

THE ALKAN SOCIETY

BULLETIN NO. 27 : OCTOBER 1985

Registered Charity No. 2761991

President: Ronald Smith

Secretary: Brian Doyle, 146 Brocks Drive, Cheam, Surrey SM3 9UT
(Tel: 01-641-1763)

Membership Secretary: Eliot Levin, 110 Derwent Avenue, East Barnet, Herts. EN4 8LZ

Editor: Charles Hailstone, 7a Alder Road, Mortlake, London SW14 8ER

Editorial Notes: The dark evenings are here again and the Alkan Society has arranged some interesting meetings. An outstanding event which should attract a good audience takes place next month in excellent surroundings at Lauderdale House, Highgate. An innovation will be songs by Schumann and Liszt. Full details will be found elsewhere in the Bulletin.

The Secretary, Brian Doyle, has moved to the outskirts of London on the fringes of the Surrey countryside. His new address will be found above.

Our President's book, volume II of his work on Alkan, is hastening towards publication early next year. The author's first proofs have now been diligently read and corrected and the copious music examples chosen. The book deals with the music of the master in detail, so that any passing curiosity about a work will be immediately satisfied.

REPORT OF THE MAY MEETING: A recital by two members, Margaret Pitts of Bournemouth and Peter Grove from Salisbury, was given at the Kensington Central Library on 2nd May 1985. 15 members and 3 guests were present.

In the first half of the programme Peter Grove began with Réconciliation Op. 42 which was published in 1857. The work divides into two main sections - the first, a series of variations on a C major theme in which later can be heard an echo of a theme from the Concerto Op. 39, published in the same year. The second section is a Zorcico, a Basque dance, in 5/4 time in which one comes across the instruction 'Quasi-castagnette'. The work ends with a brief reprise of each section.

Peter concluded his half of the programme with a performance of the complete 'Les Mois' Op. 74 published in 1872 although six of the pieces were published much earlier, in 1838, as Op. 16. Of the twelve pieces the following were particularly memorable:- 2. Carnaval - a lively 'tongue in cheek' piece, 4. La Pâque (Easter) - a simple hymn tune with a brief contrasting middle section, 5. Sérénade (Serenade) - a lively piece, 6. Promenade sur l'eau (Outing on the water) - a beautiful haunting work, probably the highlight of the set, 7. Une nuit d'été (a summer night) - a flowing piece which sounds ideal for teaching purposes, 10. Gros Temps (Bad weather) and 11. Le Mourant (the dying man) - a disturbing, tragic piece. Peter played the works with great flair and understanding.

Margaret Pitts programme for the second half of the evening began with lovely expressive performances of two early pieces nos. 1 & 2 of the Andante romantique Op. 13 published in 1832. She followed with the catchy Marche No 3 Op. 37. Then followed one of Alkan's finer early works, the hypnotic Marche Funèbre Op. 26a. Then came the rare chance to hear one of Alkan's transcriptions - the one of Haydn's quirky minuet from the 1st String Quartet Op. 76. She concluded with the Etude No 10 in G Flat Major Op. 35. A melodic piece with a sting in the tail which was particularly admired by the late Humphrey Searle.

The Society is very grateful to Margaret and Peter for all the dedication and hard work which they must have put in to be able to play their chosen pieces to such a high standard. It was a great pity that we were not able to provide them with a better instrument for the occasion. We are always on the lookout for suitable rooms for our meetings. If any members know of a room for hire, at a reasonable cost, with a decent piano, fairly central (in London) and accessible by public transport, please contact the Secretary.

The following week Margaret Pitts gave a lunchtime recital in Bournemouth. As well as Haydn and Brahms she included some of the Alkan we heard at the May meeting which seemed to go down well with the audience.

REPORT OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: On Wednesday July 17th at the Abbey Community Centre.

The Secretary was in the Chair. Apologies for absence were received from Charles Hailstone, Alan Davidson, Jean Bartholomew and Peter Grove. 9 members were present. The Secretary put on his other hat and gave the

Treasurer's Report - The Society had its best year financially with an excess of income over expenditure of £101. Donations were £78 compared to £113 last year but subscriptions were well up, £416 compared to £290. The Festival Fund was off to a slow start with only 5 members covenanting a total of £102 and donations from 4 members of £50.

Subscription Rates - It was unanimously decided that subscriptions, although lower than most Societies, would remain the same for the forthcoming year and be reviewed again at the next A.G.M.

