

News and articles from Switzerland...

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What about a Christmas family project?

Here is a Swiss Christmas carol

taken from my 'Swiss song book' (Schweizer Singbuch) with origin 1938! Ed.

liberal translation of text from German to English;

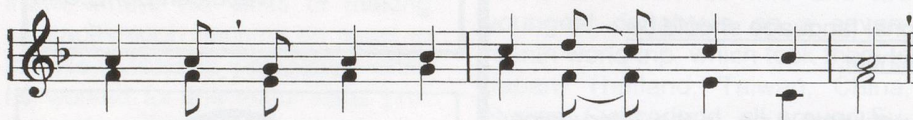
- Verse 1.* A time has come for us...a time has come for us, of great fortune!
Our saviour Jesus Christ, who for us...who for us...who for us
became man.
- Verse 2.* In a manger he is to lie, almost as hard as on rock
Between ox and donkey you lie...you lie...you lie, you poor Christ child.
- Verse 3.* Three kings came to search for you, the star lead them to Bethlehem
Crown and scepter they laid down, they brought to you... they brought to you...
they brought to you, their valuable gift.

Es ist für uns eine Zeit angekommen

Kanton Luzern. Satz Alfred Stern



1. Es ist für uns ei - ne Zeit an - ge-
2. In der Krip - pe muß er
3. Drei Kö - nig ka - men ihm zu



kom - men, es ist für uns ei - ne gros - se Gnad!
lie - gen, und wenn's der här - te - ste Fel - sen wär:
su - chen, der Stern führt sie nach Beth - le - hem,



Un - ser Hei - land Je - su Christ, der für uns, der für
Zwischen Ochs und E - se - lein lie - gest du, lie - gest
Kron' und Scep - ter leg - tensie ab, brach - ten ihm, brach - ten



uns, der für uns Mensch ge - wor - den ist.
du, lie - gest du, ar - mes Je - su - lein!
ihm, brach - ten ihm ih - re rei - che Gab.

News and Articles from Switzerland.....

New Swiss film put forward for Oscar

Switzerland has nominated "Gripsholm" - the new film by one of the country's best-known directors, Xavier Koller - for an Oscar in the category of best foreign film.

Koller already has one Oscar to his fame after winning the best foreign film award for "Reise der Hoffnung" (Journey of Hope) in 1991. "Gripsholm", a biography of the German poet, Kurt Tucholsky, opened at Swiss cinemas earlier this month to mixed reviews. Koller said he chose to make a film about the Berlin-born writer because; "Tucholsky was an incredibly multi-faceted character, full of life and yet deeply depressed. He was a fervent literary opponent of the Nazis."

Critics have described the film as a hybrid of comedy and tragedy. Koller responded by saying it was his "full intention to produce a sad comedy and a light-hearted tragedy at the same time, in line with Tucholsky's own thinking".

There is also a touch of romance in the film, offering an insight into the loving relationship between Tucholsky and his partner, Lydia. The title of the film is taken from an anecdotal tale, "Schloss Gripsholm", written by Tucholsky when he was in Sweden in the early 1930s.

Exhibition in Berne

A new exhibition in Berne highlights a turning point in the history of modern art, when colour became of primary importance.

Entitled "The Harmony of Colour" it focuses on a group of artists and friends who pioneered the new approach.

Cost of property increases threefold

compiled for the Swiss National Bank

The cost of renting or buying a home in Switzerland is three times higher than it was 30 years ago, according to a survey by Büro Wüest and Partner.

Memories of Monte Verita

One hundred years ago, a small community was established on a hilltop in southern Switzerland to escape the new world emerging elsewhere on the continent.

Monte Verita, as it was known, left a deep mark on the arts in western Europe in the first half of the 20th century. Nearly every famous artist of the period spent time in the community on Monte Verita, overlooking the lakeside town of Ascona in canton Ticino.

It began as a "back-to-nature" movement in reaction to the rapid industrialisation of Europe. But in its heyday from 1900 until the outbreak of the Second World War, Monte Verita became a haven for those seeking alternative lifestyles. The anarchists who founded the community were followed by vegetarians, Dadaists and Expressionists. Among them were also nudists, pacifists, Freemasons, feminists, Theosophists and bohemians, many of them artists, dancers or writers seeking calm and inspiration. Some lived on Monte Verita, while others just passed through. But few remained unaffected by the experience.

Among those who spent time at Monte Verita were the feminist and pianist, Ida Hofmann, the writer Hermann Hesse, and the Swiss Expressionist painter, Hans Arp. "Although no lasting and distinctive art form came into being on Monte Verita," says researcher Christine Eggenberg, "the influence of this offbeat resort in southern Switzerland is reflected in nearly every work of fiction or art created during this period."

