

Solving the Riddle of Alkan's *Grande Sonate* Op. 33 'Les quatre âges':

A Performance Guide and Programmatic Overview

by

Joshua Lester Hillmann

A Research Paper Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts

Approved April 2018 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Baruch Meir, Chair
Caio Pagano
Robert Hamilton
Jody Rockmaker

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2018

ABSTRACT

Charles-Valentin Alkan's *Grande Sonate* Op. 33 'Les quatre âges' is a unique four-movement work for piano solo that programmatically represents a man's life through four decades, passing from age 20 to 50, with each movement being progressively slower than the previous. Published in 1847, it was destined for obscurity until it was rediscovered and premiered in 1973 by English pianist Ronald Smith. Its absence from the public's reach can be attributed to multiple reasons including the reclusive nature of the composer during the time of composition and the societal issues surrounding the French Revolution of 1848.

Much of Alkan's music has a reputation for being nearly unplayable because of its complexity and the extremely high level of technical facility a pianist must possess in order to perform it convincingly. Aside from its performance length of nearly an hour, there are many technical issues that prevent Alkan's *Grande Sonate* from being performed more frequently. This paper is an exploration of some of these performance and technical issues for consideration by pianists interested in solving the riddle of performing Alkan's *Grande Sonate*.

The findings explored are based in part on the author's experience in performing the complete *Grande Sonate* in recital, as well as on extant research into Alkan's life and the interpretation and performance of his works. The paper concludes with an appendix and link to the author's live performance of the work, another appendix notating the fugato from *Quasi-Faust*, and a third appendix providing extensive fingering and voice redistribution for *Les enfans* [sic] from *40 ans*.

To mom and dad

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Bringing this document to fruition would not have been possible without the help and support of numerous individuals to whom I wish to extend my most heartfelt gratitude.

First of all, I am deeply indebted to my mentor and doctoral committee chairman, Dr. Baruch Meir, for his patience, guidance, and encouragement while completing this document and throughout my term at Arizona State University.

Secondly, I would like to thank the former and current members of my committee: Dr. Jody Rockmaker, Dr. Caio Pagano, Robert Hamilton, and Walter Cosand for their support and contributions throughout the entire doctoral degree program.

I am also thankful for my wonderful friends and colleagues who offered invaluable insight during this process, especially Dr. Jeremy Peterman, Dr. Ryan Garrison, Dr. Doug Harbin, Dr. David Bernstein, and Paul Lee.

No one has been more important to me during the completion of this project than the members of my family. They helped mold me into the person I am today, and I am grateful for their continuous enthusiasm for all my musical endeavors.

Most importantly, I wish to thank my loving and supportive fiancée, Kiersten, who has shown incomparable patience and inspiration during my many months of writing this paper.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	v
INTRODUCTION	ix
CHAPTER	
1 CHARLES-VALENTIN ALKAN	1
2 <i>GRANDE SONATE</i> OP. 33, ‘LES QUATRE ÂGES’	19
Overview	19
Performance Practice and Technical Concerns	26
3 <i>20 ANS</i>	31
4 <i>30 ANS: QUASI-FAUST</i>	46
5 <i>40 ANS</i>	72
6 <i>50 ANS: PROMÉTHÉE ENCHAÎNÉ</i>	81
7 CONCLUSION	92
REFERENCES	95
APPENDIX	
A AUDIO RECORDING OF A PERFORMANCE OF ALKAN’S <i>GRANDE SONATE</i> OP. 33, ‘LES QUATRE ÂGES,’ BY THE AUTHOR	99
B <i>QUASI-FAUST</i> FUGATO RENOTATED BY THE AUTHOR	101
C FINGERING AND VOICE REDISTRIBUTION SOLUTION FOR <i>LES ENFANS</i> BY THE AUTHOR	105

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
2.1. Alkan, <i>Grande Sonate 'Les quatre âges', Op. 33, Preface</i>	21
3.1. Chopin, <i>Scherzo in B Minor, Op. 20, mm. 12-16</i>	32
3.2. <i>20 ans, mm. 1-4</i>	32
3.3. Alkan, <i>Ah! Segnata e la mia morte, Op. 16, No. 4, variation 1, mm. 1-4</i>	32
3.4. <i>20 ans, mm. 1-17</i>	34
3.5. <i>20 ans, mm. 25-48</i>	36
3.6. <i>20 ans, mm. 61-87</i>	37
3.7. <i>20 ans, mm. 101-107</i>	38
3.8. <i>20 ans, mm. 167-182</i>	39
3.9. <i>20 ans, mm. 392-405</i>	40
3.10. <i>20 ans, mm. 406-418</i>	41
3.11. <i>20 ans, mm. 419-439</i>	42
3.12. <i>20 ans, mm. 440-462</i>	43
3.13. <i>20 ans, mm. 463-486</i>	44
3.14. <i>20 ans, mm. 498-524</i>	45
4.1. <i>30 ans, mm. 1-4</i>	49
4.2. Liszt, <i>Piano Sonata in B Minor, S. 187, mm. 10-17</i>	50
4.3. <i>Quasi-Faust, mm. 38-40</i>	50
4.4. <i>Quasi-Faust, mm. 90-93</i>	51
4.5. <i>Quasi-Faust, mm. 131-132</i>	52
4.6. <i>Quasi-Faust, mm. 28-31</i>	53

Figure		Page
4.7.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , m. 32.....	54
4.8.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 43-47.....	55
4.9.	Liszt, <i>Piano Sonata in B Minor</i> , S. 187, mm. 600-603.....	55
4.10.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 53-58.....	56
4.11.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 185-188.....	57
4.12.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 138-143.....	58
4.13.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 191-196.....	59
4.14.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 197-199.....	60
4.15.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 227-234.....	60
4.16.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 227-230. (Hillmann).....	61
4.17.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 256-257.....	64
4.18.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 258.....	65
4.19.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 256-257. (Hillmann).....	67
4.20.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 250. (Hillmann).....	68
4.21.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , m. 250.....	68
4.22.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 258-259.....	69
4.23.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 275-276.....	70
4.24.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 310-311.....	70
4.25.	<i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 325-332.....	71
5.1.	<i>40 ans</i> , mm. 1-8.....	72
5.2.	<i>40 ans</i> , mm. 5-12.....	73
5.3.	<i>40 ans</i> , mm. 41-44.....	74

Figure	Page
5.4. 40 ans, mm. 71-76.....	76
5.5. 40 ans, m. 79	77
5.6. 40 ans, mm. 116-123.....	78
5.7. 40 ans, mm. 154-156.....	79
5.8. 40 ans, mm. 159-162.....	79
5.9. 40 ans, mm. 165-192.....	80
6.1. 50 ans, inscription	81
6.2. 50 ans, mm. 21-22. (Hillmann).....	83
6.3. Beethoven, <i>String Quartet in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2</i> , 1st mvmt., mm. 36-38. (Hillmann)	83
6.4. Beethoven, <i>Sonata No. 8 In C Minor “Pathétique”, Op. 13</i> , 2nd mvmt., mm. 1-2. (Hillmann).....	83
6.5. 50 ans, mm. 1-2.....	84
6.6. 50 ans, mm. 3-9.....	85
6.7. 50 ans, mm. 20-22.....	86
6.8. 50 ans, mm. 32-35.....	86
6.9. 50 ans, mm. 58-65.....	87
6.10. 50 ans, m. 9	87
6.11. <i>Quasi-Faust</i> , mm. 1-2	88
6.12. 50 ans, mm. 16-19.....	88
6.13. Beethoven, <i>Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major Op. 55 (“Eroica”)</i> , mm. 1-2. (Hillmann).....	89

Figure	Page
6.14. 50 ans, mm. 26	90
6.15. 50 ans, mm. 52	90

INTRODUCTION

“...A cosmic event in its composer’s development and in the history of piano music. Nothing in Alkan’s previous output leads one to expect anything of such magnitude.”¹ Such are the words Raymond Lewenthal uses to describe Charles-Valentin Alkan’s *Grande Sonate* Op. 33. Alkan acknowledged his personal development with the *Grande Sonate* by observing in the preface that “each of them [the four movements] corresponds, in my case, to a specific moment of existence, to a particular disposition of imagination.”²

Published in 1847, each of the four movements of this work relates to a man’s psychological state, or stage, at the ages of 20, 30, 40, and 50, respectively, with each movement being slower than the previous. All four movements are programmatic, with two of them depicting the legends of Faust and Prometheus. The first movement, *20 ans*, is a *scherzo* that represents an early adulthood riddled with impetuosity that borders on clumsiness. *30 ans*, subtitled *Quasi-Faust*, is in sonata form and the longest of the movements. It embodies the struggle between good and evil. The elements relating to the Germanic legend of Faust can be heard throughout the movement. This movement also

¹ Raymond Lewenthal, ed., *The Piano Music of Alkan* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1964), xviii.

² Alan Beggerow, “Alkan—Grande Sonate ‘Les quatre âges’, Opus 33,” *Musical Musings: Thoughts and impressions on musicians, composers and their music*, entry posted July 22, 2017, <https://muswrite.blogspot.com/2017/07/alkan-grande-sonate-les-quatre-ages.html> (Accessed 1/8/2018).

contains the seven-voice fugato based on what Lewenthal calls the “Redemption Motif.”³ *40 ans*, subtitled *un heureux ménage*, denotes Alkan’s dream of family life at the age of 40. A three-voice *étude* in the middle section depicts children playing. Alkan labels this charming section *Les enfans*, which is an archaic spelling of *Les enfants*. This paper refers to this section by name as *Les enfans*, as did Alkan. This section is followed by a two-voice canon likely representing the parents near the end of the day after the children have been put to bed: one can hear Alkan’s representation of a clock striking 10:00 p.m., followed by a prayer in the form of a chorale. *50 ans*, subtitled *Prométhée enchaîné*, is the man at 50 years of age. After an introduction, this slow *Marche funèbre* movement alternates between two themes that repeat, with variation, in multiple descending keys until the end, where an ascending G minor scale is played in octaves while a rhythm from the first theme is played simultaneously. One can imagine this ascending scale signifying the man’s final climb into the “beyond” at his funeral. In order to provide an understanding of how the composer envisioned the interpretation of these folklores, it is important to understand how they relate to the music.

This paper is an exploration of performance and programmatic aspects for consideration by pianists interested in playing Alkan’s *Grande Sonate*. Much of Alkan’s music, except for some of the earlier miniatures, is nearly unplayable because of its complexity; a pianist must have an extremely high level of technical facility in order to perform it with conviction. There are elements of process that can help guide the pianist in solving the riddle of performing *Grande Sonate*. To start, chapter 1 is a biography of

³ Raymond Lewenthal, “Raymond Lewenthal talk on Alkan, part 17,” YouTube, March 11, 2010, accessed March 07, 2018, <https://youtu.be/3qG2bCRhHjs>.

Alkan, and places *Grande Sonate* within a historical perspective. Chapter 2 discusses the work as a whole, noting the programmatic elements and discussing possible influences that contemporary works had on Alkan and the resulting influence that this sonata had on other composers. General technical skills required by this piece are noted here and in the discussions of the individual movements.

Chapters 3-6 discuss each of the four movements in detail, focusing on technical performance-related concerns. These include articulation, fingering, pedaling, execution considerations that contribute to playability (e.g., hand substitution suggestions for some passages, among other useful recommendations), historical performance practice, practice suggestions, and remarks about Alkan's style of playing. All of these contribute to an informed interpretation of the work. The seven-voice fugato in *30 ans* is renotated in this paper. Alkan wrote this fugato in two different ways: the first shows voice leading and is nearly impossible to decipher and play as written, while the second is a simplified version that gives suggestions for pianistic interpretation. Nonetheless, Alkan's simplified version stops short of respelling the enharmonic keys and precisely timing how the grace notes, arpeggios, hemiolas, large leaps, and other features are to be played in order to maintain the integrity of each voice. As a result, this fugato quickly becomes difficult to read, and impossible to play strictly as written. The renotation that this paper provides solves these issues. Not every measure of *Grande Sonate* discussed will have an accompanying figure; rather, it is assumed that the reader also has a copy of the score.

The research available on Op. 33 includes brief surveys of the piece, descriptions, and notes from programs. One major source for information regarding Alkan is found in

the Ronald Smith books entitled *Alkan. Volume I: The Enigma*⁴ and *Alkan. Volume II: The Music*⁵ that focus mostly on Alkan's life and an overview of his musical output. Newer sources have emerged recently, including the 2007 book by William Alexander Eddie entitled *Charles Valentin Alkan: His Life and Music*.⁶ Some sources have titles with slight variation in the spelling of Alkan's name. In those cases, the spelling used in this paper matches that of the source. A detailed harmonic analysis of the entire *Grande Sonate* does not exist, and the only comments regarding performance practice and suggestions related to the piece are found in Raymond Lewenthal's edition entitled *The Piano Music of Alkan*.⁷ While he gives some recommendations regarding *30 ans*, he does not discuss the other movements. Raymond Lewenthal, an Alkan scholar and performer, intended to write a book about Alkan, yet it remained incomplete and unpublished at the time of his death.⁸ According to e-mail correspondence with its curator, The Raymond Lewenthal Collection at the University of Maryland does not contain anything significant related to *Grande Sonate*.⁹

⁴ Ronald Smith, *Alkan Volume I: The Enigma* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1976).

⁵ Ronald Smith, *Alkan Volume II: The Music* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1987).

⁶ William Alexander Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan: His Life and Music* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007).

⁷ Raymond Lewenthal, ed., *The Piano Music of Alkan* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1964).

⁸ "Raymond Lewenthal Collection," University of Maryland Libraries, accessed March 17, 2018, <https://www.lib.umd.edu/ipam/collections/raymond-lewenthal>.

⁹ Donald Manildi, "Re: Raymond Lewenthal Collection," e-mail message to Joshua Hillmann, March 29, 2017.

CHAPTER 1

CHARLES-VALENTIN ALKAN

Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813-1888) was the second of six children born to Alkan Morhange (1780-1855) and Julie Abraham (1784/5-1868). From an early age, Alkan's ability in music was palpable. Even before his formal musical training, Alkan experienced a high quality of musical education and training at his father's boarding school, where he and other Jewish children were taught the basics of music as well as French grammar. More precocious than his siblings, Alkan began studying at the *Paris Conservatoire* in October of 1820 (age six), making him one of the youngest students ever accepted. The next year, Alkan both won first prize in a *sofège* competition and gave his first concert appearance, but as a violinist. Following this recital in which he played an air and variations by Jacques Rode, there are no further reports of Alkan as a violinist—he directed all his musical efforts from that point forward to becoming a piano virtuoso.¹⁰

It would seem that the art of *sofège* played a large part in the Morhange household, as four of his other siblings also showed signs of early musical ability and training, with his sister Céleste and brothers Ernest, Maxime, and Napoléon all winning first prize in *sofège* at the ages of thirteen, fifteen, eleven, and eleven, respectively.¹¹ His brother Napoléon, in fact, went on to become the doyen of *sofège* at the *Conservatoire*

¹⁰ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 2.

¹¹ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 16.

until he retired in 1896.¹² Alkan's other brothers pursued careers as pianists, composers, and teachers. An exception was his brother Ernest, whose flute playing, noted for its "neatness of execution," won him first prize in this instrument at the age of sixteen. From there he went on to play in the orchestra of the Théâtre du Gymnase.¹³

Antoine François Marmontel, a distinguished teacher at the *Conservatoire*, remarked on Alkan's psychological nature at that early stage of his life: "He was not yet a recluse: [he was] happy, joyous, [and] full of zest for life. He had, like all of us...the foolish enthusiasm and cherished illusions of youth."¹⁴ In 1821, the same year Alkan won first prize in *sofège*, he began studying piano with the famed teacher Joseph Zimmerman.

Zimmerman was the most celebrated piano teacher at the *Conservatoire* from 1826-1848. Zimmerman was also a respected contrapuntist and opera composer. Alkan remained his favorite student—an impressive fact when one considers that his later students included Franck, Gounod, Bizet, Marmontel, and Lacombe. Zimmerman commissioned a portrait of the young Alkan (now in the possession of his brother Napoléon's descendants) in honour of his brilliant pupil.¹⁵ Under Zimmerman's tutelage, Alkan won the accessit prize (honorable mention) in 1823, the second prize in 1823, and

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Antoine François Marmontel, *Les pianistes célèbres*. Paris: Heugel and Sons, 1878, translated and quoted in Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 2.

¹⁵ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 17.

the first prize in 1824. In 1823, Alkan began studying harmony and accompaniment with Victor Dourlen at the *Conservatoire*, and in 1827, he won first prize in harmony.

It was around this time that Alkan began performing publically as a pianist and composer. Zimmerman organized Alkan's début public piano recital on April 2nd, 1826. It was held in the salon of the piano manufacturer Monsieur Henri Pape when Alkan was 12 years old, despite the concert title which read, "Au bénéfice du jeune Alkan âgé de onze ans" (For the benefit of young eleven-year-old Alkan).¹⁶

Alkan shared this concert with several other instrumentalists and singers who were already established as artists, including Mme Giuditta Pasta, Giovanni Rubini, Filipo Galli, and Lambert Massart, and also accompanied his sister Céleste. Alkan then began assisting Zimmerman, who introduced him to prominent Parisian aristocratic figures, leading to many musical engagements in the Paris salons.

In 1827, Alkan toured and performed with great success in all the major cities of Belgium, where people frequently reviewed his outstanding talent favorably.¹⁷ There was one occasion in Belgium where Alkan performed with Massart, the violinist with whom he had shared his début concert in Paris in 1826. This concert occurred in Liège as a special event for the Société Grétry, and it is the first report of Alkan's performance of his *Variations sur un thème de Steibelt* Op. 1. The Liège music reviewer praised the performances of both Alkan and Massart, writing "in his charming piano variations [Op.

¹⁶ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 18.

¹⁷ *Gazette de Liège*, February 15, 1827, quoted in William Alexander Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan: His Life and Music* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 5.

1] Alkan has proved [himself] through his effortless, light, brilliant, and rapid playing...achieving such perfection at a tender age...it became doubly interesting to see and hear [Massart] after young Alkan.”¹⁸ Following the concert in Liège, Alkan gave three concerts in Brussels. Reports of these concerts soon reached the critics in London. The London-based music journal, *The Harmonicon*, commented that the concerts attracted all the best musical amateurs and—even more prestigiously—that the Royal Highness gave his highest approval and satisfaction to Alkan’s talents.¹⁹

Upon his return to Paris, Zimmerman introduced Alkan to the Princesse de la Moscova, and he performed at several musical evenings organized by the Princesse.²⁰ In later years, Alkan spoke with tenderness of the reception he received at these gatherings; but he also recalled one dark moment that caused him deep, if only temporary, distress. He noticed the presence of a handsome stranger some two years his senior who later that evening was invited to play the piano. At that moment, Alkan witnessed a display of virtuosity he had never imagined, and one that vexed him enough to cause a sleepless night. This first meeting with Franz Liszt foreshadowed much of the careers of both Liszt and Alkan, and was likely Alkan’s most enduring lesson: in later years, Liszt declared that Alkan had the finest technique he had ever known,²¹ and indeed Alkan was the only

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *The Harmonicon*, April 1827, 73, quoted in William Alexander Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan: His Life and Music* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 5.

