

The visit of the Stadtmusik Solothurn

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1962)**

Heft 1411

PDF erstellt am: **27.06.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691187>

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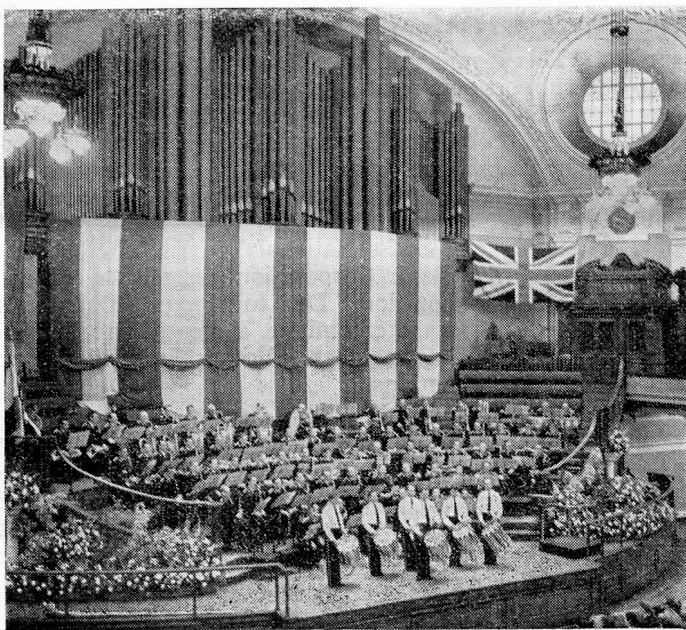
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THE VISIT OF THE STADTMUSIK SOLOTHURN

It was a keen disappointment to many that no Fête Suisse was to be held in 1962. Having just lived through a whole week of Swiss concerts, shows and parties so soon after the Bicentenary Celebrations of the Swiss Church, I realize that there would have been no room for it this year. In the circumstances I am sure we fully appreciate the wisdom of the committee's decision to wait until 1963 with the next Fête Suisse and hope that this oldest of Swiss gatherings will be as big a success as the functions which have taken its place this year.

The concert evening which reminded us most strongly of the Fête Suisse was on Wednesday, 13th June, when the Stadtmusik Solothurn gave a concert of popular music at the Central Hall, Westminster. Many of us will remember their participation at the Fête Suisse ten years ago when Mr. W. A. de Vigier, Chairman of Acrow (Engineers) Ltd., was responsible for bringing this well-known brass band over for the occasion. This time the band's appearance is once again due to Mr. de Vigier, who arranged this charity concert as an 80th birthday present to his father, Dr. Wilhelm de Vigier, Hon. President of the Stadtmusik Solothurn. The concert was held under the patronage of the Swiss Ambassador, Monsieur Armin Daeniker; The Right Worshipful The Mayor of Westminster, Councillor P. A. Negretti; the Mayor of Solothurn, Mr. Robert Kurt; and the chairmen of the Greater London Fund for the Blind, the Musicians' Social and Benevolent Council, and the Swiss Benevolent Society, in whose aid the concert was being given.

Brass bands flourish in Switzerland, and there are no fewer than 1,700 of them, with a total membership of some 56,000 musicians. As befits one of the oldest cities in Europe and the oldest town in Switzerland, its municipal band is also one of the oldest brass bands in the country. It was formed 117 years ago and was responsible for the first Swiss Music Festival for Brass Bands, in 1864. The Stadtmusik has always been amongst the foremost Swiss brass bands, and at the 1957 festival at Zurich it was awarded the first prize.



With this reputation it was expected to give a notable performance in London. It has certainly come up to and in some instances even surpassed expectations. The band, with its eighty smartly uniformed members, was again adroitly conducted by Dr. Franz Koenigshofer, who was already in charge at the previous concert in 1952. He originates from Vienna, where he was conductor of the "Radio Wien" orchestra and visiting conductor at the State Opera.

