



THE ALKAN SOCIETY

(Registered Charity number 276199)

<http://www.alkansociety.org>

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Editor's Comments

I begin with my apologies to Members for the delay in producing the present issue; they may have seen, in the Secretary's letter accompanying the AGM details, that I am presently based in Kiev, Ukraine, where I am working on an EU project (I am writing, for anyone who is interested, an occasional blog on my experiences here at www.villagefire.blogspot.com – spot the Alkan connection!). As this arose somewhat out of the blue, my avocational schedules have become somewhat out of kilter. Kiev is not a centre of Alkanisme – although I believe Ronald Smith gave a recital or two here during his visit to the Soviet Union (can anyone confirm this? – I don't have much documentation over here). Alkan's very name is unknown to local musicians I have talked to. However we may eventually remedy that: Jonathan Powell hopes to come here for an exploratory recital in June, when he will be playing, not Alkan on this occasion, but the First Sonata of Arnold Bax, written when the latter was in despair over the collapse of his affair with a beautiful Ukrainian girl whom he had chased all over Russia. If it goes well, perhaps there will be a return with some Alkan.....

In the meantime there is to be considered the practicality of my continuing to edit the Bulletin from afar. In these days of internet communications it is not impossible – if I get support and contributions from **you**, our membership. If you are attending concerts, or listen to a new recording – write a review! (I am still waiting for someone to give their opinion on the new Gebhart/Osborne recording of the cello sonata, for example). Or if you have any opinions on any aspects of Alkan's music or life – please share them with us. I can always be contacted – Kiev ISPs willing – at the Bulletin e-mail address.

Although I will alas be unable to attend the AGM and Thomas Wakefield's recital, I will be leaving the fastnesses of the Ukraine for the Second 'Indian Summer in Levoca Festival' in Slovakia (2nd-10th October). The Festival will feature Alkan's cello sonata and a number of his piano pieces, as readers will see from the article within, and again thanks to the kind sponsorship of the Society, discounts are available to Society members. The Society is also a sponsor of Mark Viner's recital at this year's Cheltenham Festival – further details also within.

Alkan Society Competition and Recital, Fitzwilliam College

Competition

After the broadening of rules in 2007 to cover a wider range of Cambridge colleges, which had resulted in eight entrants and a truly competitive nature to the event, it was a considerable disappointment that the 2008 competition, held at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge on 8th November 2008, attracted only one candidate, and only two visiting members of the Society. Daniel Tse (Robinson College) offered *La Vision* and a Beethoven sonata movement.

The view of the judges was that his performance was sufficiently competent to justify the award being made. We are grateful to Francis Knights, Director of Music at Fitzwilliam College, for the arrangements and generous hospitality made for this event, and to Nicholas King (representing the Society) and Lloyd Buck (substituting at the last minute for Dr Martin Ennis, Director of Music at Girton College, Cambridge) who joined him as judges.

The Society will be reviewing the future of this award with the authorities at Fitzwilliam College. It appears clear that placing it later in the academic year would be an improvement on running it at such an early stage that new and returning students have little opportunity to prepare effectively; it may also be that broadening the catchment to further colleges and introducing one or two supplementary awards for runners-up would stimulate greater interest. Ultimately it has to be accepted that, like all musical events in Cambridge, the occasion is but one in a myriad of competing claims on the time and predilections of students.

Nicholas King

Recital by Lloyd Buck

The Annual Alkan Society recital at the Fitzwilliam College Auditorium, on the evening of the competition, attracted a very respectable audience to hear the unusual programme of Lloyd Buck, who offered as the main element of the first half, following the Liszt transcription of Bach's *A minor Prelude and Fugue* BWV543, the four pairs of *Lamentations and Consolations* op.17 of Sergei Bortkiewicz.

Bortkiewicz's rather tragic history was outlined to us by Buck; a succession of frustrated opportunities blighting early promise which indeed parallels Alkan's in some ways, save that a good proportion of Alkan's difficulties must be admitted to have been self-inflicted, whereas Bortkiewicz seems very much to have been a victim of circumstances.

