THE ALKAN SOCIETY

Reg. Charity No. 276199

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Report of April meeting

A very successful "Alkan Day" was held at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London on April 16th, attended by some fifty members and guests. Several had come from a considerable distance, including Stockport and Edinburgh. This was a very good response to a new idea, and may point the way to future activities. We were particularly pleased to know that Mrs Elizabeth Pearce, the great-granddaughter of Napoléon Alkan, Charles-Valentin's brother, had joined our numbers for the day.

A short Annual General Meeting was held before the first main event. Sixteen members were present. Apologies were received from committee members Brian Doyle (arriving later), Richard Shaw and Howard Eldridge (both abroad with work commitments). Eliot Levin took the chair at the invitation of the President. The Treasurer was not present, but had reported a balance of some £1650 on 16 March.

The present committee (given in the members' list) was re-elected. Averil Kovacs was co-opted at the end of 1993 and her membership was confirmed with alacrity nem. con. She has offered to become treasurer when the present accounts have been finalised. Eliot reminded the meeting that it is now a legal requirement for accounts to be submitted to the Charities Commission.

Other business: Most felt that the whole-day event was preferable to the evening meetings, which have had rather small attendances. In future the business meeting might be held later in the day, so that more could attend. Averil reported that she had been in correspondence with Favard, the publishers of the French symposium on Alkan edited by Brigitte Francois-Sappey, and Scolar Press concerning a possible translation into English. Scolar are interested, but would require a major contribution from us towards the costs of translation and the royalties of FF15000 (about £1500) which Favard requires for the world rights. If anyone has any views, or practical suggestions, I would be pleased to hear them.

Peter Cardnell asked for views about publicity. We have made use of the free facility in "Classic CD" magazine: it produced about five enquiries. The "Gramophone" would be another possibility, though one would have to weigh up costs against expected results. We are in communication with the Chopin and Liszt Societies: perhaps one day we could propose an "umbrella" arrangement with a single journal. Publicity and handbills in the University of London music library and other libraries could be used. The

question of regional meetings in other locations than London was raised: however, we wonder if there is the strength of membership. Perhaps a scan of the members' list could show up an area with a sufficient concentration of members.

The radio station "Classic FM" now has larger listening figures than BBC Radio 3 and is often open to suggestions. We could offer free membership to musicians who programme Alkan's music on the radio. The colleges of music are important contacts (though the students can be surprisingly conservative in their tastes). The suggestion of covenanting subscriptions was made. Charities can recover the income tax at no extra cost to the member.

A few comments arising from the meeting: Publicity: We have a free entry in the British Music Year Book and Musical America. I was offered a display advertisement in the former but it would have been quite expensive. As appears elsewhere in this bulletin, we have a joint meeting with the Liszt Society soon. I have hopes of a joint venture with the Chopin Society, but need to discuss it carefully in committee before raising our hopes. Both classical radio stations have played some Alkan, as reported later - never enough, but we can keep trying.

The covenanting idea is a good one: it needs to be taken up with the authorities first, and needs someone to organise it. I have received about seventy subscriptions for 1994 so far: many thanks for all who continue to support us. I have not been too ruthless in drawing up the current membership list, but would ask all who would like to remain members and have not yet paid please to send the subscription as soon as convenient. It remains at £10 and should be sent to me at the address given above (a change from previous years). Postage and printing costs are high, especially for overseas mailings.

A rather obvious point: please let me know of any change of address. I usually have a few bulletins "returned to sender" and this is frustrating. If anyone can supply addresses for the following, I would be grateful: Keith Craft (last known address, Harlow), Peter Dawson (Greenwich), Mats Hugosson (Hägersten, Sweden), Daniel Millington (Hamburg).

The Alkan Day

The first event was a lecture by Dr Janet Ritterman, Director of the Royal College of Music, entitled "Asses and virtuosi: Pianist-composers in 1830's Paris". She focused on the unique environment and overall musical context which made Alkan's contribution special. Paris was a major centre for Europe, with a population of a million and eighty thousand visitors annually. As reported in journals both in Paris and elsewhere, the cultural 'season' attracted a large and discriminating group of visitors. Harold Schonberg described it as "the music capital of the world" in "The Great Pianists" (1963). Clara Schumann and other German musicians regarded Paris disapprovingly, but also as a place to make important connections. This held for pianist-composers in particular but others such as Johann Strauss also saw Paris as a "clearing-house" which gave them the "brevet" (voucher) to make their mark elsewhere. Since the time of Lully, opera had been important there, but all kinds of concerts took place: the "Concerts spirituels", suppressed at the time of the Revolution, were revived in a new form. Musical education was also significant - the Conservatoire was founded in 1795 - and instrument makers such as Plevel and Erard made the developing piano an important feature of the European concert scene.

