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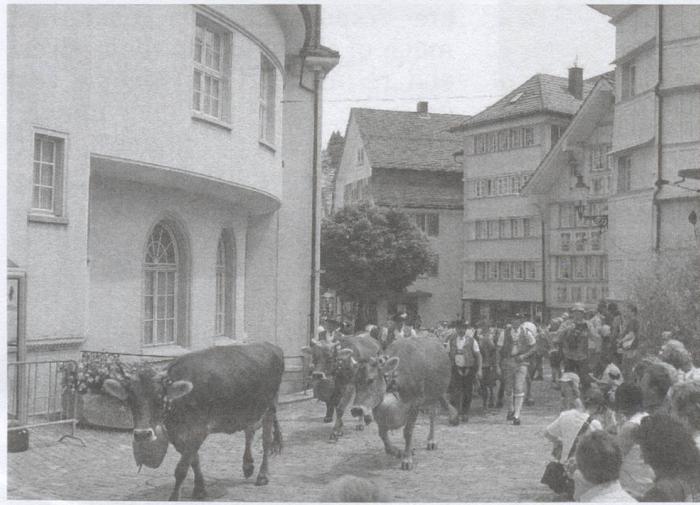
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One of the lovely things about writing these pages for you, dear Helvetia reader, is the chance to pause and think about what's been happening, and enjoy events again.

This month seems to have had a lot of music in it - of all sorts. At the formal end, Margrit and I went to St Gallen for a performance of Saint-Saëns's opera, *Samson and Delilah*, outdoors in front of the Cathedral. The music is lushly melodic, and the production was very voluptuous - one could almost say steamy! The air too - it was a warm summer's night, and a very brief rain-shower just before the production started had the audience steaming in advance. The music was added to by flights of swallows swooping around the Cathedral towers and trilling away, and by a nearby clock tower striking the hour, fortunately in the same key as Delilah's aria! St Gallen is our nearest city, just 20 minutes up the motorway, and its centre around cathedral is magnificent.

At the country music end, it's felt like accordion month. Herisau had an Accordion Festival, and we went for the closing parade. There were miles of marching bands - one mounted military band (I swear the horses stepped in time!) - floats full of accordionists, yodellers and assorted others, all led out by the traditional goats and cows with their bells.



Parade in Herisau

A week or so before, we'd gone to a country concert nearby, which had been wall-to-wall accordions. Then one evening recently our little local cafe had a couple of groups come in to entertain. There was a local men's chorus - unaccompanied, and a local women's choir, with - you guessed it - accordion accompaniment. You can see why it's such a popular instrument though - portable, great for sing-alongs, and relentlessly jolly.

I love it that there are so many local choirs and bands - and they turn up whenever there's a chance to perform. We've had at least four sessions at the café this month. Are there more "hobby musicians" in Switzerland per head of population? It certainly seems so.

There was music too in *Silo 8* - an astonishing piece of theatre about an old people's home in 2048. The set-up is that new residents have their memories extracted with a wonderfully Heath Robinson machine, so that they'll be more 'contented' and more malleable. The set is extraordinary - big metal silos set in an outdoor performance space. One holds a 'feeding station' where nozzles come down and plug into the residents' mouths. Another is the washing-station where the residents get hung up on huge clothes hangers and swung out through mechanical soaping and washing arms, then through car-wash revolving brushes.

Of course the inmates rebel - and everything ends in huge explosions and fires and the residents finding their belongings and repossessing their memories, and tottering off. In between times there are flying sequences using a huge crane, and wonderful dream-flight machines, and and and..... Amazing theatre - so physical, so funny, and really poignant. Productions like that are on the scale that we only see in New Zealand during festivals, but here there is the population to support things like *Silo 8* going into its third year around the country.

In between times we've remodelled our little front gardens; taken out a couple of conifers and put in stone gardens with a mix of cream/ochre/terracotta rocks that we scrounged from some chaps who were building dry-stone garden walls for someone along the road. We swapped them for cherries (and a bit of back-ache!) We got a second pick of cherries from brother Hans' trees. Those that didn't go straight to the mouth have ended up in cherry brandy. We crushed the fruit, steeped them in brandy in a *Rumtopf*, and now have added more flavourings, bottled the beautiful-looking liqueur, and are waiting none-too-patiently for it to mature a little. Along the process, Mani has been giving cherry-brandy-making lessons to a couple of friends and neighbours, so we're anticipating an even greater surge in good cheer! The stones have not gone to waste either - I've made a cherry-stone bag to warm up in the microwave (great combination of old and new technologies!) to comfort those bits of our bodies still complaining about the garden-clearing and -creating activities.

It seems cruel to mention the weather again when we hear that those of you at home are having a hard time of it, but perhaps imagining this will warm your soul. Think about late afternoon on a 30-degree day, windless. Think about piling a picnic into the basket on the back of the bike, and cycling to the lake. And imagine that a couple of friends have come with you and done the same, so there are two bottles of cold bubbles waiting. Now think about lake water, clear and fresh and about 23 degrees, and lake-side rocks that have been heated all day by the sun and are now ready for your wet body. Aaaah! Just hold that thought - we're enjoying it on your behalf.