Bortkiewicz was born in Kharkov (now Kharkiv, Ukraine) in 1877 to a prosperous family. He studied with Lyadov in St. Petersburg and with Liszt's pupils Jadassohn and Reisenauer in the early years of the 20th century, living in Berlin from 1904 to 1914 where he taught, performed and composed. His first Piano Concerto (op. 16) was performed there in 1913. However, at the outbreak of the First World War, Bortkiewicz, as an enemy alien, was first placed under house arrest and then left to return to Kharkov. Here he and his family were eventually embroiled in the turmoil of the Revolution; after many privations, they escaped to Constantinople in 1919. This was the commencement of many years of wandering and displacement. In 1925 he obtained Austrian citizenship; in 1928 he returned to Germany, only to be driven out in 1933 by the Nazi regime. Living throughout and after WW2 in Vienna in extreme poverty, he however continued to compose, though many of his works (e.g. four of the *Six Preludes* op 66) became lost in the turmoil. The foundation in Vienna of a Bortkiewicz Society in 1947 gave some stability to the last five years of his life – he died in 1952 following an unsuccessful operation.

The *Lamentations and Consolations*, which were published in 1913, are in some ways a forbidding introduction to Bortkiewicz's fascinating but complex music. They consist of four pairs of pieces, a Lamentation in a minor key and a Consolation in the major of the same key. This listener believes that in pairs of pieces of this magnitude (each is about 5 or 6 minutes long) one instinctively seeks some form of tonal resolution, which Bortkiewicz's scheme rather baffles, giving a perhaps intentional claustrophobic emotional atmosphere. I need to listen to this music again to discern all the influences which feed into it, but Rubinstein, Scriabin, Glazunov, Liszt and Chopin are all in there in varying proportions. Certainly Lloyd was a passionate and gifted advocate of this very original and hyper-romantic tonal world. I was particularly struck by the powerful fourth Lamentation and its flexible and song-like Consolation. Lloyd has recorded these remarkable pieces, with other works of Bortkiewicz, for Amemptos Music (CD4), using the Steinway grand which Rachmaninoff used in his UK concerts.

Lloyd's second half was devoted to Alkan: the *Trois andantes romantiques* Op.13, and the gargantuan *Scherzo focoso* Op.34. Here again the pianist's lithe technique and careful considerations of dynamics and pedalling were clearly evident. The *Scherzo* is rather a puzzle – could it have been, as some think possible, originally intended for the set of *Etudes* in the minor keys? If so, the composer was perhaps right to issue it separately – it is in every way *sui generis*, a stand-alone, almost directing two fiery fingers at standards of musical form and the pianistic capabilities of mere mortals, stretching both to, and beyond, their limits. Lloyd Buck was certainly equal to the task, although I have heard him give a performance which was – how shall I say it? – more *focused*. Not that the Cambridge performance was in any way a disappointment. The audience was rightly thrilled by this amazing display of pianism and the tension in the hall rose perceptibly as the long pedal towards the end approached its climax.

Needless to say the society was delighted and grateful that Mr. Buck could give such a remarkable recital in its name, and also extends its thanks to Francis Knights and Fitzwilliam College, for providing the opportunity for this memorable concert.

David Conway

Alkaniana

Colloquium on Alkan's *Esquisses*

On the evening of November 18 the Society held a meeting at Schott's (now called Bauer & Hieber) of Great Marlborough Street, devoted to Alkan's 49 *Esquisses* Opus 63. The idea for such a meeting was the brainchild, perhaps one might better say inspiration, of Richard Murphy. After studying the *Esquisses* for a number of years he had noticed some remarkable constructional features in them. For example that No. 31, *Début de Quatuor* is unmistakably laid out, exactly as its title promises, as the exposition of a sonata form movement of a string quartet; needing a transposition of but half a tone (from F# major) to render it palatable for strings. As proof Richard produced a recording of four friends he had induced to play the work in that form. It was most convincing. Indeed as we were to hear later, the *Petit prélude à trois* (no. 17) seems to be a trio as much as no. 31 is a quartet.

Then, as a magician produces rabbits out of a hat, so Richard Murphy produced pianists each of whom played and talked about his chosen *Esquisse(s)*.

The programme commenced with Richard himself, who played and discussed no. 34, *Odi profanum vulgus et arceo: favete linguis*, a quotation from Horace ('I disdain the uninitiated

crowd, and I keep them away; hold your tongues!') which might indeed have been the composer's watchword.

The composer John White played and discussed no.1 *La vision* and no.12 *Barcarollette*, followed by Mark Viner (no.43, *Notturmo inamorato*), who discussed the stylistic relation of the pieces to Mendelssohn. Julian Haxby then presented no. 11 (*Les soupirs*), no.17 (*Petit prélude à trois*), and no.30 (*Petit air dolent*).

