



The Alkan Society

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Ronald Smith (3rd January 1922 – 27th May 2004)

An anthology of centenary tributes



Portrait "Monochromania" by his daughter Beka Smith

This anthology of tributes to Ronald Smith, President of the Alkan Society from its inception in 1977 until his passing in 2004, has been assembled by Nicholas King and Richard Shaw (Vice-Presidents). Grateful thanks are extended to all who have contributed, and to Anne and Beka Smith for their patience and advice in completing the project.

Some contributions have necessarily been edited, on grounds of available space or correction of imperfect memories. No apology is offered that these tributes often contain an element of autobiography on the part of their authors; it would not be human to deny the extent to which Ronald's influence shaped the characters and life-attitudes of his pupils.

It is intended that a fuller biography of Ronald will be published later this year. Readers may meanwhile wish to consult Bulletin 66 and its obituary supplement, which are available on the Society website at www.alkansociety.org. Ates Orga has also compiled a centenary appreciation, which can be found at https://www.academia.edu/70424012/RONALD_SMITH_CENTENARY_NOTES_I?fbclid=IwAR258JG0NT13VajLXtg89gawh9Fbw-NNhhMTjznLqNtBKPYeA5eFr7hxKQg.

Stephanie McCallum

President, Alkan Society; pianist, recording artist, Associate Professor in Piano, Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

Accurately perceived as an 'artist of high individuality and high valour', Ronald Smith was hailed in Sydney's major broadsheet paper, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (along with new music piano exponent, Yuji Takahashi), in Roger Woodward's eclectic 1975 festival, Music Rostrum. The power of Ronald's Sydney impact was also illustrated by his later inclusion in the same paper's 'concerts of the year' for his performance of Alkan's *Grande Sonate*. This ensured his future returns down under. By his next visit in 1977 the Alkan Society had been formed, supporting his strong repertoire focus.

Piano students in Sydney were captivated by his deeply-researched performances of Alkan's major works, Chopin Etudes and Mazurkas, along with his lively and insightful masterclasses, which included plenty of humour along with the wisdom. His ability to project these to an audience and to explain his comments clearly was unusual and often theatrically enjoyable. The heights of his virtuosity came with what was, at that time to us, a strangely fluid and relaxed technique, tossed off from his signature low piano seat whilst wearing his memorably flamboyant jackets and bow-ties.

I was an enthusiastic recipient of his lessons and masterclasses, and so began a long and warmly-supportive musical relationship, continuing from 1978 in England as a private student, and spanning several decades. I could not have asked for a more inspiring mentor and model for artistic immersion and work ethic.

Some fond memories include family dinner at his house, taking trips on nearby miniature railways, and bringing our son Rupert to one of Beka's early birthday parties. (I want to claim credit for showing Beka the game of drawing crazy heads, bodies and legs, no doubt kicking off her own amazing career.) Ronald was great fun with young children, putting his glasses upside-down and doing Fee-fi-fo-fum giant impersonations. A very young Freddy Kempf played Scarlatti and Mendelssohn beautifully to me in Ronald's studio around that time. Fellow Australian long-term student and Alkan Society member, Christine Stevenson, also lived nearby and shared many musical experiences in this studio. One time a neighbour had complained about piano noise from an improbably large distance away. It turned out to be another piano teacher's studio, but to be certain of this Ronald had us both pounding out the opening of the Liszt E flat concerto as loudly as we could to see if he could hear it from the end of the garden.

Later, when we had moved up to London, I would occasionally come down to Saltwood to stay with him for a period of study, like other visiting students, many of whom were from Australia. These included visits from friends Kathy Selby, Mark Coughlan and Roger Smalley. Whenever I hear the Schubert early A minor sonata second movement, my mind goes straight back to hearing Ronald practise as it drifted upstairs from the music room in Saltwood. Anne made us welcome in a beautiful room overlooking the garden, complete with upright piano and a morning cup of tea along with urgent inquiries about our health if practice had not started pre-breakfast. I remember mentioning to Ronald that their lovely housekeeper had told me how much she enjoyed listening to me play the *Waldstein* sonata up there. He

was somewhat miffed as, no doubt too much in awe, she had never similarly commented to him! One moved to the beautiful studio with two Steinways for afternoon practice while Ronald was busy digging his vegetable garden.

Breakfast on Thursdays was special. Anne would join us over croissants in the music room while historic recordings were played. Ronald loved to leave a different record cover around to see if he could trap us into mistaking the performer and contradicting a previous opinion. I am pleased to say it never worked.

Ronald's interest in repertoire was inclusive, and he enthusiastically entered into my quirks of taste from Weber sonatas to Australian modernist composition, contributing astute judgement in works sometimes less familiar to him, and even attempting to understand my preference for some Liszt works over Chopin, for French music over Russian. He had an extraordinary gift for teaching because of this acceptance, even encouragement, of difference. He generously included me in his uncovering of unfamiliar Alkan works, suggesting I learn the op.76 *Trois Grandes Etudes* and the *Chants* op.70 for Wigmore Hall recitals and getting me to try out and to help assess the pieces for the *Alkan in Miniature* volume as quick study exercises. Just outside the music studio there was a Clementi square piano. His interest in the evolution of the piano preceded the current fashion. Alkan's association with the Erard piano and its characteristic differences of sound and construction was something he often stressed, and it encouraged my later explorations on historic Erards.

Memories of Ronald's London concerts include two concerto performances at the Fairfield Halls in Croydon. One was a strikingly virtuosic performance of Alkan's *Concerto da Camera*. The other changed my rather jaundiced view of the Tchaikovsky B flat minor concerto. This was a riveting performance where Ronald held the orchestral players under a kind of spell, his intensity of concentration in pianissimo passages urging them to listen and respond.

His performances at the Wigmore Hall and at the Queen Elizabeth Hall still resonate. I remember a Russian programme with a Balakirev sonata and the Scriabin *Ninth Sonata* as well as a programme with a towering Mussorgsky *Pictures at an Exhibition*. He had a wonderful imagination for piano sound, and the technique to produce exactly what he wanted. His *Waldstein* and *Appassionata* Beethoven Sonatas were totally involving, not because of their flurries of brilliant notes, but because of the way in which he outlined their structure and saw his vision through with sure consistency. The disciplined arrival of the reprise in the *Waldstein* first movement and the restraint preceding the shock of the Coda in the finale of the *Appassionata* were brilliant examples of this. Ronald's Chopin was memorable for its lucidity and colour, and in the B minor Sonata and *Polonaise-Fantaisie* the same care, showing clarity of construction, lifted these to rare heights. I loved his Chopin Etudes; so rounded and lacking hard edges even in the most forceful of the set. But as all in the Alkan Society know, his lingering legacy is the huge international effect of his persuasive and cleverly-shaped performances of the great Alkan works - the *Grande Sonate*, solo *Concerto* and *Symphony*. In these he gave us a revelation which is still warmly treasured at this hundredth birthday mark and into the future.

Nicholas King

Vice-President and sometime Secretary, Alkan Society; Assistant Director of Studies, Royal College of Music (1984-1988), then Vice-Director & Director of Studies, Royal College of Music (1989-1997), Chief Examiner in Music, Trinity London (1998-2002); performer, choir-trainer, ABRSM examiner, consultant, teacher and charity trustee.

My first encounter with Ronald was late in 1962, having had the temerity to win the Open class at the Kent Music Festival that summer at the age of 12 against his star pupils. In retrospect, that was clearly a maverick judgement by the adjudicator, whose name I conveniently forget. I fumbled through the scales which Ronald requested, and made a travesty of Beethoven op.14 no.1. Ronald's face, which had become longer by the minute, did however perk up when I offered some of my compositions, and even more so when I improvised on a fragment which he gave me. In short, he agreed to take me on board as a day-boy Music Scholar at The King's School, Canterbury, despite my manifest shortcomings. Looking back, it is abundantly clear that I had gone well beyond the capacity of my teacher at Folkestone. A couple of years later, Andrew Haigh was to follow me on a private basis to Ronald from the same ineffectual

teacher, who nonetheless continued for many years to vaunt herself on the developing reputations of Andrew and myself.

Ronald's teaching pattern at King's in those days was three half-hour lessons on Thursdays from 11.30am in the Shirley Hall, then five 45-minute lessons from 2.30pm at Gordon House in Nunnery Road (otherwise a games afternoon at the school). These timings were largely notional. In the morning, the first pupil would receive substantially more, and the third was often lucky to get even ten minutes before scampering off for school lunch, so times were rotated to even things out. In the afternoon, similar elasticity applied, though we would sometimes overlap or combine if, for instance, one of us was acting as orchestral pianist to the concerto work of another. Boarders had to get back to school for supper at 7pm, so we day-boys gravitated to the later slots. I often went straight from the last lesson (technically at 5.30pm, but often not starting until an hour later) down the road to catch the 7.36pm bus back to Folkestone by the skin of my teeth, the next being two hours later. The only exceptions came during my last two terms at King's, when Ronald suddenly finished more promptly in the afternoons, remarking that he had to catch a train to Dover. We discovered later that he was courting; probably the only time that he ever allowed his rigorous personal schedule to be varied.

Ronald had requisitioned the front room at Gordon House as his studio. There were two pianos: the Steinway grand (which survives at Saltwood today), and a well-worn upright which he used for initial note-learning. A pile of books sat beside the hearth, with Walter Emery's tome about Bach ornamentation always on the top. We sometimes wondered whether the pile was ever disturbed. If it was, the books were always restored to identical order by our next visit.

One day, a fearsomely black-looking score was on the upright, and Ronald decided to test my sight reading. I managed to get through fairly blamelessly, or so I thought. He then turned back to the first page to reveal the metronome marking. I had been playing at about a quarter of the correct speed, and had just had my first brush with Alkan.

Others speak elsewhere of Ronald's teaching methods. I remember especially his system for playing all 24 (or 36) major and minor scales in a continuous exercise with links between them, double octaves in diminished sevenths similarly linked into a seamless chain, and Hanon exercises being demanded in C sharp as well as C. Tricky finger-work was broken down into small units, to which various rhythmic patterns were applied so as to engrave them onto the muscular memory. He would often demonstrate matters of touch, such as pivoting on the thumb, by performing the appropriate movement on one's forearm, usually accompanied by a low grunting sound. That would doubtless be ruled as improper nowadays. He claimed to have tied the plaits of Princess Alexandra's hair to the chair when teaching her at Buckingham Palace in his earlier days, and his sister June tells a similar tale from when he taught her for a while. Rhythmic matters were often demonstrated by utterances such as *yup-baar* for a lifted upbeat or *bugga-dugga-bum* for an iterative passage, the latter causing suppressed schoolboy sniggering.

Ronald's first decision was to ban me from any further work on the organ. Needless to say, I didn't obey, though I took great care to keep such work well away from the school—and I suspect he knew that. His decision was right, of course; my technique (or the lack of it) needed major attention. It was more than two years later that he gave his rather grudging blessing, and I like to think that he took some reflected pride in my prompt progression to the ARCO and FRCO diplomas while still at King's, though I am told that for the rest of his life he labelled me as "the pianist who got away".

As well as entering pupils for Grade examinations, Ronald put us in for the annual Kent Music Festival, uniquely amongst music teachers at King's. He also encouraged me to continue taking part in the Folkestone Music Festival, being the local lad there, though without competition from his other pupils. We all therefore encountered a wide range of syllabus requirements, over and beyond the staple material which Ronald put before us in our regular learning, and he would always have something fresh to offer even when the nominated pieces were of doubtful musical value.

Every summer we would be taken to give an afternoon concert at Stella Lilley's house in Tankerton, where Ronald also gave occasional private recitals (usually to try out forthcoming items for his appearances elsewhere). Later, these were expanded to include concerts at the house of Andrew Haigh's parents in Stowting and at the teacher training college in Nonington, where his good friend Derek Hyde ran the music department. They were all valuable experiences for us in public performance.

It had become the custom for Ronald to perform a concerto at the annual King's Week symphony concert, alternating with the violinist Clarence Myerscough, who came down from London at the weekend to teach at King's and lead the Sunday orchestra rehearsals. However, he broke this tradition when his turn came round again in 1968, instead putting in Richard True to play Shostakovich 2 and myself the Franck *Symphonic Variations*, and ensuring that there were *two* symphony concerts that year to accommodate us, otherwise flanked by the same orchestral items. This new pattern of two concerts with pupil soloists (not just from Ronald) prevailed for many subsequent years.

When I left King's in 1968, Ronald seemed anxious for me to continue learning with him, and arranged for me to be auditioned for a Churchill Scholarship. It seemed odd that I had to demonstrate my need for piano lessons by auditioning on an organ in Cricklewood; but the trustees coughed up, and so I was able to come down from Cambridge to Canterbury once a month for lessons on Saturday evenings. I remember that he quoted his fee as ten guineas (the equivalent of £10.50 in those pre-decimal days), and dutifully wrote a first cheque for that amount. He was back to me a few days later, pointing out that his bank would not accept a cheque written in guineas! After his post-marital move in 1969 to a more spacious house in Nunnery Fields, remaining close at hand to his mother round the corner until her passing, supper was provided by Anne after the lesson. That was a welcome change from patronising the local chippy before getting back to Cambridge on the last train for chapel duty at 8am on the Sunday. I noticed that he did not always bank my cheques that promptly, perhaps being aware of student cashflow and the costs of travel. Over the next four years the lessons, initially on repertoire stipulated by Ronald, evolved more into consultations over whatever I brought to him from my current studies and explorations, and he would demonstrate remarkable patience whilst I grappled with the Tchaikovsky B flat minor concerto, the Liszt *Sonata*, or Lambert's *Rio Grande*. He only baulked once, when I turned up with the Bartók *Sonata for two pianos*, which I was preparing for performance with a colleague. "Ah well, I'm sure you can cope with that" was all that he felt able to say, and that was that. Ronald would always come straight to the point, rather than faffing around.

Ronald married the cellist Anne Norman in September 1969, and I was honoured when he invited me to play the organ for their wedding at Temple Ewell, asking for Bach's 9/8 C major *Prelude and Fugue*. It was only when I got to the church that I realised I had put the wrong volume into my music case. If he noticed any stumbles in my necessarily-memorised rendition, he never mentioned them.

I returned to Folkestone at the end of 1972, my parents having long since moved to London, to work as an organist and (though not expecting it) school-teacher whilst waiting for the right cathedral jobs to come along. They did, but I always seemed to be the bridesmaid. The relationship with Ronald developed into one of a close and influential colleague, and after the family moved to Saltwood in November 1977, whence he commuted to and from Canterbury by taxi for his weekly teaching at King's, there were frequent visits there for an evening meal, normally preceded by a session as orchestral pianist (usually at sight) to whatever concerto he was currently preparing, and accompanied in the summer months by a tour of the huge garden and his vegetable patches. Here was a new angle of Ronald as a family man, with a young daughter, though his personal regime remained as punishing as ever; indeed, this was the period of preparing his monumental recording of the Alkan op.39, and the first of his two books on the man of whose life and work he was increasingly becoming recognised as the ultimate authority – and, arguably, the only comprehensive and capable executant at the time.

My own marriage took place on Easter Monday in 1977. It was marvellous that Ronald (and Anne) found the time to be there, though he did excuse himself towards the end of the reception, doubtless needing to return to his daily round, but not before earnest enquiry as to where we were going for our honeymoon.

My career took me away from Kent in August 1979, but Ronald would always keep in touch, often attending organ recitals which I gave in Kent, and usually offering diplomatic comment afterwards about points of interpretation. He had arranged to provide me with copies of Alkan's organ music in 1978 after they had been unearthed at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and in due course I was able to delve into them before spending a very long evening playing them through to him in a Folkestone church in 1982. This was, I think, the first time that he became aware of their extraordinary content, and thus began a process which led to my recording them for Symposium in the Alkan centenary year of 1988, though

it remains a matter of regret that much more went into the can than could be issued on a single recording. Others subsequently took up this repertoire.

In 1984 I applied for a senior administrative post at the Royal College of Music, citing Ronald as one of my referees. Following promotion there in 1988, I happened to be going through the filing cabinets in my new office when I came across what he had written about me. It was blushingly generous, though deciphering it took some time, as anyone will know who ever received one of his letters, typically written during a train journey. The following year, I was in a position to invite him to adjudicate the senior piano prize at the College. He caused quite a stir by awarding the prize to a student, unfancied by most, for “playing the music rather than just the notes”. By all accounts it was not the first or last time that he delivered such judgements when called upon to adjudicate.

Ronald was central to the Alkan centenary celebrations in 1988. It remains a mystery quite how he found the time to learn new parts and rehearse with colleagues in the *Cello Sonata* or *Piano Trio*, performing from memory, on top of many other concerts and producing his second book. By now he was regularly undertaking lengthy overseas tours, at an age when most would have been drawing in their horns.

Many of his friends and admirers gathered to celebrate his 80th birthday with a dinner at the Athenaeum Club in January 2002; he remained as sharp as ever, despite some background health issues. Put up overnight in a guest-room of the Club, he remarked that it was the first time that he had ever encountered a hip-bath for his ablutions. Later that year saw what was arguably his *tour de force* in his 80th birthday recital at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. Only afterwards did it emerge how fortunate we had been that he completed the occasion.

