

Swiss Folklore in London

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SWISS FOLKLORE IN LONDON

It has been a cherished tradition in Switzerland to acknowledge minorities. Often, in fact, the Swiss lean over backwards to accord special treatment to their minorities, which, however, is not always appreciated.

For the past years the Fête Suisse in London has had an accent on French in as much as the visiting groups of singers and dancers from the French-speaking part of Switzerland have been in preponderance. There have been no complaints about the lack of "Schwyzerdütsch". This year, however, there has been a good bit of grumbling from some of our French-speaking compatriots because both the Männerchor Zürich and the Cabaret Rüeblisalt came from the German-speaking homeland. Taking a broad view such criticism was unwarranted and was luckily not general. But even the worst grumbler should have been more than compensated by an all-Romand performance at the Theatre of the French Institute in Kensington on 8th July. The London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique presented a programme of Vaudois Folklore. It was a most enjoyable ninety minutes of singing and dancing by two groups from the shores of the Léman. "Les Mouettes", a women's choir from Morges, was trained and conducted by Madame Lydia Barblan-Opienska, and "Lè Vegnolan" (the winegrowers), a group of men and women dancers from La Tour-de-Peilz, was under the leadership of Monsieur Georges Pluss, of Saint Maurice, who is dancing instructor of the "Association Cantonale du Costume Vaudois", a gifted choreographer and dancer.

The programme opened with Monsieur Pluss introducing the distinctive costumes worn by farmers, burghers and winegrowers of the Canton de Vaud. He then presented the artists, Madame Barblan, and Madame Marcelle Martin, a music teacher who was in charge of the folk-dance band and who herself played the accordion extremely well.

To enumerate the individual items would never do justice to the excellent singing or the lively dancing of the two groups, who both gave a splendid performance. The singing was exquisite and bore the stamp of the professional artistry of Madame Barblan, who is herself an eminent musician. The dancing was lively and natural and full of grace and spontaneity. Half-way through the programme a student of the Conservatoire of Geneva, Mademoiselle Huguette Jan, a very promising soprano, gave a recital which was much appreciated by the audience. It is not often that a good voice goes together with such a pleasant and charming personality.

It is not possible to choose a favourite from amongst the songs and dances; one lovely tune followed another, one vivacious dance was relieved by the next sprightly round. But if I may be permitted to single out one from each group it would be the last song of the choir, "La Fanfare", by the inimitable composer of bewitching tunes, Joseph Bovet. Most people in the audience were taken by "The Nightingale and the Rose" (Saint Saëns) rendered with simplicity by the soloist; but my first choice was "Les Roses de Saadi" composed by Madame Barblan, who incidentally accompanied Mademoiselle Jan at the piano. My favourite dance was the Polka by Gustave Doret from the Fête des Vignerons 1927. But then what does it matter? There was so much to choose from that everybody could wholeheartedly support the warm "thank you" that the President of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, Dr. H. Egli, expressed on behalf of the audience at the

end of the performance. The Colony has reason to be grateful to the two groups for offering such delightful entertainment while on their way to the Eisteddfod in Wales. It was their first visit to Great Britain, and I am glad to hear that they enjoyed it. Their short stay in London included a reception given by the Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker and a crowded sightseeing tour. I am sure that we Swiss in London, whether of French tongue or not, would always be delighted to see them again.

We have just heard that our friends from the Canton de Vaud have had a very successful week at Llangollen, and we wish to congratulate them heartily.

Mariann.

THE "SWISS OBSERVER" THIRTY YEARS AGO

The first issue of June 1933 carried a long report of successful Swiss Sports held at Herne Hill. A week later there was a photo of the President of the Swiss Confederation, Dr. E. Schulthess, who was Switzerland's chief delegate to the World Economic Conference in London. The second delegate was Dir. W. Stucki, who was promoted to the rank of Minister while in London. On 17th June it was reported that a new standing order was accepted by the National Council to exclude a member who had in the Council's opinion failed in his duty. The purpose was to ban Monsieur Nicole, ringleader in the Geneva riots of a few months before. He was promptly excluded by resolution for the next two sessions of Parliament. The Government had granted subsidies of eighty million francs for public utility works to relieve unemployment. The summer reunion of the City Swiss Club at Brent Bridge was also reported. At the end of the month it was reported that the "Berne Tagwache", the "Zuercher Illustrierte" and the "Thurgauer Zeitung" were banned in Germany. At Wimbledon, Swiss tennis player Mademoiselle Payot competed. The Unione Ticinese had an outing to Southsea — 110 people in three coaches. The new Swiss broadcasting station had been opened at Monte Ceneri.

The first issue in July carried news of a credit granted to the Swiss Federal Railways to enable them to reduce fares by 30% to all foreign visitors coming to Switzerland for at least a week during that summer. The same issue brought a report of the 64th Fête Suisse in London, and several photos and a description of the new building of the Swiss Legation in Bryanston Square. Next, reports were published of the opening ceremony of the Armstrong-Saurer Service Station, "We serve", on the Great West Road. From Switzerland came the news of the Tribschen House (Lucerne) being opened as a Wagner Museum. From Birmingham appeared a report on a well-attended outing and picnic of the Swiss Club. A week later we read that the son of the late Swiss General Colonel Ulrich Wille had been promoted to Army Corps Commander, and that Prof. Emil Brunner from Zurich had been made an Honorary Doctor of Divinity at Edinburgh University. Four columns of the then much bigger "Swiss Observer" were filled with a gloomy speech on "Depreciation of Currency and Exports" by the Chairman of the Oerlikon Company, Mr. Schindler-Huber. The month ended with a report that at last there was an improvement on the Swiss labour market with "only" 53,860 unemployed registered as against 3,300 more a month earlier. The issue of 29th July 1933 contained a charming essay by Sir Arthur Hort, "Memories of the Valais". For a while every number carried a column, "London Gossip", by Mops.