering when and where on earth it's going to end. We need that decrescendo. I always smile at Alkan's delay of the key change to the major - until the 192nd note! |
| 8.16 - 10.37 | The Insane Bit no. 1 – 128 bars. This extremely colourful whirling and leaping music is like an unstoppable fairground ride with its music blaring out to the point of unintelligibility [around 8.38], more forceful elements join in at 9.19, then screaming piccolos at 9.30-33. At 9.34, alternating L and R chords ratchet up the tension; at 9.42 a massive roller of a LH wave [C Sharp scale] rears up from the deep leading to a severely violent pounding of the opening melody [9.46]. Then comes a single trill [9.58], a double trill [10.08] atop imitation of parts at the 4th and augmented 4th, ending with a teetering [10.16] then plunging vertiginous roller-coaster of scales a 6th apart [10.18] with an risky gear-change on the recoil into rapidly alternating chords [10.22] swooping high and low, and ploughing with maximum impact into an orchestral tutti [10.27]. Insane in its intensity and duration, in its demands on 10 fingers, in its extremes of registers, dynamics, and in its extraordinary harmonic and timbral colours – PW executes this very testing section very well. |
| 12.23 - 12.30 | What I call the 1st 'lanciato' passage - three sudden surging 'ff to sf' arpeggios. I want to hear the point of the 'lance' piercing the sky at 'sf' on top notes, successively C, then topmost F, then topmost A. I heard the highest notes, but without the accent. Tempo good. |
| from 13.46 | PW's springy LH makes us hear the choppy texture of the repeated notes in the accompanying triplets, though it's all too loud. |
| from 15.50 | More dynamic shading of the melody would have created a bleaker and lonelier landscape around the obsessive and accurately pulsated G sharp. |

¹ Readers may further enjoy Jack Gibbons' video, also available from the members Youtube page.

- from 17.03 This turbo-charged variant of the second melody is well done apart from tendency to rush phrase endings. It would have blazed more. The 2nd 'lanciato' passage also needs sharper points. It's worth noting how Alkan was defeated by the lack of piano technology here – there's no note higher than C, so he retreated to a lower octave in order to use a top C sharp.
- 25.25 – 25.58 The most exposed part of the alternating hands – played pretty accurately but with few of the dynamics.
- 26.50 This wonderfully tense and very low trilled pedal point and it's very high tune could start in the very far distance. That's the word 'very' three times. Alkan's clarity of vision and potency of expression can't become normal or bland. He demands extremes.
- 27.19 – 27.47 What Mark Starr calls the cadenza before the final TUTTI. Very exciting. Perhaps a little too heavily pedalled for my taste, but with better 'sf's at the top of the arpeggios on F, G, and A flat.

Adagio

- 29.00 – 29.39 Good tone, but would have preferred more metrical steadiness.
- 30.45 – 31.03 This antipode to the 1st 'lanciato' surge in the opening movement also has three rising figures – scales this time – reaching ever higher peaks (G sharp, C sharp, then F double sharp with harsh pairs of major 2nds below). I feel that accelerations during the scales underplay the tension of each ascent.
- 34.19 – 35.20 The accompanied recitative section. I very much liked the textural quality and, consequently, the intensity of Alkan's fully notated tremolandi.
- from 35.21 The funeral march rhythm. This is music for three hard-stick timpani or three tightly-tongued brass. What may have worked on Alkan's pianos is nigh on impossible today. In my experience, nobody plays Alkan's dynamics, though some get closer than others. His tightly sprung left wrist produced a consistently well-articulated rhythm.
- 38.08 – 39.12 The 'Chanson de la Folle' bit is suitably listless. Alkan asks for courage at 39.02-03 to pierce the pianissimo with a five-fold force.
- 39.12 – 39.26 The expected contrast between 'fff' and 'pp' is absent.

Allegretto alla-barbaresca

- from 40.44 Not for the first time in this performance did I think "We've got a Speedy Gonzalez here".
- 42.24 – 42.38 What I call the Scintillation episode. A bit too loud to shimmer, but leading to...
- 42.38 – 44.11 ...Insane Bit no. 2. I call this Somersault Circus. To hear, to see on the page, and to watch being played, on all 3 counts, is extremely arresting. The punched note at the start of each bar is the springboard for the tumbling somersaults – which is exactly what the hands do over each other. Come 42.52, the acrobats are asked to maintain a slow moving melody – while leaping; then a shower of glitter from above dusts the action at 43.05. From 43.11, three thwacks and their drum rolls² increase the intensity till, at 43.18, double the number of acrobats do synchronised somersaults and then chaos seems to break loose as bodies fly around from every direction [43.26]. A scarcely credible new surge of tension occurs at 43.33 – 43.42 when they are asked to hop and leap around, first on the left leg, then right, then left – all the while keeping many plates spinning fast. Listen to the Mexican Waves of oohs and aahs [43.42 – 43.49] from the crowd as the final extreme bounce and slide [43.49] is followed by a crescendo of cheering [43.52 – 43.59], at which point the East European gypsy circus-band starts up its raucous scene-changing music. So much happens in this 90-second, 55-bar stretch, that it's hard to take in, and leaves one agog. I want to hear pinpoint clarity, accuracy, and total confidence, at the very least – as I would wish from an Olympic gymnast. It really happened!
- 45.55 – 46.15 This bizarre crescendo of 'trills' and 'turns', over an obsessive rhythm is played very clearly, but needs to start quietly – from a darker place.
- 47.06 – 40.17 To be truly effective, the specified dynamic contrast between hands is vital. The RH should startle. We mustn't be allowed to forget that some of Alkan's utterances are very strange indeed.

² Alkan asks for crossed hands here

47.20/23/32/36 Watch PW as he crosses his LH over his RH. Each time, he plays six very high notes. I very rarely get to hear these piercing ‘piccolo’ notes. It’s an excellent example of Alkan’s orchestral imagination, and I really want to hear them. Thank you PW.

The same figuration happens in mid-register, also in the left hand, at 48.46/49. A tiny but satisfying detail which PW finds the time to execute.

Quite honestly, before this point, I was letting the piece take me over. All I could do was submit to music that would not let go its intensity till the astonishing pentatonic slash across the keyboard. How else could it end?

And if all this were not enough, as an encore Paul wowed us with Balakirev's arrangement of the 2nd movement of Chopin’s 1st concerto.

The “Esquisses” and their visual programme: an interpretation as a “book on music theory dedicated to God”¹

Yukirou Murai, MSc., Kyoto University, Japan

yukirou@gmail.com

There are moments when, if I had to live again, I would wish to put the entire Bible in music, from the first word to the last.

Letter from Alkan to Hiller on 3 January 1861, six months before the publication of the Esquisses².

Introduction

Charles-Valentin Alkan’s suite *Esquisses* (op.63)³, comprising of 49 piano miniatures, has attracted much attention in preceding research. Of the topics of interest stand out two peculiar inventions: an unprecedented key sequence and an unnumbered last piece intentionally separated from the rest of the suite. To the best of the author’s knowledge, these peculiarities have not received enough discussion as to how one may interpret them, probably due to lack of evidence to support any assertive argument. The present paper aims at presenting *one* possible interpretation to explain the aforementioned peculiarities. Therefore the purpose of this paper is not to rule out other interpretations but purely to stimulate debate, thereby hopefully to bring the suite to a wider arena of discussion. Section 1 of this paper will first inspect circumstantial evidence suggestive of yet unknown Jewish elements in the suite, and then illustrate and examine a finding that the key sequence secretly embeds two Stars of David. Section 2 will investigate possible factors behind the secretiveness of the scheme. Section 3 will present an interpretation that the Stars and the last piece, *Laus Deo*, combined form a visual programme commonly found in old music theory books. These arguments will present an image of the *Esquisses* as a volume dedicated to God on music theory, an image that is probably far from how the suite has hitherto been described, but will feasibly sit alongside Alkan’s other inventive symbolism found throughout his works.

¹ The present paper is an extended translation from an original Japanese paper by the same author, 2015, published by Young Researchers’ Forum Committee for the 65th National Meeting of the Japanese Society for Aesthetics. The original paper is available at www.bigakukai.jp/wakate/papers2014/01_murai.pdf (in Japanese). The research was supervised by Prof. Atsushi Okada at Kyoto University, Japan, with advisory from Honorable Prof. Kazumi Negishi at Osaka University, Japan. The script was proofread for English errors by Rourke Fay and Ethan James McCollum.

² “Il y a des moments où, si je devais recommencer à vivre, je voudrais mettre en musique toute la Bible, depuis le premier mot jusqu’au dernier.” Schilling, Britta, *Charles Valentin Alkan : un solitaire dans le Romantisme français*, Romantisme, n°57, 1987, pp 33–44. English translation by the present author.

³ Alkan, Charles-Valentin, *Esquisses* Op. 63, Paris, Richault, 1861 (reprint: Paris, Costallat & Cie., ca. 1910).

Section 1: Mysterious key sequence – does it embed the Stars of David?

Although little evidence informs us of Alkan's thinking while composing the *Esquisses*, one may safely assume that he was conscious of his earlier suite, *25 Préludes pour piano ou orgue* (op.31), published 14 years prior⁴. That is because the two suites share a strikingly similar structure. Nos. 1-24 in *25 Préludes* and Nos. 1-48 in the *Esquisses* traverse all major and minor keys. These traversing sections, as we shall call them, are divided into multiple books, three in the former and four in the latter. Both are followed by one last religious piece, *Prière* in the former and *Laus Deo* in the latter. In both suites, pieces in the traversing sections are very short, whereas the last religious pieces are much longer.

