



THE ALKAN SOCIETY

(Registered Charity number 276199)

<http://www.alkansociety.org>

**Vice-Presidents: Anne Smith, Nicholas King, Hugh Macdonald,
Richard Shaw**

Secretary: Nicholas King, 42 St. Alban's Hill, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP3 9NG
e-mail: secretary@alkansociety.org

Chairman: Eliot Levin

Treasurer: Averil Kovacs e-mail: treasureralksoc@aol.com

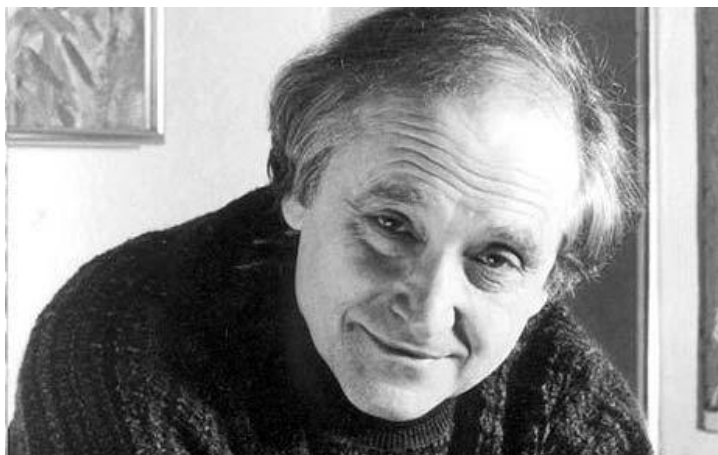
Archivist: Brian Doyle *Bulletin Editor/Webmaster:* David Conway

Bulletin e-mail: info@alkansociety.org

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Bulletin no. 79 October 2008

Yonty Solomon



We are sad to report the death on September 26th of the Society's President, Yonty Solomon. Yonty had been suffering from a brain tumour since early this year.

Yonty Solomon, who succeeded Ronald Smith as our President, was born in Cape Town South Africa in 1937. A late starter – he did not learn to read music until his teens, although he played jazz and boogie-woogie

from childhood - he studied with Myra Hess and Charles Rosen amongst others. He was a great champion of contemporary and unjustly neglected music and a renowned performer of the classic repertoire – one tribute which must have pleased him was Sacheverell Sitwell's comment that "I have certainly heard no playing to match yours since I went to Busoni's concerts". But even more telling is the comment of a pupil at his funeral service on 29th September: "Yonty was for all of his students the best role model that a teacher could possibly be, a colossus of the piano world, warm-hearted, generous, enthusiastic, energetic, and intellectually curious." Society members will recall the Alkan recital organised by Yonty at the Trinity College in April 2007. We hope to have further memoirs of Yonty in our next Bulletin.

Alkan Society: Upcoming Events

Colloquium: Alkan's 'Esquisses' - Tuesday 18th November

Richard Murphy will lead an interactive discussion on Alkan's fascinating, and often enigmatic, 48 + 1 'Esquisses'. This will include performances of some of the pieces by Society members. This should prove a fascinating evening and all members are welcome to participate. The colloquium, will take place at Schott's, 48 Great Marlborough Street, London W1 from 18.30 to 20.30.

Alkan Society Scholarship Competition and Concert – Saturday 8th November

These will be held on November 8th; once again, Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge is kindly hosting the events. For further details please see the attached flier.

Alkaniana

Alkan to Fétis (Letters VII and VIII)

We complete our series of translations of the letters of Alkan to the critic Fétis, of which the originals are held in the Fryklund collection at Stockholm. As previously, the letters are translated by the Editor, who has once again been greatly assisted in his notes and comments by those of François Luguénot. All lapses of accuracy or tone are your Editor's alone of course, but I have tried to capture something of Alkan's free-flowing phraseology. Underlinings are Alkan's – square brackets are my insertions.

