

Visit of the "Orchestre de la Suisse romande" to Edinburgh

Autor(en): [s.n.]

Objektyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): - (1949)

Heft 1119

PDF erstellt am: **25.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693541>

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VISIT OF THE "ORCHESTRE DE LA SUISSE ROMANDE" TO EDINBURGH.

We are informed that the "Orchestre de la Suisse romande," under the direction of M. Ernest Ansermet, has been engaged to appear at the Edinburgh Festival, which is taking place on August 30th and 31st, 1949.

Monsieur E. de Graffenried, the Chargé d'Affaires, will pay an official visit to Edinburgh on those days.

We take this opportunity to give herewith the story of this famous orchestra.

The five French-speaking Cantons of Western Switzerland, known as "Suisse romande", form a complete cultural group among the twenty-two small Republics which compose the Swiss Confederation. Lausanne, Geneva and Neuchâtel, all University towns, have for centuries been the cultural centres of this region and from them sprang the movement which culminated in the foundation of the "Orchestre de la Suisse romande", to-day recognized as one of Europe's finest orchestral ensembles.

The history of this Orchestra, which begins in the sombre year 1918, is very closely connected with the name of Ernest Ansermet, who needs no introduction to music-lovers as a conductor of international repute, famed especially for his interpretation of modern music.

Music in Western Switzerland.

Until 1918, "la Suisse romande" was almost entirely deprived of the joys of concert-going. Only in Geneva were the tastes of cultured circles catered for by the Committee for Subscription Concerts which yearly formed an orchestra by calling upon members of the "Grand Théâtre" Orchestra and a few other professional and amateur musicians. Other towns were not so fortunate. The need for good music was nevertheless felt so acutely that, fired by Ansermet and Pictet de Rochemont, the idea of founding a "Suisse romande" orchestra was launched; the scheme soon materialized from headquarters in Geneva. The Orchestra was financed by private subscriptions and donations and the task assigned to it was to play regularly in Geneva, Lausanne, Neuchâtel, Vevey and Montreux. The ensemble was composed of 62 executants for whom work was assured six months of the year.

Into this undertaking Ernest Ansermet threw himself heart and soul. By his vibrant, dynamic personality, he made the public aware of its need for music, welded the members of his orchestra into a magnificent ensemble. And yet, year after year, there was but discouragement on the financial side; private subscriptions and small subsidies granted by the towns in which the Orchestra regularly performed proved entirely inadequate; musicians could not live on six months' work a year. In 1938, the life of the Orchestra was in peril; it seemed impossible to secure its future. Nevertheless, thanks once again to Ansermet, it was finally granted an official status, becoming a Foundation to which Cantonal and Municipal bodies gave their full moral and financial support; in addition, Ansermet obtained that the Orchestra should be appointed the official symphonic ensemble of the Western Swiss National Broadcasting Station (Sottens). With this backing behind it, the Orchestra was increased to eighty executants to whom full-time work is assured. The "Suisse romande" Orchestra travels a great

deal; throughout the winter it gives regular subscription and popular concerts at Geneva, Lausanne, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Neuchâtel and elsewhere; it broadcasts regularly from Sottens bringing good music within reach of the whole population.

Ernest Ansermet.

Ernest Ansermet's musical career began long before his connection with the "Orchestre de la Suisse romande". Born in 1883 at Vevey, then a sleepy small town, the future maestro early showed certain signs of mathematical aptitude, a patrimony no doubt inherited from his father. But from his mother he also enjoyed the legacy of true musical talent and at the age of fifteen was given an excellent training, studying the piano with Katzenberg, the violin with Bellmann and harmony with Henri Plumhof. At school and University he pursued his studies in the scientific section and, at twenty-two, began his career as teacher of mathematics in the Cantonal schools of Lausanne.

In 1909, however, he suddenly abandoned teaching and with his wife's courageous consent, set off alone for Berlin to study the art of conducting. Two years later he returned home and was almost immediately appointed conductor of the small but excellent Montreux Kursaal Orchestra. His talent soon won him the friendship of Stravinsky, a frequent visitor to his home. The declaration of war in 1914 deprived Ansermet of his orchestra and he was obliged to meet material needs by taking up teaching again. But not for long! Serge Diaghilev was in Switzerland, an exile, but filled with dreams and high hopes. At Ouchy, Diaghilev planned his American tour, prepared the coming season; he lacked a conductor — and it was on Ansermet that his choice fell. In 1916 the Russian Ballet aroused an enthusiasm quite unique in the story of the American theatre. Then South America, Paris, Monte-Carlo and London.

To Ansermet and the "Orchestre de la Suisse romande" Western Switzerland owes much. They have made of Lausanne and Geneva centres of musical culture such as are rarely found outside a great metropolis; they have made the public here music-conscious and raised the taste and critical sense of their listeners to a remarkably high standard.



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