Martin Ball gave us no.32 (*Minuettino & Trio*) and no.33 (*Fais Dodo*), and David Conway addressed no.4 (*Les cloches*) and the un-numbered no. 49 of the 48(!), (*Laus Deo*).

Many fascinating points arose in the presentations and the ensuing discussions. Over how long a period were the *Esquisses* written? *Esquisse* means sketch, outline, rough draft or plan (according to Cassell's dictionary), yet these pieces are all remarkable for polish and detail.

What is going on in the *Barcarollette*? Perhaps the upper part is droplets of water falling from oars or the sun sparkling on wavelets. Is the lower line a typical Italian folksong sung by any Italian tenor or baritone who might happen to be a bargeman?

The titles of a remarkable proportion of the *Esquisses*, (fourteen out of 49), indicate that they are 'petit'. For some listeners *Petit air dolent* is much in the same vein as *Les regrets de la nonette*, but for others it may be touched with cynicism.

Julian Haxby demonstrated that *Morituri te salutant* is based on a theme from a mass by Palestrina. Indeed, we were several times amazed at the breadth and depth of Alkan's knowledge of other composers. The *Minuettino et Trio*, a sinister minor key version of 'Se vuol ballare' from the *Marriage of Figaro*, seemed both a tribute to and a commentary on Mozart.

Fais Dodo is the French instruction to a small child that it is bed time. Alkan had no family; well, did he have occasion to use this expression to the infant Delaborde?

Many of Alkan's works, including several played this evening, suggest strong involvement with mysticism and number. Of course this could be in the minds of the listener, projecting these ideas on to Alkan, but, knowing what we do of Alkan and his Jewish background, such a construction is plausible.

There was some discussion of the term *Gematria*, the Talmudic study of numbers as they may be construed from words in a text and what they might signify. ("I am now going swiftly heavenwards" 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 11 - the first six prime numbers, probably not significant, but if you persevere down this path you will eventually find something.) Orthodox Jewish authority frowned on *gematria* as likely to lead the practitioner into sorcery and witchcraft. Clearly, Alkan was not concerned; orthodox authority would also have frowned on him reading the New Testament, let alone translating it into French.

A more musico-technical, and practically important, matter was raised by Julian Haxby. He commented on the need in these works to consider lighter pedalling than Alkan indicates, on account of the changes in instruments since his time.

Bells appear in various of Alkan's works. Those of the miniature *Les cloches* seem to be the rather distant bells of a country church. But, one might ask, what experience had the reclusive, town-dwelling Alkan of the countryside? He did occasionally travel outside Paris, but in his day he would perhaps not have needed to go far, for then most of today's *banlieus de Paris* were still small farm-holdings. Was Alkan aware that for centuries countryside church bells were a principal means of communicating urgent news; thus, for example, when recruiting sergeants arrived in a village, no healthy males of military age were in sight. Bells also feature

in *Laus Deo* which is tonally and structurally remarkably forward-looking, suggesting features of some of Liszt's later works.

The evening was very well attended and time flew by at such a rate that the chairman had to interrupt proceedings in an attempt to vacate the hall by the due hour. There was no division between those who don't happen to be able to play the piano and those who do, other than the gratitude and admiration of those who don't play for those who had troubled to learn up the pieces for the occasion. The universal expression of everyone present was that there should be further occasions for the study of others of the *Esquisses*.

Pythagoras

Editor's note: A second colloquium on the Esquisses was scheduled for January but had to be postponed due to unforeseen circumstances. Members will be notified as soon as this has been rearranged

How Jewish was Felix Mendelssohn?

In the bicentenary year of the birth of Felix Mendelssohn, who was one of Alkan's musical heroes, readers may be interested in the following article which was commissioned from your Editor as an introductory essay for the 'Jewish Year Book 2009' (Valentine Mitchell, London). Mendelssohn's interest in his Jewish origins – which seems to have been lively, but intellectual rather than spiritual – compares with Alkan's more passionate, if troubled, relationship with the religion of his fathers.

