

THE ALKAN SOCIETY

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B U L L E T I N No. 35 : M A Y 1988

Twenty years ago no-one would have believed that, in the centenary year, BBC Radio 3 would devote 10 hours of broadcasting time to the music of Alkan within the space of two weeks. In those days there were hardly any recordings and, although the situation has improved dramatically since then, some works had to be specially recorded for the series. Inevitably some works had to be left out and they included the Symphony Op 39 and the Sonatine. All praise to those involved in producing the series, which was well researched, and let us hope that we do not have to wait 25 years (the 200th anniversary of his birth) before Alkan is Composer of the Week again.

Members will have noticed the change in format of the Bulletin in the two latest issues. This is in order to reduce printing costs which have increased five-fold as we have no longer been able to have them printed privately as before. We would welcome any comments from members and if enough feel that they would like to return to the old format(A4) and would be willing to pay, via an increase in subscriptions, we will certainly do this.

THE ALKAN PIANO COMPETITION AND FESTIVAL

The competition will take place on September 7th & 8th in the Fairfield Hall, Croydon, Surrey. In the first stage, on September 7th, each entrant will be required to play a programme (max. 15 mins.) consisting of Alkan's *Le tambour bat aux champs* and *Toccatina Op 75* plus a work of their own choice by Chopin or Liszt. The semi-finals will take place in the morning and afternoon of the following day. Entrants selected from Stage 1 will be required to give a half-hour recital including Alkan's *Op 35 No 10* (*Chant d'amour - chant de mort*) and the *Allegro barbaro Op 35 No. 5* plus two *Etudes* from *Op 10* and/or *Op 25* by Chopin or a *Transcendental Study* or *Paganini Study* by Liszt. The Final will take place in the evening. Three or four entrants will be selected from the semi-finalists. They will each give a recital of 40 - 45 minutes of works by Chopin and Liszt and to include Alkan's *Chant in E Op 38 No* and *Le Festin d'Esopé Op 39 No. 12*.

The winner will receive a first prize of £1000 plus a South Bank recital on December 2nd 1988 (during the Alkan Festival), a lunchtime recital in the Fairfield Hall and a recording contract with Symposium Records. The 2nd prize will be £300 and the 3rd prize £200. The 2nd and 3rd prize winners will be offered engagements to play for the Alkan Society.

The panel of judges will be Anthony Goldstone, Bryce Morrison, Bernard Ringeissen (to be confirmed) and Ronald Smith (President).

For full details write to Stephen Hope, 9 Cloister Gardens, Woodside, London, SE 25. Grateful thanks are due to Stephen for organising this competition.

The contracts for the Alkan Festival on the South Bank have been exchanged and we have paid the deposit on the Halls. The Festival will take place on November 30th, December 1st, 2nd and 3rd. Contributions are still needed for the Festival Fund. It is somewhat disappointing that only 27 members have contributed to the Fund so far. Contributions to the Secretary, payable to the Alkan Festival Fund.

(Reg. Charity No. 2761991)

WIGMORE HALL CENTENARY CONCERT

The long-awaited concert of Alkan's chamber works proved to be a most fitting tribute to Alkan's memory. Ronald Smith, Moray Welsh and James Clark performed as if they had played together for years. It must have been most heartening for them to have such a large, enthusiastic audience. Unfortunately this enthusiasm was not shared by some of the music critics who attended. 'Alkan an outsider still' was the heading of Stephen Pettitt's review in the Times. He wrote "individual and beautiful though many of Alkan's ideas are and, despite his unquestionable integrity, the alchemy does not quite work. He remains, essentially, an outsider. His music, nevertheless, deserves to be championed with every ounce of the ardour shown in the three rarely played chamber pieces in this recital." Of the Cello Sonata he wrote "the more convincing work of the evening, written in 1857, betrayed some influence from the more conservative composers of the day. Indeed, the passionate first movement puts one rather in mind of inflated Brahms*, while the adagio's simple tune was quite lovely. Such level-headedness could not last long, however, and the finale, which tossed the music between keys in a wilful attempt to disorientate the ear, returned to Alkan's private world where brilliance and insight live in constant conflict. Geoffrey Norris (Daily Telegraph) was generally unenthusiastic. Of the finale of the Cello Sonata he wrote "it ends with a saltarelle that displays the most conventional of harmonic and sequential devices." Meirion Bowen (The Guardian) was more sympathetic. On the final of the Cello Sonata he wrote "it contained the most spine-tingling sequences of tonal manipulation: music to work up an audience into a frenzy of excitement." David Murray (Financial Times) was the most enthusiastic - ".....far from being a pianist-composer's marginal exercises they stand very high amid Alkan's remarkable output." He urged that they be recorded without delay. One can only hope that this will happen in the not-too-distant future.

