Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1984)

Heft: 1818

Artikel: The alphorn of today - and its scope

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690001

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Mehr erfahren

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. En savoir plus

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. Find out more

Download PDF: 30.11.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, https://www.e-periodica.ch

Cheeses from Switzerland

From Page 7

Cheeses from Switzerland presented Janet and Friends.

The welcome was given by Mr Maurice Johnson, managing director of Cheeses from Switzerland.

The outstanding item on the ballroom floor was the appearance of their official alphorn blower team. Their performance brought them rapturous applause.

There is an interesting sequel to this event: The winner in this nationwide competition for the Cook of the Year, organised by Cheeses from Switzerland, was a student from the Luton Catering College, Christine Rudkin.

Her creation of a Swiss cheese recipe was a salmon surprise, a poached salmon steak filled with Emmental cheese and served with a cheesy hollandaise sauce.

Miss Rudkin is now working at the Swiss Centre Restaurants as commis chef.

Next day began their tour of cheese-selling centres, starting with the Swiss Centre in London, where Capital Radio was present at one of the Centre's renowned Swiss breakfasts.

London's oldest cheese specialists, Paxton and Whitfields, gave them a good reception as part of the Jermyn Street Festival.

At Selfridges, the Army and Navy Stores and others, traffic was so dense that the players were hard put to perform.

In the evening, there was a Fondue Fun Do at the Swiss Centre's Locanda restaurant. The Swiss national dish came into its own, not to speak of the excellent Swiss wines and all the entertainment.

The following day, the players set out on their provincial tour, starting at Asda Superstore in High Wycombe, where they entertained customers inside and the general public outside.

Then it was Manchester's turn where they attended a trade meeting at the Britannia Hotel. Kendal Milne department store had laid on a superb show of Swiss cheeses and proved generous hosts to the team. Of course, cheeses from Switzerland were much in evidence at every centre the musicians appeared.

They then journeyed on to Birmingham with Rackhams department store as the main centre of attraction, followed by another trade reception in the evening.

The Birmingham Evening Mail published a picture of the giant alphorn being carried across the road – what an extraordinary sight!

Back in London, they visited some smaller food stores, like Tylers in Motcomb Street where again they played outside the shop to entertain the passers-by and were later entertained themselves to lunch.

A special event was the visit to

Bartholdi's in Charlotte Street. The whole family were assembled, and the Swiss were treated to special refreshments. How pleased the late Mr Bartholdi and his wife would have been!

They started the Swiss food shop – and for many years a restaurant – which is now run by the third generation of Bartholdis.

Everywhere the three alphorn players and their entourage went they caused a sensation. One may be used to kilts and saris, punk outfits and African robes but to see and hear three alphorn players in attractive costumes is certainly out of the ordinary.

The biggest sensation was caused by the roof-top concert on the last day. Adolf Dettinger played his horn from the roof of the Charing Cross Hotel while Arthur Lamy and Ernst Zuberbuehler blew their horns from the top of the Swiss Centre – a double concerto audible for miles!

To get the alphorn to the top of the Swiss Centre tower block it had to be hauled up with ropes on the outside.

It was the first time such an event has been attempted. No wonder television crews, radio and press reporters were at the Swiss Centre in large numbers. In all the Swiss team appeared three times on television and three times on the radio with audiences running into millions.

There can be no doubt, the three artists made their mark. The Swiss Cheese Union scored a hit. Cheeses from Switzerland could not have been promoted in a more impressive manner than by sending their symbol in person, so to speak, to demonstrate the high quality, not only of their product but also their high standards of marketing and customer service.

The alphorn of today – and its scope

THE alphorn is usually pictured as a long conical object curved at the end, in fact earlier versions, which have practically disappeared today, were straight.

There are also some examples of folded alphorns, but the alphorn as it is known in Switzerland today is curved and conical.

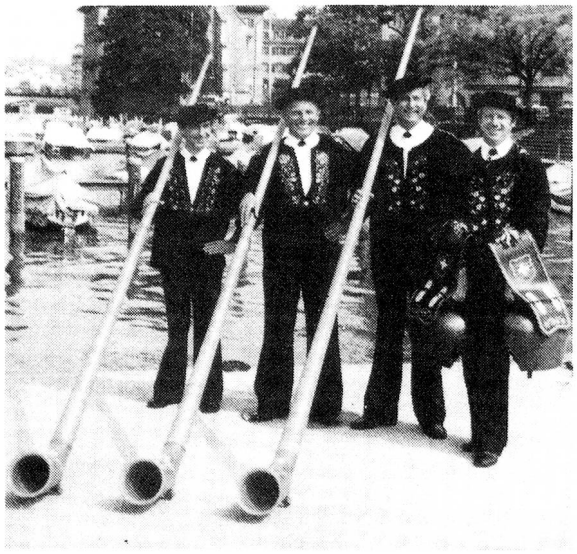
It originated in nature itself – a young fir or pine tree, crooked or straight, growing on a hill or mountain side, was cut down, peeled, cut to size and halved. The two halves were hollowed out until the sides were even and thin. They were then glued together and bound with birch bark.