Why the 1830's in particular? The revolution of 1830 had brought Louis Philippe to power. Other events conspired to bring several influences on style and taste together. The 1830's established the pattern of concert life: concerts were frequent and gained much attention. By the end of the decade, few pianists remained uninfluenced by developments in Paris.

Paris published lists of pianist-composers. The long-stay residents included Kalkbrenner, Zimmerman, Chopin, Liszt, Hallé and George Onslow: only the last-named was born in France, and he was the grandson of the first Lord Onslow, studying in London before Paris. [A bizarre connection today is that the present Lord Onslow has just presented a guide on BBC Radio 3 to contemporary popular music, covering such genres as Hip-Hop, Thrash Metal, Acid Jazz, Jungle Music and Ambient House...] Visiting pianists included Hummel, Hiller, Moscheles, Thalberg, Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann. Chopin thought that there were simply too many of both "asses and virtuosi" (the source of Dr Ritterman's title). The season expanded beyond Easter: there were some twelve important concert venues as well as private soirées. There were over six hundred concerts in 1838. The "pianiste-compositeur" was the norm (there were far fewer violinist-composers): concerts were regarded as the medium for new works to be exhibited to an audience containing competent judges, and the critics tended to concentrate on works more than performances. The main exception was the young performer: indeed, the age of musicians making their début steadily decreased. Their emergence later as a composer was a sign of approaching maturity. A major concert would contain a symphony as well as elaborate improvisations on supplied themes - sonata, variations, fugue. Later, improvisation was given less emphasis. When Ludwig Schunke played the Hummel B minor concerto, there was general disapproval as the work was for the composer to play. (Schunke was a friend of Schumann who helped to found the **Neue Zeitschrift für Musik**: he was a promising composer but died at the very young age of 24.)

Kalkbrenner, Moscheles and Hummel played almost uniquely their own music. However, by the mid-1830's the interpreter began to be seen as more important. Performances of Beethoven's music were beginning to take place. Alkan and César Franck were commended for their twin talents as pianist and composer (no longer hyphenated), the former being described as a "faithful and respectful interpreter". Young performers would play works by their teachers. Publication of works took place much sooner after the first performance, although Thalberg and Liszt, who were great rivals, tended to publish less in order to create the maximum impact with their more effective works.

In the early part of the century, the piano was regarded as a salon instrument. The Parisians were slow to accept it as a large-scale concert instrument: it had too little carrying power and could not sustain a melody sufficiently to be an adequate rival to the opera or orchestral concert. There were no solo concerts, only concertos or large-scale chamber works such as the septet or octet. The piano was only used for improvisations and variations on themes. As is well known, Liszt was the first to make the solo "recital" important.

As illustrations of key works of the period, Dr Ritterman ended by playing excerpts from the following works: the Hummel Septet, one of his most performed pieces: Liszt's Réminiscences de Don Juan, his fantasy on Mozart's Don Giovanni, as an example of the developing tonal possibilities of the piano: Liszt's transcription of Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique: and a performance by Egon Petri of Liszt's transcription of the Schubert song "Gretchen am Spinnrade".

She also supplied a list of works performed by Liszt in public during 1837-38: these included chamber works by Beethoven, Hummel and Pixis: Etudes by Chopin, Kessler and Moscheles: sonatas by Beethoven and Czerny: dance pieces by Liszt and Weber: his own operatic paraphrases: and transcriptions of music by Berlioz Rossini and Schubert (songs).

After this fascinating start to the day came the first of three recitals. Ronald Smith played and spoke about the solo works which will be coupled with the Nimbus recording of Alkan's chamber music: the first Chant (Op. 38/1), the Marche funèbre, the Capriccio alla soldatesca and the last three major-key Etudes. He began with Les Regrets de la Nonnette, of which he had given the London premiere just over a week earlier. I need hardly say that his introductions were as fascinating as ever - we never fail to hear some new insight from our President - and the performances carried his usual authority.

After lunch we made our way to St Giles, Cripplegate. The church can be seen from the Waterside Restaurant, but the most obvious route there would entail walking on water. Thus the Barbican Centre kept its reputation as a labyrinth worthy of the Minotaur, and the afternoon schedule was somewhat retarded. However, the journey was well worth making for Nicholas King's organ recital, entitled "Music written by and dedicated to Alkan". He opened with Franck's impressive Grande Pièce Symphonique, Op. 16. This was followed by Alkan's Petits Préludes sur les huit gammes du plain-chant, the Grands Préludes in F and B flat, Op. 66/1 and 9, the Prière in G, Op. 64/13 and Nos. 7 in F, 9 in E flat and 10 in D minor of the Pièces dans le style religieux, Op. 72. There was much fascinating music, not all familiar from recordings, and Nicholas produced some lovely sounds on the newly-tuned organ, as well as introducing the pieces with humour and clarity.

