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150 Swiss portraits



CHARLES LINSMAYER:
"Gesichter der Schweizer
Literatur".
Elfundzehn Verlag, 2015;
311 pages; CHF 43.90

Who is familiar with names like Lore Berger or Jonas Fränkel? Probably only a few people in the know or bookworms. It is a different story with Robert Walser or Max Frisch, names probably all of us have heard at some point in our lives, and whose works we may well also have read if we went to school in Switzerland.

A book has now been published containing 150 brief profiles of figures on the Swiss literary scene from all four language regions from the 19th century to the present day. Charles Linsmayer puts the authors in alphabetical order and dedicates two pages to each of them. All the entries are structured

in the same way. In concise terms, Linsmayer outlines their literary works and provides a brief overview with short biographical details and distinctive features. He has an excellent understanding of how to put works into their historical and literary context. With original inserts, Linsmayer also allows readers to explore the texts directly. A concise bibliography completes each profile.

The book is a reference work, but also a lucky bag of Swiss literature. It includes poets and writers who have long since been forgotten and whose works are out of print. However, it also features contemporary authors, such as Melinda Nadj Abonji, whose novel "Tauben fliegen auf" (Falcons without Falconers) won the German and Swiss Book Prizes in 2010, and Adolf Muschg, one of the greatest writers and thinkers in modern-day Switzerland.

About Werner Renfer, who died in 1936, Linsmayer writes: "What a subtle writer and great, incredibly modern poet he is." This immediately provides inspiration to read his poems. The same goes for Anita Siegfried, born in 1948. Of her novels Linsmayer notes: "She achieved a further peak in her writing in 2007 with 'Die Schatten ferner Jahre'."

The profiles are wonderfully complemented by photos taken at the Hottingen literature debates by Manfred Utzinger and author photographs by Yvonne Böhler. The book is highly recommended for anyone who is or would like to be inspired by Swiss literature.

Charles Linsmayer, born in 1945, lives in Zurich and is a leading Swiss literary scholar. After studying in Zurich and Berlin, he worked as a grammar school teacher, publishing editor and journalist. Still an active literary critic, publicist and cultural mediator, he also writes regularly for "Swiss Review".

RUTH VON GUNTEN

Soul for newcomers



SEVEN:
"BEST OF 2002-2016",
SONY MUSIC

His soft but equally cool look is familiar to the Swiss, as is his passionate but controlled voice. Seven has been influential in Swiss soul music for years, an equally impressive and contradictory figure, always likeable but somehow unapproachable and impenetrable. For some his brand of soul is movingly beautiful, for others it is too clean-cut and simply too Swiss.

In any event, the 37-year-old singer from Wohlen is celebrating 14 years of major success at home. He has released ten studio albums to date, which, from the second album onwards, have all made the charts. His latest release "Back Funk Love Soul" even topped the Swiss charts in 2015. He has also produced three live albums over the years, which highlight Seven's incredible on-stage qualities.

His ability is plain to see, and the artist is taking stock of his achievements for the first time with a "Best Of" album. It contains 19 tracks from 2002 to 2016, including the stand-out singles from "Synthetic Soul" to "Walking With You" as well as two intriguing duets with Omar and Talib Kweli as well as a less appealing collaboration with Stefanie Heinzmann. For dyed-in-the-wool fans, the album is also available as a double CD with 16 bonus tracks, some of which are live or unplugged.

The new "Best Of" album is a coherent compilation for anyone who has only just discovered Seven or who would like to, and there have probably been quite a few in that category lately. Last spring, the performer appeared on the German programme "Sing meinen Song – das Tauschkonzert". In the show, which aired on Vox, singers from different genres met at a remote location to interpret the songs of the other artists in their own way – with a backing band but no audience.

This enabled Seven to attract major attention beyond Switzerland for the first time. His recent albums were released in Germany, but the public has only really become aware of him now. In light of this, the timing of the release of the "Best Of" album is surely no coincidence. It is probably intended to open up the German market and could ultimately mark the beginning of a new chapter in Seven's career.

MARKO LEHTINEN