

# THE ALKAN SOCIETY

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Editorial Notes: The great event since our last number has been the world's first complete performance by Stephanie McCallum of Alkan's Trois Grandes Etudes, op 76, for the hands separately and reunited. This astounding feat, embracing transcendental technique and sincere musicianship, was enjoyed by an audience of 18 (the appalling weather conditions stopped many from attending) and we are much indebted to William Waterhouse for contributing a piece about it.

Some rare Alkan works will be heard at the Society's recital meeting on Thursday 2nd May, to be given by Peter Groves and Margaret Pitts at Kensington Central library. Full details in the April Bulletin.

Eliot Levin tells us he is promoting a recital at the Purcell Room, South Bank, London on Saturday 17th February at 7.00p.m. Soprano, clarinet and piano. Schubert, Brahms, Schumann, Poulenc, Dvorak, Kalliwoda (who?) and Meyerbeer.

Articles on any aspect of Alkan and his music are welcomed for insertion in the Bulletin, together with any items of personal and professional interest. Manuscripts in French or German etc. can be easily translated into English.

Charles Hailstone (Editor)

## ALKAN FESTIVAL 1988

The anniversary of the birth or death of a composer is often the stimulus for performances and broadcasts of their works. It is particularly useful in the case of lesser known composers whose compositions often get overlooked or ignored, as it gives us the chance to assess their life and work in relationship to their contemporaries. Thus 1988 gives us the unique opportunity to promote performances of Alkan's works and to encourage others to do so. As we all know, Alkan's compositions are still rarely performed or broadcast and we cannot automatically expect that in 1988 it will be any different.

In the October Bulletin we announced plans for an Alkan Festival in 1988. This will consist of a series of concerts in London linked with possible performances in Bristol and at the Bath, Brighton and Edinburgh Festivals. It is planned that the London concerts will consist of -

- (1) An orchestral concert which will include the two Concerti da Camera and possibly the Beethoven 3rd Concerto with Alkan's cadenza.
- (2) Two Queen Elizabeth Hall recitals - one by Ronald Smith.
- (3) A solo Wigmore Hall recital.

- (4) Performance of the three chamber works also probably at the Wigmore Hall.
- (5) A choral concert to include the two cantatas and possibly the Funeral March for a Dead Parrot.
- (6) An organ recital.

It is difficult to say, at this stage, how much this will all cost, but it may be as much as £50,000 depending on artists' fees and publicity costs. Stephen Hope has very kindly undertaken the task of costing these events as he has had experience in promoting concerts.

In order to put on these concerts, we will need sponsorship. To this end we are going to produce a glossy brochure to help encourage this, and to publicise the Festival. However, it is felt that we, at least in part, should help to finance this venture ourselves. So we are appealing to the generosity of members of the Society. Apart from donations to the library fund, we have not in the past asked for any money from members, although many have sent extra donations. In the field of recordings we have been very fortunate as we have not been called upon to subsidise recordings of Alkan's works, unlike many other Societies. Any donations are of course welcome but we would particularly ask members if they could consider covenanting to the Society for this fund. A donation by deed of covenant increases the value by approximately 42% as we can claim back from the Inland Revenue the tax paid on the amount donated. For example if every U.K. member was to covenant an average of £10 per year this would amount to £850 per year plus £364 from the Inland Revenue making a total to the Society of £1,214. After 3 years we would have more than £3,600 (plus interest). Deed of Covenants have to be taken out for a minimum of 4 years. This would take us into 1989, so the fourth year could count as members' subscriptions. Overseas members will not be able to covenant, but every donation will be most welcome. We feel that a target of £5,000 is not beyond our means, especially knowing the enthusiasm and generosity of many of our members. A special account will be opened for the 1988 Alkan Festival Fund.

