

THE ALKAN SOCIETY

President:

RONALD SMITH



Hon. Secretary/Treasurer

BRIAN DOYLE
146, Brocks Drive,
Cheam, Surrey
SM3 9UT

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The number of performances and broadcasts planned for this year is very heartening. In particular, attention is focused on the chamber works after many years of almost total neglect. Our President will be taking part in most of these performances including a private one at the Yehudi Menuhin School. In spite of a very heavy schedule leading up to the Centenary Concert on March 29th he and Christopher Bunting have very kindly agreed to give a performance of the Cello Sonata at our next meeting (see Forthcoming Meeting).

I have just heard that Alkan is to be featured in this month's Musical Times including a review of Volume 11 by High MacDonald.

ALKAN FESTIVAL

It is now confirmed that the B'nai B'rith Society will be sponsoring Ronald Smith's Alkan recital on Saturday December 3rd in The Queen Elizabeth Hall. This concert will still be part of our Alkan Commemorative Festival in association with The B'nai B'rith Jewish Music festival. This leaves us to concentrate on financing the other programmes on November 30th, December 1st and 2nd and the Piano Competition. The Fairfield Hall, Croydon, have expressed an interest in staging the Piano Competition and we are currently having discussions with them. Members have continued to contribute to the Festival Fund and we hope that those who have yet to do so will do so and help this worthy cause. (Cheques payable to The Alkan Festival Fund).

ALKAN JUBILEUM

We have heard from Sweden of an exciting event to commemorate the centenary of Alkan's death. Lennart Wallin and Torgay Lundmark are pianists whose interest and enthusiasm for Alkan's music goes back to their student days when they first heard his music in a recording by Ronald Smith. For the past three years they have organised a series of chamber concerts called the 'Amorina Recitals' in the Amorina Hall, Sollentuna on the outskirts of Stockholm. It is one of the major halls for recitals and chamber concerts in Sweden. This year there will be five concerts, each with a French theme and the final concert entitled 'Alkan Jubileum' features many of Alkan's works particularly from Op 39 plus works by Scarlatti Chopin and Schumann, composers that Alkan admired and featured in his own 'Petits Concerts'. The concert will last for three hours and six pianists will take part. The programme is as follows:- Symphony Op 39, three Preludes Op 28 (Chopin), Fantasticheria, Le Festin d'Esopo, Op 39 (interval), Prelude No 13 Op 31, Minuetto alla tedesca Op 46, two Sonatas (Scarlatti), Waldszenen Op 82 and Romans Op 28 (Schumann, March No 2 Op 40 for four hands, Allegro Barbaro Op 35, Nocturne No 1 Op 22, Quasi Faust (from the Grande Sonate) Op 33, (interval). Concerto for solo piano Op 39 (1st movement). In spite of the fact that Alkan is little known outside of pianistic circles

in Sweden, there has been tremendous interest in the concert, and it has been sold out months in advance. The concert will be recorded and broadcast by Radio Stockholm.

There will also be an Alkan recital in Stockholm on the Centenary day, March 29th. The pianist, Janos Solyom will be playing *Le Festin d'Esopé*, the Symphony and Concerto, all from Opus 39. The American pianist, Warren Cohen will be playing an all-Alkan programme on March 29th in Hawaii. The programme includes the Grande Sonata Op 33, the Symphony Op 39 and the final book of Chants Op 70. In the Autumn he will be including Alkan's Sonatine Op.61 in a programme of Sonatines by Ravel, Bartok and Sibelius.

In Perth, Australia there will be a concert of the Chamber works in the University. It will be introduced by Hugh Macdonald. Mark Coughlan, a member of the Society, will be giving a recital in the University on March 24th. He will be including the Variations a la vielle and some of the Op 35 studies.

CONCERTS IN ENGLAND

5th March. Our President, Ronald Smith, will be giving a series of lecture/recitals in the Wills Centre, Bristol, 10.30 a.m. Schubert 1.30pm
Chopin Etudes 3.30 - 5.00, Alkan's Trois Grandes Etudes Op 76.