Alexander Knapp was unwell and could not give his talk on the influence of the Jewish tradition in Alkan's music. I hope that he can be invited again, or supply a text for publication in a future Bulletin. Fortunately the afternoon still had two excellent events which could run without too much pressure of time.

Ronald Smith first spoke about the chamber music, playing some tantalising excerpts from the Nimbus tapes. He reminded us of the 1846 review of the Duo Concertant (quoted in **Alkan, The Music**, p. 189) by Léon Kreutzer, son of a famous violinist (Auguste) and nephew of the dedicatee of the Beethoven sonata (Rodolphe). He concentrated on the mysterious slow movement, "L'enfer", pointing out that the first chord is actually an amalgam of the motto theme in the outer movements. The opening is another good example of Alkan's exploring the developing low register of Erard's instrument. The date of the first performance of the work, written in 1840, is uncertain, but may have been 1873. Alkan and Hubert Léonard, the dedicatee of Mendelssohn's concerto, played it in 1874.

The Trio of 1841 and the Duo have tremendous variety of style, though always typical of Alkan, who at that stage had not become a recluse. The four movements in the Trio are all in G major or minor. The first is very compact, with a short development and a recapitulation which combines the first and second subjects as a further compression. Mendelssohn apparently admired the work: he too combined two themes in his violin concerto. The Scherzo has aspects of Mendelssohn, Beethoven and Haydn, with irregular phrase-lengths and a fugal Trio with an almost "café-style" tune. The slow movement is a kind of converse to the middle movement of Beethoven's

4th concerto: instead of Orpheus taming the wild beasts in the orchestra, here the strings "tame a maverick pianist" (!). In the finale, which must be played very fast, the piano has a kind of toccata (it has been published as a Perpetuum Mobile - Etude de Velocité - in the Isidore Philipp edition for Billaudot): towards the end, the piano "runs out of steam" and the strings take up the chase; finally all combine for the rush to the finish.

The Sonate de Concert for cello and piano was published in 1857, the year when many important works appeared, including two sets of Chants and the Op. 39 minor-key Etudes. Not without reason did Alkan describe it as a "sonate pour piano et basse". Ronald regards this work as one of the greatest after Beethoven and before Brahms. The Beethovenian first movement has a complex development; the Siciliano is very contrapuntal; the slow movement, with its evocative quotation from the book of Micah ("..as dew from the Lord, as showers upon the grass: that tarrieth not for man.."), is very fine; and the Saltarello makes a rousing finale. For a final illustration on tape we heard the whole of the slow movement, played by Ronald Smith and Moray Welsh.

The final event of the day was a complete performance of the Concerto for solo piano by Thomas Wakefield. He had learned the work especially for the occasion, and played it from memory with astonishing command. It is good to report that he was able to give the piece a second outing in Cambridge three months later, as reported in detail below. After this pianistic marathon he was still able to give a sparkling account of the early Saltarello as an encore.

As I said to the audience at the end of the event, sincere thanks are due to Eliot Levin, whose idea it was and who did the greatest part of the organisation, including the all-important lunch arrangements. Grateful thanks, of course, to all the participants for a uniformly high standard, and to Eliot's helpers who kept us supplied with refreshments through a long and worthwhile day.

OBITUARY - RUTH JORDAN

I am sorry to report the death in March of Ruth Jordan (née Cohen), the distinguished journalist and author. As reported in a lengthy tribute in the Independent, she was born in Haifa in 1921, a fifth-generation Israeli. She was a scholar of Hebrew, studied French and Arabic at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and obtained a First in French and Phonetics at University College, London. She broadcast and organised programmes for the Hebrew Section of the BBC World Service; later she turned to journalism, research and authorship. As a journalist, she sent dispatches for Reuters from London to her newspaper in Tel Aviv. Later she wrote several biographies, including works on George Sand and Chopin. Her final work was a biography of Jacques Fromental Halévy (1799-1862), whose "La Juive" is the only grand opera to feature a Jewish heroine; this was due to be published in May this year. [Liszt wrote a Grande Fantaisie Brillante on themes from the opera in 1835; it is rarely heard, but it was played in the Husum festival of rarities by Stephen Hough last year.]

Ruth Jordan gave a fascinating talk to the Alkan Society in January 1990 about the Prix de Rome: the names of some of the unlikely winners, and the distinguished composers who never won, caused much amazement. She also wrote an article especially for us, which appeared in Bulletin No. 38 of May 1989, on the subject of Alkan's friendship with Chopin and George Sand.

