

74th fête suisse

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74th FÊTE SUISSE

It is common knowledge that some wines improve with age, getting more mellow and richer in flavour. The same might be said of the "Fête Suisse" performances, the 74th of which was celebrated at Central Hall, Westminster, on Thursday, 9th of June, 1949. Those amongst the older generation of the Colony, in looking back to this function some ten or twenty years ago, will undoubtedly agree with me, that this annual celebration has tremendously improved, and has become an event of great significance which few would like to miss.

Last year's figures of attendance were not reached, when 3,000 of our compatriots filled the Hall to its fullest capacity. This might be explained by the fact, that the previous year, a somewhat more ambiguous programme was presented, and also by the presence of our popular Commander-in-Chief of the Swiss army during the last war, General Henry Guisan. Nevertheless this year's attendance compares well with former occasions, well over 2,000 tickets having been sold.

I have written so many accounts of this annual gathering in the past, that I feel, I must shorten this year's report somehow. I am not doing this for any other reason, because I enjoyed this festival from beginning to end, and whilst in the past I sometimes voiced some criticism, this year I have only one small complaint to make, namely that I considered the programme somewhat too long, especially the first part could have been shortened without losing any of its attraction. In these days of austerity, almost four hours of entertainment is too much of a good thing, and must have been an ordeal for some of the very young people who were present. Two cuts were made to keep within time, both to be regretted, firstly the interval was reduced to half an hour instead of three quarters of an hour, thus depriving many of an opportunity to meet old friends and acquaintances; secondly the performance of the very excellent "La Chanson de Lausanne" had to be shortened, which was a great pity; we might never again have the opportunity to hear this famous choir, whilst, after all, we can and will hear our "local talent" on many more occasions.

Long before the programme was timed to begin the Foyer and the Hall was thronged with people. Attractive Ladies, mostly dressed in picturesque national costumes sold small Swiss and cantonal flags, programmes and pictures, and as all the receipts were earmarked for the benefit of the Swiss Benevolent Society, which is doing such fine work for our less fortunate members of the Colony, many an extra shilling was "put in the bag."

The large Concert Hall was richly decorated with flowers, a huge Swiss flag, the Union Jack and the cantonal escutcheons. (Whilst last year I mentioned that some of the escutcheons were put the wrong way round, this year everything was in perfect order.)

The programme started punctually at 6.15 p.m. with a March "Under the Banner of Victory" by F. Blon, played very well by the Swiss Orchestral Society, under the conductorship of Mr. E. P. Dick. Then with patriotic fervour the entire company rose to their feet

to sing our National Anthem, followed by a short prayer by the Rev. A. Lanfranchi.

The official opening address was given by our Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, who on ascending the platform received a hearty ovation. In an excellent oration, he referred to the significance of the celebration. He referred in grave words to the fact, that most Swiss Colonies are threatened with a process of extinction owing to the restrictions of immigration put into force by almost all countries including Switzerland. The Minister stated, that since 1938 the Swiss Colony had diminished by about 500 members. This disquieting fact was somewhat lessened, he said, by a small increase in the arrival of temporary immigrants which he termed as "population flottante." He continued by saying "Si tous ceux qui sont convaincu le l'importance essentielle de nos colonies pour la mère-patrie — 365,000 Suisses vivent actuellement hors de nos frontières — unissent et coordonnent leurs efforts nous enrayerions utilement le fléchissement de la Colonie Suisse en Grand Bretagne, quatrième en importance des colonies suisse à l'étranger."

The Minister concluded his address by thanking the organisers of the "Fête Suisse" for their efforts in arranging this enjoyable entertainment. Loud applause greeted our popular Minister and at this stage, Madame de Torrenté, who accompanied the Minister, was presented with a beautiful bouquet of flowers by a little girl in national costume.

The Swiss orchestra again appeared on the stage to play the Overture from the Operetta "The Gipsy Baron" by Joh. Strauss.

And now came the turn of the youngest ones of the Colony, "Our children," who sang and danced very prettily under the direction of Mrs. Blum. To many of these little ones it must have been a bewildering experience to perform before such a large audience, but they came through the ordeal with flying colours, although one of the little performers danced "With tears in his eyes."

The sincere applause which was accorded to them had hardly died down, when Mme. Sophie Wyss, our famous "Lieder Singer" appeared to render a group of six songs, in French and Italian. Her fine soprano voice sounded as fresh as ever, and the enthusiastic applause which her fine performance evoked was well deserved.

Then followed the Swiss Accordion Group, who dressed in National costume, and headed by their conductor, Mr. A. Gandon, played with great vivacity a selection of Swiss mountain music, which was greatly enjoyed by everyone, save for the little son of the conductor, who stood in front of the band, ringing his miniature cow bells giving at the same time a fine performance of yawning, perhaps not quite a compliment to his fathers efforts, but I hope my remarks will not get him into trouble.

The first half of the programme came to an end with the appearance of the Swiss Male Choir who sang very efficiently two songs "Zieh' mit mir in den Lenz hinein" by G. Angerer, and "Emmental, grüss Gott," under the conductorship of Mr. E. P. Dick.

During the interval, lasting half an hour, refreshments were served in the two Foyers, and I am glad to say that the congestion experienced in former years was lessened, thanks to the efficient arrangements made by the family A. Schmid of the Glendower Hotel, who was in charge of the catering arrangements.

The second part of the programme opened with a Swiss Potpourri by the Orchestra, and young and old lustily joined in singing some of our popular folk songs.

