

# Swiss Cinema on show at the national film theatre

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### SWISS CLUB MANCHESTER

Members of the Swiss Club, Manchester, and their friends met once more at the lovely and imposing premises of this great Swiss Firm, not only to admire an interesting programme of films but to enjoy at the same time their generous hospitality to the full.

It was on the evening of the 12th April that over forty people, including some children, were welcomed by the President and everybody sat down to a nicely presented buffet of an exquisite choice, and plenty of it.

After coffee, the company assembled in the spacious lecture theatre to admire a film made by Messrs. Ciba-Geigy about the City of Basle, which must have awakened many memories of the beautiful town. The main film was the Swiss Classic in the 50's called "Oberstadtgasse". Everybody enjoyed the show and appreciated the outstanding performance of Schaggi Streuli and Emil Hegrenschwyler and many more famous actors and actresses. The end of the film must have come as a relief for many present, who at times must have felt some anxiety as to the outcome of it.

A great evening, indeed, for young and old and sincere thanks are due to both the hosts and the organising committee, coupled with our wish and hope that in the not too distant future a similar happy function may be offered to us.

E. B.

### SWISS CINEMA ON SHOW AT THE NATIONAL FILM THEATRE

A ten-day Swiss film season at the National Film Theatre in London was inaugurated by a Reception at the Embassy in early June. An unusually large and motley crowd gathered in the Embassy Salon to mark the première of

Swiss cinema abroad sponsored by the Pro Helvetia Foundation and the NFI. Those who participate in many Colony events found few known faces. Most of the guests had been invited from show-business and artistic circles.

When the time of the showing approached, everyone took to their cars and moved to the South Bank. The poor-

## COMMENT

Six months have elapsed since our first Special Issue was sent to all the Swiss of this country. Like its predecessor, this special number is sent to you by the Swiss Government as part of its policy of keeping alive the bonds between 300,000 Swiss abroad and their Motherland. Ever since the Swiss at home have voted a new article in the Constitution fostering ties with their compatriots abroad, Berne has taken special pains to keep its expatriate nationals within the fold. You may have forgotten about that Swiss passport tucked away in the attic: Berne has asked us to remind you of its existence by sending you this special number. Its contents have been supplied to us from the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad and the Embassy in London. It will be used in a similar publication to be distributed to the Swiss of Canada. Further special issues should soon reach all the Swiss living in the English speaking world. As this particular one is intended for every Swiss or Swiss-British national in Britain (there are over 14,000 of them), and not only to our readers, some of its material may already have appeared in our regular issues. Its news items may in particular appear a little old. We apologize for this to our subscribers and hope that those who are not will want to know more about Swiss events and subscribe to the Swiss Observer. To this end, we have

enclosed subscription slips in the hope that they will prove as efficient as they did last time, when we welcomed several hundred new readers. Our first special issue also encouraged many people to ring the Embassy for more details on Swiss Old Age Insurance and Pension, a major topic on which we give further precisions here.

In this issue, you are again reminded of the existence of institutions specially committed to the wellbeing of the Swiss living outside their homeland. At the head of these institutions is the Commission for the Swiss Abroad to which the Swiss of Britain are represented by two delegates (one from the North and one from the South) and their deputies. The delegate from the South reports in this issue on the recent activities of the Commission. A chart also represents the manifold activities of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad. The importance of its work is evident to the few "patriots" from Britain who manage to attend the annual assemblies for the Swiss abroad. This year, the Assembly will be held in St. Gall and examine the situation of Swiss societies abroad.

This subject may not appeal greatly to the majority of the Swiss in Britain who do not turn up at Swiss functions, but a trip to St. Gall and a weekend in a congenial and inspiring atmosphere may tempt some to make the journey.