The last two letters of the series are less dramatic than Alkan's outburst in letter VI (Bulletin 78). The first letter outlines the works that Alkan thinks worthy of bringing to the attention of Fétis. We note that the minor key studies (op 39) are completed at this time, although they were not published until later in the year. Alkan's enthusiasm for his own cello sonata is notable. The final letter seems to be a response to an article by Fétis on musical copyright.

Letter VII

[Paris, January of February 1857]

Here, dear M. Fétis, as you have been kind enough to ask me, is an outline of some of my works, published, in course of publication, or unpublished. =12 Caprices in 4 b[ooks], opp. 12,13,15, and 16, Richault.¹ = The Months (without opus) Richault, 4 b[ooks] = 3 Grandes études, for the two hands separate and together; 2 fugues without opus, chez Richault = nocturnes, Saltarelle and Air de Ballet, opp. 22,23 and 24, chez Aulagnier². = Marche funèbre and Marche triomphale, opp. 26 and 27, Brandus.³ = 25 Préludes op. 31; First sonata [sic] op. 33; 12 Études in all the major keys (dedicated to M. Fétis), all three with Brandus = Duo for violin, Richault. Trio for Paino, violin and bass, id[em] – Salut cendre du pauvre piano solo

¹ The publisher.

² Another publisher.

³ Successor to the publisher Schlesinger.

op. 45, Richault = Sonata for piano and violoncello (in the press) – This is the one I really want you to hear in April if you arte in Paris - = 12 Grandes etudes, in the form of [separate] pieces, in all the minor keys. = A certain number of small pieces of all sorts, printed or unpublished = A few unpublished sketches for the new piano with pedal keyboard of Érard, &c., &c., &c.

Allow me once more, my dear M. Fétis, to say how delighted I was to acquaint myself with your magnificent sextet; and to hear the fragment of song which followed it. These are absolutely original works, which will always seem fresh; in them strength and gentleness are allied in a most remarkable fashion. They are of their time but however are neither dependent on nor imitate others. Hearing this music I said to myself that nature should have granted you two existences; that which you have dedicated to imperishable creations, and another which you might have entirely devoted to works of pure imagination.....But perhaps you have discovered how to reconcile these, as I heard yesterday of further works. We will hear these some day or other, I hope, with the grace of God.

In the meanwhile, dear M. Fétis, accept as always the expression of the wholly admiring sentiments and respect of your devoted

[C. V. Alkan ainé [signature]]

Saturday evening

Letter VIII

[Paris, Sunday 31 October 1858]

Dear Monsieur Fétis,

Your article of this morning relieved me of a great weight, and removed a mask of shame which I had felt covering my face, since the question was raised concerning perpetuity of intellectual property. I had read some of the things which have been said and written on this topic; and, without wishing to indulge in either more poetry or more impartiality than was appropriate, I turned over in my mind the dominant opinions; I found, I think, good arguments to demonstrate how demeaning and humiliating it was for all products of invention, of spirit, of the imagination, of assimilation with pure matter⁴; and how, besides, the system was in practice absurd, monstrous, impossible.....At this point I had got as far as shrugging my shoulders. I am very happy to discover out of the blue an auxiliary of your importance; and I really wish that all the good things you say, and those that remain for you to say, will receive a greater publicity than the *Gazette* can give them. Whatever the outcome, dear maître, I affectionately shake your hand, and ask you to receive, as ever, the expression of my respect and my admiration.

[C. V. Alkan ainé [signature]]

36, r. de Lisbonne

Sunday

⁴ 'L'assimilation avec la matière pure'. This seems to indicate some sympathy with a Platonic idealism of art (unless of course I have completely mistaken the writer's drift).

An Early English Alkanist – W. T. Best, 1826-1897

Academic research continues to be revolutionised by technological developments and one of the innovations which will have a continuing dramatic effect is the gradual digitisation of publications, especially ephemera such as journals and magazines, allowing all sorts of discoveries. Here is an example: investigating a new digitised database of 19th-century English journals in the British Library, I entered 'Alkan' as a search word and was rewarded unexpectedly with dozens of citations. All but a few of these (a recital in Cologne and the death of the 'cellist Seligmann, and advertisements for piano anthologies prepared by Emile Sauer), related to recitals given by the organist William Thomas Best, (always known by his initials as W. T. Best), who seems to have included pieces by Alkan on a regular basis for his many concerts, the programmes for which were reported by the *'Musical Standard'*. This seemed to me to be very remarkable as during the period concerned – about 1875-1890 – it has generally been assumed that Alkan's music was unknown and ignored, even in his home



WILLIAM THOMAS BEST.