The Alkan Society invited Ronald to speak to them about his life and career at a meeting on 29th March 2004. He reminisced with brilliant eloquence, entirely without notes, for more than an hour, entrancing those who were present (a transcribed version is published later in this issue). Eliot Levin and I saw him onto the train back home at Charing Cross afterwards, and as he sat down in the compartment I was suddenly struck by a curious pang of distancing and a premonition that I would not see him again. Less than two months later he was taken from us.

We all remember him in many ways. His performances are of course legion, and he would always keep everyone informed when he was appearing in their locality. They were not always perfect – I well remember an almighty mis-hit on the first note of the Mussorgsky *Pictures* on one occasion, and a memory loss at the Wigmore Hall during the fugue of the Liszt *Sonata*, when he cast round in a wide circle before regaining his ground a page or so later. But that was part of the man, a man who would always prefer a single take at recordings to any spliced editing of deficient passages; it was the communication of the music that mattered most.

His unique stage manner was perhaps calculated, but none the less effective for that. Sitting at his ultra-low stool, and wearing one of his distinctive outfits, he would be totally absorbed in his performance, determined and dedicated to the job in hand. At the end, he would profess innocence that his efforts had in any way merited the applause which he received, spreading his hands in a gesture of self-effacement and offering a wry smile with just one corner of his lip turned up, before launching into one or more encores, sometimes no less challenging than anything in the main recital, but just as often of telling simplicity, such as de Séverac’s “music box” piece or, increasingly often towards the end of his career, Chopin’s poignant *Mazurka no. 13*, which was to be the last work he ever performed in public.

Others comment elsewhere on his personally-honed approach to technique. He would deploy the second and third fingers of the hand together rather than individual fingering for emphatic passages such as at the start of the Mussorgsky *Pictures*, the climax of the Grieg *Nocturne* or the end of Chopin op.25 no.5, exciting visually as well as aurally. His reading of both sets of the Chopin studies, both in live performance and on recordings, must remain as the last word on the subject, rendering each set as an art-form in its own right, including immediate continuity between some of them. Towards the end of his life, he remarked to me that he was preparing a Chopin recording, but was ten or so minutes short of what was needed. I was immensely honoured that he adopted my suggestion of broaching the fourth *Ballade*, and can only regret that we never heard him in the other three.

Others also mention Ronald as a composer in his earlier days. Having some bent in that direction myself, he was always prepared to offer practical comments on my submissions for the Kent Music Festival, often in pastiche styles rather than anything truly creative. Early in 1968, having reviewed my

attempt at an impressionist-style *Autumn in Lyminge Forest*, he disappeared from the room for a few minutes, returning with an Octet (wind quartet and string quartet) from his student days, which he handed over to me to take away and study. I may have mis-read what I took to be a broad hint, but I wrote out a set of parts and gathered a group of colleagues, who started working on it with a view to performance at the annual *Serenade in the Cloisters* concert of King's Week. We were well-advanced in our preparations before Edred Wright, then Director of Music at King's, called me in to say that he very much regretted the performance could not go ahead. He was clearly embarrassed to convey this message, and I could only conclude that Ronald himself had decided, on mature reflection, that a performance from his juvenilia might not rebound on his reputation in the way that we had intended.

Alongside Ronald the composer was Ronald the academic. The two do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. Having entered the Royal Academy of Music as a composer, and only then emerging as a pianist, always shown in concert programmes as Ronald Bertram Smith to distinguish him from his organist contemporary Ronald Aubrey Smith, it is not always remembered that he studied for an external BMus at the University of Durham from 1944 to 1948. With his usual self-effacement, he never presented himself in person for the degree, which was eventually conferred *in absentia* in 1961.

He would come out with perceptive comments in lessons, such as that the orchestral tutti chords at the start of the Beethoven *Emperor* (being prepared for a King's Week concert at which most of his pupils were in the orchestra) lack the fifth, leaving it to be filled in by the coruscations of the pianist, or that the C major fugue of the Shostakovich *24*, which he was teaching within fifteen years of its publication, deploys the subject on all seven degrees of the scale without a black note ever being used – shades of the Alkan *Allegro barbaro* op.35 no.5, of which a performance in 1968 was to woo Anne as his wife (“my goodness, what have we got here?”, she remembers thinking).

The academic in Ronald is reflected especially fully in his masterful two books (later consolidated as one volume) on the life and works of Alkan. His command of the English language shines to remarkable effect in his passionate descriptions. Not many of us would readily introduce such words as “fulgurating” to our writing.

The sole area in which I found Ronald at all reticent was extemporisation and improvisation. Perhaps this is a tool more particular to organists than any other branch of our profession, though it overlaps very closely with composition. An area in which I had become imbued at an early stage of my time as a chorister and organist, it is arguable how far it can be taught, rather than being instinctive. I cannot remember a single occasion when any of my teachers ever sat me down with useful instruction, though there are many who espouse a formulaic approach, especially along the lines of the French-style toccata. Nor can I remember Ronald ever sitting at the keyboard to improvise or extemporise, or involving himself in aural training.

A generation after his passing, it is perhaps possible to hazard an estimate of Ronald's place in the profession. Few stinted in their respect and regard for him, yet some had difficulty in accepting him into what might be termed the premier league. Though he was undoubtedly held in awe by fellow performers and teachers, professional jealousies, of which there were plenty, often clouded their acceptance of him. “He was too good for his contemporaries”, as one commentator once lamented to me. Some dismissed his championing of Alkan as quirky, even obsessive, beyond their grasp to appreciate or acknowledge, and that remains the case today amongst those with a discernment limited to mainstream repertoire. Unduly modest as to his own abilities, perhaps he lacked that essential streak of promoting himself, rather than the repertoire of which he became such an indisputable master.

Ronald always had a practical, no-nonsense approach to life, taking things in his stride and only rarely allowing himself to be deflected. I remember him leaning on the mantelpiece one day and briefly remarking that his father had passed away. Before I could formulate any response, the subject had been changed. The one topic on which he did seem unable to speak was of the manner in which he was summarily stood down without ceremony at The King's School in 1990 after 39 years of dedicated teaching there, as if his age (then 68) had rendered him no longer competent. There can be little doubt that he carried this wound deeply for the rest of his life. To be fair, the school perhaps had a point that he was putting in deputies so often because of his touring schedule.

It was an honour to be asked to play the organ at the service of thanksgiving which followed his interment in the graveyard at Saltwood church on 7th June 2004, and it is a delight to retain links with

Anne and Beka. His influence lives on in so many tangible ways amongst those of us who were privileged to be his pupils.

Krystian Bellière

Pianist, conductor and répétiteur.

I started having lessons with Ronald when I attended The King's School, Canterbury but continued privately for some years after, both when I was at Oxford University and when I'd moved on to London. What a marvellous man and musician he was. Witty, erudite, fascinating and inspiring. A polite, slightly eccentric demeanour concealed a burning intellect and a deep passion. His lessons were intriguing, his technical approach sometimes unorthodox but I enjoyed our discussions deeply. Even today, when studying scores, I think to myself "now what would Ronald's suggestions be? How would he work at this technical problem and which exercises would he devise?"

I attended many of his concerts over the years and we of course have some superb recordings for posterity. His programmes were among the most insane I've ever heard a pianist attempt and how brave and valiant he was. Many jaws, including my own, were prone to drop...

Happy 100th Birthday, maestro Ronald!

David Bulley

Pupil from 1974 to 1977. After leaving The King's School, Canterbury, David studied architecture at Cambridge, then worked for a number of commercial architectural companies in London before specialising in façade engineering. For the last 15 years he has worked in multidisciplinary engineering companies, currently managing construction projects for the façades team at Aecom.

Ronald was an inspiring teacher who urged his pupils to take music seriously, teaching them the strict discipline of the Russian method of piano playing. He demanded considerable commitment, but there were many rewards as well, and under his guidance our technical capabilities improved considerably. He was also a great conversationalist, and was full of stories about what it was like being a musician. On one occasion he mentioned how he had arrived at a concert but had nothing prepared, so he asked the audience what they would like to hear. There was a group of Alkan supporters in the audience who shouted "play Alkan!", so he went ahead and played pieces by Alkan, some of which he hadn't played for nine months. This must have been helped by his uncanny memory. His enthusiasm for Alkan and his love of virtuosity came across all the time.

Bryan Crimp

Established APR - Appian Publications & Recordings - in 1986. Situated in the wilds of Northumberland, APR was quickly recognised as being among the foremost labels devoted to historic piano recordings, and received numerous awards. It later entered the world of publishing with noted biographies of Leopold Godowsky and Solomon as well as the autobiography of Georges Cziffra. New recordings of Ronald Smith, Sergio Fiorentino and Valerie Tryon expanded APR's profile. On Bryan's retirement in 2004 APR passed to Mike Spring in London, where it is now based.

It might not be a surprise to learn that Ronald Smith came to APR via Alkan, the composer to whom he dedicated so much of his life and his art. In the mid-1990s Ronald was understandably frustrated that his celebrated 1977 EMI Alkan recordings of, among many pieces, the *Symphony* and *Concerto* for solo piano had been unavailable for some time. Could anything be done? His agent enquired whether APR wished to broaden its horizons by licensing those recordings. I later discovered that Ronald had admired both the presentation and sound of APR's 'historic' releases, which at that time included comprehensive surveys of such luminaries as Benno Moiseiwitsch, Vladimir Horowitz and Leopold Godowsky. The eventual outcome was a double CD album issued by APR in 1996. It served as a potent reminder of the unique combination that is Charles-Valentin Alkan and Ronald Bertram Smith. Significantly, it also paved

the way for what were to be five newly-recorded programmes, beginning in 1997 with Liszt (more of which later) and continuing through to 2002 with Chopin, Schubert and Beethoven. These releases preserved for all time repertoire that had been part of Ronald's DNA for decades.

The pianist of the APR sessions might not have been the fearless instrumentalist of the 1970s, though this was due not to any diminution of his exceptional musicianship or technique but as the result of steadily-declining eyesight. For much of his life Ronald had required powerful prescription spectacles, but in later years his condition worsened to such an extent that it became a major consideration. Some of his letters reveal the bewildering fluctuation of his vision at this time and I well remember his wife Anne confiding that he would have been categorised as 'registered blind' had he allowed himself to be so. The very idea was, of course, anathema to him. To assist him during our sessions – all held at St George's, Brandon Hill, Bristol with the magnificent ex-BBC Steinway D 090 in attendance – we positioned powerful spotlights either side of his piano bench, directed onto the keyboard. Not having seen Ronald perform live, I was initially surprised by the unusual way in which he positioned himself at keyboard. To my eyes, he sat incredibly low – could it have been just a foot or so above the floor? – the consequence being that his elbows were below the keyboard. His exceptional agility was achieved by remarkably loose wrists and long, fluid fingers. Unsurprisingly, when he had arrived as a student at the Royal Academy of Music, with this unique keyboard placement well and truly established, there had been much professorial consternation!

Ronald dismissed his condition, which a mere mortal would have found intolerable, with colossal stamina and perseverance, qualities which carried him through the obstacles of life. This was evident on many occasions and in many different situations as we worked together. The first sessions in July 1997 were devoted to an all-Liszt recital including the *Sonata*, three contrasting *Hungarian Rhapsodies* and one of Ronald's favourite party pieces, the *Grand galop chromatique*. It became the norm as we neared the end of a concentrated session, a time when family, engineer and producer were positively wilting, for Ronald to enter the control room and breezily declare "That could be better. Let's do it again". Equally remarkable was what I can only describe as his ability to stand outside himself and analyse his interpretation as he played. For example, after a performance of a Chopin scherzo he would join us in the control room and without reference to the score, which he could hardly see at the best of times, declare, "the B flat in bar 63 was missing and the chord in bar 219 failed to sound correctly". Incidentally, Ronald's remarkable memory was not confined to his own recordings. He could recall recitals of pianists long past, quoting the full contents of their programmes and the manner in which they were played. He was also partial to some gentle gossip and intrigue: he delighted in recalling the image of Marguerite Long and Lazare Lévy "squabbling in the foyer of the Salle Gaveau" in the 1950s.

But perhaps the most astonishing demonstration of Ronald's determination and fortitude came during his 80th birthday recital at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London in December 2002. The recital was designed to showcase his core classical repertoire and acknowledge his tireless celebration of Alkan. The programme opened with nothing less than Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasia* followed by the complete Chopin *Etudes* op.25. The interval appeared to be somewhat lengthier than usual, understandable perhaps given the demands of the first half, but eventually out he came to climb the Everest that is Beethoven's *Sonata* op.111, followed by the eagerly-anticipated Alkan. Before he introduced each piece from the stage, he reminded his audience that we had now arrived at the most important part of the recital! When the time came for the hair-raising octave study op.35 no.12 our hero puzzlingly informed us that this was being played despite his wife's instruction not to do so. Was this an in-family joke? We were unsure. The full significance of that remark only became apparent when he finally left the stage, dwarfed by an enormous bouquet of flowers, and we subsequently learned that he had suffered a heart attack and had been whisked off to hospital. The actual episode had taken place during the Chopin studies – characteristically he later told me exactly which one – and as a consequence he was strongly advised by the duty doctor to cancel the rest of the evening. Ronald was aghast. "I can't do that!", he retorted. "I've an audience out there waiting to hear the rest of the programme. There's Beethoven and, most importantly, Alkan!"

Recording Ronald was always invigorating, as became apparent when working on our first project, the previously-mentioned Liszt programme. As he wrote in the accompanying booklet, he wanted to create "an all-round portrait of Liszt with the exception of the epigrammatic late pieces. My reason for re-recording the *Sonata* was imperative. The vivid and inexorable unfolding of Liszt's vast conception

can so easily be lost behind its glamorous presentation. The challenge remains ever-renewable.” During preliminary discussions it was obvious that he wished to capture the spontaneity of a live performance, to which end each work was recorded complete – many times! He wore his erudition and vast experience with relaxed ease, this being achieved, to a large degree, thanks to his lively and at times impish sense of humour. That humour is abundantly apparent in those helter-skelter semiquavers which comprise much of the ridiculously impossible demands of the *Grand galop chromatique*. No relentless hammering here. Is the image of a Tom and Jerry chase too sacrilegious?

During the years we worked together, many letters flowed between his home in Kent and our studios in Northumberland. Looking through them now, almost two decades later, I discover many surprises, not least that he was awarded a *violin* scholarship at the age of 10. But first, of course, these missives have to be deciphered. The hand-written lines on the paper are surprisingly straight, though the actual words require serious forensic examination, even a dash of guesswork – in one letter he wrote, “as you know, I cannot see what I write”. In his own time, as he remains today, Ronald Smith is regarded as an Objective Interpreter, admiring “unexaggerated interpretation” and “unexaggerated honesty”, yet he had a genuine admiration for the romantics of yesteryear. He invariably responded with enthusiasm when I sent him videos and CDs of other pianists, many of whom were his ‘stable mates’ at APR. Mischa Levitzki was a particular favourite. Ronald singled out Levitzki’s 1929 recording of the Liszt E flat concerto, admiring his “wonderful filigree” and observing that “all cadenzas go like the clappers even when they shouldn’t!”. He was also fascinated to see surviving film of Josef Hofmann and his extraordinary circular hand movement.

Finally, mention must be made of more Alkan. Ronald brought to my attention that he had made recordings for Nimbus Records which, for some reason, remained unedited and consequently unpublished. In February 1992, along with violinist James Clark and cellist Moray Welsh, he had essayed the three extraordinary chamber works, while in April 1994 he recorded some solo piano pieces. With the support of the Alkan Society, negotiations to license this material proved successful. Once I was in possession of the scores, finished performances were easily assembled and crafted into yet another double CD of Alkan – proof positive (not needed of course) that Ronald Smith was Alkan’s most ardent champion.

Ben Finn

Co-creator of the music software Sibelius.

Despite being an unremarkable pianist I was lucky enough to get Ronald as a teacher at The King's School, Canterbury. This was because a friend had briefed me about his technique of playing with the weight of the hands and wrists, rather than just using the fingers typewriter-fashion. So at the audition with Ronald I pretended I'd discovered this myself, and he was sufficiently impressed to take me on as a pupil!

As part of this technique, he'd sometimes recommend throwing the hands in a parabola so as to land on the keyboard using the force of gravity alone. He justified this by quoting Albert Einstein (correctly) that the shortest distance between two points is a curve. Ronald once taught me Chopin's *Prelude in G minor*, which ends with a rest followed by three big *fortissimo* chords, with hands far apart. He advised me to place my hands on my lap in the rest, then hurl them apart and high into the air, landing with full weight exactly onto the chord. This takes practice, but is both effective and visually dramatic. (I can still do it.)

Ronald once invited several of his pupils to his house, which was full of pianos and antique clocks. The topic of Alkan came up, so he put on a recording of the composer's music. When asked who was playing, he replied, with his usual modesty and humour, "a pianist called Ronald Smith".

