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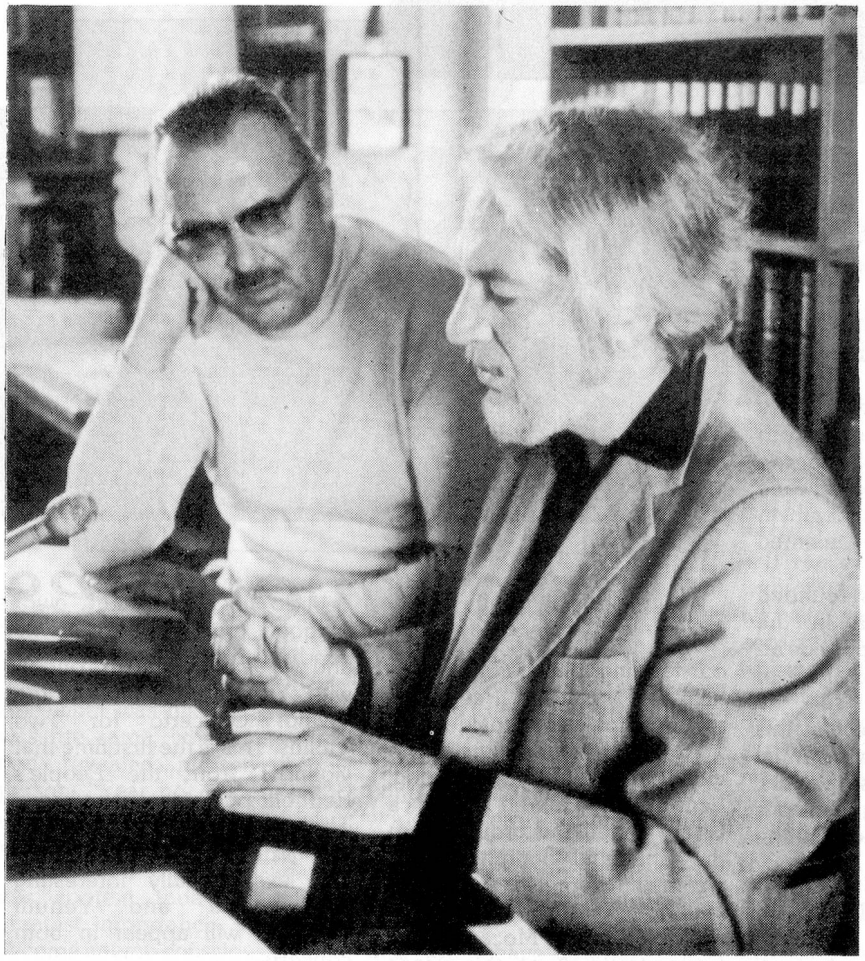

Lance Tschannen (left) – head of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation's international transcription service – discusses with the late Paul Burkhard at the composer's home in Zell the SBC production of "A Village Christmas at Zell."

Setting the musical scene for Christmas

"SBC, the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, presents Musica Helvetica. Today: Christmas in Switzerland . . ."

This is the announcement heard every year during the festive season, as millions of people tune in to their local radio stations on every continent – from Alaska to Australia, from Vietnam to Zimbabwe.

A special English-language Christmas programme is released every year by the international transcription service of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation as part of SBC's regular year-round production of "Musica Helvetica" record albums featuring the entire spectrum of Swiss music (for reasons of copyright the records are not available commercially).

Within the past few weeks more than 400 stations in some 60 countries – including 30 in Britain – have received this year's Christmas production "Jazz On A Holy Night," specially commissioned by the SBC. "Jazz On A Holy Night" is a musical dialogue between Swiss jazz pianist George Gruntz and church organist Hannes Meyer, performed in the historic setting of ancient Tarasp Castle in the lower Engadine region of the Grisons.

Other special Christmas programmes which have been produced by SBC over recent years (and are still available exclusively to radio stations) include:

- ☐ Christmas Music Throughout The Ages.
- ☐ Christmas melodies on music boxes and barrel organs from the Schifferli Collection of Zurich.
- ☐ A Village Christmas at Zell – the first recorded English version of the late Paul Burkhard's "Zeller Weihnacht," performed by children from a dozen nations at the Inter-Community School of Zumikon (Zurich).
- ☐ Christmas Carols in the Languages of Switzerland – sung in German, Swiss-German, French, Gruyere dialect, Italian and Romantsch.
- ☐ Christmas Carols in a Modern Manner – well-known Christmas melodies in modern arrangements played by the three Radio Light Orchestras of Switzerland.
- ☐ Christmas in Arosa – featuring the four church organs and choirs of this renowned Swiss Alpine resort.
- ☐ Noël Valaisan – the story of the nativity, interpreted by rural folk from Hérémence in the Canton of Valais; written, composed and directed by Jean Daetwyler, and specially commissioned by the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation.
- ☐ Christus natus est nobis – early Christmas music sung by the Schola Cantorum of the Monastery of Einsiedeln.

In addition to the special Christmas programmes, the "Musica Helvetica" series also comprises 60 other productions covering every form of Swiss music from classic to folk, jazz, pop and even rock music.

There is also "Lightly Swiss" – a series of 12 15-minute programmes of modern popular music with a Continental and Swiss flavour featuring the German-Swiss, French-Swiss and Italian-Swiss Light Orchestras of Swiss Radio.

A more recent venture has been the "New Swiss Talents" series, featuring up and coming performers in every field of Swiss music.

And a new series is about to be launched, "Swiss Folk Music – Live," presenting authentic Swiss country music as it is being played and enjoyed throughout Switzerland today.

Judging from foreign reaction, SBC transcriptions are proving to be a valuable asset in putting Switzerland on the musical map worldwide. Praise and tributes continue to come in from every continent, from every country.

Typical of the many highly favourable comments has been this one from a radio producer here in Britain: "The standard of the programmes is much superior to any other transcription programmes I have heard.. An excellent job has been done in assembling interesting pieces of music with the right balance of information between tracks. Keep up the good work!"

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