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ALKAN SOCIETY

(Reg Charity No 276199)

BULLETIN - APRIL 1981

Report of Meeting held in the Lecture/Recital Room at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama on Thursday January 29th 1981 7 - 9 pm.

Once more the Society enjoyed the hospitality of the Guildhall School. Twelve members were present with six guests. This was a Recital Programme. For the first half, Margaret Pitts had prepared a varied and interesting set of Alkan pieces and also, for contrast, two of the Fauré Nocturnes. She played with loving concentration and faultless technique.

Alkan: Nocturne Op.22; Gigue from Op.24; from the Esquisses Op.63 No.1 La Vision; No.9 Confidence.

Fauré Nocturnes: Op.63 No.6; Op.84 No.8.

Alkan: Nocturne Op.57 No.2; from Trente Chants Op.65: Barcarolle; Esprits Follets; Tempo Giusto.

After the interval, Jack Gibbons, with his customary brilliance and dedication, played the following Alkan programme:-

Ouverture: Op.39 No.11

Esquisses Op.63: No.8 Pseudo-Naïveté; 26 Petit Air (Genre Ancien); 27 Rigaudon: 33 Fais Dodo; 48 En Songe.

Les Mois Op.74: Book 4 No.2 Le Mourant

Allegro Barbaro Op.35 No.5

Morte: No 3 of Trois Morceaux dans le genre pathétique Op.15.

After Richard Shaw had warmly thanked the two soloists, who had given so generously of their time and talent, the Meeting closed about 9.10.

Report of Meeting held in the Lecture Hall of the Trinity College of Music, Mandeville Place, on Friday March 6th at 7 pm.

Eighteen members were present with one guest. At 6.45 coffee and biscuits were generously provided by the College. Then Charles Hailstone introduced a most interesting programme:-

Raymond Lewenthal's disc BTS 24 "The Grotesqueries of Alkan" followed by performance of "Marcia funèbre sulla morte d'un papagallo", "Les Diablotins" (Op.63 No.45), Etude in A flat (Op.35 No.8) - all on M 30234 of 1971.

Michael Ponti's performance of the Concerto da Camera No.2 of Op.10 for piano and strings in C sharp minor. TV 34740 (1980)

Ronald Smith's performance of Six Preludes from Op.31 and Seven Esquisses from Op.63 played on the Schneider and Erard grand fortepianos in the Colt Clavier Collection. ORYX 1803 (1969).

Malcolm Binns' performance of the two pieces Op.50 No.1 "Capriccio alla soldatesca" and No.2 "Le Tambour bat aux champs". STLPX 8017 (1967).

This last recording was kindly lent by Dick Edwards. The others were from the collection of Charles Hailstone who provided a most helpful commentary on each disc.

Few of us had heard the small Lewenthal disc and this proved to be most illuminating. His talk was chiefly concerned with the comparison of Alkan's counterpoint with that of Mahler who was not born till 1860 and, as far as is known, knew nothing of Alkan's work. Lewenthal's examples were chosen mainly from "Papagallo", "Sonatine" and "Le Tambour".

The recording apparatus was excellent and, under the skilled management of a member of the Trinity College staff, provided amazingly clear reproduction of all the discs. The printed programme rightly stated that the "Alkan Society is very grateful to the Principal and the General Administrator of Trinity College of Music in connection with this Recital".

After Patrick Lee had thanked Charles very warmly for all the time and effort he had expended on the preparation for this memorable occasion, the Meeting ended about 8.45 pm.

Membership Subscription Rates

As you all know, so far we have just managed to pay our way - with little to spare. Now that the postal charges have risen once more and also the rates for the rooms that we hire, the Executive Committee has approved the following increases in subscriptions to be put before the AGM in July. These will apply to the year 1981/82 ie for the months between September 1981 and August 1982.

Members' children (still at school)	No charge
Full-time students	£1.00 pa
Members not in the London area	Single £1.50 pa Man & wife £2.00 pa
Members (London area) who can attend Meetings	Single £3.00 Man & wife £4.00 pa

The new (6th Edition) of Grove's Dictionary

We must all be extremely grateful for the excellent summary of Alkan's life and work contributed by our Vice-President - Professor Hugh Macdonald. We would have liked more than the 6½ columns allowed but, if one compares this with the perfunctory half-column of the third edition (1927) one can see that, in the past fifty years things have moved. I am sure that we should all applaud Professor Macdonald's final paragraph:- "Alkan's music has been seriously neglected. Pianists have been slow to explore the great range and variety of his music, not all of which is extravagantly difficult to play. But he was greatly valued by Liszt, Busoni and many others, and should eventually take his due place among the most important figures of his time".