Ronald was opposed to the use of edits in recordings, and took this to an extreme with his 1980 Nimbus CD of the Chopin *Etudes*. He recorded it in just two takes, each an uninterrupted run-through of the entire work. He told the producer they could only use one complete take or other - not even individual pieces from both - as each was a single unified performance.

Once when Ronald was teaching me Beethoven's *Pathétique* sonata, he discussed the strange marking of *fp* on the opening held chord - not literally playable. He mentioned that he had once recorded it, and played the chord *staccato*, catching the dying notes with the sustaining pedal just after lifting the keys, to produce the marked effect. The astonished engineers rushed into the studio, wanting to know how he'd done it.

When Ronald heard that I was applying to study music at university, with a horrified look he urged me not to become a professional musician. I assume he either gave the same advice to everyone, or to all except the very best.

Andrew Haigh

Pianist and teacher, winner of the National Piano Competition and the Royal Overseas League Competition; debut at the age of 11 performing with the LPO at the RFH. He started his studies with Ronald Smith. Head of Piano, Kent Music Academy 1986-2007.

Ronald took on my training when I was nine. No doubt he worked me hard, and was tough on developing a technique that stood me in good stead through my performing life. Nonetheless, even then, I could appreciate his dedication, knowledge and hard work with a lad whom I'm sure was no little angel!

Now, returning to some works that I may not have looked at for decades, I think "Wow, that's Ronald's writing" and the points he made then seem just as relevant now. Like many people in the profession, for some remote reason or another, he was not given the full acclaim he deserved. A pianist that had no fears, and a tutor of immense ability. Ronald - I cannot thank you personally now, but your teaching will always be appreciated.

Robert Hammersley

Became MD to Schola Cantorum of Oxford 1971-1974, Director of Music, Ardingly College 1996-2007, piano recitalist Hever and for National Trust at Nymans and Standen.

Ronald had the most extraordinary memory and I recall Robert Scott (my tutor and excellent pianist) telling me that Ronald on his tour of Australia did three separate programmes and took no music with him.

He was always so enthusiastic to follow where my tastes took me (*Rhapsody in Blue*, selections from the show *Cavalcade*), an absolute inspiration both for imparting his virtuosic technique and mastery of musicianship.

What luck we had... amazing when you think about it. This unassuming man behind amazingly thick spectacles had one of the greatest piano techniques in the country. And he lived in a small terraced house in Canterbury, to which I trudged up once a week for a piano lesson (very fortunately during sport hours, getting me out of that for at least one afternoon in the week), arriving invariably in winter with cold hands.

Stephen Harrison

Stephen Harrison received his first engagement as a répétiteur at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in London. In 1988 he came to the Deutsche Oper am Rhein, working as head of studies, then as chief scheduler and then artistic director. From 2009 to 2020 he was opera director there. He regularly accompanies lieder in concerts.

Despite some peculiarities, such as stressing the name Mozart on the second syllable, he had a profound musical wisdom from which I have benefitted for a lifetime. So many of his sayings have stayed with me over the years, and whenever I play pieces I learnt with him, I am always impressed at how right his annotations are. Turning the other day to Schubert's A Major *Sonata* D959 which I learnt with him but failed my LRAM with, I had to confess that if only I had done what he wanted I might have passed the exam.

His success as a teacher was also due to his great encouragement of whatever one was willing to give. Of course I armed myself with Hanon and Czerny at his behest, but he never asked me to play any of them for him, or at least I don't recall it. Just as well, as in truth I never practised them. If only I had... But he didn't seem to mind, and let me get on with the pieces I could read best, and gave me the support I needed, so that I never felt bad. Only once did he give me a hard time in a lesson, and then I wondered why he was in such a grumpy mood that day!

His anecdotes about personalities as diverse as Michelangeli or Harold Truscott are memorable to this day. As are his amazing performances of Chopin Etudes in the Shirley Hall.

I am only sorry that I later lived so far from Canterbury. I would have loved to have had more lessons from him.

Wilfrid Hodges

FBA, Emeritus Professor of Mathematics, Queen Mary University of London. Studied piano with Ronald Smith at The King's School, Canterbury 1954-1959.

Before I went to The King's School, Canterbury in 1954 I was a chorister at Christchurch Cathedral in Oxford, under the baton of Tommy (Sir Thomas) Armstrong. The choral connection somehow resulted in my becoming a Music Scholar at King's, and this in turn led to piano lessons with Ronald Smith. At first this was quite a shock to the system. Tommy Armstrong was laid back almost to horizontal. Under him I learned that the choir takes its beat two seconds after the conductor's baton. He never told us how to use our chest muscles; I learned something of that when I overheard him explaining it to a visitor. But with Ronald Smith it was professional standards from the start, beginning with Tobias Matthay, forearm rotation and placing of the wrist, and endless practising.

This was a thrilling new world, helped enormously by Ronald's friendliness and complete dedication. But I fear I must have been a great disappointment to him, because music was never top of my list of ambitions. (Top of the list was mathematics. Later I came to publish and give public lectures on mathematical structures in music, and let me thank Ronald for whatever he contributed to that.) In any case I was never near the same musical league as Bryce Morrison and other musicians who studied with Ronald alongside me. Bryce's performance, under Ronald, of Mendelssohn's First Piano Concerto is still a happy and vivid memory from King's.

Somebody pointed out to me that for Ronald, the best piano piece ever written was the one he was working on right now. This was only a slight exaggeration. I remember that his enthusiasm for Rachmaninov 3 knew no bounds when he was preparing it for a Promenade concert.

Ronald used to talk to us about composers and pieces of music. Once he performed Prokofiev *Piano Sonata no.7* (the second 'war sonata') at a school concert, and afterwards he asked me how I had liked it. I said it was exciting but I didn't think I understood it. He answered that perhaps in music it was good to find oneself out of one's depth sometimes. And surely he was right about that. (The last time I found myself seriously out of depth was with Adès *Piano Mazurkas*, and yes, that was an invigorating experience.) On another occasion he told me that he had been thinking I might enjoy Skryabin—which I do and I thank him for his steer in that direction, but he never explained what he had in mind. Surely the harmonic and rhythmic techniques and not the theosophy?

Unless my memory deceives me, while I was at King's Ronald broadcast a performance of Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasia*. Our Housemaster arranged for some of us to listen to it together. That was a good listen, particularly in the light of things that Ronald had taught us about the difficulties of controlling the dynamics in Schubert. But on other occasions I heard him play his beloved Alkan, and sadly I never enjoyed that—too many notes and too much banging. No doubt I was out of my depth again, and certainly Ronald is rightly remembered as the leading pioneer of Alkan's music.

It was a pity that I lost contact with Ronald when I left King's. My younger brother Paul, who is much more of a musician than I was, also studied with Ronald and happily kept in touch with him long after they had both left King's.

Stephen Hope

Conductor, pianist/organist and fund-raiser

I, along with many other truly fortunate pianists at The King's School, Canterbury, was blessed to come under Ronald's inspirational tutelage. Rotaries, straight fifth finger, thumbs off the keyboard, will be familiar facets of his technical approach, together with Clementi's studies and others.

But for me the most life-changing influence of my time with him was his sense of colour and pointing the harmonic structure of music which informed his awesome technical command of the keyboard. I was lucky enough to pursue a professional relationship with him after University as a concert promoter, founder of the Alkan International Piano Competition in 1988 and most importantly as a conductor and collaborator in numerous concerto performances at Fairfield Halls in Croydon. His fastidiousness and forensic approach to detail was breathtaking and our rehearsals in Saltwood were eye-openers in every sense of the word, with him playing along in the orchestral tuttis as I played from the full score.

Ronald was never fussy, but precise, as he often told me and my family when we often shared Indian meals in Hythe, teasing the waiters by asking for an anti-clockwise Gelabi - a 'twirly' Indian dessert.

On a more serious note, we once had a little delay before the Grieg concerto when he was unsatisfied with his concert dress and would not go on until it was to his liking.

He became godfather to my eldest daughter, Felicity, and was always interested in and supportive to her, which she truly treasured.

When Anne came to my one-man show in Folkestone a few years ago - she whispered to my ex-wife Gill, "shades of the Old Boy there". No finer compliment could I have received.

God bless you, Ronald!

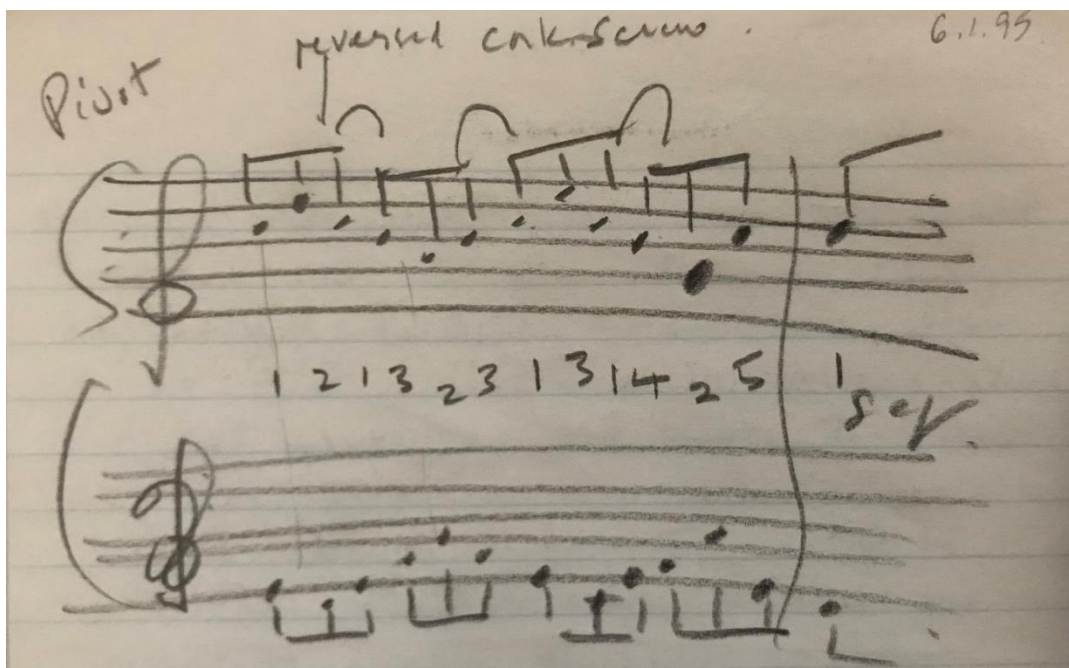
Kirsten Johnson

Studied with Ronald Smith from 1995-2000. Kirsten has since released 22 discs of solo piano music on Guild, Centaur, Delos and Nimbus. She lives in Oxford. Further information at www.kirstenjohnsonpiano.com.

I began my studies with Ronald Smith after moving to the UK upon my marriage to an Englishman. I already had two degrees from U.S. universities (a Bachelor of Music in piano performance and a Master of Music in piano performance) and was part-way through my Doctor of Musical Arts studies when I first met Ronald.

I remember my first 'consultation' lesson at his home in Saltwood, Kent, in January 1995 – my diary from that day reads "Quite an extraordinary man – exercises control over keyboard in a way I've never seen before – as if he is always caressing them – fingers flat, firm and strong. "Activated" arm, low bench. Beautiful, rich sound." Ronald marvelled about how one could have a degree in piano performance – saying that practice and performance made a concert pianist. He listened to me play and offered to take me on as a pupil provided that I was willing to go back to square one! I agreed, and we started by dropping single notes on the piano from the forearm. Sound was paramount. He showed me his hand position, with the thumb off the keys and a straight fifth finger. He taught me forearm rotation. He stressed an absolute legato, with a fluid wrist and the fingers used from the back knuckle. Ronald sat very low at the piano, and insisted I do the same – I had my piano bench legs shortened to accommodate a lower position!

That first year we went through the gamut of a comprehensive piano technique. Those who have had the privilege to work with Ronald will know the drill – scales through all the keys, a series of seventh arpeggios, forearm and wrist octaves, Brahms, Cramer and Clementi studies, and an original RS study:



Ronald Smith's notation of his exercise in Kirsten Johnson's notebook.

I faithfully worked through all of the above and more, including the 27 Chopin Etudes, and by the end of my studies with Ronald my technique was fluid and finished, with a beautiful sound. To this day, I still use his technical grounding as a 15-30 minute warm-up to get into shape after time away from the piano or on days I am recording. I also plan my practice in 15-minute increments, inspired by the records Ronald kept of his own work at the piano.

I had the privilege of staying with Ronald and Anne for several days at a time, sometimes for a week of intense study. One memory is our coffee breakfasts on Wednesdays and Sundays, where Ronald would choose recordings for us to listen to together while having hot coffee and crusty rolls with butter and apricot jam. He had a discerning ear and was keen to compare different versions of the same piece. One morning he played both Horowitz's and Rachmaninov's performances of Rachmaninov's third piano concerto, another time he played the final master compilation of his own recent recording sessions.

When Ronald found out I was a keen chamber musician, he asked if I would play concerts with his wife, Anne. I readily agreed, and happily worked my way through much glorious cello repertoire with Ronald giving us feedback on dress rehearsals and performances, and taking us out for coffee and sandwiches after.

During those years I was studying a huge amount of repertoire, competing in various piano competitions and playing on the music society circuit. Ronald advised me on a wide range of pieces, from Bach's *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue*, through Mozart, Schubert and Beethoven sonatas, a large dose of Chopin, plus Schumann, Liszt, Alkan, Shostakovich and Schoenberg. My notebooks are filled with copious details from each of our sessions, and whilst we didn't always agree on an interpretation, I was learning from a master performer who knew how these things worked on stage. Ronald was meticulous with fingerings and worked through passages in great detail, giving me myriad ways of approaching thorny passages through rhythmic variance; and when I stayed with him I heard his own extensive preparation and hours of practice. Nothing was taken for granted. I have recorded in my diary, "RS says he works in much more detail than any of his students do – while it is they who should be doing more work than he!" Creating beautiful musical lines and delivering a convincing performance was paramount – technique served the purpose of conveying musical intent.

I was lucky enough to attend most of Ronald's concerts from 1995 to 2004. I remember cheekily asking him once if he would like to 'try' out a piece on me – the look on his face – but he then agreed and sat down in his studio to play me Beethoven's op.111. I was audacious enough to offer a few comments – he took it in stride, and I believe we shared a whisky that night.

I remember Ronald's wicked sense of humour, his high and exacting standards (of us and himself), his energy in attacking his garden and mowing the lawn, his enjoyment of Spike (the dog), his love of Anne and Beka, and his generosity in opening his home to me. I was a good pianist when I met Ronald, but I became a polished artist through my study with him. I will be ever grateful.

Peter King

Organist, award-winning recording artist. City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra: Assistant Chorus Master; Accompanist (1980-1998); Bath Abbey: Director of Music (1986-2016), Organist Emeritus (since 2016).

When I arrived at The King's School, Canterbury in 1966, people spoke of Ronald Smith in awed tones and I became determined to become one of his students – though I had to wait several years for the privilege. Meanwhile there was a succession of Ronald's students playing virtuoso works at school concerts: Weber's *Konzertstück* for piano & orchestra, Shostakovich's *Piano Concerto No 1* (for piano, trumpet and string orchestra) and Liszt's first *Piano Concerto* come to mind, and I remember enjoying hearing a performance of Poulenc's *L'embarquement pour Cythère* for two pianos – a work I haven't heard since.

When eventually I graduated to Ronald's class, four of us visited his home at the end of the term before we became his students. We each played our current party piece and received encouragement and advice. I remember being advised to begin Schubert's *Impromptu in Ab op.90 no.4* with the second finger rather than the third as I had been doing. We were then all asked to learn the first movement of a Mozart or Beethoven concerto of our choice over the summer holiday. It was a master-stroke: We were all excited by the prospect of a concerto and thought that, with a concerto to learn, we were being treated as real pianists. I chose Beethoven's fourth, but this was denied; instead I was given no.1. I tackled this with enormous enthusiasm and memorised the first two movements and had a good go at the third ready for the new term. We were then told that this was the last time we would be visiting the house as he was getting married in the summer and moving to a different address.

The start of the September term was an exciting time and the beginning of an extraordinary journey. The first lesson was enormous fun; Ronald appeared delighted with progress on the concerto and we duly played through the first movement, with Ronald playing the orchestral part on his old upright and myself, the copy discarded, playing the beautiful concert Steinway. Having had our fun with Beethoven, work started in earnest with the studies and exercises by Hanon, Cramer, Brahms etc. that every Ronald student endured. This is when I was introduced to the wonders of Ronald's extraordinary technique, the low wrist, fingers at the edge of the key, low thumb, rotating wrist movement, straight fifth finger at right angles to the wrist, arm weight, relaxed arm and wrist, etc.

