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This and That Corner

Swiss Music

Switzerland, is indeed a tiny nation, but its rich and melodic folk music offers far more variety than the music of many larger countries. Swiss music is danceable and - most importantly - "different" from the music of other nations.

The massive alphorn is purely Swiss. Immense in size, the alphorn looks like anything but a musical instrument. The alphorn, made of hallowed pine trunk up to 4 metres ((13 ft) in length, was first described in 1555 and originated in the traditional rural village of Appenzell and the Bernese Oberland. By the early 19th century, the alphorn had come perilously close to disappearing from use but, from the 1820s, a cultural revival rescued it from this ignominious fate. Apparently, herdsmen used to play it to soothe the cows while they were being milked. Only a few native mountain herdsmen have the wind, the strength and embouchure to play it. Not many alphorns are to be found these days in the Swiss Alps. They are fast disappearing, and so are the men who are skilled enough to play them.

Few Swiss can yodel, contrary to a widely-prevalent myth. But those who can are the best yodellers in the world. The origin of yodelling is not clear. Some say it comes from pagan songs of consecration of the alpine meadows. Others assert that yodelling evolved down through the centuries from cattle calls. Others argue that yodelling is merely a musical way of expressing shouts of joy.

Only within the last few decades, perhaps since the turn of the century, has 'Landlermusik mit Jodel' (country dance music featuring yodelling) gained wide popularity in Switzerland. The 'Zauerli' from Canton Appenzell is similar to the 'Naturjodel', and in Eastern Switzerland these two types of yodelling are often combined with the unusual 'Talerschwingen'. A large silver coin is thrown into an earthenware basin which is then moved with one hand in a horizontal circle. The coin climbs up the side of the basin like a motorcyclist on the "wall of death" and a peculiar hissing note results.

'Landlermusik' (country dance music) is performed traditionally in the Alpine valleys and in the villages of the central plain. At harvest festivals and weddings the old, cheerful tunes are heard over and over again. The true 'Landler' is a quick waltz with a clarinet or accordion playing melody, and often with considerable virtuosity. The normal waltz and a not-too-fast polka are, however, also included in the general description, as was at one time the now almost forgotten mazurka. Each valley has its own melodies and instrumental combinations. This is apparent when you go over the Santis into Appenzell, into the valley of the Grisons, to the Lake of the Four Cantons, to the Bernese

Oberland, and the Jura. How different the music of the Ticino sounds, warm with the sun of nearby Italy!!!

At one time 'Landlermusik' was played on fiddle, bass-fiddle and 'hackbrett' (a triangle zither whose strings are struck with light wooden rods, something like the cymbalon of gypsy orchestras). Nowadays the fiddle and 'hackbrett' are found only in Appenzell. Clear trumpets notes are also to be heard, especially in the Berne district. French influences in the Jura give rise to rapid rhythms and the quick, tongue-modulated yodel.



Now a few poems for Mother's Day.

A mother is the heart of everything that matters; whenever we are sick, sad or lonely a mother's arms are the best place in the world, and a mother's love is for ever.

A mother is she who can take the place of all others, but whose place no one else can take.

Mum, you mean so much to me.

Have I ever really mentioned
Just how much you mean to me
You brighten my life in so many ways
You have helped me to really see.

To see the potential that lies within me
And my ability from crises to rebound
Even at times when I doubt my own strength
Your belief in me is total and abounds.

I try so hard to make you proud of me
Forgetting that you were proud from the start
And that you are proud of me for just who I am
And that each day love for me fills your heart.

Such love is a gift in this troubled world
And I do not take it lightly
For your love has been my anchor from the beginning
And has lit up my life so brightly.

Mum, you mean so much to me
And this is what I'd like to do
I'd like to say thank you for the faith you have in me
And to simply say once more, "I love you".

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