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ALKAN SOCIETY

(Reg Charity No 276199)

BULLETIN - 1 April 1980

Report of Meeting held at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Silk Street, Barbican, on Friday 25 January 1980 6.30-9.00 pm.

At 6.30, fourteen Members assembled and were conducted by the Senior Librarian (Mr Paul Holden) and his assistant over the School - stopping at the more interesting places and finally arriving at the Library - where a splendid display of books, records, sheet-music and Alkania generally had been laid out by the Librarians.

At 7.30, twenty-two Members, with two or three friends, went to the Lecture/Recital Room to hear a fascinating talk by Vice-President Richard Shaw. This talk had been meticulously prepared and was fully documented. Our President and a Member from the USA - Robert Behra - were there to enjoy it with the rest of us. Unfortunately there is only enough space here to list the main points of the discourse:

NAMES: His birth-certificate gives CHARLES VALENTIN MORHANGE (1813). The same appeared at the marriage of his sister Céleste (1837). Official documents dated 1855 and 1868 give Ch.-V. Alkan Morhange. On his death-certificate appeared 'MORHANGE Charles Valentin, dit Alkan'. The name 'Henri' was a mistake that has been perpetuated in books (including some dictionaries) from 1858 until our own times. It is most significant that Alkan himself, and all contemporaries who knew him personally, never used such a name.

ZIMMERMAN SUCCESSION: It is well known that Alkan wanted passionately to succeed Zimmerman as Head of the Piano Department at the Paris Conservatoire. Intimate letters from Alkan to his musicologist friend Fétis, discovered in Sweden by Richard Shaw, reveal that Alkan was very depressed to find that even Zimmerman, whose favourite pupil he had once been, had not supported his candidature - perhaps the unkindest cut of all. The speaker remarked, at this point, that perhaps it was a good thing in many ways that Alkan did not gain the coveted appointment. We might not have had the Op 39!

MANNER OF HIS DEATH: The speaker reviewed all the various accounts of Alkan's death, and it was at once obvious that the further from the event, the more fanciful the circumstances became - even to a fall from a ladder in the library! It is unlikely that Alkan was crushed by a falling bookcase and, as the accounts of responsible people vary so widely, it must still be left as an open question whether Alkan died naturally or accidentally.

About 9.00 pm Jan Hoare expressed the intense gratitude of the Members to Richard Shaw for his generosity in travelling all the way from St Andrews (returning there on the night-sleeper) to deliver such an erudite and immensely interesting talk.

Report of Meeting held at the Thomas Coram Foundation, 40 Brunswick Square, on Tuesday 11 March 1980 at 7.30 pm.

A small business matter was first dealt with. The Members agreed nem con that while the Honorary Treasurer is away in Japan, cheques drawn on the Society's bank-account shall be signed by P Lee and J H White.

As John Oxlade had found himself unable to give his proposed talk, Robert Collet - Vice-President and a Founder-Member of our Society - very kindly took his

place at fairly short notice.

The Speaker said that he first heard an Alkan piece played in 1920. He was not then particularly impressed; but from that time onward his interest grew steadily. He spoke of Busoni's efforts to put Alkan's works before the public and went on to tell of various other pianists he himself had heard playing Alkan eg Frederic Lamond (a Scot) and - in particular - Egon Petri, whose magnificent technique was sufficient to tackle anything. Robert Collet surveyed the French composers (ie those born in France) of the nineteenth century and stated that, generally speaking, they were content to produce short, fairly conventional and neatly-tailored pieces. Young composers were much influenced by older men, now regarded in the minor category, such as Meyerbeer (b Berlin 1791) - Alkan himself may well have been. The French composers were not much interested in epic, grand conceptions. Berlioz (b near Grenoble 1803) and Alkan (b Paris 1813) were different. It is, however, impossible to grade Alkan as a composer because of the uneven quality of his output.

The Delaborde/Philipp edition of Alkan's works, now published by Billaudot, appeared at the turn of the century - most of the work being done by Philipp. Isidor Philipp (b Budapest 1863) became Professor of Piano at the Paris Conservatoire in 1893. He died in 1958, aged 94, having lived in New York from 1941 to 1955. Robert Collet met him on several occasions, playing to him and discussing Alkan and other matters. He now wishes he had questioned him more closely on problems that are still with us, such as the circumstances of Alkan's death. (Philipp had been one of the pall-bearers at Alkan's funeral.)

Martin Ball warmly thanked Robert Collet for coming at short notice to deliver such a fascinating talk.

The Meeting closed about 9.30.