'Short, dark & Jewish looking': Felix Mendelssohn in England

The *Jewish Chronicle* in London has recently run a popular feature entitled 'How Jewish is...?' in which it examines the Jewish credentials, genetic, social and behavioural, of figures in the news, and assesses a percentage 'result' of its subjects. Had this series been running in the paper's first decade in the 1840s, Felix Mendelssohn could interestingly have come under its scrutiny. In his ten visits, totaling not more than twenty months, to Britain between 1829 and 1847, the year of his death, Mendelssohn was treated as a major celebrity, and had a profound effect on the country's musical life, which will doubtless be warmly recognised during 2009, his bicentenary year.

Felix never, as far as we know, visited a synagogue; he was not circumcised; he was baptised at the age of 9 and was throughout his life a sincere, if not zealous, Lutheran. Yet right from the start his Jewish connections were noted in the British press. *The Harmonicon* of 26 April 1829 announced excitedly:

Another arrival in London is the young Mr. Mendelssohn, son of the rich banker of Berlin, and, I believe, grandson of the celebrated Jewish philosopher and elegant writer. He is one of the first pianoforte players in Europe and though a very young man is supposed to be better acquainted with music than most professors of the art. Meyerbeer too is expected but he has so often promised to come to England, that he cannot be calculated upon until he actually arrives. The two last are amateurs only, the independence of their fortunes rendering it unnecessary for them to pursue the art with any view of profit.

Meyerbeer, now relegated to obscurity save for the fact that he was a principal butt of Wagner's odious '*Judaism in Music*', was also the scion of a wealthy Jewish family, and was to become renowned as the father of Grand Opera (a genre which, by the way Mendelssohn detested). He did not actually come to London until a few years later. It is interesting that Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer are linked by the *Harmonicon*. Clearly the two met some

standard of refinement (or perhaps just wealth) that allowed the *Harmonicon* implicitly to commend them – ‘amateurs’ in this context means those who practice an art for love not mere lucre, unlike worldly ‘professors’. This conclusion was later to be turned upside-down by Wagner who hinted that Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, being Jews, were only in it for the money.

Interest in Felix may also have been stimulated by the publication in London in 1825 of a book on his grandfather Moses, who was already established as a name in Germany as a philosopher of the Enlightenment. Amateurs of psychology may ponder whether Felix’s father Abraham (who is alleged to have commented resignedly ‘Once I was the son of a famous father – now I am the father of a famous son’) was motivated by his own father’s fame to renounce his Jewish heritage. When Abraham wrote to Felix in London urging him to drop the name Mendelssohn in favour of his own adopted surname Bartholdy - arguing that ‘there can no more be a Christian Mendelssohn that there can be a Jewish Confucius’ – it may have been a similar obstinacy in Felix to continue to have his cards printed, and to sign his name, ‘Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy’.

Mendelssohn’s first London visit included a rapturously received performance of his First Symphony, to conduct which he used the innovation of a baton. *The Harmonicon* commented ecstatically that ‘he will in a few years be considered as the fourth of that line which has done such immortal honour to the most musical nation in Europe’ thus placing him in English minds in the great line of German composers, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. British opinion of Mendelssohn remained at these levels throughout his life, and for some time beyond. Mendelssohn reciprocated this regard, enjoying Britain immensely (and equally disliking France). He was adopted from the start as an acceptable member of society; his 1829 engagement book reveals a constant whirlwind of invitations, concerts and dinners.

Amongst his constant companions during his visits was the Jewish pianist and composer Moscheles and his family. Moscheles (b. 1794) who had been based in London since the early 1820s, had been entrusted by Abraham with looking after Felix on his first visit. He had first encountered the 15 year old Felix at the Mendelssohn household in Berlin in 1824 when he had given the young man a piano lesson ‘without losing sight for a single moment that I was sitting next to a master, not a pupil’. Their friendship grew extremely deep; Felix became godfather to Moscheles’s son Felix (b. 1834), who recalled that ‘Mendelssohn, and what he said and did, was [...] a constant theme of conversation in our family’. Felix offered Moscheles a professorship at the Leipzig Conservatoire which he founded in 1843, and of which Moscheles became the director after Mendelssohn’s early death in 1847.

Felix frequently concertized with Moscheles during his English visits, sharing the same musical tastes, and devotion to Bach and Beethoven. Amongst his own compositions Mendelssohn gave premières in England of the *Scottish* (1842) and *Italian* (1833) Symphonies, his *Hebrides* overture (then entitled *The Isles of Fingal*) (1832), his Second Piano Concerto (1837) and *Elijah* (1846, at the Birmingham Festival). He conducted the second performance of his Second Symphony, the *Lobgesang*, at Birmingham in September 1840, with the Jewish tenor John Braham (then in his mid-sixties) as tenor soloist. Moscheles, who was present, wrote to his wife:

[O]ne of the chorales of this glorious work told so powerfully that the whole audience rose involuntarily from their seats – a custom usually confined in England to the performance of the Hallelujah chorus.