8th March A concert of the three major chamber works - the Violin Duo Op 21, the Piano Trio Op 30 and Cello Sonata Op 47 with Ronald Smith, Nona Liddell (violin) and Christopher Bunting at the Ripley Arts Centre, Sundridge Avenue, Bromley, Kent at 8.00pm.

11th March A recital by John Bingham of works by Alkan, Chopin and Liszt for the Sheffield Philharmonic Society (see November 3rd for details).

17th March A lunchtime recital by John Bingham (as above) in the Solihull Library.

20th March A recital by John Bingham (as above) in the Rotherham Arts Centre.

28th March Santiago Mantas will be including many Alkan works in his recital in the Purcell Room, South Bank, London at 7.30pm

29th March The Centenary Concert in the Wigmore Hall at 7.30pm. First London performances of the Violin Duo, Piano Trio and Cello Sonata with Ronald Smith, Moray Welsh (cello) and James Clark (violin).

17th May Ronald Smith will be giving a lunch time recital at the Fairfield Hall, Croydon, Surrey. He will be including *Le Festin d'Esopé*.

November 3rd A recital by John Bingham in the Wigmore Hall. The programme is:-
Quasi Faust (second movement of the Grande Sonata Op 33) - Alkan, Sonata in B minor - Chopin, Gretchen (2nd movement of the Faust Symphony) - Liszt, Transcendental Studies Nos 10 and 11 - Liszt, Scherzo Diabolico Op 39 No 3 - Alkan, Trois Petites Fantaisies Op 41 No 3 - Alkan, Fantasy in F minor Op 49 - Chopin, Scherzo No 1 in B minor Op 20 - Chopin

November 30th, December 1st, 2nd and 3rd - Alkan Centenary Commemorative Festival on the South Bank

ALKAN BROADCASTS

On the 17th March Ronald Smith, Moray Welsh and James Clark will be recording Alkan's Violin Duo and Cello Sonata for BBC Radio 3. It will be broadcast during the week beginning March 28th when Alkan will be 'Composer of the Week'. The programmes are broadcast on weekdays at 8.35am and, as part of the 'new look' Radio 3, all the week's programmes will be repeated the following week at 11pm.

Rohan and Druvi de Saram will be recording Alkans Cello Sonata in April for BBC Radio 3 for broadcast at a later date.

Also in that month John Bingham will be taking part in a recording for Radio 3 of Alkans Piano Trio. He will be doing the same for Hilversum KRO and Radio Suisse Romande.

REPORT ON THE MEETING ON DECEMBER 8th at the Guildhall School of Music.

The composer Erika Fox's talk centred on her own personal responses to Alkan's music and those elements that are common to her own music and to Alkans.

She was born in Vienna of a Jewish family who belonged to the Hassidic sect. This background gives her a viewpoint of Alkan's music denied to those unfamiliar with Jewish religious practises and customs. She first heard Alkan's music when a friend played to her the final movement of the Sonatine Op 61. She was surprised to find that the tune was familiar to her. It awakened in her childhood memories when her family used to attend the synagogue which was in a room in a private house.

Erika sang the tune and though not exactly the same they were similar particularly the opening and the three repeated notes. In the synagogue it was always sang by a man and the way that it was sang is very much part of the expression that she found in Alkan's music. It is to do with a percussiveness and the use of a kind of nonsense words. The percussive effects in Alkan's music also remind her of her visits to the synagogue. The banging on the tables and banging with the feet.

In the Hassidic tradition, music, singing and dancing play a large part and also repetition. The repetition of words and phrases is used as a way of drawing oneself into a different state of being. This is common in other religions also. In the synagogue the cantor recites and sings and the congregation responds, not together as in church but in their own time so that you often hear things that sound the same but they are going on at different times like people muttering the same words but not quite together.