The programme was mixed and catered for all tastes. Personally I dislike bands playing symphonic music and feel they should keep to marches and similar popular compositions. There were several of these, military marches, a Swiss pot-pourri, Khachaturian's Sabre Dance, all rousing and exhilarating, at times so powerful that the vastness of the Albert Hall would have been more appropriate as a setting. But I cannot deny that I was greatly impressed by the two Symphonic Poems (Liszt and Koenigshofer). They were interesting in their strange combination of brass and harp and certainly expertly rendered.

The English friends in the audience showed their warm appreciation particularly of the alphorn blower and the three singers. Miss Susi Salvisberg, Miss Martha Perroulaz and Mr. Hans Etter gave a very creditable performance of pleasing Swiss yodel songs, and Mr. Ernst Wegmueller showed his art of blowing the alphorn in a most skilful way.

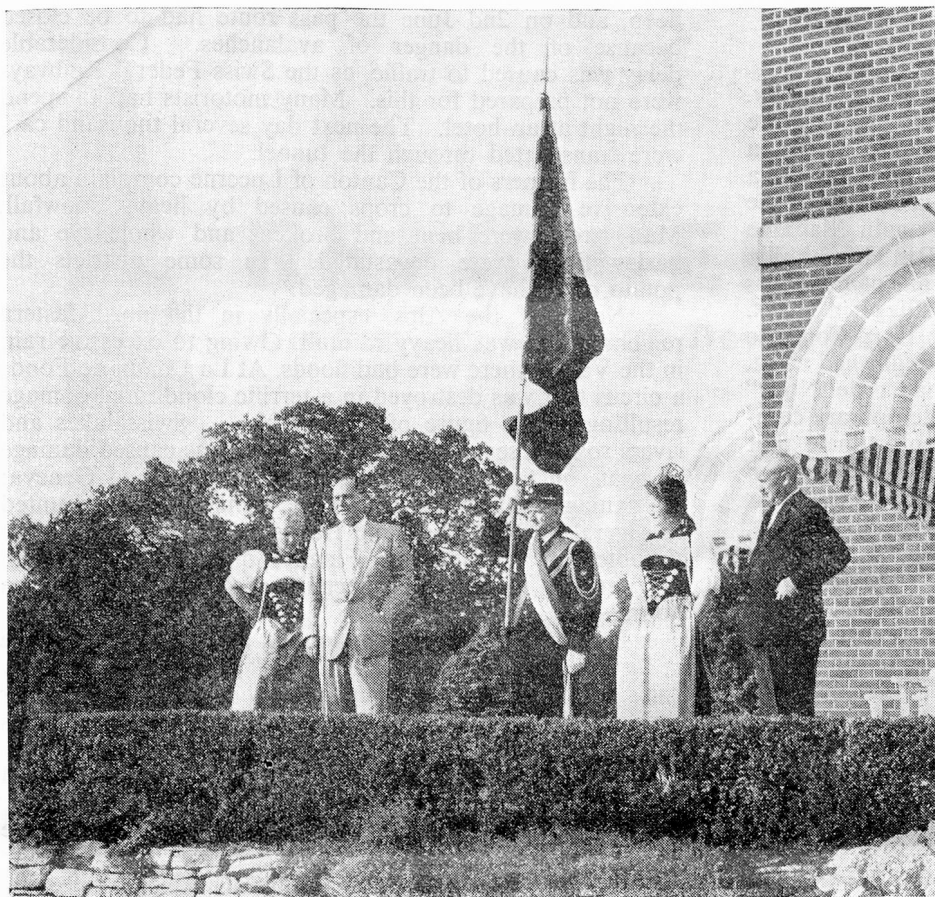
To any Basler the drums rank as high up in his affection as do the bagpipes with a Scotsman. I grew up in Basle and I fully share that feeling. To the "foreigner", particularly from Zurich, the beating of the drums is just that much noise and he shakes his head at the weakness of his compatriot on the Rhine. To me, the sound of the drumming team of the Stadtmusik was euphony and a real treat. I would not believe that the six skilled drummers could possibly have their home anywhere else but in Basle. It was only when they left the stage that I realised that their gait was unlike that of a genuine Basler, who learns to walk with his heavy drum strapped on almost as soon as he is weaned. I received confirmation later from the conductor himself that all the Stadtmusik drummers hailed indeed from Solothurn! The applause the drummers were awarded showed that the audience, even if perhaps not enamoured with this "music", at least fully appreciated the virtuosity of the performers, particularly of the soloist, the Swiss master drummer (Tambourenmeister) whose extraordinary skill was quite amazing.