BROADCASTS, CONCERTS AND RECORDINGS

As usual, broadcasts have been sparse and therefore welcome. Jack Gibbons played some Alkan on "Classic FM" in a foyer recital: I have no other details. Jack also had a lengthy interview with Mel Cooper in the programme "Authentic Performance" in which he spoke about his work on Gershwin. He has given Chopin recitals in the Wigmore Hall, Oxford and elsewhere, as well as his now regular Gershwin evening at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. His third volume of "The Authentic Gershwin" has been released on ASV Records, CD WHL 2082. It contains a greater proportion of Jack's own arrangements - the first two volumes were mainly transcribed from the composer's own broadcasts, records and piano roll recordings - and includes the Cuban Overture, Second Rhapsody and "I got Rhythm" variations (all transcribed from two-piano versions), the "Porgy and Bess" suite (from the orchestral version) and several of the late songs: a well-filled disc and excellently played.

On Classic FM again, Marc-André Hamelin was also interviewed by Mel Cooper, and included some Alkan items: part of the Concerto and of the first Concerto da Camera (reviewed later). Unfortunately the Radio Times carried a different billing and it was only thanks to a telephone call from a friend that I caught the last forty minutes of the hour-long programme (including commercial breaks).

On 23rd August, Kathryn Page (Lenehan) and John Lenehan were heard in "Musical Encounters" on Radio 3 playing the "Don Giovanni" fantasy for piano duet. I presume that this was the same recording that they made for a late-night broadcast during the Mozart bicentenary year (1991), when Grieg's bizarre two-piano arrangement of the C major Sonata was also heard. This time the broadcast was at 10 a.m. Like the early "Monty Python" series, Alkan seems to receive more than his fair share of broadcasts at awkward times.

The whole of Hamelin's new recording of the first Concerto da Camera was broadcast in "Record Release" - this time soon after 7 a.m. on a Saturday morning! As far as I could make out in my half-awake state, the accompanying announcement was very favourable and sympathetic.

A live lunchtime recital by Hamelin in Birmingham in April included the Sonatine and a short interview about the work. Like Georges Beck, he considers it to be one of Alkan's best works: economical in scale, somewhat dry and sarcastic, and in which the virtuosity is never gratuitous. The other works in the programme were Beethoven's G major Rondo, Op. 51/2, Medtner's Improvisation Op. 31/1 and the Sonata No. 3 ("Outcries") by the contemporary composer Ron Yedidia, born in Israel and now resident in the USA. His fifth Sonata, a lengthy and as yet unperformed work, was written for Hamelin, who described his style as Bartók, Debussy and Prokofiev mixed in a bowl and exploded! I enjoyed his performance of the Sonatine, though by his own admission it was not perfect. However, he is due to record it for CD soon.

Hamish Milne shared a programme with Jack Gibbons at one of our early meetings (May 1981), when he played works by Liszt including the rarity already mentioned, the Réminiscences de "La Juive". He is particularly known for his performances and recordings of Medtner: in the last two weeks we have heard him in a BBC studio recording of the second Concerto, and his live recital for BBC Birmingham included four Skazki and the Sonata Romantica. His recordings of more standard repertoire, such as the complete Schumann and Weber sonatas, are also very fine, and his interest

in rarer works. for example by Sterndale Bennett. Dussek. and Reubke have made him a welcome visitor in Husum three times already. However. he has been spotted at Alkan recitals given by Ronald Smith and Marc-André Hamelin. and it was a pleasant surprise to come across a BBC studio recording (i.e. without an audience) of him playing Alkan's Symphonie on 20th September. As usual. the afternoon time made the broadcast accessible only to shift workers. housewives (and househusbands). the retired and technological wizards with time-switches. It was a fine performance: like everything he plays. it was technically secure and thoughtful. Never one to go for the superficial effect. he used fairly steady speeds by comparison with some other performers'. but even so the notes went past quite quickly! He obviously takes this music seriously and he is a welcome addition to the list of Alkan performers.

In a recent edition of "Your Concert Choice" broadcast from the Barbican Centre. the recording of "Le Chemin de Fer" by Laurent Martin was played at the request of a listener. The listener's name is not known to me. so I do not know if he/she was a member: however. Averil Kovacs was also mentioned as having requested anything by Alkan. Having already succeeded in persuading Brian Kay to include a March for piano duet in his Sunday morning programme. she is certainly leading the field at the moment. Other members please copy!