²⁰ Alexander de Bertha, “Ch. V Alkan aîné: étude psycho-musicale,” *Bulletin Française de la Société Internationale de Musique* 5 (1909): 135, quoted in Eddie, 5.

²¹ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 19.

person before whom Liszt felt unnerved while playing.²² This view of a rivalry between the two virtuosos is not surprising when one considers the technique required for Alkan's *Grande Sonate* Op. 33 and many of his other works, such as the *Trois Grandes Études* Op. 76.

The next few years were eventful, both in the life of Paris and in that of young Alkan. His reputation was growing as a performer, and like many musicians of the time, this reputation as a brilliant pianist was augmented by his frequent inclusion of chamber music into his performances, as well as his promotion of symphonic music and opera. For the next five years, Alkan devoted his time to building on that reputation, and those efforts led him to collaborate with such famous artists as the cellist August Franchomme and leading Parisian violinist, Jean-Delphin Alard, with whom he formed a trio. Franchomme, being the dedicatee of Chopin's *Cello Sonata* Op. 65, most likely first introduced Alkan to Chopin.²³

1830 was a pivotal year for Parisian musical life. On July 30th, the "July Revolution" saw the overthrow of King Charles X and the installation of his cousin, Louis Philippe, Duke of Orléans (who would, in turn, be overthrown in 1848),²⁴ enabling the installation of a constitutional monarchy in which the bourgeoisie achieved political and social power. It also effectively marked the end of *ancien régime* (old regime)

²² John Ogdon, "The Romantic Tradition," quoted in *Keyboard Music*, edited by Denis Matthews (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972), 254.

²³ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 20.

²⁴ "Boundless World History," Lumen, accessed March 19, 2018, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-worldhistory/chapter/france-after-1815/>.

attitudes in music; however, in social custom, formality, and musical taste, Alkan clung to the habits of the old regime.²⁵ The new paradigm (or regime) and atmosphere in musical preferences was romantically charged, and the demand for virtuoso piano players was at a point unsurpassed in previous eras. This new generation of pianists, although headed by Liszt, could have easily been led by Alkan, but “he preferred the reclusive life to that of the concert platform.”²⁶

Paris, as a major cultural center, had become the intellectual and artistic capital of the world,²⁷ with over a million visitors annually.²⁸ Both pianists performed extensively in Paris and elsewhere in their early careers, and both later turned to composing as a means of their artistic expression. Paris was a veritable mecca for traveling virtuosi, with pianists such as Hummel, Hiller, Moscheles, Thalberg, Mendelssohn, and Clara Schumann making appearances regularly. They saw it as a place to make important connections,²⁹ although they felt stifled by the influx of other visiting artists. Chopin was even growing tired of the Parisian music scene. With so many visiting European artists going in and out of Paris at that time, Chopin thought there were simply too many

²⁵ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 5.

²⁶ William Murdoch, *Chopin—his life* (London, Macmillan Publishers, 1934), 232.

²⁷ Harold C Schonberg, “The great pianists,” (New York: Simon et Schuster, 1909): quoted in Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 5.

²⁸ Janet Rittermann, “The Alkan Day,” *Alkan Society Bulletin* 49 (October 1994), <http://www.alkansociety.org/Publications/Society-Bulletins/bulletin49.pdf> (accessed July 8, 2017).

²⁹ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 6.

visiting “asses and virtuosi.”³⁰ However, he and others, such as Zimmerman, Hallé, Onslow, and Liszt, decided to make Paris their permanent home. When Chopin and George Sand became residents of the Square d’Orleans, they quickly became life-long friends and neighbors with Alkan.

The friendship Alkan and Chopin shared began as early as February 1832 at Chopin’s first Parisian concert, and continued until Chopin’s death in 1849. Ruth Jordan has traced the close relationship and friendship between Alkan, Chopin, and George Sand in detail in an exclusive article for the *Alkan Society Bulletin*.³¹ From a stylistic standpoint, Chopin greatly admired Alkan for his incomparable technique and powerful playing, while Alkan similarly expressed deep regards for Chopin’s melodic and effortless harmonic style.³²

Until 1839, Alkan enjoyed a busy schedule on the concert stage as well as considerable mentions for his compositional accomplishments by notable and respected people. One was François-Joseph Fétis, who précised that “[Alkan] has become a commendable artist not just as pianist but as a composer for his instrument.”³³ Other

³⁰ Janet Rittermann, “The Alkan Dav.”

³¹ Ruth Jordan, “Alkan’s Friendship with Chopin and George Sand,” *Alkan Society Bulletin* 7 (May 1989), <http://alkansociety.org/Publications/Society-Bulletins/bulletin38.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2017). Ruth Jordan is the author of biographies of George Sand and Chopin, for which she was awarded a Certificate of Merit by the Chopin Institute in Warsaw.

³² Laura Snyderman, “Charles-Valentin Alkan: an obscure leading composer of the 19th Century,” *Alkan Society Bulletin* 93 (September, 2016), <http://alkansociety.org/Publications/Society-Bulletins/Bulletin93.pdf> (accessed 11/11/17).

³³ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 6.

accolades included an honorable mention in the Prix de Rome for his cantata *Hermann et Ketty*, as well as an induction into the *Société Académique des Enfants d'Apollon* as a notable “pianist-composer.”³⁴ Quite suddenly and without explanation, Alkan left the concert scene entirely between the years of 1839 and 1844. Some believed that he made the decision because his musical style was inconsistent with those he considered the “Parisian bourgeois audiences,” whose tastes in music he found deplorable.³⁵ Another reason for his retirement might also have been the birth of his son Élie-Miriam Delaborde on February 9th, 1839. The familial relationship between Alkan and Delaborde is still somewhat a mystery, but we do know that Delaborde became a formidable pianist and professor of piano at the *Conservatoire* in 1873. Alkan and Delaborde shared many commonalities including, of course, their brilliant pianistic abilities both on traditional pianos and on the pedal-piano. Similarly, they were both parrot enthusiasts, Alkan having compared a tombeau to a parrot in 1859 with the *Marcia funèbre sulla morte d'un papagallo*.³⁶

During these years, Alkan did not completely disappear from the music scene. He spent this time composing and becoming more involved with the Jewish community in Paris. He composed his set of 3 *Grandes Études* Op. 76, in which he explored and utilized the technical effect known as *tremolando* (also found in the *études* of Liszt). Alkan also used it as an effect in two of the four movements of the *Grande Sonate*, which

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 7.

³⁶ Ibid.

will be discussed later. In 1844, he began composing a collection of miniatures beginning with *Nocturne* Op. 22, inspired by Chopin's and John Field's nocturnes.³⁷ The next work, *Saltarelle* Op. 23, became one of his more popular works, inspired by the baroque form *saltarello* which originated from a fourteenth-century Italian dance by the same name.³⁸ Other miniatures from this period include the *Gigue et Air de Ballet dans le style ancien* Op. 24 and the *Alleluia* Op. 25.

Between the years of 1844 and 1846, Alkan made a brief return to the concert stage, programming many of his recitals with classical works by Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Mendelssohn, and interspersing baroque transcriptions with his own original works. This repertoire prompted sharp condemnation by the Parisian romantic critics, whose general feeling and response was that Alkan lacked originality in presenting transcriptions, and that his performances were bereft of romantic feeling.³⁹ The lack of warmth these concerts received led Alkan to withdraw from the concert scene again from 1846 to 1848 in order to focus solely on composition.

Although Parisian audiences may have missed hearing him perform, Alkan now composed some of his best compositions for piano: *Douze Études dans tous les tons majeurs* Op. 35, and *Grande Sonate, 'Les quatre âges'* Op. 33. Audiences that considered his earlier compositions dry and lacking romance surely would have welcomed the more romantic and technically challenging *Grande Sonate*. The unfortunate timing of the 1848

³⁷ Laura Snyderman, "Charles-Valentin Alkan", 9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

revolution in France, however, precluded even the more romantic *Grande Sonate* from being introduced and recognized because the political instability caused many prominent Parisian artists to leave Paris for London. “All the Parisian pianists are here in London,” noted Chopin, who was among those artists seeking shelter there.⁴⁰ There is no evidence that Alkan or any other pianist performed *Grande Sonate*; however, it is likely others were aware of the work and familiar with its unique structure and musical content. Nevertheless, *Grande Sonate* went into worldwide obscurity until the early 1970s, when it was rediscovered and premiered by Ronald Smith.

Because of the revolution, Alkan decided to lead a more academic path in order to assist his financial situation and promote his compositions. At that same time, Zimmerman, head of the piano department, had relinquished his position at the *Conservatoire* because he sensed a “mounting hostility from the establishment.”⁴¹ Alkan, as Zimmerman’s favorite and most distinguished pupil was, by common consent, “heir apparent” to this “important post.” He immediately put forward his name the moment the post was advertised.⁴² Despite the fact that Alkan was deemed the most likely successor to Zimmerman’s post, Alkan had lost some political ground among those tasked with replacing Zimmerman, partially because of his recent concert choices that included earlier baroque works. There were four candidates for the position: Émile Prudent, Louis

⁴⁰ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 41.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Lacombe, Antoine François Marmontel, and Alkan.⁴³ Prudent and Lacombe were not considered serious contenders for the position, but the fourth, Marmontel, posed a significant challenge to Alkan because of his closer relationship to the head of the *Conservatoire*, Daniel Auber. Auber was quite clearly favoring Marmontel, while Marmontel was playing up to Auber. It was frustrating for Alkan to see his former pupil gain a clear political advantage for this position, considering the low opinion Alkan had of him. Not only was Marmontel less qualified than Alkan in terms of performing and teaching, but Alkan criticized him for his lack of musical integrity regarding classic works:

He [Alkan] told Fétis that Marmontel was “one of the poorest musical minds which had been reared on *sofège* and piano classics...Embellishments, changes, and additions were made (by Marmontel) to various competition pieces...he [Marmontel] will take an *Adagio* by Mozart which he does not understand, and only release it decked out with a feather, dressed up in riding boots and adorned with spurs...Hummel, Mendelssohn, and Beethoven (especially in his later works) can defend themselves to a certain extent because of the more numerous markings in their music and the greater exactness of their notation, but Mozart whose method of notation corresponds to the ideas expressed, whose restrained expression marks the genius in accentuation is so attuned to his divine genius...such care will never be paid [by Marmontel] to Mozart’s work.”⁴⁴

Alkan was worried that because of the academic prestige Marmontel would acquire as successor to Zimmerman’s post, these new editions by Marmontel would pose a threat to the musical integrity of the classic works by Scarlatti, Handel, and J.S. Bach

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 12-13.

when performed by less educated pianists, and that publishers might not challenge the editorial alterations because of Marmontel's academic credentials.⁴⁵

Because Zimmerman was a former teacher of all four candidates, he was not allowed to comment or take any part in the nomination of his successor.⁴⁶ Alkan felt completely alone in both his quest for this position and his desire to protect the future standard of teaching at the *Conservatoire*.⁴⁷ Alkan did have one more connection to use, however, and wrote a series of letters to his great friend and admirer George Sand, imploring her to “come to my help, Madam, by being willing to make your voice heard to M. Ch. B. [Director of the Department of Fine Arts, Charles Blanc].”⁴⁸ Despite Alkan's vast qualifications, it was clear he would need considerable political help if he were to be successful in his quest. But even with Sand's support, Alkan's position continued to erode, and a week later, he decided to write directly to the Home Office (Ministère de l'Intérieur), as well as to Charles Blanc. Alkan sent a letter to the Home Office stating that Marmontel was lying about teaching students that Chopin, he, and others had taught. He wrote, “The pupils claimed by M. Marmontel are not his at all...For instance Mlle. Malescot, first prize last year, took lessons from Chopin and, moreover Herz...” A list of similar students follows and he concludes: “My heart bleeds, my face is covered in blushes and shame to use such means, but there has never been such a battle between

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 42.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 43.

justice and injustice.”⁴⁹ To prove this, Alkan sent a statement by the father of one of his students stating that his daughter, who had finished second at a competition held at the *Conservatoire*, was “helped by the tuition of Alkan” that year.⁵⁰ Alkan pleaded to Blanc for more time in order to rally the support of other leading musicians, such as Liszt, Chopin, Fétis, Berlioz, and others named and unnamed.⁵¹

Alkan spent the next few days writing a series of letters, each progressively more desperate. For example, to the Monsieur le Ministre (Home Office), he wrote: “If you sound out the opinion of the public, instead of that of just a small clique, I will be elected. If you collect the votes of all the leading musicians in Europe, I will be elected. If you judge the competition on three aspects—performance, composition, and teaching—I will be elected. . . .”⁵² Indeed, Alkan had strong support from influential musicians such as Liszt, Chopin, Thalberg, and Berlioz. In another letter to Monsieur le Ministre, Alkan wrote “informing them that Auber was about to appoint a man with little musical status.”⁵³ Alkan did, however, have some vocal support from other influential figures, so the thought that he was alone in this ordeal is not entirely accurate. Donatien Marquis commented that he was astonished that Alkan was third on the short list while Marmontel was first, and that Auber must have been “under some influence” and “the Director of

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁰ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 10.

⁵¹ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 44.

⁵² Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Fine Arts ought to investigate the matter.”⁵⁴ In a later letter, Marquis noted to a M.

Raynal:

Marmontel is quite simply a [substitute] *sofège* teacher...those pupils obliged to follow his course were forced to seek lessons outside the college....M. Alkan does not owe his reputation to publicity, to flattering women, to an ‘Air Varié’ on popular tunes...he loves art for art’s sake. He has opposed Charlatanism for twenty-three years and has confidence in the justice of mankind.⁵⁵

Despite the strong support Alkan had from a wide range of established artists, Auber appointed Marmontel to the position, taking advantage of the political bias and allowing the less qualified candidate to take the post. Of this nomination by Auber, Alkan wrote to Sand:

In spite of my positive rights, in spite of your all-powerful support, Madam, I have failed...The Republic, for which I have a most ardent love, allows strange blunders to be made. So far as my own sphere is concerned I felt disposed to educate a whole generation in musical matters and I have to give way, not to a worthy or even unworthy rival, but to one of the most total nonentities I can think of....⁵⁶

Marmontel became the head of the piano department and his career in that position was long and distinguished. His pupils included Bizet, and he went on to teach Debussy before he retired in 1887.

⁵⁴ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 45.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

To his credit, when reminiscing about his appointment thirty years later Marmontel was quite generous in his praise of Alkan, noting in his book *Les Pianistes Célèbres*:

We are particularly happy to render this public homage to our illustrious colleague [Alkan] for at a certain moment in our careers, in 1848, a most unfortunate misunderstanding, caused by the struggle for Zimmerman's class, separated us without, however, altering our mutual esteem and without diminishing on my part my sincere admiration for the artist; my deep sympathy for the untiring seeker and powerful creator.⁵⁷

This career failure weighed on Alkan considerably, and as a result, he returned to private teaching for his main source of income, retiring from the concert scene for twenty-five years. The death of Chopin in 1849 likely contributed to this misanthropy, while at the same time he was fortunate to inherit most of Chopin's students.⁵⁸ There can be no doubt that Chopin's early death had a significant impact on Alkan. Smith notes:

Only too soon Alkan was to sustain a further blow when Chopin died on 17th October 1849. He was now deprived of the one friend with whom he had always been able to communicate; to discuss his personal and artistic problems; whose approach to his career, whether as composer, performer, or teacher had seemed so similar to his own.⁵⁹

1848 was also the year Liszt chose to abandon his Parisian career in favor of the quiet court of Weimar. When Alkan returned to the concert scene at the age of 60, he gave a seasonal series of *Six petits concerts*. None of his significant works was included in these concerts, nor did he present anything but his smaller pieces to the public, though

⁵⁷ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 46.

⁵⁸ Lewenthal, *The Piano Music*, V.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 48.

his repertoire of other composers' works was vast. Lewenthal attributes this choice to a "modesty that was perhaps more timidity and lack of self-confidence than diffidence."⁶⁰

Alkan lived a long life, even though much of it was spent in sickness.

Alkan was 74 when he met his violent end. Different versions of the circumstances surrounding his death have circulated over the years; the most popular is that a bookcase fell on him as he reached for a copy of the *Talmud* (of which he was a lifelong scholar), crushing him to death.⁶¹ However, the most recent research by Hugh MacDonald reports that Jean-Yves Bras, the French Alkan scholar, found a letter from Marie-Antoinette Colas dated April 4th, 1888, days after Alkan's death. In the letter, she noted that Alkan did not appear for lunch around 11 a.m. on March 29th. It was unusual for him to stray from his strict routine in his later years. Around the time of his failure to appear, the concierge heard unusual sounds and moans from Alkan's apartment. After forcing an entry, the concierge found Alkan lying down in the kitchen with a heavy umbrella stand on top of him. The thought is that he may have fainted and reached out for an object for support. The concierge carried him to his bedroom, but Alkan died at 8 p.m.⁶²

Though Alkan failed to accomplish all that he intended to do in life, he was not forgotten—in large part due to many of his contemporaries who held him in high regard.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Hugh Macdonald, "The Death of Alkan," *Musical Times* 114 (1973): 25; Hugh Macdonald, "More on Alkan Death." *Musical Times* 129 (1988): 118-120, quoted and translated in Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 25.

Debussy, for example, heard miniatures from Alkan's *Esquisses* Op. 63 at the *Conservatoire* in the 1870s, and later wrote piano works which included the same rhythmic functions of Couperin and Rameau, utilized by Alkan.⁶³ César Franck transcribed Alkan's *Prières* Op. 64 for pedal-piano. And Ferruccio Busoni, known for his contrapuntal works and transcriptions of works by J.S. Bach, insisted that, since Beethoven, Alkan was one of the five greatest composers for the piano along with Chopin, Liszt, Schumann, and Brahms.⁶⁴

Alkan's compositions span seventy-six opuses, dozens of works that are uncatalogued, and still more that remain lost.⁶⁵ With so many contemporary and later artists affirming the importance of Alkan's contribution to the arts, it is puzzling that much of his music remained unknown for so long, only recently attracting interest. It deserves mention that much of Alkan's music is only accessible to pianists of the highest technical facility, with the result that audiences were not treated to live performances often enough to form an opinion one way or another. With the now universal availability of recordings, performances of Alkan's works are able to reach audiences worldwide with the touch of a screen. Additionally, what audiences may have preferred in the nineteenth century does not necessarily reflect what they prefer now, as fashions change.

⁶³ Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in music: from the genesis of the concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky polemic* (Rochester N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1996), 43-48.

⁶⁴ Antony Beaumont, *Busoni the composer* (London: Faber, 1985), preface.

⁶⁵ "List of Works by Charles-Valentin Alkan," List of Works by Charles-Valentin Alkan - IMSLP/Petrucci Music Library: Free Public Domain Sheet Music, accessed February 18, 2018, http://imslp.org/wiki/List_of_works_by_Charles-Valentin_Alkan.

