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Rock around the Swiss clock

Switzerland has never been a paradise rockery for pure leather rockers or other types of Iroquois. It has to be admitted that Homo Helveticus has rarely set himself up as a symbol of revolt. Even so, in the last few years the musical scene has been changing quite seriously.

In Switzerland it isn't easy to make a breakthrough. This is not really the fault of our musicians. You have to remember that the market is relatively small, and the right producers simply don't exist because they know what the chances are. And the media are pretty lazy really. You have to stroke the listener or the reader in the right direction and not ruffle him up, and Swiss boys and girls don't really have much belief in their own culture.

From Lausanne-City...

French-speaking Switzerland, like France itself, often shuffles around between song and rock. Artists like Patrick Chambaz, Rinaldi & Buster Kit, or much older Jean-Pierre Huser, are always half-way between the two labels. On the rock side, Constantin from Canton Valais came over very strongly a few years ago with his yodelling "Switzer-

land Reggae". But for the present it doesn't seem to have led to very much. Now we have the Maniacs, the Needles, Taboo and Silicone Carnet, amongst quite a lot of others who are all trying to take up the challenge. And our zygomatich twitchers are very happy about the fact that the Geneva group, Beau Lac de Bâle, are continuing with their own special mixture of satire and jokey rock.

The only real revelation of these last few years in French-speaking Switzerland has come from the Young Gods. For a very specialised public admittedly. With their love of samplers, their deluge of tortured sounds, it is to Iggy Pop or Brecht and Weill that you have to go in search of their forebears. This music seems to lots of us difficult to like, but it still succeeds in resonating all over the world, for the Young Gods seem to be cropping up in all sorts of unexpected places, and much of the specialised press seems to be beating the baton on their behalf.

...to down-town Zurich

German-speaking Switzerland is particularly fertile soil for rock groups. Yello, for example, has had brilliant results on the synthetics all over Europe and the United States. But if there is a good deal of talent, there isn't always much in the way of original material. Still we mustn't altogether forget Sydney, The Fool's House, that excellent melodian, Phil Carmen, and singing Betty Legler, whose latest album, "Now", has been very successful indeed.

Some have chosen the uphill route and hats off to them: those unwilling to forget their ancestry in Swiss-German dialect. Polo Hofer, for example, recently joined in this very exclusive club indeed by Patent Ochsner, whose latest CD, Schlachtplatte (or perhaps Mixed Grill), has been making its way up alongside the English-speaking stars in the German-language disc stores. And we mustn't altogether forget Züri West, which was the very first group to become a commercial success story thanks

to a very Swiss indeed title for an album, "Bümpliz-Casablanca".

And to conclude this very rapid glimpse of today's scene we must of course mention the phenomenon, Stephan Eicher. Born in Berne, young in Zurich, Gypsy at heart, Eicher decided to play the wellknown card of the music and cultural mix. And with panache - with his acoustic guitar and his computer sound. French, English and Swiss-German dialect. Rock n' folklore. At a time when lots of people are worrying about a Europe in mourning for its old cultural variety Eicher has found a way of showing that there isn't much to worry about at all: because the best way of conserving local identity is through interbreeding. It all comes out in the wash. Which means that the Tout Paris knows all about Engelberg and whistles the Swiss-German "Hemmige" in its sleep.

And it's all very well in its way. But wouldn't it be nice if the Swiss themselves might one day come to believe in their own musical artists too?

Bernard Léhot

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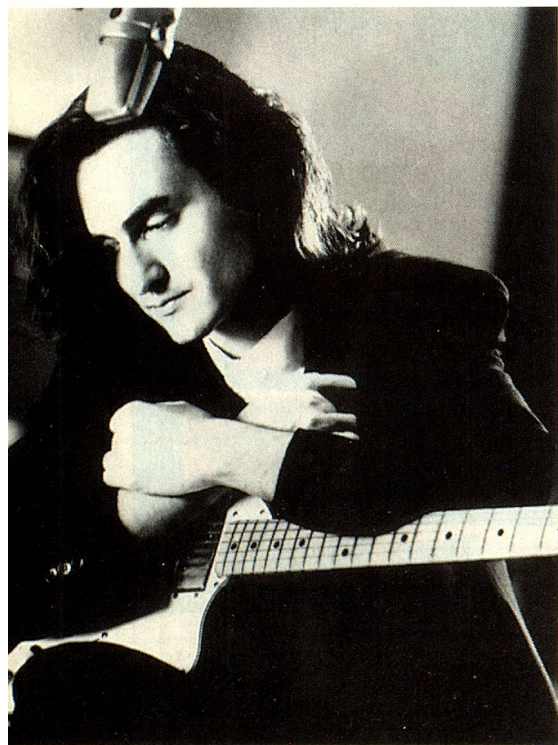
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Gypsy at heart, Stephan Eicher makes his mark on the music and culture scene (Photo: Phonogram).