Harold Truscott very wisely wrote in his review of Ronald Smith's book on Alkan's music "the writer has taken time to ponder and consider music which is rarely easily understood, even when apparently at its simplest; in fact, it is then that it may be found most difficult to assess. Snap judgements are almost invariably wrong and are out of place anywhere but, on such a subject, they are ruinous and there have been enough of them, favourable as well as unfavourable, in the past. Too often even the favourable ones have missed the point, and there is no easier composer about whom to miss the point than Alkan."

* In fact it is extremely unlikely that Alkan had heard of Brahms when he wrote his Cello Sonata. Presuming that it was written near the time of its publication in 1857, then Brahms would have been in his early twenties and only a few of his works had been published, the first being in 1853. His own two cello sonatas were published in 1866 and 1887.

CENTENARY CONCERTS

Two more commemorative concerts have come to our notice, in addition to those in Sweden, Australia and Hawaii mentioned in our last Bulletin.

On March 29th a recital of Alkan's works was given in Brussels by Alan Weiss, who is an American pianist resident in Belgium. He was the winner of the 1978 Queen Elizabeth competition. His programme was - Nocturne No 1 Op 22, Le tambour bat aux champs, Fa Op 38 No 2, Barcarolle Op 65, Esquisses Nos. 2, 3, 4, 39, 41, 20, 21, 10, 11 and 47, Le Festin d'Esopo Op 39 and the Grande Sonate Op 33. The printed programme for the concert was most unusual. It consisted of the complete issue No. 33 of 'Points Critiques', a quarterly Jewish periodical, which was entirely devoted to Alkan. There were articles on Alkan's life, his brother Napoleon, Delaborde, quotations on Alkan from other musicians, notes on the works played that evening, the pedal piano, list of Alkan's works, discography and bibliography. A total of 50 pages with many illustrations. The recital was recorded by Belgium Radio 3 (RTBF) to be broadcast on 21st May at 1730.

Cyril Ray, a member of the Society and descendant of Alkan's brother, Napoleon, writes the following description of a concert he attended in Brisbane, Australia:-

"WE LOVE ALKAN - Such were the words written inside a large heart greeting us as we went inside the performance room of the Department of Music at the Queensland University (Brisbane, Australia) for a lunch-time concert performed by advanced musical students. The concert was entitled 'A TRIBUTE TO ALKAN ON THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS DEATH' and was held, of course, on the 29th March. The pianists contributing were DEBORAH MEAGER, RACHEL TEW, LEANNE HUNT and CARSON DRON. The young ladies wore very elegant 'period' dresses adding an extra touch to a very balanced programme of short pieces selected by their teacher Mrs. PAMELA PAGE. The concert room was absolutely full, standing room only, and it was refreshing to see so many young people appreciating the talent of the young artists giving such enthusiastic interpretations of our beloved Charles Valentin. This is, no doubt, the result of a visit made some years ago by Mr. Ronald Smith who sowed the seed of love for the music of Alkan that is evident in today's music teachers and students. After the concert, I was presented to the young pianists which gave me the chance to introduce them to our Society and promised them a reproduction copy of the portrait of Alkan. I wish to add that copies of our Newsletter should be circularised from time to time (funds permitting) to various universities which are so far removed from the main stream of European culture in general and the ambitions of the Alkan Society in particular."

