

**Zeitschrift:** Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad  
**Herausgeber:** Organisation of the Swiss Abroad  
**Band:** 46 (2019)  
**Heft:** 1

**Buchbesprechung:** Ein Irokese am Genfersee [Willi Wottreng]

**Autor:** Gunten, Ruth von

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

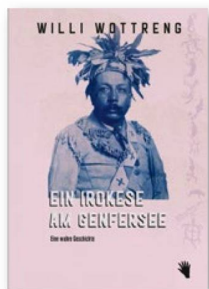
### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 09.07.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## Deskaheh – an Iroquois on Lake Geneva



WILLI WOTTRENG:  
"Ein Irokese am Genfersee"  
Bilgerverlag, Zurich  
198 pages; CHF 30.00

"I believe, when looking back, that books about the Indians were key in my education. Later I learned that one says indigenous peoples, to be politically correct." Those are the words of the first-person narrator in the novel based on the true story of Iroquois Chief Deskaheh. Just by chance, she came across some photos and letters. Her research allowed her to discover the history of the indigenous people in the Grand River territory in Ontario, which had rejected the supremacy of Canada. Appointed by the Council of Elders, Chief Deskaheh travelled for that reason to Geneva in 1923. He was to advocate for the recognition and independence of his people before the Council of the

League of Nations. But he failed – due to the lack of interest of politicians and bureaucrats and the arrogance of the Western world. Although his speeches are huge public successes, the people persist in their prejudices against the "savage" wearing an Indian costume. After spending 18 months in Europe, Deskaheh has to return empty-handed – but does not manage to make it all the way back home. The Canadian government had forcibly removed the Council of Elders and conducted "democratic" elections. Deskaheh died of pneumonia in 1925 in exile on US territory. Soon the rumour was spread that he had been poisoned.

The author of the book, Willi Wottreng, has done meticulous research; facts and figures are historically documented. The author deftly switches between the angle of the first-person narrator and the story of Deskaheh. As a reader, one closely experiences how the former farmer grows into his role of speaker for his people, and one accompanies him during his stay in Geneva and on his lecture trip right across Switzerland. His frustration can be felt when he speaks untiringly with diplomats and tries in vain to advance to the high ranks of the League of Nations. Delicately, simply by suggestion, the author describes the relationship of the Iroquois with Hedwige of Geneva. The author skilfully brings the story full circle by having the storyteller travel to Grand River where she hands over the few documents to an indigenous school. A wonderful homage to Iroquois Chief Deskaheh, advocate for the independence of his people.

Willi Wottreng, born in 1948, studied history and was involved in the youth movement in 1968. He worked as a journalist for "Weltwoche" and "NZZ am Sonntag". The book author and journalist, who lives in Zurich, is a member of the board of the GMS Society for Minorities in Switzerland.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

## A sonorous anniversary



TONHALLE  
ORCHESTRA ZÜRICH:  
Celebrating 150 Years,  
14 CD, Sony 2018

It was once again centre stage – the good old CD. In the heart of immense Beijing, Ilona Schmiel, Artistic Director of the Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, presented the excellent box set "Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, Celebrating 150 Years" to the director of the Beijing Music Festival. On tour, the 14 CDs went down just as well two days later in Shanghai where they were a present for the Swiss consul.

Naturally, the entire 150 years could not be reproduced, even if the era of the gramophone record began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, there are no recordings of Friedrich Hegar, the first principal conductor. But thanks to numerous radio recordings, the classics fan

can be present in the Tonhalle concert hall from 1942, listening to how Volkmar Andreae conducts Anton Bruckner's 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony. He directed the orchestra for 43 years.

After Swiss Principal Conductor Erich Schmid, the Tonhalle went international in 1957 with Hans Rosbaud – and remained so with Rudolf Kempe, Gerd Albrecht, Christoph Eschenbach, Hiroshi Wakasugi, Claus Peter Flor, David Zinman and Lionel Bringuier.

Arriving in Zurich with the young Frenchman in 2014 was German artistic director Ilona Schmiel, who can really enthuse when talking about the institution of the orchestra. Yet, she also knows that she is not the captain of a hip new speedboat, but of a 150-year-old steamer. She is of the opinion that one cannot tell the age of an orchestra, but one can feel when high quality and tradition have been consistently handed down to succeeding generations: "the pride in one's performance, long-standing tradition and a unique sound".

Such an old orchestra is distinguished by an interplay of the highest artistic quality, the greatest possible flexibility in the repertoire, the mastery of a variety of styles, the strong influence of the respective principal conductor and being open to guest conductors.

It is fascinating to hear on the CDs the same orchestra with 20 different conductors, also with world-famous guests such as Bernard Haitink and Lorin Maazel. All these recordings can be heard for the first time on CD. From Haydn to Heinz Holliger, the chronological spectrum of the works ranges from 1771 to 1995. Zurich can also look forward to the future under the new Principal Conductor Paavo Järvi. Incidentally, the first CD recordings featuring works by Olivier Messiaen (!) are already planned.

CHRISTIAN BERZINS