And now came the great event to which everybody was looking forward; our visitors from the lovely canton of Vaud appeared, dressed in their becoming vaudois costumes. The lights were lowered and amidst tremendous cheers from the entire audience, they filed in from both ends of the stage, followed by two members of the choir carrying their traditional "brentes" which unfortunately on this occasion, were not filled with the golden grapes of their sun-kissed vineyards. A second, no less hearty applause was accorded to the conductor, Monsieur F. Guibat, when he appeared on the platform.

A great hush fell over the audience when they began to sing, and how beautifully they sang, with smiles on their faces during gay songs, with sadness during sorrowful ones. All songs were sung without text books and from memory, they responded with remarkable alertness to the slightest move of their conductor.

Who will ever forget the beautiful rendering, with tenor solo, by M. Guibat, of "La Jardinière du Roy" by Haug. It proved that M. Guibat is not only an excellent conductor but also a fine singer. It is diffi-

cult to pick out any items of their large repertoire for special praise, all were sung with remarkable precision and perfect harmony. Much enjoyed also was the roguish song "Le vigneron" by C. Boller.

Not only can they sing well, but they are also fine dancers, which they proved in "Les filles de Lausanne," which was an exquisite performance, and which "brought the house down." The first group of songs entitled "Chansons Romandes" concluded amidst an almost riotous applause.

The next performer on the programme was no less than our famous compatriot, Albert Ferber, who needs but little introduction, he has, by his fine playing made a name for himself in the musical world of this country. He played with much skill and technical superiority Navarra by Abeniz, and Chopin's Scherzo III, C. sharp minor, with great feeling. Time after time he was called back on the platform to receive the acknowledgment of the audience for his fine performance, and was thus induced to give an *encore* which was accorded the same enthusiastic acknowledgement.

Again "La Chanson de Lausanne" appeared, again the lights were lowered and again our enthusiasm was kindled. In the second group of songs "Chansons d'ici et d'ailleurs" one might mention the fine rendering of the Scottish song "Le Lac Lomond" and "Magali" (Provence) with tenor solo by M. Guibat.

It was to be regretted that time did not allow, that all songs billed on the programme could be given, the audience thus was deprived of much enjoyment. It was altogether a remarkable performance and "La Chanson de Lausanne" and their conductor, M.

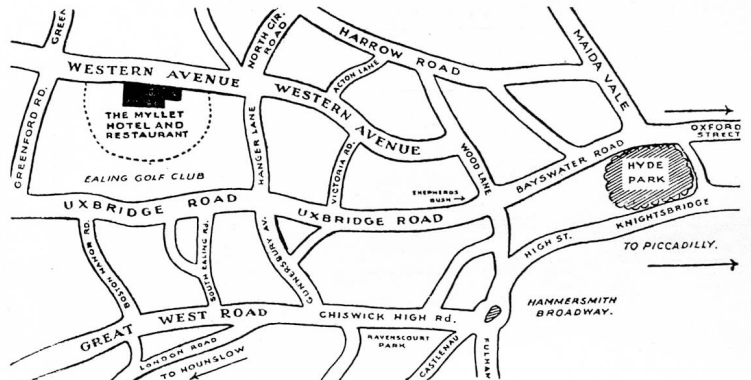
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Guibat, is heartily to be congratulated on a really fine and enjoyable programme.

As a grand Finale of this year's 74th "Fête Suisse" the Cantique Suisse was sung by the entire audience.

In concluding this report, sincere thanks should be extended to the members of the Organising Committee, they have tackled a difficult job with great efficiency, and I wish specially to mention the names of Mr. Ch. Chapuis, President of the "Fête Suisse" Committee, Mr. A. Renou, Mr. E. P. Dick and Mr. J. Zimmermann, who have borne the chief burden of the work and, of course, to "La Chanson de Lausanne" who have endeared themselves to us by their fine performance; and many thanks too to all the charming programme and flag sellers. *ST.*

1st OF AUGUST CELEBRATION.

Our readers will be interested to hear, that this year's National Day will be celebrated at the Sports Ground at Herne Hill, in connection with the "Swiss Sports" which used to be such a popular event in pre-war days. We invite all Swiss to reserve Monday, 1st of August (bank-holiday) to celebrate our National Day together at Herne Hill.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, July 15th, 1949.

We take the opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donations over and above their subscription: A. Lenheer, J. Fischer, Mrs. R. Homberger, G. A. Ochs, H. Ott.

PERSONAL.

We extend heartiest congratulations to Mr. & Mrs. G. Bartholdi on the arrival of a little daughter, and to Mr. O. Bartholdi for having become a grandfather.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

July, 1949 — Swiss Mercantile Society — No Meeting.
Tuesday, July 5th, 1949, at 6.30 (Dinner 7 o'clock) — City Swiss Club — Monthly Meeting — followed by an address by the Rt. Hon. Lord Woolton, P.C., C.H., at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1. (See Advertisement.)

Tuesday, July 19th, 1949, at 7 p.m. — Nouvelle Société Helvétique — Open Meeting — An address will be given by Mr. Th. Haller, London Representative of the Swiss National Broadcasting Service, on "Die Rolle der Geographie beim territorialen politischen Aufbau der Schweiz" at the Vienna Café, Berkeley Arcade, opposite Baker Tube station. (See Advertisement.)

Saturday, July 30th, 1949, from 7 to 11.30 p.m. — The Rutli Club — Dance — at Victoria Hall, Bloomsbury Square, W.C.

Monday (Bank-Holiday), August 1st, 1949, 1st of August Celebration and Swiss Sports Meeting — at Herne Hill. (Particulars to follow.)

Sunday, October 9th, 1949. — Unione Ticinese — 75th Anniversary Celebration — at Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1. (Particulars to follow.)

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