Accountant - it was suggested that the Society may have a member who is an Accountant and who might volunteer to do the Society accounts for no fee. If any member is able and willing to do this please contact the Secretary.

ALKAN'S TOMB: The Secretary had received a letter from Cyril Ray, an Australian member and direct descendant of Alkan's brother Napoleon. Whilst in Paris, on a brief visit in July, he learned from his cousin, Jacqueline Cuzelin, that the City of Paris Authorities had served official notice that Alkan's tomb would be demolished unless certain repairs were done within two years. There is a new government Act which states that if a grave is not kept in good repair, after ninety-nine years it will be demolished to make space for another. They contacted Mdme. Cuzelin as she is a direct descendant of Alkan's sister Céleste, who is buried in the same tomb. In 1983 our Society wrote to the French Cultural Attaché in London with regard to the inscription on the Alkan tomb, which because of weather erosion is almost illegible. We asked if the inscription could be renewed and received a favourable reply from the Minister of Culture in Paris. The Secretary has informed Mdme. Cuzelin of our correspondence with the Minister and she in turn has written to him reminding him of his promise. She has also contacted the French Alkan Society for their assistance in this matter. She has promised to let us know of any developments.

RONALD SMITH: Our President's recording of the Alkan miniatures (HMV. EG 2701871) has received very favourable reviews. Joan Chissel, not always an Alkan enthusiast, had some kind words to say on the BBC Radio 3. She cited Promenade sur l'eau as an example of why some of his contemporaries thought so highly of him. She thought that many of the pieces were quite extraordinary for their time, and praised Ronald's playing and his illuminating sleeve notes. She concluded the review with Morituri te salutant (Esquisse no 21).

The Jewish Chronicle's reviewer under 'A master rediscovered' thought that if there were a prize for the composer whose works have been most neglected, Alkan might well qualify for it. He went on to describe Alkan as 'a man of profound mood music'

The prize for the most unlikely place to find Alkan's name must go to the August issue of Womans Journal. The reviewer devotes nearly all her column to the latest rock and pop releases and then finishes off by singing the praises of Ronald's latest Alkan recording, saying that 'his music has a unique timelessness that sets it apart from his contemporaries. A fascinating album that requires constant listening'. Alkan could make the charts yet.

Ronald has now recorded three Beethoven sonatas for Nimbus, the so called Pathétique, Moonlight and Appassionata.

HANS VON BULOW ON OP. 35: In 1857 Hans von Bulow wrote an article on Alkan's 12 Studies in the Major Keys Op. 35. We are reproducing this article in two parts, in a translation by Jean Bartholomew.

Hans von Bulow (1830-1894) was one of the foremost pianists and conductors of his time. He studied with Liszt and married his daughter Cosima. He was a great admirer of Wagner and conducted the first performances of Tristan und Isolde (1865) and Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg (1868). He was also a composer and edited a large number of piano works.

Neue Berliner Musikzeitung. Elfter Jahrgang, Nr. 35, den 26. Aug. 1857

C.V. ALKAN

by Hans v. Bulow

Douze Etudes pour le Piano en 2 Suites, Op. 35
Berlin et Posen, Bote & Bock

Alkan is indisputably the most distinguished representative of modern piano-playing in Paris. It is hardly surprising that this travel-shy virtuoso and firmly-entrenched teacher has, until now, earned so little notice in Germany; as to his compositions, however, he should surely have earned a little more consideration than we have so far accorded him, in view of the fact that he is no longer exactly a novice. We may rightly deplore the fact that, whilst every year masses of worthless and trivial French trash are imported into Germany and spread far and wide, an artist who, if not ranking equal in the business to his contemporaries Liszt and Chopin, occupies nevertheless a place of honour in this school, is hardly even known by name to most German musicians. Admittedly, some German publishers (Schlesinger & Schott) have edited several of his piano works, yet he has remained virtually unknown and remote from the present-day music market. Herr Bock's publishing-house can be credited with having conceived the bright idea of pioneering a German edition of the major book of studies in question. This same work has been widely circulated and respected in France for more than a decade already.

