

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 66 (2000)
Heft: [2]

Rubrik: Snippets...

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SNIPPETS.....

US gives go ahead for Sulzer Medica's heart implants

The Swiss company, Sulzer Medica, has been given the green light to market a new type of heart implant in the United States. But permission from the European authorities is still pending. The company estimates that the global trade in heart implants amounts to 30 million dollars, half of which takes place in the US.

Construction eating into agricultural land

A new report by the Swiss Federal Planning Office shows the extent to which Switzerland's greenbelt land is being eroded by home-building. It says that one square metre of land is built on every second, and the result has been a reduction in the amount of land used for farming. The findings reveal that almost 300 square kilometres - an area the size of canton Schaffhausen - has been turned over to construction since the early 1980s. It means that urban areas have expanded by 13 per cent in that period. The figures show that construction work in the housing sector has grown much faster than the building of factories and roads.

The building boom has been most noticeable in those cantons with big cities. Geneva leads the way, with a rate of expansion three times the national average. It is followed by cantons Zurich and Aargau. But the mountain cantons of Valais and Uri have also witnessed above-average growth. The Planning Office says tighter controls need to be put in place for building work. It recommends that better use be made of derelict industrial sites, and that buildings be built closer together, thus reducing the total surface area that's built on.

"As the land is not a limitless resource, we have to use the tools available to us to ensure that future generations can enjoy a sufficient room for manoeuvre, it said in its study. However, not all cantons are in agreement. Gilles Gardet, head of town planning in Geneva, says the figures used by the Federal Office need to be put into context: "The method of calculation used works on a big scale, but is too imprecise when transferred to a local level." Meanwhile, the amount of farmland has shrunk by some three per cent. The trend has been particularly noticeable in big cantons with a farming tradition. These include Berne, Valais and Vaud. The amount of rural land not used for agriculture has increased slightly, the Federal Planning Office said.

Ruth Metzler's husband fined 1000 francs

The husband of the Swiss Justice Minister, Ruth Metzler, has been fined 1000 francs by canton St.-Gallen's lawyers' association for violating professional impartiality. Lukas Metzler was found guilty of holding the positions of lawyer and trustee simultaneously. The case was first brought to light two years ago, when he was fined 2000 francs but was re-examined after he accused the court of mishandling the case. The court ruled that the fine should be halved because Metzler no longer held the same post.

Kleine Weisheiten.....

Liebe und Freundschaft sind
Vögel, die man nicht fangen kann.
Armenisches Sprichwort

During March 2000
the Swiss will
celebrate carnival once again!



„Willst du dich nicht auch maskieren, Hermann?“

Would you not like to put your mask on as well, Hermann?

A Review....

A new study looks at how Switzerland coped with the devastating avalanches of exactly one year ago. (February) The study concludes that notwithstanding the fatalities and huge material damage, warning systems were better than ever before.

No voting rights in Zurich for Swiss expats

Swiss abroad who are registered in Zurich will not get the right to vote or stand in cantonal elections. The cantonal parliament rejected a proposal which was supported by members of several political parties. Supporters had pointed to positive results in other cantons and on a federal level.

Four lynx paws sent to Berne cantonal authorities.

A criminal investigation has been opened after four severed lynx paws were sent to canton Berne's environment office. The anonymous parcel contained paws inscribed with the names of local officials, including one which carried the name of a former canton Nidwalden official who spearheaded the reintroduction of the lynx into the wild. While the lynx is a protected animal, hunters and farmers have protested about its return to the wild.



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EXCERPTS from "PASSAGES" the Swiss Cultural Magazine SWITZERLAND'S THEATRICAL LANDSCAPE

THE VIEW FROM THE FOOTLIGHTS (by Bruno Cathomas)

My ideal would be for actors to be able to work anywhere. But I realize that this can't be, because actors are tied to a language - so if one is German-speaking, one works primarily in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

After training at the Schauspielakademie in Zürich, I immediately went to Germany to perfect my German. I worked and lived in Berlin for seven years, and I must admit that it was only there that my enunciation and diction really developed. But, being Swiss, I'll always have to work on my language. What it means to be an actor in Switzerland is hard for me to say, after only one year in Basle. But I seem to have noticed that it's a disadvantage to grow up in a society or environment that's always out for consensus; good theatre can only emerge where conflicts are argued out; but arguing conflicts out also means sticking them out, not immediately having to be conciliatory and pleasant. Allowing differences to stand, but many theatrical professionals in Switzerland can barely do that, which is why they have to go to Germany first and learn how.

Without that detour to a foreign country, an actor in Switzerland may be at a disadvantage. Otherwise I don't really care whether I perform in Switzerland or elsewhere - the main thing is that I get a chance to perform at all, because working conditions in Switzerland are good, the audience is nice and the salary is okay.

(Bruno Cathomas was born in Laax-Grison in 1965 and lives and works in Basle. He has made a name throughout the German-speaking world, above all for his prominent roles in Stefan Bachmann productions.)