Ronald had a wonderful way of coaxing his students to take the piano seriously, rather than it being treated just as another thing one did at school for fun. In Ronald's view the piano was more than that. I remember him telling me after fingering (illegibly) a passage in the Chopin *Scherzo in Bb minor* that it couldn't possibly go wrong with that fingering. "Even old Rubenstein messed up that bit when he played it at the Royal Festival Hall" – a throwaway line that was designed to intrigue a student and make him feel special. Of course it was exciting when, as a student, one bought his latest LP or heard him in concert. I remember once, when casually listening to the Radio 3 Evening Concert at home, it was announced that walking onto the platform to play Liszt's first *Piano Concerto* was Ronald Smith. He wasn't just a piano teacher, one realised; this man did it for real. When on one occasion I turned up for my lesson less than perfectly prepared, Ronald saw that the time could be used more profitably for us both. He was shortly to record the Liszt B minor *Sonata*, so I was sat in an easy chair and, after a brief explanation of the piece, given a score and treated to a private performance of that master work. It made a lasting impression and Ronald is always somewhere nearby when I play organ works such as Liszt's *Fantasia and Fugue "Ad nos, ad salutarem undam"*.

Ronald was always generous with his time and was not above fitting in the occasional extra lesson if needed. On one occasion he arranged for one of his schoolboy students who was enthusiastic about Prokofiev to deliver a lecture on the subject to the rest of us. We all gathered in Ronald's music room and Ronald treated the whole occasion with the greatest respect. A wry smile went round the group when

it was mentioned that the composer liked the key of C major because it meant he could play at the edge of the key. I remember a supper party for his students at which Anne produced sweet and sour pork – the first time I had encountered such a dish. Ronald then gloated that he enjoyed Anne’s excellent cooking every day. After the meal we all assembled in the music room to hear a live broadcast from the Royal Festival Hall of Shura Cherkassky playing Tchaikovsky’s first *Piano Concerto*. Ronald always had the stereo system turned up loud, almost deafeningly so. The concerto started and Ronald announced “Good tempo”. In one of the cadenzas in the first movement there was what sounded like a fistful of wrong notes and we all looked at Ronald for a reaction. What we got was “two wrong notes; that’s perfectly acceptable”.

A well-known pianist told me a couple of years ago of a Liszt competition he had entered. Shortly before he went on to play the *Sonata*, a fellow competitor told him how, when playing the piece to a friend recently, he had played an F# rather than an F natural in bar two (the F# comes three bars later) – a pretty mean trick. Whether or not this was the intended result, our competitor had the misfortune to play the F# in bar two. When it came to the judges’ deliberations the chairman apparently said that they could ignore this pianist because of what had happened in bar two, to which Ronald replied “Oh, but we can’t ignore him, because of everything else that happened afterwards”.

I attended at least two of Ronald’s concerts at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. I remember that one of them opened with the Bach/Busoni *Chaconne* and another with the *Wanderer Fantasia*. Other works included the *Appassionata*, Chopin’s op.25 *Etudes* and of course, some Alkan – always Alkan! One occasion saw the London premiere of Alkan’s *Grand Sonata: The Four Ages*. Before playing the piece Ronald gave one of his wonderful spoken introductions, complete with illustrations. At one point Ronald told us about four huge arpeggios which run the length of the piano, but then teased us with “I won’t tempt providence by playing them to you now”. His recitals always featured large works; miniatures such as Chopin *Mazurkas* were reserved for encores.

In the 1980s I enjoyed a day seminar at Bristol University. In the morning Ronald talked about the three Alkan *Studies* for the Left Hand, the Right Hand and for the Two hands re-united, in the afternoon he discussed the Chopin op.10 and op.25 *Etudes* and at the end of the day he performed the Alkan and the Chopin op.25. It was a most engaging day. With perfect timing he instructed us in about six different ways of practising op.10 no.2 (the chromatic scale played with the third, fourth and fifth fingers), then told us “If you practise it in all these different ways for three hours a day, after six months you will be amazed... how little progress you’ve made.” Ronald had an engaging manner on the platform. On one occasion when, I am told for I wasn’t present, he was standing in for an indisposed colleague at the Wigmore Hall, he took over the entire published programme, appearing in his customary scarlet velvet jacket. After the interval he addressed the audience, saying, “I am supposed to be playing the Liszt B minor *Sonata*, but this is a big undertaking, so I hope you won’t be disappointed if... (the audience groaned)... I take off my jacket,” which he then did, hanging it on the knob of one of the two doors in the apse behind the stage.

I fear that I was never one of Ronald’s more distinguished students, but I can point to two lasting effects he had on me. The first is undoubtedly that he taught me how to practise properly, and any keyboard technique I have subsequently possessed I owe to Ronald. Indeed, to this day, when learning or practising new passage work, it is Ronald who is, in my head, keeping a watchful eye from his wooden stool (a coffin end he informed me) on all that goes on, and shaming me into disciplined practice. The second is that he induced and nurtured a genuine love of the piano and its repertoire rather than letting the piano be used merely as a workhorse or rehearsal tool. The names of Horowitz, Gilels, Richter etc. were so often on his lips and to this day I derive enormous pleasure from listening to piano music and watching great pianists.

Jianing Kong

Professor of piano, Royal College of Music.

Twenty years ago, I left China for the U.K. to embark on my studies at the Purcell School. William Fong, who had just become the head of keyboard at the time and was himself an ex-pupil of Ronald Smith, made a big effort in organising the logistics in order to send me and another fellow student Omri Epstein to study with Ronald Smith. The arrangement was that Omri and I would travel together fortnightly from Watford down to Saltwood, and the lessons normally lasted for five hours. When we started our study with Ronald, he had just turned 80; and our last lesson was in May 2004, only a few days before he passed away. This period was perhaps the most intense, concentrated and awe-inspiring chapter in my life: Ronald not only transformed me pianistically but as a musician I owe him the entire core foundation, without which any later achievements would not have been possible.

I still remember that I played Mozart's Sonata K.333 for him in our first lesson. He smiled and said, 'You know, what separates pianists is their tone quality.' This was to become the single most important focal point in my studies with him. Whether in the slow *cantabile* exercises, Brahms exercises, Beethoven's op.109, Chopin 4th *Ballade*, and many other countless places, he went on and on about tonal production and had us listen to his demonstrations as well as our own sound tirelessly, and to compare and notice the slight differences. The basic quality of piano sound should be round and ringing without hard and sharp edges and without any audible 'hammer-attack'. All other tonal colours and gradation arise from this basis. He gave some other very clear instructions which include remaining free physically and avoiding high-finger attacks. The position of the wrist and the support of the knuckle were also stressed. Ronald was also extremely methodological about practising scales and arpeggios as well as the first two Clementi studies. He had thought through the fundamentals of piano technique systematically and was able to show us how to practice methodologically. I can still recall my total amazement when he showed me how to achieve a perfectly balanced, yet soft-edged opening chord in Beethoven's 4th Concerto: "play the chord at a certain length and then release it keeping only one note at the time and check if that note still sounds, repeat it and alternate all eight notes in the chord."

Ronald had an enormously-intellectual musical outlook and he could dissect any composition in an uncanny manner: the harmonic structure and the unique stylistic features particular to the piece were always revealed to us as if he had composed the work himself. This incredible insight I have not seen in any other musicians I have encountered after him. I believe this quality of almost intuitive perspective gave his own performances of the great masterworks a very special dimension. His favourite musicians were those greats of the past: Furtwangler, Toscanini, Busch, Edwin Fischer, Casals, Rachmaninoff and Hofmann. I always looked forward to the tea break we had together during our sessions, when he would play recordings and point out certain important aspects in the playing that we may have missed.

One of the last pieces on which we worked together intensively was Beethoven's op.109, at a time when he had also just finished working on it and brought it to the concert platform (he played the op.111 all his life but never before the op.109 and 110). He spoke a lot about spirituality and simplicity then. He told me that one must take great pains to work and master all the things that are in the score; only then can one forget about the details and just play. The last time when I finished playing the last movement, he looked quite satisfied. After a short pause, with the typical Ronald wisdom, he said half-wittily and half-meaningfully: "It's like a beautiful house full of lighting, but no one is in it". In the blink of an eye, eighteen years have passed and yet I can still feel his presence strongly. A certain phrase from his lips would suddenly come across my mind and give me new inspiration.

Happy 100th birthday, Ronald!

Nicholas McNair

Head chorister at Canterbury Cathedral at the age of 13, later studying at Cambridge University as well as composition and piano at the Royal College of Music. He moved to Lisbon in 1980, and taught at the Escola Superior de Música until recently. He has worked also with opera, film and theatre, and as organist and pianist with the Gulbenkian Choir and Orchestra.

I have treasured my memories of Ronald Smith all the 50 years of my life since I last had lessons with him as a student at Cambridge, but curiously my first awareness of him was as the teacher I did not want to have! As an ex-chorister obsessed with the organ, I did not want to make too much of an effort on the piano, and was comfortable with Robert Scott, my first teacher at The King's School, Canterbury. In his first report (the only one I still have from that time) he wrote that I was very talented but that "fingering is a weakness" (I was and am an inveterate improviser, preferring to feel my way rather than opt for a definitive solution, despite my training with Ronald). It was Robert Scott who insisted I should have lessons with Ronald, and needless to say I never regretted it for one moment. The only kind of regret I had was when I had not practised enough during the week and would ride my bicycle up to his house in Nunnery Fields feeling somewhat guilty – but, on leaving after such a lesson, Ronald's unquenchable enthusiasm never failed to fill me with inspiration!

It was at Cambridge that I decided to give up the organ (although I later remained active as an organist, especially with choral and orchestral concerts here in Portugal), and I felt an urgent need to continue my studies with Ronald, who helped me gain a bursary for this purpose. I travelled once a month from Cambridge for lessons, and enjoyed many discussions with him as well about my choice to prepare for a career as a composer. He told me from his own experience that to combine a career as performer with that of composer was quite impossible, but I secretly held to the idea as I could not imagine being one without the other – and the end result years later was that I opted for a middle path, eschewing a "career" in either (I am now writing a doctoral thesis on the subject of improvisation, an improviser's view on classical music and creativity). It was Ronald who recommended David Parkhouse as a teacher when I continued with post-graduate studies in composition and piano at the RCM, and I later studied also with Bernard Roberts. But what I learnt from Ronald, particularly in terms of the physical use of arm-weight and hand position, has been my guiding inspiration, especially as a creative researcher and teacher of improvisation. I am still active as a pianist, and my latest CD on two pianos, with the young jazz pianist Samuel Gapp, was issued just a few days after what would have been Ronald's 100th birthday. He remains in my memory above all as a friend, an extraordinary musician whom it was a huge privilege to have known.

Warren Mailley-Smith

Concert pianist.

I first met Ronald Smith when he was already 80 and he made a great impression on me from the very start. He was ruthlessly organised both in his own life and in his approach to all aspects of practice and performance preparation. Meticulous in his appearance, I don't believe I ever saw him without a waistcoat and tie on, morning or evening (and usually in his front room). Every part of his day was carefully timed - from breakfast to the arrival of his morning cup of tea and custard cream biscuits, to his teaching slots in the afternoon and the very rigorous nature of his practice.

I had sought him out as a teacher specifically for his unique approach to piano technique, having already completed my postgraduate performance studies at the Royal College of Music. From the very first lesson Ronald took me back to basics - a great leap of faith as a 23-year old fledgling professional and an even bigger leap of faith for Ronald himself as a teacher and pianist with a great reputation to uphold! My eyes were opened from the very first lesson and as the lessons progressed and we explored the mechanics of piano playing, the logistics of movement and how they all related to one crucial point; the production and quality of beautiful sound.

His musical ideas were always very clearly formed and clearly articulated and effectively demonstrated: it was hard not to learn! At first I would get the train down from London and walk from Sandling to Saltwood until I finally got a family hand-me-down car and used to pelt down the M20 from Clapham, wishing that I had done more practice that week and hoping dearly that I had done enough to please the great Maestro.

I would rarely write things down until I had left the house and would then make copious notes on everything he had said all the way home on the train or I would park up in a services to do the same. He made a particular impression on one occasion when he delivered the orchestral accompaniment piano reduction to Beethoven's piano concerto No 1 from memory (with no prior warning!). He always appeared to have intimate familiarity with every work I took to him.

I studied with him for nearly four years up until the time of his death and had the opportunity to hear him perform once in Canterbury; the complete Chopin etudes and various other warhorses to 'warm up' with. He played with great accuracy which belied his waning vision and a youthful vigour which belied his 80-plus years. It was one of the most inspiring and informative evenings of my 20s. Dedication, passion and hard work were in greater abundance in Ronald Smith in his ninth decade than in many of my own peers. Clearly, piano playing was not something to rest on one's laurels with, but was rather a lifelong obsession and something that Ronald certainly had no intention of ever retiring from.

Whilst I subsequently studied with others, I constantly find myself returning to Ronald's technical principles and methodical processes to get the best out of my practice and to maximise my reliability in performance. Ronald was, undisputedly a very rare breed: both a great performing pianist to the last, but also a truly great teacher whose lessons never failed to shed light and unlock new and exciting secrets from week to week. I remember shedding real tears at a memorial concert for him at the Fairfield Halls at the loss of such wisdom and knowledge and do my very best to keep his ideas alive in my own playing and teaching.

Bryce Morrison

Pianist, teacher, writer and jurist; a leading authority on piano repertoire and performance. His published interviews include those with Martha Argerich, Arrau, Ashkenazy, Bolet, Curzon, Horowitz, Kissin, Pogorelich, Pollini, Rubinstein, András Schiff, Sokolov, Weissenberg and Earl Wild.

My first awareness of Ronald Smith came when I was awarded a music scholarship—the then princely sum of £50 per annum—to The King's School, Canterbury in 1952. Aged thirteen, I played Mozart's D minor Fantasia, Chopin's Mazurka in A minor op.17 no.4 and 'Elizabeth' by Parry. I scored something of a hit with 'Elizabeth', being told that I played it with 'real feeling.' Privately I thought it soppy, though I warmed to the more lively *a capriccio* section. My examiner was the organist Malcolm Boyle, who I can still see red-faced and unsteady (he was fond of a drink), who immediately sent me to Ronald who enjoyed a celebrity status in the school and who was willing to teach four or five of the more gifted pupils. It was much to the credit of the school that instead of a more customary, philistine indifference to music ('so unhealthy all that practice; you should be out on the football field') that it persuaded Ronald to take time off from his busy schedule of concerts and teach at the school.

I think that all of us found our early lessons with Ronald a chastening experience. All pride or complacency at being singled out, a feeling that we were 'select' (the musical equivalent of the Brodie girls in Muriel Spark's novel *The Pride of Miss Jean Brodie*) were swept aside. "You see, none of you even begin to know what technique is" exclaimed Ronald with all of his salty brio. And thus began a second weekly lesson devoted exclusively to Brahms 51 Exercises, the Cramer Etudes and a Chopin Etude as a reward—though rarely given—for outstanding progress. There was a marked stress on 'rotation,' a freedom of arms and shoulders leading to a full sonority, the reverse of the *jeu perle* or surface dexterity taught by Marguerite Long, Ronald's one-time teacher in Paris.

I vividly recall hearing June, Ronald's pianist sister, playing by way of example Chopin's First Scherzo, a work that became my party piece during my years in America. I also recall Ronald's homely mother, her shortbread less than affectionately referred to as 'concrete biscuits' (they were dentally-challenging). Many years later on a visit to Ronald's house his mother wished to know what I was learning. "I taught

Ronnie that” she responded when I told her I was working on Chopin’s ultra-demanding A minor Etude, op.10 no.2, before, with a dazzled look on her face, she remembered visits from ‘Mr Matthews’ (Denis Matthews) and ‘Sir Adrian’ (Adrian Boult). “Nice to know these people” she exclaimed in wonder.

Under Ronald’s expert and demanding teaching, progress was rapid. After playing a version of Tchaikovsky’s ‘Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy’ for piano and orchestra (and being reprimanded by the strict tempo band-master conductor for over-expressive phrasing; “would Morrison mind playing in time?”), I advanced to greater things and the Mendelssohn G minor Concerto, this time receiving a more generous comment in the local paper from Mark Deller (son of the legendary counter-tenor) who claimed that I “played it with the brilliance for which Mendelssohn was said to play it”. Even Ronald was pleased.

Another indelible memory occurred when Ronald returned from a visit to Paris with a recording of Beethoven’s Third Piano Concerto performed by Emil Giles, whom he described as being “as great as Horowitz, but more musical”. I still possess my LP copy, and am taken back in time to recall a revelatory musical experience.

During these heady years all of us were quickly made more than aware of Alkan, his centrality to Ronald’s musical thinking and, of course, a composer he played, recorded and wrote about with supreme authority, astonishing the musical world with his imperious mastery of even the most outlandish difficulties. I should also like to mention, more than *en passant*, Ronald’s early 78 10” disc of Arthur Benjamin’s quirky ‘Scherzino’ coupled with Holt’s ‘Toccata on a Northumbrian Pipe Tune,’ enterprising repertoire played with a coruscating wit and virtuosity. Any re-issue of Ronald’s many recordings should include this early example of his artistry.

All this and so much else remains a treasured and privileged memory, an unforgettable start and foundation of what has been and continues to be a deeply fulfilling musical career. I owe Ronald an immeasurable debt of gratitude.