Eggenberg says the community was the cradle of German interpretational dance under Rudolf von Laban, whose theories helped pave the way for the creation of modern dance. She says Monte Verita was also an important meeting place for Dadaists. Many of them were active in Zurich, but met in the mountains above Ascona for "happenings" such as choral festivals, choreographed verse recitals and masquerades.

Locals tolerated the community, and seem to have regarded it as something of a lunatic asylum. The community dwindled after 1940 and disintegrated totally in 1948.



Gondo residents rebuild, and ponder the safety of their village

In canton Valais, residents are still struggling to recover from the devastating floods that hit their region in October. Meanwhile questions are being asked about just how safe it is to live in the high mountains nowadays.

In the tiny community of Gondo, the clean up operation is well underway following the disastrous mudslide that wiped out the centre of the village and killed thirteen of its inhabitants.

But for many residents of Gondo, the fact that such a catastrophe could have happened at all is still difficult to believe.

'I looked up and the trees were moving down the mountain,' said Gondo's mayor Roland Squaratti, 'in ten seconds it was all over. There was no chance for the people to escape.'

Mayor Squaratti had been in the process of evacuating people from the lower part of the village near the river when the disaster happened.

No one, as town clerk Josef Escher explained, expected danger to come from the mountainside above the village.

'We never thought there would be danger from that side,' said Escher, 'we had a concrete barrier up there to protect us from rock falls, and it seems water collected behind it and then burst through.'

The people of Gondo are especially upset because all the existing emergency procedures had been followed: most people living near the river had already left the village. But since the danger came from a completely unexpected quarter, Gondo was still unprepared.

The floods in canton Valais are only the latest in a series of natural disasters. Floods in canton Berne last year, and the catastrophic damage to Switzerland's forests caused by hurricane Lothar at Christmas, have caused many to wonder whether the extreme weather conditions are caused by climate change – and weather climate change itself may make some mountain areas unsafe to live in.

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UBS warns against tying Swiss franc to weak euro...

Switzerland's biggest bank, UBS, says any attempt to link the Swiss franc and the euro would rob Switzerland of its ability to set lower interest rates and threaten the franc's position as an international investment currency. The warning is based on a study, released on Tuesday, by the UBS group economic research department in Zurich.

The study says that pegging the Swiss franc to the euro would largely deprive the Swiss National Bank of its ability to keep interest rates low, and jeopardise the franc's standing among international investors. The study also suggests that a link to the euro would undermine the franc's stability, once the European Union admits new member countries from eastern and central Europe.

It said that although the euro had brought monetary stability to countries like Spain and Italy, this was no argument for Switzerland, which had enjoyed monetary stability for decades.

If the franc were no longer independent, says the study, the security issuing and asset management businesses would decline in importance. It points out that asset management alone accounts for 50,000 jobs in Switzerland.

For the first 18 months after the euro's introduction in January 1999, the two currencies maintained a stable exchange rate of about SFr1.60 to the euro.

However, since the Swiss National Bank adjusted monetary policy last December, the franc regained its independent status. It is currently (November 2000) trading at around SFr1.50 to the euro.

The chief economist of the UBS group, Peter Buomberger, said the study should not be seen as an argument against Swiss membership of the EU. It was a judgement from an economic perspective, he added.

Blood donors banned...

Swiss people who have spent time in Britain are to be banned from donating blood in Switzerland over fears that supplies could be contaminated by blood containing the human strain of mad cow disease.

Leading banks establish anti-money laundering principles

A group of the world's largest banks, including Switzerland's UBS and Credit Suisse groups, agreed recently to a set of global anti-money laundering guidelines for international private banks.

Transport and environment minister, Moritz Leuenberger has told his counterparts from Alpine nations that boosting public transport is the only way to realise an environmentally-friendly transport policy.

Opening the sixth Alpine conference, Leuenberger said on Monday it was also the only way to prevent a breakdown of the road system. He added that Switzerland alone could not reach its aim of increasing the railways' share of international freight. He said this is where international accords were needed. The conference, held every two years, brings together the environment ministers of the signatories to the Alpine Convention, which aims to co-ordinate the use and protection of the Alps.

At their two-day meeting in Lucerne, the ministers are expected to sign a transport protocol, which obliges signatories to keep traffic below levels where it would threaten the wellbeing of humans, flora and fauna. It also demands that no new transalpine roads be built. Switzer-

land will also sign another two protocols, covering energy and the settlement of disputes. So far, Switzerland has signed five of the protocols, covering tourism, the protection of nature, alpine economy, alpine forestry and land management. The signing of the transport protocol will prove no problem for Switzerland, which has stricter laws on major road development in the mountains than those enshrined in the protocol itself. But even with the signing of the remaining protocols, there are no guarantees that Switzerland is ready to apply the convention. Parliament has refused to ratify the convention, saying all protocols must be signed first, and there is widespread resistance to some of its provisions in certain mountain cantons.

