

# Music in Switzerland

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

Objektyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): **- (1969)**

Heft 1564

PDF erstellt am: **09.08.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-688400>

## **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern.

Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden.

Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

## **Haftungsausschluss**

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

Ein Dienst der *ETH-Bibliothek*  
ETH Zürich, Rämistrasse 101, 8092 Zürich, Schweiz, [www.library.ethz.ch](http://www.library.ethz.ch)

<http://www.e-periodica.ch>

# The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

## The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain

Advisory Council: R. J. KELLER (Chairman), GOTTFRIED KELLER (Vice-Chairman), G. BODMER (Swiss Embassy), O. F. BOEHRINGER, J. EUSEBIO, A. KUNZ, C. NATER, R. M. SUESS.

EDITED BY MRS. MARIANN MEIER WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE SWISS COLONY IN GREAT BRITAIN

Telephone: 01-253 2321/2.

Published Twice Monthly at 23 LEONARD STREET, E.C.2.

Telegrams: PAPERWYSE STOCK LONDON

Vol. 55 No. 1564

FRIDAY, 28th FEBRUARY 1969

## MUSIC IN SWITZERLAND

"Unity in the midst of diversity". Any analysis of intellectual or artistic life in a country like Switzerland must almost inevitably issue in some such formula as this. In general, it is easier to discover the elements of diversity than those of unity. Is not art, after all, the language of subtle shades, and does it not reflect differences in mental outlook? It has also been said that one can hardly speak of Swiss music, but only of music created in Switzerland or by Swiss composers.

Naturally, each ethnic region of the country is closely linked up with the German, French and Italian cultures respectively, and the historical development of the three main Swiss sub-cultures has been one with the corresponding cultures across the frontiers. In the history of music, Switzerland as such plays but an insignificant role. Mention could be made, however, of Ludwig Senfl, who in the sixteenth century won transitory fame for his country. Nevertheless, one should not minimise the importance of religious centres such as the Abbeys of Einsiedeln and St. Gall and what they contributed to the evolution of Gregorian chant. The Reformation, to be sure, curbed musical development, but, later on, with its magnificent psalms it contributed to the birth of a style to which certain French-Swiss composers are still indebted.

However, there are few countries where different influences and trends of thought have confronted one another so intimately and have become so closely interwoven. Until the end of the nineteenth century, German-Swiss composers set the pace in French-speaking Switzerland. It needed a man like Ernest Ansermet (who in 1915 founded the "Orchestre de la Suisse Romande") to make that part of the country fully aware of its Latin character and cause the French-Swiss to seek inspiration in the music of Debussy. At the same time, Ansermet was to champion the work of Hindemith and the prophetic music of Alban Berg in conservative German-speaking Switzerland. Now the situation has been reversed. Whilst the name of Ernest Ansermet will always represent steadfast defence of contemporary music, he was later much more anxious to mark the limits of a development, some aspects of which he himself regards as aberrations, and would not tolerate. This applies, for instance, to atonal music, and Ansermet liked to stress certain values which, in his opinion, emerged by a process of natural evolution, as exemplified by the music of Bartok, Hindemith, Honegger, Frank Martin and Stravinsky (with the exception of his most recent works).

Moreover, today is the major German-Swiss cities of Basle and Zurich which are most concerned with contemporary and experimental music in Switzerland. Paul

Sacher with the Basle Chamber Orchestra and the Collegium Musicum Zurich has made a great contribution in this field during the past twenty years. The youthful Raeto Tschupp with his "Camerata", Zurich, has followed in Sacher's footsteps with increasing success and genuine engagement. He has presented the world premières of many works by modern Swiss and other composers. Other ensembles which should be named in this context, are the Beromuenster Radio Orchestra (Erich Schmid first conductor) and the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra (for many years under Hans Rosbaud, followed by Rudolf Kempe). The Lausanne Chamber Orchestra and the Winterthur Philharmonic, both under the baton of Victor Desarzens, should also be mentioned. The Zurich Opera House, too, has contributed to the history of opera by presenting a number of important world premières, including Hindemith's "Mathis der Maler" (1938), Alban Berg's "Lulu" (1937), the first performance of the second version of Hindemith's "Cardillac" (1952) and the first stage presentation of Schoenberg's "Moses and Aaron" (1957). The opera "Macbeth" by the Swiss composer Ernest Bloch (1880) has recently been given its première in Geneva. Bloch lived prominently in U.S.A. from 1916 to his death in 1959.

