

"Fête des vigneronns" Vevey 1977

Autor(en): [s.n.]

Objekttyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): - (1977)

Heft 1728

PDF erstellt am: **19.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-689650>

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country and thus has not been flooded by tourists; everyone may explore quietly and undisturbed away from the crowds.

The wanderer finds some lovely parts, whether he wends his way to the attractive Birseck and its castle ruins or to the changeable and rich heights of the Jura, whether he wishes to contemplate unspoiled villages or whether he prefers to enjoy the strange magic of the industrial landscape on the Rhine. He who is interested in old types of settlements profits greatly. He will discover almost completely preserved villages like Oltingen or Rothenfluh in the upper part of the Canton: stately, mostly detached farm houses are grouped round medieval churches with «Kaessbissen» towers. Or again he comes upon villages built along the old transit roads, with terraced houses often of urban character.

The friend of art and history will find his excursions most rewarding, too. The Roman world comes to life in the ruins and excavations of Augusta Raurica near the present village of Augst and at its Roman Museum, and then again at Munzach near Liestal where he is given an excellent impression of Roman villas. He will also meet remnants of the medieval feudal and ecclesiastical reigns. Near Langenbruck, he will come upon the most ancient sacred building of the Canton with one of the oldest Romanesque portals in Switzerland, the monastic church of Schoental. Many churches remarkable for their architectural beauty contain frescoes from the Late Middle-Ages, so those of Ziefen, Ormalingen and Oltingen. Castles and strongholds are also quite numerous, some of them still inhabited like Wildenstein and the

«Wasserhaus» at Bottmingen. A breath of medieval urban life is noticeable in Liestal and at Waldenburg, whilst the neo-classic palace of «Ebenrain» near Sissach – today an agricultural centre of the Canton – and other patrician houses remind one of the Basle architects of the 18th century. The beautiful Baroque *Domplatz* at Arlesheim brings back another world, that of the sovereign bishops and canons.

The attraction of the diverse landscape, be it gentle or austere, with what has been made by man reaches a harmony of great beauty in the Baslebiet, which long remains with the visitor as a happy memory to be treasured.

Rudolf Suter
from «*Les Cantons suisses*»,
Editions Panoramic

«Fête des vigneron», Vevey 1977



Swiss who live abroad – like so many nationals of one country who have made a new life for themselves elsewhere – keep a home-grown vocabulary that is part of their ethnic heritage. For many Swiss, terms like «Vendemmia», «Winzerfest» or «Fête des Vendanges» evoke autumn leaves, sweet, ripe grapes and the harvesting of next year's wine.

Explaining the «Fête des Vignerons» of Vevey is difficult, unless

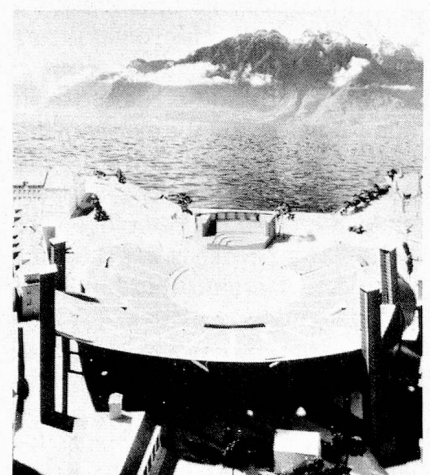
they realize that this Festival has very little in common with a traditional grape harvest celebration. The event takes place not in autumn, but in summer. What is celebrated here is not the birth of the new wine, but the end of the labour of love that gets the vineyard to the point where it will – God and weather permitting – produce the kind of grape which guarantees a good wine.

The Festival has grown out of a centuries-old quality control of the vinegrower's work. And although the Festival, now celebrated only once in a generation, has long been an artistic event with a set of values of its own, its origins and its setting as a summertime event have remained unchanged.

