

Hedy's corner

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★ HEDY'S CORNER

In the Swiss folk song the major mode prevails, in fact the minor mode is extremely rare, yet it is found in two or three traditional folk dances. Readers may be somewhat disappointed to learn that the "famous" Swiss yodel is not a typical element of the Swiss folk song, the "yodel-Lied" being of more recent date. The original yodel is a call without words, by which the cowherds assemble their cattle, and as such limited to some few mountainous districts.

In giving a brief outline of the Swiss folk songs we would stress their specific impelling force and "timeless" character. Their appeal is that of genuine feeling and truthfulness of expression. Love songs are simple and yet poetic and often symbolic content while the attraction of ballads, as well as that of the craftsmen's songs lies in their realistic and hearty tenor. The many and highly popular satirical songs may be very short but breathe a dry sense of humour and natural wit. We have age old tunes (wedding songs and patriotic songs) which in their sober and dignified way have almost documentary value. The memory of the men who founded the original confederation, their continuous battle for freedom, their faith in God is kept alive in the old battle songs, in the songs of their heroic deeds (Song of Tell etc.), which were set to known spiritual or worldly songs and distributed by means of fugitives. Here we would also mention the songs of the cowherds and those of the mercenaries which to this day have not lost their irresistible impact. The dark and distressing times of the plague and wars are most realistically portrayed in sung prayers and death dances of gripping intensity. Death and eternal life are the ever recurring subjects of the spiritual folk songs, expression of a strong and often touchingly simple faith. Some of the oldest narrative songs or ballads have pagan traits as do the formulas and chants used to drive out the evil spirits (Alpsegen = blessing of the pastures).

One may well say that all stages and walks of life have found their echo in the Swiss folk songs — we think of the warmhearted and jocular ditties sung by mothers and children, of the merry tunes of the journeymen, the proud songs of the various professions, not to forget the humorous, simple-worded and yet often satirical verses on married life. In this field too, Switzerland looks back on old tradition and it is gratifying to note that it is cherished and kept up throughout the country. Willi Gohl, director of Music School and Conservatorium at Winterthur, has made it his life's mission to collect folk songs from the hindmost valleys and hamlets, saving them from possible oblivion. (Hedy's Corner personal annotation.)

Taken from the series "Lieder der Welt" (Songs of the World), edited by Christian Wegener, Editors, Hamburg.

Laugh a Little

The newly rich have moved into their new show-off home. They have also engaged a butler. After dinner he proposes that his master and mistress would care to take black coffee at the library. The mistress says: "Too late, the libraries already close at six o'clock!"

A policeman sees a young girl in a "mini-bikini" and asks: "What would your mother say if she saw you walking around in these bits of rag?" "Oh, she would scold me, because the bikini is hers," said the girl.

—From the Nebelspalter.