BORN, CARLISLE, 1826. DIED, LIVERPOOL, 1897.

country save by a faithful few. Even more remarkable perhaps that it was Alkan's organ music, conventionally though of as a poor relation to his piano works, that found a British champion.

The name of Best rang only the faintest of bells with me (as I am alas one of those lesser mortals who is not an organ cognoscento), but an inspection of Grove reveals that he was one of Britain's leading organists of the later 19th century. Further information about him is less easy to come by and the best source I discovered was an article in the April 1918 *'Musical Quarterly'* by Orlando A. Mansfield.⁵

The son of a Carlisle lawyer, Best began playing the organ in the local cathedral. He took few lessons and seems to have been mainly self-taught. Intended to become an architect, he began studying in Liverpool, but in 1840 his overwhelming predilection for music began to show itself and at the age of 14 he was

appointed organist to a Baptist church there. Mansfield informs us that this organ had the only CC pedal-keyboard on Merseyside, at a time when organ pedals were typically only of an octave range. To this he attributes the ability of Best to master the instrument as a whole and particularly his very fine pedal technique.

By 1848 Best had become organist to the Liverpool Philharmonic Society. In 1851 he played the Willis organ at the Great Exhibition in London and then took up a series of posts, at Lincoln's Inn, St. Martin's in the Fields and at the 'Royal Panopticon of Science and Art' (later the Alhambra) in Leicester Square, where he gave regular commercial recitals. These terminated when the management insisted that he end each recital with Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March'. Best had determined views on musical propriety, and promptly resigned.

⁵ Nicholas King has also kindly provided me with information from "A Directory of Composers for the Organ".

Indeed Best's peremptoriness, and the opacity of his private life, seem to offer some parallels with Alkan. Although one pupil found Best 'cordial, warm-hearted, enthusiastic and entertaining', the organist Henry Davey described him as 'somewhat eccentric, and in the main a recluse'. Stories of Best's bluntness include his comment to the builders of a new organ he tested in Devon ('take it out to sea and sink it in the lowest depths of Tor Bay') and his report, having been retained as an examiner for three candidates for a post of organist, to the Committee – 'Gentlemen, the candidate who last played is the least offensive of the three. I'll take my fee, please'.

Ezekiel Marshall, organist of the City Temple, recalls asking Best on one of his London visits to take the Saturday evening service for him. 'As he was unaccustomed to Nonconformist 'use', I promised to tell him what to do. When Dr. Parkin [the minister] rose [...] something like the following took place:

Dr. P.: 'Hymn no. 344.'

WTB: 'Do I play now?'

EM: 'No, not yet.'

Dr. P.: 'Hymn no. 344, tune 37'.

WTB: 'Do I play now?'

EM: 'No, no, not yet.'

WTB: 'D— it! When?'

In 1855 Best returned to Liverpool, where the first large concert organ built by Willis was being installed in St. George's Hall, to specifications of S. S. Wesley (whose old-fashioned stipulation of unequal temperament Best was to reverse in a rebuilding in 1867). He was to remain organist at the Hall for 40 years, being paid £300 per annum (raised to £400 in 1883). This required giving three concerts a week (one afternoon concert, entrance fee for the public 3d., and two evening concerts, entrance fee 6d.) for about 30 weeks in the year. It is for these concerts that the *'Musical Standard'* gives some of Best's programmes in the period of about 1877 to 1892. A large number of these include pieces by Alkan. Best was reputed to have a repertoire of about 5000 pieces in all – but even so to have included amongst these a dozen by Alkan – many of which he played more than once – is I think an acceptable showing to Alkanistes, especially bearing in mind that this was the supposed fallow period for the composer. There is no record that I am aware of for Best's concerts before 1877, but it seems reasonable to suppose that his advocacy of Alkan began earlier. I note that his recitals include other representatives of the French organ school such as Lefèbure Wély, Boëly and Benoist.

