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Contents

The New Swiss Film	3
Switzerland joining the UN?	6
«Hornussen» – a Swiss Sport	8
Official Communications:	
– New Matrimonial Law	9
– New Swiss Citizen: Attention	10
– Old Age / Survivors / Disability Insurance	10
– Results of the Federal Ballot of 22nd September 1985	10
Local Pages	11–15
Communications from the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad	16
Wine-Growing in Switzerland	17
2000 Years of Rhaeto-Romanic	18
50 Years of Swiss Radio International	19
Elisabeth Kübler-Ross	22

Front page:

Shots from «Höhenfeuer» by Fredi M. Murer, winner of the «Grand Prix» at this year's film festival in Locarno.

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The New Swiss Film:

In the Limelight

The «Grand Prix» of this year's Film Festival of Locarno was awarded to Fredi M. Murer's «Höhenfeuer». Connoisseurs were not surprised at this award to a Swiss Film. Freddy Buache, Director of the Swiss Film archives, outlines the way of the Swiss Film to international recognition.

Film production in Switzerland, during the time of the silent movies, is hardly worth mentioning, in spite of the enthusiasm of a few pioneers: Lazar Zwickler, founder of the Company of Praesens in the year 1924, the airman Walter Mittelholzer or the Genevan C.-G. Duvanel, who with Arthur Porchet as cameraman, did the shooting of the newsreel for a Lausanne enterprise, the first Swiss weekly filmshow, that because of the too-costly and complex technology of sound films, disappeared again. From 1930 on, the polyglot of languages in the country prevented the coming-up of a seventh national Art, which would have been easy to convey over the whole of our territory. The French part of Switzerland, fascinated in those days with what came from Paris, displayed no great interest in production. The main centre developed itself in Zurich, where until 1939 documentary films and also rarely a few longer feature films were shot. The main ones being *Füsilier Wipf* (1938) and *Wachtmeister Studer* (1939), both by Leopold Lindtberg. Then, however, the situation of our country changed in the middle of a Europe at war, when the filming of the battle against totalitarian ideology was required. By virtue of the decree of plenary powers, the Federal Council introduced in 1940 the Swiss weekly newsreel, a weekly current affairs film-show of 8 to 10 minutes in the national languages, which had to be compulsorily shown in all the movie-theatres. As for the rest, several

film-makers were spurred on by the necessity to strengthen the morale of the Confederation. They brought the classics of Swiss literature to the screen, namely from Gottfried Keller, which were adapted by Hans Trommer with magnificent lyrics in *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe* (1941) and in Lindtbergs *Die missbrauchten Liebesbriefe* (1940). During this span of time 10 to 12 films were produced annually.



«Derborence», 1985

Photos: Cinémathèque Suisse

New Aspect

With the return of peace, this vitality slowed down and the market opened itself again for the productions from abroad. One had to wait for the development of the new films from western Switzerland, until Zurich caught up with this upswing with delay and once more became the centre of great activity. Different films

won the attention first of the critics (for example: the Works, which in a poetical way Daniel Schmid created) and then that of the public. A few of them secured great success: *Die Schweizermacher* (1978) by Rolf Lyssy, or *Das Boot ist voll* (1980) by Markus Imhoof, a work that had a similar subject-matter as *Die letzte Chance* (1946) by Lindtberg, although with a much more critical aspect and less self-righteousness.

The characteristic, which the generation after May 68 displayed, lay in the fact therein to scrutinize the official history, without hiding the contradictions of society and analysing them in their political perspectives: overheating of the economic condition, immigration of foreign workers, environmental problems, reminiscing of the past; all this lead to a new approach to the themes and an open portrayal of the country-side, which had all too often been turned by the camera into touristic clichés. The film producers have committed themselves to a seventh art, which sometimes shocks the representatives of the authorities. The latter have at their disposal since 1963 a law for the promotion of films. This support through the state is mainly of financial nature. Without any strings attached, which thus leaves a freedom to the supported film-makers, which is sometimes misunderstood by certain parliamentarians. This freedom however, guarantees more than the money, a development of the film, that fulfils its role as the mirror of a living Democracy.

