

# THE ALKAN SOCIETY

Reg. Charity No. 276199



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BULLETIN NO. 43: APRIL 1991

This will be a briefer bulletin to update some information from March, and to give notice of the next meeting. I offer my apologies again to members who had too little notice to attend the recital on March 18th. I hope that you will have time to make plans to come to the next.

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## NEXT MEETING:

Monday April 22nd: Hinde Street Methodist Church, London W.1, at 7.30 p.m. Keith Lewis, piano, and Victoria Stec, flute. Keith will introduce his arrangements of some of Alkan's Preludes and Esquisses for flute and piano. They are designed as teaching pieces with young players in mind, and should be an interesting way to attract a new audience to the music. His programme will also include the Etude for left hand, Op. 76 no. 1, the Chant in E major Op. 38 no. 1 and the last movement of the Concerto Op. 39 no. 10.

The church (official address, 19 Thayer St.) is used by Trinity College of Music for recitals and has an excellent Bösendorfer grand. The nearest Underground station is Oxford Circus. Hinde Street is one block north of Wigmore Street, and therefore not far from the Wigmore Hall. We hope to have some recordings on sale that evening.

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## CORRECTION TO TREASURER'S ADDRESS

We thank the many loyal members who have already renewed their subscriptions. Please note that the renewal form gave the wrong postcode, which should be SG4 7TY. My apologies to Elizabeth Upchurch and the Post Office.

## AN ALKAN MANUSCRIPT:

Dr P. Hick in Stockport has kindly sent some information about a manuscript. Details are available from Richard Macnutt, Ham Farmhouse, Withyham, Hartfield, Sussex TN7 4BS, tel. 0892-864218. I quote from the catalogue:

"Les Regrets de la Nonnette. Petite mélodie pour piano, par Ch: Vin. Alkan aîné. Autograph musical manuscript of the complete piece. Title + 3 pp., oblong folio. Monogrammed at the end and dated 7 July 1854.

"Autograph compositions of Alkan rarely appear on the market, and in fact very few survive at all. The present piece appears to be unpublished.

"This is a composition of considerable charm, with the dedication 'Pour Mademoiselle Louise'. A 62-bar andantino in ternary form, it makes fewer technical demands on the player than is usual with Alkan. It is in a mazurka-like style, marked 'dolce flebile', suggesting a memory of the ball-rooms that the young nun of the title is destined never to see again.

"The manuscript is a fair copy and shows a few minor alterations. At some time it has evidently been stored in a damp atmosphere, for there is show-through, offsetting and occasional blurring and damp-staining; the margins are a little ragged. But these are no more than superficial blemishes in a most interesting manuscript.

£1500"

The quoted price puts this well beyond the Society, but perhaps some rich member will be interested! I believe that another Committee member has arranged to investigate the manuscript. Dr Hick wonders if it might be a 49th Esquisse, and further, whether a 50th is "looking for an intrepid explorer in some dark archive". Tantalising questions indeed. Perhaps we shall be able to obtain a facsimile from the eventual proud owner for our library.

## MUSICA OBSCURA ALKAN ARCHIVE EDITION:

Brian Lamb in Hull has sent a list of Alkan reprints, comprising some 40 titles. I am fairly sure that many of them are available from the usual source, United Music Publishers, who now handle the Billaudot Edition: their address is 42 Rivington Street, London EC2A 3BN, tel. 071-729 4700. However, this edition could well be useful for any items unobtainable from U.M.P.

It is an American edition, with prices quoted in dollars (not too discouraging when the pound is strong). The presentation is in A4 format, reduced photographically from the originals and bound in blue card covers. Brian describes some of the reproductions as "iffy but legible" (like some of the Billaudot reprints I have, for that matter).

The address is Musica Obscura, P.O. Box 2568, Quincy, MA 02269, U.S.A. Alternatively, their British agent (we do not know whether it is official or unofficial) is Drumblade Music, 6 Canal Street, Aberdeen AB2 3ET, Scotland.

## TRIO ALKAN

Not an inversion of word order, but the name of a German piano trio comprising Rainer Klaas (piano), Kolja Lessing (violin) and Bernhard Schwarz (cello). I am indebted to our honorary member, Dr Helmut Ganteführer, for sending me this information.

Keen readers of the Bulletin will recall that Rainer Klaas has played short pieces by Alkan at the Husum festival of piano rarities on three occasions. The trio gave a concert in Recklinghausen in the centenary year, 1988, which included works by Alkan, Tomás Marco and Emil Bohnke (1888-1928). They are to record the three Alkan chamber works for Marco Polo Records in May. Mr Klaas is planning further Alkan recitals. He also organised an intriguing performance of the complete Esquisses in July of that year, with himself and twelve other pianists sharing the pieces. The evening ended with an arrangement of the final "Laus Deo" for eight hands, four on the piano and four on harmonium.

The programme for the Esquisses performance includes an interesting page which classifies the pieces under several headings. If I can obtain Mr Klaas's permission, members may be interested in a translation of this in a future Bulletin.