Any ideas about sponsorship, publicity or anything else related to the planned Festival, will be most welcome. (The Secretary)

#### LA SOCIETE ALKAN

The continued neglect and ignorance of Alkan's music in the country of his birth has long puzzled admirers of his music in this country. Members might recall the broadcast on France Musique in November 1982 which devoted many hours to a discussion of Alkan's life and music. The programme began by asking people in the streets of Paris the question 'Ou est Alkan?' Not surprisingly no one knew the answer. All this may change in the near future thanks to a young student, François Luguenot, who was listening to this programme. He was profoundly impressed with the originality of the piano writing and the mixture of classical and modern. After purchasing Ronald Smith's recording of op 39 and Pierre Reach's Grand Sonata his enthusiasm grew. With the increasing interest in France in their lesser known native composers, he decided that the time was right to form an Alkan Society in France. With great energy and enthusiasm, he contacted members of the French musical establishment. In particular Claude Pistone, a specialist in French 19th century music, François Devaux, Chairman of Billaudot and the pianists Paul Badura-Skoda and François René Duchâble. Jean-Yves Bras, an honorary member of our Society, was particularly helpful and they decided to go ahead and form the Society.

The inaugural meeting of the Society took place on December 3rd 1984. Jean Yves Bras was elected President with François Luguenot as Secretary. Other members of the committee are Laurent Martin a pianist and organiser of the Onslow Festival, François Dervaux, and Constance Himelfarb, a student of musicology. She is doing a thesis on Alkan and has already done some interesting research. It is hoped that the formation of the Society will be announced on the radio and in the French musical journals. They also aim to contact the French Jewish community with the hope of some sort of sponsorship. Also some of the record companies who specialise in lesser known composers. However, the main aim is to have Alkan's music performed and so they are going to get in touch with as many pianists as possible.

Our two Societies plan to keep in close contact with each other by exchanging news and information. The Alkan Society in France will have better means of access to the various archives and documents spread throughout the country. They aim to establish comprehensive documentation on Alkan via contact with Alkan's own descendants and those of his pupils. Also to collect together what is available of Alkan's correspondence and copies of his works annotated by his pupils. We in our turn will be able to give them the benefit of our eight years experience. Monsieur Luguenot has no illusions about the task ahead. The French musical establishment is very conservative but with the growing interest in France in rediscovering their artistic inheritance, the formation of a society devoted to one of their greatest composers is long overdue. We hope that in the not too distant future, most people in France will know the answer to the question 'Où est Alkan?'

We wish La Société Alkan a long and successful future and look forward to hearing more news of their activities. Those who wish to contact the Society please write to -

François Luguenot, 42, rue de la Palestine, F-35000 Rennes, France.

#### REPORT OF THE DECEMBER MEETING

A recital of solo and duet piano works given by Robert Bridge and Jonathan Higgins at the Thomas Coram Foundation, Brunswick Square, on Wednesday 5th December.

This interesting evening of virtuoso music which attracted an audience of 20 members and guests, included the following works: Andante with variations K501, Mozart; Barcarolle in G minor op 65 no 6, Alkan; Grand Polonaise Brillante op 22, Chopin; Etudes Symphoniques op 13, Schumann; (Interval with refreshments); Fantaisie in F minor op 49, Chopin; Le Tambour Bat aux Champs op 50 no 2, Alkan; Trois Marches op 40, Alkan; Fantaisie D940, Schubert. All were performed with great dedication and freshness of style and the Society cannot thank sufficiently these two young musicians who had obviously worked up their programme towards perfection. In one of the towering marches of Alkan the either foreshadowing or echo of a certain turn in the March to the Scaffold in Berlioz's Fantastique Symphony was clearly remarked. At the conclusion a long vote of thanks was given by Charles Hailstone. Robert Bridge was at the RCM under John Barstow and Stephen Savage, later studying with Niel Immelman in London and the Russian pianist Vitalij Margulis in Freiburg. He played at St. John's, Smith Square London, in a live radio broadcast last year. Jonathan Higgins was also a pupil of Stephen Savage and took a degree in music at Cambridge University, graduating in 1980. He has future engagements with the Basle Ballet Company, to whom he is the solo pianist, in Paris and New York. The two young pianists formed a duo in 1980 and last year were finalists in the Premio Valentino Bucchi in Rome.