Not all of Best's Alkan pieces are clearly identifiable. An *'Andante Cantabile in E'* appears often and this may or may not be the same as a frequently appearing *'Andantino in E'*.⁶ A *'Prelude religieux'* perhaps comes from the op. 72 collection. Others, such as an *'andante religioso in B flat major'* and an *'allegretto scherzando in B flat minor'* remain to be determined. Frequently played is the A flat major *March* from op. 40 (originally for piano duet), which Best also played in London, and at the inauguration of the organ at Headingley, Oxfordshire, in 1887. Other identifiable pieces are the first march from the op. 37 *'Marches quasi da cavalleria'*, the op. 26 *'Marche funèbre'*, the *'Prière op. 64 no. 5 (Dieu des Armées)'*, and the *'Air de ballet'* from op. 24. A *'Rigaudon dans le style antique'* is perhaps from the *'Souvenirs de la Conservatoire'*.

Apart from playing the organ, Best was active as an editor (Bach, Mendelssohn and Handel), and a composer (many of his Anglican psalm chants are still in use), and published over 100

⁶ This is perhaps the same Alkan *'Andante'* which Best included in the series of organ collections he edited for Augener, *'Cecilia'*, (no. 34, 1883), of which at the time of writing I have been unable to obtain a copy.

transcriptions for organ with Novello between 1850 and 1872, an important element of musical diffusion before the days of recordings and radio. He also ventured into arrangements for other instruments, e.g. a version of 'Home, Sweet Home' for mandolin and guitar.

A high point in Best's career was in 1871, when he played the inaugural recital on the Willis organ at the Albert Hall. In 1880 Best was offered the choice of a knighthood or a Civil List pension and characteristically took the latter (£100/year). In 1882 he toured Italy and at Rome played before Liszt and Sgambati – bringing back to the UK much contemporary Italian organ music which he included in his recitals. In 1890 he went to Australia to open the Hill and Son organ at Sydney Town Hall. He finally stood down from the St. George's organ in 1894 and died three years later.

His scattering of Alkan may not however have fallen entirely on stony ground; for in 1900 his successor Dr. Pearce played the 'Dieu des Armées' *Prière* at St. George's, and in 1911 Best's pupil Tonking played a '*Prière in E*' by Alkan in a recital at the Albert Hall.

Concerts, Broadcasts, Recordings

'Indian Summer in Levoča' Festival , 2008

The first '*Indian Summer in Levoča*' Festival, of which the Society was a sponsor, took place in Levoča, Slovakia, from 27th September to 5th October. Eleven concerts – plus an art exhibition – took place and were all fully attended by visitors (British and German) and by locals. As will be related, we all got more Alkan than we had bargained for, and his music was extremely well received.



Old Town Hall, Levoča

The objective of the Festival was to present world-class music, centred on the Romantic repertoire but contrasting unknown music with the less familiar, in a beautiful but little-known corner of Europe. The festival is run by a local not-for-profit NGO, the *občanské združenie 'Levočské Babie Leto'*, with substantial cooperation from the town of Levoča (which provided the use of its theatre and assembly hall free of charge) and with the support of British and local sponsors. Your Editor, in whose idle fantasy the idea of the Festival originated, and who takes responsibility as its joint artistic director, confesses candidly that had he known exactly what he was undertaking, he might never have begun; however, steered through under the magnificent leadership of Madame Editor, and of our Slovak friend Pavel Uher (its other artistic director), and with the untiring help of Cynthia Wilson who came over from Phoenix AZ to keep us in order, the Festival must be accounted an undoubted success – and, what is more, will by popular acclaim be undertaken again next year (October 2nd-8th 2009 – see below).

