

Now let's see



THE ALKAN SOCIETY

(Registered Charity number 276199)

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BULLETIN 84 May 2011

CORRECTIONS We apologise for two errors in Bulletin 83:

- 1) The Concert at Steinway's by Christopher Smith is on June 15th, not June 6th as appeared on some announcements.
- 2) A draft of the Accounts was printed; the correct final version appears in this Bulletin.

COMING EVENTS:

June 15th Alkan & Liszt Society Joint Concert at Steinway's starting at 6.45PM
Christopher Smith plays music by Alkan & Liszt

June 18th Lille Piano Festival – The Liszt Bicentenary. Geoffroy Couteau will
include in his programme Alkan's Études Op.35 No.5 & Op.39 No.3

June 19th Liszt Society Recital by Evgeny Genchev, details below.

July 29th Alkan Society Concert at Schott's starting at 7 o'clock
An all-Alkan concert by Mark Viner & Alan Demir
The programme will include the Sonatine & the Symphonie

September 24th Fourth Colloquium on the *Esquisses*, details below

November 25th Organ Recital by Nicholas King at St. Michaels, Cornhill

June 26th 2012 President's Concert at Steinway's

OBITUARY

The death occurred late in January or at the start of February of John Newing. John Newing came to know Ronald Smith on the morning train from Canterbury to London. Through these meetings he became deeply interested in the music of Alkan and became an early member of the Society, perhaps even a founder member. He was a regular attender at the Society's meetings and for some years he served as a committee member. During that time he contributed significantly to the organisation of the Centenary Festival of 1988. His understanding of Alkan's music was underpinned by a moderate keyboard facility. Members with longer memories of Society affairs will remember him as a tall, imposing, genial and quiet-spoken man, a thoroughly English gentleman.

John Newing had a distinguished career in the Navy. At the beginning of the war he served on such ships as the *Rodney*. The writer had heard that when the 16" guns of such ships were fired, men below decks were shaken about like peas in a can. "Was this true?" "Yes." "And how on earth was the recoil of these guns, which must have been huge, accommodated?" "The deck plates around the gun mountings slid over each other."

In retirement he became deeply involved with the work of the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA).

John Newing was born in ?1914 and celebrated his 90th birthday in full health.

However, a year or so later he fell whilst gardening. There was little or no apparent physical damage, but from that moment he declined. He was married first to Jean, with whom he had four children, and after her death to Ivy, who he had met when she also was involved with SSAFA. Ivy survives him and to her the Society offers its sympathies and condolences.

LISZT SOCIETY RECITAL by EVGENY GENCHEV

BACH Partita in B minor, BWV 831

BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 31 in A flat major, Opus 110

INTERVAL

LISZT Rapsodie Hongroise VI, S244/6

Première Année de pèlerinage –Année – Suisse, S160:

No.2 Au lac de Wallenstadt & No.8 Le mal du pays

Douze Études d'exécution transcendante, S139: 12 Chasse-neige

Deuxième Année de pèlerinage –Année – Italie, S161:

No.7 Après une lecture du Dante.

At 23 Vineyard Hill Road, London SW19 7JT (Tel 0208 946 7486)

3pm sharp on 19th June 2011 District Line tube station: Wimbledon Park

Admission including refreshments: Liszt Society members £10; Non-members £15

For seating and catering purposes please advise John Davies by 12th June of your intention to attend [johncolin.davies@btinternet.com or telephone 07931 771 567].

Leslie Howard's Concert at Steinway's on September 22nd 2010

On Wednesday evening The Alkan Society and The Liszt Society jointly presented a further concert in a series marking the bi-centenaries of the births of Alkan and Liszt with a number of other composers significant for their piano works and also born around 1810. It was an occasion to welcome back Leslie Howard, who is President of both Societies.

The programme opened with a warm and beautifully balanced account of Schumann's *Carnaval*. The poetry in Mendelssohn's Variations in B flat major, Op.83, which followed, radiated to the audience. Chopin's Three Mazurkas, Op.59 were warmly received. It cannot be claimed that Alkan's early Trois Andantes Romantiques, Op.13 are amongst his greatest works, but they merit an occasional hearing, especially when played as they were. Finally, Leslie Howard's heroic and bravura performance of Liszt's Scherzo and March, S.177 deserved and received prolonged and resounding applause.

