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Traditional Swiss films depended on character actors like Heiri Gretler, Schaggi Streuli, Maximilian Schell, Zarli Carigiet, Ruedi Walter and Hannes Schmidhauser – the latter seen here on a ladder in 'Uli the Farmhand'. (Photo: zvg)

I M P R E S S U M

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 24th year of issue and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in more than 20 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 320,000. Regional news appears four times a year.

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When I go to the cinema, my first thought is not whether I am going to see a Swiss or a foreign film. I want to be entertained, I want to switch off and lean back. I want to be taken out of my surroundings. I want to feel my way into the film, to be carried away by it and to come to grips with the ideas it contains.

But a Swiss film industry does exist, and there are good reasons to make a point of seeing Swiss films. They confront cinema-goers with Swiss realities and so make us think about our country. Films can establish identity. They work through language – although this has more importance for those of us who speak German or Romansh than for French and Italian speakers. They also work by showing Swiss landscapes and by treating Swiss society. And they touch us through events and persons which are fictitious – more or less – played against a background which we know well.

At the time of the Second World War, Swiss films with Swiss content were a significant element in what was called intellectual national defence. But today Swiss film directors are more likely to be suspected of looking at their country through eyes which are over-critical.

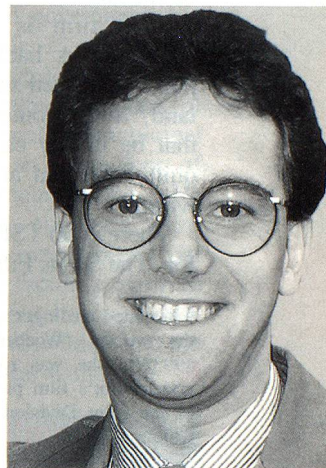
But if we look closer, there exists in the area between the "homeland" film and "soiling our own nest" a wide spectrum of film work from Swiss directors – men and women alike. Apart from feature films, there is a strong concentration on documentaries. These often win international prizes and are shown at festivals all

over the world to the applause of a specialised public.

In contrast, however, Swiss films seldom have great success with the broader public. In spite of this, we think it is worth while to devote the forum of this Swiss Review to film production in our country. The idea originally came from the fact that this year the Locarno film festival is taking place for the fiftieth time. In fact this has not much to do with Swiss films as such, but the Swiss film scene cannot be imagined without it.

If any of our readers should be sitting in the main square – the Piazza – of Locarno this coming August, they may well come into contact with Swiss films, and if so they will be able to take back home with them something of this way of coming to grips with Switzerland. There is no doubt that Swiss films contribute to explaining Swiss peculiarities to those who live abroad. Perhaps our reports will encourage you to order video cassettes of Swiss films or to look more closely to see whether there is a festival near where you live which features Swiss films or a cinema club which shows Swiss films occasionally.

One thing seems certain to me: Swiss films are indeed capable of entertaining us, taking us away from our own lives for a little and transporting us on a magic carpet.



René Lenzin
René Lenzin