Amongst many alarms and excursions we had some heart-stopping moments getting up the stairs to the Assembly Hall the wonderful Blüthner Model A grand (2m. 80 of it) very kindly loaned to us by the Vienna branch of that august company. It became one of the heroes of the Festival in its own right. We then had the appalling news that the South African pianist Petronel Malan, who was to perform in two concerts during the week, was without a passport, as the Hungarian embassy in the USA had contrived to lose it in the post. With noble intrepidity, the British pianist Jonathan Powell declared himself willing to fly out at very short

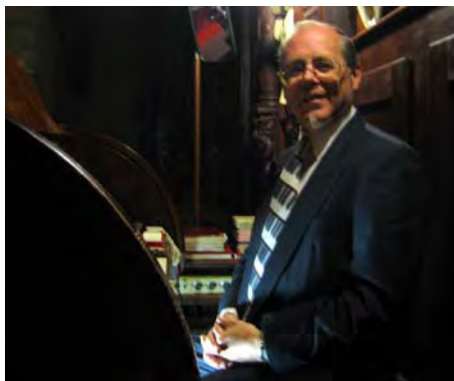
notice, and indeed played a superb recital on the Friday. Petronel has undertaken to make it by hook or by crook in 2009!

To assist a brief blow-by-blow account of the musical activities we have been fortunate enough to secure the services of a member of our audience, — Pythagoras Esq., from whose notes we copiously quote below.

Our **opening concert**, given by the Stamic Quartet of Prague, and given in the town's quaint old theatre, comprised the first quartet of Janáček ('*The Kreutzer Sonata*'), the 3rd *Quartet* of Ján Levoslav Bella, and Dvořák's *Quartet no. 12*, the 'American'. Bella was a contemporary and acquaintance of Dvořák, who was born in Slovakia and in fact educated in Levoča. We thus began with examples of Moravian, Slovak and Bohemian music. Pythagoras notes that 'the Janáček and the Bella quartets were excellently played, but after the tumult and ferocity of the Janáček finale, the quiet, introspective opening of Bella's quartet rather lost its significance'. Nevertheless the Bella came as a revelation to the audience, both local and foreign, and made a fitting tribute to our location. This was endorsed by the Mayor of Levoča, who after the concert invited one and all to an excellent reception in celebration.

On the **Sunday afternoon**, the Czech pianist Ivo Kahánek gave a solo recital in the Assembly Hall – the theatre alas was too small to accommodate the Blüthner. The programme included Beethoven's op. 109 Sonata, two *Metamorfózy* by the Slovak composer Eugen Suchoň (of whose birth 2008 is the centenary year), the *Sonata* of Martinů (in the opinion of Pythagoras 'an exciting work ending with dynamic ferocity and played for all it was worth to bring out all of its drama - it was the high point of the concert') and a stirring performance of Schumann's *Études Symphoniques*.

In the **evening** Ivo joined the Stamic Quartet for Dvořák's op. 81 *Piano Quintet*. Pythagoras writes 'Dvořák's quintet is a work of sunshine and happiness. The further the lid of a piano is opened, the better the tone. However, particularly on full stick, the pianist with a string quartet (or solo voice) must be ever wary of unbalance. Here, but for a brief moment or two towards the end of the finale, when he rather let rip, the problem was completely solved.' The Stamic also played the string quartet of Suchoň, a fascinating and complex work that left opinion divided, although all were agreed on the excellence and commitment of the performance; and began the evening with a superb performance of Mendelssohn's early, but astonishingly mature, *Quartet op. 13* (nominally his second, but actually his first).



Nicholas King at the console of the St. Jakub's organ

On Monday Nicholas King gave a generous organ recital in the historic church of St, Jakub, his programme including three Alkan pieces from the *Onze Pièces dans le style religieux*, Op.72 (nos.1, 11 & 10); Liszt's *Fantasia & Fugue on Ad nos, ad salutarem undam* S.259; the *Passacaglia & Fugue in C minor*, BWV582 of J S Bach; and an arrangement by Keith John of Mussorgsky's *Pictures from an Exhibition*. Pythagoras's account is authoritative:

Devotees of organ music are used to sitting in cold dark churches. Thus, clad in duffle coats and gloves, they turned out to welcome the Alkan Society's secretary and resident expert on Public

Service Vehicles who doubled this evening as an organist.

