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Switzerland at the Oscars

If you watched the Oscars this year, you might not have guessed it, but Switzerland was there with 9 nominations total.

First there was "Finding Neverland" by Film director Marc Forster with six nominations, then

Film Producer Arthur Cohn's "Les Choristes" with two and the German film "Downfall" in which the Swiss Actor Bruno Ganz played the role of Hitler with one nomination. However, only "Finding Neverland" won an Oscar for "Original Score".

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But just to have been present among the very best was obviously an honor and an accomplishment. Following you will find

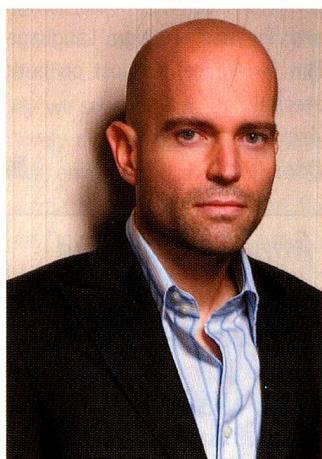
three different articles all having to do with these Swiss who made it into the big league.

Wal Baur

"Finding Neverland"

Second Oscar Nomination for Swiss Film Director Marc Forster

For Europeans - who have not grown up with Peter Pan, you may ponder what the meaning of this



**Swiss Film Director
Marc Forster**

film is. It relates the story of Sir James M. Barrie, (1860-1937), author of the book of Peter Pan. Forster avoids the Hollywood mawkishness and with fine sensibility takes the viewer into Barry's life, a

man who refused to grow up and saw the world with the precious enthusiasms of children.

One day in a London park, walking with his St. Bernard dog Porthos, he notices a young boy misbehaving while on an outing with his mother and siblings. His mother is battling an illness and is struggling to bring up her family after the death of her husband. Barrie, with a fondness and understanding for children wonders how he can take away the anger and grief of this child and engages him and his siblings in playful fantasies of fairy-tale kings, castles, cowboys, Indians. Before long London's Kensington Park becomes the ethereal scene of ships, flowing kites, and simply magic. The result is a glorious, fine-tuned story. The Film sweeps you into the wondrous world of make believe, an inspiring, heartwarming scenario of yesterday's world, but

it is all believable thanks to Forster's subtle direction. You feel like hugging the person next to you in the theatre – and – well the entire world

Johnny Depp gives a superb, mesmerizing portrayal of Barrie; Winslet is luminous as Sylvia Lewellyn Davies, the children's mother and Dustin Hoffman brilliantly underplays the producer of the play Peter Pan. "Finding Neverland" received 6 Oscar nominations (Best Actor, Johnny Depp – Adapted Screenplay – Film Editing – Art Direction – Costume Design – Original Score) and won one for Original Score. Deservedly so.

When Richard N. Gladstein, producer of the film, remarked, "Most films bear the personality of its director", he was right. Marc Forster experienced both depth and tragedy in his own life. Born into a financially well-situated family, he lived in various countries. His father was a physician and scientist. One day, the family's destiny changed dramatically when his father's financial consultant managed to lose the family's entire fortune. Almost at the same time, his Father was diagnosed with cancer and died two years later. Furthermore, one of his two Brothers became schizophrenic, which catapults any family into an emotional challenge and turmoil, his even more so when his brother committed suicide.

However, so Marc Forster points out, the tragedies brought the family closer together and gave him a deeper understanding for people and the dramas in their lives. His own dramas have resulted in a strong bond between him and his mother Ulli, who lives in Klosters, Switzerland. Marc, rather shy, does not seek the limelight; he remains modest about the achievements in his career. That does not prevent his mother to be justifiably proud of him.

If you have a chance, go see this film. It is an uplifting, wondrous experience and will linger in your memory.

Doris Ritzi

P.S. Marc Forster already finished another film "Spay" and is currently working on "Stranger than Fiction" with an extraordinary cast including Emma Thompson, Will Ferrell, Dustin Hoffman, Maggie Gyllenhaal, and Queen Latifah. ■

Next Regional News:

3/2005- Copy deadline: May 18

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3/2005- Copy deadline: Sept. 02

Mailing date: Oct. 13

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Les Choristes (The Chorus)

Swiss Producer Arthur Cohn's new film

"No", said everyone when Arthur Cohn planned to make this film. "It would not be a box office hit" it was claimed. But Cohn, who had won six Oscars in the past, more than any other producer throughout the world, and had never tried to produce a "money making" film, went right ahead. In cooperation with French producer Jacques Perrin and a French company, "Les Choristes" fortunately was realized.

