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Low-cost airlines

"Switzerland is becoming the Mecca of low-cost airlines," wrote Lorenzo Vasella in the April issue of the "Swiss Review". In view of the upgrading of Basel Airport, that sounds rather positive. However what the article does not say is that not only does easyJet manage to fly at lower cost than other airlines because it limits itself to supplying basic transport. Even when flying to airports within the European Union, easyJet does not abide by EU regulations on the protection of passengers' rights. Whereas other airlines look after their passengers when flights are cancelled due to bad weather, for example, and limit the damage caused by helping passengers find alternate transport to their destination, easyJet takes a "not our problem" approach towards its customers. Precisely this happened to us, for example, and two-and-a-half months later we still haven't been reimbursed the cost of the tickets we paid for long in advance (according to the relevant EU Directive, airlines must refund customers within a week).

DR. EVA LACOUR AND PAUL DINGER,
ANSCHAU, GERMANY

Culture shock

Firstly I'd like to say that I always enjoy reading the "Swiss Review", which keeps me informed about happenings in today's Switzerland in an attractively succinct and yet readable and interesting manner. Many thanks for that! I have just finished reading your April issue. Being far removed from agricultural matters, your article about the state of farming in Switzerland was a real culture shock for me. I understand the economic, labour, competition, political, social,

growth and many other considerations, but I still get the graphic impression that the Swiss government is in the process of sawing off one of the

four arms of its famous white cross on a red background; literally mutilating its own identity! Yes, so much stupidity at once really is saddening, even for those of us whose livelihoods are not touched by it.

A. I. OPHIR, K-YAM, ISRAEL

Franz Weber and the Lavaux

Oh yes, the Lavaux certainly is beautiful! And the region merits all the attention it gets.

But what a mistake not to have mentioned the name of environmentalist Franz Weber even once in your article. No-one should have a memory that short!

Love him or hate him, it is largely thanks to Weber that property developers and other destroyers of the countryside have been kept well away from the magnificent Lavaux. Franz Weber faced almost unanimous opposition in 1977 when he launched the "Save Lavaux" campaign: to great success. It was a case of da capo al fine in the autumn of 2005, when the indefatigable ecologist successfully fought his second "Save Lavaux" campaign after the wine-growing region was downgraded by Vaud's new cantonal constitution.

So let's give Weber his due, and the Lavaux will be the better for it.

NICOLE ALLEMANN RUCHTI,
LANGUEDOC, FRANCE

Swiss jazz has long stepped out of the shadows, and is now increasingly attracting international attention. This is confirmed by a selection of recently-released albums.

Zurich-based pianist and band leader Irène Schweizer is one of Switzerland's internationally acclaimed jazz musicians alongside percussionist Pierre Favre and fellow pianist and band leader George Gruntz. No-one else in Switzerland plays the 88 black-and-white keys like she does; constantly exploring new avenues, tirelessly improvising, playful and innovative, whether in a duo (often with drummers) or a big band with saxophonists like Co Streiff and Omri Ziegele. The 14 tracks on "Portrait" (Intakt CD 105) and a comprehensive booklet invite listeners on a journey through her work.

Does Swiss jazz yodel? For the past 20 years, more and more Swiss jazzmen and women have focused on their musical heritage. The "Alpentöne" (Alpine Sounds) festival takes place every other year. The "Alpentöne 05" sampler (Musiques Suisses MGB CD 6263) contains not only lots of exciting music but also no fewer than three versions of the famous "Guggisberglied". The Zurich Jazz Orchestra also addresses matters Swiss in "Beyond Swiss Tradition" (Universal 987 512-1). The result is a mixture of traditional music and new, folklore-based compositions with a swinging big band jazz sound. It's light and uncomplicated, but thoroughly enjoyable. The Tritonus group presents more challenging fare consisting of old Swiss music played on original instruments. "Alpan" (Zytglogge ZYT 4901) is a search for new sounds and links up with musicians in other genres, for instance the young Herisau-born jazz saxophonist Reto Suhner.

And the pianists? Despite his youth, 24-year-old Colin Vallon from Western Switzerland is hugely talented. His debut album "Les Ombres" (Unit Records UTR4145 CD), in which he plays as part of a trio, is proof of his amazing maturity and skill. His swinging, bubbly music is pleasant to listen to without being superficial, and occasionally reminiscent of Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand). The music of 35-year-old pianist Nik Bärtsch and his band Ronin is rather unusual. The compelling strains on "Rea" (Tonus Music Records TON 15) could be described as Zen funk; a stupendous blend of James Brown, minimal music, Japanese ritual music, ambient and jazz – in short, hypnotising music.

Bebop meets New Orleans: Australian trombonist Adrian Mears lives in Germany. Drummer Jeff Boudreaux is from New Orleans, though just like fellow American pianist Peter Madsen he lives in Vorarlberg. Together with the superb Bernese saxophonist Domenic Landof and driving bassist Stephan Kurmann from Basel they make up the New Orleans Hardbop ensemble. On "Jump On In" (TCB 25202), this dynamic quintet really lets rip with hell-raising, swinging, uniquely New Orleans grooves with distinct echoes of Monk, blues and Eddie Harris. The excellent Harry's Satchmo All Stars is just one of the many bands in Switzerland that play good old New Orleans jazz. To celebrate their 20th anniversary, they've produced "Happy Birthday" (Euro Top EU 333 1882), a thrilling tribute to the unforgettable Louis Armstrong.

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