To what kind of audience does the work appeal? This might possibly be the next question from the teacher who is seeking to inform himself. The question is difficult and really impossible to answer clearly and succinctly. It constitutes a valuable offering to aspiring virtuosi of the piano, from which they can draw, if they so wish, material which will both develop their technique and widen, comparatively speaking, their musical horizons, and from which they will thus derive twofold instruction. One of the different kinds of exercise presented by Alkan has certainly remained, if not unknown to them then surely little practised by every one of them, including those who have the highest opinion of themselves. They can all learn from it - studies like this are difficult to sight-read, except for the Master of Masters, and so it would not be going too far to assert that a real pianist, not one who hides his light under a bushel, must perforce have brought himself to maturity before ploughing this field of studies.

For the benefit of those dear dilettantes who, in the present climate of taste, believe themselves called above all else to toss off the classics with the least possible effort, quite apart from cultivating flippancy and vulgarity as a refreshing change, so to speak, from insincerity - we must answer in the negative the question of whether the composer reveals material which will qualify him to curry favour as a welcome guest at the loathsome fireside of this kind of individual. Far sooner will he obtain the entrée to the homes of those naive folk - for naivete always goes hand in hand with a kind of thirst for knowledge - who could hardly care less about showing off or making a splash with the title page that bears the composer's autograph. Numerous as this other class is in France, where as a rule the ear rejoices in an inferior shape, if not in an even more inferior sensibility, it seems to have vanished now in Germany as a result of the rash of incompetent fudged reviews. In Paris the Alkan Studies, in spite of their, to some extent, extraordinary difficulties, are played a great deal the whole time for the most part, perhaps, with hair raising levity, but occasionally, let it be said, with excellent consequences for the mechanism of the hand. And with regard to this, we should above all like the work to be most

widely circulated amongst those cultivated dilettantes who do not carry classical asceticism so far as to dispense with the mastery of all the proficiency (virtuosity) devoted to modern demands. We permit ourselves to address this wish, with a certain *rinforzando* to our gentlemen colleagues of the teaching profession, having no doubt that it will be shared as soon as people have, like the author, become convinced of the excellence of these Studies.

We have already indicated that we see in Alkan's Op. 35 a substantial enrichment of the piano repertoire. In making this assertion, one should of course show that it bridges a still existing gap in the technical development which must be undertaken by the player preparing himself for the very advanced exercises of present-day pianistic virtuosity. Without making pedantic claims, in what follows, to prescribing absolute norms for a progressive development of this nature, nor yet wishing to dictate a universally effective guiding principle, we must, however, allow ourselves briefly to state our own personal ideas about these Studies and how we usually practise them. We grant, therefore, that the student who has been nourished from his earliest years on the substance of the late-lamented Czerny can become a first-rate and a really versatile pianist. There is only one thing that we would doubt and that is that a teaching method of this nature could offer grounding in technique at the same time and at the same rate of progress as intellectual education. That all-important matter known as 'taste', which would be in a poor way if it could not be learnt, would remain completely uncultivated. If one recognizes and adopts the principle that technique and intellect are inseparable one will be aware of the corollary that it is not lifeless abstract theorems but only theory designed for the living demonstration of its nature and elevated to the status of a work of art, that can render these two complementary services. According to this principle, a progressive sequence of study, more or less graded from the elementary upwards, would emerge, in which the names of the individual composers, marking out at the same time the different eras of piano-playing, constitute as it were the various phases and stages.

J.B. Cramer, whose Studies may very properly be called 'the pianist's vade mecum'. At the same time, or at perhaps an even earlier stage, Stephen Heller's most useful and commendable exercises Op. 46 can be used; also Alois Schmitt, on whose Etudes the early technique of a very distinguished pianist, Felix Mendelssohn, was founded.

Clementi's 'Gradus ad Parnassum' together with the prologue to his 'Preludes Exercices', just as indispensable as the previous work, offers, as it were, an introduction to the polyphonic genre and can lead into a first acquaintanceship with J.S. Bach.

Moscheles' '24 Studies' which, in conjunction with Clementi's may be regarded as typical of the characteristic excellence of that period of piano-playing represented by Hummel. By way of Moscheles one has access to the modern (in the best sense of the word) field, and we do not believe that this would be possible by any other means.