The works performed were:- La Vision, Le legatissimo, Le staccatissimo (Esquisses Op63, Symphony Op 39 No 5 (Marche Funebre), Preludes Op 31 Nos. 16, 25 & 10, Nocturne No. 2 Op 57, Le tambour bat aux champs Op 50. Barcarolle Op 65, Fa. Op 38, Les Soupirs (Esquise No 11) and Scherzo Diabolique Op 39.

ALKAN'S CADENZA FOR BEETHOVEN'S PIANO CONCERTO by ROGER SMALLEY

This article was first published in 'Music & Musicians' in May 1972 under the title 'A case of neglect: Two virtuosos' cadenzas for Beethoven'. It also dealt with Medtner's cadenzas for Beethoven's 4th Piano Concerto.

"ANY SOLOIST WHO REGULARLY PERFORMS concertos must be faced, from time to time, with the task of choosing between several alternative cadenzas - a task which prolonged thought complicates rather than simplifies. To begin with, there are two basic distinctions: concertos for which the composer wrote his own cadenzas, and those for which he did not. In the second instance it is obvious that the performer will have to play a cadenza written by someone other than the composer - ideally, I suppose, by himself (as several performers, including Kreisler, Schnabel and Glenn Gould have done), or, failing this, by another composer (Brahms, Clara Schumann, Dohnanyi and Britten - all, incidentally, frequent performers themselves), or by an exceptionally creative musicologist (Paul Badura-Skoda, who is also a performer). Note how the categories overlap. I think it would be unusual to find a cadenza written by someone who was not, even if only occasionally, a performer himself.

The majority of concertos, however, do have cadenzas written by the composer, and these can be looked at from two points of view, very roughly corresponding to the difference between classical and romantic concertos. During the latter half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th the cadenza became increasingly integrated into the structure of the concerto. It was no longer marked off as a separate and, to a certain extent, self-contained entity between the 6:4 chord and cadential trill so characteristic of the classical concerto. At the same time cadenzas tended to become shorter and more concentrated, and the difference between a straight solo and a cadenza became obscured, as, for example, in both of Liszt's piano concertos. Another feature of some late-romantic concertos is that the cadenza is partially accompanied (as in Elgar's Violin Concerto and Bloch's Concerto symphonique for piano and orchestra - although interestingly enough the first example of an accompanied cadenza which I know of is that composed by Beethoven for the first movement of the piano transcription of his own Violin Concerto). For all these reasons the substitution of other cadenzas is obviously out of the question.

With Beethoven's Third and Fourth Piano Concertos, however, the situation is somewhat different. In these works the cadenza is still an independent section of the form. That Beethoven himself regarded it in this way can be deduced from the fact that he

wrote two cadenzas for the first movements of his First and Fourth Concertos (a third cadenza for the First Concerto remained incomplete). Thus he cannot have regarded any one particular cadenza as an inviolable element of the total musical structure - his two cadenzas for the Fourth could hardly be more different in approach.

The question which now arises is that, as Beethoven left his own cadenzas for each of these concertos, what is the point of composing more? The simple answer to this is that each generation wishes to make its own contribution to the interpretation of the greatest masterpieces of music - to which category those two concertos undoubtedly belong. Naturally this desire manifests itself in changing styles of performance, but in the case of concertos there appears to be a persistent urge to go further by taking advantage of the opportunity, afforded by the classical concerto form itself to compose new cadenzas, whether original ones exist or not. Cadenzas written by other hands manifest two distinct approaches. The first is that which attempts to remain within the stylistic world implied by the concerto and, of course, the composer's work in general. The cadenzas for various Mozart concertos written by the Badura-Skoda and published in his book 'Interpreting Mozart on the keyboard' are good examples of this approach. They do not exceed the compass of Mozart's keyboard or the textural complexity of his figurations; nor do they contain uncharacteristic modulations and harmonic progressions. These cadenzas are therefore no more interesting, although considerably more expert, than a music student's stylistic pastiche. Badura-Skoda, with typical musicologist's mind, has attempted - very successfully - to project himself into the past, as opposed to re-interpreting the past in terms of his own present.