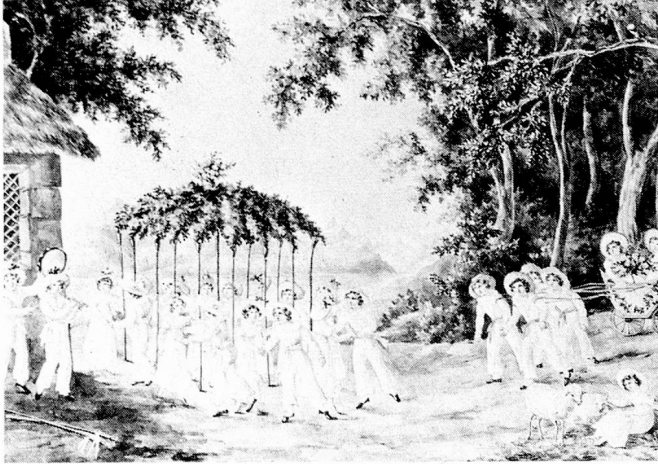
When the grapes begin to ripen on the well-tended vine-stock – and

that is in summer – the vinegrower's responsibility, so to speak, comes to an end. Of course, he will do his utmost if hail should threaten

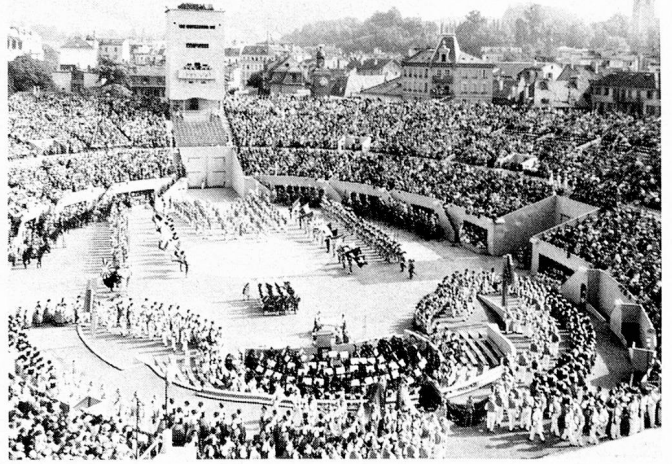
The 1977 stage will offer an open view on the Lake of Geneva and the Alps (photo Ed. Guignard)



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The 1833 Festival: Dance of the Spring Children.



The 1955 Festival: Entry of the «troops».

or if heavy rains should set in; but these trials and their possible consequences are acts of God, not flaws in his care and attention.

His work – and this is what this Vinegrowers' Festival has been all about from its very beginning – starts with the right spacing of plants, the treatment of the soil in spring, the binding, pruning and cutting of the growing shoots and the fight against parasites, until in the end he has a maturing stock with well-spaced grapes and big leaves in a weedless, well-aired soil. This is the work which the old Abbey of St. Urban used to give prizes for, centuries ago; it is the same work for which the lay Brotherhood of Vinegrowers, the «*Confrérie des vigneron*» of Vevey, sole surviving heir in Europe of such a medieval organization, gives prizes today.

An oddity in a tradition dating from feudal days: It isn't the owner of the vineyard who gets the prize, but the working vinegrower, the «*vigneron-tâcheron*», his employee or farmer. The owner is expected to put up an equal sum, thus doubling the prize money.

Prizes aren't overwhelming as money goes today: The last time around, only the very first prizes totalled over SFr. 1000.—. It is the honour that counts.

This quality control goes on, uninterrupted, every three years. But the celebration had become such a big thing two centuries ago already that Festivals were no longer held every time. They had become artistic events, a complex show for which more and more volunteers were sought – and easily found – as actors, dancers, singers and other participants. This evolution developed as the rediscovered traditions of ancient Greece began to flower in eighteenth-century Europe. What had been a parade of prize-winners took on new dimensions as participants dressed up as classic gods and goddesses, reciting and singing the artistic creations of local *litterati* and amateur musicians.

Finally, amateur work of local dilettantes was no longer enough. The Brotherhood began to commission professional composers and authors.

As for the present rhythm of one Festival per generation, this was the result of historic circumstances: One year after a big event in 1797, when all the speakers praised the security and prosperity of their times, Switzerland – then known as the «Old Confederation» – was invaded by the armies of the French Revolution; Napoleon took

over; Europe bled to death in successive wars and only in 1819 did the Veveysans find time, breath and money for the next event.

Thinking about all of this, the organizers found that longer periods between Festivals seemed to increase the expectations, and the willingness of the population for a new effort. The following «Fêtes» took place at irregular, but considerable intervals – in 1833, 1851, 1865 and 1889. During this period, the event concentrated itself more and more on Vevey's market-place, where the original parades used to end. Arches, stands and finally arenas were erected. In 1889, 12 000 seats were offered and the show was such a success that a fifth performance had to be added to the four originally foreseen.