Table 1: Pieces in 25 Préludes.

Book 1	Book 2	Book 3
1. Lentement, C major 2. Assez lentement, F minor 3. Dans le genre ancien, D-flat major 4. Prière du soir, F-sharp minor 5. Psaume 150me, D major 6. Ancienne mélodie de la synagogue, G minor 7. Librement mais sans secousses, E-flat major 8. Le chanson de la folle au bord de la mer, A-flat minor	9. Placiditas, E major 10. Dans le style fugué, A minor 11. Un petit rien, F major 12. Le temps qui n'est plus, B-flat minor 13. J'étais endormie, mais mon cœur veillait, G-flat major 14. Rapidement, B minor 15. Dans le genre gothique, G major 16. Assez lentement, C minor	17. Rêve d'amour, A-flat major 18. Sans trop de mouvement, C-sharp minor 19. Prière du matin, A major 20. Modérément vite et bien caractérise, D minor 21. Doucement, B-flat major 22. Anniversaire, E-flat minor 23. Assez vite, B major 24. Étude de vitesse, E minor 25. Prière, C major

Table 2: Pieces in the Esquisses.

Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4
1. La Vision, C major 2. Le Staccatissimo, F minor 3. Le Legatissimo, D major 4. Les Cloches, G minor 5. Les Initiés, E major 6. Fuguettes, A minor 7. Le Frisson, F-sharp major 8. Pseudo-Naïveté, B minor 9. Confiance, A-flat major 10. Incepatio, C-sharp minor 11. Les Soupirs, B-flat major 12. Barcarollette, E-flat minor	13. Ressouvenir, C minor 14. Duettino, F major 15. Tutti de Concerto dans le genre ancien, D minor 16. Fantaisie, G major 17. Petit prélude à trois, E minor 18. Liedchen, A major 19. Grâces, F-sharp minor 20. Petit marche villageoise, B major 21. Morituri te salutant, G-sharp minor 22. Innocenzia, D-flat major 23. L'homme aux sabots, B-flat minor 24. Contredanse, E flat major	25. La poursuite, C major 26. Petit air, Genre ancien, G minor 27. Rigaudon, D major 28. Inflexibilité, A minor 29. Délire, E major 30. Petit air dolent, B minor 31. Début de quatuor, F-sharp major 32. Minuetto, C-sharp minor 33. "Fais dodo", A-flat major 34. Odi profanum vulgus et arceo, Favete linguis, E-flat minor 35. Musique militaire, B-flat major 36. Toccata, F minor	37. Scherzettino, C minor 38. "Le ciel vous soit toujours prospère", G major 39. Héraclite et Démocrite, D minor 40. "Attendez-moi sous l'orme", A major 41. Les enharmoniques, E minor 42. Petit air à 5 voix, B major 43. Notturmo-Innamorato, F-sharp minor 44. Transports, C-sharp major 45. Les diabolins, G-sharp minor 46. Le premier billet doux, E-flat major 47. Scherzetto, B-flat minor 48. En songe, F major Laus Deo, C major

However, the two suites differ greatly in one aspect. The traversing section of *25 Préludes* features Jewish elements such as a quotation of an ancient synagogue melody, a morning prayer *shakhariyt* (שחרית), an evening prayer *ma'ariyv* (מעריב), a paraphrase of Psalm 150, a numerological reference to Chapter 5 Verse 2 of the Song of Songs of the Old Testament, and a vague atmosphere of a klezmer dance⁵, all converging to the last piece, *Prière*. This forms a Jewish musical programme that pervades the entire suite. In the *Esquisses*, in contrast, no apparent Jewish element is present in the traversing section⁶. This is probably why the *Esquisses* have not been considered to be of any Jewish character. Nevertheless, the last piece, *Laus Deo*, clearly expresses religiousness. And as quoted as the epigraph of the present paper, Alkan expressed his unfulfilled wish to "put the entire Bible in music" (*mettre en musique toute la Bible*) to his friend of Jewish origin, just six months prior to the day the *Esquisses* were published. This suggests that the composer's profound interest in incorporating Jewish elements into his music was still very

⁴ Alkan, Charles-Valentin, *25 Preludes* Op. 31, Berlin, A.M. Schlesinger, 1847.

⁵ Conway, David, *Jewry in Music*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp 235-236.

⁶ Some authors, including Brigitte François-Sappey, have pointed out a certain level of Jewishness in *La Vision* and *Grâces*. However, these two pieces do not make any concrete or direct reference to Judaism as far as the author is aware of, and their proportion to the size of the traversing section, 2/48, is substantially smaller than the proportion of outwardly Jewish pieces in the traversing section of *25 Préludes*, 6/24.

much alive when he was nearing the publication of the suite. This may lead to a hypothesis that some yet unknown Jewish element is hidden in the traversing section of the *Esquisses*.

The author suspected that the peculiar key sequence of the traversing section of the *Esquisses* may hold a significance in this context. Most suites traversing all major and minor keys follow typical key sequence patterns such as chromatic, dominant/subdominant or by black-key increments. The key sequence of the *Esquisses* does not follow any of these (see Table 2). It is this mysterious key sequence that the author proposes to interpret as being of Jewish significance: plot the key sequence of each of the four books on a circle of fifths, and the trace of the plots will reveal Stars of David in books 1 and 3 (see Figure 1 & Table 3)⁷. Interpretation of key sequences as visualization of religious images is an idea long in practice among musicologists, including the well-known argument that the symmetrical key sequence of the *St John's Passion* (*Passio secundum Johannem*) by J. S. Bach forms a chiasmic structure signifying Jesus Christ⁸.

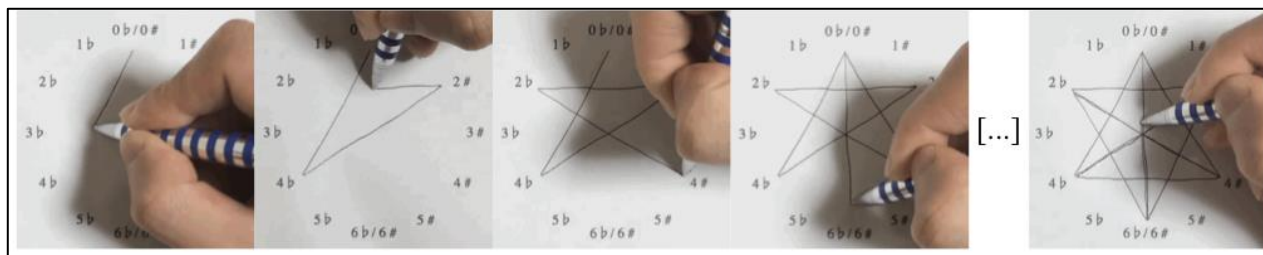


Figure 1: Plotting the key sequence of the first book of the *Esquisses* on a circle of fifths.

Table 3: Key sequence of each book plotted on circles of fifths.

Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4

Before interpreting these Stars, the following three points need to be examined.

First of all, was Alkan familiar with the circle of fifths? The answer is yes. Alkan had published two sets of piano etudes, *Douze Études dans les tons majeurs* (op. 35, 1847) and *Douze Études dans les tons mineurs* (op. 39, 1857), using key sequences that travel around the circle of fifths. Adam's piano method, which the young Alkan studied at Paris Conservatoire, contains two finger exercises that go through the circle (see Figure 2)⁹. The circle of fifths was also visualized in a contemporary music theory book by Busset, published in 1836 in Paris (see Figure 3, on p. 10)¹⁰.

Secondly, how “easy” is it to accidentally produce two star-shaped key sequences in a row without actually intending to draw the Stars? The answer is “very difficult”. Alkan's key sequences alternate back and forth through the circle of fifths in two books. Statistically speaking, the probability of

⁷ An animated version of this is available on the author's contribution to *PTNA Piano Piece Encyclopedia*, compiled by The Piano Teachers' National Association of Japan, available for viewing at www.piano.or.jp/enc/pieces/10/#tabs-2 (in Japanese).

⁸ Chafe, Eric, “Key Structure and Tonal Allegory in the Passions of JS Bach: An Introduction.” *Current Musicology*, 31, 1981, pp 39-54.

⁹ Adam, Louis, *Méthode de piano du Conservatoire*. Paris, Naderman, 1805.

¹⁰ Busset, F. C., *La musique simplifiée dans sa théorie et dans son enseignement*. Paris, Chamerot, 1836.

randomly coming up with two star-shaped key sequences from such alternating sequences is as small as 1.78%¹¹.



Figure 2: An exercise that traverses circle of fifths from Adam's piano method, *Méthode de piano du Conservatoire*, published in 1805.

Lastly, could star-shaped key sequences have been traditionally used in a different context? The answer is no. The author looked through other suites that go through every tonality or that comprise of 12, 24, or 48 pieces¹² and judged the tonality of all 1168 pieces, which were then plotted onto the circle of fifths as well as the circle of chromatic scale. The results produced no other star figures (see Figure 4, p. 11).

¹¹ This presupposes that the following thirty key sequences are equally likely. Asterisk denotes star-shaped sequences. |C-a-D-..., |C-e-D-..., |C-b-D-..., |C-f#-D-..., *|C-c#-D-..., |C-g#-D-..., *|C-e-b-D-..., |C-bb-D-..., *|C-f-D-..., |C-c-D-..., |C-d-D-..., *|C-g-D-..., |C-a-G-..., |C-e-G-..., |C-b-G-..., |C-f#-G-..., |C-c#-G-..., |C-g#-G-..., |C-e-b-G-..., |C-bb-G-..., |C-f-G-..., |C-c-G-..., |C-g-G-..., |C-d-G-..., |C-G-D-..., |C-A-D-..., |C-B-D-..., |C-C#-D-..., |C-Eb-D-..., |C-F-D-...]. Symmetric sequences may be neglected without loss of generality.

