

BBC Radio's swiss evening was a very successful event

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BBC RADIO'S SWISS EVENING WAS A VERY SUCCESSFUL EVENT

SUNDAY, 24th APRIL 1977 FROM 5.30 to 11.45 p.m.

The editor, Stanley Williamson, attempted to get behind the popular stereotype of Switzerland as a place of cuckoo clocks, cheese, milk chocolate, yodelling and bank accounts.

The *Radio Times* published an article by William Davis, questioning the myth that the Swiss have no sense of humour. It included cartoons from the "Nebelspalter" and a picture in words of its unique editor who runs this periodical (62,000 copies every week) with just a secretary and lots of contributors.

There followed a sequence of music and speech presented by Nigel Douglas (BBC Manchester) the first part – a confusion of tongues – was presented by John Steinberg (American), author of a book, "Why Switzerland" (publication celebrated at Embassy some time ago). An excellent portrait of how the four national languages work, how they are part of the Swiss make-up, the rôle dialects play in the German-speaking part, but not in the other three. It also stressed the way languages are used in political, cultural and social life, so different and yet so stable a nation. Voices and samples from all parts of the four regions were quoted.

Then two great Swiss sopranos, Lisa della Casa and Edith Mathis, sang music by Mozart, Brahms, Strauss and also a Swiss folk song.

Next there was an excellent production of Friedrich Duerrenmatt's play "Hercules and the Augean Stables" translated and adapted by Stanley Williamson.

The BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra conducted by Swiss Erich Schmid presented music by Martin, Honegger and Othmar Schoeck.

At 9 p.m. Peter Arengo-Jones, for many years Press man at the British Embassy in Berne, presented "Excelsior" – some aspects of the British love affair with the Alps.

Then Brian Beedham of the Economist gave a talk entitled "A State of Equilibrium". He argued with evidence from conversations recorded in Switzerland that the Swiss have evolved social and political structures which serve them well and are of considerable interest to the rest of the world. All in all, a most balanced talk.

We then heard Klaus Huber's mystic music "A Whiff of Eternity", Melos Ensemble and 20th Century Music Ensemble Vienna.

Then there was an extremely fair and interesting talk entitled "Neutrality

and Participation" by Jacques Freymond, Director of the Graduate Institute of International Studies at Geneva. He explained the pressures Switzerland is subjected to in preserving its neutral status in a well-reasoned exposé.

Then, in "Desirable Residence", Nigel Douglas discussed with some of his Swiss friends, young and old, critical and appreciative, the pros and cons of life in Switzerland. Some great critics like Ziegler whose anarchist views expressed in his book "Switzerland above suspicion" (cynical!) have caused a great stir. His ideas were pulled to pieces by Douglas.

The programme ended with Swiss folk songs played by the Philip Jones (his wife is Swiss) Brass Ensemble on records (MM did a write-up some time ago on one of their records).

The whole programme was most interesting and extremely fair. All extreme tendencies avoided, criticisms fairly answered and often countered by the British interviewer. Anyone listening must have realized that for once Switzerland was depicted as a country with a great culture and not just cuckoo clocks (not Swiss anyway!) and cheese and chocolate. In my opinion completely fair and most interesting.

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