Nevertheless, so-called *avant-garde* music as represented internationally by Boulez, Stockhausen or Nono has so far not enjoyed a very favourable reception in Switzerland; on the contrary, both the public and musicians are rather negatively disposed toward it. However, groups are being formed here and there to foster and propagate this new kind of music. In Geneva, for instance, concerts for this purpose are arranged, in her home, by ex-Queen Marie-Josée of Italy as well as by the international musical competition for composers which she has created. Concerts are likewise organised by the movement initiated by Jacques Guyonnet, a young musician. The Basle Conservatoire has successively called on Pierre Boulez, Stockhausen and Pousseur, qualified exponents of *avant-garde* music, to give courses. Moreover, certain radio studios have become centres of research in the field of electronic music.

This article, of course, can offer but a very fragmentary picture of musical performances in Switzerland, a country which, situated as it is in the heart of Europe, has become the meeting-place of all the great artists. The big cities have concerts practically all the year round, and the programmes offered are such that even an ever increasing public can hardly do justice to them, despite profound and widespread interest and understanding. The idea of international music festivals has taken firm root in

Switzerland as well, and the Festivals of Lucerne, Zurich and Montreux attract international audiences. Furthermore, one should not overlook the importance of choral singing and the part it plays in Swiss musical education, particularly in German-speaking Switzerland, where it is a deeply rooted institution. While the French-speaking Swiss, being greater individualists, show less spontaneous interest in this art, the large vocal *ensembles* of the Canton of Vaud, for instance, are second to none in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. In fact, the most impressive popular festival, a form of celebration so dear to the Swiss, is the famous "Fête des Vignerons", which is staged at Vevey. In Lugano, the vocal *ensemble* directed by Erwin Löhrer has attained an international status, recognised in the shape of a recent *Grand Prix du Disque*.

Mention should also be made of leading Swiss orchestras, conductors and soloists, of schools of music and opera houses. We need only refer to the excellence of Switzerland's great symphony orchestras: the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, known throughout the world for its many recordings, several of which have received *Grand Prix*; the Tonhalle Orchestra of Zurich, a very active organisation, which is especially concerned with arousing interest in music among young people; the orchestra of Basle, the Berne orchestra, that of Winterthur, a small city where generous patrons render possible an artistic activity worthy of a large metropolis. Chamber music groups like the "Festival Strings" of Lucerne or the *ensemble* maintained in Zurich by Edmond de Stoutz are in a position to undertake international tours. The same is true of a group like the "Schola Cantorum" of Basle, which was created by August Wenzinger and which specialises in early music.

Switzerland has no National Conservatoire, but every sizeable town has one; that of Geneva has achieved a certain renown by the creation of its International Competition for Musical Performance, which every year attracts the best young musicians from all over the world. And there should be mentioned in passing the constantly growing activity of the "Jeunesses Musicales" movement.

Switzerland has always been a favourite place of residence for numerous great artists. Stravinsky, Paderewsky, Furtwängler, von Hoesslin, Cortot, Lipatti, Clara Haskil, Segovia, Markevitch — to limit ourselves to the recent past — lived at one time or another on the shores of Lake Geneva. At the present time Carl Schuricht, Joseph Szigeti, Pierre Fournier, Paul Klecki, Nikita Magaloff have settled here, the latter two having even become Swiss citizens; the same also applies to Wilhelm Backhaus, resident in the Ticino, while Ferenc Fricsay settled by the Lake of Constance. We should not forget either that Paul Hindemith who lived for several years in the Valais, was at the time of his death a professor at the Zurich Conservatoire.

Considering these many different trends, can one speak of Switzerland as having produced a leading group of composers whose common characteristics could be said to form a "school"? There is no doubt that here diversity rules the field, but then the same nowadays applies to any national school, music having become utterly international. We do have, however, a certain Swiss school, which is inspired by a common ideal and imbued with a spirit which is difficult to describe precisely but which is definitely "Swiss".

Arthur Honegger, a composer of international repute, would nevertheless appear as the ideal personification of

the Swiss spirit, owing to the natural synthesis of his German-Swiss origin and his French culture. At the present time one might regard Frank Martin as an artist of much the same kind of fusion, although the results are very different.