Lisa Nelson

Flautist, Chair: British Flute Society, Yamaha Artist, Professor of Flute, Junior Department of the Guildhall School of Music.

In 1992 I’d been working in my position as flute tutor at Canterbury Christ Church College for about a year when I met Ronald Smith. A talented Australian pianist I had just started to work with, Kim Burwell, had been living in the UK, and was living with the Smiths while studying with Ronald. She had extraordinary technical ability, and memorised everything, even the piano parts to our duos. And so I would sometimes go to their home to rehearse with Kim. The first two things that made an impression on me was the thickness of his spectacles and his love of delicious coffee. Because Kim had such high regard for Ronald, I would go with her to his recitals: a few at St Gregory’s Centre in Canterbury (there was a fabulous piano there! and great acoustics), and once at the Queen Elizabeth Hall for his 80th birthday concert in London. He was a formidable character, and had very strong ideas and opinions. What I liked most about his playing was his ability to speak through the music. I understood Chopin for the first time. The Beethoven Waldstein Sonata was high on my list to listen to, after I heard him play it. And Alkan, Brahms, Liszt, Schumann - all of these composers were suddenly coming to life for me after listening to his performances of these works.

We didn’t socialise together really. He spent his time in the afternoons in his vast garden; at least, I remember it being vast. And he went for epic walks. One afternoon, after chatting with Kim about it, I plucked up courage to ask him to coach our Poulenc and Prokofiev sonatas. He said he thought he didn’t know anything about the flute, and recommended that I search out Gareth Morris in Bristol (which I did of course). He suggested I listen to the recording he made with Gareth of Brandenburg 5 (with Busch). Wonderful historic recording! And so I didn’t pursue it for another few months. But I finally did again, and I wish I’d recorded the session. It was only half an hour, full of musical dialect and simple, almost obvious advice to take the music off the page. It was only about the music... there was no discussion of technique or problems to overcome. Only phrasing, reaction, the journey and arrival. I know that Kim and his other students had much more intense experiences because of the demands of the instrument

and the hours they needed to commit to working. I was so fortunate to have a brief glimpse of his insight and love of the music.

Martyn Parry

Organist.

Sadly, Martyn Parry died in 2004, but his widow, the singer Alison Wells, with whom he gave premieres of many new works, writes: "Martyn learnt from Ronald Smith at The King's School, Canterbury, and spoke of his lessons with great fondness. I think he was pretty much in awe of Ronald, and when he started playing the piano again after years of concentrating on the organ, he recalled the technique that Ronald had taught him. He used to talk about the weight of the arm and from the shoulder that he was taught. He loved his lessons."

Paul Pellay

Composer.

I was 15 when I began my studies with Ronald Smith in 1980, and he put me through my pianistic paces for six years. He straightened me out in a big way. He taught me how to truly listen while playing. He instilled into me a work ethic that has stayed with me in my work as a composer. Most importantly, though, he was the one who convinced me over time that I should turn to composing, which I began to take seriously at age 18-19. My lessons with him never were about just going through the pieces he assigned to me (including lots of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, which I found myself more naturally attuned towards than the 19th century virtuoso repertoire as exemplified by Chopin and Liszt); it involved a lot of conversing about things I was listening to, and what his views were on all that - he often voiced his admiration for figures such as Berg, Ives and Penderecki (conversely, he had little or no time for Copland or any of the more self-regarding avant-gardists of the time, whose music he summed up as 'Plink Contra Plonk!')

Even though he stopped composing by his late 20s, to my ears he always approached whatever he played from the point of view of a composer first and foremost - whether it was Beethoven or Chopin or Prokofiev or his favourite Alkan. With him you were always aware of how any work of theirs was constructed, from the sheer intricacy of the details to how the whole structure stood as a single, unbreakable entity. Add to that the sheer musicality of his playing, a big technique that could do just about anything and a healthy dose of barnstorming theatricality (listen to his version of Balakirev's 'Islamey' to hear what I mean), and you knew you were listening to a connoisseur's idea of a performer, a real one-off.

As for his own music, I recall him playing a reel-to-reel tape of a few minutes of his Violin Concerto, which I remember as being quite striking, with a blend of poetry and violence that reminded me a little of E.J. Moeran. I wonder how his own music might have evolved had he kept writing beyond the late 1940s?

I actually wrote my own tribute to the man not long after he passed, but with notes rather than words! It's a big piece for two violins, and the final section memorialises Ronald Smith. It's actually a paraphrase of an Alkan piece that I heard him play more than once, the Marche Funèbre op.26, and I actually titled it as 'A little Alkanesque Funeral Cortège'. I wouldn't have blamed him if he'd thought I was being a bit too cheeky with this...

But yes, if there was a single figure who, to all intents and purposes, shaped me into the musician I am today, it would have to be Ronald Smith. No question! And I'm only one of many, I'm quite sure.

Trevor Pinnock

Harpsichordist, conductor.

Ronald's practising in Gordon House made a huge impression on me as a boy of four or five when I would sometimes escape from our garden and walk up the hill to listen to his magical sounds. This led directly to my having lessons with his sister June, which became the most important and enjoyable part of my life.

Although I did not have much contact with Ronald subsequently, he did sometimes allow me to join him on his afternoon walk when he would inspire me with tales of the profession or thoughts on Bach or his love of the Beethoven late quartets. His generosity of spirit is something I appreciate even today.

Christopher Seaman

LPO: Principal Timpanist (1964-1968); BBC Scottish SO: Assistant Conductor (1968-1970), Principal Conductor (1971-1977); Northern Sinfonia: Principal Conductor (1973-1979); RPO: Conductor Laureate (from 2009). Baltimore SO: Conductor (1987-1998). Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra: Music Director (1998-2011).

I had the privilege of studying the piano with Ronald between the ages of 13 and 18. He was the first person I met who had true professional standards, and this had a huge influence on me. He was able to teach his own amazing technique in a clear but friendly way.

At The King's School, Canterbury I was very busy playing three instruments and singing in everything, so I could not give as much time to practising as Ronald might have liked, but his patience, kindness, and clarity of mind enabled me to pass the ARCM while I was still 18 years old. I also greatly appreciated his own very distinctive sense of humour.

Overall I just feel grateful to have known him.

Christine Stevenson

Pianist. Recording artist (including Liszt), piano teacher Junior Department of the Royal College of Music (from 2001), Joint Artistic Director of The Summer School for Pianists, Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music examiner. Blogs about piano music at www.notesfromapianist.wordpress.com.

The Amazing Mr Smith

Ronald Smith visited Australia in the 1970s and 1980s, introducing Alkan to audiences across the country and giving masterclasses in several cities including Melbourne, where I performed Liszt's Paganini Etude no.2 for him. First impressions were misleading; he looked rather severe when he appeared, but his humour, wit and engaging personality shone through as soon as he addressed the audience, and his inspirational teaching led to a steady stream of Australians making the journey to Saltwood in Kent for lessons, including me. I lived with a family in Hythe for two years; others came for shorter stays, and the Smiths often had a student living with them for weeks at a time, housed in a comfortable bedroom – with a piano.

All Ronald's ex-pupils will recognise the following – the need for a straight fifth finger, thumbs off the keyboard, Brahms exercises, octaves, the scale chain, Clementi and Cramer studies - and the very first lesson where one had to play a middle C with one finger only and a big fat tone, followed by a perilous arching leap up an octave. No searching! Fall! Rhythmic permutations of mind-bending complexity applied to Chopin Etudes would soon follow; repertoire of staggering demand was covered.

I eventually returned to Australia, but then revisited Kent during two long antipodean summers, spending two English winters living at Tanners House with Ronald, Anne and Beka. And it was those in-house sojourns where one's musical education took on a new dimension.

Firstly - by personal example. Ronald started practising at 6.30am. At 7am he kindly brought a cup of tea upstairs to Anne and to any resident student, who would be expected to be practising shortly

afterwards. Comments would be made over breakfast – which could be up to two hours later – as to the intelligence or otherwise of said student’s overheard practice.

On the side of Ronald’s piano was a notebook in which he recorded his own practice, with each ‘tick’ representing a 15 minute focussed session. Every day he practised - for his next recital, or for a recording, or for an overseas tour. By the end of the day, the number of ‘ticks’ was remarkable, totalling perhaps seven or eight hours. His daily routine somehow managed to include tending the vegetable garden, where he would spend time in the middle of the day nurturing a delicious range of home-grown produce, deftly cooked by Anne into dishes of *haute cuisine*. Pupils might appear for lessons at about 5pm. After dinner, he’d be back at the piano, until 10.30pm.

The second influence at Tanners House was the musical example of others. Twice a week, Anne served a continental breakfast in the studio, a room graced by two Steinway pianos and innumerable scores, books, vinyl LPs - and eventually, CDs. During these occasions, the family and any resident student listened: to historic pianists such as Hoffman and Rachmaninov, or perhaps to the Busch quartet playing Beethoven, or to Sibelius symphonies with a fine orchestra and conductor. These listening sessions were fascinating, and Ronald would speak of other works, related performances, the analysis of the quartets, or introduce the symphonic themes at the piano before a recording was played. This was a broad musical education at the highest level.

Entertainment? Stimulating conversation over meals on wide-ranging topics. Visits from fellow musicians. Family walks in the countryside – brisk ones, as Ronald never wasted time. Pupils came and went; evening concerts on Radio 3 were never missed. Radio 4 was a constant background, and regular programmes featured in the weekly routine such as, on Friday evenings, *Any Questions?* And on Saturdays, *Any Answers?* I recall the Reith lectures, and – in my pre-horticulturalist days – the incomprehensibility of *Gardeners’ Question Time*.

I have headed this article *The Amazing Mr Smith*, a title taken from Ronald’s CD recording of Liszt’s transcription of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony and of the Bach-Busoni Chaconne. What a privilege to spend time in the company of The Equally Amazing Mrs Smith, whose overheard cello practice each evening brought a sense of calm to the day’s end, and whose care for Ronald, Beka and countless pupils enabled so much musical activity and learning.

Ronald’s influence continues – via his recordings, his books on Alkan, and through his teaching. There is so much more I could write, but his voice in my head repeats his oft-quoted maxim that ‘Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion’, and his well-remembered, steady gaze compels me to complete this essay, which I have so enjoyed writing – now. The piano awaits ...

Richard Strivens

As a singer, bass-baritone Richard Strivens has worked with all the national opera companies either on stage or as a workshop leader. As an educator, his career has spanned the community work of SingUp to lecturing on vocal pedagogy at the Royal Northern College of Music. He co-founded the flourishing Manchester Contemporary Youth Opera in 2017.

Thank you, Ronald.

The pencilled instructions (next page) from this snapshot of my teenage copy of the Chopin *Preludes* are clear forty years on: practise no. 22 for next week; use this fingering absolutely consistently; be precise, following Chopin's dynamics, about the length of the sustained chord in the right hand in every bar; in the left, notice where the cantabile melody implies a crescendo and where it does not; and - the particular reason I chose this example - practise the rhythm in the right hand using these rhythmic variations.

I was an eager youth at the piano, stubbornly choosing to play pieces beyond my technical capability; Ronald responded with Hanon exercises and lots of them, gently adding that, at fifteen, it was *almost* too late for me as a pianist. I don't remember having pieces foisted on me, nor do I remember Ronald saying



"let's leave that one for the time-being". I do remember that once a piece had been committed to, the expectation was that it would be learnt to the best of my ability. This sense of recognising passion and then exploiting the resultant willingness to work enabled Ronald to open new musical and technical vistas for me. I have a physical memory that this G minor prelude taught me greater independence of the right and left hands. There are markings later in the piece showing Ronald's insistence on a similarly independent use of the sustaining pedal.

The willingness to work, of course within my teenage paradigm, was partially born of a

loyalty to this Zorro of the keyboard. Walking to the Westgate in Canterbury, you knew your swordsmanship would be wholly inadequate for the master, but perhaps a little less inadequate than at the previous lesson: a marvellous achievement to return later to school with.

The singers I teach now experience the vocal equivalent of Ronald's demands of working out which finger plays which note and then sticking to that decision. The similarity extends to the decision being collaborative and in great detail. To sing a phrase well, not only precise repetition of the vowels of the words is necessary but the correct adjustment of the vowel for that voice, on that pitch of specific duration is required before you add the consonants. This repetition of an ever-increasingly accurate phrase is the quickest route to success, yet it needs to be practised playfully. Here is another link with Ronald's rhythmic games, or his exercises for leaps, which seemed ever so silly, and fun, to an earnest young pianist. My students experience the same, initially mind-boggling, suggestions of rhythmic alterations when learning coloratura and similar running phrases. I have an awful lot to thank Ronald for.

I feel so very fortunate to have studied with Ronald, his enthusiasm was a lifelong gift. I successfully braved a piano DipABRSM a few years ago and last year's Zoom teaching has reinforced how much I relish accompanying my students when we work in-person. Thank you, Ronald, for both what I pass on to my students in my teaching and through my playing and how I do it.

Robert Strivens

Solicitor, Pastor, Banbury Evangelical Free Church (1999-2007), Principal, London Theological Seminary (2008-17), Pastor, Bradford-on-Avon Baptist Church (since 2017).

Ronald Smith suited the approach to teaching at The King's School, Canterbury well – unorthodox, impressively well informed, stimulating, demanding and effective – but Ronald carried it further than most. I confess that it captivated me when I started lessons with him at the age of 13 in 1973. The sawn-off piano stool, the (initially) unfamiliar hand positions on the keyboard, the singing as you played, coupled with the occasional pressure on the shoulder for emphasis, are unforgettable. And, of course, the ever-present fragrance of peppermint tea. The concerts that Ronald organised for his students were a mixture of excitement and sheer terror; one year, we were all out-shone by a very young Freddy Kempf. Most Alkan was beyond me, but Ronald opened up to me the playing of Chopin, Beethoven, Mendelssohn and much more in ways I could never otherwise have managed and which have stayed with me ever since.

Kan Tomita

Pianist.

This year, as we remember the legendary pianist Ronald Smith and celebrate the centenary since his birth, I am extremely honoured and privileged to be paying tribute to him as one of his past pupils.

He was my very first teacher since my family and I had arrived in this country back in 1992. Having completed my early years of musical training in my home county of Japan, my father undertook an extensive search looking for the best piano teacher in London and Ronald Smith was highly recommended by many.

I still remember as if it was yesterday my first visit to Ronald's 'Tanners House' in Saltwood, Kent for my consultation lesson. My father and I were welcomed by a smartly dressed English gentleman with impeccable manner and dashing gesture, immediately followed by the lively barking of his little companion 'Spike'. I was shown through to his wonderful music studio with two antique Steinways. There I played a couple of pieces, and then he asked me if I want to be a professional pianist, to which I replied "yes". To cut the story short, I was officially accepted as his pupil.

My family was then based in north London and I was offered a place at the Purcell School of Music, located then in Harrow. Fortunately, the school and Ronald agreed on terms where I can have lessons with him in Kent every other weekend and also stay at his house for a week or two during school half-terms and holidays for intensive lessons. And so my training with him began and continued for the next four years.

Those who were lucky enough to stay at Ronald's house would know that he was a man of routine and discipline. But he got on with his daily tasks with such ease, grace and style, whether his piano practice, gardening, teaching or dog-walking. He was always in control of his pace and he did everything with great conviction. He was extremely dedicated to teaching and unbelievably patient with pupils. Since my English was almost non-existent then, he would demonstrate a lot on piano or sing certain phrases in order to carefully convey his ideas and advice until I fully understood him. Through his clear demonstration I have learnt a great deal of subtle nuances and art of rubato in romantic repertoire, in particular, the works of Chopin, Liszt, Scriabin and Balakirev as well as the know-how to structure monumental musical architecture in classical repertoire, most notably in Beethoven's compositions. Also, both consciously and unconsciously, he taught me the art of showmanship; how to create excitement in a performance, to please an audience by getting the right balance of virtuosity but still respecting the composer's true intention.

Ronald's enthusiasm in developing his pupils' skill and talent was just tremendous and he would arrange numerous performance opportunities for us pupils to play concertos with local orchestras, introduce us to music societies for recital opportunities, as well as organize student concerts in his studio. As a teenager, I was also lucky enough to perform at venues such as the Royal Festival Hall and Purcell Room, and Ronald would make the two-hour train journey into London in order to come and support my concerts, for which I am forever grateful.

If I can think of one small regret from the time of studying with Ronald, it would have to be the fact that we did not get to work on Alkan's compositions apart from a couple of op.35 Etudes. Perhaps I wasn't yet ready to tackle these gigantic musical creations, but I just wish I had had more guts to ask him to teach more Alkan pieces...

But it wasn't just the piano-playing through which he initiated his secrets; he opened up so many doors and passed on his profound knowledge of becoming a cultured person. On a musical level, Ronald triggered my fascination which later turned into an obsession with the world of old recordings by the late 19th and early 20th century golden age of pianists, other instrumentalists, conductors and singers. I used to look forward to our coffee morning in his studio joined by Anne, and three of us would enjoy the freshly-baked bread rolls and a cup of coffee listening to Ronald's extensive LP collection. I won't start listing all the names, but pianists such as Edwin Fisher, Schnabel, Gilels, Rachmaninoff and Michelangeli, conductors such as Furtwangler, Toscanini and Mravinsky, string players such as Heifetz, Oistrakh, Casals and Jacqueline du Pré were amongst many other artists that I got to know through these coffee morning sessions and also our video nights.

