



THE ALKAN SOCIETY

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ROBERT COLLET

We have to begin the bulletin once again with sad news: Robert Collet died in August. He had been a Vice-President of the Society since its inception and had vigorously supported Alkan's cause for many years before that. His name was mentioned twice in the last bulletin alone.

Ronald Smith reports that he and Robert Collet taught in adjacent rooms in the late 40s: their pupils included members of more than one royal family. From 1952 he was a Professor of Piano at the Guildhall School of Music. It was Collet who gave Ronald Smith his copies of Alkan's Grande Sonate, the Cello Sonata and the Opus 76 Etudes. He was responsible for the first broadcasts of Alkan works in this country, as well as playing some of the music on the radio some years later. He made a generous contribution to our Centenary Festival in 1988.

He was also an authority on Chopin and Liszt, being closely involved with the work of the Liszt Society, which organised a memorial concert on 14th November.

CONCERTS

The closest thing to a meeting for some time took place on September 29th, when Richard Crabtree (viola) and Charles Matthews (piano) gave an informal recital at Trinity College of Music. Their programme consisted of Alkan's Sonate de concert, Op. 47, in Casimir Nev's version for viola and piano, and the viola version of Brahms's F minor clarinet sonata, Op. 120 no. 1. I only learned of the concert three days before it took place, and sent a hurried notice to two dozen members in the London area. In spite of the short notice and the 6 p.m. starting time, we added seven to a small audience as a result.

The performers had already played the Alkan work in St. George's Bristol and hope to give further performances and to record it. It was the first time we had heard the version for viola and in general it worked very well. Certainly the performance was very accurate and got close to Alkan's speeds. The violist played with a full tone and the pianist was well in command of his demanding part though perhaps on the cool side at times. One obviously missed the low tones of the C string on the cello but Crabtree made a very good case for its addition to a limited repertoire. It was rather satisfying to be ahead of the French for once who will be able to hear this version of the work in the Maison de la culture in Grenoble next February. played by Gérard Caussé.

There have been several performances in France notably in the current season of Radio France. Their choir included the Funeral March for a Parrot in a programme in December. The Imoromotu was played by Francois-Henri Houbart in the series "L'orgue et Liszt" on 14 January. The following day Dong-Suk Kang and Olivier Gardon played the Grand Duo Concertant for violin and piano in the Salle Gaveau. A large audience received the work with great enthusiasm. The concert was recorded for broadcast on France-Musique.

RONALD SMITH

Our President makes his first appearance at St John's, Smith Square, on Thursday 7th April. As the enclosed handout shows, his programme will include the premiere of "Les regrets de la nonnette" as well as other pieces by Alkan. He will also play Beethoven's 32 Variations, the Op. 25 Etudes by Chopin and the Liszt B minor Sonata: a typically generous and demanding programme which should attract great support.

MARK-ANDRE HAMELIN

This one-man festival of rarities continues to offer some fascinating repertoire. In December he recorded both of Alkan's Concerti da Camera with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra conducted by Martyn Brabbins. The recording for Hyperion also includes Henselt's Concerto in F minor and Variations for piano and orchestra. The disc may be ready by April.

On April 27th, he will give a lunchtime recital for BBC Birmingham, his programme to include the Alkan Sonatine as well as works by Medtner, Beethoven and Ronn Yedidia (his third sonata, "Outcries").

Ates Orga, who devised the Wigmore Hall series for Nikolai Demidenko, has now devised a series for Hamelin to play there this June. Entitled "The Virtuoso Romantics", the series comprises three concerts on Thursday evenings (9th, 16th and 30th June). The first includes Alkan's transcription and cadenza for Beethoven's 3rd concerto, the Godowsky Passacaglia on Schubert's Unfinished Symphony and transcriptions by Liszt and Balakirev. The second is based on operatic and song transcriptions by Thalberg, Liszt, Busoni and Godowsky. The last includes Alkan's Trois Grandes Etudes op. 76, besides Medtner's G minor sonata, the Schubert-Liszt Soireés de Vienne no. 6 and the Schultz-Evler version of the Blue Danube.

