

THE ALKAN SOCIETY

THE BULLETIN :: OCTOBER 1984

Registered Charity No. 2761991

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Editorial Notes: Since the membership of the Alkan Society is scattered around the world, it means that in many cases the nearest member may be many hundreds of miles distant. Apart from individual interest in Alkan and enthusiasm for his music, it is the Bulletin which helps to link all together, and it is now intended to give it not only its usual learned quality but also a more personal character. To this end the editor will welcome any items of news, particularly Alkan orientated, and recitals or concerts containing Alkan's works, from members far and near which may be of interest. Short articles and comments upon any aspect of Alkan, his music and musicology are also desired. With longer articles it may be necessary to print them in instalments or hold over from one issue to another. In all cases copy may be sent direct to the editor at Mortlake - Charles Hailstone (Editor)

Jean Bartholomew: As announced in our last issue, Jean Bartholomew on quitting London for the countryside, has had to resign with considerable regret from the position of Secretary, which together with that of editor of the Bulletin she had held with distinction since October 1982. A member of the Society from its earliest days, Jean had accomplished a tremendous amount of work to ensure its viability and steady growth. She will be missed in many ways, apart from having thrown open her beautiful home in West Acton for the Executive Committee meetings and offering toothsome buffets. As a gifted pianist, Jean has performed at Society meetings, sometimes in Alkan duets with Dr. John White. Jean has gone to Long Crendon, a pleasant village in the Chilterns, with the best wishes of the Society, but her help and advice will continue unabated.

Festival of Alkan 1988: An extraordinary meeting of the Executive Committee was held in May to discuss plans for a Festival of Alkan on the centenary of the passing of the composer. Our President, Ronald Smith, took the Chair. Early initial planning is vital to avoid clashes in timing and duplication of events. The concensus of opinion was for two main London events: A piano recital in the Queen Elizabeth Hall and a concert of the chamber works. Around these a series of London based events was envisaged, with some others in, say, Manchester and Glasgow. Also put forward was an Alkan Day on the South Bank. with a Q.E.H. recital in the afternoon, a Society meeting in the Purcell Room in the evening and a celebratory dinner in between, although some felt this would prove too much for non-Alkanists and it would be better to spread the events.

The chamber concert would consist of the Trio, the Cello Sonata, the Violin Duo and possibly the Funeral March on the Death of a Parrot. The President suggested, and it was agreed, that only the best possible artists should be invited to perform these works. It was thought the Wigmore Hall would be the ideal venue. For the other concerts, to be arranged, it was felt that gifted individual members of the Society who have performed so eminently at meetings, should be invited to give the recitals. Another suggestion was that of contacting a body which had excellent relations with young artists.

Ideas for the London events included a series of lecture-recitals (e.g. by Ronald Smith) to the four great music colleges, and by others to such as gramophone societies, a master class by Ronald Smith, and the performance of the Concerti da Camera. The President was discussing with the BBC the idea of a promenade concert and some all-Alkan recitals. An organ/pedalier recital should be considered, depending upon the availability of a pedalier in concert condition, although it should be possible to adapt the pedalier works for organ. Suggested venues were the Royal Albert Hall and St. John's Smith Square. A subscription series for the Festival might be considered. Also considered were some interesting Alkan programmes for submission to the BBC, e.g. a reproduction of Alkan's Petits Concerts of the 1870's.

In liaising with other countries it was intended to contact American members and the potential branch in the U.S.A. There would also be formal steps to liaise with France. Other important matters were publicity and finance. The Committee's suggestions were thrown open for informal discussion at the conclusion of the President's lecture-recital at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in May, and generally welcomed. The subject was also discussed at the AGM in July.

REPORT OF THE MAY MEETING

Alkan in Miniature: A lecture-recital given by Ronald Smith at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Barbican, London, on Tuesday evening, 29th May.

The venue, familiar to members, was one of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama lecture theatres, with a somewhat vertiginous but excellent view of the keyboard, although the acoustic was not entirely accommodating for pianissimo and other delicate shadings. The tone was thus very bright and in some of the pieces therefore quite admirable. But in fact no apology for either the instrument or acoustic was needed since Ronald's superb technique easily overcame these difficulties, although there was an off-stage offering from a powerful soprano in an adjacent studio. The evening included all the pieces in Ronald's new Alkan disc for EMI, which is not yet released. A highly informative and often witty comment preceded each piece. For instance, what did Alkan really mean by a title such as Dans le genre gothique? At the conclusion Richard Shaw proposed a capital vote of thanks to the President and the meeting went on to discuss plans for the Festival of Alkan 1988, which had been formulated by the Executive Committee the previous day. Twenty eight members attended and eight guests, and amongst

the audience were two producers of the EMI record itself.