He encouraged me to read a lot and he would let me borrow many of his collection of rare books. He was also a very enthusiastic and skilled gardener and he would spend a good few hours a day down in his enormous back garden cultivating his beloved vegetables which would turn into most delicious cuisine masterfully prepared by Anne. These dining occasions were my very first encounter with English dishes, through which I later realized that not all English food is in the same league as Anne's culinary magic, and I felt spoiled for being introduced to such delicious feasts during my first few years of living in the UK.

Ronald was a fantastic speaker, especially when he was on stage addressing an audience before, or during his performances. His wonderful way of story-telling always relaxed what can easily be a tense atmosphere in a concert hall, and his witty sense of humour always brought laughter. He would do the same during lessons, at a dinner table or during our long afternoon walk out in the fields. All these precious and personal episodes and tales told by him will stay with me for ever. But it wasn't just what he said, but what he did and how he did things left me with a profound influence.

I cannot thank you enough, Ronald, for all your wisdom, generosity, dedication, humour and of course, your wonderful music-making. You were a legend!

Moray Welsh

Solo cellist (student of Rostropovich), Principal Cellist of the London Symphony Orchestra, and painter.

Working with Ronald on the Alkan Sonata for Cello and Piano, which we recorded and played in the Centenary Wigmore Concert, was an unforgettable experience, which I count as one of the most memorable episodes in my career.

Not only was Ronald a phenomenal pianist, and musicologist, but he was also one of the most knowledgeable people I have ever met: in short he was a force of nature, whose talent, even in the face of his debilitating sight problems, shone brilliantly to overcome what he considered merely an inconvenience.

His insight into Alkan (amongst a vast range of other composers), based on his incredible knowledge and understanding of the entire oeuvre of the composer, made for such fascinating revelations in the music, and the process of preparing the Sonata and the Piano Trio (with James Clark) became a wonderful journey of discovery.

On top of all that Ronald was a wonderful host and raconteur, which always made our meetings so joyful - to have been in his company and shared a platform with him was truly an honour for which I shall always be immensely grateful.

Howard Williams

Professor of Conducting, Royal College of Music.

I got a music scholarship to The King's School, Canterbury in 1960 on the basis of singing and playing the piano, but Edred Wright, then Director of Music, stipulated that I should take up the violin. So for the next four or five years I had two remarkable musicians egging me along – Clarence Myerscough on the violin (from whom I learned more by watching and listening than by anything he said) and – with enormous luck – Ronald Smith on the piano. Through Ronnie's persistence and strict encouragement I learned to take my piano playing to a workable level which served me well in my early career as a répétiteur and has kind of stayed with me since. I would never have made a concerto soloist but acquired enough technique to make the piano sing and when necessary to sound passably like an orchestra. Playing orchestral piano to Nicholas King's concerto solo (Beethoven 3) was the sort of thing that brought out the budding conductor in me! As all his former pupils will attest, it was depth of sound that imbued Ronald's playing and which he sought to pass on to us. Crudely speaking, this was achieved through rotation of the wrist in moving from one digit to the next. Like all others, I assume, I had to learn Chopin from the Alfred Cortot editions (published I think by Salabert) in which Cortot's suggested exercises occupied more of the page (even though in smaller print) than did the Chopin itself! This enjoyment of

sonority was demonstrated on at least one occasion by a performance of the Liszt *Grand Galop Chromatique* with two pianos, eight hands, in the Shirley Hall. The other six hands belonged to Nicholas King, Richard True, and (we think) Christopher Saunders.

Ronald had a great deal of musical wisdom to pass on. So much so that on one occasion in his small front room (occupied entirely by the two interlocking grand pianos) I felt the urge to take notes, but was immediately reprimanded and told to just “listen”. What I learned above all from him for which I shall be eternally grateful was the essential connection for a musician between the mental and the physical process.

Address given by Canon Roger Job, at the thanksgiving service for Ronald’s life at Saltwood church on 7th June 2004.

The late Roger Job, having been a chorister at Canterbury Cathedral, was one of Ronald’s first pupils at The King’s School, Canterbury in 1951, obtaining his ARCM whilst still at the school. Taking holy orders in 1962, his ministry culminated in appointments as Precentor at Manchester Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and Winchester Cathedral (where he later became Vice-Dean). He retired in 1994, uncomfortable about the introduction of female ordinations.

I should like to begin with a piece of advice which Ronald always heeded: advice coming from an unexpected quarter, St. Paul writing to Timothy. ‘Stir up the gift of God which is within you.’ (2 Timothy I, verse 6).

Take swimming. My wife and I and two small sons were on the beach here at Hythe. It was the glorious summer of 1976. We knew that Ronald and Anne had taken a house for the summer holidays not far from the promenade; but at lunch-time, to our surprise, Ronald appeared on the beach, quickly undressed, laid down his glasses, and plunged into the water. He swam up and down for quite a long time most vigorously, using the crawl. We cannot imagine him just messing about in the water. If it was swimming, he would do it properly.

It was the same with walking. Ronald never ambled about, or took a stroll. He walked fast and purposefully, in the rain crowning himself with that sou’wester. His idea of a good walk was Herne Bay to Margate, and then Ramsgate to Dover, assisted by public transport to make a good round trip.

How much more did this apply to his music! Beginning with that spark of genius which he undoubtedly possessed, and a musical gift out of the ordinary, he bestirred himself to build a career on these sure foundations with incredible industry and powers of concentration, and also imagination and daring.

As to handwriting, he received no gift. There was therefore nothing to cultivate, no stirring to be done. His letters, usually written in the train, were a maze of hieroglyphics.

Ronald already had under his belt the famous recording of Bach’s Triple Concerto with Edwin Fischer and Denis Matthews, when he came to teach at The King’s School in Canterbury. That was a happy thing for generations of boys, an association which lasted almost forty years. How could I forget the month or the year in which he arrived? It was May 1951. The school was enjoying its halcyon days under Dr. Shirley; and it was typical of Shirley that when Ronald came to meet him, the boy-prodigy violinist, Miles Baster, had been placed in an adjoining room playing Kreisler studies of incredible virtuosity, and hinting at a musical environment of awesome excellence. Ronald was hooked.

What was the secret of his teaching? He brought a seriousness to the subject, which we had not met before. We were expected to practise. Early on he said to me, looking quite fierce, ‘Never miss an opportunity to practise for two hours!’. We soon learned that he practised far, far harder than that. Also, Ronald communicated a sense that he was in it for real. It was really stimulating to know that when our lessons were moved from Thursday to Tuesday he was going to be off somewhere to play a concerto, or give a recital.

Years later he told me a story, which we would never have believed as schoolboys, because he was obviously so zealous. He was in Switzerland on a sort of working holiday, presumably after the war, when he was in his twenties. He was supposed to be learning the Schumann Concerto, but he met a lovely girl. Days of exquisite dalliance followed. Schumann was forgotten. When he came home he had to work

doubly hard. But I think he liked these challenges, enjoyed working against the clock. He rather encouraged us to do the same, putting us in for the Kent Festival to play pieces – memorized, of course – which we had had to learn at breakneck speed.

No small part of the secret of his teaching was the stimulus he provided to achieve goals, which we thought out of reach.

This is not the moment to attempt a review of his recitals and recordings, massive accomplishments though they were, achieved against the background of his perennial eye-trouble, a handicap, incidentally, which he shared with St. Paul.

For me his finest hour on the concert platform was the marvellous performance of the Moonlight Sonata in the Festival Hall, given on the day Rebecca was born.

Among his recordings a particular favourite of mine was, I believe, one of his most successful – it was a long-playing disc of lollipops, such as Liszt's Love Dream No.3 and Chaminade's *L'Automne*. It was released shortly before Ronald's marriage.

Which brings me to that question in the Book of Proverbs, 'Who can find a virtuous woman?'. Ronald took his time, but found in Anne a wonderful example: a wife who would, for her husband, always go the second mile. To the formidable list of roles required of the good wife in Proverbs, chapter 31, Anne has added chauffeur, secretary, PA, and, occasionally, I suspect, agent.

It was an honour to officiate at their marriage on a brilliant late summer day nearly thirty-five years ago. It is the only wedding I've ever done without a rehearsal. Never mind! It has worked. Ronald and Anne were made for each other.

Alkan was the lucky break in Ronald's career. The revival of interest in Alkan's life and compositions is largely down to him. Alkan suited Ronald well. The pieces are mostly of extraordinary difficulty – giving him the challenge to do the impossible, such as he liked best. He certainly had to stir up the gift to get the required results with Alkan. And only a man of Ronald's limitless energy and industry could have fitted two volumes on Alkan's life and works round the demands of concerts and records.

Not all Alkan's music is easy on the ear. I went to the Royal Academy of Music years ago to hear Ronald play the Concerto for solo piano. It lasts fifty-five minutes. It is a mind-blowing work for the performer, without considering its effect on an audience. Maybe a very elderly friend of his was thinking of the Concerto, when she confided that she worried sometimes if practising Alkan could cause brain damage. Certainly not in Ronald's case! Weaker heads should beware.

Music was Ronald's religion, and there is a verse in one of the Psalms (Ps. 71) specially for him:

- I will praise thee and thy faithfulness, O God, playing upon an instrument of musick.

But he also found time for church-going. He preferred the early service. Later in the day he might be forced to suffer hymns. He loathed hymns, and I never heard him praise a sermon. Once I drove him from South Kensington to Crewe Station. All the way up the M1/M6 he questioned me – not altogether sympathetically - on my vocation and matters of scriptural interpretation. As to funerals, he liked the words of our Lord, 'Let the dead bury their dead'.

In bereavement we lose part of ourselves. I've just been given the historian A.L. Rowse's *Diaries*, newly out. One of his greatest friends dies, and he says, 'So much of *my* life has gone'. Bereavement is the sudden stopping of a conversation. It takes us a long time to realize that this break in transmission has really happened. Whenever I sat down at the piano in retirement – on a good day about three hours later than Ronald habitually used to – he was there with me, talking to me:

- a good singing tone
- thumbs off the keyboard
- in heavy octaves a straight fifth
- play every technical exercise as though it were great music.

I hope I shall still hear his voice: criticizing, yes, warning, but much more than both of those, encouraging; as though he were even now sending one of us out from a lesson, buoyed up, and determined to go away and climb new peaks.

Our hearts go out to Anne and Rebecca and the other members of the family. Their loss is so much greater than ours, their knowledge so much deeper.

I hope they will agree that it was rather inspired of the BBC *In Tune* programme to play Alkan's *Allegro barbaro* as a tribute ten days ago.

They knew their man.

Transcript of the final talk given by Ronald to the Alkan Society on 29th March 2004.

One of the things I am often asked is how music entered into my family. Well, it didn't, I think *I* entered into it. When I was born, I know, the doctor who was there – it was all quite professional – he said, 'What do you want him to do when he's a big chap later on?' and my father said, 'I want him to be a footballer'. My mother said, 'I want him to be a pianist.' I don't know why she said this because there was absolutely no money in it – there was no money in football in those days, but it's rather different today. But, going back – I have to go back two or three generations – I go back to where the whole thing started because my parents were not really musical, although my mother played the piano in a certain sort of way and she was quite ambitious, but not properly motivated and not properly taught. So we go back to my maternal great-grandfather who, of course, I never met. I doubt I could have met him, even had he not fallen off the top of London's famous Guildhall. He was a builder and he fell to his death leaving a widow with five young children to bring up. So she did the only decent thing she could and married again very, very quickly. But she didn't really select very well because the chap she married had a terminal illness, and he also, as my daughter would say, karked it, and it was at this stage where, I think, perhaps the musical strain in the family started.

My grandfather was the youngest son of this rather large family. He was pretty unruly; he was aged six and mother immediately had to go out to work and the coffin containing his stepfather was on the kitchen table. He obviously had a commercial instinct, which has not been transmitted to the present generation unfortunately, and he invited all the little street urchins of the district in at a ha'penny a time to view the corpse. But they got more and more excited and they started to rock the coffin. Suddenly the whole thing keeled over and the corpse fell out onto the kitchen floor. Well, his mother came in and she realised from this that really she could not cope with this boy and he was sent to what was, well, they described it as a reformatory school. I don't know what such a thing is – it's an industrial school for boys who need a certain amount of discipline. And there they taught him two things. They taught him to mend boots and shoes which, because he had a vast family later on, was extremely useful to him. The other thing they taught him was to play the cornet. Now, when my mother was born, she was the eldest of the next generation of the family. When she was old enough to learn, my grandfather decided that she should have some piano lessons so that she could accompany him on his cornet. He bought a funny old piano, I can still remember it with the candlesticks, this big piano, and she went to Mrs., no *Miss* Clemence, that was it, and it was a course of lessons that cost the equivalent of 50 pence the whole lot; ten lessons for 50 pence. That was the sum of her tuition. And she could play, she had one or two pupils later on in life, but there was no proper touch and this sort of thing, but she eventually taught me.

My father was an insurance man, he wasn't musical at all, although I think he could have been, because he never said anything about my own playing. The *only* remark he ever passed was once when I was about to record Bob Simpson's first composition, his piano sonata, which is a very aggressive piece, and I was working at this and he came into the room and went out sort of muttering, 'Tch tch tch! They still send missionaries abroad'. That's the only remark I ever had from him about that. But he had an elder brother – I still remember him when I was a little boy, when I was three and four – he was a comedian, he could play any instrument by ear, and a very, very entertaining man, marvellous for children. I thought the world of him. Alas, he died when I was very young, Uncle Jack, but I think there might have been something in that. There was another member of that family, Uncle Charlie, who, they all told me, played the violin, 'makes that violin speak'. Well, I never heard him, but I had my violin concerto broadcast by Colin Sauer in 1948, and shortly afterwards I met this uncle for the first time. 'Ron, boy,' he said, 'I was really proud of you last Saturday afternoon when I listened to your broadcast. Do you think the band was a little bit too loud? I could hardly hear the piano at all.' That was my violin concerto. So that gives the sort of background that I emerged from.

I very quickly realised that I was terribly keen to get on with the piano. My mother started me when I was seven. I can still see this first page with a semibreve and two things with tails on and four things with tails on, and blacked-out notes and all this sort of thing. Within a year I was trying a piece called

'Toccatà' by Paradies and my mother couldn't play this. This intrigued me very much. She couldn't manage it and I used to practise it under the desk at school and I got my fingers going, and it was set for the under-18 class for the festival at Brighton. And it was a memory test, they put me in for this. Well, when it started, there were about twenty people in for this and these great big girls, they looked like lighthouses to me, got up (I was, well, I was eight) and went up. And I'd been doing this piece, da da di di di di di di di like this – the first one went up – diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle – oh, goodness me! And the next one went up – diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle – a lot of pedal, but there – so I went diddle, diddle, diddle – I saw my mother's chin start to vibrate a bit and she said, 'Don't you try to do that, will you?'. Well, I was number seven or eight, I went up there – diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle – I think mother nearly had a heart attack, but I got what I thought was called a 'sustificate' for this. The adjudicator, Alec Rowley, placed me third. He said, 'This little boy, although his hand wasn't large enough for the big snags (there were some octaves that shouldn't have been there anyhow), was the only one who realised this piece was written for a spinet (I'd never heard of a spinet; I think it was written for a harpsichord) and he really made it sound like a spinet'. So I went home and looked up to see what a spinet was. I'd heard of a spittoon, but I didn't know what a spinet was.

So that was how we started. And because of this, a very nice teacher at my infant school called my mother and said, 'You should put him in for a scholarship to the Brighton School of Music?'. Well, I didn't know what a scholarship was. Anyway, I went in for this, this was under-sixteen and I was still eight, and I was the youngest one to go in there and I played for a lovely lady called Maud Hornsby. We selected her scholarship because it was the most remunerative one; she was obviously the best teacher because she charged more, you see. And we had a note from the Brighton School of Music, 'We very much request your presence at the prize distribution on Saturday'. So we went, and I heard an orchestra for the first time, this was the Brighton School of Music Orchestra. You'd probably think it was absolutely chronic now, but I thought it was fantastic, they played the *Merry Wives of Windsor* overture and I thought an orchestra in those days had a piano in it and a pipe organ. That was to fill in things that were missing, of course, obviously, and I also thought from then on that anybody who played the double bass must be over eighty, from the appearance of the orchestra. Well, they had the prize-giving thing and someone suddenly said, 'The Maud Hornsby Open Scholarship is awarded to Ronald Smith, would he come this way?'. My mother said, 'Go on, you must go, go on, up there', so up I went. To my disappointment all they gave you was a little envelope, that's all I had. Well, that was my entry to the Brighton School of Music. She was an inspired teacher, who knew very, very little; knew nothing about technique. One of my great advantages, I think, over youngsters today is that I *knew* nothing. I was a bad boy at school. In the primary school, the inkwells, we used to have inkwells, and you'd have to dip your pen in in those days; I used to put in carbide, and light them up so they had little flames coming out of them. And I graduated from there to, what was it? Sugar, sulphur, iron filings, potassium chloride, that's right; I used to mix this up and we blew the school wall up. We did all sorts of very interesting things, and I think they all give one a much greater insight into life as it really is. I know my dear old headmaster, when I took my wife-to-be along to meet him, he said, 'You know, you've no idea what you're taking on; he was the worst boy we ever had in the school. The only reason he wasn't expelled was because of his piano playing'.