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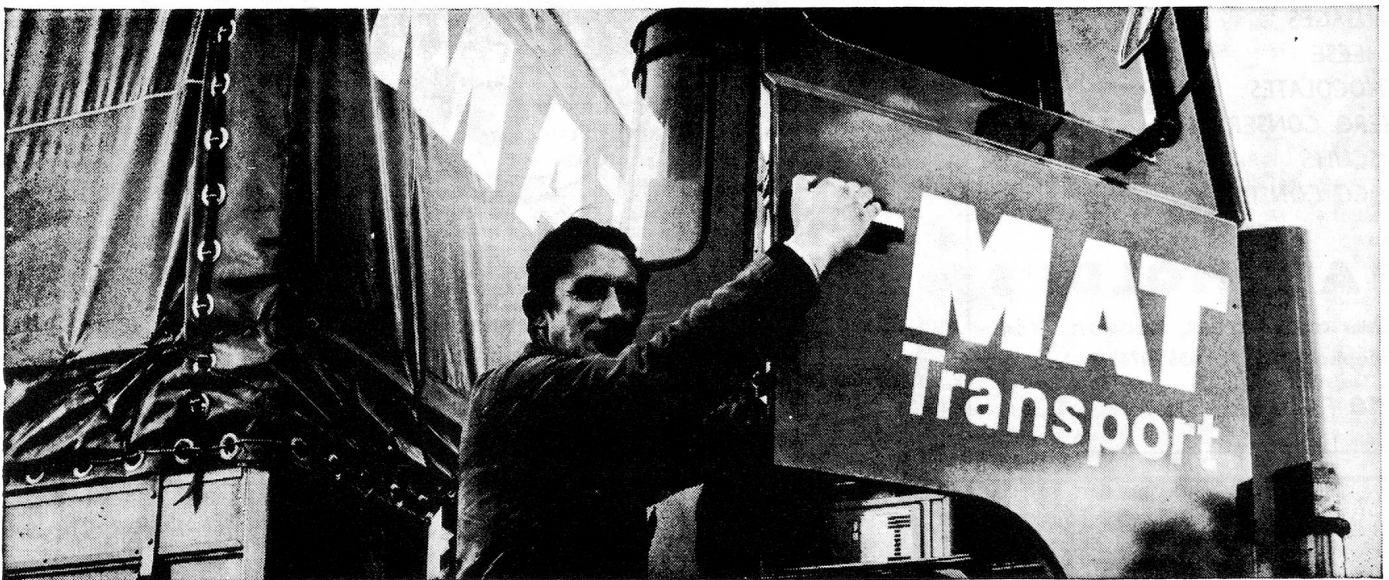
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ness of the show contrasted sadly with the distinction of the gathering and the importance of the occasion. Several guests felt an urge to escape from the darkness of hall no. 2 of the National Film Theatre and would have done so within the first twenty minutes in other circumstances.

The audience was first treated to a short silent film portraying an excruciatingly Swiss family. In fact, this was the work of a gifted amateur whose shots and sets vividly conveyed the boredom and orderliness of an elderly family living as many Swiss people still do today. The director does little more than to show us a white-haired pensioner, his spouse and their old-maid daughter sitting in the garden. The man looks on while a soft breeze ruffles his thinning hair and the women knit with concentration. The

family then takes the car to pick mushrooms in the forest. The camera aptly shows the old weekend-driver holding crisply to the wheel of his old Peugeot as the car cruises slowly through a silent countryside. The film was boring but efficient.

The main film, *Les Arpenteurs*, by Michel Soutter, had won a prize for cinematography. The programme described it as a "meditation on friendship and the difficulties of human relationships". We are then told that this "well-known theme from earlier films by Soutter is given lively form with superb dialogue constantly formulating the unexpected". This is perhaps the best hyperbola of the season. The film's dialogue is by all standards feeble-minded and the rather plump humour which drew a few smiles in *La Salamandre* tends to sadden the viewer by its ineptitude. The two leading actors, Jean-Luc Bideau and Jacques Denis, are in fact the same as those of Tanner's *La Salamandre*, which closely resembles *Les Arpenteurs*. The two film "stars" bear such likeness that anyone who hasn't read the cast would probably think the two works to be by the same man. It is true that many "unexpected" kinks crop up in the film that it is gratuitous and has nothing to do with the inventive genius of Jean-Luc Godard, another Swiss who has chosen to build his career in France. As for

the "meditation on friendship and the difficulties of human relationships", one can only say that Soutter's meditative process is rather tortuous. The film is partly allegorical and this explains why many people left the hall wondering what they had seen. We shan't try to wrap up the plot as this would be an intellectually trying task. Let us say that whatever plot there was verged on the inane and that this absence of a valid story was not redeemed by a truthful picture of life or solid technical qualities. It seems that Soutter would have done a greater service to Swiss cinema by producing an unpretentious thriller. Not everyone is a born Bunuel or Visconti.

P. M. B.

### CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS OF THE SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

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It was fitting that Lucerne was

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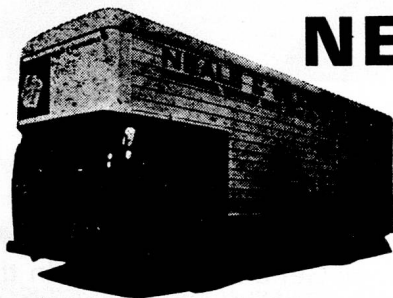
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