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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

NOUVELLE SOCIETE HELVETIQUE

The "Echo Romand" in London and Wales

Llangollen — an ordinary name until you try and pronounce it . . . though for the Swiss used to the intricacies of the guttural "Schwyzertütsch", it is not so difficult. Eisteddfod sounds already more musical, especially when uttered with a melodious French accent. No wonder, the Eisteddfod of Llangollen has an attraction for folk music lovers. A group from Berne, but of French tongue, took part in this year's Welsh International Musical Festival a few weeks ago, and they scored remarkable successes. The choir is the "Echo Romand" from Berne, a group of singers well-known in Switzerland, founded in 1950 and a member of the "Association Cantonale des Chanteurs Vaudois". The dance group of twelve couples is also affiliated to the Vaudois organisation.

At Llangollen, their mixed choir came second (166 out of 200 points) in folk songs and tenth in classical music (out of eighteen choirs). Their bass soloist Pierre Gagnebin even received a first (out of sixteen). In folk dancing, they were placed seventh out of twenty-six groups (88 out of 100 points). Their performance, therefore, may be termed excellent.

This success does not really come as a surprise to all those who were at the

Folklore Evening of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique in London on Monday, 4th July. The N.S.H. presented this performance as one of the events to mark their Golden Jubilee. The "Echo Romand" had generously offered the concert to the Swiss community free of charge.

We have often had the opportunity of hearing Swiss groups, some outstanding, some nothing out of the ordinary. The "Echo Romand" is lucky in having a first class musician as conductor in the person of François Pantillon whose professional skill is well known in Switzerland. Amongst others he has conducted the "Orchestre de la Suisse Romande".

It was perhaps a little risky to open the concert with as difficult a piece as Bruckner's "Ave Maria". In Mr. Pantillon's own compositions they were already more at home and notwithstanding the bad acoustics in the St. George's Hall (YMCA), gave a very pleasing performance of three of his songs.

Before the concert began, the *Moniteur Cantonal* of the "Association Cantonale des Chanteurs Vaudois", Mr. Georges Pluss, had introduced the costumes worn by the members of the choir. All parts of Switzerland where French is spoken were represented, either by a simple working day outfit like that of the "Jura Bernois" or an elaborate stately Sunday dress as that of the town of Fribourg. The dancers wore Vaudois costumes only, and they came into their own in several folk dances. They were produced by Miss Madeleine Regamey, herself no mean artist. The dances ranged from traditional numbers like the "Montferrine Vaudoise" or the "Valse du Luterbach", rounds whose choreography was evolved by Mr. Georges Pluss ("La fine goutte de Dézaley") or by the well-known folklore expert Louise Witzig ("L'Escarpette").

The dancers were accompanied by a rustic trio. After a bad start on arrival in England owing to their double-

bass having been damaged on the journey, they got into their stride at once that evening, and the three instruments quickly managed to recapture some of the gaiety of the "Fête des Vignerons" with the happy sounds of the expertly played clarinet dominating in Gustave Doret's or Carlo Boller's haunting tunes.

One of the most endearing qualities of the "Echo Romand" members was their obvious enjoyment going through their paces. There was an atmosphere of friendly abandonment to the task on hand and of genuine concern to please. And please they did as was shown by the resounding applause accorded them by the audience.

The bass soloist, either on his own and accompanied on the piano or in conjunction with the choir, gave a very creditable performance, and his voice was a pleasure to listen to.

As a charming gesture, some of the dances were specially chosen to honour members in the audience. Unfortunately, the Swiss Ambassador was prevented from being present on account of indisposition. But nevertheless, the group had been invited to a reception at the Ambassador's new temporary residence in Upper Brook Street at lunch time. At the concert, Monsieur de Fischer was represented by the Counsellor for Economic Affairs and Madame Feller, and it was in honour of the Swiss Confederation's representative that the group performed a Bernese dance. Consul and Madame Tosio were singled out by a Grisons tune and the President of the NSH, Dr. H. W. Egli, by a dance from the Canton of Zurich. The dance chosen for Miss R. Preiswerk, the retiring warden of the Hostel, was called "La Diligence", a symbol of the persistent efforts Miss Preiswerk had made whilst in London. The most difficult and exacting dance on the programme "Roi de Trèfle" which demanded extreme skill and concentration from the small group of the "Echo" s most nimble performers had been chosen to honour the Editor of the "Swiss Observer".

And thus the evening went on, interrupted only by an interval during which choir and dancers were offered some refreshments.

It was a happy occasion, and the audience fully supported Dr. Egli's thanks to the group and its leaders, including their President and Mrs. Michoud, for entertaining the Colony so generously. All those present must be delighted to hear of the excellent results achieved in Wales. No doubt, the "Echo Romand de Berne" will go on adding success to their already considerable list.

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