The film opens with a renowned classic concert conductor just before going on stage when a visitor comes to see him. The two men reminisce about their years at "Fond de l'Etang".

The film flashes back to the late 1940's when a new, humble, middle-aged teacher Clement Matthieu arrives at Fond de l'Etang, a boarding school for troubled youths, orphaned, illegitimate or abandoned boys. Fond de l'Etang, (bottom of the Pond) appropriately called, gives you hardly a positive feeling. A dark, sinister building and a headmaster Rachin who believes brutal, tyrannical discipline and harsh punishment for the slightest misstep is the right, and only rule acceptable.

Matthieu, a music teacher who feels he is a failure, does not receive a positive welcome. The unruly boys play hard tricks on him. But he stays on, hoping he can turn the boys around by taking a real interest in them. He makes

friends with Janitor Chabert. Matthieu observes the boys. He notices Morhange, a boy with angelical, fine features "But no, explains the janitor, "Morhange has the face of an angel and the character of a little devil". With reason, Morhange too, plays tricks on him.

One day, Matthieu hears one of the boys sing and is immediately moved. He feels that music could establish confidence for the boys in themselves and finding more hope for the future. He "auditions" all of them and starts a choir. Soon, they begin to be interested and feel they now have a purpose in life.

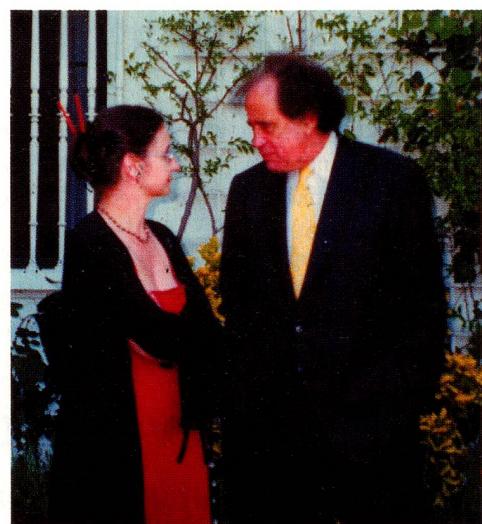
Slowly, they emerge as a truly exceptional choir and the music they make together glows, touches your heartstrings. In particular, Morhange shines as a very gifted soloist. For a while even Headmaster Rachin is affected and flies paper planes in his office. A benefactor, a wealthy countess comes to Fond de l'Etang to hear the boys' choir, and Rachin quickly

claims it was his idea to found it.

Matthieu whose heart falls for the pretty single mother of Morhange secretly hopes that she too has feelings for him. Unfortunately she is interested in another man. Matthieu not only loses her, he is even fired by Headmaster Rachin

and resignedly walks out of Fond de l'Etang into an unknown future, the boys strewing friendship notes to him out of their windows.

The film is a real jewel, will stay with you and makes you feel you have watched something worth-



Arthur Cohn in conversation with Swiss Journalist Marlene von Arx

while. The film received two Oscar nominations: for "Original Song" and for best Foreign Language film for France, but lost on both accounts.

Text and Photo:
Doris Ritzi

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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Swiss screen actor Bruno Ganz in San Francisco

The Castro Theatre once again – (10th anniversary) became the center of attraction of a critical and enthusiastic audience viewing the many new films from Germany, Austria and Switzerland. And for the 10th time organized and presented by the Goethe Institute in San Francisco – or better by its heart and soul, the ever so talented Dr. Ingrid Egger. Our gratitude does go to this director.

It was our aim to find out who Bruno Ganz is. What this Swiss actor who grew up in Zurich stands for – how and where he lived the last 63 years. Luckily as our first choice of the Ganz tribute we saw his film "Behind me". Rarely did we see a more subtle film, enlightening the viewer with a true and honest picture of the man in question. Ganz is seen at a variety of rehearsals for his 'Faust I and Faust II' performances. Just the thought that these Faust roles asked for acting solidly during 13 hours each weekend (he did that mostly in Berlin and some in Vienna) – leaves us in disbelief. Ganz teamed up with veteran documentary filmmaker Norbert Wiedmer of Berne, Switzerland.