The works performed were: Carnival (Les Mois, bk I); Petit conte; Barcarolle, op 65 no. 6; Gigue; Promenade sur l'eau (Les Mois, bk II); Cantique des cantiques; Le tambour bat aux champs; eight Esquisses: Délire, Morituri te salutant, Le premier billet doux, Les cloches, Les enharmoniques, Increpatio, Les soupirs, En songe; Nocturne in b major op.22; three preludes: Dans le genre gothique; Une petit riens; Le temps qui n'est plus; Fa; Gros temps (Les Mois); Marche quasi da cavalleria; Toccatina; Barcarole op 70. no.6. Some of these were familiar to the audience from Ronald's record (Oryx 1803) of 1969 which he performed on mid-nineteenth century pianos in the Colt Clavier Collection. It was exciting and revealing to hear them realised upon a modern instrument.

Discography: 'Alkan in Miniature' recorded for EMI by the President, Ronald Smith, is still awaiting release. There is no other news of new or rumoured discs containing Alkan at the moment, or of piano rolls. Bits of news in this direction are always of great interest and can be sent direct to the Society's discographer and editor, Charles Hailstone, at Mortlake.

Ronald Smith's recording of the Liszt transcription of Beethoven's 7th Symphony and the Bach/Busoni Chaconne, originally due for release last May, was delayed. It is hoped that it will be available next month. The number of the recording, titled 'The amazing Mr. Smith', is (LP) 2148 (compact disc) NIM 5013.

Our President's recording of the Sonatine etc. on EMI (HQS 1247), originally released in the U.K. in 1971 but unavailable now for some years, has recently been released in the U.S.A. on the Arabesque label (ARA 6516).

As well as the Sonatine the record includes the Marche funèbre and Marche triomphale op 26, the Minuetto alla tedesca op 46, Prière op 64 no 8 and two esquisses - la vision and les diabolotins. The 3 disc set of op 39 etc. and the Grand Sonate op 33 are already available in the U.S.A.

Report of the Annual General Meeting on Wednesday July 11th at 7.00 p.m. at the Abbey Community Centre.

John Newing was in the Chair. Apologies for absence were received from Britta Schilling, Patrick Lee and Jean Bartholomew. Among the 10 members present we were especially pleased to have with us Goodwin Sammel from California (see News from America).

Treasurer's Report - there was an improvement in our financial position with £100 (£75 in 1983) in our current account and £119 (£112 in 1983) on deposit. Donations were down £113 (£170 in 1983) but subscriptions, due to the increase in subscription charges, were up £290 (£211 in 1983). Six members have taken out Deed of Covenants, which were started this year. Membership remained steady at 113.

Publicity - It was agreed that an advertisement should be placed in the Gramophone magazine for 6 months, commencing with the September issue.

Centenary Celebrations - The possibility of writing to the many international piano competitions suggesting an Alkan composition as a set piece for 1988.

Honorary Membership - It was decided that Dr. Alkan of Israel should be invited to become an honorary member of the Society.

Committee Membership - Eliot Levin accepted the invitation to become a member of the Executive Committee.

Society's Officers - Brian Doyle agreed to take over as Secretary from Jean Bartholomew. He will also continue to be the Treasurer. Charles Hailstone agreed to edit the Bulletin.

The meeting ended at 8.35 p.m.

The Federation of International Music Competitions: Since the A.G.M. we have been in touch with this organisation whose headquarters are in Geneva. They have expressed an interest in our idea to have some of Alkan's compositions as set pieces. They will be discussing it at their next meeting in April 1985.

The Gramophone: The Society's advertisement appearing in this journal has brought response and enquiries. Since Alkan commences with the first letter of the alphabet, the advertisement appears at the top of the column.

Alkan Volume II: Ronald Smith's concluding and important volume on Alkan and his music is approaching completion and its publication next year by Kahn & Averill, who first published Volume I in 1976 (revised reprint 1977), is awaited with intense interest. It is specifically devoted to the music and as such will be illustrated with music examples. It is understood that both volumes are to be translated into French for publication in France.