There is, however, growing pressure, to see the convention applied as soon as possible. The International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA) has asked for a heavy-truck tax to be introduced all over Europe. The organisation, which brings together, among others, the Swiss Transport and Environment Association and the Alps Initiative, also wants road traffic to be reduced and opposes the building of a second tunnel under the Gotthard pass.

The Alpine Convention brings together Switzerland, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Liechtenstein, Monaco and Slovenia.

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Switzerland's Nef wins giant slalom in United States

The Swiss skier, Sonja Nef, has won the World Cup giant slalom race recently (November 2000) at Park City Mountain Resort, Utah. Nef rushed down the 2002 Olympic run to win the event with a time of two minutes and 40 seconds.

Experts call for centralised supervision of financial sector

Switzerland must respond to rapid changes in the financial sector by creating a centralised watchdog body, according to an expert report commissioned by the finance ministry.

Off the shelf art on sale in Solothurn

Works of contemporary art can now be bought off the shelf in Solothurn following the opening of Switzerland's first art supermarket.

Swatch brings Glashütte out of the shadows

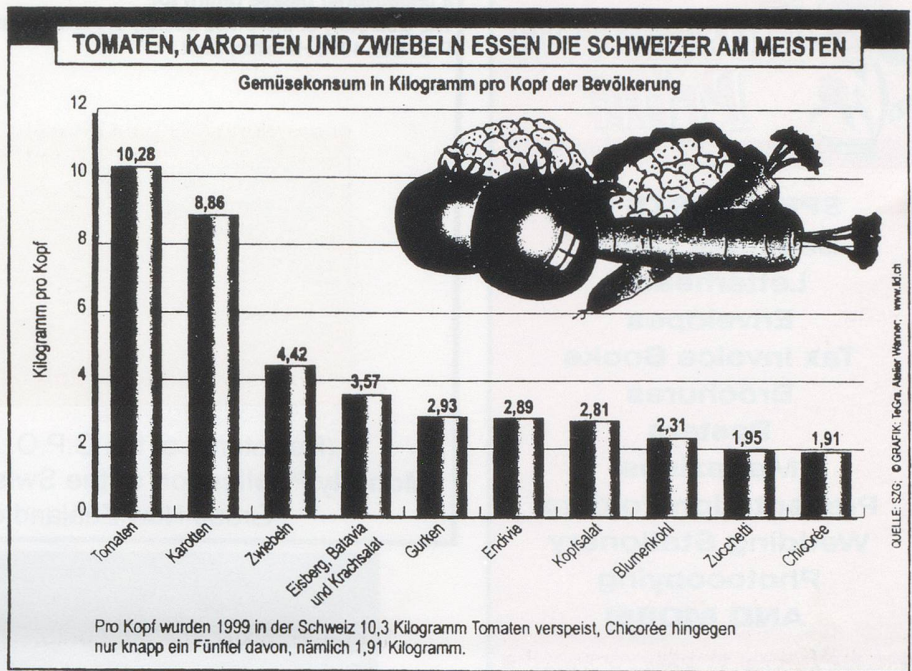
The Swiss watch group, Swatch, says it wants to establish the German luxury watch-maker, Glashütte, on international markets and boost its sales tenfold.

Swiss skier, Von Grünigen, wins giant slalom in United States

The veteran Swiss skier, Michael Von Grünigen, won the men's World Cup giant slalom race at Park City Mountain Resort in Utah on 17.November. Von Grünigen rushed down the 2002 Olympic run to win the event with a time of two minutes and 32 seconds.

Lucerne counts the cost of restoring Bourbaki panorama

The final cost of restoring one of Lucerne's main tourist attractions – the Bourbaki panorama – and building a new centre to house it will be over SFr32 million (NZ\$45 million), some SFr4 million more than anticipated.



The favourite veggies for the Swiss are: tomatoes, carrots and onions....

In 1999 the Swiss consumed 10.3 kg of tomatoes per head of population, but only 1.91 kg of Chicorée-lettuce

Swiss claim success with new cancer treatment

Swiss researchers at the Paul Scherrer Institute (PSI) say they have developed a new cancer treatment using proton rays. The scientists say they plan to speed up work on the technique to make it more widely available.

The institute said on Tuesday it had decided to accelerate the development of the treatment after obtaining successful results in four years of clinical tests. It said it had used the technique on 60 patients since 1996, and was able to stop the growth of tumors in 95 per cent of cases.