This, in fact, constitutes the second approach, which has given rise to the most fascinating cadenzas of all, and includes those by Alkan to Beethoven's Third and by Medtner to Beethoven's Fourth. Beethoven's own cadenzas for his Third and Fourth Concertos are filled with exceptionally bold and striking invention, and the cadenzas of Alkan and Medtner are similarly uncompromising in their treatment of Beethoven's material. Neither composer makes any attempt to match the style of the concertos themselves. Both re-interpret the material in the light of their own wholly individual musical language.

I have been unable to establish the precise date of Alkan's cadenza (part of a transcription of the whole of the first movement of the Third Concerto for solo piano), but on stylistic grounds I would surmise that it was composed around 1857, about the same time as his Douze études dans tous les tons mineurs, Op 39. In fact the whole transcription might almost have been a preparatory study for the first movement of the Concerto for solo piano, Op 39 No. 8. Alkan was one of the few true heirs of the classical tradition, continuing to develop in his solo piano music the heroic formal scale, textural density and motivic concentration of Beethoven's middle-period symphonies, sonatas and concertos. His musical style is therefore particularly close to that of the Third Piano Concerto. But there are also differences, notably an extended harmonic range and greater resources in the use of the piano. Alkan's cadenza is on a vast scale (196 bars of 2:2) and in a performance of the concerto's first movement (442 bars) it would occupy just under one third of the total duration. In this article I obviously only have the space to comment on a few of the most outstanding aspects of this cadenza. It is in eight distinct sections, separated by the double barlines which Alkan always used to indicate important formal subdivisions.

Section 1 (18 bars) combines the ascending scale heard at the piano's first entry with the second bar of the first subject. Beginning with gruff scales in thirds and sixths in the extreme bass register, the hands gradually move apart until they are playing at opposite extremes of the keyboard - two hallmarks of Alkan's very individual approach to the textural layout of his material. A comparison of this passage with the opening of Brahms' cadenza for this concerto, which treats almost the same material, will immediately establish Alkan's greater originality and daring. This leads via an abrupt enharmonic modulation, from F minor to E minor in just four notes - F, G flat (=F sharp): B and E - to the second section, a further development of the second bar of the first subject in both its original and inverted forms. Section 2 (43 bars) sets out in E minor and drives towards a powerful climax in E major. This is a very significant moment because, it will be recalled, E major is the key of the conc-

-erto's slow movement. Beethoven also refers back to it during the finale in the passage (bars 257-274), where the main rondo theme appears momentarily in E major. On the other hand E major is not touched upon at all in the first movement. By emphasizing this key in his cadenza Alkan is therefore going far beyond the mere elaboration of existing themes and is in fact contributing a new dimension to the key relationships of the entire work.

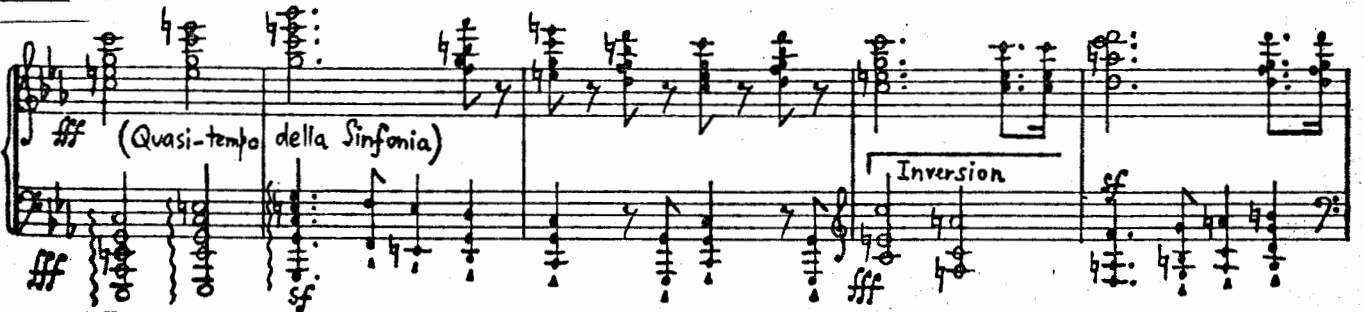
Within the context of the cadenza itself this statement of E major foreshadows the appearance of the second subject in A major in Section 6. This is preceded by four bars of a repeated E natural, thus making explicit the long-range dominant-tonic relationship. The central section of the cadenza, approached by the brief transition of Section 3 (Quasi trombe) combines fragments of the first subject (in both original and inverted forms) in canon. The two canonic parts are played in octaves together with an internal pedal point on C articulated in semiquavers by the two hands alternately (Example 1). This pedal point persists for the entire 43 bars of Section 4 in a continuous crescendo. The two canonic parts gradually become more widely separated, eventually changing from octaves to chords, whilst the pedal point, initially a single repeated C, becomes alternating octaves. This is a masterly piece of sustained development. The piano writing recalls that of the coda of the first movement of Alkan's Concerto for solo piano, but the nagging persistence of the pedal point and the harmonic clashes which it engenders are perhaps more reminiscent of the passage, shortly before the recapitulation of that same movement, which has an internal pedal point on G sharp which lasts for no less than 66 bars.

