

ALKAN SOCIETY

(Reg. Charity No. 276199)

BULLETIN - JANUARY 1982

REPORT OF MEETING held at the Thomas Coram Foundation on Tuesday,
November 10th, 1981 at 7.00 p.m.

Only fourteen Members were present, but apologies were received from Jan Hoare and Charles Hailstone. The Meeting was most interesting and it was sad that so few attended it.

First, Alan Davidson (Reading) gave an account of his musical progress since a time well before the '39-'45 War, with memories of Queen's Hall and many of the recitalists that he had heard; but Alkan never appeared on the programme. Then he heard an Alkan recording by Ronald Smith and was at once captivated. Since then, he has taken every opportunity to hear more. He commented that he had not yet heard a piece by Alkan that was not at least tinged with melancholy or gloom. He was pleased now to see young people such as Stephanie McCallum and Jack Gibbons taking such an interest in Alkan.

Next came Stephanie and her husband, Peter. When in Australia before they had met one another, they had heard Alkan played by Gordon Watson. Later came Ronald Smith and Stephanie became his pupil. Stephanie played beautifully three of Alkan's compositions and, before each, Peter pointed out interesting features about the construction, the themes and rhythmic patterns occurring in each. It was a delightful double act and the items chosen were "Le Tambour bat aux Champs" (Op. 50.2), "Allegro Barbaro" (Op. 35.5) and "Le Festin d'Esopé" (Op. 39.12).

After the interval, Antony Webster told us how, when in France recently, he and his wife had heard Pierre Reach play Alkan's "Grande Sonate" at a Berlioz Festival. Then Richard Shaw, who had borrowed our first edition of the Op.4 from the Guildhall School Library, showed us what could be learned from its title-page. The date must be 1833 or 1834. Neither the British Library nor the Bibliothèque Nationale possesses a copy and he thought that we had obtained a bargain.

Then David Gammie told us how, when a schoolboy, he had crept surreptitiously from Winchester College to listen to Alkan on a park bench and ever since then had been an "Alkanolic". He came very close to communicating Alkan's appeal and the reasons for it. He dealt with the constant surprise, the unusual harmonies, the rhythmic drive, the wide-ranging interest in his titles, his extraordinary variety of marks of expression etc. He took most of his examples from the 25 Preludes, Op.31, from which

he played Nos. 2, 10 ("Dans le style Fugué") and 25. Sometimes, he admitted, he was just unable to account for the construction and appeal of a particular composition. He instanced Op.25 No.2.

Before the Meeting closed, about 9.20 p.m., Jean Bartholomew charmingly thanked the Members who had given so much of their time in preparing such a varied and fascinating evening.

ALKAN REFERENCE LIBRARY

A friend of Brian Doyle has found, in Paris, a copy of "Une Fusee" Op.55 and we hope that this will be added to our collection before long.

Mr. R.A. Christophers, Assistant Keeper at the British Library, Department of Printed Books, has very kindly supplied me with a list of all the Alkan works held at the Library. It is an extensive list and it seems that we shall be able to obtain photostat copies of some rare Alkan items that we are unlikely to acquire in any other way. This concession will, of course, cost money. The Society does not have, at the moment, a specific Library Fund but, nevertheless, any special contribution will be most welcome.

DISCOGRAPHY

We welcome two new Members from West Germany - Hartmut Schock and his wife. Hartmut Schock tells us of another recording that includes Alkan's "Les Diablotins". The other items are Wagner's "Siegfried-Idyll", Liszt's "Malediction" (pf & strings). Details:- Ensemble 13 Baden-Baden, Reichert.
HM - 065 - 99843.

Dr. Roderick Munday and Brian Doyle have each reminded me that not only has the Ringeissen recording (HM 927) been re-issued but also the Lewenthal recording of "Funeral March for a Papagallo" is available on a disc recently released in this country. It is on the CBS Classics Label No61117 - retailing about £3.50. With it are "Le Tambour bat aux Champs" (Op.50.2), Étude in A flat (Op. 35.8), Sonatine (Op.61), from Op.63 - 1 "La Vision", 7 "Le Frisson", 11 "Les Soupirs", 12 "Barcarollette", 37 "Scherzettino", 39 "Héraclite et Démocrite", 45 "Les Diablotins", from Op.74 "Gros Temps" and "Petit Conte" (no Opus No.).

