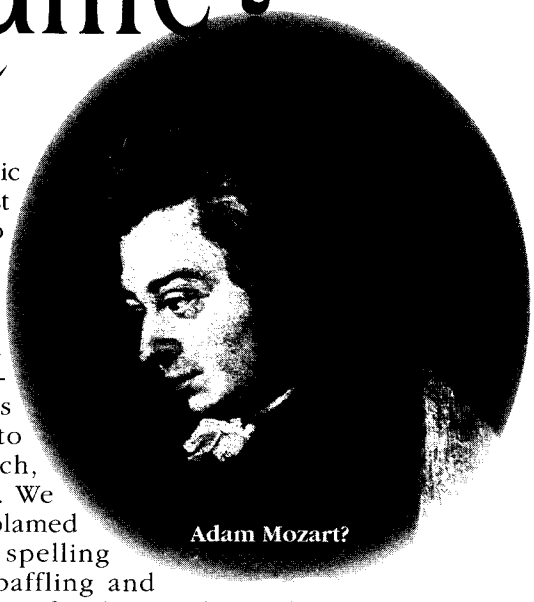
What's In A Name?

BY JOSEPH SMITH


Adam Mozart?

A reader recently questioned my spelling of Paderewski's first name (I used the internationalized "Ignace" instead of the Polish "Ignacy"). Since that time, I have been pondering the special problems that the names of so many composers seem to present.

Mozart's middle name is universally known as Amadeus. In fact, when he was born, his father used the German form of the name, Gottlieb, and the record of his baptism shows the Greek form, Theophilus. Mozart himself seems to have preferred Amadé or Amadè, also using Amadeo, Amadi, or even Amadeus—the last of these, a jokingly pretentious Latinization. (Those interested in the bizarre occurrence of the middle name as "Adam" in documents relating to Mozart's marriage should consult Maynard Solomon's superb biography.)

Ludwig van Beethoven always let people assume that the Dutch "van" was equivalent to the German "von"—an indication of aristocracy. However, in his bitter court battle to seize guardianship of his nephew, Beethoven was asked pointblank whether he could document his aristocratic origin. He was forced to admit that he had no proof, and that, in Dutch, "van" was not limited to the nobility. At that point, to his chagrin, the case was sent to a different court—one that dealt with commoners. This was not just humiliating, but a practical setback, since Beethoven's powerful aristocratic friends would have less influence in this court.

C.P.E. Bach, or K.P.E. Bach? Germans spell his first name both "Carl" and "Karl." But one can avoid the problem, because those who knew him called him not by his first name, but by his third: "Emmanuel."

Franz Schubert? *Which* Franz Schubert? Oh, you are speaking of Franz *Peter* Schubert! The other Franz Schubert (1808–1878) was a composer and violinist. His violin bagatelle "The Bee" was once a familiar virtuoso piece. This Schubert's father, when a copy of Franz Peter's *Erlkönig* was sent to him in error, won immortality by calling it trash and complaining that its composer was misusing the name "Schubert"! One must acknowledge, however, that to someone born in 1768, this song, revolutionary in the specificity and violence of the music, must have seemed strange indeed.

If you omit the accent aigu in the name Fauré, you are not simply misspelling the last name of Gabriel Urbain, but also confusing his name with that of Jean-Baptiste Faure. Faure was both a celebrated baritone and a composer of songs. His insistent "The Palms" is still remembered.

America has a history of at once resenting Europe's long traditions in music, and also knuckling under to them. One remarkably long-lasting symptom was our spelling of Russian names. The original names are represented in the Cyrillic alphabet, and must be transliterated to Roman letters. Within my memory, we still docilely accepted spellings that rendered the names phonetically into German or French, rather than English. We could hardly be blamed for finding the spelling "Tschaikowsky" baffling and plethoric (*four* letters for the initial sound?), and pronouncing the *w* like the *w* of "cow" rather than the v of "bovine." Common sense dictates that English speakers spell the name simply "Chaikovsky." Alas, however, we have been long corrupted by the German spelling, and when looking up his name, turn to T. It was on this basis that I was persuaded to use the spelling "Tchaikovsky" (a reasonable compromise between the phonetic and the traditional) in my anthology, *Romancing the Piano*. Scriabin/Skriabin remains a problem, since both are phonetic in English.

The Romanian composer George Enescu divided his time between his homeland and France, where he was known as Georges Enesco. The change of vowel is usually dismissed with some vague reference to the original pronunciation sounding unrefined in French. I had to turn to a French friend for an explanation. Apparently, the final syllable reminds French speakers of the similar-sounding vulgarism for "backside."

Richard Taruskin has written on the interesting problem with the name Musorgky. We sometimes see it spelled with the *g*, sometimes without, sometimes embellished with an extra s, and sometimes sporting a gallic ou, but most of us unquestioningly accent the second syllable. In fact, it was the composer's brother who inserted the *g*, and shifted the accent from the first to the second syllable, putting forth a false etymology as justification. The reason? In Russian, "musor" means "garbage." Modest seems to have been inconsistent on this issue.

