

Peter de Jager

Jan Peter de Jager is a Pianist, Harpsichordist, and Composer based in Melbourne, and is becoming established as one of Australia's most exciting musicians. His repertoire is diverse, encompassing all periods of western classical music, which he often plays on period instruments, as well as musical theatre and cabaret. He is currently on faculty at the Australian National Academy of Music as an Associate Artist, and works regularly as a collaborative pianist. He also plays regularly with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, and Orchestra.

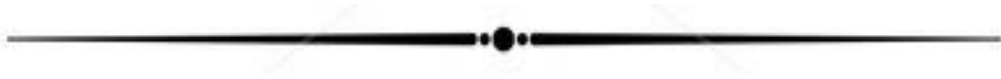
Performance highlights include the demanding solo piano part of Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie* with the Melbourne Youth Orchestra in 2011. In 2016 he performed all five major keyboard works of Iannis Xenakis at the fourth Bendigo International Festival of Exploratory Music. In 2013 he recorded a critically acclaimed album of French Oboe sonatas with Oboist Ben Opie, on the Master Performers Label. A solo album is forthcoming. He co-wrote and continues to perform Australia-wide in *Reception: The Musical* with Actor/Writer Bethany Simons, which was nominated for a Greenroom Award.

He has three times participated in the *Lucerne Festival Academy* under the baton and artistic direction of Pierre Boulez, and has also attended the *Bang on a Can Summer Institute* in North Adams, Massachusetts.

Peter's compositions are starting to gain attention, having received commissions and performances from Astra, the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra, Speak Percussion, Syzygy, and Arcadia Winds. His first album of chamber music is in the works, entitled *Crystals*.

Peter won the inaugural *Australian International Chopin Competition* in 2011, and was awarded fifth prize and best Australian competitor at the *Southern Highlands International Piano Competition* in 2013. In 2015 he was a finalist in the *Symphony Australia Young Performers Award*, and in 2016 he was awarded second prize in the *Australian National Piano Award*.

In 2014, Peter was awarded the Freedman Fellowship, an annual prize of Au\$15,000 with which he commissioned a 100-minute *Piano Sonata* by Chris Dench. He will perform this piece alongside three other pillars of the piano repertoire around Australia and Europe, and eventually record four mini-documentaries on the four works, including historical and analytical information.



Alkan Society Concert Series

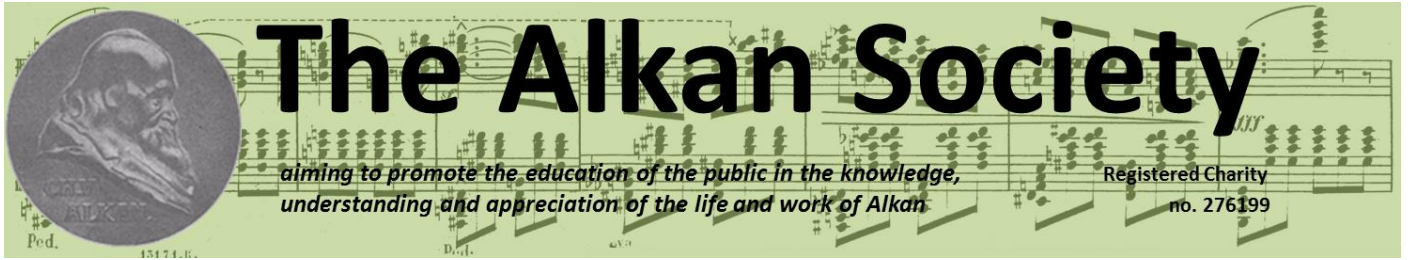
Next recital: 7:30pm on Friday 19th May, 2017

St Mary's Church, St Mary's Road, Ealing

Mark Viner & SoYeong Kim (piano duo & duet)

will perform

Gottschalk, Alkan & Liszt



Alkan Society Concert Series

St Mary's Church, Ealing, London
7:30pm on Friday 7th April 2017



Peter de Jager

Programme

Charles-Valentin Alkan Symphonie pour piano seul (op.39, nos 4-7),
from *Douze études dans tous les tons mineurs*

Chris Dench Piano Sonata: Part I (*First UK performance*)

Programme notes

Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813-1888)

Symphonie pour piano seul

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| I | Allegro moderato (C minor) | <i>op.39 no 4</i> |
| II | Andantino (Marche Funèbre) (F minor) <i>Marcia funebre sulla morte d'un Uomo da bene</i> | <i>op.39 no 5</i> |
| III | Tempo di minuetto (B ♭ minor) | <i>op.39 no 6</i> |
| IV | Presto (E ♭ minor) | <i>op.39 no 7</i> |



