

ALKAN SOCIETY

(Reg. Charity No. 276199)

BULLETIN - JANUARY 1981

Report of Meeting held at the Thomas Coram Foundation, 40 Brunswick Square on Thursday, November 20th 1980 at 7.30.

Twenty-seven Members were present, with two guests, to spend an evening with the composer's "Trente Chants". We were extremely pleased to welcome our President and others who came from some distance away e.g. Audrey King (Bournemouth), Brian Easdale (Scotland), Alan Davidson (Reading), Mr and Mrs Webster (from near Ashford) and Helmut Ganteführer (West Germany).

In his "Lieder ohne Worte" Mendelssohn wrote eight books (Op.19,30,38,53,62, 67,85,102), each of six pieces, between the years 1830 and 1845. Alkan in his "Trente Chants" wrote five books (Op.38a,38b,65,67,70), each of six pieces, between the years 1854 and 1877. In Mendelssohn's first book, the six pieces were in the keys; - E maj., A min., A maj., A maj., F sharp min., G minor. For some strange reason, Alkan kept the same key sequence in each of his five books. In 21 of the 30 pieces he also kept the same time-signature, though this may have been fortuitous.

Book I Op.38a. Peter Grove gave a splendid start to the evening. He took each piece and contrasted it with the parallel Mendelssohn one. He played splendidly No.5, the exciting but very difficult "Agitatissimo" and No.6 Barcarolle. He then dealt, informatively but more briefly, with No.1 Assez vivement; No.2 Serenade; No.3 Choeur and No.4 L'Offrande.

Book II Op.38b. Jean Bartholomew played accurately and expressively No.1 Hymne and No.4 Procession-Nocturne. She then spoke enchantingly about the essential French character of the pieces and high-lighted the salient points of the others:- No.2 Allegretto (Fa); No.3 Chant de Guerre; No.5 Andantino and No.6 Barcarolle en Choeur.

Book V Op.70. Stephanie McCallum (a Ronald Smith pupil from Australia) played the whole set with professional skill and intimate understanding - some said this was the high-light of the evening:- Duettino - Andantino - Allegro vivace - La Voix de l'Instrument - Scherzo Coro - Recapitulation - Barcarolle.

Interval for coffee and biscuits

Book III Op.65. Sheila Hoare played with feeling and understanding No.6 Barcarolle and No.3 Canon (these two, and No.4 from Book V are included in the selection "Alkan in Miniature"). John White then played No.5 "Horace et Lydie" relating it to the Horace Ode, No.ix of his third book of Odes, on which the music is obviously founded. Real 'programme' music. He then picked out interesting passages from the other pieces: No.1 Vivante; No.2 Esprits Follets; No.4 Tempo Giusto. (Of these Nos 2 and 4 may well appear in Margaret Pitts' programme for the January Meeting).

Book IV Op.67. Martin Ball played through the whole set with great sensitivity and musicianly feeling:- Neige et l'ave; Chanson de la Bonne Vieille; Bravement; Doucement; Appassionato; Barcarolle. He had prepared for each member of the audience a detailed analysis of each number, with copious musical examples, which everyone appreciated and thoroughly enjoyed.

So ended, about 10.15, one of our most fascinating evenings. Those taking part had obviously spent much time in practice and research and the audience greatly appreciated the results.

Alkan Reference Library

Helmut Ganteführer has kindly lent three early copies of Alkan's music. One (about 1840) called a Caprice is now published by Billaudot as No.2 of Op.13 "Trois Andantes Romantiques". Another, an early copy of Op.17 "Le Preux", and, thirdly, a late Victorian copy of a set of Lancers by Maxime Alkan - one of C.V.'s brothers. Photostat copies of these have been made. Our President has also provided the typescript of Antony Hopkins' two recent broadcasts on Alkan in the "Talking about Music" series.

Items of Alkan music that we do not yet possess are to be looked for by the music section of Maggs Bros (Berkeley Sq.), H. Baron (N.W.2) and Macnutt Richard Ltd (Tunbridge Wells).

Executive Committee and Officers

The Society has now been in existence for four years and I feel that we have made a good start. For the first year we had no officers or committee, but those who were elected in 1978 finish their term on July 31st 1981. I am glad to say that most of the members of the Executive Committee will be willing to serve again. They have done a splendid job - bursting with enthusiasm and bright ideas - only some of which we have so far been able to implement. One member has moved away - so we may need two or more committee members. Charles Hailstone would like to continue as Discographer. He has given generously, in all sorts of ways, to the Society and we are all proud of the work he has done on the Discography - which has been widely praised.

I have heard from John Snelling's father that he is doing so well in Japan and is so happy there that he may well extend his stay. This means that we shall be wanting an Honorary Treasurer - in a temporary capacity at least.

I am now in my seventy-fifth year and I feel that the work of Honorary Secretary should be carried on by a younger person. I am not so mobile as I was. The centenary of Alkan's death is only seven years away and there is much to be done before then.

If any Members, preferably in the London area, feel that they would like to help the Society in any of these ways, will they please write to me before the end of April.

News Items

A Member who joined us in 1980 - Squadron-Leader Sayles of the R.A.F. Staff College at Bracknell - tells me that he is such an Alkan addict that his family and friends think that there ought to be an institution "Alkanolics Anonymous"!

With postal and other charges rising, subscription rates will also have to be raised. The extent of the changes will have to be decided by the Executive Committee when they meet on February 8th. I had always believed that with a membership of 150 we could comfortably pay our way, but as our numbers are not quite one hundred we are keeping our heads above water by generous gifts, such as have recently come from Vera Tompkins, Robert Collet and Peter Grove.