TECHNICAL STAGE PROFESSIONS IN SWITZERLAND

Apart from the many options Switzerland offers for private theatrical training, the country has five publicly supported drama schools devoted to the techniques, skills and knowledge necessary to the most important stage-related careers: two in German-speaking Switzerland, two in the French-speaking west and one in Italian-speaking Ticino.

The Scuola Teatro Dimitri in Verscio dedicates much of its programme to movement and body language, in other words, to the "artiste" side of the theatre. Since its foundation in 1975, it has gained international recognition for a curriculum including pantomime, juggling, acrobatics, dance, improvisation, make-up, techniques and vocal coaching. Students from all over Switzerland and from foreign countries near and far go there to benefit from its specialized training.

That French-speaking Switzerland should have two schools is surprising, considering how few actors later earn their livings there. The Section Professionnelle d'Art Dramatique of the Lausanne Conservatory was originally conceived as an evening school for amateurs seeking to acquire basic theatrical skills. It continues to offer a one-year foundation course, which has been joined by a three-year course of professional training. A similar programme is offered by the ESAD (Ecole Supérieure d'Art Dramatique), established as an independent department of the Geneva Conservatory of Music in 1971. Its prime focus is teaching the techniques of the international theatrical avant-garde.

The two schools in German Switzerland-Zürich's Schauspiel-Akademie founded in 1937 as the "Bühnenstudio" and the Schauspielabteilung of the Berne Conservatory, founded in 1965 - already offer a wide range of options. As a result of the cantonal law on higher education, passed in 1998, the Schauspielakademie was merged with the conservatories of Zürich and Winterthur in the autumn of 1999 to form the new Hochschule 'für Musik und Theater'. The syllabus has also been revamped: the two programmes, for "Performing Professions" (stage actor, film actor and puppeteer) have been divided into two blocks, with a two-year foundation course and a two-year main course, specialisation beginning in the second year of the foundation course.

Where Switzerland still lags behind is in its training opportunities for stage design and technical careers in the theatre. The courses for costume seamstresses at the Frauenfachschule in Zürich (a pilot project for wardrobe mistresses, run in the Nineties, regrettably never reached the definitive stage), the Scuola di Pittura di Teatro in Geneva and the course for set painters at the School of Design in Zürich are all that is on offer far and wide. However the Schweizerischer Verein Technischer Bühnen-Berufe has recognised the problem and began offering a range of three-day further education courses. (This text is taken from: Beat Schläpfer, Schauspiel in der Schweiz, Pro Helvetia 1999)

Swiss soldiers start learning lingua franca of international peacekeeping

A Swiss army division has begun English classes for soldiers who may serve in peacekeeping missions abroad. The Fortification Guards Corps will be given lessons to help them overcome linguistic barriers in Kosovo and other troublespots.

Evacuations due to threat of avalanches in Switzerland (Feb.2000)

The authorities in the Swiss canton of Valais have evacuated several houses because of a threat of avalanches.

Officials said about a dozen people had to leave their homes in the commune of Saint Gingolph on Lake Geneva. They said it was a precautionary measure following heavy snowfalls in the region.

Warning to stay out of forests

The Swiss authorities have again warned the public not to enter forests which were damaged in December's hurricane.

A senior official said it was dangerous to walk in areas where trees are uprooted or branches could fall off. He called on communes and private owners to clear up faster, particularly in canton Berne. The federal and cantonal authorities have pledged financial aid for the operation.

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Initiative Opposes Swiss-EU Bi-lateral Treaties

Headed by the far-right Swiss Democrats and the Lega dei Ticinesi, the phalanx of opposition to Switzerland's treaties with the EU deposited petitions with 70,000 signatures at the Federal Chancellery recently.(Feb.2000)

They thus validated the initiative aimed at preventing ratification of the Swiss pacts with the EU. The collection of signatures was especially successful in the Lake Constance region, Central Switzerland, the Ticino, and the City of Zurich. In francophone Western Switzerland, on the other hand, no more than 7,000 signatures were collected.

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(Registered at the G.P.O. Wellington as a Magazine)
Monthly Publication of the Swiss Society of New Zealand (Inc.)
Group New Zealand of the Helvetic Society

LATEST NEWS

(18.2.2000) Nef wins world cup Giant slalom in skiing, Switzerland's Sonja Nef has won the floodlit World Cup giant slalom in the Swedish resort of Are. It was Nef's second win of the season, and lifted her to fifth in the overall standings. She completed the two legs in a combined time of 2 minutes 27.79 seconds. Michaela Dorfmeister, who crashed out on the first run, has been overtaken as overall world cup leader by fellow Austrian Renate Götschl.



Sonja Nef with Partner Hans and Parents Willi & Frieda at home in Grub/AR

In addition to the two right-wing parties, a green-left committee is preparing to fight approval of the Swiss-EU Land Transport Pact. They feel that Swiss concessions to the EU allowing the transit of 40-ton trucks go too far.

It is unclear at this time whether the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the Action for a Neutral and Independent Switzerland (Auns), the latter headed by SVP National Councilman Christoph Blocher, will jump on the anti-EU-pact bandwagon. The vote on the initiative will take place on 21 May.

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