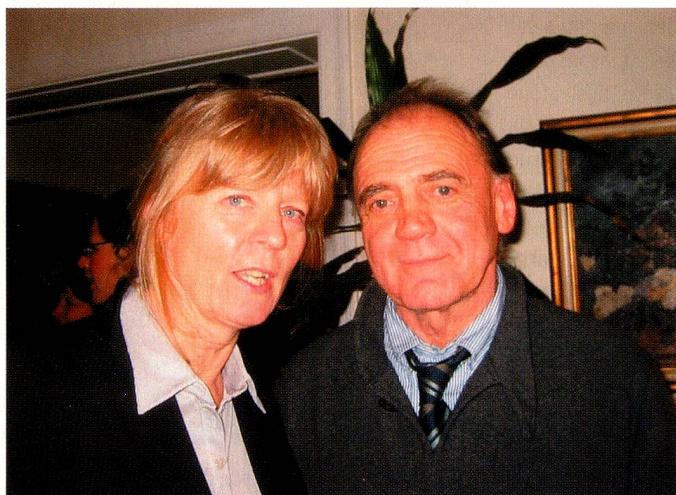
Bruno Ganz convinced us of his candid and serious character, of his talent as an actor. It's a film, which should not be missed by anyone seeking to learn more about the human aspect of the performer. It received the Berner Filmpreis in 2002. If you wish to rent a copy or find out more – e-mail to: info@swissfilms.ch.

And then came the "Downfall". The Castro was totally sold out for this performance – more so since Bruno Ganz attended in person and would face an open conversation on stage with film critic David Thomson.

The Goethe Institute chose this event to present the Swiss

actor with its Award for Lifetime Achievement in Acting. Ganz – the

was filling a void – that it should have been made. But as the ques-



Dr. Ingrid Egger and Bruno Ganz at a Reception given by Roland Quillet, Swiss Consul General in San Francisco

humble, kind, smart and clever actor deserved this award, indeed. We had a chance for an interview and questioned him – looking at a variety of aspects of this heavy role. Of course, Bruno Ganz made it clear, that he wasn't exactly stupid when confronted to play the role of Hitler – during the dictators last 12 days of life. He recognized that lending his name to a project of this magnitude could further make him or suddenly break him as well. And with so many interesting professions – there is the challenge and there is the income. One doesn't live on greatness alone. Just couldn't get "involved" in this German version of Hitler. Not one way or another. Parts were so comically strange, that film director Oliver Hirschbiegel just lost us and many more. How strange that suddenly a Michael Moore film seemed tame and innocent!

We talked to 10 women and men 45+ who attended this performance and weren't surprised that one and all felt that Ganz is a high caliber actor – but not one could say outright that this film

tion and answer period revealed, a younger audience showed more interest in the subject. And as Ganz stated a couple of days later: "4,5 million tickets were sold in Germany alone – and that just in a few short months, since its debut in September of 2004."

There is always an Oscar for best foreign film – "Downfall" is nominated. But we agree with Guenter Grass, the German author of "Die Blechtrommel" who doesn't see the necessity of this film in today's world.

For more info about "Downfall" please e-mail: ctauber@newmarketfilms.com

*Text and photos:
Gaby H Burkert
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"Downfall" Another Point of View

"...Surreal, in fact, is a mild word for what went down in the days after Hitler's 56th birthday on April 20, 1945. The dimly lighted bunker and its cramped corridors was a madhouse in the midst of the charnel house that was Berlin during the end of days, with aides drunk and debauched and Hitler alternately giving medals to school boys and ranting that 'the entire air force command should be shot.' ..."

"...Though it is based on historical accounts, including Joachim Fest's authoritative 'Inside Hitler's Bunker', 'Downfall's' soul is pure Hollywood. This is a film where the drama is inevitably right on the nose, with generals shouting into telephones, shells going off at predictable intervals and people saying things like 'Fritz, pull yourself together'...."

"...Also a force for good are the film's very chewy, watchable performances, starting with the veteran Bruno Ganz, complete with hair plastered across his forehead, as a Hitler who goes from foaming at the mouth to shuffling around the bunker like a homeless man searching for an empty park bench...."