In the words of Raymond Lewenthal, “The recent success that his music has had over the air and in concert, and the increasing interest pianists and public are taking in it would, I think, indicate that Alkan’s day is at long last dawning.”⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Lewenthal, *The Piano Music*, VI.

CHAPTER 2

GRANDE SONATE OP. 33, 'LES QUATRE ÂGES'

Overview

Like his friend Chopin, Alkan spent his career composing almost exclusively for the piano; unlike Chopin, much of his work is now out of print or remains unpublished. For example, his *Symphony in B Minor* was lost, and two cantatas which had been entered in the Prix de Rome at the Paris Conservatoire were never published. His early music is almost entirely in the “brilliant yet vapid” style of Kalkbrenner and Herz, but from the 1837 publication of *Trois morceaux dans le genre pathétique*, his compositions display more individuality and imagination.⁶⁷

With such a large output of works for piano, it is interesting that his only sonata is quite unusual in its scope and structure. His other piano sonata type, *Sonatine* (1861), shorter, compressed, and lacking the programmatic elements of *Grande Sonate*, is considered one of his finest works.⁶⁸ The fact that there is only one full sonata is not in and of itself unusual, since after Beethoven and Schubert, the piano sonata genre diminished considerably, with no major composer publishing more than four piano sonatas before the early 20th century.

Surely Romantic composers, including Alkan, must have felt like Beethoven, who wrote in 1822: “The solo pieces [i.e., sonatas]: they went out of fashion long ago, and

⁶⁷ Kenneth Hamilton, “Alkan, (Charles-) Valentin,” Oxford Music Online. Accessed November 8, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e176>.

⁶⁸ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 88.

here fashion is everything,”⁶⁹ or Schumann, who noted that the sonata genre was losing popularity with audiences, admitting that “the sonata is but smiled upon with pity in France and scarcely more than tolerated in Germany.”⁷⁰ Fétis also wrote in 1830, “In the last several years the sonata has fallen into discredit. A certain futility of taste which has contaminated music has replaced the serious forms of this sort with kinds of lighter works called fantasias, airs variés, [and] caprices.”⁷¹ The French critic Soullier remarked in 1855 that “the sonata has died with the eighteenth century that produced it so abundantly.”⁷² In 1901 another writer, M. Camille Bellaigue, described the sonata as an “admirable, vanished species.”⁷³ These last two rather conservative commentators and critics did not consider the creative approach of Schumann, Chopin, and Alkan to be representative of the true sonata form, and they seem to have completely neglected Alkan’s freer boundaries during his lifetime.⁷⁴ Indeed, it is only in recent history that Alkan’s sonata work has enjoyed a worldwide revival of interest.

⁶⁹ Alexander Wheelock Thayer, *Ludwig van Beethovens Leben* (Berlin: F. Schneider, 1866-79): 801, quoted in Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 79.

⁷⁰ Robert Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker von Robert Schumann* (Leipzig, 1914): 452, quoted in Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 81.

⁷¹ Francois-Joseph Fétis, *La musique mise à la portée de tout le monde* (Paris, 1830): 230, quoted in Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 80.

⁷² Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 81.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Grande Sonate bears the name ‘*Les quatre âges*,’ making the work readily recognizable as program music. Alkan wrote a preface to the published work where he expressed his intentions and clearly identified the nature of its programmatic elements.

On a dit et écrit beaucoup de choses sur les limites de l’expression musicale. Sans adopter telle ou telle règle, sans chercher à résoudre aucune des vastes questions soulevées par tel ou tel système, je dirai simplement pourquoi j’ai donné de semblables titres à ces quatre morceaux et employé quelquefois des termes tout à fait inusités.

Il ne s’agit point ici de musique imitative; encore moins de musique cherchant sa propre justification, la raison de son effet, de sa valeur, dans un milieu extra-musical. Le premier morceau est un **SCHERZO**; le deuxième un **ALLEGRO**; le troisième et le quatrième un **ANDANTE** et un **LARGO**; mais chacun d’eux correspond, dans mon esprit, à un moment donné de l’existence, à une disposition particulière de la pensée, de l’imagination. Pourquoi ne l’indiquerais-je point? L’élément musical subsistera toujours, et l’expression ne pourra qu’y gagner; l’exécutant, sans rien abdiquer de son sentiment individuel, s’inspire de l’idée même du compositeur: Tel nom et telle chose semblent se heurter, pris dans une acception matérielle, qui, dans le domaine intellectuel, se combinent parfaitement. Je crois donc devoir être mieux compris et mieux interprété avec ces indications, quelque ambitieuses qu’elles paraissent au premier coup d’œil, que sans leur secours.

Qu’il me soit permis, du reste, d’invoquer l’autorité de Beethoven. On sait que, vers la fin de sa carrière, ce grand homme travaillait à un catalogue raisonné de ses principaux ouvrages, dans lequel il devait consigner d’après quel plan, quel souvenir, quel genre d’inspiration ils avaient été conçus.

C. V. ALKAN.

Figure 2.1. Alkan, *Grande Sonate ‘Les quatre âges,’* Op. 33, Preface.

Alkan's passage translated to English:

Much has been said and written about the limits of musical expression. Without adopting such and such a rule, without seeking to answer any of the vast questions raised by this or that system, I shall simply say why I have given such titles to these four parts, and sometimes use quite unusual terms.

It is not a question here of imitative music, still less music seeking its own justification, the reason for its effect, its value, in an extra musical environment. The first piece is a *scherzo*, the second an *allegro*, the third and the fourth an *andante* and a *largo*, but each of them corresponds, in my case, to a particular moment of existence, to a particular disposition of the imagination. Why should I not point it out? The musical element will always subsist, and the expression can only gain by it, executing it, without renouncing it, it is inspired by the very idea of the composer. Such a name and a thing seem to clash, taken in a material sense, which, in the intellectual domain, combine perfectly. I believe, then, that I ought to be better understood and better interpreted with these indications, however ambitious they appear at first glance.

Let me, moreover, be permitted to invoke Beethoven's authority. It is well known that towards the end of his career this great man was working on a catalog of his principal works, in which he was to be instructed on what plan, what remembrance, what kind of inspiration the work had been conceived.

C.V. Alkan⁷⁵

To begin to understand Alkan's sonata form idiom, which includes both the *Grande Sonate* Op. 33 and the *Sonatina* Op. 61, it is helpful to briefly review the background of his French contemporaries and predecessors who also wrote in sonata form. As discussed earlier, Alkan had a thorough training in music history, repertoire, and musicianship. He would have been acutely aware of the historical developments of the sonata and other forms in France and throughout Western Europe, including the contributions of Beethoven, Mozart, and Haydn. It is well documented that Beethoven

⁷⁵ Alan Beggerow, "Alkan—Grande Sonate 'Les quatre âges,' Opus 33." Translated by Alan Beggerow.

held a particularly large influence on any serious sonata composer in France,⁷⁶ and that there are only a few examples of sonatas of this scale from that country. Alkan's *Grande Sonate* is his reply to Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Op. 106.⁷⁷ It is even longer in measure numbers than Beethoven's work. The influence of earlier French composers is also seen in Alkan's sonata, such as his propensity for dividing main sections with double bars also found in the sonatas of Johann Edelmann many decades earlier. This style may reflect a persistence of the clavecin tradition as demonstrated in the keyboard music of Rameau.⁷⁸ Other commonalities between Alkan and Edelmann include the use of extravagant dynamic and *tempi* expressions.⁷⁹

Additional significant French influences on Alkan's sonata style include composer Etienne Méhul, whose sonatas contain elements of Gluck-like drama (e.g., the use of tremolo figures as an orchestral device to depict tragedy).⁸⁰ These qualities are easily identified in Alkan's *Grande Sonate*, with orchestral-like tremolos appearing in the second movement, *Quasi-Faust*, as well as in the final movement, *Prométhée enchaîné*.

⁷⁶ Katharine Ellis, *Music criticism in nineteenth-century France: La revue et gazette musicale de Paris, 1934-80* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). This book provides an excellent account of the importance of Beethoven in Paris during the nineteenth century.

⁷⁷ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 78.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Both composers derive their dramatic style from Beethoven.⁸¹ Hyacinthe Jadin, a professor at the *Conservatoire* from 1795 until just before his death at the turn of the century, had an affinity for remote major and minor keys, and we see his influence in the key structure of Alkan's sonata.⁸² The brilliant passagework and programmatic elements found throughout *Les quatre âges* can be traced to French composer Ignace Ladurner, whose fifteen piano sonatas, composed after the turn of the 19th century, include similarly intense and brilliant passagework with programmatic elements.⁸³ It was important to Alkan that his *Grande Sonate* have some semblance of originality as well, which posed a significant challenge.

The *Grande Sonate*, dedicated to Alkan's father, is a unique four-movement work in which each movement is progressively slower than the previous. It is useful to note here that the tonality is also progressive (*20 ans*: D major/B minor/B major, *30 ans*: D-sharp minor/E-sharp Mixolydian/F-sharp major, *40 ans*: G major, and *50 ans*: G-sharp minor) and seems to show a proclivity of Alkan for semitone shifts between movements (D major to D-sharp minor, and then G major to G-sharp minor). Thus, there are two pairs of movements that contain an identical remote tonal relationship, and the progression of keys moves toward the depressive⁸⁴ while simultaneously becoming

⁸¹ Alexander L. Ringer, "A French Symphonist At The Time Of Beethoven: Etienne Nicolas Méhul," *The Musical Quarterly* XXXVII, No. 4 (1951).

⁸² Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 78.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁸⁴ That some keys are considered more depressive than others is highly subjective; however, because the natural overtone series operates universally within major key

incrementally slower. Smith refers to this phenomenon as a unique example of “retrogressive tonality.”⁸⁵ It is useful for the pianist to also realize that the ethos of the *Grande Sonate* is that of realism in the first and third movements and symbolism in the second and fourth movements conveying the mythical elements of Faust and Prometheus.⁸⁶ The uniqueness of this work shows that Alkan was actively and creatively stretching the boundaries of sonata form. Coincidentally, this also seems to reflect the sentiments of Schumann, who said this about form: “I no longer think about form when I compose, I create it.”⁸⁷ Regarding Alkan’s sonata, H. H. Bellamann notes that:

The sonata is long, very long; it is unlikely that anyone will ever play it, but it has many originalities; the concept is heroic and the treatment is astonishingly modern. How much other composers must have learned from him, how much they must have absorbed, consciously or unconsciously, is apparent to even the superficial student who will place side by side with Alkan’s, some other bravura works of a little later period.⁸⁸

Les quatre âges follows a man’s life from the age of 20 (a fast *scherzo*) to a man at the age of 50 (in a movement with a tempo indication to play *extrêmement lent* and is entitled *Prométhée enchaîné*). The second movement at thirty years old entitled *Quasi-*

patterns, we generally interpret major keys as exhibiting normal behavior, while minor key patterns, being a departure from what naturally occurs, to be abnormal, or depressive.

⁸⁵ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 69.

⁸⁶ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 82.

⁸⁷ Wolfgang Gertler, *Robert Schumann in seinen frühen Klavierwerken* (Wolfenbüttel-Bln.: Kallmeyer, 1931), 1-13.

⁸⁸ H.H. Bellamann, “The Piano Works of C. V. Alkan,” *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (April 1924), 251-262.

Faust is the first piece that Alkan composed in sonata form. It contains themes that bear a remarkable resemblance to those found in Liszt's own sonata composed about six years later, suggesting that Liszt may have had knowledge of the piece. The third movement entitled *Un heureux ménage*, represents a happy family man forty years of age, surrounded by children.

General Performance and Technical Concerns

When one is interpreting a relatively unknown work by an obscure composer, it is essential to be familiar with that composer's other works and environment in order to effectively understand his or her idiom. For example, when interpreting Beethoven's late piano sonatas, the informed pianist sees much more than the notes on the page: he or she also sees and remembers other sonatas, reflects upon Beethoven's mental and physical state at the time of composition, and understands the capabilities of the pianos of that era. Regarding Alkan, we thankfully have access to many of his works from which we can discover known compositional tendencies and peculiarities.

In addition, we have recordings not only of *Grande Sonate*, but also of many other works of the composer. Listening to recordings to gain insight prior to one's own exploration of a work is as helpful as it is unhelpful. While it gives the immediate impression of a work from an accomplished interpreter, it deprives the musician the opportunity to personally discover many intricacies that are to be found within the score.

It is important to consider a number of questions before proceeding to the task of interpreting and practicing the music. What is the general style of music we are interpreting? What were the social and personal circumstances surrounding its

composition? How did others perform the work during the composer's lifetime? Does the musical content suggest a certain interpretation? What are some general guidelines to consider for challenging passages? Once these types of issues are considered, more specific technical and artistic decisions are far easier to navigate.

Alkan's compositions are pianistic once the underlying difficulty and possible solutions are discovered. For *Grande Sonate*, however, the riddle is then only half solved because these pieces were composed at the height of Alkan's virtuoso pianistic abilities. Since it was composed in the same decade as the publication of Liszt's *Transcendental Études*, as well as Alkan's own devilishly difficult Op. 39 (a set of *études* in twelve keys), the *Grande Sonate* poses numerous technical and interpretive challenges for any pianist, which is likely another reason pianists many pianists have avoided it. Marc-André Hamelin, one of the greatest pianists currently performing, has this to say about Alkan and the preparation and performance of his works:

The aspect of Alkan that is most apparent when people who don't know him listen to him for the first time is the fact that the music is so difficult to play, and it requires a great deal of virtuosity. But in a way I wish that it did not require such a formidable technique to play because I don't really enjoy sweating over this music. I wish it were easier to play, actually, because all of its details—all of the music—would be much easier to communicate; but the great musical worth of Alkan's music makes it worthwhile to master those difficulties, even though it may take a lot of time.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Marc-André Hamelin, *It's all about the music*, DVD, directed by Robert Chesterman, performed by Marc-André Hamelin (England: Hyperion Records, 2006).

Alkan was also a composer for which no “tradition” of interpretation exists.⁹⁰ There are no known recordings of Alkan playing the piano, and it is doubtful he ever performed the *Grande Sonate*. However, there are some generalizations that can be drawn given what we do know. Alkan’s compositions for the piano are frequently based on orchestral sonorities,⁹¹ and this sonata is not an exception. This orchestral nature presents challenges for the performer in sonority, balance between hands, and balance between notes in each hand, chord, and octaves.⁹² While the same could be said for any number of piano compositions, it is especially true for compositions that are composed with an orchestral sound in mind. The orchestral piano sound of Alkan’s *Grande Sonate* requires not only a beautiful lyricism and a light touch, but also a technical fluency that is never far from explosive interjection. Lewenthal describes the difference between Alkan’s orchestral sound and that of his contemporaries:

...it is as different from Chopin’s, Liszt’s, and Schumann’s (which are in turn very different from one another) as Mahler’s sound is different from Wagner’s and Strauss’s, and in somewhat the same way. Alkan and Mahler are lean and linear....Alkan requires a great deal of playing with little or no pedal. He uses *staccato* touch more than any other piano composer, Mendelssohn notwithstanding.⁹³

Other frequent orchestral features include fast leaps from far registers of the piano that must be navigated without hesitation or rhythmic disruption. This type of technical

⁹⁰ Lewenthal, *The Piano Music*, VII.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, XI.

⁹² *Ibid.*, VII.

⁹³ Lewenthal, *The Piano Music*, X.

challenge is immediately apparent to audiences if performed without significant smoothness of execution. We find this rhythmic challenge throughout Alkan's music. Disliking *rubato*, he was a strict player in what the French called *le style sévère*.⁹⁴ The rhythmic nature of his work is shared with other notable composers, such as Berlioz, Bizet, Fauré, and Ravel.⁹⁵ In fact, Oxford Music Online describes Alkan's playing and compositional style in this manner: "Alkan rarely compromises the logic of his counterpoint, and a similar inflexibility was noted in his playing, which avoided the indulgent *rubato* of many of his contemporaries. His use of rhythm and meter was also individual; his music is full of repetitive *ostinato* rhythms...."⁹⁶ This becomes a greater challenge when one realizes that the *tempi* notated by Alkan are not mere suggestions—they are required by the music, and are almost always faster than they appear at first glance. Both the quality of the interpretation and the beauty of the music are directly connected to the adherence to the tempo markings, as what seems musically satisfying to one's ears frequently feels too fast for the fingers. Alkan does not discriminate based on whether one's fingers are fast and light enough to make a passage sound musical. If a passage seems impossible, it is one's own technique or approach to the music that must improve, because those sections are only possible with a degree of lightness of movement.

Fingering is an essential component in solving the riddle of this piece. One of the best ways to discover a practical fingering for any passage is to experiment playing it at

⁹⁴ Ibid., IX.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Hamilton, "Alkan, (Charles-) Valentin."

or near performance tempo with a variety of possible fingerings. The score provides some fingerings throughout the sonata, the majority of which are helpful. This paper provides an update to some of these existing fingerings, as well as abundant recommendations for certain passages that are truly enigmatic.

CHAPTER 3

20 ANS

As the plan for *Grande Sonate* is quite different from others of the time (each movement slower than the previous), it begins with *20 ans*, the fastest and shortest of the four movements. This movement starts the journey through four decades by introducing the listener to an energetic and impetuous, if not at times clumsy twenty-year-old man. The ternary form, key, genre, and gestures indicated in the opening section all suggest that Chopin's *Scherzo in B Minor* Op. 20, which was published in 1835, was an inspiration for this piece.⁹⁷ One example of the similarity between these two works can be found in the beginning of both. The ascending flurry of notes in the first 4 measures of the Alkan shows a remarkable similarity to the ascending flurry of notes in the *Scherzo*, as well as a definite similarity in cross accents. Many other similarities between the two compositions have been mentioned by Brigitte François-Sappey, who also mentions that the *arabesques* in mm. 65-75, the *valeureusement* at m. 460, the *animé de plus en plus* beginning in m. 486, and much of the *coda* share similarities with the Chopin *Scherzo*.⁹⁸ *20 ans* also brings to mind memories of Schumann's *Sonata in G Minor* Op. 22 because the tempo in both is quite fast, and near the end, Alkan marks the score *en rapidement* (even faster) while Schumann marks his score the comparable *noch schneller*.

⁹⁷ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 83.

⁹⁸ François-Sappey, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 105-106.



Figure 3.1. Chopin, *Scherzo in B Minor*, Op. 20, mm. 12-16.



Figure 3.2. *20 ans*, mm. 1-4.



Figure 3.3. Alkan, *Ah! Segnata e la mia morte*, Op. 16, No. 4, variation 1, mm. 1-4.