Nicholas King was hampered by the short compass of the instrument which his skills concealed remarkably well. Problems of pitch were seriously obtrusive in one of the

Alkan pieces, less so elsewhere. This was a pity, for many of the audience were hearing music of Alkan for the first time, and a composer being experienced for the first time deserves the best possible hearing.

At 34 minutes the piece by Liszt does not suffer from brevity. It is a tribute to our organist that attention never flagged. Unsurprisingly, the high point of the evening was Bach's Passacaglia & Fugue, for it is one of the instrument's greatest glories. The choice of stops in this large building was particularly effective.

According to the programme notes, Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* was an arrangement. It seemed, however, to be more a straightforward transcription. Either way, one might ask if it could work on an organ in a large resonant building and at one or two points it did sound a little strange. However, King's convincing choices of registrations and tempi won the day.

Despite Pythagoras's strictures, your Editor can report that numerous locals enquired of him after the concert about Alkan and as to where (and whether) records of his music could be obtained.

Tuesday brought the Slovak Chamber Orchestra (also known as the Warchalovci in memory of their founder Bohdan Warchal), led by Ewald Daniel. It began with the *Serenade* of Dvořák's pupil (and later son-in-law) Josef Suk; Pythagoras notes 'Suk, like Mendelssohn, wrote his first serenade at the age of eighteen. It is a very pleasant and enjoyable work, and to add that nowhere is it on the level of Mendelssohn at the same age is not to detract from it.' It ended with the masterful *Serenade* of Dvořák himself. In between we were originally to have heard a concertante work with Petronel; but instead the orchestra provided us with the sprightly and very enjoyable five-movement *Serenade* of Suchoň, which like many of the early 18th century serenades begins with a march to which one can imagine the players entering. This was a charming discovery, enhanced by the charm and verve of the young orchestra.

On the **Wednesday** we had a 'diverse and interesting'⁷ programme from Oxford's Holywell Ensemble, beginning with a light-hearted suite by Milhaud 'which received an excellent performance' and continuing with Beethoven's own very jolly arrangement for piano, clarinet and cello of his own Septet. The second half contained miniatures by Bella and the Scottish composer Richard Hill, as well as a tango by the Argentinean composer Astor Piazzolla. But the performance which most won the hearts of the local and foreign audience was a dashing rendering of John Ireland's *Phantasy Trio*. An encore of Cole Porter's 'So in Love' further ravished the audience, many of whom were then invited to a reception given by the British Ambassador, Michael Roberts (who by a strange coincidence is the husband of the Holywell's pianist, Margaret Ozanne) at the town's quaint Old Town Hall.

Thursday brought us a dramatic recital by the young Polish pianist Tomasz Kamieniak. Pythagoras confesses himself 'in a minority of one [...] A programme of pieces of tremendous and ever increasing pianistic difficulty played by steel fingers commanding enormous technical facility, much of the time at extraordinarily loudness, was received with a prolonged standing ovation [...] Kamieniak was undoubtedly born with talent and he has undoubtedly nurtured it, by devoting years to serious study and gruelling practice. However, to apply his armoury effectively, exuberance and display must be tempered with moderation and restraint; his audience must feel that he is playing the piano not attacking it. [...] These comments may seem harsh, but they are, as all criticism should be, written sincerely and intended constructively.' Notwithstanding, the audience was undoubtedly thrilled by

⁷ By now the reader will realise that quote marks represent the voice of Pythagoras.



l. to r.: Editor, Tomasz Kamieniak, Jonathan Powell and Mme. Nadežda Büchlerová-Conwayová, (Chairman of the občanské združenie 'Levočské Babie Leto')

Kamieniak's programming and execution, perhaps especially in the *Valse de Concert no. 2* of Jozef Wieniawski (brother of the more famous Henryk) and Thalberg's caprice, growing ever more fantastic and complex, on Bellini's *La Sonnambula*. In the second half, Alkan's *Concerto op. 39, 7-10* was given a full-blooded and committed performance which as Pythagoras notes had the audience on its feet (even if the player did make that egregious substitution of a glissando on the final page). One was, admittedly, a little surprised to see the piano still standing. Kamieniak is still only 26 and clearly has enormous potential, as well as present charisma. It was gratifying to the Festival organisers, by the way, that although the large British and German tourist groups had left the town, the audience level on this occasion and

subsequently was more than maintained by locals, as word of the success and quality of the Festival events spread.