All of these works became staples of the English concert repertoire throughout the nineteenth century, and his sets of *Songs Without Words* for the piano were to be found in every musical household in the country.

Mendelssohn's status was endorsed by the ultimate authorities. When Queen Victoria met him in 1842 her first comment in her journal was that 'he is short, dark and Jewish-looking', but her admiration and that of Prince Albert is indisputable. Following a visit a few days later, Mendelssohn gives a charming account of the Queen and Prince informally at home, joining in a chorus from *St Paul* with the composer at the organ, and of the Queen singing him her favourite of his songs (which he had to confess was actually written by his sister Fanny). The Queen and Prince continued to favour Mendelssohn; they were present in 1847 when he conducted the London premiere of *Elijah*, and at his subsequent (last) concert in London with the Philharmonic, when he played Beethoven's Fourth Piano concerto and conducted his own *Scottish Symphony*. Moreover Mendelssohn's friend Moscheles was appointed as 'Pianist to the Prince Consort', a sinecure to be sure, but a prestigious one.

Overall, the musical legacy in England of Mendelssohn was significantly formative; so much so that at least for a generation Leipzig was regarded as a premier destination for any British students wishing to acquire a recognised musical training. Amongst Britons who studied there were Mendelssohn's friend Sterndale Bennett and Arthur Sullivan. Under Moscheles the Conservatory remained a bastion of Mendelssohnian musical conservatism: Edward Dannreuther, who studied there between 1859 and 1863, later wrote:

It was whispered that the two old Grands in the pianoforte-room of the Conservatorium were wont to rehearse Mendelssohn's D minor Concerto all alone by themselves, from 12.30 on Sunday night until cock-crow! Force of habit, probably.

Efforts to demonstrate Jewishness in Mendelssohn's music are not convincing. Vague resemblance to traditional Jewish tunes here and there can only be coincidental, and there is no reference in the composer's voluminous correspondence of any interest in synagogal music. The German tradition in music was supreme to him, and this would have been natural to one whose great-aunt, Sara Levy, was a pupil and patron of JS Bach's son, Carl Philip Emmanuel, and had amassed a magnificent collection of Bach manuscripts. It was almost certainly his aunt Sara who had recommended as teacher to Felix her friend Carl Zelter (1758-1832), a conservative musician and friend of Goethe, to whom he introduced Felix in 1821. Felix, by his revival of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829, reawakened interest in the then-forgotten master; but although this seems a Christian enough event, it is noteworthy that he commented to his colleague the actor Eduard Devrient, who sang the part of Christ, 'To think that it should be an actor and a Jew that give back to the people the greatest of Christian works'.

For although Mendelssohn the composer was a German, in Mendelssohn the man we often find glimpses of the Jew, or rather, of *yiddishkeit* (a Yiddish word encompassing Jewish social and intellectual mores, as opposed to just the Jewish religion). Visiting Parliament in London he listened with interest to debates on the 'Posen statutes' limiting the rights of German Jews, and did not hesitate, in his correspondence with Fanny, to condemn those who spoke against Jewish civic rights 'Jewhaters' and '*Rohsche*' (using the Yiddish word derived from the Hebrew רשע, wicked). Indeed his family correspondence is littered with Yiddish – his mother Lea for example writes to warn him 'to avoid *shatchanisieren*' (being married off: from Yiddish *shadchan* = marriage broker). Nor is the Jewish ironic inflection absent: in a letter to his sister Rebecka, Felix chafes her mocking complaint about a displeasing relative: 'What do you mean by saying you are not hostile to Jews? I hope this was a joke [...] It is really sweet of you that you do not despise your family, isn't it?'

