

Chalanda mars - a spring festival

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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **1 (1935-1936)**

Heft 6

PDF erstellt am: **02.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-941989>

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YODELING.

The Swiss Yodelers Association was founded in 1912. Its immediate object was to promote characteristic Swiss pastimes and customs, such as yodeling, alphorn-playing, singing of folk-songs and flag-swinging. At this time the Association had about 1200 members belonging to all the different cantons.

Yodeling dates back to the earliest days when the people of the mountains made up their own melodies and songs. Thus, high up in his solitary pastoral realm, the dairyman sang of his love and longing, and of the joys of his vast, free domain. But the ever present, overwhelming majesty of the mountains affects singers and listeners alike in these alpine domains, and alpine music features, therefore, a certain consecration by Nature herself.

In the beginning, yodeling was strictly confined to its original home, the mountains. Later, however, the Swiss who went on military expeditions into foreign lands began to yodel on their weary marches - and many a tough warrior began to long for home. Early in the nineteenth century some observing Swiss began to take notes of the words and melodies of different yodel songs. Many of the best native yodelers are direct descendants of mountain dwellers, and that curious gift within their throats is a true heritage handed down through generations.

The Swiss yodels are not uniform in their cadences. In the beginning all yodels contained long drawn, far-sounding, tones, which echoed in the mountains. According to his individual gifts, a mountain-dweller would know how to form and vary the tones. Especially in the Bernese and Lucerne mountain regions yodel melodies came into being which contained a wider range and demanded more skill, but, on the whole, the Swiss yodel is rather uniform and has nothing in common with the yodel of the Tyrol. The cultivation of the uniform characteristics in the yodel of the different cantons is one of the main objects of the Swiss Yodelers Association.

Alphorn-playing dates back to the 9th century. This ancient 9 to 10 feet long wooden instrument is a typically Swiss product. It can only produce the natural tones and belongs, therefore, out-of-doors. Up in the lofty pastoral realms, it affords the dairyman a means to commune with a far-off neighbour after the day's work is done. It is said that Louis XIV forbade the Swiss in his regiments to play the alphorn for fear that resulting homesickness would prompt them to desert the army.

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CHALANDA MARS - A Spring Festival.

The New Year of the ancient Romans, which began on March 1st, was fêted as the "Calendae Martis", and this Latin name is still retained in the Romantsch fête of the Upper and Lower Engadin, Bergell and Poschiavo, called the "Chalanda Mars".

Early in the morning, the village youths gather with heavy, big cowbells hung round their necks, with large whips and other noisy instruments, to fête the departure of the Winter Demons, who are frightened and chased away by the din, and at the same time to welcome the arrival of the gods of Spring and of the Sun. The processions are sometimes repeated for three days, especially if large quantities of snow seem to indicate the reluctance of the Winter Gods to depart. The boys are given cakes, nuts and chest-nuts by the villagers, and they may feast a whole week on these gifts, which, e.g., in Lavin, are deposited in the house of a friendly woman patron, who then invites the youths to her place.

During the din a magic verse is sung, beginning with the words: Chalanda Mars, Chalanda Avrigl implying that now the cattle should be let out of the stables, so that grass may grow and the snow may disappear.

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