Brian Doyle spent part of his summer holiday in Paris in 1980 seeking out the places associated with Alkan and his work. The result was very depressing. Whereas Chopin and Liszt had plaques there was not one for Alkan (although he alone was born in France). When he discovered the Alkan tomb, Brian found it completely neglected with the inscription almost indecipherable. By contrast, that of Berlioz was splendid and well cared for. When he tried to buy Alkan music in two or three of the largest Paris music shops, all he could find was Beck's "Oeuvres Choiesies". Our Executive Committee feels that tactful representations should be made, on behalf of the Society, to the appropriate authority in Paris. The matter is in train. I understand that our Member from the Netherlands, Frank Lioni, has already done something of the sort. Action ought to be stimulated well before the Alkan centenary. While I am typing these notes two letters have arrived; one from Australia (see below) and one from our very keen Member in Paris - Madame M. Husson. Mme Husson sends me the addresses of people to whom I should write and states that the music shops in Paris are not so devoid of Alkan's music as Brian Doyle found. She tells me that the well-known firm of Durand is now no more. She promises to "do all that is possible to help Alkan Society and prepare a centenary worthy of the composer".

Frank Lioni sent a Christmas Card to wish "all Members of the Alkan Society a very Merry Christmas and a happy and musical New Year". He hopes to bring his family to London in the Spring. Professor Dott. Faienza also hopes to be in London in May.

Letter from Australia

C.W. Ray has sent a very interesting letter the contents of which he has asked me to pass on to Members. Here it is:-

"I have been fascinated for many years in retracing the life-history of Charles-Valentin, not from the point of view of a musician (which I am not) but for the human aspect of his enigmatic life and mystery of character.

I am a direct descendant of the Alkan family; my great grandfather was Napoleon (Charles-V's brother) who was also a musician of note. Stories have circulated from time to time creating pieces of a great puzzle. Some are true, like the impression of my cousin Rachael when, as a little girl, she attended some of the Ch-V concerts. Others are partly true, tinted with imagination, prejudices or calculated guesses. It is all intriguing to me and I have the ambition to recreate the man whose life must be reflected through his art. Certain easy deductions could be made if we take into consideration certain characteristics of members of the family (genetic influence?) and/or the political and religious attitudes of the Jewish people of his time.

I would like to appeal to your members for any information which could help me. The book produced by my friend Mr Ronald Smith has been the first attempt to portray Alkan as an artist and a man. I am grateful to Mr Smith for having whetted my appetite. As a matter of interest, I am sending you a photocopy of a letter addressed to Ch-V's father dated 18 May 1826 and addressed to "Monsieur Alkan". I am attaching also a copy of a photograph which was for many years thought to be of Ch-V but was identified as Delaborde's.

Just a food for thought: How much influence was made on his character by the virulent anti-semitism of the period and that his birthplace (sic) was considered German territory after 1870. I will gladly write to any member who might wish to discuss the matter."

Mr Ray's address is:- 94 Orchid Street, ENOGGERA, Brisbane 4051.

Programme of Meetings

January Meeting. This will be held in the Lecture/Recital Room at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, on Thursday January 29th from 7 - 9 pm. Refreshment Bar open at 6.30. Margaret Pitts will play to us for the first half of the programme and she will include two of the Nocturnes; Nos 2 & 4 of the Trente Chants Op.65 ("Esprits Follets" and "Tempo Giusto") Gigue (from Op.24) and a Fauré Nocturne. After the interval, Jack Gibbons hopes to include in his programme "Morte" (from Trois Morceaux Op.15), Two preludes from Op.31 and two at least from the great "Trois grandes etudes" Op.76 (l.-hand, r-hand, both hands). I repeat a note on how to get there. Emerging from Moorgate Underground Station on the west side of Moorgate, turn right then right again into a short street - Moor Place - cross the road ahead and go down another side-street - New Union Street. At the end of New Union Street turn right, then left in Silk Street. The entrance to the School is near the far end of Silk Street on the left-hand side. If coming by car and proceeding northwards up Moorgate, pass the Underground Station and turn left at traffic-lights into Ropemaker Street, then left again down Moor Lane. Silk Street is the first right from Moor Lane. Silk Street is rather narrow but there are plenty of parking-places near. The Guildhall School is next to the nearly-completed Shakespeare Theatre.

March Meeting. This will be held in the Lecture Hall of the Trinity College of Music, 11-13 Mandeville Place, on Friday March 6th. This is the first Meeting that the Society has held at Trinity College and I hope that Members will support the venture. We are very grateful to the Principal and the General Administrator for allowing us this privilege. The evening will be arranged by Charles Hailstone with disc and cassette and I know that he is taking great pains to make this occasion a success. For those who can manage it, coffee will be served at 6.45 pm. The programme will start about 7 pm and continue till about 8.30. The College closes at 8 but we shall be kindly allowed an extension. The College is not far from Bond Street Station. Coming out of the station, go slightly left and cross Oxford Street. Then go up James Street, cross Wigmore Street into Mandeville Place. Trinity College is the last building on the left-hand side. It is a stone's throw from the western exit of Manchester Square - where there is usually plenty of parking-space.

May Meeting. This will be held at the Thomas Coram Foundation on Wednesday May 6th at 7.30 pm. It will be a joint meeting with the Liszt Society. The provisional programme:- For the first half-hour Richard Shaw will give a talk on Liszt, Alkan and their relationship. Following that, some Liszt pianoforte music will be played. After the interval we shall listen to some Alkan. Further details will be given in our next Bulletin.

Annual General Meeting. Usual place and time Wednesday, 15th July 1981.

J.H. White - Hon. Secretary