

The open-air theatre at Interlaken : popular performances of "William Tell" by 350 actors

Autor(en): **Urech, Charles**

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The steel clad knights of Gessler prevent the unarmed peasantry from rescuing Tell from the Governor, to save him from shooting at the apple

Phot. Photomutz

The Open-air Theatre at Interlaken Popular performances of "William Tell" by 350 actors

The popular performances of Schiller's famous classic, "William Tell", in the Rugen Forest at Interlaken are something extraordinary in more than one sense. They present something entirely unusual, which cannot be classed among the ordinary and accepted forms of theatrical "production".

At first one is inclined to think, by comparison, of Oberammergau. Here, as in Bavaria, it is the enthusiastic effort of a part of the village population which produces a heartfelt, profoundly sincere performance that leaves a deep impression in the minds and the emotions of the audience. But at Oberammergau, as in other productions like "Everyman" etc., a real stage is used, sometimes placed in a historical setting, while at Interlaken a village consisting of various houses, normal chalets, a church, a market place with a flowing well, a small "lake" (or pond) on which a punt manned by several people arrives, real rocks, stone benches, ancient trees and forest roads — all these things go to make the "stage" for the great scenes of this drama.

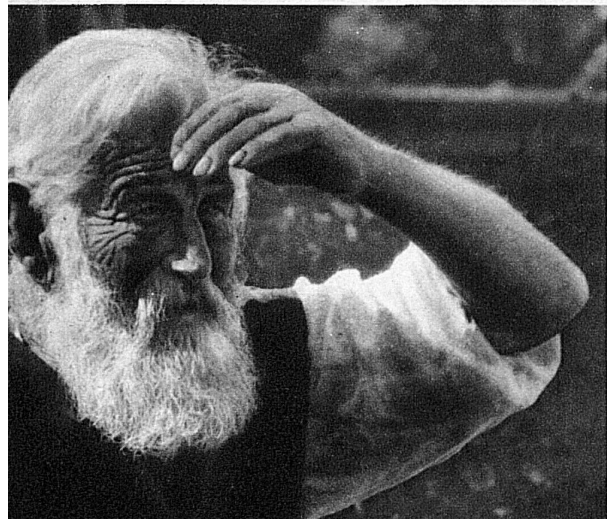
And through this village pass processions of finest cattle with the decorated "cow-queen", a herd of goats, alpine herdsmen transporting hay, cheese, household implements, also their

wives and babies, while mountain songs, yodels and the sounds of the alphorn fill the air. Everything is as real as in any mountain village of Switzerland, when such people descend from their alpine pastures, returning into the commune to which they belong as citizens. Other pastoral groups in the ancient, colourful costumes pass before the covered grand stand, on which over 2000 spectators can be comfortably seated. One such group represents a village wedding party, led by a rustic band, the young people walking or dancing to a "kermess". In another scene twenty horsemen, clothed in the rich armour of the Middle Ages, gallop up a hill in perfect formation.

It is no doubt the mass-scenes which are the most effective in such an open-air performance. The brilliance of colour and historical costume in the grand scene, where the hero is forced to shoot an apple off the head of his own child, is highly impressive, while the simplicity and sincerity, which characterise the acting throughout, enhance the quality of the entire performance and stir to the innermost depths our passion for justice, liberty and independence.

Dr. Charles Urech.

A typical rustic actor, 83 years old



Procession of alpine herdsmen with their cattle, led by the "cow-queen", which carries a bouquet of flowers on her head

