

News from the colony

Objekttyp: **Group**

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

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

Heft 1604

PDF erstellt am: **01.05.2024**

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Both speakers share a strong sense of humour (of a Viennese and a Basler brand) and this made their respective exposés all the more enjoyable.

(PMB)

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

The Monthly Meeting of the Society, held at Swiss House on Wednesday, 14th October, was chiefly dedicated to the veterans, no less than 10 of whom had earlier in the year received the "Wappenscheibe" of the S.K.V. for 50 years' membership of the association.

Some 25 members have obtained this coveted distinction during the last decade, seven of whom, viz Messrs. A. Baenziger, R. Chappuis, O. Grob, E. Hardmeier, G. Hediger, J. Oertli and E. Zwicky, with an aggregate membership of 374 years (an average of 54 years), were present. They were extended a cordial welcome by the Chairman, Mr. A. Jaccard, who thanked them for their long-standing and devoted support of the Society's activities.

He had a special word of welcome to the doyen of this venerable company, Mr. E. Hardmeier, who had come down from Ipswich for the occasion.

On behalf of the Central Committee, Mr. Jaccard presented the "Wappenscheibe", with a suitable commendation, to Mr. E. Zwicky, a member of the General Purposes and House Committee, who had been unable to attend the ceremony in Switzerland in June last.

A message of goodwill, signed by all present was sent to Mr. F. Streit, another veteran member, whose health prevented him from attending.

Adjourning to the ante-room, where a buffet, as well as liquid refreshments, awaited the company, the second half of the meeting was spent in lively conversation and exchange of reminiscences. Special thanks were expressed to Mr. D. Paschoud, a member of the Society, for making such excellent catering arrangements. Thus came to a close a most enjoyable and well-attended meeting.

W.B.

A "SWISS EVENING" AT JOHN LAING LTD.

Lady Kirby Laing, wife of the chairman of the John Laing group of companies, patroned a charity ball in the company headquarters for the benefit of the John Grooms Crippleage, Mill Hill. She was keeping up a family tradition as the Laings are a well-known Derbist family involved in many charitable organisations. The style of this particular charity function varies from year to year. Last year it took the form of a Halloween Party. This year's, as Lady Kirby Laing explained to me, was placed under the sign of Switzerland for no deeper reason than that she had spent a holiday in Switzerland and had fallen in love with the place.

In order to get this so-called "Swiss Evening" organised it was necessary to find Swiss costumes, a Swiss décor and Swiss specialities. John Laing's established contact with Mr. A. Schalch, manager of the Institute of Swiss Trade Promotion, who helpfully secured the co-operation of the Swiss Cheese Union, the Dorchester Hotel, the Swiss National Tourist Office, Hürlimann Beer and other Swiss com-

panies.

The modern refectory of Laing's Hendon headquarters were thus decorated with posters and flags supplied by the SNTU, with a "chalet" jointly owned by Hürlimann and the Swiss Cheese Union. Mr. Kaufeler, head chef of the Dorchester, had delegated two cooks to supervise the concoction of the fondues and the preparation of reuchtis and Swiss veal sausages. In fact, everything "Swiss" at this function with the exception of the colossal St. Bernard dog panting at Lady Laing's feet as she greeted her guests were supplied by Swiss personalities or Swiss firms. Their helpfulness must surely have been appreciated by the management of Laing's great contracting empire and served towards the cause of Anglo-Swiss relations.

This charity was in fact a local one. With the exception of a handful of Swiss Centre employees and one or two Laing managers, the 400 guests present were local residents supporting a local charity. We enjoyed an hour-long reception before dinner, during which we drank punch and supplied ourselves with raffle and tombola tickets. The Blue City Five were playing slow rocks to an empty dance floor but their tunes supplied an agreeable background to the reception hum. Dinner began with a highly successful fondue. Guests were pressed around the fondue pans, dipping their bread morsels with cocktail sticks ornated with a Swiss flag into the unctuous molten cheese.

This entrée was followed with other recipes from home and a prolonged dinner gave way to the raffle draw, performed by the celebrity of the



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evening, pop star Cliff Richard. The first prize was a holiday in Switzerland. When he had given away all the prizes, Cliff performed some of his very old and classical numbers, such as "Living Doll" and "Bachelor Boy" and the attendance accompanied him with rhythmic clapping.

Cliff Richard came out mopping his forehead from this exercise and was immediately surrounded by a swarm of raptured old ladies trying for an autograph. As he was claimed by so many people, it was not possible for me to talk to him. Although I wouldn't think that the majority of the friends who read this report rock and roll anymore, I'm sure that they must of heard of Cliff Richard, a veteran of the pop world. He was already at the top in the heady days of Paul Anka, Ricky Nelson and Tommy Steele and has professionally outlived them all. In fact, the only group with a comparable history would be "The Shadows". They, like Cliff Richard, were active long before the "Beatles" and the "Rolling Stones". Cliff is now 31 or 32 and still a bachelor. This, together with the exceptional length of his career, makes him a rather off-beam pop singer. There is another important element: Cliff is a confessed Christian and has written a sincere and limpid book on his faith. He doesn't seem to have a forcible personality but exudes a gentle simplicity and a genuine kindness which catches anyone who observes him for a little while.

