

Vintners' Festival - Vevey, 1955

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VINTNERS' FESTIVAL — Vevey, 1955

Every 25 years, the well-known resort of Vevey on Lake Geneva organises a remarkably interesting, time-honoured VINTNERS' FESTIVAL. Apart from being a resort, Vevey is a centre of the Swiss wine industry, for it lies at the foot of the terraced, south-facing vineyards of Lavaux, which stretch some 12 miles along the Swiss shore of the lake, between Lausanne and Montreux.

A traditional event of the Festival is an open-air Festival Play which assumes such proportions that almost the entire population of the township is mobilised; its preparations and organisation commences several years before the actual Festival and the play is performed in the Market Square, the town's centre. Accommodation on vast stands is provided for 15,000 to 20,000 spectators.

The Vintners' Festival is an ancient folk tradition. Originally it consisted of a simple, merry pageant of vintners, who filed through the streets of Vevey, after they had received their wages from their guild. This march-past soon assumed the proportions of a local folk festival, then expanded into a grand-scale event of international repute: its organisation continued to be undertaken by the "Louable Confrerie des Vignerons" (Worshipful Company of Vintners), and still is today. However, in order to secure the success of the Festival, the Company now mobilises the aid of the whole population of the town, who train intensively to supply choirs, actors, musicians.

The Festival play itself is performed during a two-week period, and throughout this fortnight, great animation fills the town. Everyone has something to do with the play, some part to fill—tradesmen and business men, employees, vintners and farmers from the neighbouring countryside—and all wear local costumes.

August, 1955, has been earmarked for the forthcoming Vevey Festival. The huge Market Square will once again be converted into a vast amphitheatre, with the stands rising tier upon tier around it. The traditional theme of the Festival—the cycle of the Seasons, the soil and the farmer's and vintner's work—is an occasion for a magnificent thanksgiving for the fruit of the earth.

The last Festival took place in 1927: settings and costumes were due to the Swiss painter Ernest Bieler; the words and musical score were written by Pierre Girard and Gustave Doret—to the latter's great talent was also due the 1905 Festival. Some 2000 performers took part in this impressive play.

It is also a tradition in Vevey that each successive Festival Play should surpass the preceding one and, certainly, the 1955 performance promises to do so. The words and musical score have been written by Geo. Blanc and Carlo Hem-

merling; the stage manager is Jo Baeriswyl, the scenic artist Louis Fost and, co-ordinating the work of all these experts is the art manager, Maurice Lehmann, Director of the Paris Opera and Opera-Comique.

The human material with which these specialists will have to work include some 3100 performers (in 1927, there were 2140)—of whom about 500 will sing the great massed choirs.

The backdrop of the 1955 play will be the natural scenic beauty of the Savoy Alps and the blue waters of the Lake; for the first time in the annals of the Festival, the stands will be built facing the Lake, so that spectators can enjoy the really beautiful natural scenery.

Full use will be made of all technical innovations to improve the acoustics and sonic rendering of the music. The stereophonic system will probably be employed to obtain novel sound effects and ensure perfect hearing for all spectators.

Eleven performances of the Festival Play are to be given: seven in the morning and four at night. The evening performances will be particularly interesting on account of lighting effects, stressing the colour and fantasy of massed groups of performers. The programme of the Festival will also include two pageants.

HAPPY SWISS PARTY IN WELLINGTON.

A delightful party was held on December 29th, when members of the Swiss Ladies' Group met at the beautiful home of Mrs. O. Oesch.

It was a warm, sunny afternoon and everyone was in a gay Christmas mood. The children played happily on the lawns while the ladies talked together, and then a most delicious afternoon tea, which had been contributed by each one bringing a plate, was rapidly consumed by the children, and eaten with more leisure but equal enjoyment by the adults.

Then it was the children's turn to entertain us with a concert, and we soon realized that we had some fine young artists in our group. Who knows—perhaps some future Eileen Joyce or Laurence Olivier? Noreen Schlatter, Ruth Oesch, and Theri Brulisauer played the piano very charmingly for us, Ronnie Schlatter and Michael Neuer recited, and little Michelle Brulisauer, while perhaps not showing any future as an opera singer, nevertheless charmed us all with her little song.

As we all sat round the beautifully decorated and lighted Christmas tree we felt that the spirit of the Christ child was with us, and those who had loved ones in Switzerland felt very near to them. We listened to some fine recordings, and sang carols while Mrs. Meadows played for us, then she thrilled us all with her lovely voice as she sang Reber's Cradle Song.

Now came the time the children were waiting for, because they could see, tucked away under the Christmas tree some parcels tied with gay