Forthcoming broadcasts: You are not mistaken! It remains very difficult to obtain information much in advance. but there may be just enough time between buying the "Radio Times" and mailing this bulletin to let British readers know about a broadcast on **Thursday 20th October at 4.15 p.m.** (shift workers. etc.. please note). John Lenehan. the winner of our Centenary piano competition. will be heard playing the Sonatine and three major-key Etudes. Op. 35 No. 5 in F. No. 10 in G flat and No. 11 in B. John told me two years ago. when he and Kathryn played at Salisbury Festival. that he was due to record a programme for BBC Bristol - this must be it. Not only Nimbus CDs are a long time coming!

Another important broadcast will be the live recital in the BBC Pebble Mill Studios in Birmingham by Marc-André Hamelin on **Tuesday 29th November at 7.30 p.m.** - at last a prime-time broadcast! His programme will contain the Wagner-Liszt "Liebestod". the Brahms Variations on a theme of Handel. and Alkan's Concerto for solo piano. Details of tickets for the audience can be obtained by phoning 021-414 8333. Perhaps some of our Midlands members can at last hear some live Alkan from one of his best young supporters.

Other concerts: Several members heard Ronald Smith's recital at St John's. Smith Square. which was previewed in the last Bulletin. Before the interval he played Beethoven's 32 Variations and Chopin's Op. 25 Etudes. He then introduced some short pieces by Alkan: the world premiere of "Les regrets de la nonnette". the Chant No. 1 (Op. 38). the Song of the Mad Woman (Preludes Op. 31/8) and the Octave study (Op. 35/12). The generous programme ended with the Liszt Sonata. I could not be there myself. but read a very favourable review in the Independent: the Liszt was particularly praised. and the Alkan pieces rated a brief mention for their curiosity value.

The composer and teacher Simon Ballard included the Barcarolle Op. 65/6 in his chamber music recital in Croydon Unitarian Church on 24th September. The rest of the programme contained several of his own Serenades for chamber ensemble. excerpts from the Beethoven piano and wind quintet Op. 16 and the Hummel Septet Op. 74. and the fourth Ballade for piano by the

Croydon-born composer Joseph Holbrooke (1878-1958). Need I add that one of our committee members also lives in Croydon and suggested the piece to him?

Thomas Wakefield included the Concerto for solo piano in his recital on 18th July in the theatre at Peterhouse, Cambridge. This was an event arranged for an invited audience, including participants in a legal summer school organised by Dr Roderick Munday, one of our most faithful members (and the school friend with whom I discovered Alkan after an impulsive borrowing of Lewenthal's record from Liverpool music library). It was a typically adventurous programme: before the interval he played his own arrangement of Suppé's "Light Cavalry" overture (we found the transcription to be both Lisztian and Alkanian in turn); the solo version of the slow movement of Henselt's F minor Concerto; Liszt's Réminiscences de "Lucia di Lammermoor" (Donizetti) and the "Hexameron" Variations by Thalberg, Liszt, Pixis, Herz, Czerny and Chopin. The Donizetti/Liszt and the Hexameron are included on Thomas's CD for Symposium (no. 1091) on the theme of Liszt's British concert tour.

Although there were a few blemishes in the Alkan Concerto, it was a great success, warmly applauded by a capacity audience; for once, a particularly welcome exposure of the work to an audience who were mostly unfamiliar with Alkan. It was good to see one of our Vice-Presidents, Richard Shaw, at the concert; for once his schedule of work found him in this country and able to attend. The rarities continued with the encores: Raff's "La Fileuse" and Gottschalk's "Souvenirs d'Andalousie", his fantasy on three familiar Spanish themes including the famous Fandango. Many congratulations to Thomas for a splendid evening.

Donna Amato, who is one of the few pianists to play and record Sorabji's music, has returned to the USA after living for several years in Sevenoaks, Kent. She included "Le Festin d'Esope" in her recital in Federal Hall, New York City, on June 15th. She has also shown interest in Alkan's cadenzas for the Mozart D minor Concerto K. 466 (No. 20).

Marc-André Hamelin's series of three recitals in the Wigmore Hall devoted to "Virtuoso Romantics" was a great success. He deserved larger audiences, but those present, including a good number of our members, were very enthusiastic and wholly impressed by his wonderful musicianship. Unfortunately the press reviews were very sparse. I understand that the Financial Times carried an article. The Independent had a very enthusiastic review of the whole series by Adrian Jack, but since it appeared only after the third recital, it could do nothing to swell the numbers present. He was very impressed by the three Grandes Etudes Op. 76: he rather unfairly mentioned that the first, for left hand, would "need a bit of patching" (there was a minor hesitation at one point), but the right-hand study was "played immaculately", and found the final "attractively murky **perpetuum mobile**" the most distinctive, "with a characteristically sour charm". I timed the three pieces at 9'09", 14'33" (taken without repeats) and 4'37" - compare Smith's 10'40" and 5'26" for the first and third, and Martin's 9'13", 15'53" and 5'07". Hamelin repeated the final study as an encore, just to prove that he could do it again, and it may have been even faster! I am glad to report that there must have been enough material from the afternoon rehearsal for any necessary "patching", and all three Etudes appear on the Hyperion recording (CDA 66765) which is to be released shortly - details taken from the Hyperion advertisement in the November "Gramophone".