¹² Gorzanis, Giacomo, passamezzo-saltarello, 16c.; Bartolotti, Angelo, Libro primo di chitarra spagnola, 1640.; Bach, Johann Sebastian, Das Wohltemperierte Klavier I, 1722.; Bach, Johann Sebastian, Das Wohltemperierte Klavier II, 1742.; Gottlieb, Johann, Goldberg 24 polonaises, 1749.; Clementi, Muzio, Préludes et exercices, 1811.; Clementi, Muzio, Grande Exercice, 1811.; Seydler, Philip, XXIV grands Caprices pour une Flûte, 1810-1812.; Nepomuk, Johann Hummel, 24 Préludes, 1815.; Rode, Pierre, 24 Caprices en forme d'études, 1815.; Paganini, Niccolò, 24 Capricci, 1802-1817.; Chaulieu, Charles, 24 petits préludes dans les tons majeurs et mineurs, 1820.; Moscheles, Ignaz, 24 Études, 1825-1826.; Kalkbrenner, Friedrich Wilhelm, 24 Preludes, 1827.; Kessler, Joseph Christoph, 24 Études, 1827.; Kessler, Joseph Christoph, 24 Études, 1829.; Herz, Henri, 24 Exercices et préludes, 1830.; Moscheles, Ignaz, 50 Preludes, 1830.; Chopin, Frédéric, Études, 1833.; Wolff, Edward, 24 Études en forme de Préludes, ?.; Chopin, Frédéric, Études, 1837.; Chopin, Frédéric, 24 Preludes, 1835-1839.; David, Ferdinand, 30 Bunte Reihe, 1840.; Klengel,

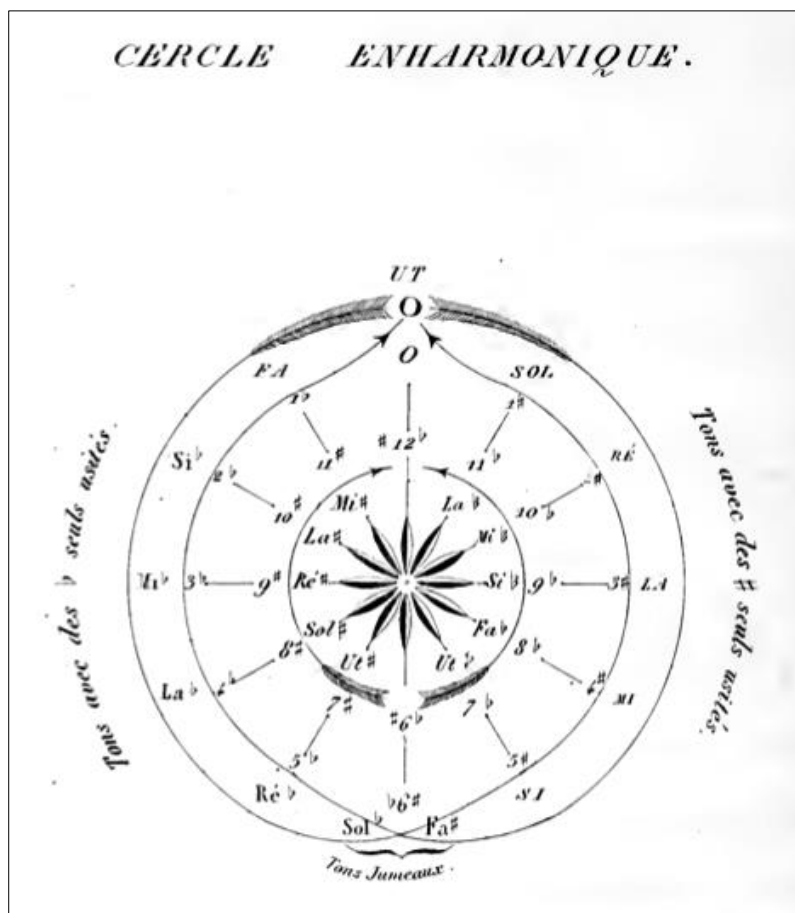


Figure 3. A figure of circle of fifths in Busset's music theory book, *La musique simplifiée dans sa théorie et dans son enseignement*, published in 1836.

As examined above, the Stars were drawn within a scheme that Alkan was familiar with, are not likely to be a product of coincidence, and are probably Alkan's own invention. While these do not necessarily constitute conclusive evidence to support the author's interpretation, it is of certain plausibility that it reflects Alkan's intentions. If it does, then the very idea of using key sequence to draw the Stars may have been cultivated under Jewish influences. To draw the Stars, one needs to look at only the first bar of each piece for the number of sharps or flats. One then connects each of them to form figures. This is equivalent to reading acrostic poems, where the first letter of each word/sentence/verse in a poem spells out something of great importance. Acrostic poems are deep-rooted in Hebrew literature including the Old Testament, which Alkan claimed to have translated from Hebrew in the 1850s and 60s. Engagement in numbers may parallel Jewish

mystic practice *geymatriyah* (גימטריה), where numerical value assigned to each Hebrew letter is used to uncover a presumably deeper meaning of a word.

The findings of this section suggest that the *Esquisses* are no less of a Jewish character than *25 Préludes*. However, the two suites, separated by 14 years, show two significant changes in the way Alkan handles Jewish elements. Let us explore the two in the following two sections.

Section 2: From exhibition to crypticism – the *Esquisses* as a book dedicated to God

The first change can be phrased as a shift from exhibition to crypticism. In *25 Préludes*, the Jewish elements were openly exhibited. In contrast, Alkan hid the Stars of David beneath the mysterious key sequence in the *Esquisses*. The Stars are not readily visible and require a bird's eye perspective from which the entire key sequence can be observed. This stands in analogy to a Christian cathedral, which

August, *Les Avant-coureurs*, 24 Canons, 1841.; Kummer, Caspar, 24 *Études mélodiques*, 1846.; Alkan, Charles-Valentin, 25 *préludes*, 1847.; Alkan, Charles-Valentin, 12 *Études dans les tons majeurs*, 1847.; Liszt, Franz, *Études d'exécution transcendante*, 1852.; Heller, Stephen, 24 *Preludes*, 1853.; Wallace, William Vincent, 24 *Preludes and Scales*, 1855.; Alkan, Charles-Valentin, 12 *Études in all the minor keys*, 1857.; Hiller, Ferdinand, 12 *Gesänge*, 1858.; Concone, Giuseppe, 24 *Brilliant Preludes*, ?.; Alkan, Charles-Valentin, *Esquisses*, 1861.; Hiller, Ferdinand, 12 *Lieder*, 1864.; Jensen, Adolf, 25 *Études*, 1866.; David, Ferdinand, *Dur und Moll 25 Etüden, Capricen und Charakterstücke in allen Tonarten*, ?.; Busoni, Ferruccio, 24 *Preludes*, 1881.; Blumenfeld, Felix, 24 *Preludes*, 1892.; Arensky, Anton, 24 *Morceaux caractéristiques*, 1894.; Scriabin, Alexander, *Preludes*, 1895.; Reger, Max, 111 *Canons in all major and minor tonalities Book 1*, 1895.; Reger, Max, 111 *Canons in all major and minor tonalities Book 2*, 1895.; Winding, August, *Preludes in all the keys A Cycle*, ?.; Cui, César, 25 *Preludes*, 1903.; Lyapunov, Sergei, 12 *Études d'exécution transcendante*, 1905.; Glière, Reinhold, 25 *Preludes*, 1907.; Palmgren, Selim, 24 *Preludes*, 1907.; Rachmaninoff, Sergei, 24 *Preludes*, 1892-1910.; Colomer, Blas María de, 24 *Préludes mélodiques*, 1910.

only reveals its cross-shaped plan from a heavenly perspective. Here is where one may refer to German philosopher Walter Benjamin. Benjamin introduces two distinct types of value associated with a work of art, cult value (*Kultwert*) and exhibition value (*Ausstellungswert*) and explains the former concept as follows:

Artistic production begins with figures that stand in service of magic (*Magie*). The only thing of importance about these figures is that they exist, but not that they are seen. The elk that a Stone Age man draws on the walls of his cave is an instrument for magic (*Zauber*), and if it is presented to his kinfolk, it would be by mere coincidence; of utmost importance is that the spirits see it. Cult value of this manner prompts a work of art to be kept hidden: certain god statues are only approachable to the priest in the cella¹³, certain Madonna paintings stay covered almost all year through, certain sculptures on medieval cathedrals are not visible to an observer on the ground¹⁴.

