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The Swiss summer of sound

A whole host of music festivals are held throughout Switzerland during the summer months. Rock, pop and hip-hop concerts take place at sometimes extraordinary venues, such as Roman arenas and the shores of lakes. We take a look at this growing phenomenon. By Alain Wey

With magnificent views of the mountains, lake or sunset and with the music and atmosphere created by inspirational bands, festivals certainly provide some memorable moments. Switzerland has a vast array to choose from, which attract hordes of festival-goers each year. The Swiss have been moving to sounds from all over the world since the 1970s. The same pattern emerges each time. A group of friends with a passion for a particular type of music start a small festival which, over the years, turns into a major event, such as the Paléo Festival in Nyon, to rival the best in Europe. We take a closer look at these temporary spectacles.

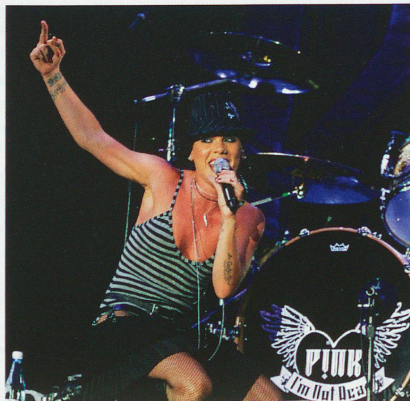
Nature as a backdrop

The appeal and the convivial atmosphere found at festivals are largely explained by the idyllic settings in which they take place. The shores of Lake Neuchâtel, for instance, play host to the Festi'neuch (2 to 5 June 2011) and the Estivale d'Estavayer-le-lac. Lake Geneva is home to the Montreux Jazz Festival and the Caribana Festival at Crans-sur-Nyon (8 to 12 June 2011), where the music is performed virtually on the water's edge. Nature is the backdrop to these events. Woodrock is held in the middle of a forest in Emmental amidst ancient trees, as is the OpenAir in St. Gallen, which takes place in a clearing in the woods. In Berne, festival-

goers climb the Gurten hill each evening to enjoy the music and picture-postcard sunsets or, if the weather turns inclement, to endure driving rain. Historic town centres are also used as venues with Locarno's magnificent Piazza Grande hosting the Moon and Stars festival, while performances take place on the cobblestoned streets during Winterthur's music weeks. Rock'Oz'Arènes prides itself on taking place in the legendary Roman arenas of Avenches, a magical venue that comes to life each summer.

Volunteers and professionals

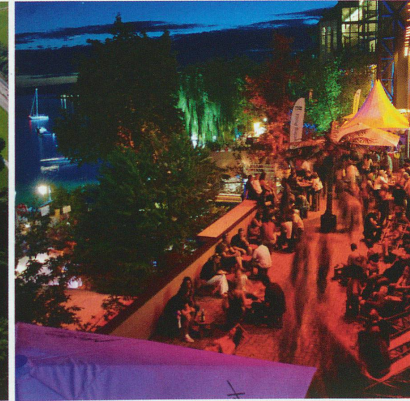
The success of these events depends heavily on the commitment of volunteers. There are no paid workers at the small-scale festivals as the budget predominantly goes towards the fees of the bands and infrastructure. However, where the scale of the event requires organisation throughout the year, professionals are employed. The Paléo Festival, for example, has 55 employees and 4400 volunteers.



Pink at the Heitere Open Air festival, Zofingen



Sittertobel, OpenAir St. Gallen



Jazz Festival, Montreux

KEY DATES AND FIGURES

■ OpenAir St. Gallen

30 June to 3 July 2011, 35th event, established in 1977, around 30 000 visitors. Headline acts: Queens of the Stone Age, Linkin Park, Die Fantastischen Vier, The Young Gods. www.openairsq.ch

■ Montreux Jazz Festival

1 to 16 July 2011, 45th event, established in 1967, around 230,000 visitors. Headline acts: Santana, B.B. King, Quincy Jones,

Herbie Hancock, Sting, Deep Purple, etc.

www.montreuxjazz.com

■ Openair Frauenfeld

8 to 10 July 2011, 17th event, established in 1987, festival now entirely dedicated to hip-hop and the largest of its kind in Europe around 150 000 visitors. Headline acts: Snoop Dogg, Cypress Hill, Wu-Tang Clan, The Roots, Ice Cube, Public Enemy, Sens Unik. www.openair-frauenfeld.ch

■ Gurten Festival

14 to 17 July 2011, Berne, 28th event, established in 1977 around 32 000 visitors. Headline acts: Arctic Monkeys, Jamiroquai, Kasabian, Sophie Hunger, Jamie Cullum, Kaiser Chiefs. www.gurtenfestival.ch

■ Moon and Stars

8 to 17 July 2011, Piazza Grande, Locarno, 8th event, established in 2004, around 85 000 visitors. Headline acts: Sting, Santana, Amy Winehouse, Bryan Adams,