Alkan repeats a pianistic pattern in these opening measures that he used previously in a set of variations on *Ah! Segnata e la mia morte [sorte]* from *Anna Bolena* by Donizetti: the same pattern for the right hand is used as ornamentation obscuring the melody from that in the theme. One finds this type of figuration in other contemporaneous works, such as Weber's *Sonata in C Major*, Op. 24 (1812). William Eddie notes that these early “apprentice works” relied heavily on contemporary pianistic models of the 1820s. Alkan still manages to develop individual touches of the unexpected

in harmonic turns, and in a colorful and direct approach to the piano texture that would later become a characteristic of Alkan's compositional style.⁹⁹

When beginning to study this work, the riddle that fundamentally impacts the flow and nature of the movement is meter. One generally assumes that most measures will be in the 3/4 meter indicated. Alkan stays in 3/4 for exactly eight full measures. In mm. 9-12, there is a perceived meter change into 4/4, and then four measures later another perceived meter change into 3/2 before returning to 3/4 in m. 17 (see fig. 3.4). Robert Gaulden describes this change in perceived meter as simply "changes of meter," and notes that, while rare in the common-practice period, they are generally camouflaged by the retention of the same meter signature.¹⁰⁰ This movement cycles through these perceived meter changes several times throughout this opening section. One can therefore speculate that Alkan included accent markings on beat one of mm. 1-4 in order to make sure the 3/4 meter was brought out at that time. It is not possible to bring out beat one of every measure when some of those measures imply a perceived meter contrary to what is marked.

When viewed with these metrical changes in mind, it is clear that Alkan wanted this opening to seem awkward and unsettling, to some degree. Imagining the mentality of someone twenty years of age might bring different images to different people. The listener can imagine him looking anxiously into the future while a part of him remains in the past.

⁹⁹ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 37.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Gauldin, *Harmonic Practice in Tonal Music*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 124.

The image shows a musical score for the piece '20 ans' by Alkan, measures 1-17. The score is written for piano and is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The tempo is marked 'TRÈS VITE.' and the mood is 'décidément'. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 1-4) is marked 'mf' and features a piano part with a series of chords and a melodic line with fingerings (2, 4, 1, 5, 2, 4, 1). The second system (measures 5-8) starts with a 'Ped.' marking and a 'rf' (ritardando) marking, followed by a 'p gaicement.' (piano) marking. The third system (measures 9-17) shows a change in meter to 4/4, indicated by a '3' over a '2' and a '3' over a '4'. The score includes various articulations such as accents and slurs, and fingerings are provided throughout.

Figure 3.4. *20 ans*, mm. 1-17.

The resulting clumsiness, missteps, and breathlessness are all a part of this person changing into an independent member of society.

Another useful image is that of the twenty-year-old attempting something overly daring in those places in 3/4 that are similar to mm. 2-5. Then this person stumbles in m. 5, laughs, and proceeds in a more careful 4/4 fashion until attempting the feat again, only to suffer the same fate. In figure 3.4, we can see the alternating accents Alkan put on beat one of mm. 1-4, and also the changes of meter in mm. 9-17 not marked in the score.

Figure 3.4 shows where these perceived meter changes are, as well as a fingering change in mm. 13-16. It is unclear whether the printed fingering marks are editorial or if they are

Alkan's own; however, the right hand fingering for mm. 13-16 is marked as follows: 1 – 3 – 2 – 5 (repeats). This might work for some with larger hands, but it is more practical to group the notes together by thumb position and then finger them as one would a blocked chord. For example, notes 2-5 in m. 13 form a 2nd inversion F-sharp major triad which is normally fingered 1 – 2 – 4 – 5. Why then should we use a 3 on the A-sharp where a 4 also helps get the 1 in position for its next note? For these reasons, the fingering as changed in figure 3.5 is suggested.

Pianistically, the dynamic intensity of the opening measures should be surpassed only by clarity and lightness throughout the movement. Pedal use should be sparse and intentional, and for this first section, that means no pedal at all. Possible exceptions include those measures that are originally marked as requiring pedal, possibly a half-style (or “flutter” style) pedal in mm. 12-16, and down for the duration of the F-sharp octaves in mm. 75-83. In figures 3.5 and 3.6 we see that the meter changes continue throughout this section. In m. 33 Alkan has modulated to D-sharp minor, the key with which movement 2 begins, through a chromatically altered chord in m. 32. This move allows a melodic connection between the dominant C-sharp and the beginning of the melody in m. 33. These chromatic sideslips can be found throughout Alkan's music, and a discussion on this section would not be complete without pointing out that there is another one in the bass voice of m. 46 (see fig. 3.5).

The image displays a musical score for the piece '20 ans', spanning measures 61 to 87. The score is written for piano and consists of four systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. Measure numbers 61, 67, 73, and 80 are clearly marked at the beginning of their respective systems. The notation includes various musical elements such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1 through 5 above or below notes. Performance instructions include 'en augmentant.' (crescendo), 'f' (forte), 'ff' (fortissimo), and 'Ped.' (pedal). A 3/4 time signature is shown above the first system, and a 3/4 time signature is shown above the fourth system. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

Figure 3.6. *20 ans*, mm. 61-87.

The fingering marked on beat 2 of m. 47 would be more useful if changed to 1 and 3 instead of 2 and 5. The markings in mm. 65-68 clearly imply the use of a 5 on the first of each two-note slur in order to facilitate arm weight on the first note of the slur. In m. 103, there is a chord in the remote key of B-flat major. This chord is shown in figure 3.7, and it is the only place where it occurs (all others in similar locations are in the tonic

key). This “wrong-note chord” might represent the 20-year-old stumbling, or at least attaining a result that differs from what he anticipated. It is imperative to take time during the *fermata* here—if we stumble in life, we might need a moment to recover as well.



Figure 3.7. *20 ans*, mm. 101-107.

Measures 105-106 are marked *ridendo*, which translates to “laughing.” This is a metered trill, and should be played *a tempo* and not in the same way one might play it if it were simply two notes under a “tr” sign. This “laughing” portion happens several times with a slight variation at each occurrence.

Measures 114-158 comprise a unique section marked *palpitant*, meaning “exciting.” One imagines someone who has just stopped for a breath after running aimlessly for some time. The subject’s heart is beating rapidly, represented by the unison F-sharp quarter notes and all similar rhythmic dyads in mm. 115-166 that are marked *portato*. The unison and dyad heartbeats suggest there is more than one heart beating, and given that the love story does not begin until the *trio* in m. 167, this short section might represent the moment our subject has met someone special—perhaps only stopping to ponder this attraction. Regardless, there should be no *rubato* until the *trio*. The sense of slowing down comes from the manner in which Alkan has arranged the notes

surrounding the heartbeat. The distance between these heartbeats increases slightly near the end of this section, suggesting that the subject's pulse has also slowed as we approach the *trio*.

The *trio* is a slower melodic section that might represent our subject finding love. It begins *timidement*, or “shyly” in the key of B major (see fig. 3.8). It is a simple triadic melody that is recited several times, with each recitation being treated differently. Eddie notes that “this *trio* shows a strong resemblance in rhythmic values, melodic line, and texture to Chopin’s *Scherzo in E Major Op. 54* (1843).¹⁰¹

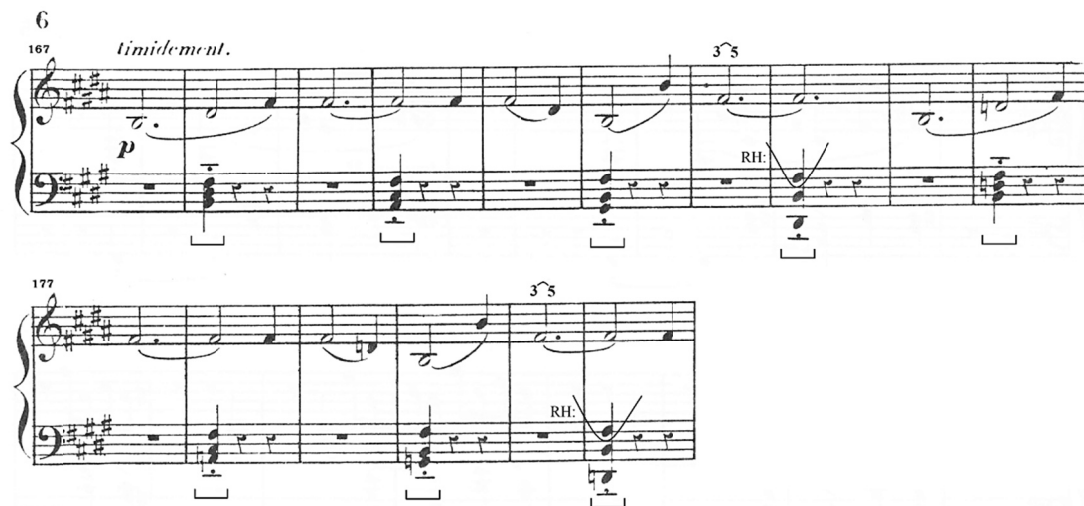


Figure 3.8. *20 ans*, mm. 167-182.

The bass chords here and following are all marked *tenuto-staccato*, which implies a lingering, yet disconnected approach to these triads. To accommodate this effect, use a small amount of pedal with the left hand chords. The melody should be *legato* throughout this section, regardless of pedal usage. At m. 199, the pedal should be changed every measure, and at m. 215, every two measures. For pianists with smaller hands, the author

¹⁰¹ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 83.

recommends a finger substitution from fingers 3 to 5 in mm. 173 and 181 in order to allow the right hand to play the dominant pitch that appears in the bass without resorting to an untimely left hand arpeggio. The *trio* increases in loudness and passion until its climax in m. 254. From m. 255 to the end of the section a fairly long *diminuendo* leads to the reprise of the first section.

The reprise is much like its first iteration until m. 383, where a sequence of the opening ascending flurry of notes begins transposed up a whole step to E minor. The left-hand fingering in m. 397 should be change to 2 – 5 – 1 – 4 – 2 – 5, as shown in figure 3.9, a change from the original 2 – 5 – 1 – 3 – 2 – 5.

Figure 3.9. *20 ans*, mm. 392-405.

All other fingering and pedaling in figure 3.9 are additional and recommended.

This section is continued with the same recommended additions in figure 3.10.

Figure 3.10. *20 ans*, mm. 406-418.

Measure 420 joins the melody of the *trio* with a left-hand accompaniment that is quite dependent on effective fingering (see fig. 3.11). All fingering and pedaling in figure 3.11 are additional and recommended.

The next two figures (see fig. 3.12 and fig. 3.13) show recommendations for fingering, pedaling, and hand designations when certain notes could be played by either hand. The left-hand accompaniment should be played lightly, with some emphasis placed on the bass note that begins each arpeggiated chord. There should be a *crescendo* from the second left-hand note to the top-most note in each two-measure arpeggio, followed by a *diminuendo* so that each instance is shaped with *messa di voce* while the right hand is shaping the melody.

Figure 3.11. *20 ans*, mm. 419-439.

While playing the left-hand material, take care that each note and beat in the arpeggios is steadily navigated—no *rubato*. After the second phrase, there is an ascending sequence of phrases that should continuously *crescendo* until arriving at the *coda* in full force in m. 460. Therefore, it is advisable to *decrescendo* in the preceding phrase so that at mm. 436 one can start this *crescendo* sequence at a softer dynamic.

440

avec enthousiasme.

446

456

f valement.

Figure 3.12. *20 ans*, mm. 440-462.

Much of the fingering in the *coda* is intuitive; however, there are a few places where trial and error have illuminated the best solution. For example, the right hand fingering in m. 481 might seem awkward at first, with a 3 on beat 2, but it is the best solution when compared to other options (see fig. 3.13). The figure below shows the recommended fingering and pedaling for the *coda* through m. 483.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "20 ans", spanning measures 463 to 486. The score is presented in three systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The first system (measures 463-470) features a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes fingering numbers (1-5) and accents. The second system (measures 471-478) is marked "en augm:" (ritardando) and *f* (forte), with a crescendo hairpin. The third system (measures 479-486) concludes with the instruction "ff, et ahimé de plus en plus." (fortissimo, and ahimé de plus en plus). The score is characterized by intricate melodic lines with frequent octaves and complex rhythmic patterns.

Figure 3.13. *20 ans*, mm. 463-486.

The *coda* ends in a spectacularly virtuosic display of octaves alternating between hands, followed by a recitation of the Redemption Motif from *Quasi-Faust* (see fig. 3.14).

The image displays three systems of a musical score for piano. The first system, starting at measure 498, is marked *Rapidement.* and *ff*. The second system, starting at measure 503, includes a *Ped.* marking and an asterisk. The third system, starting at measure 518, features the *"Redemption Theme"* marked *victorieusement.* and *très largement.* with a *Ped.* marking and an asterisk. The score is written in treble and bass clefs with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#).

Figure 3.14. *20 ans*, mm. 498-524.

CHAPTER 4

30 ANS: QUASI-FAUST

The second movement, subtitled *Quasi-Faust*, is the man at 30 years of age. It is in sonata form and is a retelling of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*. Frequently programmed as a solo piece, *Quasi-Faust* is one of the most remarkable displays of purely virtuosic piano compositions of the nineteenth century—even eclipsing the *Transcendental Études* of Liszt.¹⁰² As Raymond Lewenthal warns, fasten your seatbelts because this is quite a piece.¹⁰³ Lewenthal introduced this movement on the radio in 1963 as follows:

The second movement of this fascinating sonata is actually a tone poem within a tone poem as you can see by its title, *Quasi-Faust*. It is one of the most remarkable pieces in the entire piano literature....Just as there is something Straussian in the idea behind the sonata as a whole, so is there something Straussian in the *Schwung* of this magnificent movement, which could actually be considered the first tone poem as it was written before Liszt had created that much debated art form. It forms the apex of the sonata and is the longest and most difficult movement. It stands very well by itself and no one performing it without the other movements need fear being criticized for serving up a bleeding chunk.¹⁰⁴

Explicitly based on the two-part poem by Goethe, *Quasi-Faust* is one of the many mid-nineteenth century French works centered on the tragedy, notably: Charles Gounod's Opera *Faust* (premiered in 1859), Hector Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* (1846),

¹⁰² Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 84.

¹⁰³ “Raymond Lewenthal talk on Alkan, part 17,” YouTube, March 07, 2010, accessed March 15, 2018, <https://youtu.be/3qG2bCRhHjs>.

¹⁰⁴ Lewenthal, *The Piano Music*, XVIII.

Michel Carré's play *Faust et Marguerite* (1850), and Louise Bertin's opera *Fausto* (1831). Additionally, Robert Schumann was composing his *Szenen aus Goethes Faust* (1854) around that time. The timely public interest in the Faust literature in France almost certainly stems from the fact that Goethe's play was first translated from German into French in 1823, and then again by Gérard de Nerval in 1827.

The story centers on Heinrich Faust, a learned scholar, who is bored and depressed that his accomplishments have not brought him happiness and satisfaction in life. After a failed attempt at suicide, Faust prays to the devil for magical powers and supernatural worldly knowledge and Mephistopheles suddenly appears to him. Faust makes a deal with the devil, and as a result, Mephistopheles agrees to serve Faust for a set number of years, magically allowing Faust to indulge himself in worldly knowledge and pleasure until he experiences a single moment of pure bliss powerful enough to make him want to suspend that moment in time forever. At the end of the agreed upon term, Faust would surrender his soul to the devil to be forever tormented.

With Mephistopheles's help, Faust first chases happiness in the form of an emotional connection with Gretchen, though this love affair ends tragically with her death. He then attempts to find contentment with short-term accomplishments, pleasures, and knowledge. This period brings him everything he thought he wanted: he obtains an important position at the Imperial Court, falls in love with Helen of Troy, wins many military victories, and is greatly respected by his fellow countrymen. Despite all of these successes, nothing gives Faust lasting peace or contentment. When he dies, Faust is miraculously saved from eternal torment and admitted into heaven because of his continual pursuit of goodness.

There are many similarities between this movement and Liszt's *Sonata in B Minor*. Brigitte François-Sappey and Ronald Smith both compare its content to Liszt's sonata while William Eddie says the likeness to the Alkan is mainly rhetorical.¹⁰⁵ Though exploring this topic at length is beyond the scope of this paper, it is interesting that both sonatas deal with the subject of Faust versus the devil: Alkan entitles a movement after it and includes other markings in the score as well, while Liszt's sonata is alleged to be a musical portrait of the Faust legend, with "Faust," "Gretchen," and "Mephistopheles" themes symbolizing the main characters,¹⁰⁶ though Liszt did not explicitly mention this connection. Other theories hold that it is autobiographical; that it is about the divine and the diabolical; that it is an allegory set in the Garden of Eden, dealing with the Fall of Man, and contains "God," "Lucifer," "Serpent," "Adam," and "Eve" themes; that it has no programmatic allusions; and that it is a piece of *absolute music* with no programmatic meaning.¹⁰⁷

Regardless of Liszt's inspiration, there are some coincidental similarities. These resemblances suggest that while there is no evidence that Alkan performed the *Grande Sonate*, Liszt was almost certainly aware of it and may have even possessed a copy

¹⁰⁵ François-Sappey, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 106-112; Smith, *The Music*, 67-76; and Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 84.

¹⁰⁶ Bertrand Ott, "An Interpretation of Liszt's Sonata in B Minor," *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 10 (December): 30-38.

¹⁰⁷ F. D. Leone, "Overview and Analysis of the Liszt Piano Sonata in B Minor, S. 178," *Musica Kaleidoskopea*, March 03, 2018, accessed March 07, 2017, <https://fdleone.com/2015/07/09/overview-and-analysis-of-the-liszt-piano-sonata-in-b-minor-s-178/>.

during the six years that passed between the publications of *Grande Sonate* in 1848 and Liszt's *Sonata in B Minor* in 1854.

At the center of this whirlwind of a piece is a recurring species of *leitmotiv* that Lewenthal calls the Faust Motif.¹⁰⁸ This Faust Motif is a shortened version of the Redemption Motif which begins in m. 235.¹⁰⁹ Alkan treats this Faust Motif similarly to how Liszt and Wagner later treated motifs. While a full analysis is beyond the scope of the current project, it is important for a pianist to understand the significance of this motif and how it is transformed through the movement. Alkan introduces the Faust Motif in mm. 1 and 2 as D-sharp, F-sharp, E-sharp, and D-sharp (see fig. 4.1).

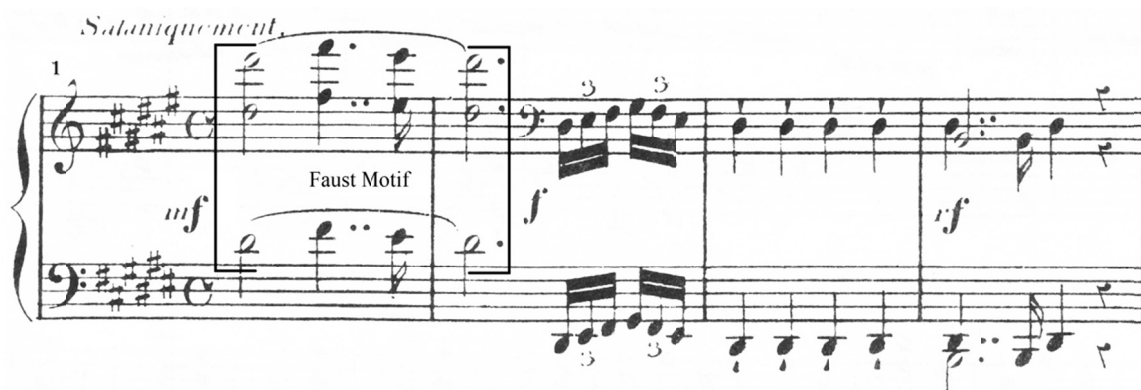


Figure 4.1. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 1-4.