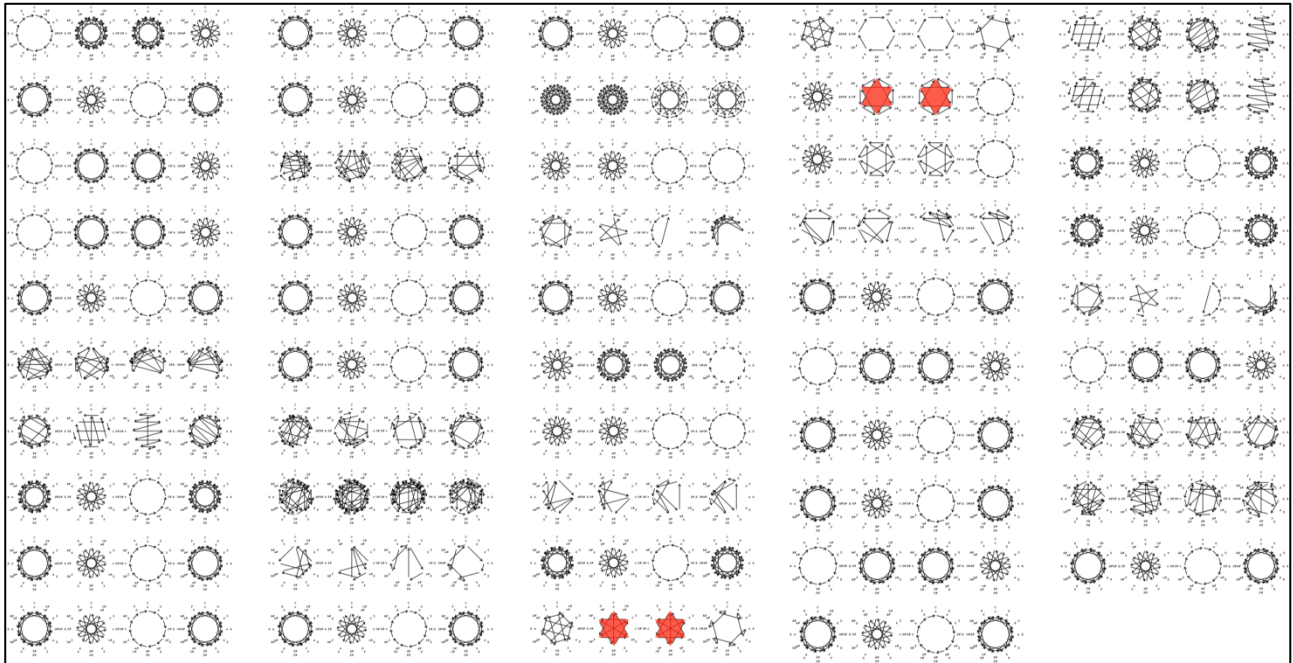


Figure 4: Key sequences of suites plotted on circles of fifths and chromatics.

Back to Alkan's *Esquisses*, one may now see the composer's scheme to give the suite cult value rather than exhibition value: Alkan seems to have intended to dedicate the Stars of David to the God he believed in, rather than exhibiting them outwardly to the public. What was behind this new attitude? The key may lie in the way *25 Préludes* was treated. Let us look at some contemporary records.

1. The pieces were not in the right order when *25 Préludes* was published. This suggests poor handling of the suite by the publisher Maurice Schlesinger, who, curiously enough, happened to be Jewish as well.
2. It has been suggested that although Alkan initially composed *25 Préludes* for pédalier, it was probably repackaged due to commercial reasons to a suite for piano or organ¹⁵.

¹³ The English word *cella* or the German word *Cella* literally means "a place to hide something", derived from the Latin verb *cēlāre* (to hide).

¹⁴ "Die künstlerische Produktion beginnt mit Gebilden, die im Dienst der Magie stehen. Von diesen Gebilden ist einzig wichtig, daß sie vorhanden sind, nicht aber sie gesehen werden. Das Elentier, das der Mensch der Steinzeit an den Wänden seiner Höhle abbildet, ist ein Zauberinstrument, das er nur zufällig vor seinen Mitmenschen ausstellt; wichtig ist höchstens, daß es die Geister sehen. Der Kultwert als solcher drängt geradezu darauf hin, das Kunstwerk im Verborgenen zu halten: gewisse Götterstatuen sind nur dem Hohenpriester in der Cella zugänglich, gewisse Madonnenbilder bleiben fast das ganze Jahr über verhangen, gewisse Skulpturen an mittelalterlichen Domen sind für den Betrachter zu ebener Erde nicht sichtbar." Schweppenhäuser, Hermann & Tiedemann, Rolf (ed.), *Walter Benjamin Gesammelte Schriften - I:2*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1991, p.443. English translation by the present author.

¹⁵ Eddie, William Alexander, *Charles-Valentin Alkan His Life and His Music*. Hampshire, Ashgate, 2007, p. 100.

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Figure 5: Advertisement of Alkan's transcription series and 25 *Préludes* that appeared in *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* on May 9 & 16, 1847.

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2. Jamais dans ces beaux lieux, de l'Arvide, de Gluck.	5. La garde passe, de Grétry.
3. Chœur d'Iphigénie de Gluck.	6. Menuet de la symphonie en si bémol de Mozart.

Figure 6: List of Alkan's new publication that appeared in *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* on February 14 & 21 and March 7, 1847

3. 25 *Préludes* was treated as a “second class” work to accompany Alkan's “first class” transcriptions of orchestral works. Advertisements¹⁶ and notices¹⁷ in *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* gave much more space to his transcription series rather than to 25 *Préludes*, even omitting the piece list for 25 *Préludes* (see Figures 5 & 6). *Publications Nouvelles* highly praised the transcription series, but no mention of 25 *Préludes* was made except that its review by music theorist Fétis was to follow (see Figure 7)¹⁸.
4. The review by Fétis mentions the usage of synagogue melody as quoted below. However, it is reduced to a mere geographical attribute and its religious significance is ignored. No mention was made of the other Jewish elements:


The oriental taste dominates in No. 6, which employs an ancient Jewish melody as the theme. The character of this melody, its ornaments, its nuances [...]; all this is generally seen in the songs of the Orient¹⁹.

¹⁶ *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, v.14, Paris, Gazette musicale de Paris, 1847, p. 160, 168.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60, 68, 84

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 230

¹⁹ “Le goût oriental domine dans le numéro 6, qui a pour thème une ancienne mélodie juive. Le caractère de cette mélodie, ses ornements, ses nuances [...]; tout cela se fait remarquer en général dans les chants de l'Orient.” *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, v.14, Paris, Gazette musicale de Paris, 1847, p. 245. English translation by the present author.



BIBLIOGRAPHIE MUSICALE.

PIANO.

Alkan (C.-V.). *Souvenirs des concerts du Conservatoire.* Partitions pour piano, contenant :

<p>1. 18^e Psaume de Marcello. 2. Jamais dans ces beaux lieux, d'Armide, de Gluck. 3. Chœur d'Iphigénie de Gluck.</p>	<p>4. Andante de la 36^e symphonie de Haydn 5. La garde passe, de Grétry. 6. Menuet de la symphonie en mi bémol de Mozart.</p>
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Nous nous bornerons à cette annonce, notre savant collaborateur M. Fétis père s'occupant d'écrire sur cet ouvrage et le précédent un article spécial que les lecteurs de la *Gazette musicale* verront sous peu.

Figure 7: *Publications Nouvelles* section of *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* on July 11, 1847.

5. 25 *Préludes* was published in Germany as well, and an anonymous review was posted in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* on March 25, 1848. The review, quoted below, focused mainly on the fact that it can be played both on the piano and the organ in an ironical manner. It makes virtually no mention of the suite's Jewish elements:

Other instruments are not subject to blame, should they ever observe the organ with a certain jealousy in their eyes. The organ always desires to expand its field! Not satisfied with being what it already is, or with representing a – perhaps even *the* – orchestra, the organ even claims to replace the piano. [...] Now people write compositions “for piano or organ”. The present work of interest is unfortunately one of them, set for piano or organ. It emancipates the organ from the rule of counterpoint that has been inflicted on the instrument [...], and brings into the field of the organ the lovely Muses [...] instead of this old pedant called counterpoint²⁰.

These illustrate how the Jewish elements in 25 *Préludes* were neglected or at the very least poorly appreciated by the public or music theorists. It is easy to imagine how this poor reception affected Alkan, who had bravely set out to compose a suite to manifest his Jewish heritage and beliefs. When Alkan was working out a plan for the *Esquisses*, the memory of 25 *Préludes* and its reception must inevitably have come back. This may have been one contributing factor to the change in how Alkan handled Jewish elements, from as a carrier of exhibition value in 25 *Préludes* to as an invisible embodiment of cult value in the *Esquisses*. The invisibility of the Stars of David in the *Esquisses* was not a failure. The Stars do not need to be viewed or appreciated by the public. The only thing that mattered is that they existed, and that they were presented to the supernal perspective. In this sense, the *Esquisses*

²⁰ “Es ist den übrigen Instrumenten nicht zu verdenken, wenn sie nachgerade die Orgel mit einiger Eifersucht betrachten. Will doch diese ihren Bereich immer weiter ausdehnen! Nicht damit zufrieden, sie selbst zu sein, oder ein --- vielleicht auch das Orchester zu repräsentiren, macht sie auch Ansprüche, das Pianoforte zu ersetzen. Man schreibt jetzt Compositionen “für Pianoforte oder Orgel”. [...] Das vorliegende Werk ist leider nun auch für Pianoforte oder Orgel bestimmt. Es emancipirt die Orgel von der [...] ihr auferlegten Herrschaft des Contrapunktes, und führt statt dieses alten Pedanten an seiner Hand die lieblichen Musen [...] in ihren Bereich.” *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Bd. 28, Leipzig, Robert Frieze, 1848, p. 147. English translation by the present author.

have a much wider scope than what it is often considered to be: it can be interpreted as a book dedicated to God.

Section 3: Visual programme converging to *Laus Deo* – the *Esquisses* as a book on music theory



Figure 8: Closing bars of the 48th piece of the *Esquisses*.



Figure 9: Alkan's handwritten indication on the author's proof of the *Esquisses*.



Figure 10: Alkan's handwritten indication on the author's proof of the *Esquisses*.

