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Autor: Baumann, Alice
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Jazz festival in Willisau

Syncopation out in the country

Montreux, Nyon, Berne, St. Gall, Lucerne, Zurich, Schaffhausen. In Switzerland you simply cannot get away from music festivals. One of the smallest, but also one of the best, is the Willisau Jazz Festival. It has just turned 20 years old.

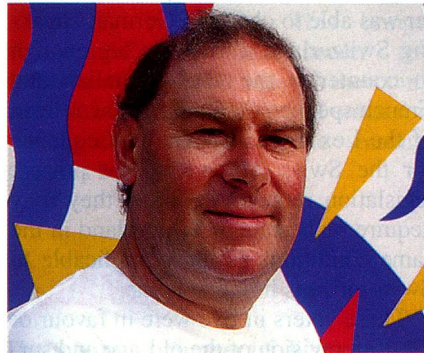
While the Montreux Jazz Festival attracts over 68,000 people on 16 evenings and gets corresponding headlines, the Willisau Jazz Festival is relatively modest – with 6

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concert sessions over 4 days and an attendance of about 10,000.

A one-man band

Behind every note played in Willisau year after year stands one man. Niklaus Troxler, a 48-year old draughtsman and concert organiser, has brought the jazz world to Willisau. In the same way as he assembles many design elements to make one picture or poster, Troxler built up a whole festival out of individual events. It is 30 years since he, together with his brother, started to organise jazz concerts. In 1975 the two of them, helped by the wife of Niklaus, launched their first festival – with great success from the outset.



His posters are music, his instrument is the pen: portrait of Niklaus Troxler and his jazz festival. (Photos: zvg)

Just like a person, the festival has gone through many different phases and moods during the first 20 years of its life: rebellious, conformist, high-volume, refined, avant-garde, classical. The public could never be sure in advance whether it would like what it was going to hear. Or whether it was not in for one of those prickly surprises meant to redirect the mind. Stylistically, offerings have ranged from free jazz to bebop to New Orleans through world music back to classical.

Arena for experiments

But harmonious or atonal, big band or small group, avant-garde or traditional, the most important element has always been the same. In Willisau audiences can enjoy at close quarters the unique experience of how people of the most varying beats can produce such fantastic music.

This current of energy deep in the Lucerne countryside also fascinates locals. So the festival has become a social occasion, a sociological phenomenon even, you might say. Young and old, people who work with their hands and with their minds, play equal parts in the musical events of the little town.

And in the midst of it all you are sure to find Niklaus Troxler. He is the one who gets the most pleasure when things go really well on stage.

Images and sound

Nor does Troxler leave jazz out of his professional life: "A poster must make music before it gets the onlooker's attention". Troxler's style is based on the classical elements of the graphic arts. But in spite of this his own artistic signature is unmistakable. You can see this in his book "Niklaus Troxler: Jazz Posters". Over a hundred of his works provide a cross-section of his poster art. And they also give an international overview of two decades of musical history. This is a book bursting with colour and form, full of interest for amateurs and professionals alike, and which reads like a Who's Who of jazz. Throughout his career Troxler has organised and illustrated more than 200 events which have included more than 500 concerts. Some of his posters have won prizes and are found in the Museum of Modern Art as well as in uncounted living rooms, ateliers and offices from Lucerne to New York. ■

In 1995 the Willisau Jazz Festival takes place from August 31 to September 3. Information may be obtained and the book ordered from: Jazz Willisau, Bahnhofstrasse 22, CH-6130 Willisau.