How does this news, which I have only just heard, affect Ronald Smith's plans for recording the works? I hope that the news will encourage rather than discourage the project. Mr Ganteführer sent me a tape of performances of the Trio and the Violin Duo. They are technically very impressive, and to judge from one hurried hearing, extremely accurate. The major difference from the performances we have heard in England is in the choice of speeds. Several are noticeably slower, resulting in an admirable clarity, but at the expense of some of the physical exhilaration and knife-edge quality we have experienced. It would be most interesting to have the comparison available on record.

Ronald Smith's team will be playing the chamber works at Eton College on Sunday 21st April and at Brighton College the following day; we regret the clash with the Society meeting in London. I think that the Eton performance will be at 8.30, but it would be advisable to check with the College if you are thinking of going.

## MORE NEWS OF RECORDINGS

Stephanie McCallum's Australian recording of the Concerto and the Op. 70 Chants is due out this month. We hope to obtain copies for sale to members. The offer in the previous Bulletin received an encouraging response, particularly for Laurent Martin's recording of the Preludes. Brian Doyle will be ordering more, having sold out of his first batch.

The two Marco Polo recordings by Bernard Ringeissen and Laurent Martin are reviewed in the April edition of the "Gramophone", in a well-informed article by Michael Stewart. He suggests that Ringeissen's interpretation of the Symphonie, Overture and two other minor-key Etudes will be a useful "stop-gap" until Ronald Smith's integral recording is reissued. Could this provoke EMI into re-thinking their discouraging policy reported in our previous bulletin? I sincerely hope so.

More good news from Australia: Stephanie has obtained a staff fellowship to enable her to record all the major-key Etudes, Op. 35 - another first for most of the pieces. The recording will, I have it on good authority, appear on the "Tall Puppies" label.

One of our Vice-Presidents, the scholar Richard Shaw, has examined the manuscript described in the Bulletin and tells me that it is a most valuable and unique item which we must endeavour to obtain for the Society. It is an attractive piece, undoubtedly authentic, and we should dearly like to have its first performance take place in England.

We have almost 150 members, and if enough people can offer to help, it is quite feasible that we could achieve the target of £1500. I gather that this is not an excessive price for an item of this quality and rarity. Already ten members have been in touch with Richard Shaw and guaranteed some £250 in all.

It is almost certain that the manuscript will be snapped up by a collector as soon as the catalogue is published abroad, and as a matter of urgency, could you please let me know in the next few days whether you would be willing to help, either with an outright gift of between £10 and £25 or as a guarantor to help to cover the purchase price until the money has been collected?

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Harvey Dugal and partner have recorded the splendid three Marches, Op. 40, together with other French duets. Reviews of the CD, on Priory Records, should appear soon.

UPDATE: The number of Alan Weiss's CD (Bulletin 42) on Fidelio is 8839. Ronald Smith's re-released cassette of the Sonata and Sonatine is on EMI 7 69421 4. His recordings of these and of the Opp. 76 and 16 Etudes are now sold in Japan on the EMI Angel label (TOCE 6239 and 6240 respectively).

MISCELLANEOUS: Richard Murphy, Dave Smith and Christopher Hobbs have sent two cassettes which include arrangements of Alkan pieces played by the Leicester Percussion Ensemble based at the Polytechnic. They include several Esquisses, the Op. 26 Marches funèbre et triomphale, the Ouverture, Minuetto alla tedesca, the second movement of the Sonatine and the Benedictus. The arrangements are often witty, occasionally bizarre, and are admirably well played by a large group. Whether an ensemble including marimbas and steel drums is the most suitable medium for Alkan's music may be debatable, but it undoubtedly provided excellent publicity. The audiences sounded extremely enthusiastic.

#### REPORT OF MEETING, 18th MARCH

In spite of the short notice, nine members and one guest heard a fine recital by Anthony Williams at the Guildhall School. His Alkan pieces were the transcription of the Bach Siciliano in G minor (from the flute sonata), and the Trois Petites Fantaisies, Op. 41. All were given excellent performances. The Fantasies, which are by no means "little", were technically superb: there are some cruel leaps in the final page of No. 3 which Mr Williams took at full speed and with impressive accuracy. Most of those present only knew the pieces from Ronald Smith's recording and it was good to see and hear them played so well. How prophetic No. 3 is of some of the percussive music of our own century. But all three are beautifully written and full of fine ideas.

The rest of his programme contained the sonata No. 1 (1952) by the Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera (1916-83), and Ravel's "Le Tombeau de Couperin". The Ginastera sonata is a virtuoso work in four movements, full of Hispanic colour and idiomatic piano writing. Ravel's work is perhaps better known as an orchestral suite, but the original has two extra movements, a strange Fugue and a Toccata difficult enough to make Ravel himself wonder if he had made it too hard. "J'ai manqué ma Toccata," he said to his pupil Yvonne Léfébure.

Mr Williams kindly repeated the Siciliano as an encore for the Secretary, who arrived late thanks to a half-hour delay by British Rail, and who thanked him warmly for a fascinating evening. The audience particularly appreciated his professional approach in giving such a committed performance to a small gathering.

My thanks to all the members who supplied items for this bulletin, and for your messages of encouragement. I have only succeeded in giving you a little more notice for the April 22nd meeting, but hope to improve further next time.

Peter Grove