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Swiss Yodlers in London



The "WILLIAM TELL" YODLE CHOIR of the Swiss Federal Railways, Berne.

Every year there takes place a Réunion of the Polytechnic Tours, and to this annual gathering, which was held on Saturday last, at the Albert Hall, a Yodel Choir, consisting of employees of the Swiss Federal Railways, was bidden.

Good Swiss as they are, they expressed a wish that their compatriots in London should have an opportunity to hear them; and so it happened that through the courtesy of the Union Helvetic Club, which offered their Hall free of charge, a concert was arranged, which took place on Friday, March 9th, at 1, Gerrard Street, the proceeds to go to the funds of the "Fonds de Secours pour les Suisses pauvres."

Those who held the view that "yodling" was not any more a sufficient attraction to assemble a big audience, were badly mistaken; in fact, the Hall at the Union Helvetic Club was far too small to accommodate all those who wished to spend a pleasant evening with their "yodling" compatriots. The attendance, including the Choir and the members of the Swiss Orchestral Society, reached the figure of over 350 people, which I understand was a record.

* * * * *

The Swiss Orchestra, under the able conductorship of Mr. E. P. Dick, opened the evening with a breezy march, "Unter dem Siegesbanner," and hardly had the sounds disappeared, when the sturdy yodlers made their entrance amidst deafening applause. They appeared, of course, in their national costumes, amongst them being one lady member, the well-known yodel singer of the Tell Plays at Interlaken, Madame Balmer-Baudenbacher.

The first three songs were:—

Bi üs im Bärnerland,
Solo Yodel by E. Sommer,
Morge frie we d' Sunne lacht,

the fine rendering of which earned them a well-deserved applause, especially the clever yodeling of Mr. Ernst Sommer; his deep and pleasant voice is somehow different from the usual "star" yodlers, but it blended splendidly with the tone of the choir.

Again the Swiss Orchestra tuned in and gave us a worthy rendering of the "Lustspiel" Ouverture from Keler-Bela.

Three more songs by the Yodel Choir followed, namely:—

Solo Yodel, by E. Sommer,
Wie baas isch mir da obe,
Zur e Alphütt,

and gave further proof of the excellency of the choir.

Mr. Dick and his efficient orchestra undoubtedly endeavoured to make things lively, and in playing Lopez' "Spanische Tänze" and "Wienerblut," by Strauss, got the audience in that jolly spirit which is such an antidote against "feeling blue."

The jolly yodlers, who had by now refreshed themselves with a few bottles of "Neuchâtel," appeared again, and Mr. Sommer gave us one of his famous yodel solos, which brought us back in thoughts to our beloved mountains. Then followed that charming song, "Zwei Schümeli," and when Mme. Balmer made her bow before the audience one could have heard a pin drop, the stuffy atmosphere caused by some members of the audience, who insisted on smoking bad cigars, and a certain nervousness affected, no doubt, her voice to a certain degree in the beginning, but later on she fully made up for some slight defects at the start—her singing at the Albert Hall for instance was excellent.

The conductor of the orchestra then brought his "Boys and Girls" into action again. They played the Ouverture, "Poète et Paysan," by Souppé, and a waltz variation of "Tales of Hoffmann"; the applause which they earned proved that their performance was much appreciated.

Two songs in French:—

Le petit Village,
Le Ranz des Vaches,

concluded the official programme of the choir, and I might perhaps be permitted to make a few comments on their performance.

Considering that the choir was only formed three months ago, the *ensemble* was remarkable. I was greatly impressed by the fine singing, which one often misses in yodel choirs. Unfortunately, the acoustics of the Hall were unsatisfactory, owing firstly to over-crowding, and secondly to the hanging up of too many flags, which, although it made the Hall look bright and cheery, greatly impaired the sound, and so many of the finer points were missed. The performance, both at the studio of the B.B.C. and the Albert Hall was better, and the tremendous applause which was extended to them at this vast concert hall was fully justified. Mme. Balmer-Baudenbacher espe-

cially scored a big personal triumph. Mr. Sommer and his colleagues were nearly carried about shoulder high.

The last two numbers which the orchestra played were the "Grasshopper Dance," by Bucalossi, and "Lausanne qui rit."

For my part, I should have preferred to listen to a programme which had contained more Swiss music. With the exception of the last number (Lausanne qui rit), there was not one number which would have reminded one that a Swiss orchestra was performing at a typically Swiss affair. But, no doubt, the notice which the orchestra received was too short to prepare such a programme. I take this opportunity once again to remind the Colony how proud we can be to possess such a fine orchestra, which at any time shows its willingness to put its services at the disposal of its compatriots.

In the "Old Country" a yodel concert is always a sort of a family affair, and so it was last Friday. The much appreciated presence of our Minister, Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, who was accompanied by Madame Paravicini, Mademoiselle Livia and Monsieur Vincent Paravicini, gave this function a special *cachet*, and the witty speech which the Minister made in the course of the evening, greatly added to the enjoyment.

After a short interval, dancing started, and our yodling friends proved that they can not only sing, but that they are equally good dancers.

Shortly before two o'clock a.m. this most enjoyable function came to an end. The choir, as well as the Committee of the Union Helvetic Club, are to be heartily congratulated for having enabled us to spend such a pleasant evening in their midst. They have awakened in us many treasured memories of home and country, and have thus brought us nearer together.

On Saturday afternoon listeners to the "Tea Time Variety" in the London Regional programme had a very pleasant surprise in hearing the yodellers over the Radio. The *compère*, who introduced them, made a few witty remarks which seemed at once to bring the necessary *Stimmung* into the studio. At any rate, though the yodellers, to the great disappointment of the *compère*, had not brought their goats or mountains with them, must have been at once at home in the studio, and the two songs, "Morge frueh wenn d'Sunne lacht," "Zwei Schümeli," and the solo yodel by Frau Balmer, sounded even better than the previous evening. No doubt the air in the studio came just a little nearer to the *Alpenluft* than the air at Gerrard Place. The enthusiastic applause which could be heard coming over the air testified to the pleasure of the studio audience, and proved that the yodellers not only had given pleasure to their Swiss compatriots, but also to our English friends.

In the evening the choir, as already mentioned, appeared at the Albert Hall in connection with the "Polytechnic Tours Réunion, 1934," and there they really had a wonderful success. The audience was not satisfied with the officially listed songs, and clamoured for more, a demand which was willingly acceded to, and several *encores* were given, which were all acknowledged by rousing cheers from an audience which exceeded 4,000.

This no doubt tiresome performance for our friends was not the end of their labours, because, much to the delight of the members of the City Swiss Club, they paid a flying visit to the May Fair Hotel, where a Cindrella Dance was in progress, and there again they made everybody happy by their exquisite singing.

Well done, Yodlers. You have given us immense pleasure; you have once again awakened in us the longing to see our Homeland, and to thousands of our English friends you have conveyed a message to visit a country which is not only known for beautiful scenery, but also as the home of beautiful songs.

ST.

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