Another difference between 25 *Préludes* and the *Esquisses* can be found in the ways they treat the last piece. As implied by the title, 25 *Préludes* consists of 25 pieces, counting the last piece into the suite. On the other hand, the *Esquisses* have a strange subtitle of 48 motifs²¹. Although it has a 49th piece, it leaves it out from the main body of the suite. The music sheet of the 48th piece ends with the inscription “End of book 4” (*Fin du 4e livre*), although it is followed by the last piece *Laus Deo* (see Figure 8). Contemporary record tells us that Alkan himself asked the publisher to inscribe “48 motifs” on the actual music sheets (see Figures 9 & 10)²². Alkan must have intended to differentiate the last piece, *Laus Deo*, from the rest of the suite. What was his motivation behind this peculiar treatment?

Differentiation of the concluding sacred phrase reminds us of a number of music theory books written around or after the 17th century that inscribe it on the last page of the book. Almost all of them were written in different fonts or sizes, clearly distinguished from the body of the book. This visual programme is homogenous to what Alkan did in the *Esquisses* (see Table 4, p.16).

Moreover, some of the books ending in “*Laus Deo*” place figures combining religion/thought and music theory in the main body of the book. These figures are part of a visual programme that finally converges to the phrase “*Laus Deo*” on the last page. The Stars of David in the *Esquisses*, too, are a product of fusion of religion and music theory, and they also stand in a visual programme that converges to the last piece, *Laus Deo* (see Table 5, p.16).

These two points suggest that the *Esquisses* features characters of music theory books on a visual level. How about on a musical level? The traversing section of the *Esquisses* includes such pieces as *Le Staccatissimo*, *Le Legatissimo*, *Les enharmoniques*, *Notturmo* or *Barcarollette*, and these terms may well be discussed in a music theory book. In particular, *Les enharmoniques* may well be a reference to music theorist Rameau's

²¹ *Bibliographie de la France*, Paris, Cercle de la librairie, 1861, p. 261.

²² François-Sappey, Brigitte & Luguenot, François, *Charles-Valentin Alkan*. Paris, bleu nuit éditeur, 2013, p. 55, 80.

*L'enharmonique*²³. Most pieces in the traversing section are short and build on a single musical idea, similar to short example melodies in music theory books. This is indicative of Alkan's intention to scheme the *Esquisses* as a music theory book with many examples, a 19th century *Affektenlehre* book. What Alkan devoted to God may not merely have been his own confession of Jewish heritage or beliefs: it may be interpreted as a book on music theory, embracing deep within its rich compositional layers Alkan's towering achievement in both music and thought.

Closing remarks

The author has proposed an interpretation of the *Esquisses* to explain the peculiarities of the suite. As clarified in the introduction, this will remain within an "if" clause until new evidence will prove it right or wrong. Even if it is proven right, however, the author wishes to emphasize that it should not be used to deny classical views of the *Esquisses* as a collection of sketches of everyday life or small musical ideas²⁴. The charm and beauty of the suite undoubtedly lies also in its individual pieces, independent from the visual programme. Pianist Yui Morishita, unaware of the visual programme discussed here, wrote the following:

Be the pieces arrayed under an immense concept, however, each piece never lessens its value as an individual work. Above all, Alkan gave each piece a superb title, which together with the contents of the piece creates an elaborate ambience. For example, the first piece [...], which is a truly beautiful piece of music, gains by the titling of *La Vision* an indescribable sense of desolation and sadness..... at least in my opinion²⁵.

Also, one should not overlook the fact that the scope of the *Esquisses* surpasses Judaism and encompasses other religions and thoughts: some pieces in the traversing section have Greek/Roman connotations or employ Christian church modes. Needless to say, the Latin phrase "Laus Deo" has a clear Christian overtone as opposed to a more Jewish phrasing of the same expression "Hallelujah" (הללויה), and music theory books ending in "Laus Deo" were all written under Christian influences. Openness toward other religions or thoughts is exactly what describes Alkan himself, who was friends with devoted Catholic musicians such as Chrétien Urhan and Santiago de Masarnau, was deeply impressed by Protestant composers including J. S. Bach, and even claimed to have studied and translated the New Testament²⁶, all the while being a devoted Orthodox Jew himself.

The author hopes that this paper will serve to encourage debate, both for and against the present interpretation, to reveal the potentiality of viewing the *Esquisses* within a wider framework, with any luck to reveal yet unknown aspects of this preeminent suite. Any feedback is appreciated, and the author is available at the address given at the beginning of this paper.

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²³ Morishita, Yui, "Alkan, Prometheus Unbound — Far away from Contemporaneity", Master's thesis submitted to Graduate School of Music, Tokyo University of the Arts, Japan, 2005, p.86. (Unpublished, available for viewing and download on Morishita's website at www.morishitayui.sakura.ne.jp/alkan/alkan.pdf (in Japanese), retrieved on January 12, 2015).

²⁴ Ibid, pp 64-65, 92-93.


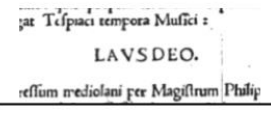
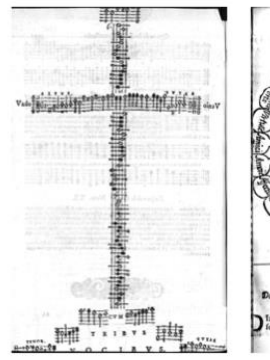
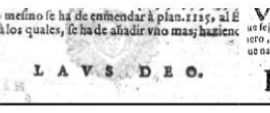
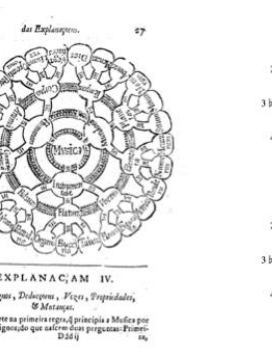
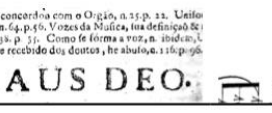
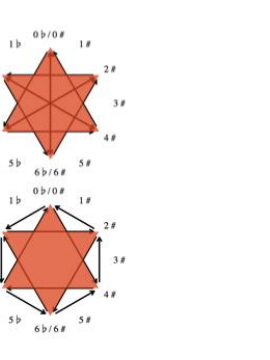

²⁵ "ただし、大きな構想の下に配列されたからといって、1曲1曲が単独での価値を減じるわけではない。何より、それぞれにつけられたタイトルが秀逸で、それらは曲の内容と相まって複雑な味わいを醸している。たとえば [...] 第1曲、実に美しい曲なのだけど、「幻影」というタイトルがつくことで、えもいわれぬ寂寥感や切なさが生まれている.....と私は思う。" Morishita, Yui, "A Marvellous Miniature Suite — An Introduction to the Piano Works by Alkan", PTNA Report, edited by The Piano Teachers' National Association of Japan, 2008. (Available for viewing at www.piano.or.jp/report/01cmp/alkan63/2008/05/25_4567.html, Retrieved on May 1, 2015.) English translation by the present author.

²⁶ François-Sappey, Brigitte (ed.), *Charles-Valentin Alkan*. Paris, Fayard, 1991, p. 97, pp. 101-102, 191-192.; Smith, Ronald, *Alkan: The Man*. London, Kahn & Averill, 2000, p. 54.; Conway, David, *Jewry in Music*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 231.

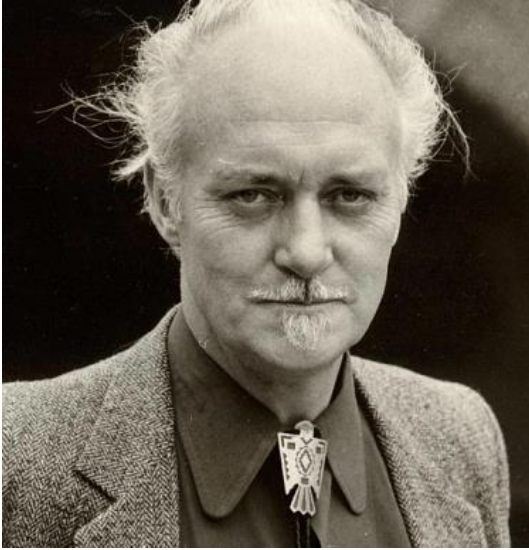
Table 4: Last pages of music theory books ending in the phrase "Laus Deo".

<p>Gaffurius, Franchinus, 1492, <i>Theorica musicae</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>	<p>Venegas de Henestrosa, Luis, 1557, <i>Libro de cifra nueva</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>	<p>Lieto Panhormitano, Bartolomeo, 1559, <i>Dialogo quarto de musica</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>
<p>Santamaría, Tomás, 1565, <i>Arte de Tañer Fantasia</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>	<p>Bovicelli, Giovanni Battista, 1594, <i>Regole, passaggi di musica</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>	<p>Brunelli, Antonio, 1606, <i>Regole utilissime della meliola cap. 2.2. a car. delle prolazioni cap. 2.3. a car. anone Contrapunti a car.</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>
<p>Cerone, Pietro, 1613, <i>El melopeo y maestro</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>	<p>Talésio, Pedro, 1618, <i>Arte de Cantochão</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>	<p>Fernandez, António, 1626, <i>Arte de música</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>
<p>Bevin, Elway, 1631, <i>A Briefe and Short Instruction on the Art of Musick</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>	<p>Picerli, Silverio, 1631, <i>Specchio secondo di musica</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>	<p>Gómez, Tomás, 1649, <i>Arte de canto llano, órgano, y cifra</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>
<p>Kircher, Athanasius, 1650, <i>Musurgia Universalis</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>	<p>Silva, Manuel Nunes da, 1685, <i>Arte mínima</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>	<p>Anonymous, 1748, <i>The Art of Singing</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>
<p>Pedroso, Manuel de Moraes, 1751, <i>Compendio musico</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>	<p>Ribeiro, Manuel da Paixão, 1789, <i>Nova arte de viola</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>	<p>Hoey, P., 1800, <i>A Plain and Concise Method of Learning the Gregorian Note</i></p>  <p>LAUS DEO.</p>

Table 5: Similarities between visual programme of music theory books and the *Esquisses*.

