



BANDSCAPE OF SWITZERLAND

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Switzerland, which stands in the centre of Europe, is surrounded by many different cultures. Being a small country with four national languages, it does not really possess a common identity (except perhaps chocolate and cheese) but several regional cultures. This large cultural wealth naturally has a significant impact on the musical landscape of Swiss wind bands. Through this article, we will first present an overview of the Swiss wind bands and we will then address the topic of the musicians' professional training. After that, we will go through the Swiss section of the WASBE and will conclude with a few words about the Swiss musical repertoire and its composers.



Community band

Just like in other countries neighboring Switzerland, the musical history of wind bands begins in the 18th-19th centuries. The Napoleonic troops passing through Swiss territory with their military orchestras will have, as a consequence for some towns, the desire to equip themselves with the same musical ensembles. The oldest wind bands of Switzerland have military origins. For example, the “Landwehr” in Geneva (1789), the “Landwehr” in Fribourg (1804), la “Civica” in Lugano (1798), are bands that were born during the Napoleonic period. These “musica militaris” developed a taste for wind music around the country. During the 19th century, other orchestras will see the light of day in cities and villages which will serve a political or religious ideal. Today, if the ideals are not as pronounced as they were in the past, the wind bands of the cities and villages remain important cultural actors.

The country counts more than 1,900 wind bands, meaning more than 60,000 active musicians in those ensembles for a population of approximately 8 million inhabitants.

Because of its history, the movement of the Swiss wind music is essentially amateur. Even if a lot of musicians make a living out of wind music, none of the orchestras are professional. This also holds true for military orchestras. Switzerland does not have any orchestras like the French “Garde Républicaine”. The Swiss army is based on the militia, which is an obligation for young men and women in

their twenties to serve the country during a few months. This way, the best musicians can join a military orchestra during their military engagement.

Nevertheless, this non-professionalization of the Swiss bandscape does not lack high-quality orchestras. It happens that orchestras participate and distinguish themselves in competition such as the WMC (World Music Contest) in Kerkrade or the EBBC (European Brass Band Contest).

The community bands felt the need to regroup throughout their history. By following the administrative division of the territory, there are today regional, cantonal¹ and national² federations.

A certain rivalry exists between the Swiss community bands. This simply comes from the desire to do well, to do better than the neighboring orchestras. This rivalry mainly occurs during competitions. Each federation organizes its own competition. We have, therefore, regional, cantonal and national competitions. The national rendezvous takes place once every five years. The next one is scheduled for 2021³. The bands are clustered in different categories, depending on their instrumentation and their level.

There are two types of formations: the concert bands/symphonic bands and the English brass bands. The second type appeared in Switzerland during the second half of the 20th century. Today still, this type of orchestras is very

1 Examples: «Société cantonale des musiques fribourgeoises», www.scmf.ch / «Zürcher Blasmusikverband», www.zhvb.ch

2 «Association Suisse des musiques», www.windband.ch

3 www.emf2021.ch

popular in Switzerland: a large number of the community bands has made the transition towards the music for brass instruments exclusively. The principal advantage for village orchestras is that the brass band type requires fewer musicians than the concert band type. No more than thirty musicians are necessary to form a complete orchestra. This ensemble is therefore more suited to the reality of many village community band.

Musicians Musical Training

Music is taught in every compulsory schooling. However, music lessons only teach the basics of the musical theory.

Learning how to play an instrument is not possible within Swiss schools. As a result, school bands do not exist in Switzerland apart for a few exceptions.

Students that would like to learn how to play an instrument have to do so in institutions such as conservatories⁴ or music schools at their own expense. A lot of community bands have their own music school in order to insure a succession, in other words, insure the orchestra longevity. Within this context, young bands are created to allow young musicians to be initiated to the ensemble music.

Swiss « non-specialized » universities do not offer instrument lessons. We can however study musicology there like economy, law or theology. In order to become a musician, a student has to sign up in a university specialized⁵ in Arts. Within these institutions, we can study to play the instrument of our choice as well as conducting and composing. The course adheres to the usual university structure: a bachelor followed by a master's degree. Nevertheless, no PhD is issued in Switzerland within these institutions. Students often do two master's degrees, which include a particular specialization; for example, musical performance or teaching. In fact, job opportunities are essentially connected to teaching music for a Swiss wind musician. Sometimes, these professionals expand their musical activities with the conducting of a wind orchestra.



WASBE Switzerland

Founded in 1994, the Swiss section of WASBE has the same objective that the international association, which is the wind music promotion in every shape and form. Of course, the promotion of our section is mainly Swiss.