Adrian Jack rightly said that Alkan, "this morose contemporary of Liszt, too retiring to compete with him, will always divide opinion between those who revel in his blend of objective austerity and preposterous" (that word again!) "technical challenges, and those who hear only shallow note-spinning. Unsurprisingly, Alkan's vast cadenza for Beethoven's Third Concerto .. lends support to the second view. Yet Hamelin played it .. with such relaxed elegance, it was impossible to call it bombastic." I had to miss the recital in which he played that piece, but I am delighted to report that it too appears on the CD. The other pieces on the disc are the Romanza from Chopin's first Concerto, arranged by Balakirev; the Sonatina No. 6 (Carmen Fantasy) by Busoni; and two of his encores, Godowsky's beautiful "Gardens of Buitenzorg" and Medtner's "Dansa festiva", Op. 38/3. Therefore the only Alkan not to be included is his encore of the Op. 65 Barcarolle, which he also played in Husum this year. The Hyperion publicity includes a quotation from the Financial Times: "Hamelin's wizardry defies the laws of nature, but it is a mark of his seriousness that he used it only to illuminate the composer's musical intentions" - it may be a selected quote, but unlike those which appear outside theatres, it is probably representative of the whole article!

Ates Orga devised the series for Hamelin, and it is good to see the appearance of a section of his programme notes in "Pseuds' Corner", a regular feature of the satirical magazine "Private Eye" containing allegedly pretentious writings on the arts. "In the sense that Hummel's or Britten's Mozart cadenzas are unmistakeably Hummelian, Brittenesque experiences, so Alkan's Beethoven is unquestionably Alkanesque (like Brahms's several are definably Brahmsian): the personality, thrust and texture, the peculiar Franco-German synthesis, cannot be the work of anyone else. When the music blazes into C major **fortissimo** with a **maggiore** version of the Concerto's opening subject thundered out in the left hand counterpointed against the **marcia** finale of the Fifth Symphony a trinity of octaves away in the right, the effect is cataclysmic, the audacity belief-defying." In context it makes much more sense, of course; nevertheless, it is always encouraging to find Alkan's name in unlikely places.

Other forthcoming concerts: Next month, Ronald Smith will be playing one of the less frequently performed concertos by Saint-Saëns, his Fourth, and Beethoven's Choral Fantasia with the Worthing Philharmonic. The concert is on Sunday 20th November at 3 p.m. at the Assembly Hall in Worthing.

I feel duty bound to say that Hamelin will also be playing Alkan's Concerto for solo piano on Sunday 20th November in the centre for Performing Arts, at the University of Surrey in Guildford. This is part of their Celebrity Sunday Concert Series. I am sure that resourceful members will be able to track down a telephone number to enquire about tickets. The rest of the programme will include two Mazurkas and the Barcarolle by Chopin. He is playing the same programme for Radio France the previous day at the Conservatoire d'Art Dramatique in Paris; the producer is Brigitte François-Sappey. I presume, and hope, that Hamelin will be giving his recital in the evening, having travelled from Paris, so that really keen supporters with fast enough transport may get to both concerts.

JOINT MEETING WITH LISZT SOCIETY: Thursday 3rd November, Steinway Hall at 7 p.m. (please note the early starting time). A separate notice is enclosed giving full details. Our last Liszt / Alkan meeting was a very successful musical and social occasion. They need applications in advance because accommodation is limited (cheques payable to the Liszt Society).

New recordings: Two important CDs have already come out this year. The Henselt and Alkan CD, which Hamelin recorded last December as the seventh volume (CDA 66717) in Hyperion's valuable Romantic Concerto series, has been very well received by general reviewers and Alkanians alike. It contains both Concerti da Camera, the first in A minor, with full orchestra, being on disc for the first time. We have to thank our colleague François Luguenot of the Société Alkan for helping the record producer, Michael Spring, to obtain the orchestral parts for the first Concerto, and Professor Hugh Macdonald for discovering them in the first place. Congratulations are also due to Marc-André, who had to relearn his part rather quickly, having studied it in the published version for solo piano.

