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Autor: M.G.

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LUCERNERS SING IN LONDON

On Wednesday, 28th July, a concert took place at the Swiss Church in Endell Street, which will remain in the memory of those present for a very long time. The artists were the "Luzerner Singer", a young choir of about 60 talented singers under the direction of Hansruedi Willisegger. They had given a concert at Chichester the evening before and were on their way to EUROPA CANTAT in Leicester, the triennial conference of song, the sixth in Europe, the first in Britain. They will be there for a week together with something like 3,000 other singers from all over the continent, as well as five orchestras. There will be choral singing in 16 languages, work-shop rehearsals and concerts of individual, combined, and mass choirs — a tough week of "choral singing of remarkable quality" as one critic put it.

Members and friends of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique and the International Liszt Centre for 19th Century Music in London had a wonderful foretaste of what the choir would present at the Leicester Festival.

The programme was in four parts. The first was devoted to *Church Music*. The choir sang works by Monteverdi, Josquin des Prés, J. S. Bach and Hugo Distler. These works were sung with beautiful smoothness and good acoustic balance, except perhaps in parts of the Bach which tended to be a little harsh in the soprano section.

Part two consisted of *Negro Spirituals*. They were rendered with easy style, the right amount of emotion and with generally very clear diction.

The third part consisted of *Secular Music of the 20th Century*, the main works of the evening. Johann Nepomik David's "Es taget vor dem Walde" and Hugo Distler's three songs "Vorspruch", "der Gaertner" and the famous "Feuerreiter" were superbly performed. It is a pity that Hugo Distler's music is not well known in this country. He is modern and forward-looking, yet he still writes *music* and shows great sense of drama and deep insight. The choir did him justice, sang as if they were one

body, yet every member was magnificently clear. Other works in this part were by Debussy and Poulenc, both satisfying, but not as dramatic as those by the other two composers.

After a short interval followed the last section of the programme *Folk Songs from Several Countries*, Finland, Switzerland (several by the conductor), Israel, Bulgaria and Jugoslavia, all sung in their original languages. It would be difficult to pick out the best — they were all sung with conviction and charm, but the Israeli song left the deepest impression.

It would be impossible to produce such a high standard without extremely hard work which the choir no doubt does under its indefatigable conductor. May one say here that even the elegant white dresses of the ladies and black suits of the gentlemen matched the high quality of the performance.

The choir has ten years of successful performances in many countries behind it. If the concert in London is anything to go by, the Lucerne Singers may be assured of a brilliant future.

M.G.

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