On **Friday**, 'Jonathan Powell appeared at the Festival at short notice as a replacement. The centrepiece of his programme was the Alkan Symphony. Not only did this double the amount of time dedicated to Alkan at the Festival, but it was by a considerable margin the finest performance of this work that the writer has heard in a goodly while. That this might be so was suggested by the overall quality of performance of the first two numbers, the Chopin *Polonaise-Fantasia, Op.61* and Fauré's *Nocturne No.13 in B minor, Op.119*.

'The second half of the concert opened with the 10th sonata by Scriabin; an interesting work, cleverly crafted and of just the right length for the material on which it is built. The composer regarded it as "a sonata of insects". The insect content was not apparent, but this did not seem much to matter.

'The discovery of the evening for this writer, and, he guesses, for most of the audience, was the contemporary composer, John White. The three sonatas played this evening (no. 138, no.164 which is dedicated to Powell, and no. 95) whet the appetite for more. Perhaps at the next festival Jonathan Powell will be invited to devote an entire recital to this composer.'

Your Editor is particularly gratified by this last accolade, as it was at his suggestion that Powell added White to his programme. The composer we understand was delighted, if mystified, to hear that his works had been requested at a Slovak music festival. Your Editor shares Pythagoras's hopes that we can hear more White in Levoča – perhaps Mr. White will be able to unearth the mislaid manuscript of his fourth Sonatina, which, it is said, runs for several hours and contains a five-movement symphony at its core, the whole being dedicated to the memory of Alkan

The three remaining events of the Festival entered the realm of the theatre. On **Saturday afternoon** Tomasz Kamieniak gave a free recital of his arrangements of, improvisations on, music from the cinema and TV, in the auditorium of the town's Art School. 'There must have been about thirty short pieces [...] The overall effect was a sort of *Motion Pictures at an*

Exhibition, and indeed at one point there seemed to be a thematic connection. It was good to see many children in the audience, many of them very young, and if they wandered in and out and chattered a little it did not matter. [...] After the barnstorming excesses of a couple of evenings previously your reviewer anticipated that this concert would be a matter of duty rather than pleasure. However, to his utter astonishment there was no barnstorming, but delicacy and restraint, and a sensible range of dynamics'. Kamieniak's '*Fantasy on the X-Files Theme*' was notable amongst the pieces presented, and went down particularly well with the children.

On **Saturday evening** we returned to the Theatre. ' *Jeux*' is the final year practical module for their degree course of five students of Prof. Pavel Uher at the Bratislava Academy of Performing Arts. It is a musical entertainment with ballet, puppets and black theatre with an accompaniment, from records, of music by Debussy, Franaix, Ravel and Stravinsky. There were simple props and day-glo paints were used very effectively against the jet black backcloth. Every detail had been thoroughly rehearsed and the standard of production was high. All in all it was an ideal entertainment for the little theatre. Adults thought that three quarters of an hour was sufficient and children asked why it could not go on longer, so probably it was just about right.'

On **Sunday** the Festival concluded with a bravura display of flamenco singing and dancing in the theatre from the ensemble 'Los Remedios', a Slovak troupe which has studied with leading Flamenco artists in Spain. The theatre was quite sold out and the ensemble brought the Festival to a rousing and warmly applauded conclusion.

Space forbids a detailed description of the exhibition featuring works by the Czech graphic artist T. F. Šimon, and also works of the local artist Lubo Repaský (which sold well to British visitors); or to give an account of the many outings undertaken by visitors, both in and around the town of Levoa and to nearby places of historic interest or natural beauty, including the High Tatra mountains, the gigantic Spiš Castle, and the towns of Prešov and Kežmarok.