The "Gramophone" reviewer was extremely enthusiastic in his review in the August issue: the Alkan works are delivered "with astonishing dexterity and panache" and the "committed support from the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Martyn Brabbins" is rightly acknowledged. They are early works, of course, but they are "original in invention and full of melodic appeal, with more than a hint or two of the Alkan of later years". "Classic CD" remarks: "You could hardly ask for a more brilliant display of fireworks." I would endorse these words. They are outstanding performances by both soloist and orchestra and are unlikely to be bettered.

The Henselt Concerto in F minor is the main work on the disc. It was recorded a long time ago on LP by Raymond Lewenthal and Michael Ponti, and is a work which is apparently much harder to play than it sounds, particularly because of the huge stretches which are a feature of Henselt's music. It is a very fine piece of music which I am sure you will be listening to as often as the Alkan pieces. The fourth work, Henselt's Variations de Concert on a theme from Meyerbeer's "Robert le Diable", is such a rarity that no performance has been located this century. Less substantial than the Concerto, they are brilliantly effective and a great discovery.

The essay by Jeremy Nicholas is another excellent feature of this issue, which I recommend wholeheartedly.

I can reveal that Hamelin is soon to record another Alkan CD for Hyperion. It should contain the Grande Sonate, which he recorded for the BBC in an outstanding performance last year, and the Sonatine. With luck there may be space for some shorter works too - if the first two movements of the Sonata are as speedy as his broadcast performance, there should be.

The other valuable release is a collection of works, mostly recorded for the first time (outside Japan!) by Laurent Martin, on Marco Polo 8.223657. It contains the two sets of four Impromptus, Op. 32 (1 and 2), Salut, cendre du pauvre!, Op. 45, Alleluia, Op. 25, Rondo chromatique, Op. 12, Variations on a theme from Steibelt's "Orage" Concerto, Op. 1 and Super flumina Babylonis, paraphrase on Psalm 137, Op. 52 - sixty-seven minutes of largely unfamiliar music. The first set of Impromptus are pleasant enough, though not especially interesting, while the second are fascinating experiments in 5- and 7-beat rhythms: one correspondent tried No. 3 out on friends who hazarded guesses at Bartók or Ginastera! The other pieces are very well played; the piano sound does not receive full marks from me, but it is acceptable. It is perhaps not a disc for starting an Alkan collection, but there is much to interest the converted.

An organ record by Pierre Pincemaille on the French label Solstice (SOCD 116) includes Alkan's "Pro organo" in C minor of 1850. The other works, played on "le grande orgue Cavaillé-Coll de la Basilique de Saint-Denis", are by Boëly, Saint-Saëns, Chauvet, Franck and Lefébure-Wély. The disc is mentioned as a new release in the October "Gramophone": no further information so far.

Our President tells me that Stephanie McCallum's re-recorded disc of the Op. 35 major-key Etudes has at last been released on the Australian "Tall Poppies" label (TP 055). It has not been mentioned in the British literature as yet, but Tall Poppies records are distributed by the Complete Record Company and it should be possible to track it down. Ronald says that the performances are excellent, as is the recorded sound. Stephanie has also released a disc of modern Australian works and some early Boulez on the same record label.

News (again) of the elusive Nimbus CDs of the chamber music by Ronald Smith and friends: Ronald has now re-recorded his solo items - incidentally, all in single takes with no edits - and we eagerly await their appearance. The solo pieces are the last three Op. 35 Etudes, the first Chant, the Marche funèbre and the Capriccio alla soldatesca.

A much-belated review by Andrew Thompson of the chamber music played by the Trio Alkan on Marco Polo 8.223383 appeared in the May 1994 "Musical Times". He is very enthusiastic about both the music and the performances. He comments on the "grandiose rhetorical gestures" in the Grand Duo and is particularly struck by the central movement, "surely the musical counterpart of Baudelaire's poem 'Le gouffre', a vision of 'l'espace affreux et captivant'." The "classical equilibrium" of the "comparatively genial and less ambitious Piano Trio" is "violently shaken in the **lentement** movement by extraordinary pianistic eruptions which subside into the prevailing calm of the strings." Of the "outstanding" Sonate de concert, he remarks that each movement is "highly distinctive, but once again the heart of the work lies in the Adagio, astonishingly advanced in its use of fascinating cross-rhythms, and in the aquatic impressionism of the piano texture." In general, the Trio Alkan "meets the immense musical and technical challenge involved to reveal truly inspired works of formidable inventive power .. their dedication to the cause deserves the highest commendation." What will he have left to say when the Smith / Clark / Welsh set is released? All the same, such attention from this long-established journal is most welcome.