In his spoken introductions to the various pieces, there were no programme notes, the pianist concentrated on the links between the composers. Alkan, Chopin, and Liszt were close friends in Paris, whilst Mendelssohn and Schumann were familiar with music by Alkan. Mendelssohn enjoyed playing the piano part in Alkan's piano trio; Schumann reviewed piano pieces by Alkan, albeit unfavourably. Conversely, Alkan admired and played works by both Mendelssohn and Schumann, but did not care for Liszt's music. And Liszt regarded Chopin's Mazurkas and Polonaises, his essentially Polish pieces, as his finest compositions.

The connections, as became clear over refreshments afterwards, widened further in the minds of the audience: Pierrot, the second piece in *Carnaval* seems to recur in *Pictures at an Exhibition*; in composing his third Andantes Romantique Alkan cannot not have had in mind the 'Choral' Symphony, and Liszt's 'Scherzo and March' contains many ideas and phrases which could have been written by Alkan.

As a charming gesture Leslie Howard declined to play an encore, for which his audience clamoured, and instead invited his student Christopher Smith to play. Thus we were treated to a fine performance of Alkan's *Fire in the next Village*.

The Societies are most grateful to Messrs. Steinway for allowing us to use their premises and their excellent piano.

Pythagoras

Marc-André Hamelin's Recital at the Société du Palais Montcalm in Quebec City, on May 14, included the following works:

Alkan: Fantaisie pour la main gauche seule, op.76 no.1

Fauré: 6ème Nocturne, op.63

Ravel: Gaspard de la Nuit

Debussy: Préludes, deuxième livre (excerpts)

Hamelin: Douze études dans tous les tons mineurs (excerpts)

Alkan's Duo and Duets Recording – The Critical Reception

CHARLES VALENTIN ALKAN: Complete Piano Duos and Duets

Anthony Goldstone, Caroline Clemmow - pianos

Toccata Classics TOCC 0070 (70:36)

Members of the Society probably did not need any encouragement to purchase the recently issued recording on Toccata Records of Alkan's Piano Duo and Duets, but Richard Murphy's insightful and enthusiastic review of the recording in the last Bulletin (No.83) certainly whetted the appetite.

So far I have seen three reviews of the recording. Jeremy Nicholas in the *Gramophone* said that "all the Alkanesque characteristics – ferocious digital and rhythmic challenges, memorable melodic and bold (sometimes experimental) harmonic invention, whimsical (sometimes mischievous) ideas – are all in evidence on this frequently astonishing disc. Enthusiastically recommended to Alkanophiles and lovers of bravura piano repertoire alike". The editor of *The Gramophone*, John Inverne, must also have shared Jeremy Nicholas' opinion as he chose it as one of his "Editor's Choice" for the month. Martin Anderson (a long term member of the Society) and founder of Toccata Records, must have been delighted as his label completed a double that month. The Toccata recording, *Music for Violin and Piano Vol. 1* by Wilhelm Ernst, also received the same accolade - quite a coup for Martin's enterprising label.

Andrew Clements in the *Guardian* was less enthusiastic only awarding it three out of five stars. He said, "While there are flashes of the strangeness that gives Alkan's music its piquancy, it is hard to regard much of this repertoire as comparable to his finest solo works. Though the 'Fantasy on Don Giovanni' for four hands rivals Liszt's 'Don Giovanni Reminiscences' in its scope and intensity, it is the arrangements that seem closest to the better known Alkan, especially the *Impromptu* which is more substantial than the title suggests".

The critic on the website *MusicWeb-International* had no such reservations, although I imagine that the statement "this CD adds further weight to the already substantial recorded evidence for Alkan's parity with Liszt", would not go unchallenged in some quarters. All the works and performances are welcomed with enthusiasm. In particular the *Impromptu* and 'Don Juan Fantasy' – "the *Impromptu* is an imposing, complex, astounding piece and offers a master class in variation form.

