

The Swiss Male Choir en Television

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THE SWISS MALE CHOIR ON TELEVISION.

On the 6th of April last Mr. Walton Anderson of the B.B.C. Television Service produced something new for the viewers. He had been visiting Kandersteg some time ago and there the idea came to him to produce on Television a scene depicting life in a Swiss Café of the Chalet kind, getting two English tourists to mingle with the habitual Café guests in the garden outside the Chalet. Mr. Anderson called his little half-hour play "Alpine Hut" where we met Irene Prador, Winifred Shotter, Olaf Olsen, Walter Horsbrugh, Jan van Loewen and Van Dusen as the principal actors, with the Swiss Male Choir under their conductor Paul Dick, Mr. Gandon with his accordion group and the "Schrammel" Quartet providing the music for the party.

It was an experience we "Männerhörler" would not have missed for anything. The play opened by showing a skying film in which we saw the principal actors, Edna and George, arrive on skis at the Alpine Hut to the accompaniment of peaceful soft music sung by the Male Choir. They are received by the Café proprietor, the dialogue being very amusing owing to the language difficulty. In the garden we met boys and girls from the neighbourhood in beautiful Swiss costumes, there is music, a valse, and everybody starts dancing. The proprietor's daughter, Rösli, sings a song or two, the yodeller follows the wish expressed by the English guests to hear some of that extraordinary art, a sextet of "Schuhplattler" do their dance, and, since everybody is gay and happy and sings, the Male Choir sings a partsong called "Emmenthal." Gradually the guests leave with the singing of "Vo Luzärn uf Wäggis zue" to the accompaniment of the "Schrammel" quartet and the "Handörgeler."

All this the viewer could hear and see — but what he could not hear and see was just as interesting; that was, of course, the rehearsing of the whole play prior to its performance. Hour upon hour Mr. Anderson, untiring, went on "You do this — you do that — you sit here, you sit there" now I want a peaceful Swiss atmosphere, relax, act naturally," etc., etc., his words of instruction still ring in my ears. Four hours of this at a preliminary rehearsal at the "Schweizerbund," a whole afternoon at the final rehearsal at Alexandra Palace. As most of the Choir singers work at the Swiss Bank Corporation, its Management most kindly allowed these to follow the whole of that afternoon rehearsal. When we arrived at the Alexandra Palace we were amazed to see the scene; scores of cables and wires all over the studio, scenery depicting the Chalet Inn, a sort of "Gartenwirtschaft," was all in place ready for the actors to carry on. The tremendous heat from scores of huge lights was almost unbearable. Three cameras were ready to pick up the picture from various angles, microphones hung in the air and were

moved hither and thither from performer to performer; all this necessitates a big staff with earphones glued to the head trailing wires behind them — as I said, an amazing sight! And in the midst of this-turmoil everybody remained calm and collected and did as the producer and the stage manager told them, and the desired effect of being ones self, cheerful, natural and at ease came to us all *ipso facto*. The actual stage giving the viewer his picture was, of course, too small to have the whole of the Choir on view; therefore eight had to be chosen as being in the picture, the others including the conductor being placed behind the camera, the latter on a chair so as to have command over the two sections of the Choir. What I wonder is who chose the eight members of the Choir to be in the picture, so as to avoid any "Kantönligeist" repercussions; anyway, whoever it was, did a good job, for the eight certainly were cheerful boys and did their stuff well, but the best looking of the lost was our dear old Mr. Bossert in full Swiss regalia — he was the ninth!

An Englishman told me that he had never seen on Television such a lively and picturesque scene and hoped it would be repeated. Other people have actually written up to Alexandra Palace expressing their complete admiration for the play which Mr. Anderson conceived in Switzerland. However, the Swiss point of view is somewhat different; some of the dialogue was anything but Swiss and I am afraid that was a mistake. The Swiss also criticised the "Schuhplattler," a dance which is typically Austrian and not seen in Switzerland. The producer must be forgiven, however, as he was not aware of the intricate difference of an Austrian jargon as against "Schwyzerdütsch."

In conclusion, I must mention that Mr. Dick's idea of approaching Madame Bolla to produce six Swiss girls in costume was an excellent one. These girls were the neatest, loveliest creatures I have seen for a long time and Madame Bolla is to be congratulated on the choice and on the truly Swiss costumes in which she dressed them. It is a pity that the viewer was not able to see the actual colours of these costumes, they were most beautiful. I must also congratulate the Swiss Male Choir and the Accordion Group on their splendid performance. I would also like to extend warm thanks to Mr. Walton Anderson and his stage manager, Mr. Jackson, whose ease with which they organised and directed the rehearsals and the show was admired by all. If the Television enthusiast enjoyed this refreshing half-hour as much as we performers did, then all is well.

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