

# Sounds : enjoyable retro kitsch

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad**

Band (Jahr): **48 (2021)**

Heft 5

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

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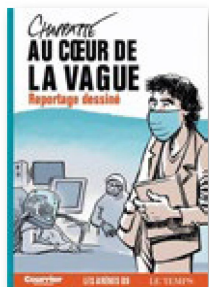
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## A look back at Covid-19, in snapshots



PATRICK CHAPPATTE:  
"Au cœur de la vague"  
Chappatte & Éditions  
Les Arènes Paris, 2020  
123 pages, 36 CHF  
Available in French only

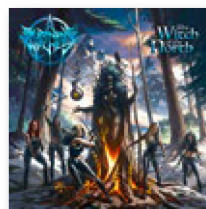
What were we doing when the first news of a virus which attacked the respiratory system arrived from China, at the end of January 2020? How did we handle the information about the first case in Switzerland, detected in February 2020? And when was the first death announced? What was our vision of the future when the country was swept into almost complete lockdown on 16 March? This illustrated report by Genevan Patrick Chappatte, released in October 2020, enables us to rediscover our original feelings through the tale he illustrates of the first wave of Covid-19. His approach is both private and public. He draws his own seclusion, with his family in the

mountains. And then his anxiety when he experiences a strong fever, forcing him to isolate for a week. A serological test completed later showed that he had indeed contracted the virus. At that time, only those experiencing serious symptoms had access to tests. The country was not yet advocating masks. "Au cœur de la vague (In the eye of the storm)" recalls the key moments of this world which was hurtling towards the unknown. Every reader will find something to relate to.

The other angle of the report is dedicated to the inner workings of the Geneva University Hospitals (HUG), the largest medical institution in Switzerland. From his place of seclusion in the mountains, Chappatte converses with Professor Didier Pittet, director of the Infectious Diseases Division at HUG, by phone. From 7 March, the inventor of hydroalcoholic gel began passing on information firsthand. The Genevan illustrator describes the strategy implemented by HUG to cope with the approaching wave of patients. Once recovered, Chappatte enters the heart of the machine: the intensive care unit, led by Professor Jérôme Pugin. He describes the contact with death. The tears of carers for those who die and whose families have not been able to see them. He gives the floor to a nurse, who tells of her 12-hour working days. He passes the microphone to the cleaning staff, some of whom volunteered to go to disinfect the "dirty" rooms in which those infected with the virus were treated. He shows the impact of the crisis on undocumented migrants and the response in Geneva to look after those living in the most precarious situations. Each of the five chapters of this work, documented with care and filled with empathy, holds the illustrations of Chappatte published during the period they describe.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

## Enjoyable retro kitsch



BURNING WITCHES:  
"The Witch Of The North"  
Nuclear Blast, 2021

They certainly haven't decided to reinvent the wheel. On the contrary, Burning Witches play a very traditional not to say old-fashioned type of heavy metal. Be that as it may, the Swiss combo have a certain something. On the one hand, they are an all-women band – still something of a novelty in their particular genre. Without doubt, this has turned heads. But they also market themselves very cleverly, portraying themselves as timeless fantasy heroines, maiden warriors, and witches – strong female characters whose powers are as striking as their looks.

This well-executed image combined with a catchy, highly choreographed, accomplished heavy metal sound was what initially won Burning Witches a major record deal with Nuclear Blast – quite the coup for guitarist Romana Kalkuhl's band. Appearances then followed at huge festivals like Wacken Open Air. Their fourth album "The Witch Of The North" has now catapulted the girls high up the charts in many countries, reaching number six in Switzerland for example and – much more importantly – number 16 in Germany. Very respectable indeed. And as if to underscore the band's arrival in the big time, Kalkuhl even ended up appearing on the cover of Switzerland's best-known tabloid.

With this new LP, the quintet have quite evidently satisfied their broad fan base. "The Witch Of The North", produced by Marcel Schirmer of Destruction and V.O. Pulver of Gurd, is a concept album devoted to Nordic mythology, in which Burning Witches are unafraid to explore the clichés of retro metal both lyrically and from an overall aesthetic point of view. Once again, the five witches have taken inspiration from the traditional metal sound of the 1980s. Ballads like "Lady Of The Woods" are juxtaposed with high-energy numbers like "Nine Worlds". We also have kicking, biting refrains ("We Stand As One" and "Thrall"). And as if it wasn't obvious enough already where their musical roots lie, Burning Witches have thrown in a cover of a track by US power-metal stalwarts Savatage for good measure.

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