Note the double-dotted notes in the 1st and 4th measures—the initial Faust Motif is most effective when it is played with conviction and an exacting rhythm. At the tempo and dynamic required of the piece, it is easy to allow the passing E-sharp to lose vitality when played against the neighboring notes of longer duration. To prevent this, an accent

¹⁰⁸ Lewenthal, *The piano music, XVIII*.

¹⁰⁹ “Raymond Lewenthal talk on Alkan, part 17,” YouTube, March 07, 2010, accessed March 15, 2018, <https://youtu.be/3qG2bCRhHjs>.

should be placed on the 16th-note E-sharp so that all notes within the Faust Motif are of equal dynamic. It is clear that there is a duality involved with this opening theme, much like the duality present in the Liszt sonata. In fact, the similarities between the two sonatas start here with the duality of the unison octaves (Faust Motif) that are answered by the low register repeated notes in the subsequent phrase. The similarities continue further as Liszt also includes the low, menacing repeated notes as part of his answering phrase (see fig. 4.2).



Figure 4.2. Liszt, *Piano Sonata in B Minor*, S. 187, mm. 10-17.

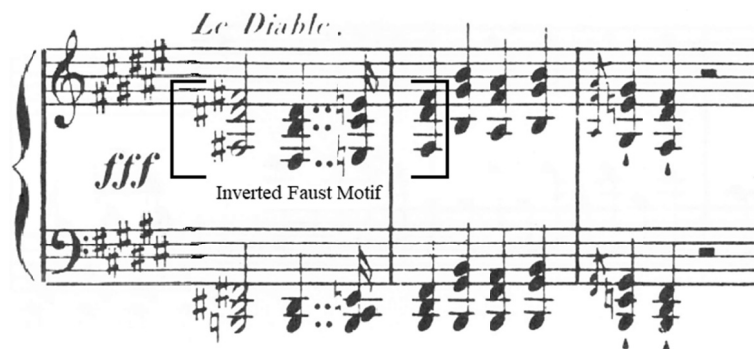


Figure 4.3. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 38-40.

Alkan transforms the Faust Motif in mm. 38-40 (see fig. 4.3) by inverting it and conveniently labeling it “Le Diable”—the Devil. He repeats this motive in mm. 90-93, where a tremolo bassline accompanies a fresh harmonization and is labeled *sourdement* (see fig. 4.4). The left-hand tremolos accompany the Faust Motif of mm. 15-16 and 19-20. In mm. 131-132, Alkan begins the development with a recitation of the Faust Motif in C major (a distant key from all other keys in the *Grande Sonate*), this time with thirds in the left hand. Three measures later, the same orchestration occurs a major third higher, this time harmonized with a diminished quality. There are many more recitations of the Faust Motif throughout the movement.

The image displays a musical score for two systems, measures 90 and 92. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The time signature is 3/4. The right-hand part (treble clef) features a melodic line with dotted rhythms and rests, labeled 'sourdement.' and 'p'. The left-hand part (bass clef) consists of a continuous tremolo pattern of eighth notes, with some notes marked with a '6' indicating a sixth finger. The score is presented in two systems, with measure 90 on the top system and measure 92 on the bottom system.

Figure 4.4. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 90-93.



Figure 4.5. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 131-132.

Figure 4.6 introduces a spectacularly virtuosic passage representing the lightning that heralds the devil’s imminent materialization in m. 38.¹¹⁰ *Quasi-Faust* is the only movement of *Grande Sonate* that Lewenthal ever performed, though he was a champion of Alkan’s music. Lewenthal’s book, *The Piano Music of Alkan*, discusses practical solutions to many technical problems associated with performing selections of Alkan’s music. Lewenthal mentions the passage beginning in m. 28 and suggests that the “nine notes to the beat at *circa* M.M. 126 may be a bit much, but lightning waits for no man.”¹¹¹ He then suggests doubling the first 2 notes of beat 2 in the right hand, playing the next 4 notes with the left hand, and the rest with the right hand. While this is tempting, the impact of the whole passage is diminished if the number of notes is reduced, not to mention that this approach leaves an open spot in the arpeggio after the left hand plays its notes. It is much better to play them as written, with the left hand

¹¹⁰ Lewenthal, *The Piano Music*, XIX.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* Note from the author: There are no metronome markings in Alkan’s *Grande Sonate*; however, the descriptive tempo indications are quite clear. *20 ans*, for example, is marked to be played *très vite* and *décidément*, until the flurry of octaves in the *coda* is marked *rapidement*, meaning it should be played faster than before.

assisting on the descent (though with different notes than Lewenthal suggests). The left-hand indications within the treble clef by the author are shown in figure 4.6.

The image displays a musical score for four measures (28-31) of a piece titled "Quasi-Faust". The score is written for piano, with a treble clef and a bass clef. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo/mood is marked "à l'8^{ve}". The dynamics are marked "ff" (fortissimo) and "en augm:" (crescendo). The left hand (LH) is indicated by a bracket and the letters "LH" above the treble clef staff. The right hand (RH) is indicated by a bracket and the letters "RH" above the bass clef staff. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and ornaments. The left hand part is heavily annotated with numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) and arrows, indicating fingerings and slurs. The right hand part features a complex rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes and rests. The score is divided into four systems, each corresponding to a measure number (28, 29, 30, 31). The first system (measure 28) starts with a "Ped." (pedal) marking. The second system (measure 29) also starts with a "Ped." marking. The third system (measure 30) starts with a "Ped." marking and includes the instruction "en augm:". The fourth system (measure 31) starts with a "Ped." marking. There are asterisks (*) in the right hand part of measures 29, 30, and 31, likely indicating specific performance instructions or ornaments.

Figure 4.6. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 28-31.

The second part of the fanfare introducing the devil is 4 measures of alternating thirds and triads beginning in m. 32 (see fig. 4.7). Simply using fingers 2 and 4 with high wrists (with the addition of a 5 in the left hand in mm. 34-35) with both hands is sufficient for the desired effect. This fingering is largely in contrast to Lewenthal's advocating for a closed fist or doubling fingers on each note.¹¹²

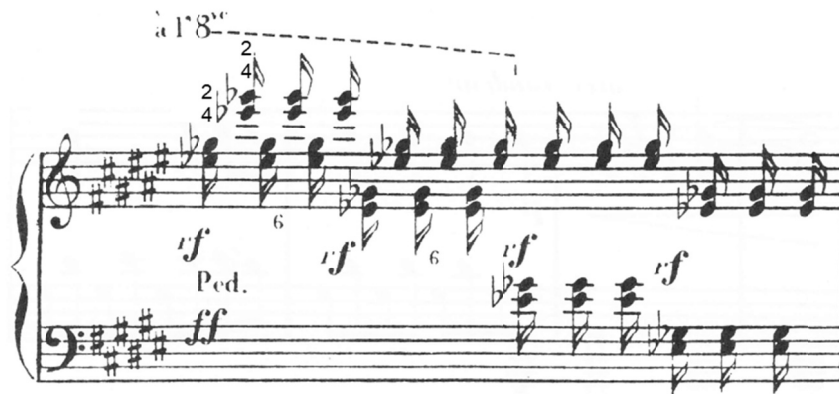


Figure 4.7. *Quasi-Faust*, m. 32.

When the devil is introduced in m. 38, be sure it is loud, broad, and rhythmically inflexible. As recommended in m. 1, accenting the 16th-notes as well as the grace notes will help them stay balanced within this *forte* passage. The chordal trills and turns in mm. 44 and 46, as part of the devil's introduction, should be played with great pomp and precisely in time. Care should be taken that the notes of the *trill* and turn—E-sharp, F-sharp, and D-sharp—are brought out in m. 44, and similarly in m. 46 (see fig. 4.8).

¹¹² Ibid.

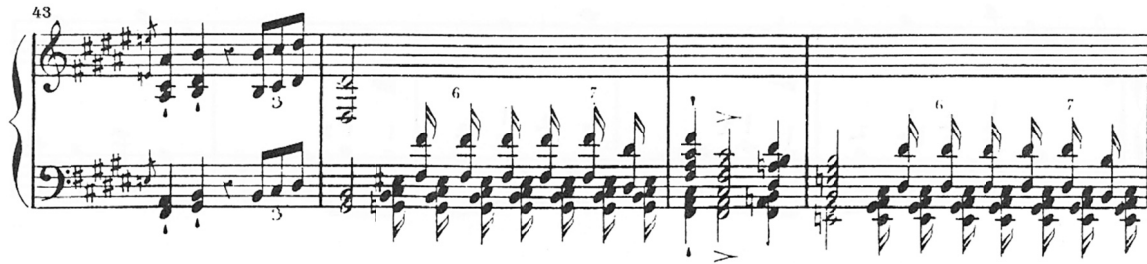


Figure 4.8. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 43-47.

Theme 2 begins in m. 57 and contrasts spectacularly with the preceding material. It is peculiar that this second theme is in the subdominant. This lyrical melody represents Marguerite (Gretchen), and is one of the few places of relative physical respite for the performer, though one should be careful to maintain the musical intention. When compared to Liszt's *Sonata in B Minor*, mm. 600-603, one sees "Marguerite's Theme" ("Gretchen's Theme"), beginning in m. 56, as yet another coincidental similarity (see fig. 4.9 and fig. 4.10).



Figure 4.9. Liszt, *Piano Sonata in B Minor*, S. 187, mm. 600-603.

Marked *avec candeur*, plan the phrasing and pace accordingly so that the required sense of innocence and tenderness is tempered by a sense of urgency. In mm. 55-56, the low rumbling of the trill can easily overpower the resolving triads above it, so the left hand must be played as a relative *pianissimo*, subtly bringing out the 16th-note *Nachschlag*

leading into m. 57. Because Marguerite's Theme is introduced immediately following this low resolution, these two notes are effective if played as 8th-notes, rather than the notated 16th-notes. One might also consider lifting the pedal on beat 4 of m. 56 in order to allow these low notes to be heard clearly (see fig. 4.10).



Figure 4.10. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 53-58.

The development, beginning in m. 131, is the most technically difficult section of the entire sonata, and includes musical effects also found in Liszt's music: full ostinato chords and wide octave leaps in both hands, chordal trills, chromatically alternating octaves for both hands, and even a device similar to the chromatic octaves, but also including thirds, in m. 187. According to Lewenthal, "this is the first appearance in piano literature of this wonderful effect," and notes that it is strange that Liszt did not use it (the closest he came to it were the alternating chromatic chords of the sixth in the second version of his *Paganini Étude No. 2 in E-flat*, S.140).¹¹³

These measures should both have a sweeping feel to the listener, while maintaining the 4-beat meter. If one gets through these alternating octaves with time to spare before the correct placement of beat 1 of mm. 186 and 188, all is well, since that leaves time to locate the first chords of those measures. In other words, it is completely

¹¹³ Lewenthal, *The Piano Music*, XIX.

valid to play m. 185 with a slight *accelerando* and as its own entity, without considering it to phrase over into mm. 186. The same is true of mm. 187-188. Suggested fingering for m. 187 is marked in figure 4.11.

Figure 4.11. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 185-188.

Other difficulties in the development section involve *ostinato* chords and large leaps for both hands, beginning in m. 138 (see fig. 4.12). To preserve stamina through the passage, place a *subito mf* on beat 2 of m. 138, followed by a *crescendo* leading to *fff* on beat 1 of m. 140. This treatment works well for all similar locations. Be sure to clearly articulate the sextuplet on beat 4 of the bass of m. 139 and in all similar locations. The large leaps in both hands of m. 142 and other similar measures are potentially disastrous at tempo, since missing the octaves or reducing tempo can destroy the confidence of one's audience and disrupt the musical line. Lewenthal recommends keeping each beat within the same octave as each of the initial octaves, thereby eliminating the risk of the

leaps.¹¹⁴ While this may be a viable solution for some, it changes the sound too much for the author’s taste—when the risk is high, so are the rewards. It is best to isolate the leaps as written while practicing with varying rhythms (see fig. 4.12).



Figure 4.12. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 138-143.

In order to promote sustained interest from the audience, as well as ensuring the sustained energy level of the pianist, it is recommended that beat 2 of m. 138 be considerable softer than beat 1, followed by a *crescendo* from there through beat 1 of m. 140 and all similar places—the effect being that the “wedge” of F minor chords beginning with beat 2 is rising out of the sonority generated by the preceding phrase ending with beat 1 of m. 138.

The recapitulation, beginning at m. 190, brings back the Faust Motif in the original key of D-sharp minor, though the accompanying material presents yet more

¹¹⁴ Lewenthal, *The Piano Music*, XIX.

technical issues with which to contend, specifically, the leaping octaves in m. 191 and all similar locations (see fig 4.13). Alkan has left all of the leaping octaves in the bass clef so that the pianist can easily see the shape of the line. A well-planned redistribution of some of the octave notes is a necessity. Lewenthal suggests, perhaps with an air of humor, to practice them as written and then, after this honest attempt fails, the pianist should redistribute some of the octaves between the hands.¹¹⁵

Figure 4.13. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 191-196.

Beyond redistribution, it is clear that the pianist will benefit from these leaping octaves in various dotted rhythms in order to perfect the passage. Harmonically, V^7 in m. 199 is yet another example of how Alkan moves through keys by chromatic sideslips, bringing the Faust Motif of m. 200 to the rare key of A-sharp major. All fingerings and hand redistributions in figures 4.13 and 4.14 are additional and recommended.

¹¹⁵ Lewenthal, *The Piano Music*, XIX.



Figure 4.14. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 197-199.

At the end of the recapitulation, there are four chords spanning five and a half octaves each, and marked to be arpeggiated (see fig. 4.15). The highest note of each of these chords forms the retrograde of the Redemption Theme.

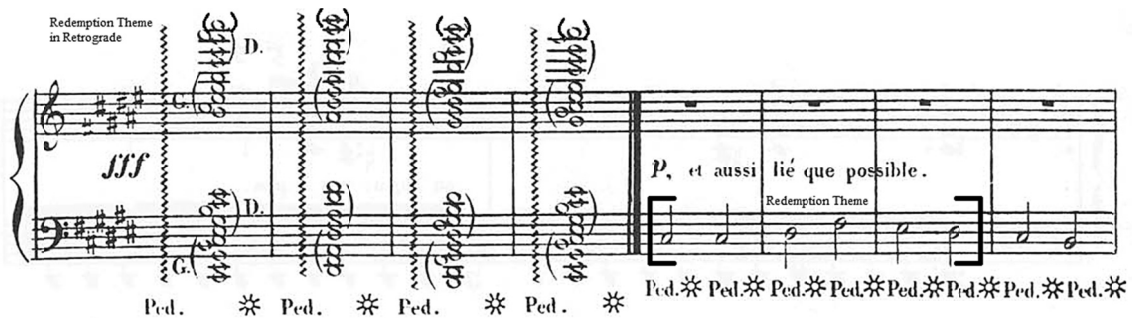


Figure 4.15. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 227-234.

Lewenthal suggests handling these “skyscraper chords” by playing an octave in each hand for the lower octaves, playing the arpeggio between beats 2 and 3, and playing a full blocked chord in the right hand in the upper octave.¹¹⁶ The author’s approach is shown in figure 4.16. Instead of a full chord at the top, place full blocked chords on the

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

downbeat. Arrange the notes of these blocked chords so that the top note of each forms the Redemption Motif in retrograde, while the left and right hand alternate octaves (stems down for left hand, stems up for right hand). Because there are either 16 or 20 notes to be played between beats 2 and 3, it is advisable to begin the arpeggio before beat 1 is finished. Once the final note of m. 230 is played, keep the pedal down and allow the colossal sound to decay naturally for several seconds. The effect here is one of smoke settling, and from out of the smoke the Redemption Motif transforms into the fugato subject, which is an extended version of the Faust Motif.

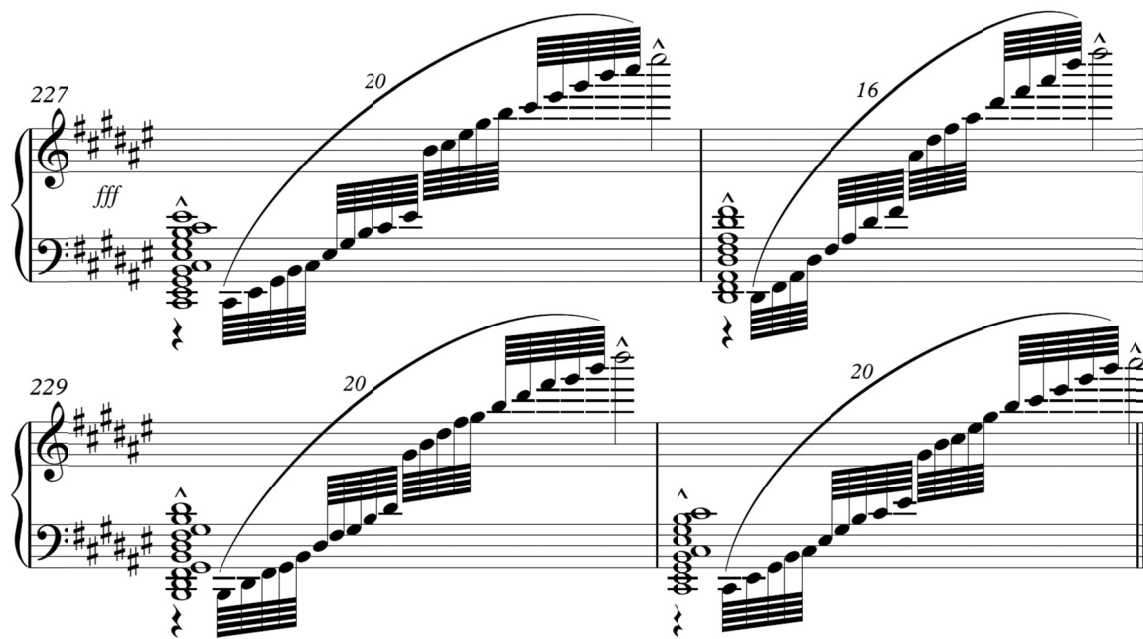


Figure 4.16. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 227-230. (Hillmann)

There is some disagreement about the exact number of voices introduced in the fugato that begins in m. 231 (see fig. 4.15). Nearly everyone familiar with this piece will say there are eight, though Albrecht writes that “It is a seven-voiced fugue exposition with six different countersubjects, realized in most rigid consequence. Eventually an 8th

voice wanders around, without any contrapuntal involvement.”¹¹⁷ Smith writes that there is a “combination of six parts in invertible counterpoint, plus two extra voices and three doublings—eleven parts in all,”¹¹⁸ and Lewenthal mentions that “Alkan gets seven different voices going simultaneously, the last of which is doubled in octaves, plus an eighth extra voice—nine parts in all.”¹¹⁹

Regardless of whether there are six, seven, eight, nine, or eleven parts, it is safe to say that this fugato broke the record for the number of simultaneous contrapuntal parts for a solo keyboard instrument.¹²⁰ Since *Grande Sonata*, several fugues with even more voices have been composed, yet none of them were written for the piano: Darius Milhaud’s *Dixtuor à Cordes* in the *Little (Chamber) Symphony* No. 4 for ten strings (1921), Benjamin Britten’s *Prelude and Fugue for 18-part string orchestra* Op. 29 (1943), and Witold Lutoslawski’s *Prelude and Fugue for 13 Strings* (1972) are a few examples. The fugato subject is surprisingly similar in shape to J.S. Bach’s *Fugue in E Major* subject from the *Well-Tempered Clavier, Book II*, suggesting this might be the source of this subject, though it is impossible to confirm this. Alkan has written this

¹¹⁷ Hartwig Albrecht, “Alkan’s Grande Sonate ‘Les Quatre Âges’ (Albrecht, Hartwig),” Alkan’s Grande Sonate ‘Les Quatre Âges’ (Albrecht, Hartwig) - IMSLP/Petrucci Music Library: Free Public Domain Sheet Music, July 8, 2011, accessed January 8, 2018, [http://imslp.org/wiki/Alkan's_Grande_Sonate_Le_Quatre_Ages_\(Albrecht,_Hartwig\),_IX](http://imslp.org/wiki/Alkan's_Grande_Sonate_Le_Quatre_Ages_(Albrecht,_Hartwig),_IX).

