

Media release

12 June 2025

A stubete at the museum. A journey of discovery through the sounds of Switzerland in the exhibition 'Traditional folk music'

What does Switzerland actually sound like? As of 14 June, the new temporary exhibition 'Traditional folk music' at the Forum of Swiss History Schwyz deals with the many facets of popular Swiss music culture – from traditional instruments to the voices and familiar faces of traditional music to its modern interpretations. Moreover, everyone is welcome to join in – visitors are invited to try their hand at 'playing the squeezebox', yodelling, and dancing on our 'stubete stage'.

There is no single traditional Swiss folk music – rather, it is shaped by a huge variety of regional styles, instruments, and voices. The exhibition takes visitors on a cultural-historical journey through the soundscape of Switzerland. It shows how the “myth of Swiss folk music” came about, and how, to this day, it has constantly been developed and reinterpreted. The focus of the exhibition is on four formative elements: the melodeon (*schwyzerörgeli*), which revolutionized traditional folk music around 1886, pushing out the old string and wind instruments in many areas; the alphorn, which was actively promoted as an emblem of Switzerland following the Unspunnen Festival of 1805; the (hammered) dulcimer, which found its way from distant Persia to the Säntis region as early as the 15th century; and, of course, yodelling, which ranges from wordless, natural yodelling to singing competitions organized by clubs.

Ländler legends, a dismantled melodeon, and 'Sepplis'

Historical exhibits, authentic sound samples, and portraits of musicians bring the origins and development of traditional Swiss folk music to life. Items on display include, for example, the 2,500 single components that make up a traditional 'Nussbaumer' melodeon, or the elaborately decorated head mask of an Appenzell *Silversterchlaus*, complete with wood-carved scenes featuring delicate figurines and beads. Next to that, we also portray legends of Swiss folk music from different generations such as the clarinettist Kasimir Geisser, the 'TV king of *ländler* music' Wysel Gyr as well as the young alphorn soloist Lisa Stoll.

The exhibition highlights how traditional Swiss folk music sounds different, depending on which part of the country we are talking about: central Switzerland became a stronghold of *ländler* music; in Appenzell, string music held its ground; in the Grisons, the 'Fränzlis'.

Forum Schweizer Geschichte Schwyz.

From lower-class music to national pride

‘What many people don’t know’, Sibylle Gerber, the exhibition curator, explains ‘is that *ländler* once used to be the music that members of the lower-classes typically danced to’. It was only during the Second World War that Swiss radio began widely broadcasting *ländler* music in an effort to strengthen national cohesion and resilience. From the 1960s onwards, counter-movements began to emerge that experimented with a mix of traditional and new elements, leading to what is referred to as ‘new folk music’ – a dynamics between preservation and innovation that continues to this day.

Join the fun!

The interactive exhibition invites people to actively engage, at least in musical terms. On our ‘*stubete* stage’, visitors are encouraged to try their hand yodelling, playing an instrument or dancing: typical folk instruments are available along with step-by-step instructions how to play them – for instance the melodeon (*schwyzerörgeli*) or the traditional yodel for beginners called ‘*schuelerbuebe*’ yodel. Who knows, apart from exploring new sounds, we might even discover a hidden talent among the audience. Anyone who wishes to become part of the exhibition is invited to contribute their experiences and memories of traditional folk music in the shape of snapshots, sound recordings or videos. These will be used to create the digital collection ‘Meine Volksmusik’ (My Folk Music): a musical mosaic of traditional Swiss folk music – for all, and from all.

A rich supporting programme

Apart from special educational offers for school classes, the exhibition also has a rich supporting programme including concerts, workshops, and guided tours with experts. Additionally, children can explore the exhibition with a specially designed audio guide that playfully guides them through the soundscapes of Swiss folk music.

If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to contact us:

Sibylle Gerber | Exhibition curator | Forum Schweizer Geschichte Schwyz.
T. +41 41 819 60 15 | email: sibylle.gerber@nationalmuseum.ch

Karin Freitag-Masa | Communications | Forum Schweizer Geschichte Schwyz.
T. +41 41 819 60 18 | email: karin.freitag@nationalmuseum.ch