"...Showing the German leader's more human aspects alongside his murderous rantings doesn't whitewash Hitler or rehabilitate him, it merely points out, whether we feel comfortable recognizing it, that ultimate evil inevitably shows up in human form."..." Any film that reminds us what our darkest nature looks like has value for that reason alone..."

Excerpts from an article by Los Angeles Times film critic Kenneth Turan.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Swiss architect Mario Botta in San Francisco

On January 21 swissnex in San Francisco (part of the Consulate General of Switzerland in San Francisco) and its director and Honorary Consul General, Christian Simm, invited to a morning lecture by Mario Botta. We all knew that we were in for a treat. Having covered Botta for the last 20 years – we just can't help but admire this genial personality. Again – a sold-out event (not even charging for it!) – Botta guided us through many of his architectural ventures of the world.

Out of his office in Lugano, Switzerland – the master assisted by a staff of 30 – creates, orchestrates and delivers his projects. And projects of today and tomorrow and way into the future they are.

With a bit of wit, lots of charm

and know-how he illustrates his thinking and gives his reasons for using this stone or that rock in any given and particular country. And it all falls in place and makes so much sense. Botta built different museums. And each is the answer or solution asked for. Botta built churches of different confessions

and in each congregation one feels to worship in. No matter where the industrial- or office buildings stand – in Asia, Europe, USA or

India – Botta makes a statement every time.

The Swiss architect presently works at about 40 projects. No



Mario Botta - the artist, the teacher - the lecturer: fascinating event!

design or step ever leaves his office without his approval. "How well does this operation work?" one of the many guests asked during the very lively question and answer period. "Not well at all!" Botta replied. But his warm smile, almost boyish grin, convinced us all otherwise.

Congratulations Mario Botta! It was so nice to see you and this time also with Mrs. Botta in – one of your favorite cities – San Francisco.

Mario Botta was celebrated at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art – he strolled through the museum approvingly – the gentle man he always is.

*Text and photos:
Gaby Burkert
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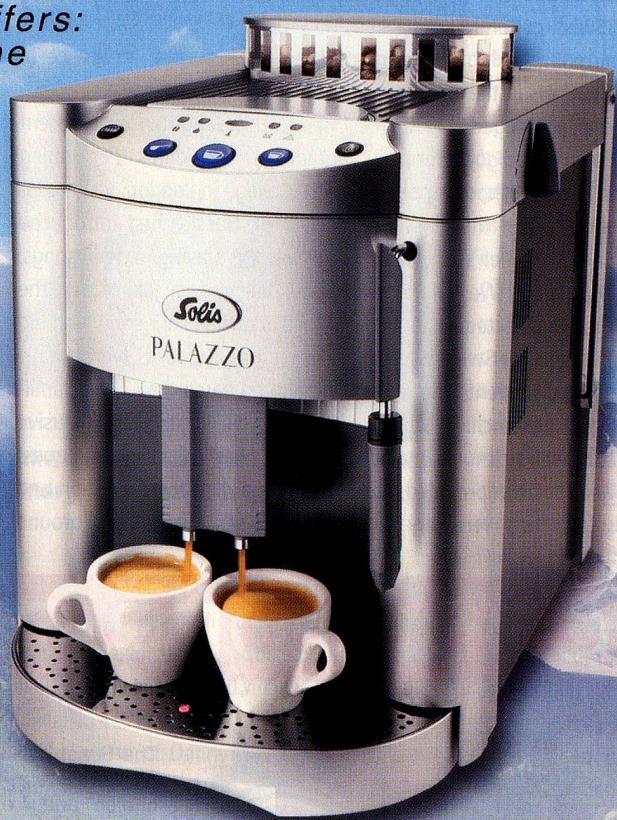
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NEW YORK

Swiss Folk Music in a New York City School Class

Adopt-A-Class-Project of the Consulate General of Switzerland in New York

The Consulate General of Switzerland launched its second Adopt-A-Class project last summer. The aim of this project is to teach students from disadvantaged communities about Switzerland and to expose them to Swiss cultural activities, such as current art exhibitions and concerts. Teachers in the New York region were encouraged to explain their motivation and goals for participation. Several schools applied for the project and the class of Ms. Pat Shein and her sixth-graders from P.S. 192 in West Harlem, Manhattan was selected.