So I went to the Brighton School of Music and Maud Hornsby had a large number of very, very good pupils. They all went to her. She taught by singing at the top of her voice and breaking chair legs and this sort of thing, and she used to put a concert on at the Aeolian Hall once a year in London and at the Dome in Brighton, also once a year. And there were opportunities to play; it was an absolutely new world to me, I'd known nothing about this. My parents bought a gramophone, but their music was, well, things like 'We Love the College Girls', and there was one record they bought that was Mark Hambourg playing the *Hungarian Rhapsody*. There was only one *Hungarian Rhapsody* in those days, it was number two. Liszt obviously hadn't written number one or the rest of them, and this was my treat; if I'd been a good boy on Sunday night, they'd put this on for me. I thought this was absolutely fabulous, and I began to realise that people clapped a lot after I played and this was rather nice. And I thought of composing, I thought it would be rather nice. Somebody gave me, I think a master at school, gave me a book and they rolled out lines on it, music lines like this, and I started with a waltz. I wrote something

for one of my masters at school, a clarinet piece, I think. And then, of course we were coming up towards what was then called the 'School Cert.', now called 'GCSE', and I remember the very, very boring history lessons in which we had to take notes down from what this chap read out at breakneck speed; that was the history lesson. If you memorised his notes you'd pass. Well, I wrote notes furiously during these lessons, but mine were a piano concerto, and that piano concerto got me a composition scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music later on when I was sixteen.

Going back a little bit, I also took the violin up, there was a violin class at the school, but we didn't think the teacher was very good. I competed again at the Festival. I thought I played rather well, but I came bottom. But somebody heard me, and Madam Kate Menges gave me a scholarship for a year to study with her. Isolde Menges, does her name mean anything to you? Yes? It was her mother. Isolde Menges, what's happened to her, I never know of any records or anything, she was a very famous name. She had a string quartet of course. And Herbert Menges, the son of course, I got to know very well and did many concerts with him. I didn't really enjoy these fiddle lessons, but I did learn quite a bit about the fiddle and I could write for it, which was very useful; I think all pianists *should* play a stringed instrument, it would be very helpful for them to do so. I'm always telling my pupils, an up-bow for this – you know, *yup baar* – and that gives them the idea how these things go.

I tried for one or two piano scholarships to the Royal Academy of Music, but it was coming up towards the war and I really do think there was a bias against taking on male students, because they thought they would be called up anyhow. Everybody thought the war was inevitable. It may have been that I didn't play well enough, I don't know, but I didn't get a piano scholarship. I was very highly commended, and that sort of thing. But I got this scholarship for composition, and that was fantastic, and I went to a marvellous man called Theodore Holland. His wife Ismena is still alive; she's just had her hundredth birthday, and she's in a sort of nursing home about ten minutes' walk from my house in Hythe. She's still alive, she was half his age in those days. Theodore Holland was Chairman of the Royal Philharmonic Society, when they were commissioning, or helping to commission, Sibelius to write his eighth symphony, which never came. But he was also brought on to the radio to introduce Richard Strauss after the war, when he came back. Behind the scenes he was quite an important person, but he was a marvellous composition teacher. I did strict counterpoint. When I went to the Academy I didn't even know what a triad was, I didn't know anything.

Of course, going back a few years to just before the war, we acquired a radio, a wireless it was called in those days, and I was able to twiddle the knobs when my parents weren't around and get things from abroad. I heard the Liszt E flat concerto for the first time and was bowled over by it. And on the radio in those days, British radio, there were two stations. There was a National and a Regional. And the National had a thing called – they were very unfortunate with their titles in those days, very stuffy – 'Foundations of Music'. I mean, it just is enough to put anybody off, isn't it? But the Foundations of Music, they used to get a gentleman called Egon Petri, and Egon Petri played lots of Liszt, I heard it all, campanellas and things like this for the first time in my life, I was thrilled. But I imagine, I can't remember this, in 1938 I was fourteen or fifteen, I imagine in the *Radio Times* I would have seen that Petri was going to play something by a chap called Alkan, and that wouldn't have attracted me you see. And this is one of the things with Alkan that we've always been up against. I remember some years ago, in the earlier days when I was pioneering Alkan, putting on the Concerto for Solo Piano in a cut version for a music club, I think it was in Sheffield, and I stayed with a very good pianist friend of mine, and she always used to come to my concerts. She said, 'I'm not coming tonight', so I said, 'Why not?' 'Well,' she said, 'I don't care for the programme, this Alkan is the whole of the second half'. I said, 'Do you know any Alkan?' and she said 'No, but I'm not sort of attracted by the idea of it'. So you see how difficult it is with a lot of people, and she was a professional musician. So, I digress slightly, I wouldn't unfortunately have heard the Alkan programmes, I probably wouldn't have understood them at that stage.

Well, the war came. I was turned down flat for any sort of military service on my sight. And so I made it to the Academy. I was jolly lucky, I had an orchestral piece played in a public concert by Sir Henry Wood when I was eighteen. And still Alkan was never on the horizon, nobody had heard of him, although the Academy library had a large amount of Alkan music. And they gave me a scholarship afterwards. I was the first one to have this sort of travelling scholarship to go abroad to study. It was

very generous of them. And I went out to study with Marguerite Long for a time. She was very nice to me. And of course she had been through all Debussy's music with Debussy, and she was very interesting. She was also very interesting about Ravel and she was the dedicatee of his G major Concerto. And she, I think, had been the girlfriend of Gabriel Fauré, so she was quite a lady, but I didn't get from her what I wanted so this lapsed.

I was starting to get broadcast for the first time. The Third Programme had just started in a rather experimental way, and one of the producers was Humphrey Searle, you know the name, of course, the composer. He clearly had remembered and been inspired by the Petri/Alkan programmes. Petri did two for the National Radio and two for the Regional Radio. I can't think which were which, but I know he played the Symphony at one of these, which he played quite a lot, it was a sort of star turn of his. He played what was described as 'Aesop's Banquet' and he played 'Le tambour bat au champs' which was quite correctly translated as 'The Drum beats a Salute', not as they do now as 'The Drum beats on the Field' which is crass, of course. And he played the Concerto, which got a mixed bag of critiques. One man said the end of the first movement was 'almost shriek worthy, it went on and on.' Somebody said it was a fraud; somebody else said it was a most interesting and extraordinary composition. But I think he must have made *some* cuts, although he was one of the fast boys; he might have done the whole thing in about forty-nine minutes, I don't know. I certainly couldn't. He certainly plays parts of the Symphony, particularly what I think are the slower parts, rather faster than I would. So, it's possible he played the whole thing. I do know from Anthony Lewis – you know Sir Anthony Lewis was the Principal of the Royal Academy of Music for a period – that he had been a young producer before the war at the BBC and he was in on the Petri broadcast. He told me that they gave Petri three weeks for these four recitals. They said, 'Can you do it?' and he said, 'Yes, I think so'. And he did everything from the music, and I think Lewis turned the pages for him, for the concerto. So, that's a little piece of history which you may not know.

So, getting back to the period after the war, in '49 I was very busy, I had my first job. I was teaching at Harrow, teaching little boys to try to play the piano. I used to travel up from Canterbury four days a week. It was an absolute killer. I used to catch the 6.47 in the morning. I did all my work – I was working for a BMus. – standing up because there was no room to sit down in the corridor of the train. *[A memory lapse here, as Ronald had completed his BMus in 1948 – NDK.]* The great luxury was to get a corridor and not the concertina thing between the two coaches. And, back in the early hours of the morning very often, and then up again for the 6.47 the next day – not very good. I must have been quite mad because the BBC asked me, Humphrey Searle asked me, if I would do a live broadcast of some Brahms studies. They were Opus 25 No.2 Study of Chopin, but arranged in double sixths and thirds, you may have seen it, fearfully difficult; the 'Moto Perpetuum' of Weber; the last movement of the C major Sonata, but with the filigree work in the left hand, it was like stroking the cat the wrong way, and there were all sorts of other things, the Bach G minor violin partita with the hands reversed, that's terribly difficult to memorise. I must have been mad. It was on, I believe, a Saturday night. I went and taught at Harrow literally all day, had a meal, went straight along to the studio, broadcast at 10.15 that night and caught the eleven something train home. I must have been quite crazy in those days, but I managed to get through the thing somehow.

Two or three days later I went into the Royal Academy of Music and Sir Stanley Marchant, the Principal, who'd always been terribly nice to me, came up to me. 'Ah, dear boy,' he said, 'I heard your little broadcast the other night. Very good, it's quite tricky some of those pieces.' 'Yes,' I replied, 'a little bit tricky' and I continued, 'I have a problem now. Really, I don't know what to do about it. I've had a telegram from him' (I didn't even have a telephone in those days). 'Would I play a concerto by somebody called Alkan? A concerto without orchestra, and really they've only given me three weeks to learn this, I haven't seen it yet and I wonder whether I really ought to do this. I'm in two minds.' He said 'My dear boy, there's a queue of people who'd give their eyes to get that broadcast; you must do it'. So, I think I rang Humphrey up from a call-box and said 'Yes, I'll do this. Could you *not* give me more than sort of just under three weeks?' 'Well,' he said, 'I'll have a word with Robert Collett, he's doing one of these things and see if he can perhaps swap dates with you' and he did, very nicely, Robert swapped dates and gave me an extra three or four days, I think. 'Mind you,' Humphrey said, 'You'll have to make some cuts, you know, because you've only got thirty-five minutes.' Of course, the piece takes about fifty-five

minutes, but I didn't know this, I didn't know Alkan. This huge volume arrived and I was unfortunate because I just opened it at random and what very strange looking piano music, very busy. I propped it up and tried to read some of it – I was never the world's greatest reader – but I couldn't make any sense of this. I turned the pages back – 'Pour la main gauche seule' – good gracious, left hand alone!

That was my introduction to one of Alkan's toughest pieces, but I had found the Concerto. 'Ah, this is rather nice music' was my first impression. Well, I got into it and I became quite hooked on it. The last movement was very brilliant, I played the last movement complete. I made a cut in the second movement, and Alkan's prescribed huge cut in the first movement. I got it down to about thirty-three minutes. I think four people played in that, Colin Horsley played the Symphony. I heard it for the first time on the radio, I heard his broadcast. That would certainly be, after Petri, the first time the Symphony had been played in this country. But Horsley didn't take it up afterwards, I don't know how he played it. It sounded quite a leisurely piece to me so I imagine he didn't play it with quite the fire and sort of single-minded élan that it requires. I don't know. Good pianist. And Kyla Greenbaum, I'm pretty sure they landed her with some of the shorter pieces, and Robert had some of the shorter pieces, and by then he was also teaching at Harrow. He had left the BBC – he was a producer, got fed up with it – and he taught at Harrow, why he wanted to do this I don't know. He was, I shouldn't really say these things you know, he's not here to defend himself, he was an absolute master at knowing when there were going to be field days, Harrow and Eton cricket matches, and all this sort of thing, and he arranged his timetable so that the pupils couldn't turn up because they had something else on and he was always in this room next to me practising Brahms D minor Concerto. And, between us, I had Prince Wali, who was the Crown Prince of Afghanistan I was told, whatever that can mean now I don't know, great little chap, he wasn't very good at the piano, he was very good at the drums. He only turned up about once every three lessons, Prince Wali; and King Faisal, who was younger, he was supposed to have come to me, but it was the wrong day, I couldn't take him, so he went to Robert. I don't know what happened to him, he was probably bumped off or something, poor little chap. But during our coffee breaks, Robert regaled us with all sorts of stories about Alkan. He knew quite a lot about him because he studied with Isidore Philipp, and Isidore Philipp, of course, had known Alkan, so there was a direct link there. And some of the legends, the bookcase falling, they came from that direction, from Isidore Philipp via Robert. And he also told us about the '*petits concerts*', but we didn't know quite what they were, at which Alkan used to play what *he* wanted to play, spontaneously, and people used to say 'Play Scarlatti', 'Play Couperin', 'Play Chopin', 'Play Schumann' and that sort of thing and Alkan used to sit down and play. Well, I don't know whether this is so, but that is what he was telling us at that time.

I have two things I will say now about my own impressions of Alkan as a composer; having devoted many, many years to him, having written about him, having listened to a great amount of his music, and played a great amount. I think, although things are righting themselves now, he was first of all totally neglected for the wrong, but understandable reasons. France completely scorned him for many, many years. I had a broadcast in the early 'fifties for Paris Radio. When Capdevielle, who was the head of chamber music there, asked me to submit a programme and I suggested some Alkan, I already knew Alkan then, a little bit of Alkan – this was after Humphrey Searle's little escapade on the BBC – and I suggested some Alkan. I had a letter back, I've still got it, from Capdevielle. He said, 'I'm absolutely astonished,' (in French, you see, I'll say it in English), 'I'm absolutely astonished that you suggested Alkan. Even our French pianists don't play this long-forgotten composer, who perhaps was interesting for certain technical innovations but not for any musical value. We'd much rather you played some of your English music, marvellous composers like John Ireland for instance'. So I remember the announcer, and I was suddenly transfixed while I was in the middle of this recital, the announcer said, '*Et maintenant, M. Smit va jouer 'The Dark Valley' de John Ireland*'. Oh my god, what's this? Oh, the 'The Darkened Valley' by John Ireland, of course.

When eventually a new generation came into Radiodiffusion Française, young people, and, I think, largely because Lewenthal had come over from America, quite flamboyantly, and a huge thing had appeared in *The Times*, a big article about Alkan, with pictures of him, this brought the thing forward again. I had played a certain amount of Alkan on the radio, but up to then it had gone off at half-cock. You see, occasionally they would have a little broadcast about Alkan – I won't give you any names of the people who did this sort of thing, they were, after all, friends of mine – in which they fell over

backwards not to overstate the case. You can imagine the result. I mean, of course, they had read Sorabji's *Around Music*, 1930; and they had read the van Dieren book of 1935, *Down Among the Dead Men*. Van Dieren emphasised two pieces, one of which I don't think is the best Alkan by any means, although it is rather a nice piece, which is the '*L'Incendie au village voisin*' ('The Fire in the Neighbouring Village'). And he spoke about '*Le Tambour bat au champs*' as he doubted if any such piece of so simple means had ever been written that so expressed such unmitigated tragedy. Well, I don't hear the piece quite like that, but because these two pieces were mentioned, so little bits of these were played, you heard just the opening in these talks of *The Fire in the Neighbouring Village*, which by itself, out of its context, doesn't sound particularly original, it might have been written by almost anybody you see, and then perhaps somebody else mentioned the Symphony and played just the exposition, but rather gently. Well, the exposition of the Symphony, for somebody who doesn't know Alkan at all, it could really sound a little bit like Mendelssohn, before things really happen. And so he got off to a rather weak start and there was always this sort of almost apology for him. He used to say as a start off 'Why is this music not well-known?' and then try to find why it shouldn't be any better known, which is not quite the way to do it.

Then Lewenthal came along, with quite a lot of colour and positive thoughts. I came along at exactly the same time and some people might have thought I overdid it a bit, I don't know. Lewenthal was asked to give a talk for Radio 3, by Robert Leighton, for his department, and they asked me if I could do illustrations for this. I thought it's not necessary, I mean he can do illustrations perfectly well. However, they wanted to get me in on the act for some reason. They gave him microphone tests, but for some reason they didn't take to his delivery, so they then came back to me and said, 'Would you do the whole thing?' So I did, and I did, what, three big recitals following that. That would have been in 1968. And that helped to get things going. In 1968 I also recorded some short pieces on old pianos from the Colt Clavier Collection, and three records went out, one of them was Alkan and Roger Fisk in *The Gramophone* went overboard about the quality of the music. That helped enormously, and I was asked to record for the BBC, the concerto, still with some cuts – not the big cut – some cuts to make it take about three-quarters of an hour, for Robert Simpson. And he said, 'I think the BBC would be interested in making a disc of this commercially.' However, a friend of mine who had been the engineer on this particular occasion rang me up and said, 'There's a company called Radnor that's very interested in this. I can tell you you'd get a fantastic recording from them in stereo.' This particular broadcast had been in mono, you see. The result was I recorded the concerto in – I think it must have been '68, yes – in the Wigmore Hall, and this was the first version that went out.

