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Little gems

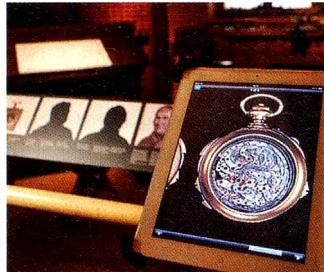
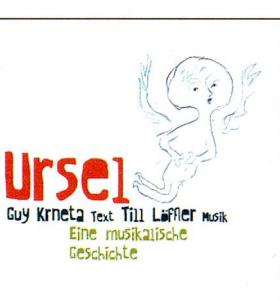
Angels and envy

"When I arrived in the world, Urs was already in Heaven. Urs was three, I am six. 'Urs was an angel', my parents say. But when he flew out of the window, he found he could not fly." So begins Guy Krneta's story "Ursel", which Merian-Verlag has brought out as a CD. It tells the tale of six-year-old Ursel, who recounts how her dead brother dominates her life. Her parents set a place at the table for Urs; he is the shining role model. The family visit him every Sunday at the cemetery. Ursel wants to be just as loved as her brother. So, she stages her disappearance, dreams of her own funeral, her parents' tears and a gravestone twice the size of Urs'.

Guy Krneta, who was born in Berne and lives in Basel, is an author, a great wordsmith and a politically engaged creative artist. "Ursel" once again demonstrates his ability to tackle challenging issues deftly and sensitively. The CD, featuring wonderful chamber music by Till Löffler, is a perfect gift for adults and children alike. BE

Guy Krneta, "Ursel" Eine musikalische Geschichte (in German); 1 CD, 45 minutes; Christoph Merian Verlag, Basel; ISBN 978-3-85616-554-3; CHF 19.90/EUR 13.90

Theatre performances: 11 and 12 November, Theater Rigiblick Zurich www.theater-rigiblick.ch 1 and 2 December 2012, Schlachthaus theater Berne, www.schlachthaus.ch



Things run like clockwork in the Vallée de Joux

The Vallée de Joux in Vaud's Jura region is regarded as the birthplace of the art of watchmaking. Back in the 17th century, local farmers would spend the long winter months working at home as watchmakers. The region's workshops and factories still produce globally unique timepieces, some of which use highly complex mechanisms. The "Espace Horloger" museum was reopened in the village of Le Sentier in May. The mu-

seum covers the period between the 16th and the 19th centuries when the first watches were produced with split-second chronograph, tourbillon, perpetual calendar, moon phases and minute repeater. The horologists also created quirky pieces, such as a skeleton watch complete with a calendar and chime. "Espace Horloger" also shows how the art of watchmaking is preserved in the region today. Thanks to the local technical college, the museum has a remarkable collection of Com-

toise clocks that were repaired by students as part of their training. The exhibitions are designed to be educationally stimulating. State-of-the-art IT allows visitors to travel back through the centuries of watchmaking, and they can even create watches in their own style on a giant iPad. BE

Espace Horloger, Grand Rue 2, 1347 Le Sentier, Tel: +41 (0)21 845 75 45 Open: from November to April, Tuesday to Sunday, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. www.espace-horloger.ch



Where mountains rise

Shortly after its 100th anniversary, the Alpine Museum in Berne embarked on a brave new beginning. The building, located on Helvetiaplatz in Berne and therefore somewhat overshadowed by the grand Museum of History, has been renovated, and the management asked itself some fundamental questions for the reopening: Does the city need this collection of alpine paraphernalia? What is the significance of all these items from the alpine region? What should an alpine museum collect now and in the future?

The first exhibition was entitled "Berge versetzen" (Moving Mountains). Thousands of exhibits from the past were displayed, tidily set out thematically on the floor and accessible via a bridge. The Swiss Alpine Club (SAC) was

housed in a stylised alpine hut. Founded in 1863 by wealthy lowlanders in Olten, the SAC today has over 130,000 members.

An exhibition entitled "Intensivstation" (Intensive Care Unit) featuring the work of the Austrian photographer Lois Heckenblaikner will now be running from 28 September to 24 March. He photographs alpine winter tourism not just in winter but throughout the year. Visitors will see the impact the tourism leisure industry is having: water accumulated in reservoirs in summer for the production of artificial snow, gigantic machines in front of a leisure-industry backdrop alongside an abject natural environment. This thought-provoking exhibition is accompanied by numerous events and educational programmes. BE www.alpinesmuseum.ch

Bulletins

Eight million inhabitants

The Federal Statistical Office (FSO) announced at the beginning of August that Switzerland's population had reached the eight-million mark. The FSO was unable to say exactly when the figure was reached as population censuses are not taken every day. The Swiss population has more than trebled since 1860. However, population growth has not been linear. Switzerland was a nation of emigration in the second half of the 19th century and also between 1910 and 1930. Population growth was highest between 1950 and 1970 at 1.4% on average per year.