¹¹⁸ Smith, *The Music*, 75.

¹¹⁹ Lewenthal, *The Piano Music*, XX.

¹²⁰ Up until *Grande Sonate*, the record for the most-voiced fugue belonged to the *Ricercar* in the *Musikalisches Opfer* by Johann Sebastian Bach, with six voices.

fugato in Mixolydian mode, necessitating the entrance of the second theme in m. 235 in the subdominant instead of the usual dominant.¹²¹

A cursory glance through this fugato (see fig. 4.17) will leave most pianists perplexed, even after all the technical fireworks that precede it. The problem is two-fold: the key scheme and the notes. When one considers that this is the strangest and most complex passage in all nineteenth-century piano music,¹²² ten fingers and two hands hardly seem adequate for the task at hand. Realizing this dilemma, Alkan renotated mm. 247-258 of the fugato directly above the original notation in order to make it more accessible. The original is theoretical in nature, and is simply not playable as notated.

¹²¹ The Mixolydian mode is similar to our major mode, but includes a flat seventh scale degree (the leading tone). Since there is no major seventh, there is no dominant in major mode to use, as is standard practice for fugues. He instead uses the subdominant for the second, fourth, and sixth entries.

¹²² Smith, *The Music*, 75.

FACILITÉ.

256

Figure 4.17. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 256-257.

Even with this welcomed assistance from the composer, reading through this passage is a lengthy process—the number of accidentals is overwhelming because the key scheme travels briefly through several pitch centers while remaining in F-sharp Mixolydian. The voice-leading is so complex that there is a rare phenomenon in m. 258: a triple F-sharp (see fig. 4.18).

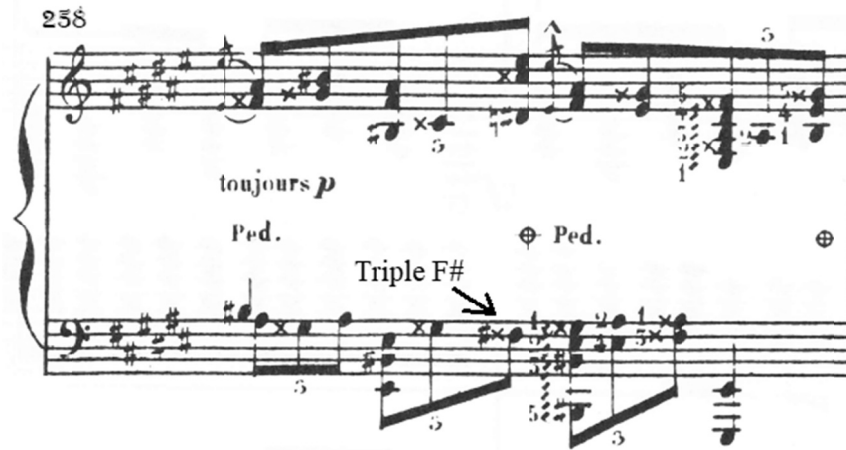


Figure 4.18. *Quasi-Faust*, m. 258.

Alkan does not hesitate to use triple accidentals in other works, though examples of this apart from Alkan are few and far between. For example, there are multiple triple F-sharps in the *Concerto pour Piano Solo* Op. 39, No. 10, 3rd movement (there is even one that functions as leading note to G-triple-sharp minor).¹²³ Lewenthal contends that the fugato is playable, though when describing the passage, he says, “Everyone, according to the length and number of fingers he possesses, had best decide for himself what is most humane.”¹²⁴

He also mentions that one should practice each voice of each four-measure section separately, and then all combinations of two voices, three voices, etc., and also reminds us that Alkan’s division between the hands is not the only possibility.¹²⁵ It is also impossible to determine where some of the notes belong, rhythmically, and even with

¹²³ Albrecht, “Alkan’s Grande Sonate ‘Les Quatre Âges,’ VIII.

¹²⁴ Lewenthal, *The Piano Music*, XX.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

Alkan's renotation, the arpeggios that begin on m. 248 still leave much room for rhythmic interpretation.

This tedious passage has been newly renotated in this document and is included in its entirety as Appendix B. This renotation makes it much easier to read by introducing each new entrance of the subject with an accompanying key signature that most effectively removes accidentals, and redistributes the voices between hands in locations where doing so is advantageous. It is intended to be studied alongside Alkan's original notation in order to understand the relationship between the different voices.

This is not a series of transpositions based solely on Alkan's renotation, but it is a new interpretation of the fugato. The pitches remain the same, but some notes have been redistributed among hands, the placement of the many arpeggiated notes has been made explicitly clear, and a fingering has been supplied. Alkan indicated fingerings intermittently throughout this fugato in his renotation; when warranted, the Hillmann renotation remains true to those fingerings, with exception of those places where the redistribution of the notes required an entirely different approach. As an example of the visual differences between the Alkan renotation and the Hillmann renotation, compare mm. 256-257 in figure 4.17 to those seen in figure 4.19.

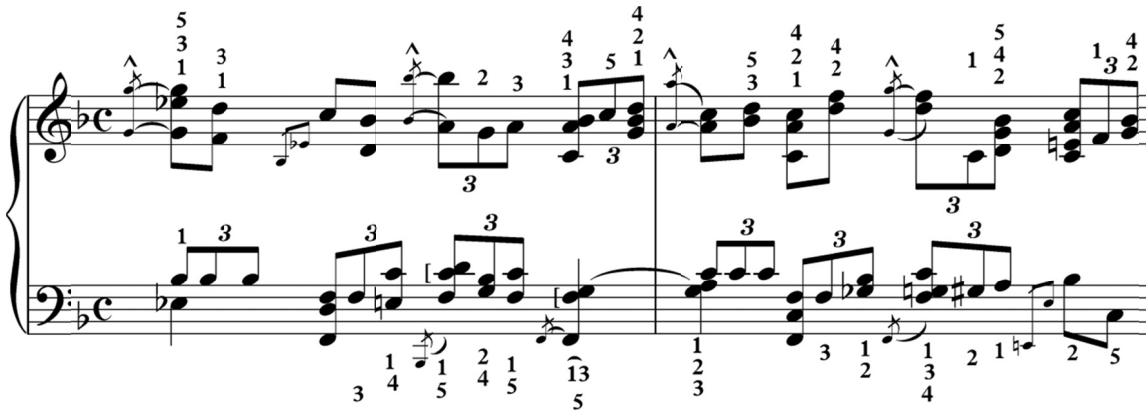


Figure 4.19. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 256-257. (Hillmann)

Do not pedal differently than prescribed by Alkan in this fugato. Doing so obscures the voice leading that Alkan intended at any given moment. The pedaling should occur only on beats one and three of each measure as Alkan indicates in mm. 231-234 (see fig 4.15). In the Hillmann notation, the pedaling is marked for the first 4 measures, followed by *sim*, indicating the pedaling should continue in the same manner for the entire fugato. The dream-like nature of this section builds each new voice on top of the others, and by the sixth or seventh voice the harmonies will start to challenge the limits of tonality, but keep the pedal down and change only where marked by the composer. The effect Alkan wants is one of impressionistic haziness—like hushed voices emanating from a nearby foggy hillside. It is also tempting to increase the dynamic level as the number of voices increases, but this fugato must maintain the *piano* dynamic throughout.



Figure 4.20. *Quasi-Faust*, m. 250. (Hillmann)



Figure 4.21. *Quasi-Faust*, m. 250.

One final note regarding this renotation: There are 8th-note and 16th-note sextuplets in this renotation (see fig 4.20). All pairs of 16th notes beginning on the beat should be arpeggiated so that the higher voice leapt to is played as closely after the beat as possible, thereby maintaining the continuity of the scalar voice when present. In Alkan’s original, there are no marks on these notes, and in his renotation, there is an arpeggio line; however, it is not clear which voice should be played on the beat (see fig. 4.21). This extended renotation is in Appendix B.

When the fugato is completed, the heavens erupt as the many themes discussed earlier suddenly converge upon each other (see fig 4.22): the low bass pedal point labeled “Le Seigneur” (The Lord), the high chords playing the Redemption Motif, and the middle chords the fugato. Measures 259-274 are quite perilous—one must certainly practice each hand slowly and separately in order to find comfort in the chords. The goal is to show no hesitancy from chord to chord while at the same time maintaining complete freedom of movement.

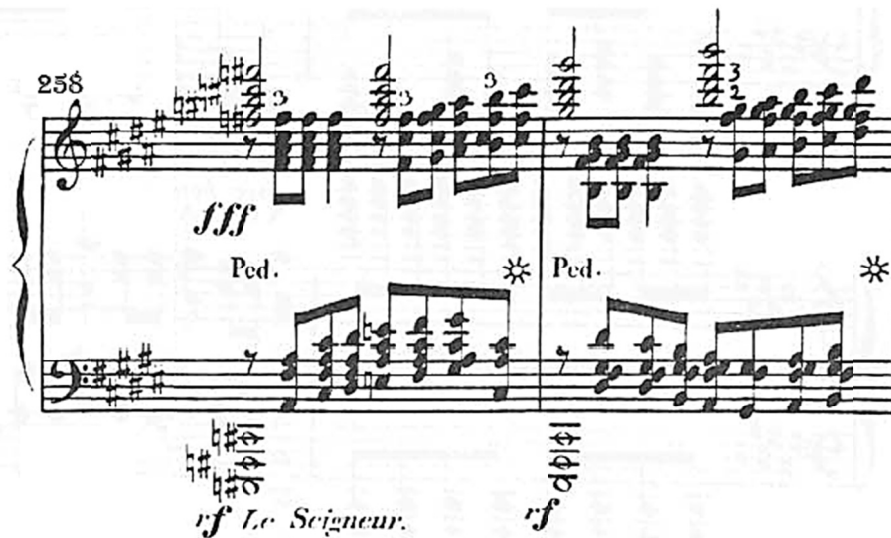


Figure 4.22. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 258-259.

When the second theme returns in the recapitulation, more complexities emerge as the Redemption Motif is heard simultaneously with Marguerite's Theme, beginning in m. 275 (see fig. 4.23).

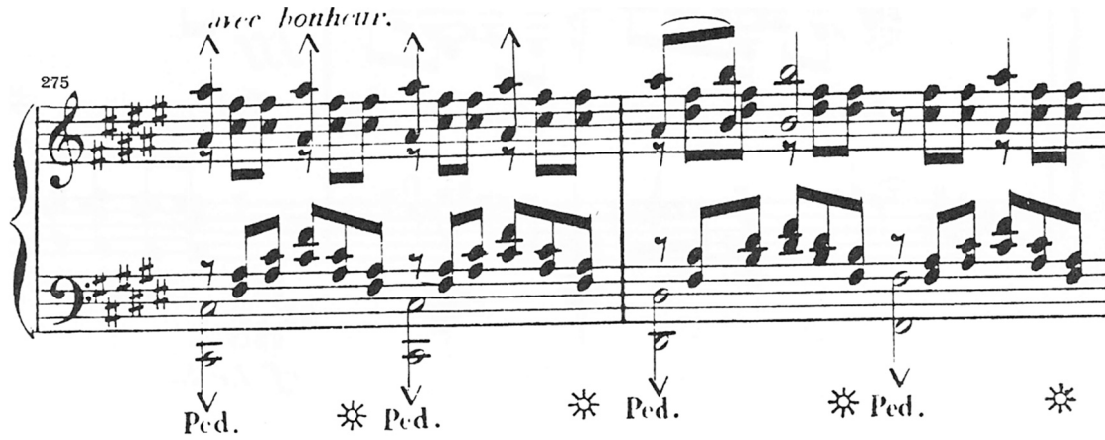


Figure 4.23. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 275-276.

The *coda* begins in m. 310 with the Redemption Motif and Marguerite's Theme both united again as the Redemption Motif is now a six-beat long bass octave ostinato (see fig. 4.24).

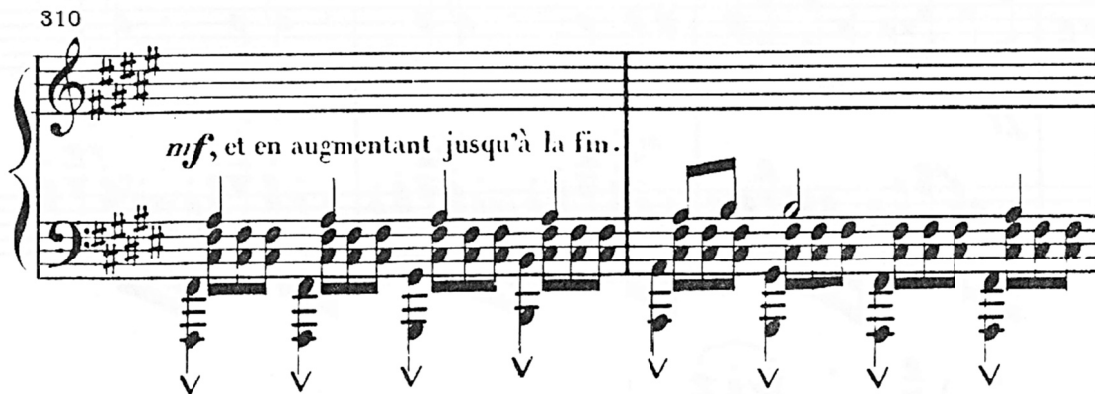


Figure 4.24. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 310-311.

From here to the end of the movement, the effect of a wall of sound becomes nearly deafening as higher registers in the right hand increase the range while a steady *crescendo* increases the dynamic level until the final chords. Interestingly, near the middle and apex of this *coda*, the devil's theme makes one final statement, only to be drowned out by the deafening freight train of chords that comprise the final eight measures. The pedal should remain down as indicated. For the final two chords, Lewenthal makes a last suggestion: double the grace note octaves of the left hand in the upper octave, *à la* Scriabin (see fig. 4.25).¹²⁶ After the final chords are played, allow some time to pass while the audience processes the magnitude of what they just heard.

Figure 4.25. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 325-332.

¹²⁶ Lewenthal, *The Piano Music*, XX. While not mentioned, Lewenthal must be referring to the opening measures of *Sonata No. 3 in F-sharp Minor*, Op. 23.

CHAPTER 5

40 ANS

If Alkan, at thirty-four years of age, intended for this *Grande Sonate* to be a reflection of his own life and what he dreamed would come in his later years, the musical content of *40 ans* is a pleasant image of a happy family life at the age of forty. It is a welcome domestic respite, given the apocalyptic saga of *Quasi-Faust* and the mental and physical stamina required for its performance. Like *20 ans*, *40 ans* is in ternary form.

UN HEUREUX MÉNAGE.

1 *très lié.*
LENTEMENT. *avec tendresse et quiétude.*
p

5 *Ped.* *

Figure 5.1. *40 ans*, mm. 1-8.

It is a gentle intermezzo that captures the mood of peaceful familial contentment from beginning to end through melodies that generously weave themselves throughout the movement and bring to mind the symphonic tone poem by Richard Strauss, *Symphonia Domestica*, Op. 53 (composed 40 years after *Grande Sonate*). François-

Sappey has also commented on the similarity between *40 ans* and Liszt's *Benediction de dieu dans la Solitude*.¹²⁷

While such a movement is not entirely unexpected following *Quasi-Faust* with its bravura and hair-raising complexities, *40 ans* brings its own set of enigmas and oddities. One of the first challenges one must face is that of phrasing. Alkan starts this movement with an uncommon and irregular seven-measure phrase structure (see fig. 5.1). This opening idea is followed by a contrasting phrase of equal length in mm. 8-14 that seems to serve as a reassuring two-voice canon. One might imagine these first phrases as the beginning of a conversation between a child and his or her parents.



Figure 5.2. *40 ans*, mm. 5-12.

From there, the movement cycles through regular and irregular phrase structures throughout. Chapter 3 discussed Alkan's dislike for *rubato*; however, as we saw in the middle section of *20 ans*, *Quasi-Faust*, and the majority of other works, there are places

¹²⁷ François-Sappey, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 114-115.

where time must be taken, where phrases must be shaped, and where melodies must be projected with beauty and sensitivity. Because of the style of the bass accompaniment in mm. 1-7 (as well as in all similar places), the right hand will tend to follow the left hand's timing—but this process should be avoided. It is strongly recommended to first play these melodies isolated from the accompaniment in order to plan the shape of the phrase, as this method will enable the melody to assume a more dominant role.

As the movement progresses toward the middle section, the harmonic language intensifies through the use of repeated Neapolitan sixths¹²⁸ beginning in m. 41 which Ronald Smith describes as an “Alkan tang.”¹²⁹



Figure 5.3. *40 ans*, mm. 41-44.

The middle section, *Les enfans*, is an *étude*-like passage of 48 measures, and is a representation of children playing in a well-behaved and quiet manner. We can assume there are three children because there are three voices: two in the treble and one in the bass, though they do move around. Though this movement represents a charming look

¹²⁸ The preceding measures include a series of tonicizations. By mm. 40, the piece has settled into A Minor. The N⁶, or II⁶, is the Bb⁶ of A Minor.