When spelling the name "Grieg," do you have trouble remembering whether the *e* or the *i* comes first? If you do get it wrong, you will at least be reverting to the correct Scottish spelling of Grieg's paternal ancestors. Similarly, if you cannot remember the order of *s* and *z* in the name Liszt, if you omit the *z*, you will at least be reverting to the correct German spelling of Liszt's paternal

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Art of Piano *continued*

pretation; and finally, with all of its perils, the act of recreation. The world very often claimed victory for the great virtuoso, pronouncing him the greatest of them all. But in his final years, like a sublime but faded singer or an aging athlete, he gave up what he could no longer do—play like a lion—and the mighty roar, the floods of fortissimos were withdrawn. He concentrated on new colors, colors such as Monet had realized through his near-blindness, a palette of incandescent pastels of which even Horowitz had not previously dreamed. In the mid-1980s, he began playing—indeed, became all but obsessed with—that most youthful master, Mozart, whose music he performed with indescribable nuance and relaxed beauty. It was a Mozart of Italian vintage, bathed in sunlight, fetching and flirtatious. Only the aged Horowitz could give such a young Mozart to the world. ■

What's In A Name? *continued*

ancestors. (In Hungarian, *s* alone is pronounced like our sh, as in the name Solti, whereas the *sz* combination is pronounced like our *s*, as in the name Szell.)

It remains uncertain why Charles-Valentin Morhange took as his last name his father's first name, Alkan. One must wonder why, in an article celebrating Alkan, another eccentric composer, Sorabji, should have called attention to Alkan's original name, since Sorabji detested and sought to conceal his own given names, Leon Dudley, which he replaced with Kaikhosru Shapurji (Shapurji being his father's first name). It is almost certain that Alkan's pupil and colleague, Elie Delaborde, was his own son, born out of wedlock. The result is that grandfather, son, and grandson bear three different last names!

Alkan once exclaimed, "If I could live my life over again, I would set the entire bible to music!" The Alkan prelude in this issue is inspired by the *Song of Solomon* 5:2—"I was asleep, but my heart was awake." The ambiguous rhythm of quintuplets is a reflection of dreaminess, but it is also an encoding of chapter *five*, verse *two*.

See Alkan's *Prelude* on page 12.

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from 25 Preludes

PRELUDE NO. 15

CHARLES-VALENTIN ALKAN
(1813-1888)

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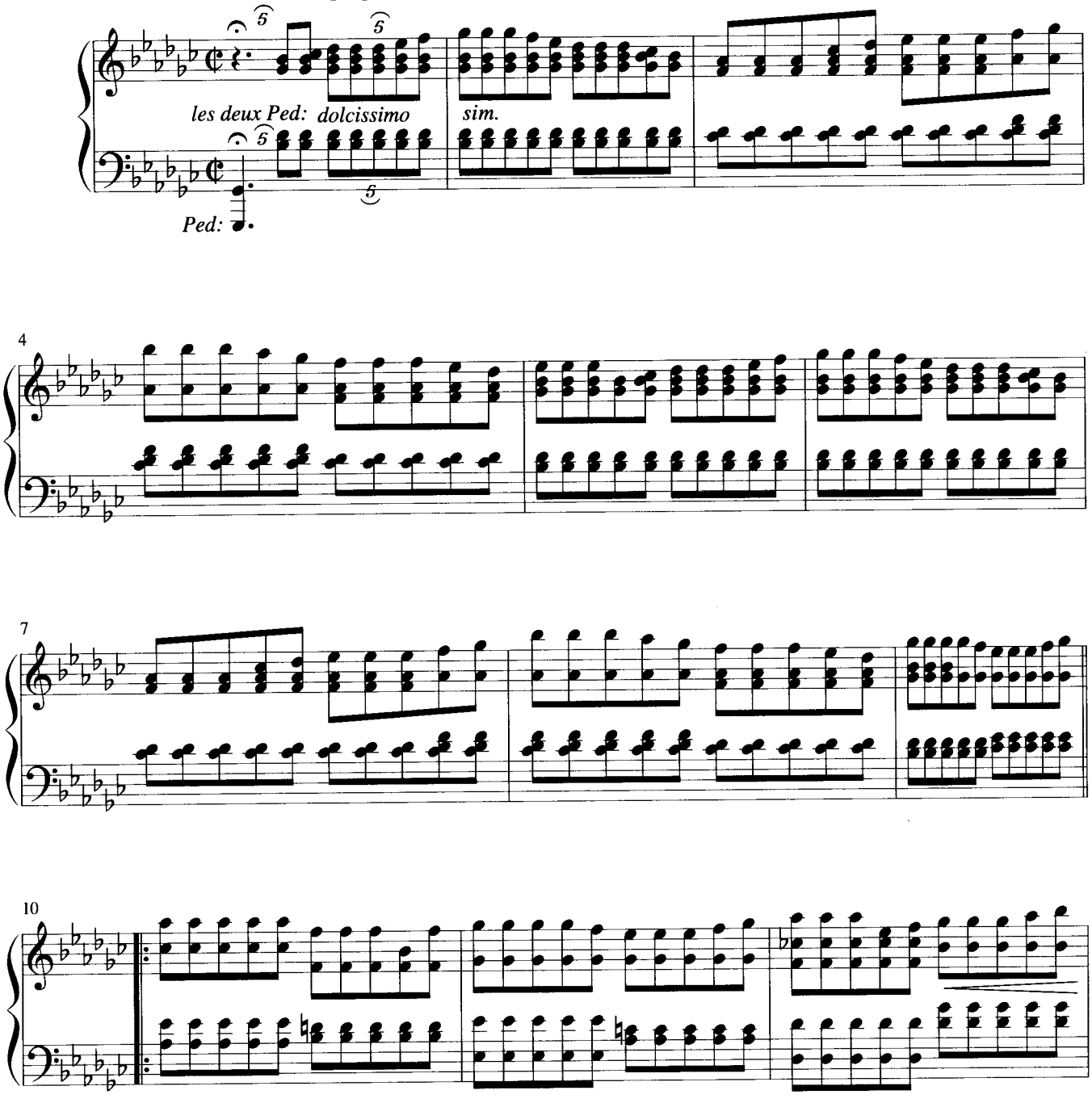


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