This sort of family interplay disproves almost by itself the assertions of some modern academics that Abraham Mendelssohn and his offspring went out of their way to distance

themselves from their Jewish origins. All the evidence is that they continued to socialise largely with Jews or *Neuchristen* (Jewish converts to Christianity). We have seen that Abraham entrusted Felix to Moscheles, who at that time still regarded himself as a Jew (he had married in synagogue in Frankfurt in 1825, and converted in London in 1832 after the birth of his son for social reasons). In Paris and in London, Felix continued to associate closely with the established Jewish banking families such as the Foulds, the d'Eichthals and the Rothschilds, and with Jewish musicians such as Ferdinand Hiller and Julius Benedict. With Meyerbeer, true, he did not get on, liking the man no more than his music. But then, they were relatives (both descended from Rabbi Moses Isserlis), which perhaps explains the *broiges* [quarrel] between them. When Hiller commented to Felix on his resemblance to his distant cousin, Mendelssohn was so disgusted that he rushed to get his hair cut to diminish the similarity. Even after death members of the Mendelssohn family were buried in a part of the Lutheran *Dreifältigkeit* Cemetery in Berlin reserved for other *Neuchristen*, where their tombs can be seen today close to those of Rahel Levin, Henrietta Herz and other notable German-Jewish converts.



Mendelssohn's grave in Berlin

civil rights, his being attacked by Wagner, and his literary transformation as Seraphael. I think we must concede at least 85%.

In England after his death Mendelssohn's Jewish roots also became part of his enduring legend, partly due to a once highly popular but now forgotten, and almost unreadable, novel. *Charles Auchester*. Its author, Elizabeth Sara Sheppard, wrote it in 1847 at the age of seventeen. Sheppard, who, although the daughter of an English parson, had a Jewish grandmother, was enthusiastically philo-Semitic; her book, whose hero is the noble, talented and generous Chevalier Seraphael, a very thinly disguised idealization of Mendelssohn, is embarrassingly effusive on the supposed God-given musicality of the Jewish people, expressed in the purplest of prose. Shrewdly the young authoress showed the manuscript before publication to Disraeli, who pronounced 'No greater work will ever be written upon music'. Mendelssohn's friend the critic Henry Chorley described it more accurately as 'half-crazy'. Nonetheless it sold by the thousand, and was still in print (in *Everyman's Library*) in 1928. In this eccentric but influential work Mendelssohn had somehow become both the perfect Jew and the perfect English gentleman.

So – to sum up 200 years after his birth – how Jewish is Felix Mendelssohn? Against – the absence of a *bris* (circumcision), his Lutheran profession, and, perhaps, his oratorio *St. Paul*. In favour – his genes, his appearance (as attested by royalty), his name, his friends, his demonstrable familiarity with Yiddish expressions, his interest in Jewish

Concert Review

Organ Recital by Nicholas King

St. Michael's Cornhill, 23 February 2009

Nicholas King's recital opened with a Præludium in G by Homilius, a name until one o'clock yesterday unknown to the writer. It was a pleasant enough piece – on returning home one read in Henderson's *A Directory of Composers for the Organ*: "Constantin Fyodorovich Homilius, an organist of German extraction resident in St. Petersburg, was a brother of Louis Homilius, the director of the organ class at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. He was born in St. Petersburg in 1840 and studied music at the Dresden Conservatory before taking a position as violinist at the Imperial Opera in St. Petersburg. In 1866 he was made organist at the German Reformed Church in St. Petersburg. He wrote music chamber music, including trios, string quartets, sonatas and a piano quintet. Beside the Prelude for organ, his Fugue in D minor for organ or harmonium is also known."

Glazunov is rather better known, mainly for his violin concerto and for his ballet *The Seasons*. His Prelude & Fugue in D, Op.93 is an attractive, if not a great work, and it adds, especially when performed as it was this lunchtime, worthily to the instrument's repertoire.

The substance of the occasion was *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Mussorgsky's masterpiece has incited various transcriptions, this one for organ by Keith John. In the 19th century arrangements and transcriptions were made broadly with three aims: to provide material for virtuoso performers, to popularise great music and for purely musical pleasure. The œuvres of Liszt contain many examples of all three. This recent transcription of *Pictures at an Exhibition* must surely be a tour de force to play and it can scarcely make it better known than it already is. The real justification is that it also, perhaps unexpectedly, works very well on the organ as a vehicle of purely musical pleasure. The programme referred to it as an arrangement. It seemed, however, to be more a straightforward transcription. The writer last heard it played, also by King, on a large instrument in poor repair and rather out of tune, in a large and very resonant church. Yesterday, in a building of moderate size and on an organ in much better state King's registrations and playing ably demonstrated how the subtleties of the work have been retained in transferring it to its new guise. The individual pictures were excellently delineated, though Schmuyle did seem to whinge rather louder than usual, hectoring, perhaps, rather than wheedling. In particular, the balance between the various pictures and their relations to the intervening promenades was precisely right.

