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Swiss Army Band in New Zealand

A happy memory

Being the man behind the show, I have the pleasure to write about the tour of the Swiss Army Band in New Zealand. The project started even one year before I arrived in New Zealand (September 2017). The following months, especially from the beginning of May, turned out by far to be the most demanding and rewarding work experience in my life.

After more than a hundred phone calls and over a thousand e-mails, I welcomed the band in Auckland on 26 July. The members of the band looked to be in a very good shape despite the long flight. The next day, they rehearsed and gave a concert at Aotea Square where around 200 people attended. The day concluded with a beautiful view over Auckland on top of the Sky Tower. On Saturday 28 July, we transferred to the Bruce Mason Center for the biggest, sold out event, together with the Royal New Zealand Navy Band. Consul Peter Deutsche introduced the band to the public. At night, the band played for the members of the Auckland Swiss Club at their 1 August celebration. That was when I realized that it had been a good decision to put so much energy into the intense preparation. I could now completely focus on upcoming issues while the band was here, for example answering one million questions, getting a drum-kit back to its owners, organising the laundry for the band or sorting out a mix-up of flag-stands.

On Sunday 29 July, we traveled to New Plymouth for the next gigs. En route, we enjoyed the beautiful landscape and had fun with Jassen. The first of these three gigs was in the Pukekura Park in the Band Rotunda next to the little lake. It was a wonderful spot to play in front of 200 people. Later that day, the number of listeners doubled for the Taranaki Swiss Club's 1st of August celebration in the nicely decorated War Memorial Centre in Stratford. By this stage, the band turned into rockstars as groupies chatted them up and tried to get phone numbers. Despite that, they kept their professionalism and gave an indoor concert the following day, where the Mayor of New Plymouth, Neil Holdom, and Barbara Kuriger MP and her husband Louis with Swiss ancestors were among the guests. When Barbara left, she called out: "See you down in Wellington". That is exactly what we were after. We arrived late at night, had a nice dinner and before going to bed, we checked out the nightlife of Wellington. I

can report, that not a lot was going on, but it was a good way to end the day.

Tuesday 31 July started with an outdoor concert in front of Te Papa. Despite the wind, the Mayor of Wellington Justin Lester attended with a bright smile on his face and welcomed the Swiss Army Band to his city. In the afternoon, after an intense rehearsal, the Swiss Army Band and the Royal New Zealand Air Force Band played at the moving *Last Post Ceremony* at the National War Memorial. Together with the Minister of Defence, the Hon Ron Mark, our Ambassador David Vogelsanger layed down a wreath to remember losses of WW I. He spoke about how much we Swiss also owe to those who gave their lives for freedom. It gave me goosebumps all over. Later on, both bands dined together before they played in Upper Hutt in front of a packed audience. Of course, the Mayor of Upper Hutt Wayne Guppy was present and I am 100% sure he liked it. On 1 August we had amazingly good weather for Wellington standards. In Midland Park the band attracted quite a few people for this time of the year and some people told me they heard them while they were working in their offices. At midday, the Swiss Army Band and the Royal New Zealand Air Force Band teamed up for their last performance. It was by invitation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Rt Hon Trevor Mallard, and in front of Parliament. I should also mention, that Barbara Kuriger was there again. The tune, which will always make me remember this moment, is Band of Brothers, which stands for the strong connection we had during the tour.

The last really well-attended event was the 1st of August celebration at the provisional Swiss Residence in Upper Hutt. Describing the guestlist would probably fill up another page, but Barbara Kuriger was there once again. David, for the last time, gave a well-spoken speech about Switzerland and New Zealand. He thanked Peter Deutsche and Roland Schütz for all the years they contributed to the Swiss community in New Zealand. The band, of course, played the "Appenzeller Landsgemeindelied" for the former and the "Bernermarsch" for the latter. The Ambassador presented an original Landsgemeinde sword to Peter and a Bern flag to Roland. Sir Harawira Gardiner honoured us with his speech. It was the perfect choice. His family spontaneously decided to wish the band well by singing Pokarekare Ana. After the official part,

people feasted and enjoyed the lampion procession and the bonfire. The new 18 year-old Swiss citizens were especially welcomed as well. Unfortunately, the band, Othmar, Marlies and I had to leave before midnight in order to catch at least some sleep before going to the airport. On the way back, it was just a "Gaudi" and I am not sure, if all of them actually slept. At 6 o'clock in the morning, I was back at my apartment totally exhausted, but so happy for all the moments I had experienced.

Personally, this project showed me once again that life is about sharing, giving and taking. Therefore, my thanks goes to David for his ideas and for pushing me forward, to Jürg who always advised and supported me when I needed it most, to Wivian for dealing with more than a thousand invitations, to Tatjana, Marianne, Tamara and Andy who contributed with their workforce, to Peter Deutsche for his marketing advice and logistical support, to Othmar and Marlies for being the best driver and best tour-guide I ever met, to Roland and his team for the best Berner Platte I ever had, to Peter Koller whose sausages we all enjoyed, to the committees of the Auckland and the Taranaki Swiss Club for organising great events and to all helpers who made this cool experience become a resounding success and a happy memory.

Danke viimol vö diä guet Zitt z'Neuseeland!



The man behind the show in action

Written by Maurus Räss, former Embassy staff member

Swiss Army Band in New Zealand



1st of August celebration in Auckland



Last Post Ceremony at the National War Memorial together with the Minister of Defence, the Hon Ron Mark



Performing in Taranaki



Big crowd at the residence on the 1st of August



Joint performance with the New Zealand Air Force Band in front of parliament