In order to present an accurate picture of the Swiss school, we find that we have to offer a list of composers nearly all of whom are over 50, or even over 60. Is this to be attributed to the fact that the lack of firm stylistic conventions has encouraged a certain licence, a formlessness in the work of younger composers?

One of the best ways of getting acquainted with Swiss musical production is offered by the Association of Swiss Musicians, founded in 1900. The annual conventions of this organisation provide an opportunity to hear a number of selected works, and they also give the musicians a chance to establish personal contacts. If one attended these conventions year by year, one could note that the influence of German neo-romanticism and of French impressionism which had marked German-Swiss and French-Swiss production, respectively, has grown progressively weaker — and this was to be expected. Othmar Schoeck — who in many of his works appeared closely akin to Schubert and Wolf — was one of the last typical representatives of the romantic tradition, while, on the other hand, Jean Binet, who passed away in 1960, had kept alive a connection with the impressionists.

What typical traits have these men of 50, 60 or even 75, in common? Surprisingly perhaps, there is no folklore element to be found — or only incidentally — which might give concert music a "Swiss" flavour. The folklore of our mountains does not appear at all, and one would have to turn to Jacques Dalcroze, to Doret or Naegeli to find tangible signs of a folklore spirit which, moreover, has no historical basis. The term Swiss "spirit" would best apply to a certain mental outlook. Generally speaking, the majority of this generation of composers portray a world that is inwardly tormented, or anguished. At least, this is the impression created by their most significant works. They often take up the great religious themes without, however, achieving complete repose in their serene or even joyful episodes. Most Swiss composers may lack spontaneity, but their music possesses a profound resonance, even though access to it may not be easy; and it is wholly sincere. Mention should be made in this connection of Willy Burkhard (who died in 1955), Robert Oboussier (who died in 1957), Conrad Beck, Walter Geiser, Albert Moeschinger, Henri Gagnebin, Roger Vuataz, Frank Martin.

Ernest Bloch (who died in 1959) occupies a very special position. There is no gainsaying the fact that he is the Swiss composer who won the greatest international reputation and who has been the most ignored in his own country. It is true that his artistic independence makes it impossible to assign him to any specific movement; we can only note a certain Hebraic inspiration.

Let us pause at this juncture to consider the personality of Frank Martin, whose work has been internationally accepted. He was 50 when he began to attract international attention, and he did so the moment he fully discovered the possibilities of an idiom which he had developed for himself in 30 years of study and experiment. His encounter with Schoenberg's twelve-tone system was one of the turning-points in his development, but whilst he perfected its technical resources, he refused to accept the consequence of atonality. Thus he made use of the great freedom of movement offered him by this system,



to the benefit of tonal relationships. His compositions, which are the fruit of so many profound experiences, owe just as much to Wagner as they do to Debussy; out of these two influences he achieved a synthesis which, in a sense, is also in accord with the Swiss "spirit".

Frank Martin's influence was of great profit to composers such as Peter Mieg (born 1906) or Michel Wibl  (1923). Other composers, like Constantin Regamey (1907) also first adopted Schoenberg's theories, and later relinquished them.

Let us also name at this point Robert Blum (born 1900), certainly one of the country's most important composers. He is a profound craftsman (in the best old sense of the term), and willing to turn his hand to modern tasks (he is the best Swiss composer of film music). His powerful religious works, such as his oratorio "The Archangel Michael" and highly secular compositions (e.g. his Fourth Symphony) are major contributions to contemporary Swiss music.

The artistic development of Andr -Fr ois Marescotti (1902) took the opposite direction. Known as a gay composer of original inspiration, whose creative mind ran along the lines of Ravel and Chabrier, Marescotti suddenly, when over 50, developed a passion for the problems of serial technique. This results in a number of works absolutely new in tone, which bespeak a spirited personality who has not wholly conformed to the "system".

Another typically "Latin" composer is Pierre Wismer (1915), who has become a parisian and has completely immersed himself in its ambiance.

Among the composers in their fifties, one should not forget Heinrich Sutermeister, who holds a rather special position inasmuch as it is his operatic works that have won him international repute. This is due probably to the direction of his musical expression, to the lively, uncomplicated tenor of his compositions.