Guests were still pounding the dance floor when we left at 1 a.m., taking a Swiss flag with Cliff Richard's autograph as a souvenir.

(PMB)

MADELEINE BAER AND LENNART RABES

A Musical Treat commemorating the World Day for Animals

On Saturday, 3rd October, a concert took place at the Humane Education Centre in London. It was in aid of the Crusade against all Cruelty to Animals, and it was held in association with the European Liszt Centre (ELC). The good cause and the reputation of the artists greatly appealed to members, and a second performance had to be fixed for the late afternoon. This demanded great stamina of the artists, but both rose magnificently to the strenuous demand.

The well-known Swiss soprano, Miss Madeleine Baer (niece of Mr. Frank Conrad), had kindly offered to come all the way from Switzerland to take part in the recital. The Swedish-born pianist, Lennart Rabes, has connections with the Swiss community in London, too; he is the organist of the German-speaking parish of the Swiss Church. This Swiss accent was no doubt the reason why the Swiss Cultural Attaché and Mrs. Birrer, as well as the Swiss Consul and Mrs. Adams attended the concert. There were a number of prominent Swiss in the audience, some of them connected with the

European Liszt Centre. Also among the guests were the Wood Green Deputy Mayor and Lady Mayoress, as well as the Lord Somers who is connected both with the Crusade and the ELC (he is on their Advisory Committee which includes such personalities as Sir Adrian Bold, C.H.). Lord Somers made the introduction and welcomed the guests.

The concert began with a series of piano pieces and songs in which animals figured, whilst the second part was devoted to Liszt. Miss Baer contributed three songs to the animals series, among them Schubert's "Forelle". In the second part, she sang six songs by Liszt, well-known poems by Goethe, Heine and others, which have attracted composers in the past. Liszt's supremacy showed itself in the way he adjusted his music to the mood of the words.

Miss Baer's considerable reputation was made on the continent as a talented operatic singer, and her sense of the dramatic is very marked, rather too much perhaps for a *Lieder* singer. In Moussorgsky's "Käfer" and Pfitzner's "Ich hör ein Vöglein locken", this was an advantage, and her skill manifested itself to the full. In Liszt's beautiful lyrical songs, however, she showed a certain lack of serenity and calm, one of the essential qualities of a *Lieder* singer. But her voice is full and warm, especially in the middle range, and it is here that her musicality shows itself to the greatest advantage. It is hoped that one will have the opportunity of hearing her fine voice in more dramatic works in the future.

Lennart Rabes began his career in Sweden with piano instruction at the age of 4½ and conducting lessons at 9, and although he is now resident in London, his reputation is as yet more established on the continent than in this country. He is the first pianist who was given the honour of playing Liszt's "Totentanz" at the Campo Santo Monumentale in Pisa, below the famous frescos which inspired Liszt to compose that superb work. Mr. Rabes's recital made such an impression that he was called back to Italy to repeat the concert.

In the recital on 3rd October, he was impressive both as a pianist and as a perceptive and responsive accompanist. His strength lies in the interpretation of Liszt, a composer he seems to know intimately, rather than in some of the descriptive "animal" pieces. In spite of his beautifully polished style and fleetness of fingers, it is not in his character to produce the flippancy required for Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumble Bee", nor the light-hearted playfulness for Debussy's "Jimbo Lullaby". He is an artist who puts himself completely into second place and lets the music dominate, a most welcome change from some of the keyboard artists who show an over-endowment of panache. Behind his cool and always collected

appearance lies great sensitivity and a very wide range of accomplished and powerful interpretation from the soft lyrical to the highly spectacular. In "Un Sospiro" and "La Leggerezza", his lightness of touch was as convincing as his brilliance and vigour in the "Csárdás Macabre", a spirited and astonishingly modern work by Liszt, composed in 1881-2, but not published until 1953, and which has only recently been included in pianists' repertoires. Lennart Rabes is undoubtedly a highly gifted and skilful artist. One hopes to hear him more frequently also in this country. (E.F.)

GEORGE A. RONUS



As we announced in our last issue, Mr. George Ronus died on 8th October after a short but severe illness at the London Clinic. With him, the Swiss community in Great Britain, especially the Swiss in London, have lost not only a prominent member but also a trusted friend. As Managing Director of the Dorchester Hotel he was a much respected representative of what is best in the Swiss tradition of hotel-keeping.



George Ronus was born in Basle and decided very early in his life that he would like to be an *hôtelier*. But he wanted to learn about finances first, so he spent four years in a bank in St. Moritz, followed by a year in the office of a chartered accountant in London. He began his real training at the Suvretta House in St. Moritz, followed by a period at the equally renowned Park Hotel at Vitznau on the Lake of Lucerne.

The late Mr. Anton Bon of the famous Swiss hotel family, Managing Director of the Dorchester Hotel in London until 1946, chose the young man as his assistant in 1936. Shrewdly assessing his abilities, he trained him to be his successor, and he appointed him Manager at the outbreak of the war, when George Ronus was only 31. He could not have made a better choice. Throughout the war, Mr. Ronus remained at his post, taking no holidays and no notice of bombs and rockets.