When she became more familiar with Alkans music she found in them certain characteristics which she also finds in her own music, although, as she pointed out, this may not be immediately obvious to many listeners. She finds in a lot of Alkans music that there is something very extreme. It is often very fast, very loud or soft, high or low and there are great changes of speed suddenly. She is also interested in lots of different types of extremes and different speeds, very great changes of speed suddenly, two different speeds at the same time. Her own composition Pas de Deux (1981) for violin and double bass illustrated this. We also heard excerpts from a synagogue service and Richard Shaw played Alkans 'Ancient Melody of the Synagogue (Prelude No. 6 Op.31).

An aspect of Alkan's music which she finds he has in common with another Jewish composer, Mahler, is that in their music major and minor are almost interchangeable. In Romantic music and music of other periods you often get a major chord following a minor passage, rarely the other way round but in Alkan it often happens. The minor, a semitone smaller gives you a feeling of closing in. Also in his music the beginning and end are often exactly the same. This is in effect like a frame around the work, closing it in. The feeling of being closed in is something one notices very much about his music.

In Alkan's music there are a great many notes but she finds that they often do not get anywhere. In his music and in her own and also in a great deal of Russian and Eastern music you will find a passage followed by another passage. They are different but do not get anywhere. The end is like the beginning.

She compared the Scherzo of Alkan's Sonatine to her own composition Exercise for Two Pianos (1974). The Alkan Scherzo is very fast but very static. It goes around in circles, like being locked in a room trying desperately to get out and going faster and faster but no matter how fast you go you will never get out. Her Exercise is very much like that - frenzied activity on a few notes and then a static bit in the middle. Also to illustrate the going around in circles we heard an excerpt from her Kaleidoscope for Flute, Harp, Viraphone and Cello which won the Finzi Award in 1983.

Another element in Alkan's music that she felt that people had not cottoned on to, which she thought was rather special, could be found in Alkan's Funeral March for a Dead Parrot. Partly it was to do with the nonsense words which put her in mind of the Zen attitude. One asks questions and one answers in a very enigmatic way. Don't ask too many questions life just goes on. In the work there is a repetition of the tonic and dominant. A lot of very early music is like that. It keeps you anchored. The idea of always staying in the same place.

The sadness of parting and sorrow for something that is gone is very much part of her own musical language and also, she feels, of Alkan's. In the East End of London from the early part of the century to the 1950's there flourished a famous Yiddish theatre. There was a song which was very popular and often sang there. It was a sentimental song and the words spoke about the past which was gone forever. Erika did not know where it originated from but she sang us the melody. We then heard one of Alkan's Preludes Op 31 which bore a strong resemblance. Its title - 'Le temps qui n'est plus'.

ALKAN VOL 11 - The Music A review by Harold Truscott.

A review by Harold Truscott, who has given some memorable talks on Alkan for the Society, is reproduced at the end of the Bulletin. It first appeared in the December issue of Music for Musicians.

Copies of Volume 11 can be ordered from the Secretary at the reduced price of £12.50 plus £1 p & p (£1.50 overseas). A few copies of Volume 1 (the biography) are available at £5.00 plus 50p p & p (80p overseas).

STEPHANIE McCALLUM

Stephanie has continued to champion Alkan's cause since her return to Australia. She has added the Concerto for Solo Piano to her repertoire and played it in public for the first time on October 2nd in Sydney.

The music critic of the Sydney Morning Herald, Fred Blanks writes under the heading "Neglected Alkan Revived in Style" - 'No greater injustice exists in the piano repertoire than the almost total neglect of Alkan. This French contemporary of Liszt and Chopin was a remarkable, though eccentric pianist and composer, with a prolific output of extraordinary quality. Few pianists and listeners seem to be aware of him. Stephanie McCallum is an exception and on Friday she played the huge Concerto for Solo Piano, 56 minutes of tremendous variety and difficulty, mostly turbulent enough to sound as if it needed four hands. The performance, amazingly from memory, was superb. The pianist's fingers flew over the keyboard at lightning speed and landed impeccably. Her sense of the grotesque and of the romantic gestures was unfailing. We heard a marvellous work (last played here by Ronald Smith in the mid 1970s) and argueably the best piano playing by a local musician this year.