

Report of Meeting at the Thomas Coram Foundation - 16 January 1979 at 7.30

There were about twenty-five people present, some Members being unfortunately prevented from attending by the strike of railwaymen. Fortunately, Mr and Mrs McCallum were able to bring Ronald Smith up to London from Hythe by road.

The Hon Secretary spoke briefly on the efforts to obtain publication (starting as early as 1972) of an album of Alkan short pieces. This album was now in the proof-reading stage and is to be called "Alkan in Miniature". Then our President took up the story, playing and speaking about many of the pieces selected - mainly from the Préludes Op 31, the Esquisses Op 63 and the Trente Chants. Later, for good measure, he played a few longer pieces including Alleluia Op 25, "Fa" Op 38 No 2 and the first of the Marches Op 37.

Was there ever a man who could talk about music so persuasively, having all relevant examples literally at his finger-tips? He inspires all his hearers with his own great enthusiasm and never fails to throw new light even on music that one feels one knows well. Even in the middle of a disquisition new ideas may occur to him! It is not an over-statement to claim that his audience was spellbound.

Before the Meeting closed (about 9.45) Patrick Lee expressed the intense appreciation of the audience and warmly thanked the President.

Report of Meeting at the Thomas Coram Foundation - 15 March 1979 at 7.30

Again there were about twenty-five people present, eighteen Members with a few friends.

The first half of the programme was played by two young pianists - brilliant Australian pupils of our President. They started with No 1 from Trois Marches (à quatre mains) Op 40 - played with much verve. Then Mrs Stephanie McCallum gave a remarkably assured performance of "Le Festin" and "Comme le Vent" (Nos 12 and 1 of Op 39). Christine Stevenson followed with a mature and conscientious performance of the Sonatine Op 61. The two young ladies then performed, with appropriate gusto, the Salterelle - Alkan's own arrangement, for four hands, of the last movement of the 'cello sonata Op 47. Our President introduced his pupils - of whom he must have been very proud.

After the interval Peter Grove (from Salisbury) chose 13 from the Esquisses Op 63 (Nos 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 14, 23, 24, 27, 33, 42, 43, 47). He spoke most interestingly about each one and played them beautifully. He was shy about playing them before the President but Ronald Smith enjoyed the selection as much as anyone.

Then Jean Bartholomew tackled the difficult and rather abstruse Benedictus Op 54 written for Pedal-Piano or Piano 3-hands. She played it in splendid fashion. The third hand was contributed by the Hon Secretary though this one was not as good as the other two! The President said that he had never before heard a performance of it.

The programme ended with Nos 6 and 9 from the nine arrangements for four hands from "Onze grands préludes" Op 66 arranged by J V da Motta. These Préludes were also originally written for pedal-piano. Ronald Smith said afterwards that he particularly enjoyed No 9. Jean Bartholomew played the upper part and the Hon Secretary the lower.

The programme was tremendously enjoyed by all those present and the Meeting closed about 10 pm.

Alkan Reference Library

Richard Murphy has kindly given valuable additions to the Library. These are: Super Flumina Op 52, Les Mois Op 74 and Toccata Op 75. Les Mois is a fairly early work and should have an Op No round about 20. By the generous cash contributions of a few other Members, the initial cost of sheet music (about £30) has been cleared. Largely through the very generous contribution by Knut Franke we have been able to order the Three Nocturnes (Op 22 and 57), the Grande Sonate (Op 33) and the five books of the Trente Chants. Messrs Bärenreiter Ltd must make all our Members sincerely grateful for the gift of a complimentary copy of the 'Cello Sonata Op 47 (edited by Hugh Macdonald). The very warm thanks of our Members must be given to all these kind people for their generous help.

There have been no further gifts of recordings, but the Library has received two copies of a reissue of a Lewenthal disc. The Senior Librarian has put one in the Lending Library and one in our Reference Library.

Draft Constitution

There will have to be another small amendment. Although the financial year ends on 31 May, the Membership year must end on 31 July - to include the AGM. It is hoped to send out the final Constitution later in the year.