The final fugue is mind-blowing in its energy and intensity as it swirls towards chromaticism. The 'Fantasy on Don Juan' almost succeeds in upstaging the *Impromptu*. This work may have been a message to Liszt of the "anything you can do" variety. Liszt had recently published his 'Reminiscences de Don Juan' based on Mozart's opera. Cheekily Alkan even uses the same aria for his finale". He also praises the excellent essay by Malcolm MacDonald in the accompanying booklet.

One must not forget the husband and wife duo, Anthony Goldstone and Caroline Clemmow whose performances all the reviewers praised unreservedly.

Some members with long memories may recall a performance of the Roger Smalley arrangements of the Benedictus Op.54 and Impromptu Op.69. These were given their UK première by Roger Smalley and Cathy Travers at a Society meeting in January 1986 at the Royal College of Music. They also performed the Trois Marches Op.40. Roger Smalley introduced the works and said of the Impromptu "it is Alkan's greatest work for pedal piano and one of his greatest half dozen works". Let us hope that the two arrangements will one day appear in print, along with the Smalley arrangements of some of the Esquisses Op.63 for brass, and for string quartet.

Brian Doyle

John White at 75

Fifty-three folk attended honorary member John White's birthday concert at Schott's in Great Marlborough Street on April 1st 2011, including at least nine other members whose curiosity was no doubt aroused by the programming of his 5-movement piano symphony (1961) 'in memory of Ch.V.Morhange', with Jonathan Powell playing.

Much of the piano writing was chordal, as in Alkan's *Symphonie*, and each movement's character was easy to understand because of the conventionally phrased melodies and old-fashioned repetition of material.

Movement 1, in C, was a rather Handelian fanfare-toccata based on a slow trill, reminiscent of Enescu's *Piano Suite Op.10* in its Baroque thrusting, and of Prokofiev in the lyrical middle part.

Movement 2, in G, was Alkanian in its low left-hand chords accompanying a bel canto line which sounded like Prokofiev. There was a faster middle section.

Movement 3, in F, was an aggressive *Vivace scherzo*, and in the Trio, in C, fleetingly recalled Brahms' *Rhapsody in E flat Op.119*.

Movement 4, in A minor, was a *Barcarolle* which ended in a *tièrce de Picardie*.

Movement 5, in C, was a *Polonaise* with a jolly tune and a good many big chords and octaves playfully gallumphing about.

The whole piece lasted 23 minutes.

White's sonata No.170 was the music which reminded most me of Alkan. The low register opening sounded familiar from the *Bombardo* and the second part contained Carillon chimes in contradiction to the prevailing rhythm, as found in the *Prière Op.64 No.12*.

Boethius

LES ESQUISSES Op.63 – A NEW EDITION

Prythm of Tokyo published Op.63 in 2009 in a single volume. It is in paperback with pages a little larger than A4. The pieces have been formatted to fit complete pages (except for 3 pieces), and this edition uses 20 pages more than the Billaudot edition, giving the music a less cramped look on the page. Gone are Billaudot's incipits so that the two contents pages now list the pieces 1-48 plus Laus Deo, and are in consecutive page numbers from 8 to 126.

All stave-lines and note-stems are now visible, modern conventions are used for crotchet rests, triplet brackets and time signatures, with Alkan's directions placed above the stave at the start of each piece.

Alkan's positioning of pedal, fingering, phrasing and barline signs seem to have been scrupulously copied from Billaudot's edition and there has been no tampering with Alkan's habit of writing-in-parts; so still remaining are the rests for silent voices, and the appropriate ascending and descending note-stems.

The editor, Yui Morishita has further contributed four pages of text (untranslated from Japanese) and seven footnotes querying accidentals, ornaments and rhythm. Throughout, the (presumably) editorial brackets around metronome marks found in Billaudot are not used.