The treatment has so far only been used to treat eye cancer, but the institute says it has potential for treating cancers on the sensitive parts of the body, particularly the brain or spine. It says proton rays can be focused so precisely that damage to peripheral tissue is kept to an absolute minimum. The Spot-Scanning technique works by firing protons – subatomic particles with a positive electrical charge – at the tumor and destroying the cells. The

institute said the initial evidence suggests it is a more effective method of treatment than conventional photon ray therapy, although no long-term studies are available. The research institute, based at Villigen in canton Aargau, said it would be at least another four years before the treatment was ready for widespread use in hospitals. It added that further investment of SFr23 million (NZ\$32 million) was needed, and that it was appealing to private donors to raise a third of this sum.

The Paul Scherrer Institute is a multi-disciplinary research centre for natural sciences and technology. Together with universities in Switzerland and abroad, PSI is active in solid-state physics, materials sciences, elementary particle physics, life sciences, nuclear and non-nuclear energy research, and energy-related ecology.

SBC boss wins prize for fostering cultural awareness

The director of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, Armin Walpen, has won the Oertli Prize for his work in fostering better cultural relations among Switzerland's language regions.



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Is this kind of cheese making in Switzerland under threat as well?

The picture shows a young farmer in his 'alpine hut' on 'Stigen-Alp' near Hemberg (Toggenburg) making cheese

Swiss cheese makers face uncertain future in global market

Since the closure of the Swiss Cheese Union last year, producers of Emmentaler and Gruyere have been coping with the harsh realities of the market.

For 85 years the cheese union supported the cheese makers by buying every kilo of cheese produced at a guaranteed price. But that sort of protectionism has no place in today's global market, and now that the cheese union has closed its doors, cheese makers have to go out and sell their produce themselves.

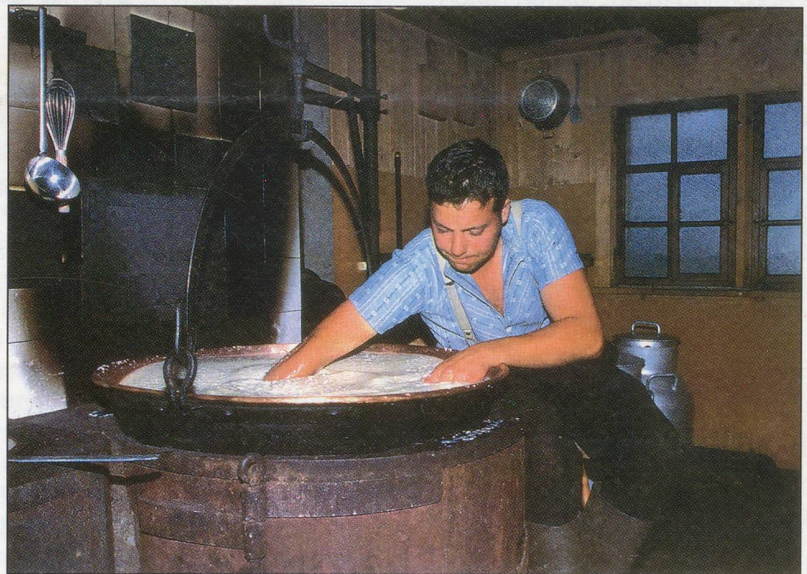
Cheese makers in Switzerland's Emmentaler region, where the world famous Emmentaler cheese is produced, are already feeling the consequences. Over the past 12 months, 50 of the Emmentaler's 450 cheese factories have closed. Most of these businesses were small: some villages supported half a dozen cheese makers. But despite being small, the cheese factories

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are an integral part of the rural economy.

The Emmentaler village of Heimiswil once had seven cheese makers in a population of only 1,600. Now only one remains, and it produces cheese only in the summer months. Andreas Hügli was the latest cheese maker to give up. "It wasn't that I couldn't sell my cheese," he says. "But the local farmers worried that, once the cheese union closed, I might not always be able to buy their milk. So now they are selling to Swiss Dairy Food. That is such a big producer they think their future is secure."

Hügli is bitter that the farmers, most of whom are neighbours he grew up with, should have abandoned him in this way. "I invested a lot in the cheese business," he said. "I bought lots of modern equipment, and I could have kept going for at least another five or six years without investing another penny. But instead, the cheese factory is empty,

and all that new equipment is standing idle."

"People used to come from all over to see us making cheese. Now they have to go to the working cheese museum in the next village, and that's not the same thing at all. And don't forget these factories were businesses: they paid taxes to the local community."

At Switzerland's Federal Office for Agriculture, Christian Häberli, who is Director of International Affairs, has some sympathy for the cheese makers. "Of course we think it's a pity when a piece of history disappears," he said. "But on the other hand we have to think about how much we want to spend hanging on to these things. Government subsidies cannot solve every rural problem." Häberli believes the Emmentaler producers have to help themselves by promoting their product vigorously, especially abroad. Three quarters of the 40,000 tonnes of Emmentaler produced annually is exported.