Matters of Finance

Till now, the Society has managed to pay its way - but with very little to spare. Now with costs of postage, room-hire etc all rising, the Executive Committee might have to consider raising the fairly low subscription rates. However, the Society has recently received a stroke of good fortune. When a Registered Charity has, unfortunately, to wind up its affairs, any monies left over may, with the approval of the Charity Commissioners, be distributed to other similar Charities. Patrick Lee was closely associated with the Harlow Music Association and, as that organisation has ceased to be, through his good offices the sum of £104.06 has been given to our Society. £80 of this has been put on deposit at the Bank. How best to use this windfall will be discussed at the next Meeting of the Committee and any recommendations will be submitted for approval at the AGM in July.

Largely through the help of special donations to the Library Fund we are still adding items of interest. There are still pieces available that we have not yet been able to afford. If any Members, who have not already done so, would like to make a contribution to this Fund, please write to me. (See also under 'Alkan Reference Library')

Discography

John Bingham (pianoforte) included Alkan's "Les Diablotins" Op 63 No 45 on the disc Harmonia Mundi (Deutsche) EMI Electrola 065-99 843. It also has Wagner's 'Siegfried Idyll' and Liszt's 'Malédiction' for solo piano and strings.

I have heard no more concerning Dr Hanns Steger's recording of the Mozart/Alkan Concerto No 20 (K 466) and the Alkan Cadenza to the Beethoven Concerto Op 37.

Alkan Reference Library

The following sixteen items of sheet music have been added:

Op 10 1st Concerto da Camera and the 2nd also
Op 13 Trois Andantes Romantiques
Op 24 Gigue et Air de Ballet
Op 42 Reconciliation
Op 45 Salut Cendre du Pauvre
Op 51 Capriccio - Alla Soldatesca
Op 53 Quasi-Caccia - Caprice
Op 76 No 1 Etude pour la main gauche seule

Transcriptions:

Auteur inconnu: Rigaudons
Beethoven: Chant d'Alliance Op 122
Beethoven: Cadenza for Op 37
Handel: Choeur des Prêtres de Dagon
Haydn: Menuet du Quatuor Op 76
Mozart: Ne Cinis at Pulvis Superbe

For four hands: Finale - Marche.

Jean Bartholomew's translation of the von Bulow article (1857) on Alkan's Op 35 is now in the Library.

The Library Authorities have very generously decided to put all our items of sheet music into permanent covers - at a cost of about £1.50 per item! I feel that the Society should make a contribution towards this expense and this must be discussed by the Executive Committee.

News Items

For the first time it is my melancholy duty to record the death of two keen members - Mr D K S Blanchard of Bournemouth and Mr Norman Tyrrell of Croydon, Surrey. Some may remember that Mr Tyrrell was to have read a paper at our Meeting at the British Institute of Recorded Sound last May but his illness prevented him from doing so.

'Le Festin d'Esope' (Op 39 No 12) seems to be favoured in the pianoforte repertory eg Bryn Turley (BBC Third 20 March am) and Anthony Goldstone (QEH 10 April).

Members who were able to hear them were delighted by the two programmes on Alkan given recently by Antony Hopkins in the "Talking About Music" series. It is such a pity that one cannot know beforehand what is to come up in these programmes.

We were grateful that our President at the end of his magnificent Chopin recital at the QEH on 28 February popped in an Alkan Nocturne - beautifully played - as an encore.

Our Honorary Treasurer, John Snelling, is to spend a year teaching English (and perhaps some Alkan!) in Japan. Whilst he is away, I shall be acting both as Secretary and Treasurer. Will Members please note that for the next twelve months subscriptions, donations etc should be sent to me.

The next Bulletin will be produced in October.

Programme of Meetings

May Meeting: President's evening at the Coram Foundation, 40 Brunswick Square at 7.30 pm on Thursday 22 May. I am not sure what his programme will be, but it is likely to include the Symphonie and a few shorter pieces. Recently he has been devoting most of his time to Chopin.

Annual General Meeting: This will be held in the Music Room at the Abbey Community Association on Tuesday 15 July at 7.30 pm. The Music Room is on the ground floor, to the right after entering. I hope more Members will try to attend this year. The ACA is at 29 Marsham Street, SW1. It is not very near any Underground

Station. Westminster (District) and St James's Park (District) are each about $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile distant. Bus No 88 passes close. Starting from the North of Vauxhall Bridge and walking up Horseferry Road, Marsham Street is the third turning right. Walking towards Westminster up Marsham Street, the ACA is on the right-hand side.

November Meeting: This will also be at the Coram Foundation, 40 Brunswick Square at 7.30 on Thursday 20 November. Five or six Members are going to explore the beauties of the Trente Chants Op 38a, 38b, 65, 67 and 70. This should prove to be a very interesting evening.

J H White
Hon Secretary