While scanning the Marco Polo advertisement, I noticed that they have released a CD of works by Harold Truscott (1914-92), a notable supporter of our Society. The album (8.223674) contains his Symphony in E major, Suite in G major and Elegy for Strings. They are played by the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, conducted by Gary Brain. Marco Polo have also released four CDs of music by Thalberg which may be of interest. Their catalogue can be obtained from Dept. M, Naxos and Marco Polo Ltd. (UK), P.O. Box 576, Sheffield S10 1AY.

THE SOCIETY LIBRARY: As promised before, a complete list of the contents of our library in the Guildhall School is enclosed, with an update of recent additions on the last page. Certain items of music are still proving hard to obtain, and ideas or donations will be welcome. We thank John White for his contribution of scores which increases the availability of items for loan. I shall be delivering Roger Smalley's scores of the "Luther" Impromptu, arranged for two pianos, the next time I visit the library, and apologise for taking so long to do so.

DISCOGRAPHY: I have been unable to update the computer discs produced by the late Charles Hailstone, having no access to suitable hardware. I am therefore extremely grateful to François Luguenot for allowing me to reprint the latest edition of the discography compiled for the Société Alkan. Members of both

societies will thus be experiencing a sense of "déjà vu". I have supplied a new cover sheet with a few comments and updates, and hope that the rest is obvious enough to non-French speakers. The early editions of the French discography were based on Charles's work, and it is good that we can help each other in this and other ways.

Bibliography of articles about Alkan: Nicolas Bell, our member at Selwyn College, Cambridge, has compiled a bibliography which is more extensive than any other published so far, and at his invitation I enclose a copy which may help researchers.

Piano et romantisme, cahiers de la Société Alkan: Our French colleagues have recently published a volume containing improved, revised and corrected reprints of articles from their early Bulletins. It is properly printed and bound, and contains an index. This first collection contains pieces by Constance Himelfarb and Britta Schilling, three by Jean-Yves Bras (on Alkan's death, his will and his son Delaborde), Liszt's review of the Trois morceaux das le genre pathétique Op. 15, Hans von Bülow's review of the major-key Etudes and Harold Truscott's article on Alkan's orchestral writing. The volume costs 75 francs and can be obtained from Sylvie Vaudier, Société Alkan, 145 rue de Saussure, 75017 PARIS. They do not accept Eurocheques.

Scores: Billaudot have recently republished the 4th Nocturne "Le Grillon" (The Cricket, i.e. the insect rather than the so-called sport), Op. 60bis.

News from Australia (who usually beat us at cricket): Rex Burgess has presented a series of no fewer than thirteen programmes about Alkan on the radio station 2MBS-FM between July 1993 and July 1994. The series was entitled "The Enigma: Alkan" and went out on Sunday evenings, usually at 8 p.m. Eleven programmes lasted an hour, and two lasted an hour and a half. The bulk of each broadcast was devoted to the recorded music, and thus the series covered most of the available output. We congratulate Mr Burgess on his endeavour. He even managed to include my name and address in the final programme.

Husum 1994: Our member from New York, Mark Morrison, made his third visit to this wonderful festival of Piano Rarities this year, and I was there for the sixth time. I was not interviewed by the press or radio this year. It was another enjoyable week. There were perhaps fewer highlights than in the truly exceptional series last year, when Enrique Perez de Guzman, Stephen Hough and Roberto Cappello all gave recitals, any of which would have crowned any festival. All the same, the recitals by Hough, Hamish Milne and Marc-André Hamelin were all excellent. Hamelin included the large Sonata in E flat minor by Paul Dukas, a work mentioned by the composer Chris Dench in one of our first ever meetings as a possible successor to Alkan's style. As already mentioned, he included the Alkan Barcarolle as an encore, as well as a delicious piece by Walter Gieseking entitled "Schorschi-Batschi Fox-Trott", which he had noticed in the exhibition that morning. It was straight out of the school of Chico Marx: I hope it appears on the CD of highlights next year. [Incidentally, Charles Koechlin, another "one of a kind" mentioned by Dench, was recognised recently by the "Gramophone" award for best orchestral record to the album of his "Jungle Book" pieces, played by the RSO Berlin under David Zinman.] The Sunday matinée lecture was given by Dr Hartmut Lück: subtitled "Ornaments in the polyphonic jungle", it concerned the composer Sorabji. It was copiously illustrated, but tended to the anecdotal and shed little light on the musical technique. A bizarre version of Chopin's "Minute" Waltz showed a sense of humour: however, most of us remained happy to stay with Hamelin's CD of the twenty-minute Sonata No. 1 as a representative sample of his music.

Here ends Bulletin 49: late as usual, but with a few "scoops" for once.

PETER GROVE