But now, it seems to us, a bridge is missing which might pave the way for the leap to Chopin. It is not in fact missing, but, sadly is known to but few. Here Kessler with his four books of Etudes may be warmly recommended. Through these one can acquire the stamina, energy and resilience of attack which, later on, becomes an imperative 'conditio sine qua non ultra'. His studies are far less, like those of Moscheles, charming 'salon' pieces, they are harmonious and tuneful but interesting enough to attract the intellect to their lively, briskly-operating mechanism. They are longer by comparison, and it is chiefly through the steady execution of one and the same figure - that is to say, therefore, through physical exhaustion which, however, is prevented by the interesting harmonic structure from ever turning to fatigue - that the flexibility and suppleness of the hand are to be taken a stage further. 'Saepe Cadendo'.

Similarly, one can see no definite stepping-stone from Chopin about whom there is no room here for further observation, to some of the Henselt studies, or above all to the Great Studies of Liszt. And it is here, we believe, that Alkan's Op. 35 should take its proper place. In this regard he forms, as it were, a pendant to Kessler but just one 'Gradus and Parnassum' further on. Here, to use a prosaic expression, one takes off at the double for the goal of that orchestral concert-style which is typified by Liszt and which, at all events, is more than a mere complement to Chopin's noble concert-style. What Theodor Kullak has paved the way for in one particular direction in his excellent School of Octaves will be further exploited, in other directions as well, by Alkan.

Now the characteristic importance which we have just briefly attributed to Alkan's Etudes is by no means to be interpreted as meaning that it is clearly demonstrated that, in order to use them, the player is required to have progressed through every stage of the above-mentioned evolution. The work we are considering may be used successfully at every stage, whether the player has already worked his way right through Chopin or not. Only the individual case can ever decide this. Just as the homeopathic doctor directs his attention to the patient rather than his illness, so must the conscientious piano-teacher concern himself with observing and treating piano-playing not as an abstract idea but as the materialisation of the person playing the piano. In the hundred pages of the Alkan Studies, as it has already been remarked at the outset, every player without exception should be able to make many an instructive and exciting discovery

o o o o o o o o

(the second part of this article will appear in the next Bulletin)

STEPHANIE McCALLUM: As mentioned in our last number, Stephanie is returning to this country in November. Her tour dates are:-

12th November - Sunderland Piano Society, 13th November - Doncaster Museum, 15th November - Caerphilly Music Club, 16th November - Haywards Heath Music Club, 19th November - Lauderdale House, Highgate, 23rd November - Isle of Wight Arts Association, 27th November - Brighton College, 29th November - Paris (French Alkan Society), 1st December - Folkestone Metropole. On the 6th December she will be giving a recital at the Wigmore Hall, London including Sonata K576, Mozart; First Sonata, Op 24, Weber; Offering Joyous Leaves, Nigel Butterly and Alkan's Trios Grandes Etudes Op. 76. On the above dates which are underlined she will be playing Alkan's Op. 76.

SOME NINETEENTH CENTURY JEWISH COMPOSERS: Under this title a course has been arranged by The Spiro Institute for the Study of Jewish History and Culture, for one term commencing Wednesdays 15th January. The lecturer is Ruth Jordan. The venue is Marble Arch Synagogue, London W1, on Wednesday between 8.00 and 10.00 p.m. Alkan is included together with Julius Benedict, Louis Gottschalk, Jacques Halevy and Jacques Offenbach. In the prospectus Alkan is described as 'a Paris recluse and Jewish scholar, whose vast output is a modern pianist's delight'. For further details and prospectus write to the Institute at 3 St. John's Wood Road, London NW8 8RB (Tel: 01-286 6701). There is also a course on the Jew, Society and Music.

ALKAN'S MOZART CADENZA: Patrick Lee of Harlow has sent us the following:- 'On 3rd August, at the Cambridge University Concert Hall, Roger Smalley gave what is believed to be the first public performance of Mozart's piano concerto no. 20 in D. minor (K466) with the first and third movement cadenzas which Alkan wrote as part of his arrangement of the whole work for solo piano. On this occasion Roger Smalley played the concerto in its original form with the Sinfonia of Cambridge, conducted by Peter Britton. There was a full house for the concert which also included Haydn's symphony no 76 and Beethoven's Pastoral symphony. Whilst it is always enjoyable to hear a 'new' Alkan work, to me the cadenzas seemed a bit 'over the top' in the context of the sublime work into which they were interpolated. In other words, the contrast between the pianistic styles of Mozart and Alkan was so extreme as to make the latter's cadenzas sound out of place - a least at a first hearing - so perhaps further hearing would modify this impression'.