NEWS ITEMS

Stephanie McCallum will be giving a Recital at the Wigmore Hall on Wednesday, February 24th. In her programme she will include the whole of the fifth book of the Trente Chants, Op.70. Many members will have heard her perform these pieces at the Coram Foundation in November 1980. Stephanie and her husband, Peter, have been so generous in their support of our Society that I hope all Members will do their very best to aid Stephanie in this venture.

Antony Webster has informed me that the "Cello Sonata" is to be performed as one of a Chamber Music Series at the Arts Centre, New Metropole, The Leas, Folkestone, on Friday June 11th. It will be played by Rohan de Saram with Druvide Saram (pf). Also in the programme will be the Beethoven Sonata Op.69 in A and some music from India. Tickets £2.50. Enquiries 'phone Folkestone 55070. Not many of our Members live in the Folkestone district, but a few might well be interested.

Volume II of "Alkan - the Enigma" will not be published yet. Our President has assembled a large number of notes and references but with all the Recitals, Master Classes, lecturing and teaching which he undertakes, all demanding much travelling time, he is finding difficulty in proceeding with the composition of the book.

Universal Edition Ltd. has produced a new catalogue of pianoforte compositions which includes all the Alkan they can supply including, at last, the "Alkan in Miniature".

An article on Alkan and his shorter pianoforte pieces should appear in the February issue of "Piano Journal" produced for the European Pianoforte Teachers' Association.

Charles Hailstone's book on "Alleyways of Mortlake" will not now appear before March.

Members who have not yet paid their subscriptions for the 1981/2 Session will they please send them to the Hon. Treasurer:-

Brian Doyle, 27 Fawcett Street, London S.W.10. as soon as possible. (I am sorry that, owing to a misunderstanding, Brian was mis-spelled Bryan in the last Bulletin).

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 1982

(Will Members please enter these dates in their diaries without delay. So often a Member says to me "I am sorry I missed the last Meeting, but I had not entered the date in my diary and something else turned up".)

February 2nd Tuesday in the Lecture/Recital Room at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, Silk Street, Barbican (nearest Underground Station - Moorgate) at 7.30 p.m. our President, two or three days before he leaves for Toronto and New York, will give his long-awaited talk on the Alkan Concerto (Op. 39 Nos. 8,9,10). For the first ½-hour he will give an analysis of the work; then, after a short interval, he will play it straight through. (We cannot start this Meeting any earlier because the Lecture/Recital Room is in use until 7.00 p.m.).

March 26th Friday in the Lecture Hall at the Trinity College of Music, 11/13 Mandeville Place (nearest Underground Station - Bond Street), Charles Hailstone will present another programme of recordings. Last year's Meeting at T.C. was most enjoyable and the arrangements will be much the same:-

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6.45 Coffee and Biscuits (no charge)

7-8.30 Charles' Programme. He will include Lewenthal's talk on Alkan's music (repeated by special request), Trio Op.30 (Mirecourt Trio), Marche Funèbre & March Triomphale (Ronald Smith), A Minuet, Barcarolle & Fantaisie (Pierre Reach) and a Toccata (1920) by Sorabji.

May 24th Monday at the Thomas Coram Foundation, 40 Brunswick Square (nearest Underground Station - Russell Square; turn right when leaving the Station) at 7.00 p.m. Dr. William Eddie will give a talk "Analysing Alkan's music - How and Why". Dr. Eddie has kindly supplied this note:-

"Many accepted methods of analysing music have been established since Tovey's day; yet few have been applied to a study of Alkan's music. The talk will provide a non-technical introduction to some of the more recent methods of examining and describing music. There will be plenty of illustrations at the piano".

Annual General Meeting - Please make a special effort to attend. It will be held as usual at the Abbey Community Association, in the Music Room (ground-floor), 29 Marsham Street, London S.W.1. at 7.00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 14th.

J.H. White
(Hon. Secretary)