

# For the love of drumming

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## DER EERSCHT FASSTUUGELEFAARER UND SCHYKANOONE

*The following story relates to an old friend of the Swiss Colony, Mr. Joe Christen. He spent most of his life in London, but lives in retirement at Artherstrasse 135, (c/o Sidler), 6317 Oberwil-Zug. A school friend of his, Hans Bossard, has published a book in Zug dialect, which contains a number of stories related to Mr. Christen. The following is an example, and we publish it by special permission of the author as well as of Mr. Christen who wishes to be remembered to all his old friends in Britain.*

De Chrischte-Seebi, won üs doo vo syner Juget uf em Zugerbürg verzellt, isch mit drüü Gschwüschterte uf em Widisguet uufwachse, uf Zug abe i d Schuel und hed de bi sym Vatter puuret. Denäbet hed er gääre gspörllet, was aber synerzyt nid vil hed töffe choschte. D Füüfyer sind bi irem Hoof ume tünng gsäjet gsy. Aeutue! Wäge dem hed de Seebi bi üs Stadtbuebe glych as de bescht Schlitteryter ggulte. Wie hemmer en au bistuunet, wen er alig uf syner Gäiss oder mit eme Horemänner dur d Zugerbürgstrooss aab z schnüüze choo isch! Schier oni z brämse hed er äi Rank um der ander sauber gnoo.

Wo du um 1900 ume s Schyfaare elengerimee uufchoo isch, so hed s em jedi Nacht devoo traunt. Er hed aber nid äifach chönne zum Vatter sääge: "Bitti, chauff mer es paar settegi Brätter!". Es hätt de ghäisse: "Jää, me hend e käis Gäld für derigs; du choschtisch suscht nu gnueg." — Das hed de Seebi scho gwüsst und sich sälber gluegt z hälffe.

Am ene chalte Wintertag hed er äinisch müessen uf Oberwyl abe öppis go bsoorge. Dunden isch er grad dezue choo, wie s Chäisers Xaffeeri es alts Fass gschlisse hed. Wo de Seebi die lange Tuugele gsee hed umeligge, sind em Schy i Sinn choo. "Chönnt i doo nid öppe zuee haa, Her Chäiser", frogt er, und de Xaffeeri hed glachet: "Joo-jo Seebi, lis du nur zuee uus." De Seebi hed tanket und die zwaü beschte Brätter i Bäarg ufe pugglet. Dehäime hed ers a äim Aendi e chly zuegspitzt und uf s ander es Paar fauki Schue gnaaglet und Rieme. Syni Schy sind fertig gsy. Er hed s aagläid und isch mit über e Schneehoger abe. Dunde hed s ene üerrüert. Er hed sich nüüd druus gmacht, und gly hed er eso guet chönne faare, das mir Stadtbuebe gsäid hend: "Das machid mir au!" Vo doo aa hed s Fasstuugelifaare langiszyt as e zümftege Buebesport ggulte. Aber mit ere Tausse Milch über e hööche, gääche, ghogerete Abhang abe-suuse wie de Seebi, das hätt e käi andere truuet und käne fertig prunge.

Um die säb Zyt ume isch äinisch de Fritsch vom Sportgschäft z Züri uf e Zugerbürg cho luege, öb dee zum Schyfaare güüschtig syg. Er hed du grad de Chrischteseebi gsee, wien er s vom Felsenegg ewägg duraab i äim hääle Schnuuz über Stock und Stäi und über d Strooss und d Gräaben ine ghaue hed. "Potz Hagel Tonnerwätter!" rüeflt der Zürcher, "dee schlaat s ja zäme da une!" — Won aber de Seebi im Widishoof unde ase ständlige hed chönne halte, so hed er dee Püürschtel grad für sys Geschäft kaperet, hed em es Päärli Schy vereert und ene as Schyleerer lo uusбилde. Scho am nächschte innerschwyzzerische Rigränne hed de Chrischte putzt und alli eerschte Pryse gholt.

Gly druf abe hed de Fritsch üse Zugerbürgler uf Aengland über gschickt, zum d Sprooch leere, und dee isch ggange; läider grad dääne plibe. Zääch, wien er gsy isch, hed sich de Seebi deet ufgeschaffet, und noch es paar

Joore isch er Bsitzer gsy vom Hotel "Schweizerklub" z London. Es isch em rächt guet ggange bis zum zwaüte Wältchrieg. Dee hed em s Uglück prunge. Bim eine Bombardemänt ane 1941 hed sys Hotel e Vollträffer verwütscht. Sy Frau, d Gescht und alli syni Dientschte sind deby umchoo. Inn eläi mit vertütschte Bäine hed mer läbig chönne us em Schutt usegraabe und rette. Was mues dee Maa glitte haa? Alleszäme hy!