Roxette, Zucchero, Joe Cocker, Jack Johnson. www.moonandstarslocarno.ch

■ Paléo Festival

19 to 24 July 2011, Nyon, 36th event, established in 1976, around 230 000 visitors. Headline acts: Amy Winehouse, The Strokes, PJ Harvey, Robert Plant, Jack Johnson, Portishead, Eddy Mitchell. www.paleo.ch

■ Blue Balls Festival

22 to 30 July 2011, Lucerne, 7th event, established in 2005,

Montreux Jazz Festival: the pioneering event

Established in 1967 by Claude Nobs of the Local Tourism Office, the Montreux Jazz Festival has become a firm fixture on the summer calendar for fans of rock and jazz. Festival stands take over Lake Geneva's riviera for a fortnight in July, while leading performers from all over the world come to crank up the decibels in the festival venues, which, since the 1990s, have been the Auditorium Stravinski and the Miles Davis Hall. In its 44-year history, many big names have performed at Montreux. Queen, David Bowie, Santana and the greatest jazz musicians of the golden age have all made appearances. The Rolling Stones gave their first performance outside the UK in Montreux. The concerts originally took place in the Casino de Montreux, which burned down in 1971 during a Frank Zappa concert. This fire

went down in history when Deep Purple wrote their greatest track entitled "Smoke on the Water". Miles Davis, the pianists Ray Charles and Herbie Hancock as well as the blues singer B.B. King have all appeared many times at Montreux. The last two artists mentioned also feature on the 2011 programme. Today, the event welcomes almost 230 000 visitors. The festival also stands out from its peers with anthological jam sessions which go on well into the night at the Montreux Jazz Café long after the end of the official concerts. In 2009, Prince stunned festival-goers by playing in the night-time venue until three in the morning. And the hospitality of the festival does not stop there. The greatest stars are sometimes put up by Claude Nobs himself, including the jazz musician/producer Quincy Jones who comes to Montreux almost every summer. It is also

not unusual for the festival organiser himself to take to the stage with his harmonica. Montreux Jazz also has the greatest collection of concert recordings in the world, immortalising all the performances since the event began.

The model open-air festival: Paléo

While the spirit of Woodstock pervades the festivals, Paléo stands out in terms of organisation. In the 35 festivals held since it was established in 1976, Switzerland's largest open-air concert has welcomed 2460 performers and groups for 3035 concerts and events attended by almost 4.8 million fans. In 2010, almost 230 000 descended on the lowlands of Asse at the edge of the forest where 195 performances took place on six stages. With a budget of 23 million Swiss francs, an 84-hectare site, 8000 campers, 206 stands and 42 bars, a small town is created from nothing for the festival each year. The streets of the camping and festival sites are given the names of major world cities and a global village welcomes each country and its culture, in terms of cuisine, art and music.

Peace, love and rock'n'roll

Anyone who has attended many festivals will have been left with a general impression of celebration and peace. These musical events are the place to look if you are wondering what happened to the 1960's philosophy of peace and love. Living together in a self-governed environment and engaging with people without prejudice are part of the attraction of another era where time stood still. These microcosmic summer events have an enduring appeal for lovers of open-air music, embracing the spirit of rock'n'roll!

■ Heitere Open Air

3 to 6 August 2011, Avenches, 20th event, established in 1992, around 30 000 visitors. Headline acts: Ben Harper, Motörhead, Stephan Eicher. www.rockozarenes.com

■ Winterthur

Music Festival Weeks

17 to 28 August 2011, Winterthur, 36th event, established in 1976, around 38 000 visitors. Headline acts: Archive, Deus. www.musikfestwochen.ch

■ Open Air Gampel

18 to 21 August 2011, 25th event, established in 1986, around 81 000 visitors. Headline acts: The Chemical Brothers, The Offspring, Skunk Anansie, NOFX, Simple Plan, Favez. www.openairgampel.ch

■ Chant du Gros

88 to 10 September 2011, Noirmont, 20th event, established in 1991, around 20 000 visitors. www.chantdu Gros.ch

■ Rock Oz'Arènes

3 to 6 August 2011, Avenches, 20th event, established in 1992, around 30 000 visitors. Headline acts: Ben Harper, Motörhead, Stephan Eicher. www.rockozarenes.com

■ Lake Brienz Rock Festival

5 to 7 August 2011, 24th event, established in 1988, around 8 000 visitors. Headline acts: Steve Lukather (guitarist of Toto). www.brienzerseerockfestival.ch

100 000 to 150 000 visitors.

Headline acts: Sophie Hunger, Macy Gray, Beverley Knight, Erykah Badu, Johnny Lang, Heather Nova, Keziah Jones, Rodrigo y Gabriela, Ben Harper. www.blueballs.ch

■ Estivale Open Air

29 July to 1 August 2011, Estavayer-le-Lac (Fribourg), 21st event, established in 1990, around 15 000 visitors. www.estivale.ch