Nevertheless, the ambience of the earlier performance, though blurring fine detail, lent a grandeur to some of the slower passages; the Ox Cart and the Great Gate for example, which remain in the memory.

Organs, like humans, tend to emit noises which they should not; the wind noise of this instrument was such that in all three works quieter passages tended to be lost. Raising money for organ repairs is always an up hill task. To provide a useful degree of silencing might not be expensive in this instance.

One hopes that the warmth with which the audience expressed its appreciation was some compensation to both organist and promoter for its small number.

Pythagoras

Forthcoming events

BBC Radio3 to feature Alkan

The afternoon of Sunday 26th April will bring a large scale programme on Alkan on BBC Radio 3, scripted by Jo Wheeler and presided over by Piers Lane. The programme will cover Alkan's life and works, liberally illustrated with recordings of his music. Amongst those discussing Alkan you are likely to hear your editor (but don't let that put you off). It is very encouraging to see the BBC giving serious coverage to Alkan – do listen, and send encouraging comments to the Radio 3 internet message boards.

Mark Viner - Cheltenham 17th July

Once again the Alkan Society is helping to sponsoring an event at the Cheltenham Music Festival (3rd-18th July). This year we are delighted to support the recital of Mark Viner at the Pittville Pump Room at 15.00 on 17th July. This will be the final recital in the Festivals 'Young Artists' series. Mark's programme will be:

Haydn Sonata B minor Hob. XVI:32
Schumann Etudes Symphoniques Op. 13
Alkan Symphony for Solo Piano Op. 39 4 - 7

'Indian Summer in Levoca' Festival, 2nd-10th October 2009



Levoca Town Hall and Church

Following last year's successful Festival, the Second 'Indian Summer in Levoca' Festival in Slovakia will recognise two major musical bicentenaries, the death of Josef Haydn and the birth of Felix Mendelssohn, both composers, as it happens, great favourites of Alkan, who made arrangements of music by the former, and modelled his *Chants* for piano on the *Songs without Words* of the latter.

The Festival is delighted to have the Alkan Society as one of its sponsors, and the music of Alkan is again strongly represented. Jonathan Powell and Rohan de Saram will play the *Sonate de concert* for cello, in a programme which also includes Mendelssohn's *Second Cello Sonata* and, appropriately, Martinů's *Variations on a Slovak Song*. And Tomasz Kamieniak, who last year gave a remarkable performance of the *Concerto*, is giving a recital 'in the spirit of a melodrama' which will include Alkan's *Le tambour bat aux champs*, the *Ouverture* op. 39 no. 11, and *Morte* from op. 15. Both Jonathan and Tomasz are giving additional recitals: Tomasz with his piano trio, which will include one of his own compositions, Beethoven's own transcription of his *Second Symphony* and Tchaikovsky's *Trio* op. 50; Jonathan a solo recital to include Bax's *First Sonata*, Suchoň's *Little Suite* and Rachmaninoff's *Etudes Tableaux* op. 33, and Godowsky's paraphrase on Johan Strauss's *Fledermaus*.

In addition there is a panoply of wonderful musicians – the Vienna Piano Trio, the Stamic Quartet, the Zemlinsky Quartet, the tenor Jose Guerrero, and the Slovak Sinfonietta – playing music both familiar and neglected- the full programme is on the next page. Not least amongst our guests is the South African pianist Petronel Malan who was prevented from coming last year when a certain European embassy in the US managed to lose her passport in the post. (*contd. p. 12*)

The second
Indian Summer in Levoca Festival

2nd-10th October 2009

Celebrating two musical bicentenaries:

{Josef Haydn 1732-[1809] - 1847 Felix Mendelssohn}

Friday 2 nd October 19.00 Theatre Levoča	Stamic Quartet (Czech Republic) Haydn: String Quartet in g op. 74/3 ('The Rider') Krasá: String Quartet (1921) Mendelssohn: String Quartet in f op. 80
Saturday 3 rd October , 15.00 Dardanelly Summerhouse, Markušovce	Budapest Haydn Baryton Trio (Hungary) Music from the Esterhazy court: Haydn, Tomasini, Liedl, Burgksteiner and Pal Esterhazy
Saturday 3 rd October 19.00 Theatre Levoča	Stamic Quartet + Zemlinsky Quartet (Czech Republic) Bartók: 8 Duos for 2 violins (Sz. 98 book 4) Brahms: Sextet no. 2 in G op. 36 Mendelssohn: Octet op 20
Sunday 4 th October 15.00 Theatre Levoča	Zemlinsky Quartet (Czech Republic) Haydn: String Quartet in D op. 76/5 Zemlinsky: String Quartet no. 1 Mendelssohn: String Quartet in e op. 44/2
Sunday 4 th October 19.00 Congress Hall Levoča	Vienna Piano Trio (Austria) Haydn: Piano Trio (tbd) Schumann: Piano Trio no. 2 in F op. 80 Mendelssohn: Piano Trio no. 1 in d op. 49
Monday 5 th October 15.00 Congress Hall Levoča	Jonathan Powell (piano) (UK) Schubert: Sonata in C –Bax: Sonata no 1 - Rachmaninoff: Etudes Tableaux op. 33 - Suchoň: Little Suite and Passacaglia – Haydn: Adagio - Godowsky/Strauss: 'Fledermaus' paraphrase.
Monday 5 th October 19.00 Congress Hall Levoča	Vienna Piano Trio (Austria) Haydn: Piano Trio (tbd) Anton Rubinstein: Piano Trio no. 2 in g op. 15 Mendelssohn: Piano Trio no. 2 in c op. 66
Tuesday 6 th October 19.00 Congress Hall Levoča	State Chamber Orchestra of Žilina (Slovakia)/ Petronel Malan (piano) (S. Africa) I.Hrusovsky: Noble Dances of Levoča – Haydn: Piano Concerto in F –Mendelssohn: Piano Concerto no. 1 op. 25 – Haydn: Symphony no. 104 ('London')
Wednesday 7 th October 19.00 Congress Hall Levoča	Kamieniak Trio (Poland) T. Kamieniak: Four Serious Pieces Beethoven: Piano Trio op. 36 (Beethoven's own arrangement of his Second Symphony) - Tchaikovsky: Piano Trio in a op. 50
Thursday 8 th October 19.00 Congress Hall Levoča	Jonathan Powell (piano)/Rohan de Saram ('cello) (UK) Martinů: Variations on a Slovak song Mendelssohn: Cello sonata no. 2 in D op. 58 Alkan: Sonate de concert for 'cello and piano op. 47
Friday 9 th October 19.00 Congress Hall, Levoča	Petronel Malan (piano) (S. Africa) Haydn: Sonata in c – Cikker: Sonata op. 12/1 – Zhelobinsky: Six short etudes – Rachmaninoff: Moments Musicaux op. 16
Saturday 10 th October 15.00 Dardanelly Summerhouse, Markušovce	Tomasz Kamieniak (piano) Haydn: Sonata in G - Mendelssohn/Liszt: 7 Lieder – Liszt: Transcriptions of Schubert and Wagner – Alkan: Le tambour bat aux champs op. 50/2; Morte op. 13/2; Ouverture op. 39/11
Saturday 10 th October 19.00 Theatre, Levoča	Jose Guerrero (Spain) (tenor) acc. John Knight (UK) (guitar) A programme of Spanish song, to include works of Garcia Lorca.

This time she tells me she'll make it by hook or by crook, playing Mendelssohn and Haydn concertos with the Slovak Sinfonietta, and a solo recital to include Haydn, Rachmaninoff and Zhelobinsky.

Once again the main venues for concerts will be the Congress Hall and the delightful old Theatre of Levoca, but there will also be two concerts in the Summerhouse of the nearby chateau of Markušovce, a beautiful building in its own right which now houses a state music museum.



The Summerhouse at Markušovce

Due to the uncertainty of the pound, the Patrons' subscription for the Festival is this year set in Euros, but members of the Alkan Society may obtain a Euros 25 discount from the fee, paying a subscription of Euros 175 instead of Euros 200. With cheap flights available from SkyEurope between Luton and the nearby towns of Poprad and Košice, the modest rates of the attractive

local hotels (between Euros 30 and Euros 70/night), and the beautiful and historic location, the Festival offers one of the best value quality musical breaks in Europe. More information is available at the Festival's website <http://www.lblfestival.eu>. You can see video clips from last year's Festival at <http://www.youtube.com/smerus>.

The Festival organizers will be glad to assist with travel and/or accommodation or to deal with any questions you may have – send an e-mail to info@lblfestival.eu.

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