The concert of the Stadtmusik was a great success in every respect. Even though the hall was not quite full, the financial result was very handsome. Thanks to the generosity of Mr. de Vigier and the support of a large number of friends, English and Swiss, over £1,700 will be distributed to the three charities. This was announced by Mr. de Vigier at a

GARDEN PARTY

which he and his wife gave at their beautiful home in Mill Hill on Friday, 15th June. Some two hundred guests were invited, including the eighty bandsmen, many of them accompanied by their wives. Amongst the prominent guests were the Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker, Dr. Wilhelm de Vigier, and the Mayor of Solothurn.

During the afternoon and evening the band and the yodellers gave more performances. The smooth lawns



Mr. W. A. de Vigier, flanked by the two yodellers, the flag bearer and Mr. H. Morf, President of the Stadtmusik Solothurn, welcoming his guests at the Garden Party.

provided an admirable stage. The band sounded even better in the open than in the concert hall. For the alphorn, too, it was a perfect setting, and the drummers could swing their sticks to their hearts' content without fear of overwhelming the audience. A sumptuous buffet was laid out in a spacious marquee, and even the proverbial bad weather did for once not spoil the arrangements which were on a most lavish scale. The host and hostess received gifts of flowers and two beautiful pictures of Solothurn from the Swiss visitors, and Mr. de Vigier in his turn presented the Band with an English silver tray engraved with the names of all the musicians partaking in the London visit.

It was indeed a very happy and carefree party greatly enjoyed by all, and my only regret was that I had to leave early because of another engagement.

The Stadtmusik spent a very memorable week in London. On the day of the concert they were entertained

by the Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker at a cocktail party at the Embassy. One evening they visited "My Fair Lady", where the solid block of uniformed men in the stalls created quite a stir. Their arrival at Victoria on 10th June was reported in the ITV News, and they went to Lime Grove to appear in the television programme "To-Night". The band was also invited to Wellington Barracks to hear one of the famous military bands, that of the Irish Guards, whose conductor, Major Jaeger, was greatly impressed by the Stadtmusik, particularly as every member of it is an amateur.

Finally, the drivers of the coaches who took the band round London during the whole week made a point of commenting on the excellent behaviour and extreme tidiness of the Swiss party!

Altogether it was a successful stay and a magnificent birthday present, not least to the three benefiting charities.
Mariann.

SWISSAIR'S MILLION BY JET

Swissair has carried more than one million passengers by jet in less than two years, its April traffic figures show. The airline started jet operations at the end of May 1960 with the Caravelle. Now it has Caravelles, DC-8s and Convair 990 Coronados and uses only jets on its major routes, which stretch as far as Chicago, Buenos Aires and Tokyo.

During April the capacity offered by Swissair was about the same as the figure for the whole of 1952 and showed an increase of 26 per cent over April 1961,

Passenger traffic rose 28 per cent and mail rose 22 per cent, but freight dropped 19 per cent, compared with April 1961. Of the offered total of 32,931,000 ton-kilometres, 16,261,000 ton-kilometres were utilised, giving a load factor of 49.8 per cent, compared with 52.3 per cent.

The load factor across the North Atlantic went up from 46.9 per cent to 50.6 per cent, due to a 14-per-cent increase in demand. The highest load factor for the month — 53.3 per cent — was on the Far East routes,