In preparation for Swiss culture immersion, the students immediately started researching about Switzerland with brochures, maps, videos, and posters provided by the Consulate. They were very ex-

cited when a team of the Cultural Section visited them at their school and answered all their questions.

The next event took place this February with Swiss music as the topic. The Swiss composer and accordionist Hans Hassler, who is currently an artist-in-residence in New York, and vocalist Ingala Hassler, his daughter and a recent graduate of Colin's Performing Arts College in London, visited the class. Mr. Hassler first introduced himself by playing a few songs: Swiss folk music, jazz tunes, the New York, New York song, and hip-hop tunes. Students were totally fascinated when they heard familiar tunes. Following this exclusive concert, they asked various questions regarding the accordion and Mr. Hassler's musical background

as a professional, which were answered with a lot of wit and passion. From time to time, he would play some tunes on his accordion, imitating the siren of an ambulance or the mooing of a cow.

At the end of the lesson, Mr. Hassler taught the class the Swiss-German traditional folk song "Äs Burebüebli mani nid". Although the words in Bernese dialect were hard to pronounce for the sixth-graders, they tried with a lot of enthusiasm in getting the words, melody, and movements together.

As an encore, Ingala Hassler



The accordionist Hans Hassler and his daughter Ingala at P.S. 192 in West Harlem, Manhattan

with her beautiful voice accompanied by her father's accordion, interpreted *Somewhere over the Rainbow*, a song that was again familiar to the students. The class and the two musicians truly enjoyed this Swiss music lesson.

*Irene Portmann
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TEXAS

1965 - 2005, 40 Years Swiss Club Dallas/North Texas

In the 1890s a Swiss immigrant, Jacob Buhler (grandfather of Bill Sampert), established a dairy farm, most of which now lies beneath the waters of White Rock Lake. His family's home stood on a hill, now bare, that overlooked the White Rock Valley and a picturesque bridge over which travelers crossed the creek on their way to or from Dallas.

When Edward Gut first came to Dallas in 1950, there was a Swiss Benevolent Society. The youngest members were in their sixties and none had ever gone back to visit the old country. Most of them were quite suspicious of the new young arrivals. The Society members all had contributed for years to their 'Sterbekasse' (funeral fund) and were afraid that the young ones would lay their hands on the money. One member had a plant-nursery at the end of Second Avenue where they met in a little Gazebo.

In the late 50's and the early 60's, a number of Swiss chefs showed up in Dallas. They tried several times to start a Swiss Club, and at times it looked very promising, and then at other times the project was postponed for later. One of the principal reasons why more had not been done was that the Swiss people in Dallas had many diverse interests and were of greatly differing age groups. Furthermore, a large percentage was more of the transient type who came to Dallas for a certain length of time and then moved to other, possibly

greener pastures. The short time residents in Dallas were not interested in a society with fringe benefits, such as building up capital, equity, or life and death policies.

too were interested in a Swiss Club. Danny Dreyfus was a very strong driving force to get things started. That's how the first meeting came about. Hilda Widmer and

Sonquist for assistance secretary, Daniel Dreyfus and Margrit Caplazi for associate committee members. Together they came up with the name 'The Swiss Club of Dallas'

since the other existing club's name was Swiss Society. They set some basic rules and minimum dues. They felt that it should be primarily a social group for informal get-togethers, where many cultural ties with the Old Country could be maintained and also occasionally the native tongue could be revived. It was also felt that this group should cultivate good public relations in the Dallas community by

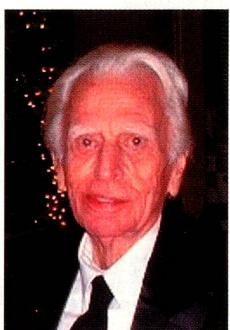


A very early committee meeting shows clockwise from left: Paul Buettiker, Daniel Dreyfus, Marlies Sonquist, Werner Voegeli, Margrit Caplazi, Edward Gut, and (possibly) Andre Nussbaumer.