The four errata found in Billaudot have been corrected, but others have occurred:

- p.3 – The alternative title to No.38 – Les Bons Souhails (Good Wishes) – is missing.
- p.29–No.8–Bar 23–L(ef) H(and)–first note should be E (as in bar 19) not C.
- p.60–No.20–Bar 12–LH–third note should be G#, not F#.
- p.63–No.22–Bar 3–LH–grace note C needs a 'natural' sign.
- p.67–No.24–Bar 33–LH–chord is missing its 'thorn' staccato.
- p.72–No.27–MM should be Crotchet = 84 not Minim = 84
- p.74–No.28–Bar 14–LH–first note should be D not F
- p.127–Laus Deo–Bar 29–LH–first chord should be G and B \flat , not G \flat and B.
- p.56–No.17–Bars 10 and 11–Both hands–As written in both editions, this piece is in $\frac{3}{4}$, but bars 10 and 11 have been written with only two beats in each. The second beat in each bar is trilled for one beat. Performers have ignored this apparent anomaly and trill for two beats in each bar in imitation of bar 21.

Blackwell's Music shop in Oxford charge £23.60 – July 2010 price.

Richard Murphy

TREASURER'S REPORT

Financial Statement for the period 01 January to 31 December 2010

| <i>Income</i> | £ |
|--|-------------------|
| Subscriptions and donations | 1114.40 |
| War Stock | 355.82 |
| Amazon.co.uk (commission on orders via our website) | - |
| Total: | 1470.22 |
| <i>Expenditure</i> | |
| Bulletin expenses | 42.85 |
| Renewal + reminder forms, postage/envelopes, files etc. (incl. 2009) | 133.04 |
| Room hire | - |
| Renewal of The Alkan Society website for 5 years (Freeola) | 55.34 |
| Leslie Howard's recital at AGM 22/09/10 (Steinway's) | |
| - refreshments + gift to artist | 120.32 |
| - cheque to Liszt Society re. joint event | 63.44 |
| Contribution to Tomasz Kamieniak's recital at Schott's | 100.00 |
| Contribution to Mark Viner's recital at Blüthner's | 100.00 |
| Travel expenses | 29.20 |
| Total: | 644.19 |
| Net surplus of income over expenditure | 826.03 |

BALANCE SHEET at 31/12/10

| | | |
|---|---------|----------------|
| Capital Fund | | |
| Balance brought forward at 31/12/09 | 6744.13 | |
| Net surplus of income over expenditure | 826.03 | |
| Interest received at Halifax plc | 4.74 | |
| Cheque for £139.48 of 30/11/09 banked in 2010 | -139.48 | 7435.42 |
| represented by | | |
| Cash at NatWest Bank plc | 2187.02 | |
| Cash at Halifax plc | 5248.40 | 7435.42 |

Averil Kovacs
Honorary Treasurer
The Alkan Society

22 February 2011

The ALKAN SOCIETY & The LISZT SOCIETY

RECITAL by CHRISTOPHER SMITH

at STEINWAY'S, 44, Marylebone Lane, London W1U 2DB
on June 15th 2011 commencing at 18.45hrs.

Alkan: Douze Études dans les ton majeurs Op.35
No.3 in G Major
No.5 in F Major, "Allegro Barbaro"
No.7 in E flat Major, "L'Incendie au village voisin"

La Chanson de la folle au bord de la mer, Op.31 No.8

Trois Études de Bravoure (Improvisations), Op.12
I. Prestissimo
II. Allegretto
III. Allegro marziale

Liszt: En Rêve
Dem Andenken Petofis

Bach-Liszt: Prelude in A minor S.462

Liszt: Deuxième Ballade S.171

(Total running time c.70 minutes)

REFRESHMENTS (after concert)

Pianist Christopher Smith, 25, has lived in Guisborough, North Yorkshire all his life. He started receiving piano lessons in 1995 at the age of nine and he is currently studying at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama for the B. Mus. (Hons.) Performance - Pianoforte. Over the last five years, Christopher has had many successes in piano competitions around the country. He is currently under the tutelage of the highly acclaimed concert pianist, Leslie Howard and the respected tutor, Michael Young. Under their guidance and his determination, he hopes that he will be able improve as a pianist and establish himself further afield in the coming years as he continues and completes his studies.

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY: To accord with Local Regulations tickets may not be sold for this event. However, donations may be made at the concert (to be shared equally between the two Societies). Your Committees feel that a donation of £10 would be appropriate.