Three points struck me as I read:-

- (1) Professor Macdonald writes Alkan's full name with the Charles- in parentheses. He does not explain why.
- (2) It seems that we shall never know the exact circumstances of Alkan's death but our President and Vice-President differ on this subject. It is true that the 'crushed by a falling book-case' story does seem very improbable, but, on the other hand, one cannot see why anyone should make up the story just for the fun of the thing. Could it be that the old man had a heart attack, clutched at a piece of furniture and brought it down with him? If this had happened, the police would not have made any special note of it and it might explain how the story came about.
- (3) "La Voix de l'Instrument" (Op.70 No.4). It has always seemed to me that the instrument referred to is the pianoforte itself - not the 'cello. It is as if the piano says that it is tired of putting in the plonk and the plonk, plonk to a singer's recitative and is quite capable of singing an interesting and expressive recit. itself.

Finally, one can look in vain for an entry under 'Smith, Ronald' although there are twenty-five others. Without making odious comparisons, this does seem to be a grave sin of omission.

Letter to Paris

The following is the main text of a letter sent to Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication - Direction de la Musique:

THE ALKAN SOCIETY

Four years ago a Society was formed in London whose object is "to advance the education of the public in the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the life and work of the French composer and pianist, C V Alkan (1813-1888)." Members of the Society consider that Alkan was perhaps the most neglected genius of the nineteenth century and they cannot understand why French people take so little interest in him. His great works, and among these I would include the Grande Sonate Op.33, the Twelve Studies in the Major Keys Op.35, the Twelve Studies in the Minor Keys Op.39 and the 'Cello Sonata Op.47, will stand comparison with the major works of Chopin and Liszt; and there are also many intriguing short pieces to be found in the Preludes Op.31, the Esquisses Op.63 and the Trente Chants (Op.38a, 38b, 65, 67 and 70). As a pianist Alkan was from all accounts as brilliant as Chopin or Liszt and, of these three, he alone was born in France.

Our Members have been sad to see that Alkan's tomb in the Montmartre Cemetery is badly neglected and the inscription hardly decipherable. (His complete name was Charles-Valentin Alkan Morhange). By contrast, the tomb of Berlioz is splendid and well maintained. It is therefore the hope of our Society that, before we celebrate in 1988 the Centenary of Alkan's death, the appropriate Authority will have done its best to put matters right in this respect. We would also like to see commemorative plaques shown on his residence in the Square d'Orléans and perhaps, also at the Salle Erard.

For your interest, I enclose a copy of our Constitution, together with a recent list of Members. You will see from the latter that the Society now has Members all over the world."

Executive Committee and Officers

In the last Bulletin I appealed for volunteers to fill vacancies in the Executive Committee, the Hon Treasurer'ship and the Hon Secretary'ship. So far I have had no offers. Anyone who can help to run the Society in any of these posts please write to me within the next month.

News Items

Knut Franke was in London again for a few days last January accompanied by his charming son (aged 13). He left us a most generous contribution to the Library Fund.

Frank Lioni has sent us a tape recording of the 'cello sonata played by Jacha Silberstein and John Ogdon at the Concertgebouw in November 1975 (I think).

If any Member can offer us a programme or part of a programme on something of interest to Alkanians we should be very glad to know about it. We do not want to call too often on the generosity of a few keen friends.

Our President has a very tight engagement programme in the autumn and it may be that we shall not be able to hear his eagerly-awaited talk on the Alkan Concerto until next January. He leaves for the USA and Canada in early February.

The next Bulletin will go out early in October.

Programme of Meetings

May Meeting This will be held in the Picture Gallery (first-floor) of the Thomas Coram Foundation, 40 Brunswick Square. This is at the NE corner of the Square, next to Coram Fields. The nearest Underground Station is Russell Square (turn right when leaving the station). Time - 7.30 pm. Date - Wednesday May 6th.

Richard Shaw will be arranging this programme and I am not yet sure of the details. The general idea is that Richard will give a talk on Liszt, Alkan and the relationship between them. Excellent pianists will play representative music of each composer which should illustrate points from the talk. This is a joint venture of the two Societies and I hope that it will be well supported. There will be an interval when coffee and biscuits can be obtained for 15p (I think).

Annual General Meeting This will be held in the Music Room (ground-floor) at the Abbey Community Association, 29 Marsham Street, SW1 on Wednesday 15th July at 7.30 pm. It is an important Meeting because, after three years, Officers and Members of the Executive Committee have to be re-appointed or appointed.

The ACA is not very near any Underground Station. Westminster (District) and St James's Park (District) are each about $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile distant. Bus No 88 passes close. Starting from the North end of Vauxhall Bridge and walking up Horseferry Road, Marsham Street is the third turning right. Walking up Marsham Street towards Westminster, the ACA is on the right-hand side. It is not far from St John's, Smith Square.

November Meeting A provisional date for this is Tuesday, November 10th. It will probably be a domestic evening.

J H White
Hon Secretary