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Sunday Morning with Charlie

Malcolm Bulpitt

Swiss Sunday mornings are quiet. Most shops (except those on stations) are shut, and in many communities there are local ordinances banning activities such as cutting the grass, or even hanging out washing. However public transport runs to a near normal timetable so it is time to get out of town for a good walk, or to visit people. One Sunday last October we decided to visit Charlie. Charlie is not a friend living in the country but a music automaton, who was featured in a special exhibition of 'street instruments' such as old Barrel Organs, etc. running from October 2015 to April 2016 at a museum in Seewen, Canton Solothurn. Seewen is one of the most northerly communities in that Canton, situated just outside Basel in the foothills of the Jura, and easily reached from the City. From Basel SBB service S3 takes

10-min to reach Dornach-Arlesheim twice-an-hour, or it is a 23 min. ride on BLT's frequent tram Line 10. From outside the SBB station at Dornach PostAuto Route 67 takes 30 min. on its hourly trip to Seewen, and stops outside the museum.

The Museum of Music Automats is a Swiss National Museum, which is based in a modern building that was constructed specifically to house the collection of music boxes, fairground organs, music automatons and self-playing keyboard instruments, put together over many years by wealthy Swiss businessman Dr. Heinrich Weiss-Stauffacher who donated it all to the nation. Centrepiece of the collection is the huge, self-playing Welte Philharmonie organ that dates from 1913/14, and was built in Germany for the White Star Line's Britannic, sister ship of the ill-fated Titanic. The outbreak of WW1 meant that the completed organ was never delivered, but crated-up and placed in store where it survived for over 90 years only to be rediscovered in 2007, bought for the museum, and installed in a special gallery. It is only one of five organs of this type that survive in the world and it is operated twice daily at 13.40 and 15.40. The museum is sited at the edge of this attractive village, and is also home to a very pleasant glass-walled café/restaurant that has views out over the countryside. This is worth a visit in its own right.

The special exhibition that Charlie forms a part of, was being staged to highlight the work of the renowned German builder of automata Franz Oehrlein who died in 2013. Although it will be open for around six months, on the morning of Sunday 25th October it was being launched with a special concert staged by Basel members of the Swiss association dedicated to preserving and playing the street instruments that were in common use right up to the 1930s. Friends in Basel-Land had obtained some of the limited number of tickets to this event, so we headed out into the countryside, which was especially attractive in the sunshine of this cool, crisp, morning that served to highlight the



TOP: The audience enjoys the line-up of street organs.

LEFT: Charlie and his owner.

All photos: Malcolm Bulpitt

burnished autumn colours of the forested hills. Nine beautifully preserved small organs were displayed and played by their owners, who were immaculately dressed in costumes of the period from when they would have been in use. It was a fascinating couple of hours as each instrument was described, and items from its repertoire reprised. These lovingly cared-for machines displayed both the craftsmanship of their creators and the care and patience lavished upon their restoration by their operators. One woman had spent some 1,900 hours on rebuilding her complex machine.

A visit to Seewen and the attractive Schwarzbubenland, an area probably unknown outside its own country, is recommended to anyone visiting Basel. The hills and valleys of these Jura foothills are laced with easy or moderate walking routes whilst the attractive villages generally have welcoming

Gasthofs offering local fare. This is the real Switzerland with few non-Swiss tourists in sight but, as always, easily visited by public transport. There is free entry to the Museum with a Swiss Pass. More details are available by visiting www.musikautomaten.ch or www.vvsl.ch for general visitor information. 

This woman put 1,900 hours of work into restoring the organ shown.



Photographing the Landwasser Viaduct

James Pope

Staying in Chur, and having crossed the Landwasser Viaduct on a day trip to Tirano, we decided to retrace our route to Filisur and have a closer look and get some photographs of this iconic structure. The usual yellow signpost at Filisur station showed the viaduct to be a 25min walk away. The road led first of all under the railway at the north end of the station and then we were directed onto a forest path above and to the right of the railway. This was an easy and well-marked path and in due course we came to a wooden platform fronted by a palisade fence overlooking the viaduct with a notice proclaiming 'Aussicht Plattform Sud' – or the South Viewing Platform. An information board in German gave details of the viaduct. After the passage of the 09.58 Chur to St Moritz at 11.04, that was running four minutes late, we retraced our steps for a short way until we reached a path to the right that was signposted Landwasser Viaduct and 'Aussicht Plattform Nord'. Following this took us via a field and a path to the main road in the valley bottom.

Here we turned onto a gravelled lane heading towards the viaduct. After 200 to 300m a sign simply stating 'Fotos' pointed to the left. This was a narrow steep path with quite a few steps of unequal height, the worst type. However we soon reached and passed under the railway, which crossed us on a short viaduct, and turning to the right continued on an upward path, this time on the left of the railway leading to the north viewing platform. This was situated over the southern end of the short Zalaint tunnel and provided a first class, and obviously popular, view of the line crossing the viaduct and entering the tunnel in the cliff face. We were in time to photograph a St Moritz service, again running slightly late. After a few more photographs of the viaduct we retraced our steps and just after leaving the main road took a grassy path signposted Filisur Bahnhof, which we reached in about 15 minutes. We then retired to the Society's favourite hotel/restaurant, the Grischuna, and enjoyed a most satisfying lunch before returning to Chur. 