

# Hugues Cuenod, glyndebourne's longest-serving tenor

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1970)**

Heft 1599

PDF erstellt am: **01.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690540>

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## A BUNDLE OF PAPERS FROM BERNE

All Swiss societies and institutions abroad—that is to say those who are known at the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, 3000 Berne—recently received bundles of printed matter of important contents.

Apart from the message of the President of the Confederation on the occasion of the Swiss National Day (in seven languages; the English version appeared in the "Swiss Observer" of 24th July), there was a leaflet on "*Die Schweiz-heute*", a book which was published by Sauerlaender in Aarau and has been brought up to date, i.e. to 1968. It is an excellent book especially for young people, and as it only costs 10 francs for the Swiss abroad, it is well worth ordering from the Secretariat. A number of competent experts have written articles on the past, on the present life in Switzerland from every aspect and on important problems of the future.

Talking of young people, the consignment of printed matter also contained a small leaflet introducing the "*Weltschweizer*" *Youth Magazine*. It is a highly informative as well as entertaining periodical, small and neat and extremely well edited. Young people who are interested in the German or French/Italian edition, should apply to the Secretariat. It is sent free of charge, but as it is a burden on the funds, the publishers would be glad to have a minimum annual contribution of 7 francs from those able to pay. Apart from giving interesting facts on Switzerland and Swiss life, it also contains information on skiing camps, youth meetings and summer camps, schooling and training facilities in Switzerland and many other matters of interest to young Swiss living abroad. Even if no "*Weltschweizer*" is required, is it a good idea to register with the "*Jugenddienst*", the youth service in Berne.

For young people too, is the *Pestalozzi Almanach* which may be ordered before 10th September from Berne. There are three editions at S. Fr. 4.40, one in German for boys, one in German for girls and a mixed one in French. The Italian edition costs S.Fr. 2.30.

The 51st *Annual Report* of the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad which is under the auspices of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, is an illustrated booklet of nearly 50 pages. It tells of all the varied activities of the organisation, the work of the Commission, our "Parliament", the contacts with over 550 individual societies (visits, film service, etc.), information and advice service, press and publicity, social insurance, youth service and its camps, taking care of young Swiss from abroad who do their military service in Switzerland, "*Weltschweizer*" and "*Echo*" (the two publications), education and training, Swiss schools abroad (20 now and all recognised by

the Confederation), Solidarity Fund, etc. The report tells about last year's assembly at Montreux, and it carries the accounts. It gives a list of all members of the Commission and the staff, members of various committees, and a list of Swiss papers published abroad. The "Swiss Observer" is one of only seven (one in Buenos Aires, three in USA, one in Paris and one in Rome). The report ends with a three page map showing where the Swiss communities abroad are. Anyone interested in receiving a free copy should apply to the Secretariat.

Finally, the packet included several sheets and brochures with regard to the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in Berne in 1972 when the 50th *Assembly* will be celebrated for a full week. More about this event will be published in the S.O. at a later date.

And please, don't forget to call at the Secretariat if you happen to pass through Berne or any time. They will be happy to receive you.

(complement sent in independently  
by MM)

## HUGUES CUENOD, GLYNDEBOURNE'S LONGEST-SERVING TENOR

At 68, Hugues Cuenod, tenor extraordinary, inspirer of Stravinsky, most cherished of Glyndebourne ornaments, must be the older opera-singer in the world in regular solo harness. He looks and behaves at least 15 years younger than he is and I asked him what the secret was. How could he preserve his voice exactly as it was nearly half a century ago? The answer was simple, he said. "I didn't really have a voice to start with. It was built up on nothing."

You can see what he means. His high tenor, clear and trumpet-toned, is not a voice of body. In a sense it is fabricated, yet it is such a true instrument and the artistry behind it is so intense, that Stravinsky chose Cuenod to create the part of the auctioneer Sellem in "*The Rake's Progress*," a comedy rôle which drew him to Glyndebourne in the first place. Within a couple of years Stravinsky told him—very casually during a not very good Swiss performance of "*Rake's Progress*"—that he'd written a work specially for him.

The Cantata of 1952, settings of medieval English verse, has a tenor part so painfully high in tessitura that Cuenod is one of the few who can cope with it. Even he had to complain to the composer that at one point 13 minutes of singing in one taxing register was too much. Stravinsky had the answer. He had heard a record of Cuenod—in fact it had directly inspired him—in one of Couperin's "*Tenebrae*" Masses, and there he sang in that register for 22 minutes. "But on a record I was able to pause between 'takes'," Cuenod pointed out. "I hadn't thought of that", said Stravinsky gruffly.

Cuenod's first appearance at Glyndebourne came in 1954 when he was already over 50, yet since then he has appeared there in some 350 performances. Proudly he points out that this season he has topped the record for Glyndebourne appearances previously held by another tenor, Richard Lewis. When he first arrived he pointed out to Moran Caplat that he had very nearly been engaged some 18 years

earlier for one of the pre-war seasons. John Christie had read about him, and Cuenod, having given a preliminary audition in Paris, was due to come over for a final audition when a cable arrived asking with Christie-like directness: "How tall are you?" No, they said promptly in their next cable, he was far too tall for Monastatos or Pedrillo.

That failure to appear at Glyndebourne before the war had been a disappointment to him, but when he did arrive in 1954 he had his consolation. Since then he has appeared in every Glyndebourne season except one, creating dozens of comedy rôles, providing Glyndebourne sparkle more predictably than any other singer. The one exception was the 1961 season, but Cuenod told Caplat frankly that he wouldn't get rid of him that easily. He came for a holiday instead, staying where he always stays at Mrs. Almond's in Ringmer, a marvellous haven where generations of Glyndebourne singers find a home from home.