More than a hundred members are part of our association. Eight people work within the committee. These people are: Stéphane Delley, president; Melanie Hösli, vice-president; Alexander Kübler, secretary; Axel Catillaz, cashier; Urs Erdin, webmaster; Thomas Fischer, member; Manuel Imhof, member; Vincent Baroni, member.

At the usual pace of one day seminar per year, the Swiss WASBE has had the opportunity to deal with many topics since its beginnings. A large number of renowned speakers in the wind music world was invited, such as Thomas Ludescher (Austria), Philippe Bach (Switzerland) or Henrie Adams (the Netherlands)

2019 has been an exceptional year due to the organization of three WASB'Events prepared by WASBE-CH. The first event which took place in March had for objective to present the concept of "instrument class 18+" by its creator Markus Amgwerd in Altdorf.

The second WASB'Event brought Swiss composers to light. The theme of the day was "wind music of Switzerland: past, present and future". In the morning, Thomas Trachsel and Oliver Waespi, internationally known Swiss composers, brought their valuable conducting experience during their

4 Examples : Conservatory of Fribourg, www.conservatoire-fribourg.ch / Conservatory of Lausanne, www.conservatoire-lausanne.ch

5 Examples : Bern University of the Arts, www.hkb.bfh.ch / Zurich University of the Arts, www.zhdk.ch / Basel Academy of Music, www.fhnw.ch



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conferences. In the afternoon, three composers from the new generation, Fabian Künzli, Sami Lörtscher and Cédric Fuhrer, came to present their vision of music through their work.

The third WASBE Event is a masterclass for conductors. The speaker Jean-Claude Kolly is a conducting teacher renowned in Switzerland. He has been a WASBE member for a very long time. In addition to that, he teaches at the Conservatory of Fribourg and at the Lausanne University of Music. The theme of the day is: "a creative conductor for a motivated ensemble!". The participants will work with the invited orchestra: the Brass band of Fribourg.

Still with the purpose of promoting wind music, Swiss WASBE has ordered a piece of music from Oliver Waespi for October 2020. Swiss WASBE would also wish to promote some works of reorchestration of ancient major pieces of music made by Swiss composers, which are not played nowadays mainly due to instrumentation problems. In the style of Gustav Holst's Suites, WASBE-CH hope to give a new life to these forgotten pieces.

Swiss Repertoire

As mentioned in the introduction, the country does not have a common musical identity. A French speaking Swiss will be closer to French culture and a German speaking Swiss will be more sensitive to Austrian or German cultures, of course all of which will have some distinctive characteristics. When it comes to the musical repertoire, it is difficult, even impossible, to define a Swiss identity. It is perhaps a part of the answer to the observation that there are few Swiss composers who really have left their mark on the history of music. Nevertheless, Switzerland is a country of music. The density of musicians, singers, instrumentalists, amateurs or professionals, is very large in comparison with the surface area of the country, a country that grants importance to creativity. There are many Swiss composers considering the small size of the country.

Since 1997, Swiss WASBE has been making an inventory of every piece of wind music made by Swiss composers. This project, called "Wind music of Switzerland" is regularly updated. The last available version was made in 2019 and is downloadable on the following website: www.wasbe.ch.

It is a list rich of more than 1'200 titles that can be identified by their difficulties, their length of time and their type of formation: a nice work tool for conductors that are looking for playing new pieces of music.

On this list appears a few experienced and famous Swiss composers such as Franco Cesarini (*1961), Oliver Waespi (*1971) and Thomas Trachsel (*1972). We can also find some

composers that are no longer among us but who have left their mark on the Swiss wind music: Stefan Jaeggi (1903-1957), Paul Huber (1918-2001), Albert Benz (1927-1988), Jean Balissat (1936-2007)

The young generation is very well represented and it is cheering to notice that Switzerland counts a lot of new creators. To name only a few of them: Marc Jeanbourquin (*1977), Sami Lörtscher (*1978), Etienne Crausaz (*1981), Ludovic Neurohr (*1983), Fabian Künzli (*1984), Cédric Fuhrer (*1990), Theo Schmitt (*1991), etc

Wind music in Switzerland is extremely lively. There is a large number of orchestras, musicians and composers that are active in that environment. In terms of creativity, it is exciting to recognize that there is a new generation of composers, with many representatives of international renown. It is definitely the result of a high-quality training within our institutions. Switzerland often is described as a tax haven, but it is before anything else, a musical paradise