Hüt läbt de Chrischte Seebi z Oberwyl obe bi sym Schwooger und bi syne Nichte und verzellt öppedie nu gärne us de Zyt, won er as die bescht Schykanooone ggulte hed.

H. Bossard.

## FOR THE LOVE OF DRUMMING

by

Lee Eugster

As birds of a feather flock together, the Valaisans and Basler unite. They share a sense of humour, are quick at repartee, and have a passion for drumming and playing fifes. Any excuse is good to bring out their treasured instruments.

Fifers and drummers of St. Luc accompany the burghers of the Val d'Anniviers to Sierre of the *vignolage*, stimulating their hard work of tilling the communal vineyards with music. On St. Sebastian's feast, fifers and drummers lead the military parade in Finhaut, while the famous Lord's Grenadiers of the Lötschental walk to the rhythm of their military band.

The Basler are allowed to drum during the carnival season only, or on official festivals, else the bedlam disturb the citizens work or rest.

Basler are said to be born with drumsticks in their hands, hence the sound of drumming goes to their heart and marrow. Children practice with pieces of wood on chair-backs. Later they are taught by the drum-master of their father's *Fasnachts Clique*. Fifers learn their art at the Conservatoire. To avoid excessive noise, drummers practice during the year on special wooden blocks at the *Cliques'* club-houses — ancient guild-halls.

The Valaisans' and Baslers' fondness for drumming has a common origin — military service in foreign lands.

Crusaders returning from the Holy Land, introduced drums in Europe between the 11th and 13th centuries. These crude wooden barrels were presumably of Persian origin, *tambour* being a Persian word. They served to transmit military signals and commands, or to sound alarm at surprise attacks of towns. Soon, fifes were added to lead marching troops. In Switzerland, these instruments first appeared at the battle of Sempach in 1386.

Basle tradesmen and artisans, grouped in guilds, were the city's militia. They went for yearly muster on the Monday following Ash Wednesday. Reveille was beaten at four o'clock in the morning to assemble the men. After muster, the guildsmen-soldiers paraded in town with drums and fifes, frequently followed by soot-grimed masqueraders. Despite threats of heavy fines and imprisonment decreed by the Church to suppress the heathenish mummery, the Basler did not refrain from these revelries. Basle chronicles mention carnivals as from the 13th century.

Louis XIV, impressed by the drumming of his Swiss Guard, granted his Swiss regiments the special favour to march to the tunes of their own bands playing the "Swiss March" and the "Swiss Streich". Much later, Napoleon I who also appreciated drumming, awarded good drum-masters with gold-encrusted ebony drumsticks.

Meanwhile, copper kettles had replaced the original wooden drums; nowadays, these instruments are made of brass cylinders, with taut calphides closing the open ends. As an added feature, the Basle drum (40 cm high with a diameter of 40-42 cm) has a metal string spanned across the lower hide, to enhance the resonance. It also serves now as solo instrument in symphonies.

During foreign service, the Swiss picked up other nations' military marches. In the Netherlands, the regiment De Meuron played in 1781-83 the Royal Dutch Marine's tunes, while bandmen of the regiment de Courten adopted the British Grenadiers' and the Royal Irish regiment's marches. Others learnt from the Allied troops marching through Switzerland in 1813-14.

When the Swiss Guard was dissolved in 1830, and a few years later the Federal Army replaced the cantonal militia, the Basle drummers were at a loss. Former guilds became private clubs — *Fasnachts Cliquen* — whose chief occupations are the practice of drumming and preparation of carnival. Since then, the Basle carnival begins with the *Morgestraich* — reveille — at 4 a.m. on the Monday after Ash Wednesday. To light the way in the dark city, each Clique carries a huge lantern, on whose transparent paper sides caricature depict the chosen carnival subject. To enable the men carrying the heavy lanterns to keep in step, the drummers adapted their rhythm. Not content with just beating time, they developed their technique, refined and varied the strokes.

From 1830 onward, the Basler composed many new marches. Emil Krug (1841-1907), a rich merchant, was dissatisfied with the firm Basle stroke which Severin had taught him. Around 1880 he went to the Valais to learn from César Dornay who, for many years, had been drummer in France. The Valaisan taught the Basler in a marble quarry and light, flowing strokes of the French school. At home, Krug composed the "Walliser" and the "Märmeli" recalling the lessons in the marble quarry.

(In recent years, one of Basle's *Regierungsräte*, Dr. Lucas Burckhardt, composed special marches for drummers and fifers, at least one of them on Scottish folk tunes, called "Whisky Soda". ED.)

Despite marked differences in their drumming, the Valaisans and the Basler like to meet and compete. This year, a Basle *Clique* is playing as guest band in the carnival pageant of Monthey. No doubt, the men of both Cantons will afterwards sit together far into night to discuss techniques and their passion for drumming.

(By courtesy of "Treize Etoiles" Sion.)

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