Alkan's career was a succession of peaks and troughs, and his essentially anti-social personality perhaps made the troughs linger. After a pause at the end of the 1830s, he made a storming comeback in the 1840s with acclaimed performances which led him to be ranked alongside his friends Liszt and Chopin, and with major publications including the *Grand Sonate*, and the 12 *Etudes* op. 35 in all the major keys. Then came two shattering blows; his defeat in 1848 for the piano professorship at the Conservatoire, and the death of Chopin in the following year. His public performances dwindled and then ceased; in a despairing letter of 1850 he wrote "I have lost the strength to be of any political or economic use". And yet this physical withdrawal led to an explosion of creative effort. In 1857 he broke a publishing silence of ten years with his masterly *Etudes* op. 39, in all the minor keys, including as numbers 4-7 the *Symphonie* we are to hear this evening.

Not for Alkan were the rhapsodies or structural innovations of Liszt and the so-called New German school. His op. 39, which also includes a *Concerto*, an *Ouverture* and a set of variations (*Le festin d'Esope*), shows his steadfast allegiance to classical musical forms. What extends the music of the *Symphonie* and the *Concerto* into worlds undreamt of even by Beethoven is Alkan's frequent determination to follow a musical idea remorselessly wherever it may lead. Such intensity of exploration makes these exhilarating pieces thrilling and convincing intellectual adventures, as well as being amongst the most formidable pyrotechnic displays of keyboard potential in the repertoire. These "études" are studies for the listener as well as for the performer.

Each of the op. 39 *Etudes* is in a key a perfect fourth above its predecessor. This makes the grouped études, the *Concerto* and *Symphonie*, precursors of the progressive tonality more typically associated with later composers such as Gustav Mahler. Ronald Smith notes that the *Symphonie's* movements are "closely integrated one with the other, but (...) never parade their badge of identity" – common factors including a falling semitone at the summits of themes, and recurring suggestions of drum beats. The funeral march of "a good man", with its evocation of hymns, tears and regrets, is counterbalanced by a moody first movement, a minuet of unparalleled brusqueness, and a violent finale described by Raymond Lewenthal as "a ride through hell".

Chris Dench (b1953)

Piano sonata: Part I

The **Piano Sonata** occupies a special place in my composerly output, in that it is the final realisation of a project I've contemplated since the 1960s. It took shape entirely in my studio in Ballarat, Australia, and the writing occupied me for all of 2015 and the beginning of 2016. Peter de Jager commissioned the work, and I was delighted to be able to provide a vehicle for his astonishing pianistic talents. It was originally written to share a program with the Alkan *Symphonie*, Szymanowski's *Third Piano Sonata*, and Barraqué's *Sonate pour piano*, and to a degree the Sonata's resulting character reflects its intended company; however, although the piece was first performed in an abbreviated form with these other works, it eventually outgrew this plan and has become a concert in itself.

My hope for the work was that it would be intelligible in multiple ways: as a piece of abstract modernism; as a piece of 'Science-Fiction music'; and as an enlarged traditional Sonata form derived from Schubert or Liszt (or Alkan, of course). Cast in a single arch, it lasts about 95 minutes, and consists of nine continuous, inter-related movements, of which Peter will be playing the first five today. These five form, loosely, a Part I of the piece, a gradual crescendo of warmth, from the opening **WHITEOUT** to the energetic **LÉVY FLIGHTS** —or, if you like, from the Prelude and Sonata-Rondo, to a closing 'gigue'-like finale.

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| WHITEOUT: a blizzard of unremembering | PRELUDE—30'' |
| I THREE WINDOWS: refuges in infinite winter ...interrupted by | SONATA-RONDO—12' |
| II HEAT SINK: all warmth is local | INTERMEZZO I—3' |
| III PHOTINO BIRDS: avian dark matter | SCHERZO I & TRIO—8' |
| IV GALLERY OF SPACES: in the musical multiverse | PASSACAGLIA—18' |
| V LÉVY FLIGHTS: random leaps in a musical configuration space | SCHERZO II—8' |

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Chris Dench



Chris was born in London in 1953. After periods living in Tuscany and Berlin he moved to Australia and became a citizen in 1992, he now lives in Ballarat. His music has been extensively performed, broadcast, and recorded, in Australia, North America, Europe and Asia—even in a tent in the Gobi desert. He has works on sixteen CDs at last count.