Today it is rare to have an instrument from a tree grown naturally in the right shape. The best pinewood or spruce is now used, and the horn is made in two, three or even four pieces which will fit into each other.

This allows easy transport – in former times, the instrument was very much tied to residence!

The binding is mostly of split "peddigrohr" (rattan). Earlier alphorns were blown without mouthpieces. Nowadays, these are made of hard beechwood.

One is often asked if all instru-



ments have the same sound. There are actually seven different tonal types (C, B, A-flat, G, G-flat, F and E). Not surprisingly, they are not cheap – they can cost a couple of thousand francs.

Alphorn making used to be a hobby. Shepherds made the instruments during rainy summers or in winter time, more often than not with very primitive tools.

Today, there are a good two dozen alphorn builders, many of them hobby instrument makers, and they use modern tools.

The large alphorn manufacturers, like Jos. Stocker and his Pilatus instruments, export half of their production (of some 300 instruments a year) abroad, including USA and Japan. It is this firm that built the longest alphorn in the world – 18.326m – and it figures in the Guinness Book of Records.

It can actually be extended to 22 metres, and its weight is 32kg. With this instrument, the previous record held by a Bavarian, 10.51, was beaten.

Incidentally, it took 230 working hours by seven people to produce this huge horn. It needed 650 metres of rattan of 6mm width to wind round the spruce fir instrument – the tree, some 25m high, had been well seasoned – 10kg of varnish, 2kg of glue and 5kg of special lubricating oil.

The instrument has been tuned electronically and has 23 sounds spanning four octaves. The price equals that of a small car.

To keep an alphorn in good condition, it has to be lubricated every few years. There is also a "Rollhorn", a "rolled-up" horn which can be used for practising at home.

The alphorn belongs mainly to the mountains, as its name indicates. This is where its sound is at its best. There are some thousand alphorn players in Switzerland – mostly men, only about 50 women.

Its popularity has been growing ever since the interest taken in the instrument by the Swiss Yodellers' Association founded in 1910.

For well over 10 years, the alphorn has been used as an orchestral instrument. The Valaisan composer Jean Daetwyler wrote a concerto for alphorn and orchestra, flute and organ. It was given its first performance in 1972 in Paris with the Lamourex Concert Orchestra.

Etienne Isoz from Lausanne wrote a concerto and prayer for alphorn and orchestra, and finally, André Besançon composed a sonatina for brass quartet and alphorn, and several other composers use the alphorn in modern works.

One of the most successful orchestral alphorn players in Switzerland, Jozsef Molnar, is a professional musician and professor at the conservatoires of Lausanne and Fribourg, who was born in Hungary.

Incidentally, the valveless trumpet for which Bach wrote his trumpet concerto, has the same musical characteristics as the alphorn, and it is possible to solo this work with an alphorn.

When Brahms went on a ramble on the Rigi on September 12 1868, he heard an alphorn melody which he wrote on a postcard to Clara Schumann on her birthday. Some 20 years later that same tune reappeared as the introduction of the fourth movement of his first symphony.

We know that the alphorn is an instrument with no fingerholes or valves. How are the sounds created?

To produce them, the same lip movement is required as for a trumpet. Musical scope is natrually restricted because of the unalterable shape of the instrument. The fundamental tone is deep – the longer the instrument, the deeper the tone.

The upper notes are the natural overtones determined by the length of the horn. The ability to produce natural sounds depends on the elasticity and tension of the lips.

The player learns his pieces from sheet music, but a good musician must always play his compositions by heart – it is a matter of honour!

The alphorn has a strange timbre somewhere between the French horn and the bass clarinet, but without the metallic trumpet sound which is mellowed by the vibrations of the wood fibre. Thus it has a mellow sound which cannot be produced by any other instrument.

Top awards

THE Swiss Cheese Union has recently been awarded two coveted trophies, one was the prestigious Italian La Madonnina Award for Commerce, a prize for outstanding achievement in quality of product, integrity and honesty in a high standard of advertising. Previous winners included Dr Christian Barnard, the heart transplant pioneer, and eight Nobel Prize winners.

The Cheese Union has also been awarded the 1984 Grand Prix Triomphe De L'Excellence Européenne in Paris, a trophy given by an eminent international body whose task it is to preserve the European tradition of excellence.

The award, which in the past was won by such famous organizations as Cartier, Dior, Rolls Royce and Mercedes-Benz, was given in recognition of the Swiss Cheese Union's achievement in marketing with utmost integrity and honesty only traditional products of the finest quality and distinction.

"Cheeses of Switzerland" in this country celebrated these successes as proof of the Cheese Union's right policies and approach all along.