Nevertheless, a certain number of Swiss that had settled down in Dallas felt that some kind of contact among themselves and the transient Swiss should be maintained, to be of benefit to everyone concerned. The driving force was Margrit Caplazi. They occa-

Edward Gut composed the club invitations (personal computers were not invented yet). Then one evening, seven Swiss-born citizens of Dallas sat down around a table at the house of Danny and Elvira Dreyfus in spring 1965 and laid the foundation stone. The following persons were accepted for a committee: Dr. Paul Buettiker for president, Werner Sigg for vice president, Jim Meier for treasurer, Edward Gut for secretary, Marlies

means of the public media on occasions where Americans would participate, such as films, festivals, lectures or discussion groups. It was felt that the Swiss people in this area should meet, not only on August 1st and Christmas, but maybe once a month, and that the activities should include musicals, car rallies, dances and maybe even a ladies group. Since they were all young with starting families, they also wanted to have family



Eduard Gut, one of the founding members

sionally gathered at the Flagpole Hill and at the old bathhouse on White Rock Lake, which was build on the land Jacob Buhler had sold to the city of Dallas in 1904.

Daniel and Elvira Dreyfus started their bakery business in 1961 and word got around about those Swiss making fine Swiss breads and pastries. Through the business they met other Swiss in this area, among them two young men from the Volkart Brothers Cotton Exchange (René and Martin). They

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oriented gatherings like picnics, Easter Egg Hunts, and St. Nicola's children's Parties, to give and show their children some of their heritage.

As time went on, a lot of Swiss in the food business (mostly in hotel kitchens) joined. There were also Ernst and Olga Bertschi from 'Mr. Peppe's Restaurant', who were always very generous in supplying food for those gatherings. Of course the breads and goodies came from the bakery.



Fondue chefs, from left:
Alphonse Widmer, Kurt Stadelmann, Werner Voegeli, Beat Kotun

A few years down the road, not knowing where to hold the 'General Meeting', the bakery opened up on a Sunday in January for the Swiss Club. It was Danny's idea to serve a cheese Fondue and dessert after the meeting. That was so well received from every one that it became the yearly staple. To this day it is still very popular among the members and is served following the annual General Meeting in February.

Later on (in the 1970's) they again opened up the bakery's Deli part once a month to meet and

play Jass with the members of the 'Swiss Society', which had about 10 – 14 members left. They were already retired by that time. In the late 70's, the Swiss Club began to participate in the International Bazaar of the city of Dallas, which was held at the City Hall Plaza. They all donated items from Switzerland, baked, made sandwiches etc, etc. That really brought the community together; everyone pitched in to top it all. It was a good moneymaker for the young club. It lasted a few years and ended when the city discontinued the festivities.

The membership has grown to well over 200 members. Ruedi Berner (in the committee since 1991) has been president for the past 8 years, with the help of a very stable committee. With times becoming more hectic, gatherings became sparser with just four to five main events per year and six Jass afternoons. The club is planning to get a sub-committee off the ground this year, which will be responsible for organizing a few other social events throughout the year.

This year, the Swiss Club of Dallas and North Texas is celebrating its 40th anniversary. For that occasion, a special event on Saturday, March 5, at the A.W. Harris Faculty Club in Dallas was open to



from left: President Ruedi Berner, Vice-president Matthias Brunner, Honorary Consul Gabriel Barbier-Mueller, David Kocurek (one of the 'Longhorns'), Ann Barbier-Mueller, Consul General Armin Meile and wife and Vice-president Kurt Fuhrer

all Swiss and friends of the Swiss culture. Consul General Armin Meile from Houston and Honorary Consul Gabriel Barbier-Mueller from Dallas were present at this auspicious occasion, which was attended by more than 270 people. The club presented a plaque to honorary member Edward Gut in recognition of his efforts as a



The Streichmusik Alder from Switzerland presented a spectacular Folklore Show

founder of the Swiss Club of Dallas and in appreciation of his con-

tributions and loyalty during 40 years. Helen & André Nussbaumer, Tilly & Werner Voegeli, as well as Josy & Hans Stettler received honorary membership; they have held many offices in the committee and/or donated countless hours of work since the very beginning of the club. Entertainment was provided by the 'Streichmusik Alder' from Switzerland who presented their spectacular Folklore Show, and by the 'Swiss Longhorns' who performed haunting melodies on their alphorns.

For additional information about 'The Swiss Club of Dallas and North Texas', and to read their on-line newsletters, go to www.SwissClubDallas.org.
*Marie-Louise Norton
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