Dr. W.J. Alkan, M.D.: We have pleasure in announcing that Dr. Alkan who lives in Rehovot in Israel, has kindly accepted the invitation of the Society to become an Honorary Member. Dr. Alkan says that 'Voice of Music', a section of the Israel radio, is preparing a programme on nineteenth century French/Jewish composers with particular attention to Alkan, for transmission around the end of October or beginning of November, and that he has been able to render assistance.

News from America: Wallace Lafferty of Chesterfield, Virginia, wrote to Jean Bartholomew in April thanking her for the enthusiastic support for his venture for a brother Society in America. Mrs. Jane Franck Land, a great-great-granddaughter of Cesar Franck, was anticipating membership. Wallace was issuing a formal Alkan press release to the newspapers and radio stations.

Daniel L. Hitchcock of Wichita, Kansas, will be writing the notes for a disc of six fantasies by Thalberg (1812-1871) to be made by Stanley Waldoff for MHS.

Goodwin Sammel, of Berkeley, California, Professor of Piano at Mills College, Oakwood, was welcomed at the London A.G.M. in July. He was studying certain Haydn manuscripts in the British Museum library, thence going to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and hoping to visit the tomb of Alkan.

France: We have had a number of enquiries from non-members in France, the composer's natal soil, asking about the possibility of setting up an Alkan Society in that country. We are corresponding and further details will appear in our next issue.

Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris: The editor has sent a copy of the Fourth Edition of the Alkan Discography and the leaflet about the Alkan Society to the above institution. In a letter of thanks, Dominique Villemot of the Département de la Phonothèque Nationale et de l'Audiovisuel says that the items 'will be of great interest to our readers'.

Canada: Marc-André Roberge of Dons Mills, Ontario, has sent the Society a copy of his article 'Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813-1888): un excentrique enfin pris au sérieux' in Sonances, revue musicale québécoise (April), pp 11-16. It is intended to give more details in our next issue. In the meantime our thanks to Marc-André Roberge.

A German Pedalier: Eliot Levin of East Barnet, Hertfordshire, has seen a pedalier in the Nuremberg National Museum. It is exhibit No. MIR 1127, a Pedalhammerflügel by (probably) Johann Schmidt of Salzburg, dated c1795. As Eliot points out, the instrument has its drawbacks even if playable, having only about five and a half octaves on top and two beneath, and he doubts if permission would be given for it to be played. The Society would always be delighted to hear of a pedalier in good condition upon which the Alkan works for it could be performed and recorded. Note: Eliot would be happy to see any members at a concert he is organising at the Purcell Room, South Bank on Saturday 24th November, 1984 at 7.30 p.m. (£2.50). Gordon Kirkwood (piano), Carl Murray (baritone). Songs by Purcell, Schubert, Brahms, Finzi, Moussorgsky.

London Debut of Jack Gibbons: This took place at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on Thursday evening 19th April, 1984, with a fair sprinkling of members of the Society present to wish him well in a taxing programme. Jack who lives in Oxford, joined the Society at its inception and his musical progress has been followed with considerable interest and encouragement. As a boy of 17 he astonished us with a monumental all-Alkan recital at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 1979. His repertoire includes concertos and he has given recitals both in England and France. We cannot do better than print in entirety the review by Stephen Pettitt which appeared in the Times:-

Freshness of Manner

'The pianist Jack Gibbons, winner of the 1982 Newport International Competition, could be Britain's answer to Ivo Pogorelich. His playing is almost outrageously mannered yet absolutely convincing. Nothing was predictable in his account (without repeats) of Bach's Goldberg Variations, yet each and every eccentricity made some musically valid point, whether it was a phrase imbued with odd stresses and dynamics or a variation taken at one extremity of tempo or another.

The same freshness in his reaction was evident in Chopin's Second Sonata, which was again spiced with colour. Perhaps the first movement was a shade splashy, but the Funeral March's outer sections were monumentally mournful while the reposeful D flat major middle section was taken daringly slowly. The finale was likewise even more fleeting than usual with some careful pedalling heightening its ghostliness, and Gibbons's hyperactively poetic account of Ravel's Gaspard de la nuit - more considered, I felt, than Pogorelich's recorded performance - was yet both vivid and hypnotic.