The roster of composers, librettists and artists who «created» each successive Festival reads like a page of Swiss theatre and music history: Hugo von Senger, Gustave Doret, Carlo Hemmerling for the musical score; René and Jean Morax for the 1905 libretto and stage design; Pierre Girard wrote the text and Ernest Biéler, a well-known painter, designed the stage and the costumes in 1927; Géo-H. Blanc wrote the libretto of 1955 and Oskar Eberle, pioneer of Swiss folk theatre, masterfully directed

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the several battalions of amateur participants.

For the next «Fête» of 1977, this century's fourth (after 1905, 1927 and 1955), the score has been written by Jean Balissat; Henri Debluë, one of the most powerful dramatic authors of French-speaking Switzerland, has written the libretto; Jean Monod, well-known in Geneva and Paris, has designed the stage and the costumes; Charles Apothéloz, the director, was Eberle's assistant in 1955 and has since been the driving force behind a remarkable revival of French-Swiss theatre.

What is the show all about? Basically, it has a classic and compulsory development: the cycle of the seasons with its meaning to man and nature.

How every generation of creators sees its artistic possibilities within this given framework makes all the difference.

The 1927 Festival, for instance, was rooted in folklore and gave a glorified picture of a rustic Swiss life-style that was even then a melancholy reminder of Victor Hugo's 19th century concept rather than an up-to-date picture of the actual situation – but it was a runaway success.

1955 saw a «theatre» concept dominated by flawless professional dancing and singing, with internationally known stars as soloists and an orchestral performance of conservative, classic proportions. 1977 will be different. For one, the cycle of the seasons is starting in spring, instead of going from harvest to harvest. Librettist Debluë has added symbolic depth. He sees life rising in spring, maturing through summer and coming to the end that awaits all of us, Passion and Death, in autumn, when the grape is crushed and its blood is spent. Far from meaning death, however, this becomes the start of a new life-cycle. The bare stump of a stock, covered with winter snow, draws mysterious new life

under the frozen earth. The plant's blood ferments to become next year's wine. With the coming of spring, life begins anew – death is only for those without hope. A children's choir at Easter ends the Festival, adding to the strong animistic under current of the old show the dimension of Christian belief in eternal life.

There are «musts» for the music as well: Every new score has to incorporate the most popular airs of previous «Fêtes». Jean Balissat, the composer, far from resenting this, intends to bridge past and present with easy-to-sing new melodies which will, he hopes, become part of the regional folklore, too. He goes as far as flirting with the idea of a pop record of the show's liveliest tunes. But he has gone beyond that in the orchestral part, and he is not opposed to experimental music either. There should be a summer scene with giant wheels manned by gymnasts and karate experts symbolizing the new, mechanized agriculture of our day – with electronic sounds. Uniting all of this in a coherent performance was no mean task, but those who have heard Balissat's score say that he has succeeded beyond their expectations.



The same goes, of course, for Jean Monod, the show's artistic creator. He turned away from the concept of a closed arena and built a stylized vineyard hillside – a lopsided stand that rises up to 20 meters on the northern, or city side, sinking to street level on the southern side, facing the lake and the Alps, using the natural backdrop which has enchanted visitors of the «Riviera» of Lake Geneva for centuries.

It did create some problems: An elaborate sound system has been devised to compensate for the «escaping» sound on the open side; TV cameramen will have to work against the glare of the lake to the south and may end up concentrating their work on the night shows.

For his costumes, in close cooperation with Balissat's and Debluë's concepts, Monod tried to unite two aspects: folklore, with subtly blended traditional colours and a modern, almost abstract style for scenes like carnival – a symbol of man's fight against the forces of evil and winter – for bacchantic scenes and some allusions to spring and flower children. But like all the creators of the 1977 Festival, he has worked with deep respect for tradition and with one goal in mind: To make the event relevant to all the peoples of today who live in our complex last quarter of this twentieth century, be they veterans of three Festivals – as some senior citizens said when they ordered their tickets well in advance – or young people about to see their first «Fête».

So the «Fête des Vignerons» of 1977 at Vevey promises to be the offspring of a proud tradition as well as a new, meaningful show that will give a message of hope to those who seek answers to the problems of our day. Whether it will be, as some say, the last «Fête» of this century or not, it will be an event not to be missed.