Also present were Dr. Roderick Munday, of Peterhouse, Cambridge, who says 'Roger played beautifully and the house was packed'. He found the Alkan cadenzas 'full of Alkanesque fireworks and brooding'. 'The audience, despite a short note in the programme, was evidently unprepared for it', Roderick says, 'and seemed slightly startled, so that the interval talk very much revolved around it'. (Roger Smalley is a member of the Alkan Society).

ELIOT LEVIN: Our East Barnet member has met Eugene d'Albert's daughter who with her husband and he hope to collaborate on a further record in his Symposium series with some magnificent illustrations from her family album. Eliot is also producing a new issue on LP for the Furtwangler Centenary - the Rosamunde Overture and Beethoven's Fifth from exceedingly rare recordings of c1926-29 in very good sound. (Symposium 1003). Available from the Wilhelm Furtwangler Society. There are other hitherto unpublished recordings of various composers. Any members interested in 78 rpm repressings of famous great singers from original metal plates (not re-recordings) can contact Eliot at 110 Derwent Avenue, East Barnet, Herts. EN4 8LZ. He has also produced a cassette of four rolls of Alkan's music with the kind co-operation of Frank Holland of the Musical Museum, Brentford, Middx. Members interested should contact Eliot

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Eliot Levin is taking over some of the treasurer's duties. Please send all subscription renewals to Eliot Levin, 110 Derwent Avenue, East Barnet, Herts. EN4 8LZ.

There is no change in the subscription rates:-

£5 for London and overseas members (payable in sterling)

£3 for members out of London and students.

(both these rates cover husband and wife membership).

Members are reminded that they can take out Deed of Covenants to the Society. This considerably increases the value of their subscription to the Society. Please apply to the Secretary for a form.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS: for the November meeting the planned performance of Alkan's Cello Sonata has regrettably had to be cancelled as the cellist Marc Bonetti is unable to return to England from Australia this year. Instead the Society is presenting a recital of music by Alkan, Liszt and Schumann.

Tuesday 19th November at 8.00 p.m. at Lauderdale House, Waterlow Park, Highgate Hill, London N6 The Alkan Society presents a Recital of music written in the middle of the 19th century. Liszt Songs and Transcendental Studies, Schumann - Frauen leben und-leben, Alkan - right hand Study Op 76 and duets - a march from Op. 40 and Saltarelle Op. 47.

Stephanie McCallum (piano) Patricia Wright (Soprano)
and Richard Shaw (piano)

Tickets £2.50 (£1.50 concessions) at the door
FREE to Society members and guests (up to two)

Wine and soft drinks available during the interval

Directions:- Underground to Archway Station, turn left up Highgate Hill past the hospital and Catholic Church. Lauderdale House is about 100 yards on left. For those who do not want to walk from the station there are frequent buses.

Patricia Wright was born in New Zealand and studied at the Melbourne Conservatory with Joan Hammond. She was awarded the Dame Joan Hammond Scholarship, the most prestigious scholarship in Australia, enabling her to study abroad. In 1981 Patricia came second in the Benson and Hedges competition. Since then she has undertaken a wide variety of engagements in concert halls, opera houses and broadcasting and recording studios. Recent highlights include various Radio 3 recitals of works by Prokofiev, Menotti, Brahms, Poulenc and Auric, and various British composers. She has made two records of songs of Frank Bridge for Pearl and a further disc of English songs will be released in 1986. As a soloist in oratorio and opera she has recently appeared in the Proms and has worked with the English Chamber Orchestra and Northern Ireland Orchestra.

Wednesday, January 8th at 7.00 p.m. in the Concert Hall at the Royal College of Music, Prince Consort Road, London SW7 (behind the Albert Hall).

Roger Smalley/Cathie Travers (pianos). An all Alkan programme with introductions by Roger Smalley:-

Benedictus for pedal piano Op. 54 (arranged for two pianos by Roger Smalley), Trois Marches Op. 40 for piano duet, Impromptu sur le choral de Luther, 'Un tort rempart est notre Dieu' Op. 69 (arranged for two pianos by Roger Smalley).

It is particularly exciting to have the opportunity to hear Op. 69 which Roger Smalley has a very high opinion of 'only Brahms Haydn & Regers Beethoven Variations can be compared with it'.

Roger as well as being a fine pianist, is well known as a composer. He recently took part in a performance of his own piano concerto which was recorded by the BBC for broadcasting at a later date.