¹²⁹ Smith. *Alkan Vol. II*, 77.

into a happy household, not everyone agrees about its worth. H.H. Bellamann had this to say of this movement:

The [*un*] *heureux ménage* is a less interesting movement, much too diffuse, but containing one charming episode labeled *Les Enfants*. Here is an extended passage of sixths absolutely as charming as Henselt's *Si oiseau j'étais*. It deserves to be lifted from its present oblivion and utilized as a separate piece. There is a harmonic tang that saves it from being all treacle – a tang that anticipates a little the quality of Godowsky's transcription of the Henselt *étude* just mentioned.¹³⁰

Bellamann and Smith are both referring to the Neapolitan sixths in figure 5.3 when they mention this “tang.” *Les Enfants* contrasts with the outer sections without altering the mood. The challenges here are multiple. The first challenge will be obvious to any pianist looking at a fresh, unmarked score: fingering. Aside from one *fermata* in mm. 87, appropriate fingering is crucial because there are no breaks; whereas one could take some time in shaping the phrases of the first section, here one cannot halt the motion.

Additionally, the music should be contained and playful—neither finger *legato* nor *staccato*, but rather a hand and finger motion that allows for consistent playing of all notes. A small and gentle wrist motion will facilitate this consistency. The damper pedal can be used with quick and shallow strokes, taking care not to blur harmonies. The chosen fingering must allow for smooth transitions between notes as well as relaxed playing.

¹³⁰ H.H. Bellamann, “The Piano Works of C. V. Alkan,” *Musical Quarterly* 10 (1924): 255-56.

The image shows a musical score for the piece '40 ans' by Alkan, specifically measures 71 through 76. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The music is highly technical, featuring rapid sixteenth-note passages with numerous accidentals. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1 through 5 placed above or below the notes. Measure numbers 71, 74, and 76 are clearly marked at the beginning of their respective systems. The score is presented in a standard musical notation format with a grand staff layout.

Figure 5.4. *40 ans*, mm. 71-76.

The author's fingering shown in figure 5.4 is proven to be useful and should be consulted as one's own fingerings are prepared. Due to the intricate and extended nature of this Alkan riddle, the author's fingering for mm. 56-100 is shown in its entirety in Appendix C.

Another challenge of the middle section is that the children seem to be traveling in multiple directions at once. This becomes an issue when our fingers cannot reach where the notes are going, as notated in the score. Measures 79, 81, 83, 88, 89, and 90 all share this characteristic. Those pianists whose hands can comfortably reach a tenth might not require this special consideration, but three of those measures, as written, require a tenth to be played from an F-sharp to an A an octave above. Fortunately, the solution to this is quite simple, though it does require some creative thinking: play the wandering notes with the left hand. Redistributing the lower treble voice into the left hand during the measures listed above creates parallel thirds in the left hand, thereby decreasing the

difficulty of the entire section. Figure 5.5 shows what such a redistribution looks like, with the lower treble voice crossed out and added to the bass, and supplied with the author's fingering. Because these measures are all located within *Les enfants*, those measures that benefit from redistribution have also been marked in Appendix C.

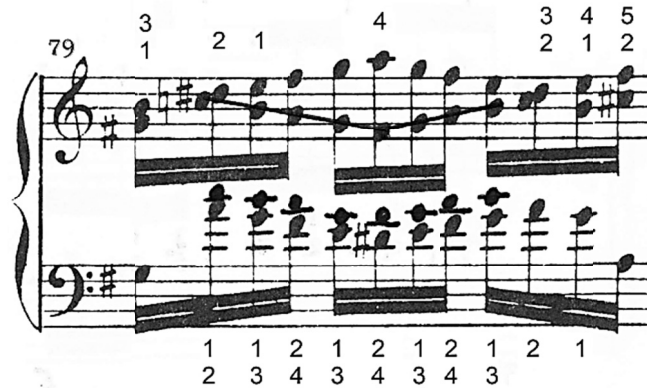


Figure 5.5. *40 ans*, m. 79.

When the children have finished playing, material from the first section returns. However, the solo melody from the beginning now becomes an imitating melodic duet that meanders through multiple key centers and melodic content. Immediately following this imitative section, several events occur. Alkan has marked the three measures beginning in m. 154 as *10 heures* (10 hours). In those measures are ten accented Bs which represent a clock striking 10:00 p.m. It would seem, then, that this melodic duet represents the parents conversing following the *Les enfants* section. Following the clock chime is a section titled *La prière* (the prayer) and the final 4 measures, which likely represent the parents retiring into sleep.



Figure 5.6. *40 ans*, mm. 116-123.

When it comes time to kneel down and pray, the clock strikes 10:00 p.m. and then proceeds to die away right before the prayer. Figure 5.7 shows the event with the clock. There are two options in approaching these measures, one with both arms crossed, and one without them crossed. Either way, one hand plays the top and middle voices, and the other plays the B major triad. Personally, it is most efficient to navigate both the span between arms and complexity of rhythms sans crossed arms, and so it is this option that has been marked in figure 5.7. We know the prayer begins in m. 159, as marked in Alkan's score. From this point to the end, the piece is organized into four-bar phrases. Figure 5.8 shows the commencement of *La prière*.

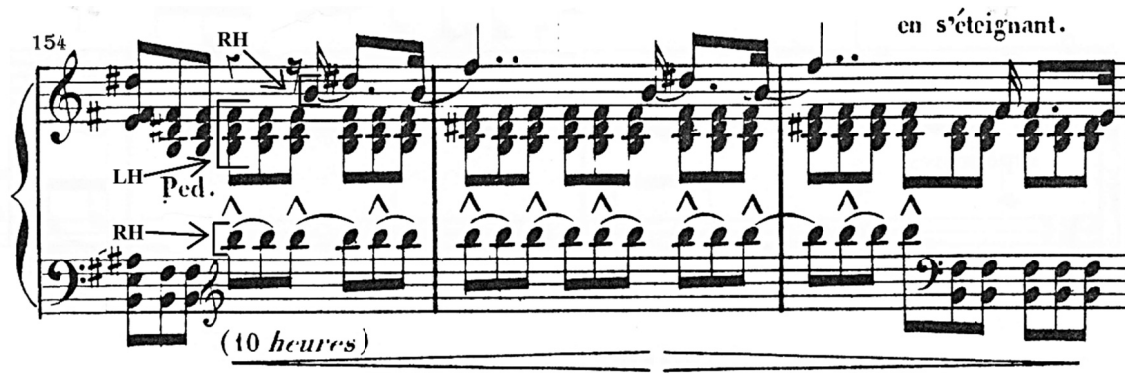


Figure 5.7. *40 ans*, mm. 154-156.



Figure 5.8. *40 ans*, mm. 159-162.

The final page of this movement is a repeat of the prayer, but with variation. The treble voices from *Les enfants* are added, along with two chords that are substituted for their original harmony. Those substituted chords are beat 1 of m. 171 (originally G major, now E minor), and beat 2 of m. 181 (originally A minor, now F major). These chords have been circled in figure 5.9. All fingering in figure 5.9 is additional and recommended. After prayers, the beginning melody starts again for the final time, but is interrupted by what could represent a yawn or ruffling of sheets in the penultimate measure, as well as a final cadence that closes the curtains on this story.

165 *pp* un peu plus de son. Chord Substitution *pp* daux et lié.

173 toujours de même.

177

181 Chord Substitution *f*, et soutenu. *ad lib.* très fort. Ped.

187 un peu plus lentement. *pp*, et tendrement. gentiment. en ral: et en dim.

Figure 5.9. 40 ans, mm. 165-192.

CHAPTER 6

50 ANS: PROMÉTHÉE ENCHAÎNÉ

The final movement, *50 ans*, is the second of two movements within *Grande Sonate*'s mythical story. It is the sad and lonely story of the Greek titan Prometheus who, chained to a rock, must endure eternal torture in isolation imposed by Zeus for gifting fire to mankind. On the title page, Alkan has quoted lines 750-754, 1051, and 1091 of the play by Aeschylus in which Prometheus complains about his suffering and agony.

PROMÉTHÉE ENCHAÎNÉ.

Non, tu ne pourrais point endurer ma souffrance!
Si du moins le destin m'accordoit de mourir!
Mourir... de mes tourments serait la délivrance!
Aucun terme à mes maux ne se vied plus offrir
Que Jupiter avant n'ait perdu sa puissance.
«Vers 750 à 754.»
Je vivrai quoiqu'il fasse.....
«Vers 1051.»
Vois s'ils sont mérités les tourments que j'endure!
«Vers 1091 et dernier.»

Figure 6.1. *50 ans*, inscription.

This is the inscription translated into English:

No, you could not bear my torment!
If at least fate had allowed me to die!
Dying...that would be the liberation from my torture!
No end will be my pain before Jupiter loses his power.
I will live whatever he is going to do.....
Consider whether I deserve what I suffer!¹³¹

¹³¹ Alan Beggerow, “Alkan—Grande Sonate ‘Les quatre âges’, Opus 33.”

The programmatic aspect of this movement is not quite as easy to recognize as in *Quasi-Faust*, and Albrecht even notes that “a link between the god Prometheus and a 50-year-old man can hardly be constructed.”¹³² It is also useful to note that Alkan was, in fact, only thirty-four when he composed this movement. However, when one considers that the average lifespan of Europeans in 1850 was 36.3 years,¹³³ we can begin to understand that Alkan was undoubtedly facing the prospect of his own mortality at that time. We know from a historical perspective that Alkan craved recognition of his artistic talents. This movement could be a rather pessimistic projection of his own life at the age of fifty.¹³⁴ Indeed, Alkan had already set out on a lonely path that would ultimately lead him to social and artistic isolation.¹³⁵

In the *Alkan Society Bulletin*, John Goslin points out a connection between the second theme of *50 ans* and a theme Beethoven has used multiple times.¹³⁶ The first eleven notes of Alkan’s second theme are shown in figure 6.2.

¹³² Albrecht, “Alkan’s Grande Sonate ‘Les Quatre Âges,’ XVII.

¹³³ Max Roser, “Life Expectancy,” Our World in Data, accessed February 08, 2018, <https://ourworldindata.org/life-expectancy>.

¹³⁴ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 86.

¹³⁵ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 78.

¹³⁶ John Goslin, “An Alkan Puzzle,” *Alkan Society Bulletin* 93 (September 2016): accessed November 08, 2017, <http://www.alkansociety.org/Publications/Society-Bulletins/Bulletin93.pdf>. Goslin also notes that when Beethoven died in 1827 he left behind sketches of his unfinished 10th Symphony in E-flat major. These sketches were discovered by Dr. Barry Cooper over 150 years later in 1984-5, who then reconstructed the first movement of the symphony in 1988. Goslin observes that Alkan’s theme is identical to a theme from sketches of Beethoven’s 10th symphony. While it is possible that Alkan independently composed the exact same theme as Beethoven sketched out for his symphony, it is far more likely that this was a deliberate quote from Beethoven’s



Figure 6.2. *50 ans*, mm. 21-22. (Hillmann)

This is similar to a theme used in Beethoven’s *String Quartet in G Major Op. 18, No. 2*:



Figure 6.3. Beethoven, *String Quartet in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2*, 1st mvmt., mm. 36-38. (Hillmann)

Additionally, the first five notes of the second theme appear in Beethoven’s *Pathétique Sonata*, Op. 13, 2nd movement:



Figure 6.4. Beethoven, *Sonata No. 8 In C Minor “Pathétique”, Op. 13*, 2nd mvmt., mm. 1-2. (Hillmann)

other works. Goslin hypothesizes that Alkan’s text on the title page of *50 ans* likely refers not to Goethe, or to Alkan himself, but to his great master Ludwig van Beethoven, and his deafness.

The movement is in *Rondo* form¹³⁷ and begins with an eight measure introduction in two halves. Marked *extrêmement lent*—as long as the tempo allows for a beautiful melodic line and phrase structure—it is nearly impossible to play this movement too slowly. A successful performance requires an uncompromising reverence and well-balanced chordal structure. Measure one begins with a tremolo followed by a first inversion triad. Given the title, one could imagine this as Prometheus rattling his chains in the distance, turning, and rattling again in m. 2, which is sequentially repeated a step lower (see fig. 6.5).

It is imperative that all rhythms be followed throughout this slow movement, including the rests. In learning the piece, it is advantageous to be as deliberate and pedantic as possible. The written-out tremolos cause the rhythmic values of the other notes and rests to visually appear differently than they truly are.

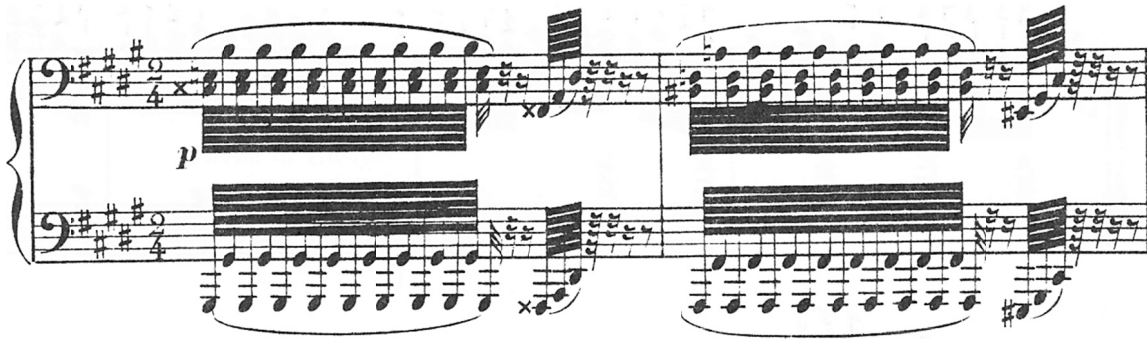


Figure 6.5. *50 ans*, mm. 1-2.

The damper pedal should be used for these gestures, but care must be taken to observe the integrity of the rests. Also, make sure both hands are playing the tremolos

¹³⁷ Smith, *Alkan Vol. I*, 78.

precisely and together—there are other similar effects in this movement that do not require an exacting number of notes, but this is not one of those places. Other passages to check for rhythmic accuracy include the double-dotted notes in the second half of the introduction (see fig. 6.6), as well as where they occur throughout the movement. Also, in figure 6.6 beginning with m. 5, there is a bass melody in a downward sequence until the theme 1 begins in m. 9. It is important that nothing in these measures is rushed. The feeling should be one of dispirited agony as this low register melody leads to the next section.

3

6

10

que possible.

f

p

p et aussi soutenu

Figure 6.6. *50 ans*, mm. 3-9.



Figure 6.7. *50 ans*, mm. 20-22.

At this juncture, it would be useful to mark the sections as follows: Beginning in m. 9, it is theme 1 in the original key (see fig. 6.6). Measure 21 begins theme 2 in the relative major key of B (see fig. 6.7). Theme 1 returns in the chromatically descending key of G major in m. 32, and descends further when it returns again in F-sharp minor in m. 58 (see fig. 6.8 and fig. 6.9).

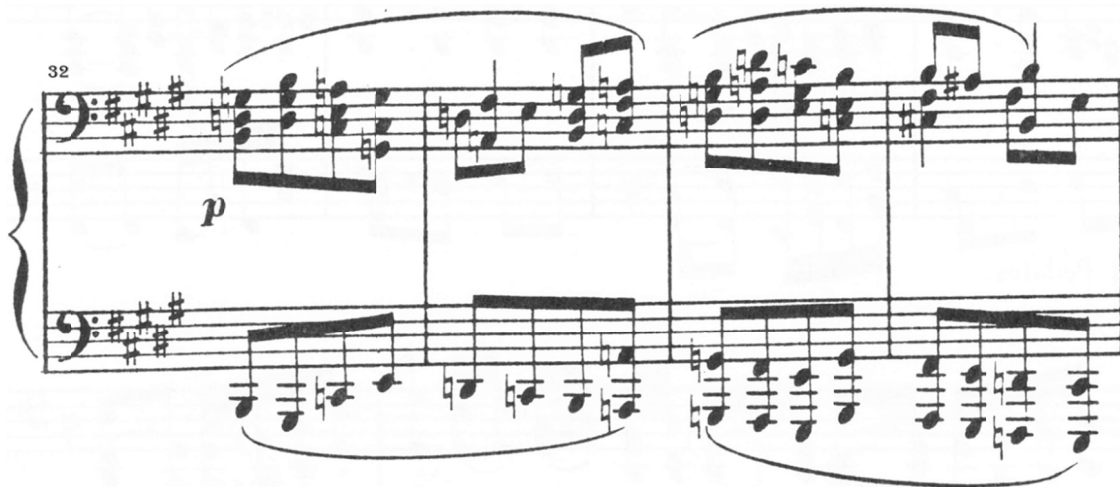


Figure 6.8. *50 ans*, mm. 32-35.



Figure 6.9. *50 ans*, mm. 58-65.

Theme 2 returns in the original key of G-sharp minor. Theme 1 returns a third time in m. 56, this time in F-sharp minor. Finally, the *coda* begins in m. 65. Theme 1 is an augmented version of the Faust theme from *30 ans*, this time marked *piano, et aussi soutenu que possible* (soft and as supported as possible). For a comparison, please see figures 6.10 and 6.11.



Figure 6.10. *50 ans*, m. 9.



Figure 6.11. *Quasi-Faust*, mm. 1-2.

Because of this instruction, balancing the chords is of utmost importance. Voicing the melody is the first priority, followed by the bass, and then the middle notes. It is advisable to use the damper pedal on every 8th note during this section, and possibly more often when the note values are smaller in mm. 17, 19, and similar places.

The origin of the explosive double-dotted melody beginning in m. 16 and ending when theme 2 begins is based on the dotted rhythm and melodic direction of the *Marcia Funebre* from Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony Op. 55 (see fig. 6.12 and fig. 6.13).¹³⁸



Figure 6.12. *50 ans*, mm. 16-19.

¹³⁸ Eddie, *Charles Valentin Alkan*, 87.



Figure 6.13. Beethoven, *Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major Op. 55* (“*Eroica*”), mm. 1-2. (Hillmann)

The *fortissimo* dynamics are to be played *subito* during this theme, as well as the *piano* dynamic that immediately follows with the funeral march melody. Theme 2 therefore plays an important part, with the *Faust* theme and the funeral march interpolating throughout this movement, Alkan is bringing this 50-year-old’s life to a close with the mourning lament of a hero with nothing left to anticipate. The nature of theme 2 as a hymn-like chorale is such that there must be an ease of playing all four voices, even though it is painfully slow. To help facilitate this passage, it is useful to redistribute some of the voices between hands in two measures (see fig. 6.14 and fig. 6.15). The two figures below illustrate a possible voice redistribution solution for m. 26, as well as the analogous passage in m. 52. In both cases, the original distribution is shown above the author’s redistributed measure for purposes of comparison.