The «Romands» first

In the French part of Switzerland, a few beginners have started a movement, which has not yet ceased to bear fruit. This was possible thanks to the help of the upcoming television, which allowed for the acquisition of the ne-

cessary professional knowledge, as well as the impulse from the National Exposition of 1964 in Lausanne. Tanner, Soutter, Gorretta, Roy and Lagrange (replaced

(1971), both from Alain Tanner, *Les Arpenteurs* (1972) by Michel Soutter, *Le fou* (1970) and *L'invitation* (1973) from Claude Gorretta succeeded in being in-



«Füsilier Wipf», 1938 ▲

«Das Boot ist voll», 1980 ▼



by Yersin) formed the Group 5 in the year 1968. Their films were very well received in the festivals abroad and became internationally famous. They drew attention towards an unexpected phenomenon: The up-coming of a lively, militant film, not without humour, in a country without a particular tradition in this area of artistic expression. *Charles mort ou vif* (1969) and *La Salamandre*

spirated by local events without falling into regionalism. Through the quality of a personal composition full of freshness and depth they expressed doubts and questions of fellow-citizens. In the euphoria of consumption they succeeded in depicting dissatisfaction, which was only grudgingly admitted and which the individual only felt in his sub-conscious. In this way, they touch on

and illustrate the uneasiness of civilisation, which from its contemporaries on the other side of the borders and their traditions likewise, are recognised. Yves Yersin associated himself with them with his successful masterpiece *Les petites fugues* (1978) and Jean-Luc Godard returned to the country.

Their genuineness, authenticity, their talent and their ability to pull themselves out of financial bottlenecks makes them exemplary. Colleagues in the German part of Switzerland copy their methods, to use them in their own situation. In their own environment, in western Switzerland, new beginners are learning from their experience.

No more a shadowy existence

The best proof that one can give of the upswing of the new Swiss film and its blooming development during around 15 years, lies well in the presence of the Swiss

«Les petites fugues», 1978 ▼



productions in the Festivals of 1985: in Berlin *Je vous salue, Marie* by Jean-Luc Godard, *Le livre de Marie* by Anne-Marie Miéville, *After Darkness* by Dominique Othenin-Girard and Sergio Guerraz; in Cannes *Derborance* by Francis Reusser, after the novel of Ramuz, which clearly follows the same beaten track of the Group 5, without however belonging to it; in Locarno *Höhenfeuer* from Fredi M. Murer was received with much sympathy and awarded the «Grand Prix»,



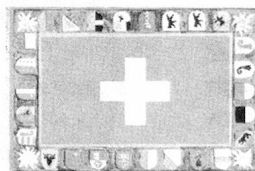
«Die missbrauchten Liebesbriefe», 1940 ▲

while other Swiss works likewise did not remain unnoticed and received distinctions. In Annecy in the «Festival of Trickfilms», *78 Tours* by the Genevan Georges Schwizgebel, an artist who has made a name for himself where Switzerland already has excellent international talents in this field. In Venice was a great come-back for the group 5: *No man's land* by Alain Tanner, *Signé Renart* by Michel Soutter, *Orfeo* (after Monteverdi) by Claude Goretta and *Der Rekord* by Daniel Helfer, a co-production of the television in Zurich with Germany. This very well accepted work gave occasion to show that the Federal Department of the Interior tries with great effort, to make pacts for co-production with other European countries. It deals with the survival of the film-art in general, and that of Switzerland in particular, in the face of the unforeseeable technological changes. ●

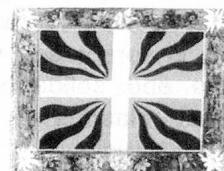
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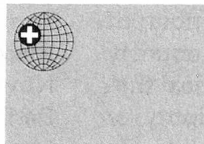


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