The Festival watchwords

Pythagoras concludes: 'Music festivals don't just happen; they result from a prodigious amount of work built on foundations of vision, idealism, willingness to take risks and ability to cope with last-minute emergencies without panic.

'This festival has provided opportunities of hearing a considerable amount of music off the beaten track, much of it in very good, and excellent performances. The Alkan Society feels that the quantity of Alkan's music performed justified the extent of its sponsorship. It is of interest to note that four members of the Society were present, including one from the United States, and that three members were present for the entire festival.

'One hopes that the promoters of the festival will feel sufficiently encouraged to continue in future years.'

NB: Video clips of items from the Powell and Kamieniak recitals at Levoa, together with some snippets of the Warchalovci, can be found on the internet at <http://uk.youtube.com/smerus>.

Plans for 2009

The plans for 2009 are indeed well advanced and it is proposed at this stage to have a series of recitals from Friday October 2nd to Wednesday 7th. 2009 being the bicentenary of the death of Haydn and of the birth of Mendelssohn, it is intended to have strong representations of both. The Vienna Piano Trio will play both the Mendelssohn trios, together with trios by Haydn, Schumann and Anton Rubinstein. The Stamic Quartet and the Zemlinsky Quartet will each give recitals containing Mendelssohn and Haydn, and will play a joint recital to include the Mendelssohn Octet. We also plan to feature, inter alia, a concert coupling a Mendelssohn cello sonata with the Alkan sonata, another to feature Haydn's music for the baryton, and piano recitals to include music by Liszt, Alkan and indeed John White. Following the formal recitals we may organise a 'break-out' period for the remainder of the week featuring more exotic musical items. We will keep Society members fully informed.....and hope to see you there! Please don't hesitate to contact the Editor, by e-mail (info@alkansociety.org) or otherwise, for any information.

A New Recording of the Cello Sonata

The German cellist Alban Gerhardt and the British pianist Steven Osborne have recently released a new recording of the Alkan *Sonate de Concert*, coupled with the cello sonata of Chopin. (Hyperion CDA67624). The recording, which will be reviewed in the next edition of the *Bulletin*, was selected by the *Daily Telegraph* on the 11th October as its 'Classical CD of the Week'. Of the Alkan work, the reviewer Matthew Rye writes:

The Alkan emerges as a surprisingly strong work, made more so by the sterling advocacy of these fine players. Its four movements betray its composer's love of harmonic quirks and unexpected changes of direction alongside a freely lyrical spirit. Gerhardt draws a suitably Romantic sound from his rich-toned Matteus Gofriller cello, and he conveys a lithe ease of articulation and rhythm in the jaunty saltarella that concludes the work.

The work may be purchased from Amazon via the front page (or from the discography) of the Society's website at www.alkansociety.org.

Alkan on the BBC – but not at Husum....

Peter Grove writes:

Martin Handley played M-A Hamelin's performance of the Haydn/Alkan movement from the "Surprise" symphony on the Breakfast show at 7.25 this morning (Sat. 13 September). As keen discographers, you will know that it comes from his "Composer-Pianists" album on Hyperion (CDA 67050). That in turn is linked to Robert Rimm's book "Hamelin and the Eight" (Amadeus Press) - the eight being Alkan, Busoni, Feinberg, Godowsky, Medtner, Rachmaninov, Scriabin and Sorabji. Martin's announcement was quite short, but he said all the right things and got Ch. V.'s name right.

No Alkan at Husum this year, either in the main programme nor encores, although he was the answer to one question in Jeremy Nicholas's Piano Quiz. Hamelin was there for his biennial visit, playing mainly pieces from his recent "jazz" and Godowsky albums, as well as two of his new piano minor-key Etudes and a chunk of Castelnuovo-Tedesco. His second encore was another recent composition of his own, and the third and last (a bit ungenerous for him in Husum) was his own 34th Diabelli variation, which combined the waltz theme with "Chopsticks" - called, of course, "Suggestion diabellique".