More traffic – more congestion

Motorists travelled almost 26 billion kilometres on Swiss motorways last year – 2.8% more than in the previous year. Mileage covered on the motorways has more than doubled since 1990. The rise in traffic has also resulted in increasing delays and congestion. A total of 19,149 hours spent in traffic jams was recorded in 2011 based on 12,325 traffic reports. This is 20% more than in the previous year.

Second homes – effective from 2013

The initiative restricting the proportion of second homes, approved by the electorate on 11 March 2012, will only take effect in early 2013. The Federal Council resolved on 22 August that the ordinance governing the key issues will not enter into force until 1 January 2013. The campaigners behind the initiative, led by Franz Weber, were outraged and accused the Federal Council of giving in to the construction lobby.

The most popular first names

Mia, Mattia, Gabriel, Emma, Leon and Giulia were the most popular first names in Switzerland in 2011. Broken down by linguistic region, Mia, ahead of Lena and Elena, for girls and Leon, followed by Noah and Luca for boys were the most popular names in German-speaking Switzerland. Emma has been the number 1 for girls in French-speaking Switzerland since 2004, followed by Chloé and Lara. Gabriel, Noah and Nathan were the top choices for boys. Mattia, Alessandro and Leonardo and Giulia, Sofia and Emma held the top spots in Italian-speaking Switzerland. 80,808 children came into the world in 2011, of whom 39,182 were girls and 41,626 boys.

No ransom money paid

The June issue of "Swiss Review" reported on the escape and return to Switzerland of the two Swiss hostages in Pakistan. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) wishes to emphasise that Switzerland did not pay any ransom money or render any other services to secure the release of the hostages. It has also stated that, contrary to reports shortly after their release, the two hostages did not have to bear any costs incurred by federal government in connection with their abduction. They will take part in information events at schools and other institutions to highlight the dangers of travelling in crisis areas.

Quotations

"Death is nothing to us. When we exist death is not, and when death exists we are not."

Epicurus, Greek philosopher (341–270 B.C.)

"I was already happy yesterday, am today and will be tomorrow.

I'm a complex character." Steve Guerda, Swiss Olympic show jumping champion

*"Switzerland has not got worse, other nations have improved.
Dreaming will achieve nothing."*

Ueli Maurer, Federal Councillor and Minister of Sport, on Switzerland's performance at the Olympic Games

"There are foolish thoughts in everyone, but the wise keep them a secret."

Wilhelm Busch, German poet and artist (1832–1908)

"If 50 million people say a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing."

Anatole France, French author and Nobel Prize winner (1844–1924)

"Truth is the most valuable of all possessions and should be used sparingly and with restraint."

André Kaminski, Swiss author (1923–1991)

"Facts and truth really don't have much to do with each other."

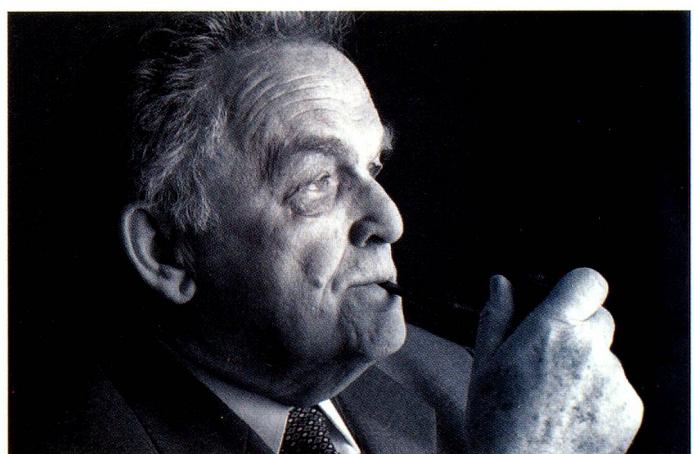
William Faulkner, American author and Nobel Prize winner (1897–1962)

"Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is probably the reason why so few engage in it."

Henry Ford, 1862–1947, founder of the Ford Motor Company

*"Only human beings undergo catastrophes, provided they survive them.
Nature knows no catastrophes."*

Max Frisch, Swiss author (1911–1991)



The date was 7 December 1983. Otto Stich was elected to the Federal Council – by just one vote more than the absolute majority. His party, the Social Democrats, and Swiss women were shocked and outraged. The party had put forward Liliane Uchtenhagen as its official candidate to succeed Federal Councillor Willy Ritschard, but the conservative majority in Parliament elected Stich. Only, Otto Stich did not prove to be the easy-going SP representative the conservatives had wanted. He was an extremely frugal Finance Minister, he had no fear of confrontation, and he was resolute and sometimes gruff. He retired from the Federal Council on 30 August 1995. He passed away recently, on 13 September 2012, at the age of 85.