

# "Berner Singbuben" Recital

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objekttyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): **- (1952)**

Heft 1192

PDF erstellt am: **25.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693700>

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## "BERNER SINGBUBEN" RECITAL.

For the last twelve months the B.B.C. has given us plenty of opportunity of listening to a multitude of "Girls Choirs". I think it was the Luton Girls Choir which set the ball rolling, and since then "Girls Choirs" have grown like mushrooms all over the country, and one begins to feel just a little tired of them.

It came, therefore, as a welcome break to hear just for once in a while, and as a change, a boys choir.

The "Berner Singbuben" made their *début* in the Metropolis on Thursday, October 16th in the Great Drawing Room of the Arts Council, 4, St. James' Square, S.W.1.; it was, as far as the attendance was concerned a modest one. There were plenty of vacant seats, and I can not help saying that the unsatisfactory attendance was largely due to the way in which this recital was brought to the notice of the Colony, and in order to prevent such hasty and inadequate arrangements being repeated, I shall deal with this matter at the end of the report.

This Boys Choir, numbering thirty-five "unbroken" (according to circular) voices, under the conductorship of Albert Steiner, has, I was told, a fine record and reputation at home, where it can often be heard over the Beromünster and Sottens transmitters.

A few days before their appearance in London, they gave a concert at Birmingham before a "full house", they were received by the Lord Mayor of that town, and as a special concession, were invited to sing in the Cathedral.

The welcome which they received from the audience on Thursday, 16th of October at No. 4 St. James' Square, was a very warm and cordial one. The Swiss Minister and Madame de Torrénté honoured the choir by their presence.

The boys were neatly dressed in white shirts bearing the Bernese escutcheon black berets and knickerbocker.

After a short introduction by their conductor, they sang two songs by Felix Mendelssohn "Gruss" and "Herbstlied". One was at once struck by the richness of tone produced by these youthful voices and their fine technique.

I do not propose to pass in review every single item of a programme, which, I maintain, was over generous and must have put a great strain on the boys, whose ages varied between nine and fourteen years, considering that they had a long journey, concerts, sightseeing and plenty of excitement behind them.

Amongst the many folklore items on the programme special mention should be made of the following: "O, du liebs Aengeli" and "La petite Jeanneton" (Singspiel) sang with amazing perfection and youthful enthusiasm.

Most enjoyable to listen to were the lovely songs by Robert Schumann, "Ländliches Lied" and "Schön Blümlein", rendered with much feeling, and how exhilarating were such songs as "Reiselied" and "Wanderlied der Prager Studenten" by the Swiss composer Othmar Schoeck,

"Weiss mir ein Blümlein blau", was sung by the conductor of the choir, as soloist with the accompaniment of the choir. Albert Steiner has a pleasing voice which blended well into the *ensemble*, his rendering too of "Schönster Abestärn" was really delightful. How sweetly sounded the lullaby

"Nunnu, Chindli schlaf" with solo by one of the boys of the choir.

To bring a little variation into the performance, Mme. Lea Wormser, an accomplished pianist played a Sonata by Schumann and an Andante by Mendelssohn, which were deservedly heartily applauded by the audience.

Various popular folk songs, in French, Italian and German were sung very well and with an amazingly clear diction, no mean achievement for boys whose knowledge of all the three languages must obviously be limited.

Whether the choir sang under the baton of its conductor or without they produced a really fine ensemble and Mr. Steiner is to be congratulated on having achieved such remarkable results.

This youthful choir has, of course, also its limitations, and it would be hardly fair to compare them, *f.i.*, with the Vienna boys choir or the Vatican boys choir, both of whom were heard in London. (Albert Hall).

The recital concluded, as it started, with the songs from Felix Mendelssohn "Wasserfahrt" and "Maiglöckchen und die Blümlein", the latter making quite an impression by the fine singing.

The long and hearty applause, which was so generously extended to the "Berner Singbuben" at the close of their concert, was well and truly deserved, and a striking testimonial to how much the audience had enjoyed this evening.

Dr. H. W. Egli, President of the N.S.H., thanked the conductor, the pianiste, and the boys, on behalf of the company, very warmly for their fine performance. He did this in "Zürditsch" which was apparently understood, and clearly shows what clever little fellows these "Berner Singbuben" are.

\* \* \*

If I conclude this report with a little homily and a few critical remarks concerning the advertising of this concert, I am not doing so in any vindictive spirit, and they should be simply taken and understood as "constructive criticism".

As mentioned in my introduction, the attendance was unsatisfactory, there were barely 100 persons present and I counted about 40 vacant seats. The circular (I received no less than four) announcing this concert mentioned, that the attendance was to be strictly limited to 100. Enquiring about the many empty seats, I was told, that the authorities of the



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Arts Council had, on their own initiative put up an extra 30-40 chairs. This, in my humble opinion, could have been ascertained before the circular was sent out.

I had heard of the intended visit of these "Berner Singbuben" some months ago. Why is it then that only a few days before the concert took place should the Colony only then have been advised? Why was the Editor of this paper not supplied with particulars of their visit? Why could not a larger Hall have been acquired considering that the coming of this choir had been known for several months to the N.S.H., thus giving the Colony an opportunity to hear this excellent choir?

As much as I admire the good work and activities of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, I can not help saying, that they are singularly unlucky in some of their arrangements. I recall lectures announced in the past, where the lecturer failed to appear; film shows where the projector refused to function, Lantern slide performances where the slides did not fit the frame or did not arrive in time to be shown, etc.etc.

This really is unfortunate. If members and friends of the Society — some of whom travel from some considerable distance — show an interest and take the trouble to attend the various functions, they must be assured of adequate arrangements being made, and that they can enjoy an evening's entertainment without these annoying happenings. With a little organising, better and more satisfactory results could be attained, and both the members and the Society would be the beneficiaries.

ST.

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