Whilst Heinrich Sutermeister was relatively well known decades ago and in recent years has been rather less in the limelight, a composer only four years his junior has lately come into his own: Hugo Pfister (1914). He too may be regarded as a typically Swiss composer, in that Alemannic and Latin elements, significance and consciousness of form, "unity in diversity", may all be encountered in his work.

The status of Rolf Liebermann (1910) is even more unique. He tends strongly towards modern technique, ranging from jazz to serial music, and is the author of successful operas which have made him an internationally known figure. His music is played less in Switzerland than abroad, and he is now pursuing his career in Germany.

Among the men in their forties, two again are rather typical of their ethnic background: Armin Schibler, whose more tense and subjective music reveals his German-Swiss nature, and Julien-Fr ois Zbinden, more objective and frank, even gay, and who is truly French-Swiss.

Vladimir Vogel, Russian-born but recently naturalised, should be mentioned not only for his own works but also for the influence he has had on some of the young as a teacher; he has been inspired by the twelve-tone technique.

As a matter of fact, only very few of the younger generation have not been attracted by these ideas. This is true in particular of Jacques Wildberger (1922), a pupil of Vogel's, Klaus Huber (1924) and Rudolf Kelterborn (1931).

The latter two should especially be borne in mind. The works of Klaus Huber differ in value but have proved him to be a composer who knows how to develop a phrase

with perfect logic of expression and in full tonal freedom and who handles the interplay of tones with a great delicacy of touch. Rudolf Kelterborn is the youngest of them all. His works have a very personal note; his musical expression is fragmentary, but his fleeting visions have an undeniable impact. Others could be mentioned, such as Franz Tischhauser (1921), who is known for his often unbridled humour.

Swiss music today offers a diversified, many-faceted aspect. A young generation of composers has relieved the old, a generation no longer willing to follow docilely in the footsteps of its predecessors. Instead it has set out to discover for itself the new territory into which youthful composers of other lands have long since penetrated. To these young musicians, it seems as if Swiss music has for too long been caught in the web of its own individual character and bound by the laws of tradition. A fresh wind has already blown away many of the cobwebs; what is valid and good in the older music will not be endangered by it.

The centre of creative musical activity in Switzerland has shifted back, to some extent, to the German-speaking part of the country. Swiss contemporary music is represented today of newcomers like Giuseppe Englert (1927), Hans Ulrich Lehmann (1937), Juerg Tyttenbach (1935) and Heinz Holliger (1939) are being heard with increasing frequency. Representative of the French-speaking part of Switzerland today is Jacques Guyonnet (1933).

In conclusion it should be noted that the above listing of names, by necessity far from complete, is meant to provide basic information and in no way constitutes a statement of evaluation.

(By courtesy of "Pro Helvetia" Foundation.)

## ANGLO-SWISS NEWS ITEMS

The conductor and Director of the Music Festival of Montreux, Ren  Klopfenstein, was awarded the "Prix Honegger" for his first concerto recordings by the English composer Thomas A. Arne (1741-1801).

Edward Bond's play "Saved", prohibited in England in 1965, was given the Swiss premi re at the Comedy Theatre in Basle. Werner Wollenberger had adapted the German translation into dialect.

Audrey Hepburn became Mrs. Andrea Dotti at Morges on 20th January. The Reception took place at Yul Brynner's house, himself of Swiss extraction.

The British Council has recently shown an exhibition of books on the teaching of English in various Swiss towns. It includes sections on language, phonetics, textbooks, audio-visual aids and speech work.

The Chief Conductor of the English Chamber Orchestra (whose Director is a Swiss, Miss Ursula Strebi) and famous pianist Daniel Barenboim gave a successful concert in Basle on 27th January, again with the same orchestra.

The "Th  tre du Jorat" at M zi res, well-known beyond Switzerland's boundaries, and to whose premi res the Federal Council appears *in corpore*, will show Shakespeare for the first time.

John Ayres, Curator at London's Victoria and Albert Museum, has published the first of four volumes on 7,000 oriental art treasures of the "Collections Baur" in Geneva. It is called "Chinese Ceramics, Volume one (with Korean and Thai Wares)". Photos by the Geneva artist Jean Arland.

(A.T.S. and "Pro. Helvetia".)