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Life Stories

The Yodeller with an Extraordinary Voice



I sat down recently with my older brother Peter Arnold and asked him to share with me his Yodelling /Singing journey.

Peter started by sharing a few moments from his childhood years, 1949-1961, when we were all still living in Switzerland. He always felt drawn to listening to anyone who he heard yodelling and he assured me that our father, Josef (Sepp) Arnold, did not always yodel, he tended to keep the yodelling moments to the rehearsals and final events. Peter told me that Dad whistled a lot, as he "head-composed" his "Natur Juitz" while performing the endless tasks that running a farm in Rengg, Aplnach demanded. Peter seemed to soak up these moments, as did apparently the whole family.

I must digress for a minute and share a recently discovered Arnold family moment:

Since Peter's recent return to our family roots in Aplnach, he has been told by many of the older locals in Aplnach area that they remember a special Mass being held in 1961 for the departure of the Arnold family. Apparently the whole family stood at the front of the church and sang.

Back to our conversation where we have now reached July 1961 and we, the Arnold family, have immigrated to New Zealand. A vastly different culture, language and governmental system needed to be assimilated. The relatively flat Waikato land did not reverberate with the sound of yodelling or of cowbells and a good cheese and salami (we won't talk about yoghurt) was unattainable.

However the Hamilton Swiss Club did exist and in 1965 a few of its members including our father, Sepp Arnold,

decided to form a Yodelling Group to help retain some Swiss customs and use them to entertain themselves and others. Dad often performed his solo-yodels at Swiss functions. As for Peter, he sat in on some of the practise sessions, but never participated.

There was always something that Peter had that was not obvious to himself - a God-given talent to sing. This became obvious to me when, during our reminiscing, Peter told me how in his first few months at school here in New Zealand, he was pulled out of the class choir by the singing teacher who proceeded to say "You have an unusual voice. Where did you learn to sing like that?" A perplexed Peter said "Nowhere" and immediately became the choir's lead singer.

Fast forward to the age of 17 onwards when a lot of time was spent partying with other young Swiss immigrants. Most of these parties took place in Auckland and occasionally at Louis and Martha Baggenstoss's place at Ngarua near Morrinsville. At these they always sang and yodelled. It was not important whether they knew all the words - the flow of alcohol smoothed the vocal chords and banished any sense of shyness. Photos attest to the fun and frivolity enjoyed by the many young Swiss girls and boys.

In the late 1960s serious life took hold. Adulthood had arrived. Marriage and 2 children followed and a farming career began.

During this time Hansueli Hess, a member of the Auckland Swiss Club approached Peter, who by this time



was dairyfarming at Te Kauwhata, and invited him to join the Auckland Yodel Club where our older brother Joe was already yodelling.

"It was not an easy process to join" Peter told me "I was put through my paces by Hans Fitzi the organiser and conductor of the group. He asked me if I could hold a tune and did I know what the musical scale was? I floundered my way through the test and I was accepted into the group".

So began more than 35 years of yodelling and singing with a fabulous group of like-minded Swiss people. It was during this time that the now divorced Peter met his 2nd wife, Ursula, who had also joined the Auckland Swiss Club. Ursula was and still is a very talented accordion player and musician herself and, along with the Yodel group, played a huge part in helping Peter to continue to harness his God-given talents.

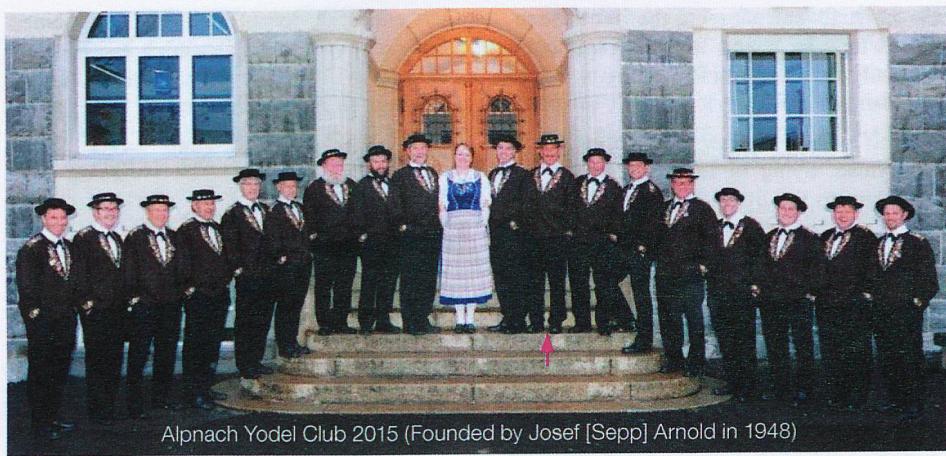
Auckland Swiss Kiwi Yodel Group was eventually formed and Ursi eventually became its conductor. The group began to travel and entertain not only in NZ, but Japan, Korea, Australia, Canada, China and of-course Switzerland where the Yodel Group attended 5 National Yodel Fests and took part in both Team (Group) and Yodel solo categories. As a group they attained four Class 1 (highest category) and one Class 2. Generally the competitors were (and still are) mostly from Switzerland with only a few foreign countries, like NZ, taking part. In competitions there were (and still are) over 400 groups participating and approximately 50 solo competitors.

Peter has always felt drawn to folkloric tunes and yodels. His voice has brought great joy to many and mystified a few:

An Opera singer approached him once and asked: "How do you sing those extremely high notes so easily?" Reply: "I don't know". She said "open your mouth"; he obeyed; she looked in, she said: "Ah you have a high rear upper palate"; he said: "do I?" And both parted company knowing more!!!