<p>Gaffurius, Franchinus, 1492, <i>Theorica musicae</i></p> <p>Body</p> <p>Neoplatonistic fusion of Greek and Church music theories</p>  <p>Last Page</p> 	<p>Cerone, Pietro, 1613, <i>El melopeo y maestro</i></p> <p>Body</p> <p>Canon notated on a Christian Cross</p>  <p>Last Page</p> 	<p>Silva, Manuel Nunes da, 1685, <i>Arte mínima</i></p> <p>Body</p> <p>Classification of music by Boetius</p>  <p>Last Page</p> 	<p>«Esquisses»</p> <p>Traversing Section</p> <p>Stars of David on circle of fifths</p>  <p>Last Piece</p> 
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Ronald Stevenson: an appreciation



The composer and pianist Ronald Stevenson died on 28 March 2015, at his home in West Linton, aged 87. Stevenson was a lifelong champion of pianist-composers, including Paderewski, Grainger, Busoni, Sorabji and, not least, Alkan. He is, perhaps, best known for his massive Passacaglia on DSCB – at 80 minutes, the longest single-movement work in the piano literature. But he has many other fine works to his credit: a vast corpus of original and exciting works for the piano, a number of innovative and impressive scores for orchestra, many attractive pieces of chamber music, and over two hundred songs.

Our two articles here focus on one of Stevenson's finest works which pays homage to Alkan: his *Le Festin d'Alkan: Concerto for solo piano without orchestra*. Alkan Society member Richard Murphy interviewed Ronald Stevenson prior to the first performance (given by Marc-André

Hamelin) in 1998. Richard has kindly provided us with his transcript of the interview. In the second article, Society member Peter Hick writes about the commissioning of the work.

Ronald Stevenson in conversation with Alkan Society member Richard Murphy Sunday 6 September 1998, 1:20pm to 1:50pm, at Blackheath Concert Halls café, London

The occasion was one of three concerts given by Marc-André Hamelin. His programme was:

Alkan	Chanson de la Folle, Barcarolle Op65, Le Festin d'Ésope
Stevenson	Le Festin d'Alkan (World Première)
Medtner	Sonata Remeniscenza
Chopin/Godowsky	Études 1.18.25.33.45.44.42. - 13 (bis)
Medtner	Primavera (bis)

I introduced myself as an Alkan Society member and asked to record our chat, which I've transcribed as a monologue. I questioned very little, not wishing to stem any flow.

First encounter with Alkan's music

"I remember very clearly that I first came across the name Alkan in Busoni's letters to his wife. I managed to get a copy of that book in my first year as a student at the Royal Manchester College of Music. It had been printed before the Second World War, but it was still in the bookshops in 1945. A wonderful book. I can recommend it. I'd never heard any of Alkan's music in my student years.

I suppose most people encounter Alkan's music through *Le Festin d'Ésope*, but it wasn't my first introduction. A prodigy at the college at that time was John Ogdon. I was 18 and he was nine. I am pretty sure it was he who first showed me the music of Alkan – a very unusual piece which, I find, even lovers of Alkan don't know: *Prières* for piano transcribed from pedal piano by José Vianna da Motta. John gave me a copy, which was rather rare. I immediately liked them, and I found most of them to be modestly written, to suit the title "prayers". Da Motta had been a student of Liszt, then of Busoni at the Weimar masterclasses in 1900. His New Year present to Busoni was this book of transcriptions which has just been published.

I was later intrigued by the Hebraic aspects of Alkan's music. I have used many folk sources of music in my own compositions. Curiously, I didn't address myself to Hebraic music until my cello concerto, which is in memory of Jacqueline du Pré, who married in Israel. So my cello concerto has another link with Alkan and his interest in Hebraic music.

At the Royal Manchester College the standard piano repertoire was taught, so I learnt no Alkan. My teacher was Iso Elinson, a Russian Jew, who had been a pupil of Felix Blumenfeld (Horowitz's teacher) and composer of a lovely left hand etude in A flat. Elinson never mentioned Alkan to me, but expressed an interest in Arnold Bax. So I learned Bax's fourth Sonata, because Elinson played it often: teachers

teach in that way to get a bit of extra practice in themselves during lessons – and I don't blame them.

Perhaps I should make a reference to one of Busoni's friends, Van Dieren, who wrote an amazing book of essays "Down Among the Dead Men", which should be reprinted. I read this when I was about 17 years of age, and noted the references to Alkan. I also read Sorabji's "Mi Contra Fa est Diabolus in Musica", which had more references to Alkan. Such writings became very long footnotes to my knowledge of music.

Ogdon and Alkan – the darker side

I remember precisely when I first met John Ogdon. I had just discovered the full score of Busoni's piano concerto in the College library and was rather rashly sight reading it, and had reached that point in the second movement which was marked, very unusually, *Quasi con Brutalità* – as if with brutality. Busoni didn't say with brutality – his aesthetic wouldn't allow that. He was quite right in my opinion. As I reached that passage, a little boy appeared at the door, and in a piping treble he said "What was that you were playing?" I told him it was Busoni's piano concerto. Years later he played it, and I wrote the programme notes for the performance.

When he was about 18 or 19, he wrote to me care of the BBC after a broadcast, and when he visited we played some two-piano work. He was fairly often a visitor, and was a family friend. I think that John Ogdon had an uncanny comprehension of Alkan. I hesitate, because I'm not medically qualified to say, but possibly there was a relationship between John's mental and emotional condition as a schizophrenic, and the unknown regions of that music. They're even unknown when one has practiced them a good deal. I would also need to know more about the history of Judaism, about whether there is a background to the occult. There is a rather large corner of Alkan's music which is occult, as everyone knows. "Occult" means unknown or hidden, not necessarily anything stranger than that, although it can be strange in expression. There is a hidden aspect, and perhaps John understood these things very well, maybe through his inherited schizophrenia.

He would often relax after a recital, at my family home in Scotland, and he wouldn't want to go to bed. He would sip whisky and meditate, and I would wait for the first prophetic word, which might come after 20 or 30 minutes. And on one night he said to me: "you know, I don't think there's much piano music worth playing". That, from a man who had an enormous repertoire, should be a surprising statement. So I said: "John, tell me what you think is worth playing". I can tell you that the name Alkan appeared very early on in that very short list. He said the *Hammerklavier* and Busoni's *Fantasia Contrappuntistica*. I do know it included Alkan, I think the *Concerto for solo piano*, which was, I think, a great favourite of John's.

I do believe that John had a dimension that other pianists are not able to bring to Alkan's music, and I think it was physio-psychological. John inherited schizophrenia from his father Howard, who wrote a wonderful book about it called *The Kingdom of the Damned*. It's worth reading, and is a very long footnote to John Ogdon, which it wasn't intended to be. Howard Ogdon had an uncanny kinship with his son in finding a very deep and personal interest in the unknown and mysterious. Howard Ogdon presented me with an annotated copy in which he wrote a second preface which said that "this book would have been improved had I known, which I did not, about Freud's theory of the superego". John used to travel with that book, and was perhaps obsessive about it. Perhaps he was reading not only his parental past, but his own future. Perhaps this links up with the semi-occult world of Alkan.

The word "banal" is very near to the concept of the word "popular" and there certainly is a popular aspect to some of Alkan's music. I'm more interested in the banal than I am in the obsessive or the dark psychological – which seems to interest everybody these days. I'm fundamentally interested in healthy things, though if I were a doctor I'd take great interest in the unhealthy things as well.

It's just very fine music, and very well written. It interests me that Alkan had the guts to write very big works. However, a short piece of music has more possibility of being perfect than an epic piece because, of its nature, the epic has a rougher brush stroke.

Le Festin d'Alkan

This piece that I've taken some years to compose and which I call, rather cheekily, *Le Festin d'Alkan*, has three movements. The first is free composition and, as far as I know, has no quotations. I'd be delighted

if somebody finds that I've unintentionally quoted. The second movement is free transcription, and the last free variations, and I believe that these three things are fundamentally the same. If variations or transcriptions are free enough, they become composition. The idea of both left-hand and right-hand cadenzas in the third movement was not consciously taken from Alkan's op 76.

This piece is being given its premiere today, and I'm very much looking forward to it. I'm very very lucky in the pianist who's playing today – the Pied Piper of Hamelin, Marc-André Hamelin – who visited me when I composed only the first movement, and he said with great conviction “I shall play this work”. We did not discuss the work during composition, but I'd be delighted if he wants to change anything – because I'm interested in transcription.

To orchestrate for the piano as did both Godowsky and Alkan is infinitely more difficult than to write for orchestra where each instrument plays only a line of single notes. Many people don't think this. It's an impossibility, in my opinion, to write real piano music without being a pianist. In writing for the orchestra one can cover a multitude of sins, say by doubling parts. To people who have good ears, the sins are exposed on the piano.

I wish the Alkan Society all the luck and interest that it deserves.”

Postscript: Whilst talking of Alkan, Ogdon, and unknown regions of the mind, I suggested to RS that a number of Alkan's descriptive pieces were, as often as not, portrayals of psyches or states of mind (as in The Grande Sonate or some of the Esquisses). RS said: “I agree. You must attribute that worthwhile statement to yourself and not to me, because I haven't made it” (chuckles), “but I do agree with it.”