News Items

Issue of Bulletins now seems to be falling into a regular pattern. There will normally be three issues - September, January and April. It would help if the Members who can attend Meetings would, as soon as they receive a Bulletin, make a note in their diaries of coming events and try to keep those dates free.

Patrick Lee has found a friend at Harlow who is willing to act as our Hon Auditor. He is Keith Craft ACCA and we are very grateful to him for taking on this extra work.

On Sunday afternoon, 18 March, Ronald Smith gave an excellent recital (Chopin and Alkan) to the Chopin Society at the Polish Institute. This seems to have been the first time that anyone has played Alkan to this Society. Several of our Members were present.

Ronald Smith's Autumn Q E Hall Recital is likely to be on Thursday 11 October.

We are pleased to welcome our first Member from West Germany - Günter Holtz of Bremen. Recently, Knut Franke - an eminent West German musicologist and critic - has been in England to visit Ronald Smith and spend a few days with John Bingham. In a letter to Ronald Smith he describes himself as having a "fanatic engagement to Alkan" - rather nicely put, I think.

I had hoped that our numbers would reach 100 in the second year of the Society's existence. If all first-year Members had renewed their subscriptions we should have managed it easily. At the moment, the figure stands at 85. An up-to-date list of Members accompanies this Bulletin.

At the last Meeting of our Executive Committee it was suggested that we might invite a few gentlemen who have made great efforts in the Alkan cause in countries other than our own to become Honorary Members of our Society. I am delighted to say that each of the five approached expressed his pleasurable willingness to accept the offer. They are: Gérard Billaudot, Georges Beck, Jean-Yves Bras (France), Knut Franke (West Germany) and Raymond Lewenthal (USA).

In a very interesting letter Jean-Yves Bras tells me that he is responsible for organising the "festival du Marais" which takes place in Paris each year in June and July. Last year he engaged a young French pianist, Pierre Reach, to play the Grande Sonate of Alkan. It made such an impression that the performance was later recorded by RCA and, as I write these notes, two copies of it have reached me from France - one for Ronald Smith and one for me; my copy will eventually go to our Reference Library. Jean-Yves Bras wrote an excellent introduction on the sleeve, of which there appears an English translation. He used photographs etc of Alkan that appear in Ronald Smith's book. The disc is RCA RL37243 and on it Reach plays, besides the Sonate, the Menuet Op 51 No 3, Barcarolle from Op 65 and Fantaisie Op 41 No 2. At the Festival this year, Alan and Nancy Maudel will play the Grande Duo (vln/pf) Op 21 and also there will be pieces for 'piano à pedalièr'. Apparently Alkan's own instrument is preserved in the instrumental museum at the Paris Conservatoire but, alas, it is not in playable condition. Georges Beck has now retired to a quiet village in Central France. He tells me that he wrote the commentary for a recording by Pierre Reach in 1975 for Disques Charlin. A recording of his "Oeuvres Choiesies" was made for Harmonia Mundi by Bernard Ringeissen.

Programme of Meetings to finish this year's arrangements

Thursday 17 May 1979 at 7.30: at the British Institute of Recorded Sound, 29 Exhibition Road, London SW7, Charles Hailstone will be assisted by Dick Edwards and Norman Tyrrell. Charles will talk about the Alkan Discography and then will follow excerpts from interesting Alkan recordings. It is hoped that the third edition of the Discography will be ready by then.

The Institute is at the northern corner where Prince Consort Road runs into Exhibition Road. Light refreshment (licensed) are available from 7 pm and during the interval. Friends are welcome.

Wednesday 18 July 1979 at 7.30: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - Members only. This will take place, as last year, in the Music Room (ground floor) at the Abbey Community Association, 29 Marsham Street, London SW1. The ACA is not

far from St John's, Smith Square. A cafeteria is available, but it closes at 8 pm.

"Alkan in Miniature" This has now passed its final proof stage and should be published soon. In France it will cost about 19 francs - here, I suppose, about £2.50.

J H WHITE
Hon Secretary
May 1979