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«Nit möööglich . . .»

Grock – King of Clowns



in memory of the most famous clown of all times on his 100th birthday

At the head of my contribution on Grock, the greatest musical clown of this century, I should like to put a few dates.

Charles Adrian Wettach which was the real name of the world-renowned clown, was born on 10th January 1880 at Reconvilier in the Bernese Jura, son of a watchmaker and innkeeper. Young Wettach followed an «ordinary» occupation first, but then he was fascinated by the world of artistes when he visited a wandering circus: He learned a number of tricks and, together with his sister, he entertained the guests at his father's inn. Although millions laughed at his ideas later, for him, too, the beginning was difficult. Adrian Wettach first tried his luck as hotel page, house teacher and piano tuner, before he became a master of wit and fun at variety shows and the circus. He had great success in the

circus arena with his partner An-tonet, but then he left the circus and became the most expensive clown at variety shows. In 1952, he went on tour with Director Kurt Collien: the latter opened a circus with the name of «Grock», in which the famous clown was the great attraction. When, two years later, Grock retired to his luxury estate on the Italian Riviera with his wife Ines, he was a millionaire several times over. He died on 14th July 1959.

When I was a small boy already, I was proud that the indisputably best clown was a Swiss. I met Grock for the first time over 50 years ago, when I was 8. Together with my parents, I visited a performance at the Zurich Corso Theatre, and in the foyer we were greeted by Grock. He was always responsible for more than half the programme, and that is why we could never engage him at the Knie Circus; but

for financial reasons, too, we should never have been able to engage him. Nevertheless, my father Friedrich and my Uncle Charles Knie kept up a great friendship with Grock. Before the outbreak of the second world war, I could no longer visit any more performances. But when he came on tour from Italy during the war years 1944/45, we went to visit him almost twice a week, and during the winter months, he often visited us in our winter quarters in Rapperswil.

I was most impressed by the way Grock managed to attract the public to him, to engage their eyes, ears and feelings. He could make himself understood in many languages, and when he talked in private, he explained all his inventions of which he was particularly proud. In the course of time, I saw him on stage with four different





From left to right: Fredy Knie, Grock and Rolf Knie in 1944 in Basle (Photo H. E. Staub)

partners, among them also a Swiss. For me, the Dutchman Max van Embden was the most ideal partner; he is still alive in Geneva, aged

well over 80 and visits the Knie Circus regularly.

Later I met Grock in Paris and in various towns in Germany. Every

time we sat together, he reminded me of Gottlieb Duttweiler; he, too, could talk for hours of his world. In 1953, the Grock Circus undertook a tour of Switzerland, but not without previously discussing the tour places with the Knie Circus, so that there would be no problems.

After Grock's death in 1959, his widow bequeathed some of his requisites: two stiff collars, three wigs, a felt hat, the frock-coat always several sizes too small, the large «August» trousers and the waistcoat belonging to it, the rattle which his wife used to work during the performance, the large violin with the double-sized violin case and the famous seat of the chair through which he executed his unique and world-renowned jump onto the chair-back. I shall treasure all these souvenirs. For to me Grock was the absolute best individual musical clown.

Fredy Knie sen.

Aphorisms

A selection of aphorisms taken from the speech made by Federal Councillor Willi Ritschard, head of the Federal Department of Finance, during the Assembly of the Swiss abroad held in Lugano on August 23rd 1980.

«Here you have a federal cashbox in which a five-franc piece will soon start getting bored because it is all on its own. Anyone who is married to the Confederation cannot expect a night on the tiles at the moment.»

«You should know, and must know, that the imaginary «Golden Calf» around which we Swiss are also reputedly supposed to dance, is now nothing more than an ordinary cow, at least for the Minister of Finance.»

«Since 1950 we have voted thirteen times in all on Federal Tax proposals – that is an average of once every three years. On seven occasions the people have voted against. The only times they have voted in favour of such proposals have been when tax concessions have punched new holes in the federal cashbox instead of filling it.»

«Our national balance-sheet is bound in beautiful green paper full of hope. But when

you see the red figures in this green balance-sheet you are more likely to see black spots in front of your eyes.»

«I would probably have grasped some things in my life better if they had not been explained to me.»

«A person whose total knowledge is derived solely from books would be better off placed on a bookshelf.»

«The financial position of the Confederation is not the result of mismanagement or a late night booze-up.»

«If you ask the man in the street or even some politicians *where* exactly economies should be made, you often get the not-exactly-instructive reply: «In the field of expenditure, of course!»»

«You cannot constantly ask the Confederation to contribute towards every possible scheme, at the same time persistently refuse new sources of income, and then still expect the red figures in the federal balance-sheet to disappear. You might just as well try to smash a revolving door.»

«Either the jacket is too loose, or the trousers

are too tight. Nobody is satisfied anymore, in spite of our financial blessings. We have become a poor rich people.»

«Switzerland is of course a small country. America is 200 times bigger and has a population 35 times larger. No point in Switzerland is farther than 249 kilometres from Berne. That is the sort of distance an American travels to the cinema.»

«The landscape, the type of houses and the climate change every few kilometres in Switzerland. And in most cases the character of the people changes at the same time.»

«But as Minister of Finance I cannot live in the belief that «Rösti» will grow if you plant boiled potatoes.»

«But we do not want any stormy upheavals either. Not every burst of gunfire heralds a revolution.»

«But – and this is the crucial point – he who does not think of the future will have no future. And I know that for our Swiss compatriots abroad too the future of our country is more important than temporary advantages which may then only lead to an abrupt end.»