## REPORT OF THE JANUARY MEETING

The piano recital by Stephanie McCallum given to the Society at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama on Tuesday evening 8th January proved to be an outstanding musical event and an impressive achievement on the part of this young Australian artist. Having whetted our appetites in January 1983 with the first of the Trois Grandes Etudes (that for the left hand alone), on this occasion she was able to present us with the entire set of these outstandingly original studies, "pour les deux mains séparées et réunies". Here the point that the third is "a mouvement semblable" was telling. Can this effect of an entire piece of both hands in unison have antedated Chopin's op 35 Sonata finale of 1837? This unique work raises other questions as well. Was Alkan the pioneer of the left hand solo repertoire? Or was Czerny? Stephanie's husband Peter, in introducing the work, told us that our concert was the first recorded performance of all three ever having been played together. In view of the fact that the publisher Hofmeister had seen fit to re-engrave the work in Leipzig in 1849 (the original Richault edition dates from 1838), this seemed hardly credible. However the central étude for right hand alone is a tour de force lasting over twenty minutes, and of quite extraordinary difficulty even by Alkan's own standards. In the event full justice was done, not only to its 'superbamente' and 'vittoriosamente' sections, but indeed to the whole programme, which was played from memory and included "Aesop's Banquet" to start, and the more Chopinesque three Nocturnes op 22 and 57 to follow. It is to be hoped that such bold artistic initiative on Stephanie's part will be recognised and fittingly rewarded in the future.

William Waterhouse

**GONE TO AUSTRALIA:** Stephanie and Peter McCallum have returned to Australia where they are taking up teaching posts. We are extremely grateful to them for all that they have done for the Society and we wish them well in their new careers. Members will be pleased to know that Stephanie is returning to England in November for a concert tour. She will be taking part in a performance of Alkan's Cello Sonata with the young Australian cellist, Marc Bonetti, at our November meeting.

**EGON PETRI:** The name of Egon Petri is a familiar one to Alkan enthusiasts as he was one of the few pianists to consistently include Alkan works in his programmes. In 1938 he gave four all-Alkan recitals for the BBC. Although regarded by some as one of this century's greatest pianists, he was until recently, an almost forgotten figure. The recent release of two recordings have helped revive interest in this neglected musician. The latest recording of Petri playing the last three Beethoven Sonatas, was voted best historical non-vocal recording of 1984 by Gramophone magazine.

The distinguished critic and author, James Methuen-Campbell has kindly agreed to give an illustrated talk about the life and work of Egon Petri, at our next meeting on March 6th (see forthcoming meetings). Among the many examples of performances by Petri we shall have the unique opportunity to hear a recording of him playing Alkan's Symphony for Solo Piano op 39. This was recorded at a concert at Mills College, California in 1952.

James Methuen-Campbell is the author of a fascinating book on styles of Chopin playing, called 'Chopin Playing from the Composer to the Present Day' (Gollanz) and the recently published 'Catalogue of Recordings by Classical Pianists Vol. 1 - Pianists born to 1872' (Disco Epsom Ltd.). He is a regular contributor to 'Music and Musicians' and the 'Musical Times'.

**BROADCAST OF SYMPHONIE:** The Israeli pianist Allan Sternfield performed the Alkan Symphonie, op 39, nos. 4-7, in a morning recital on Thursday 13th December. The other work in this BBC Third Programme recital was Haydn's Sonata in A flat (H XVI 46).

**GREETING FROM HOLLAND:** Frank Lioni of Bleiswijk, Netherlands, kindly sent a Christmas card with the greeting: Prettige Kerstdagen en Gelukkig Nieuwjaar. In an accompanying message Mr. Lioni wrote: "Our President gave some recitals in Holland last month (November). He got very good mentions in the newspapers". Mr. Lioni wished all members of the Alkan Society a merry Christmas and a prosperous new year.

**RONALD SMITH:** Members will be delighted to learn that Ronald Smith has completed Alkan: Vol. II and that the manuscript is with the publishers Kahn & Averill. It will be two and a half times the size of Volume I and will contain many music illustrations. Alan Ridout, the composer, has written an introduction. Morris Kahn, the publisher, and a member of the Society, is kindly offering a generous discount to all members.