After this, as a sort of last fling before getting married, I went out on an adjudication tour across Canada, five months. When I came back my wife-to-be met me at the airport. She said, 'I've got one piece of rather bad news for you. You know that recording you made of the *Concerto for Solo Piano*, the Alkan, well, Radnor have gone into liquidation. Oh dear'. Well, I rang up the producer, and he said, 'Well, I think the engineer made a copy of this, but I believe he's made off with the master'. So I rang him up and he said, 'Yes, I've got it, what do you want me to do with it?' So I thought of my friend Patrick Piggott, who invented John Field you know. He said, 'I have a great friend in the Saga Gramophone Company; I think they might take it on board'. Well, I rang this man, and they said, 'Oh, he's gone over to EMI – HMV'. At this point I thought is it worth pursuing this? Well, I managed to track this chap down in his office, rang him one morning and told him about this. He said 'Look, I'm the wrong person, I'm in light music. The person you want is John Whittle'. Well, I'd heard this name, and he said 'Why don't you ring his secretary, I'll give you the number'. So I rang his secretary and I asked, 'Would it be possible for me to see Mr. Whittle just for a short time this afternoon, as I'm in London, and talk about a rather interesting record of Alkan, it might interest him. Would you call his attention to page so-and-so of the current *Gramophone*?' (Where this fantastic notice that Roger Fisk had written appeared). Yes, I was told, he would see me. So I went along there, I met him and we clicked. 'Well,' he said, 'It would be very nice to hear it'. He remembered, of course, that I had recorded for EMI with Edwin Fisher and Denis Matthews in the Bach Triple Concerto in 1950, a long time earlier. I said 'I can [get] a copy of this to you to hear and see what you think of it'. Well, he rang me up and said 'We have heard it, it's been all round the departments, and we are going to put it out'.

Round about that time John Ogdon, who had heard me play a cut version of the concerto at the Wigmore Hall, this was how he knew it, decided that he wanted to learn it. And he had learned it without

any cuts, and he had recorded for RCA, and a thing appeared in *The Gramophone* to say it was great news that John Ogdon's recording of the *Concerto for Solo Piano* by Alkan – this gigantic piece – is going to be available in a few months' time. Well, I immediately rang up John Whittle, and I said 'Look, have you seen this?' He said, 'We've seen it and it's alright, we've brought yours forward'. And mine came out that Christmas. I won't tell you what it said about the pianist, but the work got the thumbs up and it got into the sort of top four of the bestsellers for a month. That really, I think, with Lewenthal's record got us off the ground with Alkan.

I gave a long talk to the Alkan Society on the terrific saga of the chamber works, so we won't go into those any more now.

Before you ask questions, there is one thing that has just come into my mind; different things float into my mind you see. There are two very prominent members on the Committee of the Society to whom I am very much in debt. One, of course, is Richard Shaw who did his thesis on Alkan at Edinburgh University just about the time I was writing my first book. He put all his researches at my disposal; it was an absolute godsend. He also read all my stuff as well; we used to get together. We had some fun over that.

The other is Nicholas King. When we decided to do something about the pédalier works, the pedal piano works, the odd thing for organ, the odd thing for harmonium, he came down to Folkestone. We went into Holy Trinity Church, a vast Victorian church with a large organ, which had a fault, I know, one note that wouldn't work or something. Nicholas King literally sight-read onto a tape for me the entire works for that medium. It took about two hours. He went straight through from beginning to end. Really, quite a lot of this should come out on disc you know. [*In fact I had had the music a few years earlier, and Symposium issued a recording of much of it in 1988 – NDK.*] That was a red-letter evening in my life, when I heard all these things for the first time. He didn't do the pedal studies, he chickened out of those, but he did a two-handed version of them on the piano for me.

So – questions.

Q. You've given us a very interesting talk from a British perspective. I'd be interested to know if the enthusiasm is the same in other countries, like the United States or Germany or France.

A. Well, I can tell you two or three things. Certainly, with the new generation of the French, there is quite a considerable coterie there, absolutely fanatically interested. And the radio, I gave the first performance in France of the *Grande Sonate* for them, for radio. I've even been involved over there in a sort of impromptu discussion *en français* for France Culture; I'm sure it's a jolly sight less 'culture' now than it was when I started.

Also I went to Russia about ten years ago with two programmes. One was entirely Alkan. I was going to play for the Composers' Guild there and I met this man who ostracized Shostakovich, but unfortunately there was a spy exchange beforehand and this went asunder. When I arrived, they said 'We don't want Alkan. You're not French, it must be a Frenchman to play Alkan. They want all the other pieces.' I said, 'Well, I'm sorry, I'm going to play Alkan'. And I had a terrific argument. In the end I changed every programme, putting in a substantial amount of Alkan. And when I played Alkan at Kharkov the students all came on to the platform afterwards and they all shouted 'Alkan! Alkan!'; and a boy went over to the piano and by ear played quite a chunk of 'Festin d'Aesop' that he'd heard me play once. There was such enormous enthusiasm and shortly afterwards they published for the first time the 'Festin d'Aesop'. But I will never go to Russia again, they said, because I misbehaved myself abominably there by doing this.

Q. You might get let back there now.

A. Oh, it's possible, but I shan't go, I think. I'm going to Singapore, that's enough. Then, the States, of course, I gave an all-Alkan recital in New York. Got a very, very good review in the *New York Times* – they described him as an obsessive, which he is of course – obsessional perhaps the better word would be. I played shorter pieces in the first half, ending with the 'Festin d'Aesop' and the Concerto in the second half, so it was quite a programme. The audience was very enthusiastic about this. But by then Lewenthal's endeavours were on the wane – this happens in the States, they do tend to grow hot and cold very quickly. They made a great fuss of Lewenthal, then they sort of rather dropped him, which was a shame. But I really couldn't continue to keep going out there and doing it. You know, one gets older and one doesn't want to do these things any longer. I'm in my 83rd year now - one can't go on for ever.

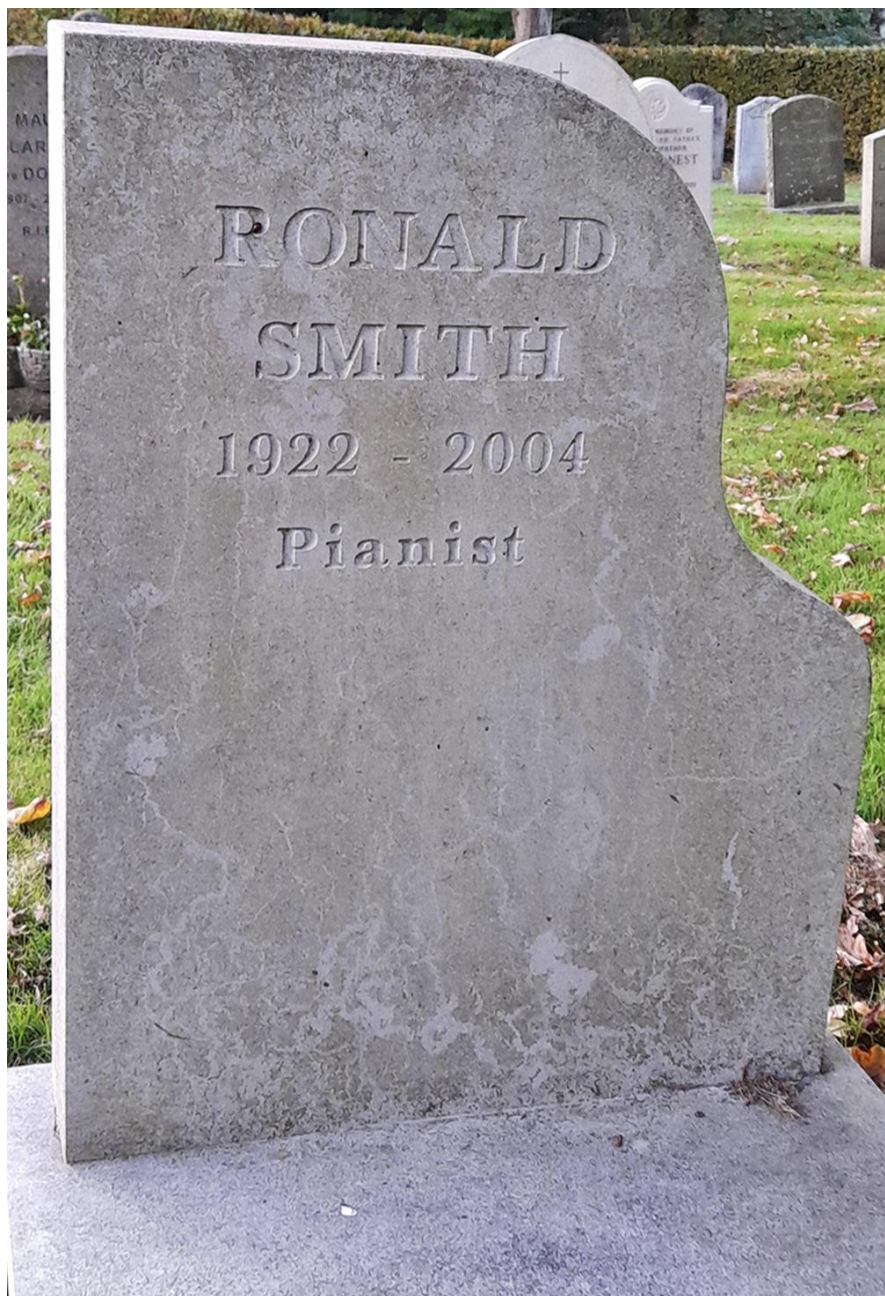
And Australia, of course. I played and broadcast Alkan extensively there and yes, they're mightily interested there. My old pupil Stephanie McCallum is over there and she's made the only recording, I think, of all the major key studies, plays them marvellously. She plays this stuff, she's done the Symphony, she's done all sorts of things. Yes, so she is carrying on the tradition over there.

Of course, we have our younger coterie of artists; quite a number feel that it's quite a good thing now to play Alkan, to put one Alkan item in their repertory, perhaps the Symphony or the 'Festin' or something like this.

My own thoughts on the great works of Alkan? I'm quite convinced now: the Symphony, the Concerto, Overture. I would say these are greater works than the 'Festin d'Aesop'. It's a marvellous piece, but they are greater works. The *Grande Sonate*, that is a very special work, you've got to view it in its historic perspective – it's amazingly original. Whether it quite works - I suppose it does in its own curious way. I think some of the greatest Alkan is also to be found in the chamber music, the three works, that I've recorded, so I know them very, very well indeed. The *Duo Concertante*, which looks so unpromising on paper, but it comes off. It's furiously difficult to play for both instruments, terribly difficult, but it is a most remarkable early piece of Alkan. And the Trio, so different, so concise, so relevant, marvellous piece – Harold Truscott thought it was the best of them. Most people think the best of these works is the later cello sonata, which of course is a wonderful piece. I think some people find the opening movement, the actual quality of the ideas a little bit Mendelssohnian, but it is not so if you know it very, very well. And the construction of this first movement is fantastic, on a very big scale. The second movement is so original in the way *Petit conte* is original, with these strange shifting harmonies. No other composer used harmony in quite this way. The third movement, of course, is a masterpiece and the finale, of course, is wonderful – *alla saltarello* – a fantastic showpiece.

A vote of thanks moved by the Chairman was carried with acclaim.

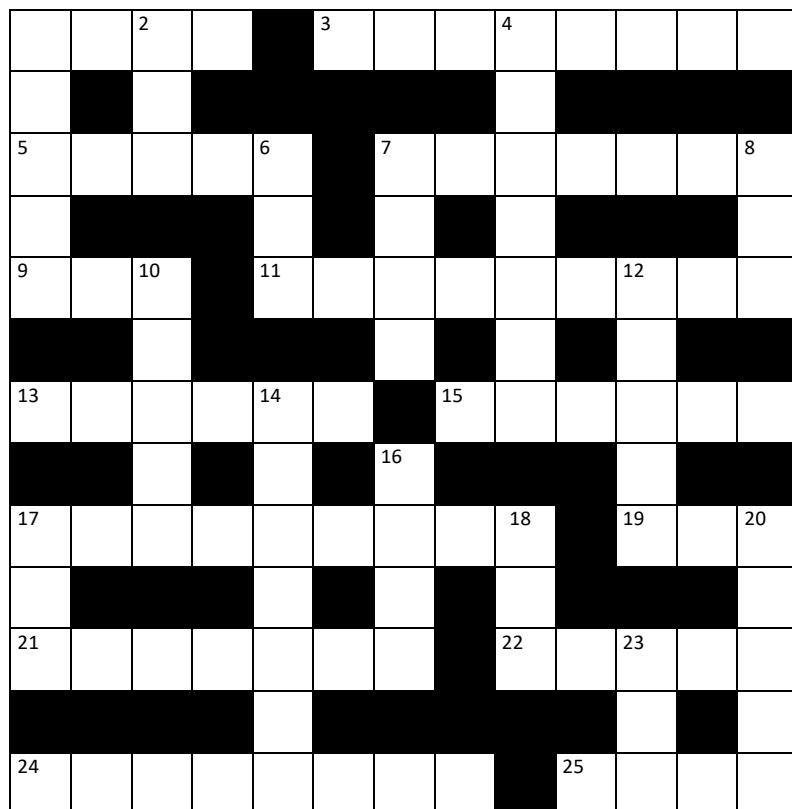
Well, it's lovely to see you all again.



Ronald's headstone in the graveyard of Saltwood church, strikingly brief in its wording, and tellingly shaped as the lid of a grand piano. Picture by Richard Shan.



The final bars of Chopin's hauntingly inconclusive Mazurka op.17 no.4, the last piece which Ronald played in public on 23rd May 2004 in a recital at Brighton, four days before his passing. Acknowledgements to the PWM edition.

Prize Crossword number 10 (Set by *Pedaliér*)

Notes

- All clues across relate to a notable centenarian this year, and can be detected from material in either this Bulletin or Bulletin 66 (available online). Clues down are more generalised. All clues comprise a mixture of cryptic and factual solutions. 11a and 10d entail transliterations.
- Completed grids can be sent to the Treasurer* to arrive by 31st July 2022. The first correct solution (drawn randomly from a hat) will win a home-produced CD of the *Symphonie* (op.39 nos. 4 to 7) performed by Allan Sternfield in 1984 and 1985.
- With acknowledgment to *En Songe* for assistance.

*treasurer@alkansociety.org, or Nick Hammond, Woodend House, High Stittenham, York YO60 7TW, UK.

Need a hint? Send an email to *Pedaliér* c/o EnSonge.Alkan@gmail.com.

Across

- Emery's ornamental book on his output was always close to hand in the studio (4)
- Promenading conductor, having taken NaCl, arrives at home (8)
- So-called triangle concerto by this composer in repertoire (5)
- Participated with Edwin in Triple Concerto by 1a (7)
- Initially so throughout his life (1,1,1)
- Taught by Pyotr in Paris (9)
- External degree achieved from hard Musicians' Union leaders (6)
- Conquering William became his wife (6)
- Royal pupil I could join in Egypt (9)
- Alumnus and fellow, perhaps feeling sheepish? (1,1,1 or 3)
- Nothing feminine about canon who made appointment at Canterbury! (7)
- Martin premiered violin concerto (5)
- Early award gained for performing toccata from a heavenly place (8)
- Artistic progeny (4)

Down

- Bartók gathers hay, we hear (5)
- Lettuce, a shortened trigonometrical function (3)
- Confusion as Count comes from Italian region (7)
- Semi-repetitive mode of transport in Far East (3)
- Abstain from food when performing op.39 no.1? (4)
- Short arbiter on football pitch (3)
- Twilled fabric produced four piano concertos (5)
- Edible ear-shell common off Jersey (5)
- Made use of temperance group linked to Faust (7)
- Nervous state, undesirable when performing (4)
- Award-bearing student at Royal conservatoire shortly missing lesson? (1,1,1 or 3)
- Dull fellow denied progress across bridge by Euclid (3)
- Invoked by Gounod in adapting the first of four dozen by 1a (5)
- Adopt ecclesiastical form of liturgy (3)



The Alkan Society

aiming to promote the education of the public in the knowledge,
understanding and appreciation of the life and work of Alkan

Registered Charity
no. 276199



The **Alkan Society**, founded in 1977, is an organization with members from across the globe. It is based in the UK and registered as an official Charity.

The Society promotes the life and work of the French composer and pianist Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813-1888). It supports regular recitals, produces publications (including a regular Bulletin) and is the definitive source of information on Alkan's life and works.



About Alkan

Alkan was recognised by Liszt and Chopin as one of the outstanding musicians of their day. His music has been championed by such eminent performers as Claudio Arrau, Ferruccio Busoni, Jack Gibbons, Marc-André Hamelin, Raymond Lewenthal, John Ogdon, Egon Petri, Sergei Rachmaninoff and Ronald Smith.

His works cover a vast gamut of forms, moods and techniques, combining rigorous classicism with bold modernity. His individual use of harmony and rhythm, extraordinary imagination, and uncompromising keyboard writing guarantee his music a unique place in the repertoire, making him one of the great figures of the Romantic era.

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- ✓ Can contribute announcements and promotions to our website
- ✓ Can benefit from our expert query service on the life and music of Alkan

Join at:

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