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Vive la difference

Celebrations are as much part of everyday human life as our daily bread. Nevertheless traditional customs are threatened by an insidious process of erosion, as individualism and commercialisation make ever greater inroads into time-honoured folk rituals. The loss of individuality is undermining the beliefs on which many traditions are founded. Yet it is the very cult which lies at the root of many festivals that lends them such charm! We only have to think of the magic of carnival masks that herald the approach of spring throughout the country. Even in today's climate of spiritual barrenness, ceremonies to drive out evil spirits and ward off demons re-awaken the belief in magic.

Switzerland boasts a highly diversified festival culture, and all regions of the country have their own unique customs according to the season. In Eastern Switzerland the caterwauling music of the "Chalanda Marz" ushers in springtime festivals,



Lukas M. Schneider

"Switzerland has a highly diversified festival culture."

while the shrill ringing of bells celebrates the end of winter. In the early hours of the morning young people gather on village squares and form a noisy procession through the streets. In Zurich a major spring festival, the "Sechseläuten", is celebrated and culminates in the burning of the "Böög" (an effigy of Winter) on a huge bonfire.

Summer is the time for mountain festivals. In the central and lower Valais the season begins with classical cow fights in which the winner is selected to lead the herd for summering on the Alp. In Eastern Switzerland, picturesque cowherd meets are celebrated with alpenhorn blowing, flag-throwing and Swiss wrestling. And fans of horse-racing congregate for the equestrian festival in Saignelégier in the Jura.

Autumn heralds the time of wine festivals. While vintners invite the population to taste the latest vintage in the wine-growing villages of French-speaking Switzerland, in Locarno people gather at the lakeside promenade, where passers-by stop to buy chestnuts roasted on an open fire. And in Northern Switzerland children carrying "Räbeliechtl" (lanterns) light the way for street processions at dusk.

Finally, winter is dominated by representations of St. Nicholas. One of the most colourful is the costume worn by residents of the Appenzell hinterland, with its intricate filigree head-dress. The noise made by the "Trychler" of Oberhasli in the canton of Berne is impossible to ignore. Shaking their huge cowbells in synchrony, these muscular fellows march through villages and fields. Among festivals based on a historical event, Geneva's "Escalade" holds a special place. The festival is held to commemorate the failure of Savoy troops to seize the city of Calvin on 11 December 1602. The pitch torches which accompany the evening procession are emblematic of Geneva's dire situation at the time.

At "Swiss Review", too, the publishers and editorial team have reason to celebrate. Our magazine has been given a facelift by Karl-Heinz Gebert, a well-known Zurich print media designer. The new look is based primarily on modern typography and a simpler layout structure. It is our aim in future to increase the focus on the visual aspect, and we look forward eagerly to your feedback!

Lukas M. Schneider



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Basle's Carnival holds a special place in Switzerland's Shrovetide festivities. In terms of quantity it is the largest of all the country's regularly held events. But in terms of quality, too, this popular festival with its imaginative costumes is a cut above the rest.

Cover: ALEXANDRE ORLOFF

SWISS REVIEW

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 27th year of issue and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in more than 20 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 355,000. Regional news appears four times a year.

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