

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 84 (2018)
Heft: [1]

Artikel: Carnival time
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943785>

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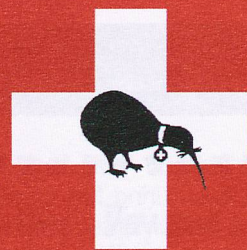
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Carnival Time



The Toétché: A carnival inspired folk music band

Folk music in Switzerland can take a number of forms between regions. The Toétché were founded in 1986 to take part in and liven up the local carnival. In a nutshell they are a brass band that wear costumes and play energetic music accompanied by dancers. They are very far from the traditional impression of a brass band that has a strict and almost military style. The Toétché are a rather wild, jolly and flamboyant folk band.

The first things that come to mind when thinking about Swiss folk music are Alpine horns, bell ringers, yodelling, bands of schwyzerörgeli (little accordions) but there is another genre: 'Clique' or 'Guggenmusik'. This genre is uniquely Swiss and cannot be found in neighbouring countries such as France, Germany or Austria.

The term 'Guggenmusik' is generally used in the Swiss German cantons (regions), whereas the term 'Clique' is used in the Swiss French cantons, more specifically in the Jura region in northern Switzerland. These costume clad ensembles play music with the hope of warming up the audience and livening up the party. Originally, their main goal was to play at carnivals, but with time, these folk bands have come to play at all sorts of cultural and sporting events.

The Toétché is made up of 40 musicians from all walks of life aged from 15 to 47. More than half of the Clique musicians have no formal solfège music education. The band comes from Noirmont (Jura canton) a small village of 1800 inhabitants, located in the picturesque region of Franches-Montagnes. Situated on a high plateau, 1000 metres above sea level, the landscape is characterized by large pastures and forests of spruce and fir. It is an ideal place for hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding; in winter, snowshoeing, dog sledging and cross-country skiing. The end of winter is marked by the carnival.

In Switzerland the large carnivals of Basel and Lucerne are well known. Basel's, which is a carnival of fifes and drums, has applied to become recognized by UNESCO as an 'Intangible Cultural Heritage'. The Toétché were founded to take part in and animate the 'Franches-Montagnes du Noirmont' carnival in 1986. Like all carnivals, Noirmont's carnival, taking place over five days, is a festival where locals dressed in costumes and masks get together to sing, dance and throw confetti. Several themed processions are organised through the village streets with the theme changing on a yearly basis. Mask contests and Clique concerts accompany evening parties in communal buildings.

Carnival Time

The Toétché play and liven up the festivities during five carnival days. The main instruments they use include: trumpets, trombones, sousaphones, lyres, bass drums, drum sets, bells and cymbals. They change their costumes around every three years. Their musical repertoire includes about 30 pieces; each year they add five to seven new pieces and remove some of the older ones. Their pieces are remixed to include covers of pop, traditional and modern music. There is something for everyone, but compared to other Cliques or Guggenmusik, the Toétché definitely have a modern style and play varied covers including Michael Jackson, LMFAO, Johnny Hallyday, ACDC, U2 etc. Some videos are available to view online at www.lestoetche.ch, under the 'Repertoire' link. They have recently added a new CD to their discography, called 'TED Toétché Extrêmement Délirant'. This CD includes musical pieces remixed and played between 2006 and 2016

The Toétché mainly play at the Franches-Montagnes's carnival, at other regional carnivals, as well as in France and Belgium. They can also be seen at village festivals, Neuchâtel's grape harvest festival and at sporting events like the race 'Course de l'Escalade' in Geneva. They have also played on the side of ski slopes in Nendaz and Vercorin in the Swiss Alps. Highlights of 2015, they played at two large events: Nice Carnival (third largest in the world) with 600,000 festival-goers where they marched on the Promenade des Anglais; and in China at the folk festival of Shanghai and in several cities including Xi'an, Shaolin and Beijing. This can only be promising for New Zealand... The Toétché gladly travels.

Written by Véronique Vuille

Photos kindly supplied by Stephane Meyer



What can be said in New Year rhymes,
That's not been said a thousand times?

The new years come, the old years go,
We know we dream, we dream we know.

We rise up laughing with the light,
We lie down weeping with the night.

We hug the world until it stings,
We curse it then and sigh for wings.

We live, we love, we woo, we wed,
We wreath our brides, we sheet our dead.

We laugh, we weep, we hope, we fear,
And that's the burden of the year.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

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