Peter Hick writes about commissioning *Le Festin d'Alkan*

I was a medical student in Leeds in the early 1970s when Ronald Stevenson came to give a two-piano recital with Edward Weiss in the Great Hall of the University. Weiss had been a Busoni pupil and the programme included the two-piano version of the *Fantasia Contrappuntistica*. (Edward Weiss can be heard playing Busoni's four-movement *Indian Diary* on the Naxos CD *Busoni and his Pupils*, catalogue 8.110777). Radio 3 had recently broadcast a major series about the piano music of Busoni, the script having been written by Ronald, who also played in several of the programmes. I had been very taken with a little piece called *Klein Zaches* (“Little Sharpwit”) which Busoni had written when he was twelve years old. I had tried to find the score but it was not to be had, so I took the opportunity to approach Ronald after the recital and spoke to him about it. I remember how helpful and interested he was, telling me that the piece was not (at that time) generally available. He had his own copy which he had made in long hand on manuscript paper from Busoni's own manuscript, and he generously offered to send me a copy, which he duly did. A friendship was forged as I fell under the spell of his very personal magnetism and softly spoken voice. He told me about his home at West Linton in the Scottish borders, and we corresponded, if somewhat infrequently. Incidentally, *Klein Zaches* is now available as the middle of three *Racconti Fantastici* (op.12), published by Breitkopf & Hartel (edition no 8128).

Radio 3 was instrumental in the next step of the story. I heard a broadcast by Ronald around 1985/6 including *Triptych* by Czeslaw Marek (typically enterprising repertoire and completely new to me), and Ronald's own “Fugue on a fragment of Chopin” which took as its starting point the contrapuntal passage beginning at bar 135 of the Chopin 4th Ballade.



I remember thinking what a wonderfully clever and audacious thing to have done. The brilliance and ingenuity of the piano writing struck me afresh, reinforcing the knowledge gained from his Passacaglia that here was someone who really knew how to write for the piano. Correspondence with Ronald ensued, taking up threads which had lain fallow for a few years. I asked for a copy of the Fugue and he

duly sent it to me pointing out that it was actually a very early work. On the copy, which he finished on 1st December 1983, Ronald has written: "Original MS composed at 21 years of age in 1949, to commemorate the centenary of Chopin's death".

I was able to savour enough at the piano, and my own attempts to play it, to want to be involved more with Ronald's writing. This led to the idea of commissioning a piece to celebrate the Liszt centenary which fell in 1986. I wrote to Ronald accordingly who was immediately enthusiastic about the idea, and indeed somewhat taken aback that this was to be a private commission, very unusual in his experience. We discussed a few matters but basically I gave Ronald carte blanche for composition of the piece. The resulting *Symphonic Elegy for Liszt* was given its first performance by the composer at St Mary's Music school in Edinburgh, as part of a European Piano Teachers Association event entitled "Liszt's Teaching and his Pupils", on 9th November 1986. Derek Watson gave an illustrated talk before Ronald's premiere.

Towards the end of 1987 I injured my left hand at the piano and decided to have a serious look at Alkan's study for right hand (op.76 no2) while resting the left. There is nothing quite like getting to know an Alkan piece from the inside! I was taken by the contrapuntal exposition which starts variation 2 (marked "marcatissimo").



The variation as a whole is an oddity and changes character in the 6th bar. After the sombre rather Faustian polyphonic opening, the Harlequinesque seems to take over and the expected fugal development doesn't appear. The passage stayed with me, and in January 1988 I wrote to Ronald again enclosing the relevant 5½ bars of score wondering if he would be interested in a further commission to celebrate the Alkan centenary, which of course fell in 1988. I was thinking of something along the lines of the Fugue on a fragment of Chopin and was keen to send something to Ronald that I felt might be of interest. I have a copy of the letter I wrote and I seem to have enthusiastically suggested "an accolade for Alkan; a clarion call not a funeral march." The Liszt commission had been such a thrilling experience, the Chopin piece already existed so why not a third piece to complete the trilogy of my then three favourite composers? Ronald of course was delighted to oblige, and again he was given carte blanche for the composition. How interesting to note the opening bars of *Le Festin d'Alkan* recall the Shofar (a Jewish ram's horn instrument), as if to echo my mention of a clarion call in the commissioning letter.

So the seeds for another piece were sown, and after a little discussion I left Ronald to get on with it. Time passed. He was able to stay briefly at my home in Stockport in the mid-1990s, and I recall him sitting at our dining room table looking at my collection of Alkan scores for about four hours, while I went off to work. He certainly made good use of his time, if the number of quotations from Alkan's works that appear in the last movement is anything to go by. Years passed. Ronald worked at his creation which was finally finished, as he documents after the closing double bar, "Writ in the garden cabin-study, Townfoot House, West Linton, Peeblesshire, Scotland, 1st October 1997". In fact it was not until 15th January 1999, almost exactly 11 years since the commission, that I went to West Linton to hear

Ronald play the work to me on his own Steinway. And what a work it had turned out to be. It had become Ronald's longest solo piano work since the *Passacaglia* and had grown to cover the three facets of his own compositional activity: from free composition in the first movement via transcription (of the Barcarolle, op.65 no 6) in the second, to variation form in the third movement finale, where there are numerous quotations from Alkan, notably the opening of the solo Concerto (op.39 no 8) announced in a spectral piano form, *Chanson de la folle au bord de la mer* from the Preludes (op.31 no 8), and the fragment from the right hand study I had sent him (which first makes an appearance on page 44 of the manuscript score). Blow me, he had also included the Scarlatti sonata I had sent him (K69/Longo 423, in D minor), wondering if the beautiful Aria might form the basis for variations, little thinking, when I made the suggestion, that he would incorporate it into the piece, calling forth the unique marking "Scarlattianalkanesco". The Scarlatti sonata first makes its appearance as the basis for the first of two Trios in the middle movement, after the section made up of the Barcarolle transcription. This section, up to Trio no 1, seems to stand well on its own and might well provide an evocative encore to delight and perplex an audience at the end of a recital by an adventurous pianist! Surprising inclusions in the score are a "memory and premonition of Luigi Dallapiccola", with a nod to the latter's *Sonatina canonica* (on page 37), and to Schubert in "the Bicentenary year of his birth", recalling his short life, at the top of page 64, and just before the end, after 2 lines on page 65.

Ronald was interviewed by Sheena Nicoll for an article in the EPTA Journal (February 1995, no 46 vol 16) in which he says:

"Recently I was commissioned to write a piece for the centenary of Liszt and also a piece for the Alkan centenary – it will bamboozle the critics this latest work of mine! There are three movements – a concerto for piano. I've called it *Le Festin d'Alkan*. The first movement is a free composition, the second a free transcription of a Barcarolle by Alkan, the third is free variation. You see it embodies my philosophy of composition, which is that composition, transcription and variation are all the same thing in different guises, and it does not matter whether the composer is working with so called original material or not. What is the difference between Beethoven writing the Diabelli Variations and Busoni making a transcription?"

Ronald had studied composition in Rome with Busoni's pupil Guido Guerrini, and knew Dallapiccola, indeed interviewing him for the BBC in 1966. He also knew Pizzetti, and Ronald's *Variations on a theme of Pizzetti* is based on an aria from his opera *La Pisanella*, so his Italian years were indeed fertile and fruitful ones.

He thought highly of the *Sonatina canonica*, so it is touching to have the reference to that music in *Le Festin d'Alkan*. Ronald was, of course, a great, if under-celebrated, song writer, and there are many hundreds of songs that await a first performance. He loved the simple lyricism of a good melody and it is in this context that the reference to Schubert, the greatest song writer of them all, should come as no surprise. It is interesting to reflect that Ronald Smith once told me that he thought that there was a lot of Schubert in Alkan's music.

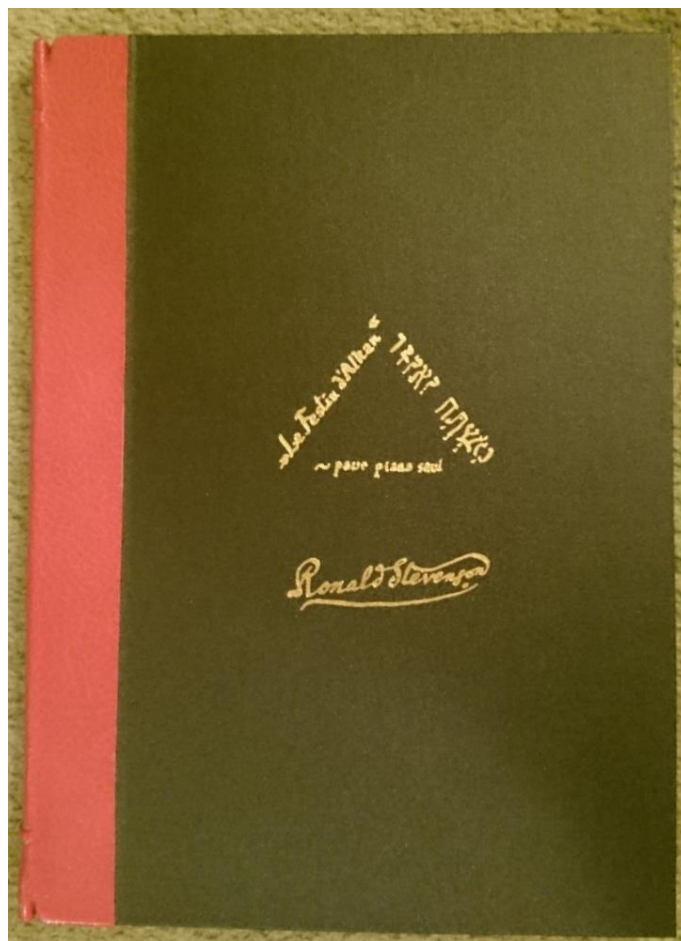
I recall Ronald meeting me off the bus from Edinburgh when I visited him, and we agreed the title for the work walking down to his house: "*Le Festin d'Alkan, Petit Concert en Forme d'Etudes*". There are indeed many etude-like passages in the work and it stands as a monument to his own transcendental piano playing.