EXAMPLE 1



The climax of the present passage (Section 5) is the appearance of the complete first subject in a blazing C major combined, most unexpectedly and with dazzling effectiveness with the first subject of the finale of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (Example 2). Once again note the characteristic layout with the two hands, each playing huge chords, widely separated. Incidentally, with reference to this and other similar passages, I think it is worth pointing out that the pianos of Alkan's own time possessed much greater clarity in the bass register than do pianos of today. In this respect Ronald Smith's Alkan recital (recorded on ORYX 1803), which he plays on Schneider and Erard grand fortepianos of 1851 and 1855, is a real ear-opener.

EXAMPLE 2 gva



I would like to draw attention to the rhythmic aspect of the preceding passage. As can be seen from Example 1, the layout for alternating hands results in the upper canonic part being continuously out of step with the lower part by one semiquaver. This type of composed-out rubato is often found in the piano works of Chopin and Schumann, but is seen at its most subtle in Alkan. One notable aspect of Alkan's classicism (and one which he shares with Brahms) is his avoidance - even in this cadenza - of the free 'cadenza-like' passages which are such a feature of most romantic piano music - that of Liszt and Chopin, for example. As Raymond Lewenthal has remarked, Alkan's music should be played with a minimum of rubato, because within the strict metrical scheme the rubato, as in Example 1, is actually composed into the

text.

Another and perhaps even more extreme example of the same technique occurs in the eighth and final section of this cadenza. This consists of an enormously prolonged cadential trill on the Dominant (at first D and E, later D and E flat) written out in demisemi-quavers and persisting for 23 bars. Around this trill the first and second subjects are quietly recalled, their originally diatonic contours chromatically distorted. This dream-like atmosphere is emphasised by the almost polytonal harmonies and by the rhythmic displacement of the upper part, which always occurs three demisemi-quavers after the beat, thus confusing our sense of metrical regularity (Ex. 3).

EXAMPLE 3

The image shows a musical score for a piano cadenza, labeled 'EXAMPLE 3'. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The music is in a key with two flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The tempo is marked 'Poco ritens.' and the dynamics range from 'p' to 'rf'. A large trill is written across the top of the treble staff, with the instruction 'cresci sempre.' written below it. The bass staff features chromatic lines and some rests. The score ends with a section marked 'A tempo' and 'rf'. There are various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings throughout.

This passage leads straight into Beethoven's own coda, and forms a perfect preparation for its (initially) mysteriously veiled atmosphere. Even the harmonic ambiguities of the cadenza find a reflection here - what composer other than Beethoven would have retained the G in the bass of the third bar of the coda (bar 418) instead of altering it to an F to conform with the F major harmony above?"

DELABORDE

This year is the 75th anniversary of the death of Alkan's son Delaborde. Coincidentally he died in the centenary year of his father's birth and both father and son died at the age of 74. As well as being an accomplished pianist, Delaborde was also a composer. Among his compositions were an unpublished comic opera 'The Queen Asleep' and a Concert Fantasy on Carmen.