Not surprisingly life at Glyndebourne during the season isn't just a question of going on stage, and Cuenod's rôle over the years has been almost as much social as theatrical. He is a star, but he is also one of the team. Now that he has been there so long, he finds that he has to act as father confessor in the sort of emotional problems you get when any temperamental artistes are working together. Not that he minds temperament. He prefers that to the plodding inability to enjoy working at Glyndebourne which afflicts some of the teutonic newcomers. "A singing pudding" he says, of one rising star.

Significantly the colleagues he singles out for highest praise are those who remain themselves, unspoiled, "simple" in the best sense, who have worked at Glyndebourne as though born there. Joan Sutherland he mentions particularly (Mme. Silberklang in Glyndebourne's "*Impresario*" was a landmark when she was on her way up) and also Janet Baker "one of the greatest artistes I've ever heard." He

listened to Janet Baker's Dido at Glyndebourne from the wings every night, before going off to make up for his part in the second half of the programme, Ravel's "L'heure Espagnole." This very season Janet Baker has even managed to expand her dramatic range in the comic Cavalli opera "La Calisto", doubling the rôles of Diana and (riding crop in hand) the lascivious Jove dressed as Diana. Cuenod in the same production, as a bad-tempered nymph, finally ravished by one of Pan's satyrs, has a memorable triumph.

The part of the nymph in "La Calisto" was devised by the editor and conductor, Raymond Leppard, as a vehicle specially for Cuenod (the sort of adaptation dear to seventeenth-century hearts) yet Cuenod almost missed the chance of appearing. Some government official asked Moran Caplat why so small a part could not be taken by an English instead of a Swiss singer. Caplat had the complete answer. M. Cuenod, he explained, was unique in such "drag" parts. He was "an operatic Danny La Rue".

That link with cabaret did not insult Cuenod in the way it would have done many other singers. His first appearance in England—as far back as 1928—was not in opera at all, but in Noël Coward's "Bitter Sweet" as one of the Green Carnations. The singer Mary Garden recommended him, and Coward "out of respect" engaged him. "I may have lost a lot a year in not singing Bach and things, but I learnt a lot about another side of my work".

Cuenod, unlike so many singers, has a wide range of interests. In praising Vittorio Gui, great Glyndebourne figure for many years after the war, Cuenod at once mentions the conductor's literary taste. "You could talk Proust with him." He himself came to know Aldous Huxley through Stravinsky and before the war as one of Nadia Boulangers' group (he was one of the soloists in her famous pre-war records of Monteverdi) he was at the centre of the Parisian world of music and the arts.

He remembers that for one of Nadia Boulanger's concerts he was preparing excerpts from Debussy's "Pelléas et Mélisande", and (again with the good offices of Mary Garden) he went to see Maeterlinck's widow, Georgette Leblanc. Her home was almost a caricature of 1890 taste—"orange cushions, black velvet Pierrots, spooky in a Charles Adams way"—and she told Cuenod of the time when, still married to her first husband, she was meeting Maeterlinck secretly. She remembered one meeting on a park bench in a Belgian provincial town, prosaic with its bandstand and lamp standards. "Don't look now, but I think my husband is behind us", she had said to Maeterlinck. Then a

moment later: "I can see his shadow. It is my husband". The husband then stepped forward, brandishing not a spear as Golaud does in "Pelléas et Mélisande" but a pistol. Maeterlinck was so frightened he jumped straight up a tree, and so impressed he transformed a sordid scene into the magical experience of "Pelléas".

Cuenod's background is Swiss. He has lived in and around Vevey on Lake Geneva almost all his life, and still keeps a fine old house there. Curiously he was living there at exactly the time when within a mile or so Stravinsky was busy writing "The Rite of Spring" but Cuenod, 20 years younger than the great man, was too young to know him.

He had family connections with England on both sides. His father had two English grandmothers (producing colonel cousins who, as Cuenod says, were "the backbone of empire") and on his mother's side he has Spencer-Churchill ancestors. His first visit to England came through the family, when he tutored two distant cousins in French in their Gloucestershire home. That was in the early twenties. He remembers that "they drank barley-water y'know, and made me look at cricket for a long time, which bored me to death". As long as he doesn't have to look at cricket (which he still doesn't understand) Cuenod loves being in England. For as long as he can sing, I predict that he will be here every season, for he, like cricket and Glyndebourne, has become an English institution.

(Guardian)

## ANGLO-SWISS

### ACROW JUST SHORT OF FORECAST

Acrow (Engineers), William de Vigiers structural metalwork group, reports profits for the year of £2,079,000 before tax. This is within £1,000 of the forecast made last September, at the time of Acrow's unsuccessful takeover bid for Allied Ironfounders, and is exactly 10 per cent better than the previous year.

At the trading level, profits were 16 per cent higher at £2,585,000, but depreciation rose £68,000 to £377,000, and instead of receiving net "other" income of £39,000, Acrow paid net interest of £44,000. After a lower proportionate tax charge, however, earnings are over 19 per cent better at £1,223,000, or 1s. 10.2d. a share. The total dividend is increased by a final of 5.4d. to 10.8d. a share, compared with the equivalent of 9.5d.

For the first four months of the current year, sales are reported to be at an all-time record.

(Times)

### SWISS DRUG FIRMS IN UK PROFITS CLASH

The British Government has clashed head on with major Swiss drug companies over a demand by the Department of Health that the firms provide complete sets of accounts—something which not even the Swiss Government can demand.

This follows arrangements agreed in Britain in April to ensure that the price of prescription drugs is fair and there is no excessive profiteering.



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