As described above, Ronald thought of the work as having a tripartite structure reflecting the three aspects of his own compositional aspirations and endeavours, "composition", "transcription" and "variation". The opening represents the sound of the Jewish rams-horn instrument, the Shofar, and Ronald was keen to acknowledge Alkan's own ethnic background. He even went to the trouble of finding someone who could write an appropriately Hebrew script because he wanted to have that at the top of the title page and indeed on the cover of the manuscript where it sits imposingly, the gold lettering against a black background, with the spine red (see page 22).

He took great pride in the composition, as well as in the appearance of his manuscript, and used to use a quill pen on occasion though I don't think that was the case here. He had a range of nibs that he could dip in an inkwell. No Sibelius computerisation for Ronald!

A recording of Marc-André Hamelin's performance of *Le Festin d'Alkan* is available on youtube, with the first movement at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=R55tLre9M_U.

Although the middle movement has had the least YouTube viewings, it is the most immediately approachable, being a transcendental Godowskian reworking of the Barcarolle op.65 no 6, fulfilling Ronald's desire to lay down a transcription in the piece. The first movement is certainly the toughest and stands rather forbiddingly at the portals of the piece. The last movement has multiple quotations and contrapuntal reworkings, particularly of the opening of the Concerto (op.39 no 8), and perhaps may prove too much for those not in the know. This final movement, the contents of which really give the whole work its alluring title, opens with a variation on, almost a subtle allusion to, Alkan's wonderfully forthright theme which of course forms the basis for his *Le Festin d'Esopé*, the last of the minor key studies (op.39 no 12). The theme is not stated by Ronald although there are further variations on it later in the movement. The title *Le Festin d'Alkan* is indicative of the sort of elision that Ronald was



very keen on, a beautiful marriage between a work and its composer.

The scores for *Le Festin d'Alkan* as well as for the *Symphonic Elegy for Liszt*, are available from the Ronald Stevenson Society (www.ronaldstevensonsonociety.org.uk). There are fine CD recordings of the *Symphonic Elegy* by Joseph Banowetz on the Altarus label and of *Le Festin d'Alkan* as part of a 3-CD set (also including the Fugue on a fragment of Chopin) by Murray McLachlan on Divine Art.

CD reviews

Alkan: the complete transcriptions, volume 1: Mozart José Raúl López, piano

Toccata Classics TOCC0240, released 1 June 2015, length 67 minutes

Symphony no.39, K543: Minuet and trio	4:55
<i>Thamos, King of Egypt</i> , K345: Ne pulvis et cinis superbe	7:27
Symphony no.40, K550: Minuet and trio	4:38
String quartet no.18, K464: Andante	13:42
Piano concerto no.20 in D minor, K466	36:59

Reviewed by Mark Viner

Aside from the masterworks written for the pedal-piano, Alkan's sizeable body of transcriptions is perhaps the most overlooked area of his output – a pity, as they are masterfully conceived for the piano.

Apart from the transcription of the first movement of Beethoven's third piano concerto, op.37 (1800), which beckons indecisive virtuosi with Alkan's (in)famous and genial cadenza (1860), and the transcription of the second movement of Bach's sonata for flute and harpsichord BWV.1031 (1730-34) from the *Souvenirs de musique de chambre* (1866) which, incidentally, has found itself on the A.B.R.S.M. Grade 7 piano syllabus (2015 & 2016), the vast majority are rarities.

Here, José Raúl López begins his survey of Alkan's transcriptions on the pioneering Toccata Classics label with the complete Mozart transcriptions. While the recorded sound is good, if a little close, López's delivery of the music is respectful, if somewhat matter-of-fact. And while these transcriptions offer the performer comparatively limited scope for interpretative possibilities alongside others of the genre, the ear would welcome a somewhat more phrased approach at times – a softening of the edges, as it were – all the more important when handling such colossal textures. This reservation aside, we finally have a record of these works – and a good one. Above all else, and perhaps most importantly, one felt that it wasn't Alkan's music one was listening to, but Mozart's – a thing our beloved French master would wholly approve of.



Letter to the editor regarding José Raúl López's CD

Sir,

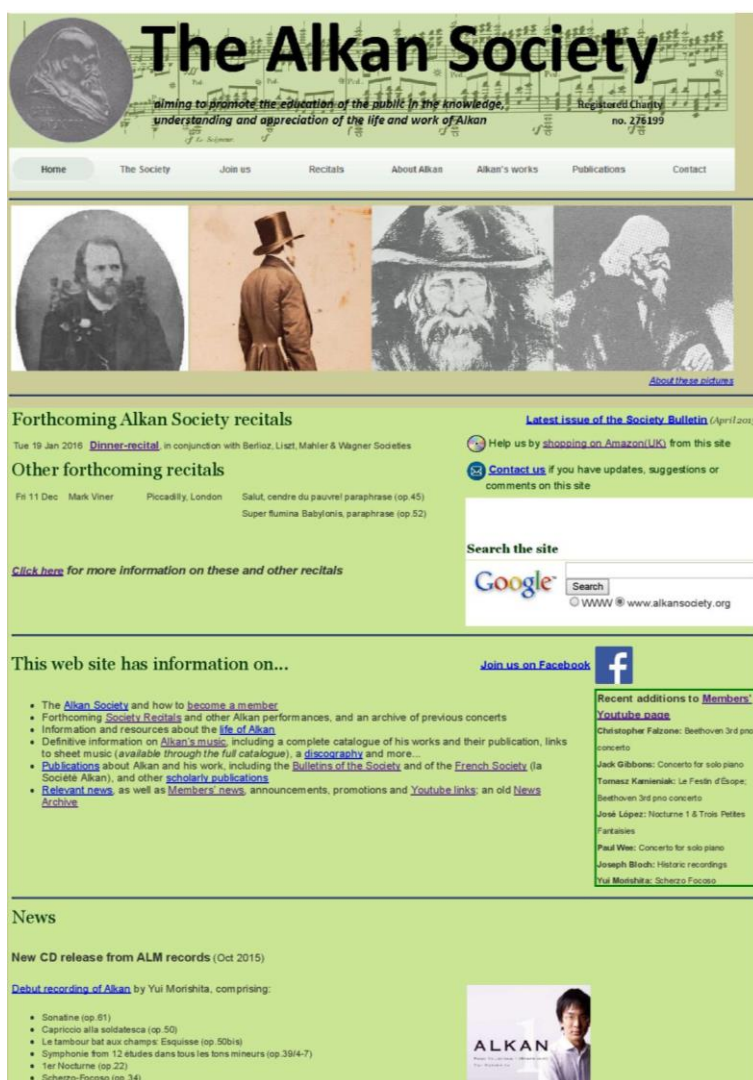
Hurrah for David Baker's booklet-cover design, which has given a refreshing and funny purpose to the ubiquitous image of Alkan's back. CVA is now looking at a framed detail of the famous unfinished portrait of Mozart, painted by Mozart's brother-in-law and fellow mason – Josef Lange. I foresee a long line of similar constructs: CVA looking at the Alkan Society website, or watching cricket, or talking to an historical figure. I'd have preferred the text on the page to have been lowered a little, so that the whole portrait-frame could be included.

Equally off-beat is a photograph of pianist José Raúl López which lies under the plastic rosette which holds the disc. I will presume that the two dogs are Alsations, and that this is a pointer to the Alkan family background in Morhange, Alsace. What larks!

Faithfully,

Richard Murphy

The Society Website



The screenshot shows the homepage of The Alkan Society website. At the top, there is a header with the society's name and a circular portrait of Alkan. Below this is a navigation bar with links: Home, The Society, Join us, Recitals, About Alkan, Alkan's works, Publications, and Contact. The main content area features a row of four portraits of Alkan in different outfits. Below this, there are sections for 'Forthcoming Alkan Society recitals' (listing a dinner-recital on Jan 19, 2016) and 'Other forthcoming recitals' (listing a concert on Dec 11). A search bar is present, and a Google search link is provided. The bottom section, titled 'This web site has information on...', lists various resources like the Alkan Society, recitals, and publications. A 'Join us on Facebook' link is also visible. The footer mentions a new CD release from ALM records (Oct 2015) and a debut recording of Alkan by Yui Morishita.

Members are reminded that the Society website (www.alkansociety.org) maintains up-to-the-moment information on forthcoming events and recitals involving Alkan's music, as well as a wealth of information on Alkan's works, including a comprehensive discography. Note that a Search box on the front page allows search of the information on the site (including information in many of the past Bulletin of the Society).

Recent developments include:

- Expansion of the members' YouTube links page, with links to many interesting performances provided by members.
- Inclusion in the catalogue of Alkan's works those opus numbers for which there are no currently known associated works (22 in all). The reason for these unassigned opus numbers has been the source of much speculation: some may be associated with lost works; some may be associated with planned works never written; some may be the result of errors in cataloguing by various publishers or by Alkan himself. In any case, the unassigned opus numbers are included in order to highlight the issue, and to alert musicologists, librarians and others to the possibility of locating missing compositions.