Return to Switzerland

Ursi and Peter had for a while discussed the idea of moving back to Switzerland to further their musical careers and the death of our brother Frank helped to show how, in life, one must seize the moment. So in 2012 they sold up and relocated to Stans not far from our birthplace. Life there has taken



Alpnach Yodel Club 2015 (Founded by Josef [Sepp] Arnold in 1948)

on a whole new rhythm with festivals, celebrations and competitions now a stone's throw away, rather than a long plane flight away.

Peter joined the same Yodel Group that our father, Josef (Sepp) Arnold had founded in 1948. He was soon to find that The Alpnach Yodel Club's vocalisations had changed in those 50 years. This change was influenced by the trend amongst yodellers to attend Yodelling schools outside their cantons and thus bring back other forms of vocalisation. In doing so, some of the intrinsic notes in the unwritten "Natur Juizts" had changed. It must be remembered that in early years "The Natur Juizts" were never written down and remained the property of the composer.

Our father "head" composed 3 Natur Juizts and they became well known in Central Switzerland, where they were passed on and learnt by using only the auditory system.

Then the unwritten "Natur Juiz" compositions were put on paper not only because it was feared they would be lost, but also to help with the teaching and to have "written" notes for the judges to judge by. Some notes/verses were changed so as not to abrogate the "copyright" issues. So the purely aural composition became a thing of the past. Fortunately Peter and Ursi had heard Sepp's Juizts on a small cassette tape that someone had had the foresight to make and keep many years ago. This cassette enabled Ursi and Peter to have Sepp's Natur Juizts put on paper in their original form. Ursi and Peter did this by contacting Edi Gasser, a man well known in the Yodelling fraternity with many awards and achievements as a conductor, composer and designer. Edi was awarded the "Golden Tell" in 1988 by the record company Record Tell AG,

and in 1996 he was awarded a well-deserved honorary membership of the Central Swiss Yodel Association (ZSJV) and a year later followed that of *The Swiss Yodel Association*, so they were in good hands.

Edi, of course, had heard Peter's solo performances at the Swiss Yodelling festivals and had been fascinated by Peter's vocalisation of the "Natur Juitz"; a Yodel which was traditional to Central Switzerland.

So our Dad's Juizts were finally put to paper in their original format. Peter and Ursi also told me that Edi Gasser and a few others are exploring the idea of re-introducing competitions where Judges have no notes but use purely their own ears, knowledge and experience to judge: no written notes.

To see how this would change things Edi Gasser set up 6 judges, 3 with written notes and 3 without, and had Peter perform our father's composition titled "The Rengg Juitz". The judges with notes gave him a lower mark than those

ZENTRALSWITZERISCHE JODLERFEST SCHÜPFHEIM 24.-26.JUNI 2016		Festbericht	
Stand: 22.07.16		Klasse 1	Vortrag 313
JD - Jodler Duet, ZSJV		Steigli-Juiz	
Arnold Peter, Stans		Komponist: Sepp Arnold	
Wolfsberg Gerhard, Alpnach		Textbächer:	
Gesamteindruck			
Schon der Einstieg des 1. Jodlers lässt auffordern. Zwei natürliche Stimmen lassen mit dem Natur Juitz die schroffen Felsen vom Plateau und die darunter liegende Steig-Alp in Erscheinung treten. Die spürbare Weimut aber auch Freude hinterlässt einen nachhaltigen Eindruck. Der begeisterte Vortrag berührt, überzeugt in allen Sparten und verdient die höchste Punktzahl.			
Tongebung		Abzug: <input type="checkbox"/>	
Positiv	Die Stimmen passen sehr gut zusammen, in allen Lagen rund und klangvoll, strahlende Hochnote.		
Negativ			
Ausgesprache		Abzug: <input type="checkbox"/>	
Positiv	Abwechslungsreiche und gut abgestimmte Jodelvokalisation.		
Negativ			
Rhythmus		Abzug: <input type="checkbox"/>	
Positiv	Grundtempo gut gewählt, gelungener Tempowechsel zum 3. Jodelteil, Taktart deutlich spürbar, schöne "Mazzen"		
Negativ			

who had purely listened. The ones who judged using only their auditory system remarked on how they had enjoyed the Yodel, how it ebbed and flowed as the yodeller revealed the story.

Recently, just before leaving for a trip to New Zealand, Peter competed at the Jodlerfest Schüpfheim. There he performed our father's "Steigli Juitz" in duet with Gerhard Wolfsberg from Alpnach. They gained 100% pass in their performance; by now a familiar result.

Peter has also become a composer, composing his own solo Natur Juitz "Echo von Fern" which tells the story of bridging life between 2 countries. It can be found at www.naturjodler.ch in the "Komponisten-Liste". Here you will also find recordings of Sepp Arnold's 3 Natur Juizts: Rengg-Juiz/Aelpler -Jodel/Steigli-Juiz,

Where to now?

Since returning to Switzerland many festivals and competitions have been enjoyed during the time as a member of the Alpnacher Jodel Choerli .

Now it is once again time to move on. Peter and Ursi have, with 4 others, formed a yodel and singing chörli: "Hoeibode Chörli" thus extending their combined talents further, providing entertainment for all sorts of celebrations. This combines their joint talents well and brings a monetary reward that will never pay the bills but helps with some costs. Ursi and Peter enjoy the challenges and camaraderie of their new life in Switzerland. How long they will be there time will tell. Suffice it to say, yodelling will continue to play a huge part in his life.

A sense of immense pride sits in my heart as I think of all the wonderful memories this article has evoked and the great humble and hugely talented person that my brother is. I enjoyed writing this and hope you, the reader, enjoyed reading it.

Written by Heidi Wehrle



Photo: Kathy Sanders