RECORDINGS

Two major releases have appeared on Marco Polo one long-awaited and the other unexpected. The former is Laurent Martin's CD (8.223500) containing the Op. 76 Etudes, the three short Etudes de bravoure Op. 12, Le Preux Op. 17 and Le chemin de fer Op. 27. The "Gramophone" reviewer was not impressed with the recorded sound, but I find it very acceptable and the performances are well worth attention. The Op. 12 and 17 pieces while among Alkan's less important works, are particularly well played and this is the first readily available recording of them. "Le chemin de fer" is taken at the marked metronome speed and sounds a little scrambled at times. The Op. 76 large studies are, for me, no replacement for Ronald Smith's performance, but opinions will vary. He takes a much shorter time for the second right-hand study, but that is because the repeats are omitted.

Bernard Ringeissen on 8.223351 has made the first available recording of the complete Op. 35 major-key Etudes. The disc also has the Scherzo diabolico and Le festin d'Esopé from Op. 39. These are very impressive performances indeed, with good recorded sound too. He has the technique needed and brings out the many beauties of the Op. 35 set. He is sparing with the pedal, even where it is sanctioned in "Le festin", giving a performance almost clear enough to take down as dictation.

Ringeissen included the Sonatine in his recital at the Husum festival of rarities last summer. It was a thoughtful performance with some slower speeds giving the audience time to absorb the new sounds.

Egon Petri's performance of the Symphonie has appeared on a Symposium disc (no. 1145) which also has Percy Grainger's recording of Chopin's B minor sonata and Busoni's of shorter pieces by Bach, Beethoven, Chopin and Liszt. The Petri performance is from the same source as the earlier release on Pearl (which is entirely of Petri recordings), but the Symposium disc, while not subjected to any major cleaning of the sound, is marginally better to my ears. The performance is well worth hearing: it was made late in Petri's career but is powerful and technically assured.

This disc is available from Symposium Records, 110 Derwent Avenue, East Barnet, Hertfordshire EN4 8LZ at the following rates: £10 in the U.K., £11.50 in Europe and £13 for other countries.

I have now heard the recording of the Cello Sonata and Violin Duo by Husevin Sermet with Christoph Henkel and Tedi Papavrami respectively (Valois-Auvidis V 4680), and like both performances. Since both works are already available more than once - and Nimbus has certainly not forgotten that it will be releasing Ronald Smith's performances eventually - this is perhaps a disc for the keener collectors.

A new label, the United Recording Company, has plans for a series of Alkan recordings to be made by John Lenehan, the winner of our Centenary Piano Competition. The company is determined to offer rare repertoire and we wish them well.

Nikolai Demidenko's set of recordings from his recitals at the Wigmore Hall has been released, but he was not satisfied enough with "Le tambour bat aux champs" to have it included.

AN ALKAN DAY: Saturday April 16th 1994 at the Guildhall School

The committee has felt for a long time that members might be more willing to come to a major event lasting for a day rather than the shorter evening meetings which attract rather limited support. Accordingly, Eliot Levin has invited several performers and speakers for a stimulating day based in the Guildhall School of Music, to run from 9.30 until late afternoon. You should have already received some information about the day. We will begin with a short meeting before the main programme. So far this is known to include a lecture-recital by Ronald Smith, an organ recital in St Giles Cripplegate by Nicholas King, a recital by Thomas Wakefield who has given such splendid performances for us before, and talks by the scholars Alexander Knapp and Janet Ritterman (Director of the Royal College of Music). Dr Ritterman will speak about performance practice in Paris during the 1830-50 period.

This is obviously an ambitious and costly event, which we do hope that many people will want to support. Members will be very welcome to bring guests. Arrangements have been made for lunch in the Barbican Centre, and anyone who wishes to have lunch is urged to make an early reply to Eliot Levin with payment.

NEW ORDER FORM

An order form for selected recordings and books is enclosed. Brian Doble has worked hard to obtain some of these, particularly the Australian recording by Stephanie McCallum. Our small society has problems if we have too much money tied up in stocks of records, even though Brian limits the numbers he buys in each batch. Therefore please do order from him if you wish this service to continue.

MEMBERSHIP 1994

A form for renewal and payment of your membership is enclosed. We did not send a formal request for payment last year because our activities were so limited. However, the forthcoming event is going to draw on our resources considerably, and I hope that it will encourage you to renew your membership.

We sincerely thank all those who paid for membership last year without a reminder. If you wish to make a donation in addition to the 1994 subscription, that would be most welcome.

Please note that the cheques for membership should be sent to me this time, so that I can more easily update my list of members.

DISCOGRAPHY

Our French colleagues are producing the latest version of the discography, and have given us permission to use it with a glossary for English readers when it is available.

PETER GROVE