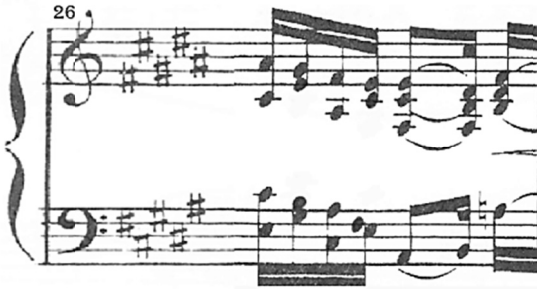
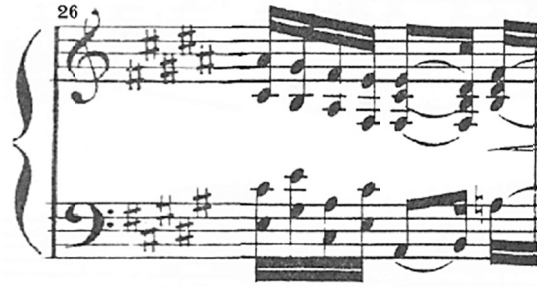


Figure 6.14. *50 ans*, m. 26.

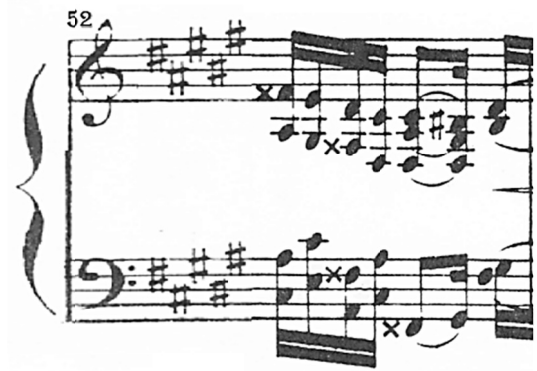


Figure 6.15. *50 ans*, m. 52.

Alkan has marked theme 2 to be played with “les 2 Pédales,” which means that both the *una corda* and the damper pedal are to be used simultaneously. These funeral march sections should therefore be the softest sections of the movement. Alkan has marked that both pedals are to be lifted at the end of m. 28. This works for the *una corda* pedal; however, the damper pedal should continue in the fashion described above. Alkan was meticulous about marking his music, but this is one situation where studying other works by a composer, relying on one’s own experience, and listening intently are invaluable assets.

The three measures from 29-31 include a rumbling trill in the bass, the notes of which change every beat. Ideally, an informed performance would include all the notes called for in the left hand. However, the number of notes in the trill is not the most important element. The downward sequential melody should be the focus here. Therefore, it is recommended that the right hand be responsible for maintaining the momentum, while the left hand is responsible for creating the ominous background as the music transitions back into theme 1 in m. 32.

The *coda*, beginning in m. 65, is an ascending four-octave unison G natural minor scale that slowly ascends three and a half octaves while unison octaves within the hands trumpet the funeral march rhythm. The incessant rhythmic and dynamic tensions build until the final two high and full chords are reached. Despite this triumphant turn of events, the piece in fact ends with a whisper—three simple and quiet G-sharp minor chords.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Admired by even the great Franz Liszt, Charles-Valentin Alkan was one of the finest pianists the world has ever seen. As a young child, Alkan showed the world his genius by winning *sofège* contests at the *Paris Conservatoire* and also touring the developed world by performing as a child prodigy. This brought him into contact with some of the most celebrated musicians and societal figures. Alkan spent much of his adult life cycling between the public spotlight and reclusiveness. His aspirations of becoming head of the piano department at the *Conservatoire* were crushed by internal politics, despite the perception that Alkan was the strongest candidate to apply.

Grande Sonate is a unique four-movement work that follows the life stages of a man through four decades, with titles declaiming the age depicted: *20 ans* for the 1st movement, *30 ans (Quasi-Faust)* for the 2nd movement, *40 ans* for the 3rd movement, and *50 ans* for the 4th movement. Alkan prefaces *Grande Sonate* by describing the programmatic form of the work: *20 ans* is a fast *scherzo*; *30 ans (Quasi-Faust)* is a musical depiction of the *Faust* myth which also contains a seven-voice fugato; *40 ans (un heureux ménage)* represents a happy household at 40 years of age; and *50 ans (Prometheus enchaîné)* depicts the myth of the bound Prometheus who was punished by Zeus for gifting fire to humanity.

In preparing to perform a work of music, a pianist is trained to accomplish certain tasks. The first is to select the music. In selecting the music, consideration is given not only to the beauty of the work, the audience, and the pianist's interest in the work, but

also whether that pianist is technically capable and has the time to devote to the technical intricacies required. For the professional pianist, time is a precious commodity. *Grande Sonate* is a work that demands such an abundance of time to prepare that it is frequently rejected by the concert pianist when selecting repertoire. Subsequently, this sonata has unfortunately remained in relative obscurity for its entire existence.

Grande Sonate requires a high level of technical ability, and preparing Alkan's music takes time even for those possessing this level. It is fortunate that Hamelin and others such as Ronald Smith and Raymond Lewenthal persisted—despite the sweat¹³⁹—in championing Alkan's music. Without their impressive resolve, it is possible that this sonata and other works might have gone into complete obscurity with no chance of receiving an audience.

Just as the work was validated by Alkan's own peers and critics, this paper continues to be a proponent of the *Grande Sonate* by discussing those aspects that are most prohibitive for the pianist and brings them to a practical level while maintaining the integrity of what Alkan wrote. This means understanding the inspiration and purpose of the piece and its individual movements, identifying the difficulties posed by the piece, and proposing solutions that empower the pianist to play the piece as envisioned by the composer. Some of the specific solutions discussed in the document include analyzing the metrical foundations of the piece, renotating sections originally written in a confusing way in order to save practice time, redistributing voices in order to simplify complicated

¹³⁹ Marc-André Hamelin, *It's all about the music*, DVD.

material, and supplying fingering for places where specific, practical fingerings promote effective artistry.

The musical worth of *Grande Sonate* and Alkan's other works warrants more discussion and performance. This paper provides insights into the sonata's most puzzling technical and musical challenges. It also recommences a narrative allowing the skills and talents of future musicians, with their own unique technical approach and imaginations, to focus on the music and not on solving the riddle of the notes. As a result, one can spend more time transforming those notes into captivating music.

REFERENCES

Books

- Beaumont, Antony. *Busoni the composer*. London: Faber, 1985.
- Eddie, William Alexander. *Charles Valentin Alkan: His Life and Music*. Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007.
- Ellis, Katharine. *Music Criticism in Nineteenth Century France: La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris, 1834-1880*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- François-Sappey, Brigitte. *Charles Valentin Alkan*. Paris: Fayard, 1991.
- Gauldin, Robert. *Harmonic Practice in Tonal Music*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997.
- Gertler, Wolfgang, and Robert Schumann. *Robert Schumann in seinen frühen Klavierwerken*. Wolfenbüttel-Bln.: Kallmeyer, 1931.
- Gordon, Stewart. *A History of Keyboard Literature: Music for the Piano and its Forerunners*. Belmont, CA: G. Schirmer, 1996.
- Lewenthal, Raymond, ed. *The Piano Music of Alkan*. New York: G. Schirmer, 1964.
- Marmontel, Antoine François. *Les pianistes célèbres*. Paris: Heugel and Sons, 1878.
- Messing, Scott. *Neoclassicism in music: from the genesis of the concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky polemic*. Rochester N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1996.
- Murdoch, William. *Chopin—his life*. London, Macmillan Publishers, 1934.
- Ogdon, John. "The Romantic Tradition." In *Keyboard Music*, edited by Denis Matthews. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972: 254.
- Schonberg, Harold C. *The great pianists*. New York: Simon et Schuster, 2006.
- Schumann, Robert. *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und musiken von Robert Schumann*. Edited by M. Kreisig. Leipzig, 1914.
- Smith, Ronald. *Alkan. Volume 1: The Enigma*. London: Kahn and Averill, 1976.

_____. *Alkan. Volume 2: The Music*. London: Kahn and Averill, London, 1987.

Soullier, Charles. *Nouveau dictionnaire de musique illustré*. Paris: Bazault, 1855.

Thayer, Alexander Wheelock. *Ludwig van Beethoven's Leben*. Berlin: F. Schneider, 1866-79.

Timbrell, Charles. *French pianism: an historical perspective*. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1999.

Communications

Manildi, Donald. "Re: Raymond Lewenthal Collection." E-mail message to Joshua Hillmann, March 29, 2017.

Journals

Bellamann, H. H., and Charles Valentin Morhange Alkan. "The Piano Works of C. V. Alkan." *The Musical Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1924): 251-62. Accessed Marth 5, 2018. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/738272>.

Bertha, Alexander de., "Ch. V Alkan aîné: étude psycho-musicale." *Bulletin Française de la Société Internationale de Musique* 5 (1909): 135-47.

Brown, David. "The B Minor Sonata Revisited: Deciphering Liszt." *The Musical Times* 144, no. 1882 (2003): 6.

Lewenthal, Raymond. "In Search of Alkan." *Music & Musicians* 15, no 8 (1967): 37.

_____. "The Berlioz of the Piano." *Musical America* 84 (1964).

Macdonald, Hugh. "The Death of Alkan." *Musical Times* 114 (1973): 25.

_____. "More on Alkan Death." *Musical Times* 129 (1988): 118-20.

Ott, Bertrand. "An Interpretation of Liszt's Sonata in B minor." *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 10 (December 1981): 30-38.

Ringer, Alexander L. "A French Symphonist At The Time Of Beethoven: Etienne Nicolas Méhul." *The Musical Quarterly* XXXVII, no. 4 (1951).

Searle, Humphrey. "A plea for Alkan." *Music and Letters* 18 (1937): 276-79.

White, J. "The Alkan Centenary: A Time for Recognition." *Music Review* 49 (1988): 161-168.

Goslin, John. "An Alkan Puzzle." *Alkan Society Bulletin* 93 (September 2016): Accessed November 08, 2017. <http://www.alkansociety.org/Publications/Society-Bulletins/Bulletin93.pdf>.

Jordan, Ruth. "Alkan's Friendship with Chopin and George Sand." *Alkan Society Bulletin* 38 (May 1989): Accessed November 10, 2017. <http://alkansociety.org/Publications/Society-Bulletins/bulletin38.pdf>.

Laura Snyderman. "Charles-Valentin Alkan: an obscure leading composer of the 19th Century." *Alkan Society Bulletin* 93 (September 2016): Accessed November 11, 2017. <http://alkansociety.org/Publications/Society-Bulletins/Bulletin93.pdf>.

Rittermann, Janet. "The Alkan Dav." *Alkan Society Bulletin* 49 (October 1994): Accessed July 08, 2017. <http://www.alkansociety.org/Publications/Society-Bulletins/bulletin49.pdf>.

Manuscripts

Alkan, Charles-Valentin. *Grande Sonata, 'Les Quatre Âges', Op. 33*. Paris: Brandus, 1848. [http://imslp.org/wiki/Grande_Sonate_%27Les_Quatre_Ages%27,_Op.33_\(Alkan,_Charles-Valentin\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Grande_Sonate_%27Les_Quatre_Ages%27,_Op.33_(Alkan,_Charles-Valentin)).

Liszt, Franz. *Piano Sonata in B minor, S.178*. Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1854. [http://imslp.org/wiki/Piano_Sonata_in_B_minor,_S.178_\(Liszt,_Franz\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Piano_Sonata_in_B_minor,_S.178_(Liszt,_Franz)).

Online Resources

"List of works by Charles-Valentin Alkan." List of works by Charles-Valentin Alkan – IMSLP/Petrucci Music Library: Free Public Domain Sheet Music. Accessed February 18, 2018. http://imslp.org/wiki/List_of_works_by_Charles-Valentin_Alkan.

"Boundless World History." Lumen. Accessed March 19, 2018. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-worldhistory/chapter/france-after-1815/>.

"Raymond Lewenthal Collection." University of Maryland Libraries. Accessed March 17, 2018. <https://www.lib.umd.edu/ipam/collections/raymond-lewenthal>.

"Raymond Lewenthal talk on Alkan, part 17." YouTube. March 11, 2010. Accessed March 15, 2018. <https://youtu.be/3qG2bCRhHjs>.

“Symphony No.10 (Beethoven, Ludwig van).” Symphony No.10 (Beethoven, Ludwig van) - IMSLP/Petrucci Music Library: Free Public Domain Sheet Music. Accessed March 10, 2018. [http://imslp.org/wiki/Symphony_No.10_\(Beethoven,_Ludwig_van\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Symphony_No.10_(Beethoven,_Ludwig_van)).

Albrecht, Hartwig. *Charles-Valentin Alkan Grande Sonate pour piano op 33 “Les Quatre Âges”*: Annotations and Revision Report. Germany: Werner Jaksch, 2011. Accessed January 8, 2018. [http://imslp.org/wiki/Alkan%27s_Grande_Sonate_%27Les_Quatre_%C3%82ges%27_\(Albrecht,_Hartwig\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Alkan%27s_Grande_Sonate_%27Les_Quatre_%C3%82ges%27_(Albrecht,_Hartwig)).

Beggerow, Alan. “Alkan—Grande Sonate ‘Les quatre âges’, Opus 33.” *Musical Musings: Thoughts and impressions on musicians, composers and their music* (web log), July 22, 2017. Accessed March 10, 2018. <https://muswrite.blogspot.com/2017/07/alkan-grande-sonate-les-quatre-ages.html>.

Hamilton, Kenneth. “Alkan, (Charles-)Valentin.” Oxford Music Online. Accessed November 08, 2017. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e176>.

Leone, F. D. “Overview and Analysis of the Liszt Piano Sonata in B Minor, S. 178.” *Musica Kaleidoskopea*. March 03, 2017. Accessed March 07, 2018. <https://fdleone.com/2015/07/09/overview-and-analysis-of-the-liszt-piano-sonata-in-b-minor-s-178/>.

Lewenthal, Raymond. “Raymond Lewenthal talk on Alkan, part 17.” YouTube. March 11, 2010. Accessed March 07, 2018. <https://youtu.be/3qG2bCRhHjs>.

Roser, Max. “Life Expectancy.” Our World in Data. Accessed February 08, 2018. <https://ourworldindata.org/life-expectancy>.

Videos

Hamelin Marc-André. *It's all about the music*. DVD. Directed by Robert Chesterman, performed by Marc-André Hamelin. England: Hyperion Records, 2006.

APPENDIX A

AUDIO RECORDING OF A PERFORMANCE OF
ALKAN'S *GRANDE SONATE* OP. 33, 'LES QUATRE ÂGES,' BY THE AUTHOR

Recorded live in recital at Katzin Concert Hall on December 2nd 2012, the audio recording and recital program are on file in the Arizona State University digital repository. Permanent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2286/R.I.15736>

APPENDIX B

QUASI-FAUST FUGATO RENOTATED BY THE AUTHOR

B et aussie lié que possible.

Ped.

235

RH

LH *sim*

239

RH

LH

243

2

245

Musical score for measures 245-246. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). Measure 245 features a treble clef with a dotted quarter note followed by eighth notes, and a bass clef with a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 246 continues with similar patterns. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes, and triplets are marked with a '3' below notes.

247

Musical score for measures 247-248. Measure 247 has a treble clef with eighth notes and a bass clef with eighth notes. Measure 248 continues with eighth notes. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes, and triplets are marked with a '3' below notes.

249

Musical score for measures 249-250. The key signature changes to two sharps (F#, C#). Measure 249 features a treble clef with eighth notes and a bass clef with eighth notes. Measure 250 continues with eighth notes. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes, and triplets are marked with a '3' below notes.

251

Musical score for measures 251-252. The key signature changes to two flats (Bb, Eb). Measure 251 features a treble clef with eighth notes and a bass clef with eighth notes. Measure 252 continues with eighth notes. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes, and triplets are marked with a '3' below notes.

253

5 1 1 1 5 2 1 6 1 2 2 1 3 5 1 2 2 1 1 3 2 5 2 1 5 2 1 3 3

3 3 6 6 3 3 5 2 1 1 1

255

4 5 5 5 2 3 3 1 5 3 1 3 1 5 2 3 4 5 2 4 3 1 4 5 2

3 3 3 1 3 1 3 1 3 1 3 3 4 3 3 4 5 4 5 5

257

5 4 4 1 4 1 4 2 5 4 5 4 2 3 3 2 1 5 2 4 5 4

1 2 3 3 1 2 1 3 2 1 2 5 1 2 3 2 3 2 1 3 2 1 3 4 3

APPENDIX C
FINGERING AND VOICE REDISTRIBUTION SOLUTION FOR
LES ENFANS BY THE AUTHOR

Les enfants.

4 5 4 5 4 5 4 3 4 5 4 5 4 5 3 5 4 5 3 2 4 5 3 5 3 5 4 5 4 3 4 5 4 5
 2 1 2 1 1 1 1 2 1 1 1 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

56 *très doux et très lié.*
en mesure.

4 2 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 5 2 5 2 3 1 2 5 2 3 2 1 2 4 2 1 2

4 5 3 5 3 5 3 5 3 5 3 5 5 3 5 3 5 5 3 5 3 5 5 3 5 3 5 3 5 3 5
 1 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1

59

5 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 5 2 3 5 4 5 3 5 4 5 3 2 5 4 5 4 5 4 3 4 5 4 5
 1 2 1

62 *toujours de même.*

3 2 2 2 3 3 2 5 3 2 2 2 5 4 5 4 5 4 3 4 5 4 5 1 3 2 1 1 1 1 2 1 1 1 2

5 4 5 4 3 4 5 4 5 3 5 4 5 4 5 3 2 4 5 4 5 4 5 3 2 1 1 2 1 1 1 1 1
 1

65

5 4 3 4 5 4 5 3 4 5 4 5 3 4 5 4 5 3 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 5 4 5 4
 2 5 4 2 1 2 1 1 1 2 3 4 3 1 2 1 2 1 1 1 2 1 1 1 2 1 2 1 1 1 1 1

68

3 2 4 2 4 2 3 1 2 3 4 3 1 1 2 1 2 1 1 1 2 3 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 5 4 5 4
 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1

71

5 3 4 5 5 3 2 5 5 3 4 5 5 3 2 5 5 3 4 5 5 5 3 4 5 3 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 2 3 4
 2 1 1 3 2 1 1 1 2 1 1 3 2 1 1 1 2 1 1 3 2 1 1 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 1 1

4 3 4 1 4 3 4 1 4 1 3 2 1 2 1 3 2 1 1

74

5 3 4 5 4 3 4 5 4 2 3 4 5 3 5 5 4 5 5 5 4 5 4 5 4 3 5 4 3
 2 1 2 1 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 2 1 2 2 2 3 2 2 2 2 1 2 1 1 2 1 1

2 1 1 4 2 1

77

5 4 5
2 1 2

3 2 1 4 3 4 5
2 1 2

1 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1
2 3 4 3 4 3 4 3

2 4

80

3 4 5 4 4 5 3 2 1 5 4 5 3 4 5 4
1 1 2 1 1 1 1 2 1 2 1 1 2 1 2 1

louis p

1 1 2 1 2 3 2 1 2 1 5 5
2 3 4 3 4 5 4 3 4

83

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 2 5 3 5 3 5 3
2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1

1 4 1

86 *mf* *p* Ped. ✱

en augm: un peu.

89 *très doux.*

92

95 *p, et Ped.*

98