Following the success of this recital Jack Gibbons has been invited to do a concerto and recording with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Brilliant new score: Writing in the Sunday Times, Felix Aprahamian said that a "brilliant new score attached to a famous silent film" first heard at the 1983 Tyneside Festival and repeated at the Dominion Theatre, London, deserved more than passing notice. He went on to state "...The Italian Straw Hat, Rene Clair's 1927 comedy based on that farce, has now acquired from Benedict Mason the joyous musical support it deserves. It was played with panache by a 32-piece orchestra under the expert direction of the versatile Alan Fearon". Benedict of London W1 is a member of the Alkan Society.

Changes of Address: The following new addresses of members have been notified:-

Jean Bartholomew, 10 Wainwrights, Long Crendon, Near Aylesbury, Bucks.
Daniel L. Hitchcock, 605 South Broadview, Wichita, Kansas 67218. USA
(Telephone: 316/688-0794)
Wallace Lafferty, 6631 Welch Drive, Chesterfield, Virginia 23832 USA.

Subscriptions: There is no change in the subscription rates:-
£5 for London and overseas members (payable in sterling)
£3 for members out of London and students.
(both these rates cover husband and wife membership).

Members are reminded that they can pay by Deed of Covenant (form available from the Treasurer). This considerably increases the value, to the Society, of your subscription.

In order to save on postage, receipts will only be sent on request.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Wednesday, December 5th at the Thomas Coram Foundation, at 7.00 p.m. (Address: 40 Brunswick Square, WC1. Tube: Russell Square). We are delighted that the distinguished young pianist Robert Bridge will be giving us a recital. His programme is designed to put Alkan's music into context. He will be playing works by Chopin (Andante spianato and Grande polonaise brillante, 'Funeral March' Sonata in B flat minor), Liszt (Funerailles, Nuages gris, La lugubre gondola 2, etc.) and, of course, Alkan (including Le tambour bat aux champs and the 'Gershwin' Barcarolle and many others).

Robert Bridge studied at the Royal College of Music with John Barstow and Stephen Savage. He won several major piano prizes there and graduated with a first-class honours degree. Scholarships from various sources enabled him to further his studies with Niel Immelman in London and with the Russian pianist Vitalij Margulis in Freiburg.

His career is blossoming steadily. He has performed at many major festivals both here and abroad. Last year he played works by Messiaen alongside the composer's sister, Jeanne Loriod, and made his South Bank debut in a Purcell Room recital promoted by the Park Lane Group. This recital received high critical acclaim and led to a series of further engagements. Earlier this year he played at St. John's, Smith Square for a live BBC broadcast, and in August he gave a marvellously clear and exciting performance of Bartok's Sonata for 2 Pianos and Percussion at the Proms.

In addition to his work as a soloist, Robert is much in demand as an accompanist. He has been on the staff of the Britten-Pears Centre at Aldenburgh for master classes given by Gerard Souzay, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Ruggiero Ricci. The recital promises to be quite an event, so please bring along as many friends as you can.

Premiere of Alkan's Violin Duo: Members may be interested to learn that Richard Shaw (piano) and Jacqueline Shave (violin) will be giving a recital at Burgh House (New End Square, Hampstead, NW3. Tube: Hampstead) on Thursday December 13th at 8.00 p.m. The programme will include Alkan's Duo op 21, a substantial piece (it lasts 22 minutes) which, amazingly, will probably be receiving its first performance in this country. Sonatas by Mozart, Brahms and Franck will also be included. Tickets will be available at the door (£2.50 including wine). Burgh House, a lovely early 18th C. building, is close to the Hampstead Tube (down Hampstead High Street for about 50 yards, turn left and go down Flask Walk which opens up on New End Square).

Tuesday 8th January, 1985 at 7.00 p.m. at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Barbican, London. Piano recital by Stephanie McCallum. The programme will include Alkan's Trois Grandes Etudes, op 76, for the two hands separately and reunited. The first for the left hand, is a Fantaisie; the second for the right hand is an Introduction, Variations and Finale; the third for both hands is a form of perpetual motion. In his Alkan, vol. I, Ronald Smith describes the opus as 'one of the most appallingly difficult pieces ever written'. He points out that Busoni played the first study and Rudolf Ganz the concluding one, but that no public performance of the right hand study has yet been traced. So the complete performance at the GSM can be virtually regarded as another world first for the Alkan Society.

Stephanie, who has previously played for the Society, was born in 1956 in Sydney, Australia, coming to England in 1978 to study with Ronald Smith. Amongst her repertoire are twelve concerti.

The March and May meetings have not yet been finalised, details in the January Bulletin.