ALKANEWS

Anthony Goldstone and Caroline Clemmow will be featuring Alkan's 'Fantaisie sur Don Juan' in their programmes for following dates:-

- June 25th at 7.30 pm. St. John's, Smith Square, London, SW1
- October 14th at 7.30 pm. Jodrell Bank Observatory, Cheshire.
- October 15th at 7.30 pm. Silk Heritage Centre, Macclesfield, Cheshire.
(Details for both October 14th and October 15th can be had from Mrs. Shirley Jarvis, Rulow House, Buxton Old Road, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK3 0AG)
- October 19th at 8 pm. Stockport Sunday School, Stockport, Cheshire.
(Details from Mrs. Marjorie Bottomley, 9 Oakfield Mews, Garners Lane, Davenport, Stockport, SK3 8SS)
- November 19th at 7.30 pm. Graigie College of Education, Ayr.

There will be a performance of Alkan's Concerto da camera No. 2 Op 10 on October 28th at 1.05 pm in Studio 7, New Broadcasting House, Manchester. Anthony Goldstone will be the soloist with the Musicians of the Royal Exchange. This concert will be broadcast live on BBC Radio 3.

Anthony Goldstone and Caroline Clemmow have recorded the Fantaisie sur Don Juan for Symposium Records (No. 1037) to be released shortly on cassette and compact disc. The recording includes other sets of variations by Beethoven, César Franck, Herzogenberg and Schubert.

David Armitage, our New Zealand member, informs us that the organist, John Wells introduced and played Alkan's organ works in a series of three programmes which were broadcast on Radio New Zealand on March 28th, April 4th and 11th. Later in the year they are planning to broadcast a programme of Alkan recordings by Ronald Smith and Raymond Lewenthal.

In a concert in Bath, Thomas Wakefield gave what was probably the first performance in the U.K. of Beethoven's 3rd Piano Concerto with Alkan's cadenza.

There was a broadcast on Radio 3 on March 1st of the Trois Marches Op 40 played by Isobel Beyer and Harvey Dagul. It is believed that it was the first broadcast of these works in the U.K..

Ronald Smith's recording of the Trois Etudes de bravoure Op 16 and the Trois Grandes Etudes Op 76 should be released by EMI in July on compact disc, L.P. and cassette. Also due for release this year is Ronald Smith's recording of the Grande Sonate Op 33 and the Sonatine Op 61. This will be on compact disc only on EMI's mid-price Studio label.

Kahn and Averill have now reprinted Ronald Smith's biography of Alkan the Enigma Vol I. It will retail at £7.95. Members can order copies from the Secretary at £6.50 plus 50p postage & packing (80p outside the U.K.). Volume II on the music is available at £12.50 plus £1 postage & packing (£1.50 outside the U.K.).

Please note that the closing date for entry for the Alkan Centenary Piano Competition is 30th May. The age limit is 35.

ALKAN'S ORGAN WORKS

The next meeting of the Society will give us the opportunity to hear some of the least known works in Alkan's output. Those for organ/pedal-piano. They were all composed in the latter part of Alkan's creative life, from 1859 to 1869. Nicholas King will play, on the organ, works from the Treize prières Op 64, Onze grands préludes Op 66, Onze pièces dans le style religieux Op 72 and the Petits préludes. Ronald Smith considers these some of the most important works in Alkan's output and thinks that one day they will prove indispensable to the organ repertory.

The meeting will take place on MONDAY, MAY 16TH AT 7.00 PM in the Concert Hall at the Royal College of Music, Prince Consort Road, London, SW7.

Members are most welcome to bring guests to this meeting.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING will take place on WEDNESDAY JULY 13TH AT 7.00 PM at the Abbey Community Centre, 29 Marsham Street, London, SW1.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

£6 for London members.

£4 for members out of London and students.

£7 for overseas members (payable in sterling).

All rates cover husband and wife membership.

ALL SUBSCRIPTIONS TO THE SECRETARY.