Ronald's recording of Alkan Miniatures is being released in the U.S.A. in February, under the title "Carnival". It is hoped that it will be released in the United Kingdom shortly afterwards.

As noted in the communication from Frank Lioni, Ronald has given all-Alkan recitals in Holland. These were in Amsterdam, Flushing and Utrecht. The audiences were very enthusiastic and there was considerable press coverage.

**THE AMAZING MR. SMITH:** This long awaited disc, entitled "The Amazing Mr. Smith" is now available on LP 2148 and compact disc NIM 5031. The Daily Mail (London) of Thursday 13th December commented as follows: "Critics who have been praising pianist Ronald Smith's recording of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony do not realise what he had to go through to make it. The sessions were held at the height of this year's long hot summer, and sexagenarian Smith had to take his shirt off to get through the symphony, in Liszt's transcription. 'We trained three fans on the digital recording equipment so it didn't overheat' says Adrian Farmer of Nimbus Records in Monmouthshire. Smith, famous for playing works most other pianists wouldn't attempt, survived". It will be recalled that Ronald played the work in a Queen Elizabeth Hall recital last year, with some Alkan Society members in the audience.

**PHILATELIC POSSIBILITY:** Eliot Levin, of East Barnet, Herts, has written to the French Ministere des Postes, Telephones & Telegraphes, with regard to the possibility of a stamp issue to mark the 1888 Centenary, and thus to honour the genius of Alkan in his native land. Eliot has received a most courteous reply to the effect that this request will be carefully considered and that he will be informed when the Commission responsible has made a decision.

Eliot has started a new record label called SYMPOSIUM. Issues in the pipeline include the first movement of the 'Emperor' concerto played by Eugen d'Albert, a pupil of Liszt, and a record for the Wilhelm Furtwangler Society to mark his centenary next year. Already available are records of the famous Italian tenor Fernando de Lucia pressed from original 78 RPM masters originally recorded between 1917 and 1922. The story is that these survived the war buried in a churchyard. Some members will have already his cassette of four piano rolls of music by Alkan.

**MARTIN ANDERSON:** Harold Truscott's The Music of Franz Schmidt Vol. I: THE ORCHESTRAL MUSIC (Toccata Press, 190pp, £9.95) has been published by Martin Anderson, an Alkan Society member in Wandsworth, London SW11. Writing in the Telegraph, Bayan Northcott praised Martin "in risking so much for a yet uncanonised composer".

**THE GRAMOPHONE** - The Society's advertisement in this journal is continuing to appear. So far the Secretary has received eighteen enquiries, leading to nine new and greatly welcomed members, from near and far, including Norway, Saudi Arabia, Rome and New York.

**NEW MEMBERS** - Andy Carmichael, Dundee. A.G. Charlesworth, Macclesfield.  
Bard Dahle, Norway. Howard Eldridge, London N9.  
Antonio Latanza, Italy. François Luguenot, Rennes, France.  
A.C. Mason, Dorchester. Michael McKaig, London SW19.  
Toby Ridge, Nr Winchester. L.W. Roberts, Saudi Arabia.  
Jay Silman, New York.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:** £5 for London and overseas members (payable in sterling).  
£3 for members out of London and Students (both these rates cover husband and wife membership).

**FORTHCOMING MEETINGS**

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6TH** at 6.45 p.m. (coffee first then talk at approx. 7.00 p.m.) Trinity College of Music, 11/13 Mandeville Place, London W1. Illustrated talk on the life and work of the pianist Egon Petri by James Methuen-Campbell.

**THURSDAY, MAY 2ND** at 7.00 p.m. at the Meeting Room, Kensington Central Library, Phillimore Walk, W.8., entrance through the Children's Library. A recital by Margaret Pitts and Peter Groves, including performances of the March Funebre and Les Mois (complete)

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 17TH** at 7.00 p.m. The Annual General Meeting at the Abbey Community Centre, 29 Marsham Street, London SW1.