

Swiss take Saint Joan to France

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Will Members please note that
NO MONTHLY MEETINGS
will be held until September.

“SEMAINES DE LA ROSE 1963”

Each year, when May is out, the Parc de la Grange becomes the rendezvous for admirers of the most beautiful of all flowers — the rose. For Geneva, the city of parks, it was a sacred duty to pay a special homage to the queen of flowers.

Already during the war, the splendid Rose Garden — among the finest in Europe, where an “International competition of new roses” takes place each year — was under preparation. Horticulturists and flower-growers from every country meet in Geneva to present their latest creations for the appraisal of the greatest European and American specialists.

It is in connection with these manifestations and within this lovely frame that the “Association des Intérêts de Genève” has organized its traditional “Semaines de la Rose” since 1952.

This year it is a fairy-like entertainment which will be offered to the visitors to the Rose Garden each evening at 8.45, 9.45, and 10.30, the *Serenade for a Rose*, a sound and light spectacle, will be presented, that is, three performances nightly in the delightful frame of the Rose Garden. Mrs. Pernette Chaponnière, with her fine and delicate style, has written this “Serenade for a Rose” specially for the occasion; the Swiss composer, Pierre Wissmer, who lives in Paris, was entrusted with the musical score and its execution to the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, with the composer as conductor and Mr. Eric Tappy, tenor, as soloist. The voices of the narrators are those of Miss Claude Winter and Mr. Jean Piat, both members of the Comédie française. The sound production is due to the Swiss Radio, Geneva Studio, while the choreography is by Ulysse Bolle, who is also responsible for the scenery, the lighting effects and general production. Finally, the costumes were made on Michel Monnier’s designs. The spectacles will last while the roses are in bloom, that is approximately to mid-July.

SWISS FOOD FESTIVAL

Swissair organised a propaganda drive in North America during the first three months of the year. Thanks to its originality it was an outstanding success: For five to eleven days Swissair chefs and board personnel served delicious Swiss specialities, and the best wines from Swiss vineyards, in the rooms of the Hilton Hotels in large North American cities. No fewer than 14,000 Americans and Canadians took advantage of this opportunity, whilst millions watched Swissair Chef Oswald prepare a *Fondue* on Television. An attractive, illustrated brochure with recipes from all parts of Switzerland was distributed.

In order to demonstrate the success of this “Swiss Food Festival” the organisers invited a number of prominent personalities to the personnel restaurant at Kloten Airport early in May. Swissair Press Chief Max Virchaux looked after the guests, assisted by hostesses and stewards. Some of the delicacies which had been served on the American Tour were prepared for the visitors, who paid flattering compliments. [A.T.S.]

SWISS TAKE SAINT JOAN TO FRANCE

The situation with Bernard Shaw’s plays in France has not changed so very much since that day some 30 years ago when the Irish wit explained to M. André Maurois the reasons for his neglect in the latter’s country. Since Mme. Ludmilla Pitoëff created the role of France’s most beloved national saint in Paris in 1925, few actresses have attempted the part. Theatrical records cite only two names in the intervening years. It has taken 38 years and the joint initiative of the directors of the Théâtre des Célestins in Lyons and of the Comédie de Genève for something approaching Shaw’s original conception of the character to reach the French-speaking stage.

France’s second largest city, Lyons is within four hours’ reach of the capital by fast electric train. It is a pity that none of the leading critics of the Paris press were invited to make the journey for the first performance, though they regularly visit Lyons during the annual summer music and drama festival. Mlle. Simone Turck, a former member of the Grenier de Toulouse, is not only an actress of “a very definite personality”, as Dame Sybil Thorndike was described by a leading London critic in 1924. She seems to have a perfect understanding of the role and she fills it out to perfection.

This production of *Saint Joan* is certainly of a quality to make Shaw’s dramas as a whole more acceptable to French theatregoers. Although staged by a Swiss company under the management of M. André Talmès, it has been very much an international affair. Director and designer and leading actress are French; Cauchon is a Belgian; Warwick half Anglo-Saxon; and the first night was given, not in Geneva but in Lyons, as part of the exchange programme between the two cities. Those who still look upon Geneva as being an integral part of the Savoy will have found this arrangement quite appropriate.

Designed to be played not only in Geneva but also in Lausanne and other French-speaking centres in Switzerland, this production of *Saint Joan* is naturally lightweight. M. Yves Bonnat, himself a native of these parts, has introduced an element of visual stylization in the decor which works extremely well. The entire setting revolves, as it were, around an ingeniously conceived central scenic element, that might be described as a column sprouting sawn-off arches. This does duty for every scene, including that on the banks of the Loire, when it effectively takes on the guise of a tree, and in the epilogue when it conveniently becomes the headpiece of King Charles’s bedstead, a vast structure in itself that belongs wholly to the world of dreams.

Simplicity in decor is made up for in richness of costume. Here all the colour and splendour necessary to feast the eye are abundantly in evidence. One only regrets that simplicity has meant the loss of the splendid visions in the epilogue of Joan at Winchester and in Rheims, surely indispensable components of Shaw’s imagination. It has also meant trimming the dialogue a shade too finely.

We all know that M. Pierre Valde, who has got the exact measure of the Shavian dialogue and has his actors do marvels with its subtle dramatic timing, cannot follow the Shavian advice and re-time the French railway system at night, but need he have cut the Inquisitor’s masterly monologue so drastically? Especially when his own powerful and rich enunciation gave such immense stature to the role?

It was Mlle. Turck who carried off the major honours. First as the *bourgeoise* hesitatingly confronting de Baudri-

court, because unsure of her own powers, then warming to her new missionary role as she begins to feel the religious inspiration waxing inside her, and finally confused and dismayed, torn between contrition and defiance, with a beautifully controlled outburst at her recantation that sparked the emotions and blazoned forth her triumph in her defeat.

(By courtesy, "The Times", 12th March 1963.)

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