

The background is a vibrant blue field filled with a dense, chaotic pattern of horizontal white and black bars of varying lengths. Small red squares are scattered throughout the composition, some appearing to sit atop the white bars. The overall effect is one of dynamic, layered movement.

Christian Broecking

This Uncontainable  
Feeling of Freedom

Irène Schweizer –  
European Jazz and the  
Politics of Improvisation

**Christian Broecking**

# **This Uncontainable Feeling of Freedom**

**Irène Schweizer — European Jazz,  
and the Politics of Improvisation**

**The Authorized Biography**

**Translated from the German by Jeb Bishop**

Verein Freundinnen und Freunde von Irène Schweizer  
Hochschule Luzern – Musik  
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## IMPRESSUM

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## IMPORTANT PERSONS

**Conny Bauer:** Trombonist, born 1943. Repeated appearances with Schweizer in the 1980s. Recordings with Schweizer and the London Jazz Composers Orchestra: *Theoria* (1991) and *Radio Rondo* (2008). Lives in Berlin.

**Han Bennink:** Percussionist, born 1942. Has worked with Schweizer since the recording of *European Echoes* in 1969. Countless appearances together in various ensembles. Duo CDs: *Irène Schweizer – Han Bennink* (1995) and *Welcome Back* (2015). Lives in Amsterdam.

**Anthony Braxton:** Saxophonist, music theorist, born 1945. Lives in Middletown (Connecticut).

**Peter Brötzmann:** Saxophonist, born 1941. Has known Schweizer since 1965. Occasional concerts together in the early years. Recorded on *European Echoes* in 1969. In 1984, Schweizer played in his ensemble at the Sound Unity Festival in New York. Lives in Wuppertal.

**Peter Bürli:** Journalist, head of the jazz department of the Swiss Radio DRS/SRF. Born 1957. Has done articles and programs on Schweizer since 1985; organized numerous studio recordings and concert recordings with Schweizer, some of which appear on Intakt CDs. Lives in Zürich.

**Rüdiger Carl:** Saxophonist, clarinetist, accordionist, born 1944. Met Schweizer in 1972 as part of the FMP scene, and then played in many ensembles with her. Various recordings together for FMP, and, after 1988, with COWWS. Lives in Frankfurt.

**John Corbett:** Cultural organizer, concert promoter, gallerist, born 1963. Presented Schweizer in Chicago; her solo concert there in 2000 was released on CD. Re-released the out-of-print live recording of the Tchicai-Schweizer Group at the 1975 Willisau Jazz Festival, "Willi the Pig," on CD. Lives in Chicago.

**Sylvie Courvoisier:** Pianist, born 1968. Met Schweizer in the early 1980s. Lives in New York.

**Monique Crelieu:** Born 1994; has been Schweizer's partner since 2009. Formerly ran a hairdresser's salon. Lives in Basel.

**Marilyn Crispell:** Pianist, born 1947. Duo CD with Irène Schweizer: *Overlapping Hands: Eight Segments* (FMP 1990). Lives in Woodstock.

**Andrew Cyrille:** Percussionist, born 1939. Various concerts with Schweizer; CD releases: *Irène Schweizer - Andrew Cyrille* (recorded live at Willisau Jazz Festival 1988) and *Berne Concert* with Trio 3 + Irène Schweizer (2007). Lives in New York.

**Jacques Demière:** Pianist, born 1954. Worked with Schweizer as composer and pianist in the mid-1980s. Lives in Geneva.

**Hamid Drake:** Percussionist, born 1955. Numerous appearances with Schweizer in Europe and Chicago. Their recordings from taktlos 1998 and Willisau 2007 appear on the Intakt CD *Irène Schweizer - Fred Anderson - Hamid Drake*. Lives in Chicago and Milan.

**Pierre Favre:** Percussionist, born 1937. First recording with Schweizer as Pierre Favre Trio: *Santana* (1968). Has since been a close musical partner and confidant of Schweizer. Was present along with Schweizer in 1969 at the recording of *European Echoes* by Manfred Schoof. Countless concerts and three duo CDs with Schweizer. Worked at Paiste from

1967 to 1972, Schweizer worked there as his secretary. Lives in Uster.

**Peter K. Frey:** Bassist, born 1941. In 1971, played in the Irène Schweizer Quartet with Makaya Ntshoko and Jürg Grau. Lived in the cultural-politically engaged musicians' living community WG am Wasser with, among others, Schweizer and the pianist Urs Voerker, from 1974 to 1977. In their Huus Trio, Schweizer played drums. Founded the Workshop for Improvised Music (WIM) and Swiss Musicians' Cooperative (MKS). Lives in Zürich.

**Jost Gebers:** Bassist, social worker, born 1940. Founder of Free Music Production (FMP), directed FMP, organized the Total Music Meeting, Free Music Workshop, and other concert series in Berlin from 1968 to 2000. Produced and released numerous recordings with Schweizer, including *Wilde Señoritas* (1976) and *Hexensabbat* (1977). Lives in Borken.

**Barry Guy:** Bassist, born 1947. Leads the London Jazz Composers Orchestra. Various appearances and recordings with Schweizer, including *Theoria* (1991) and *Radio Rondo* (2008). Lives near Zürich.

**Rosina Kuhn:** Painter, born 1940, a friend of Schweizer's since 1977. Performances together until 1983. Designed the CD covers for Les Diaboliques. Lives in Zürich.

**Oliver Lake:** Saxophonist, born 1942. Concerts with Schweizer, Reggie Workman, and Andrew Cyrille in 2007 in Bern and Zürich; a concert recording was released on Intakt as *Berne Concert* with Trio 3 + Irène Schweizer. Lives in Montclair, New Jersey.

**Patrik Landolt:** Cultural organizer, journalist, CD producer, concert organizer, editor for many years of the left-wing weekly paper *WoZ*. Born 1956. Has known Schweizer since 1976. Beginning in 1982, he founded, with Schweizer,

various autonomous musicians' and cultural initiatives, including Fabrikjazz, taktlos, unerhört! and, finally, Intakt. Close friend, confidant, and supporter of Schweizer. Lives in Zürich.

**Joëlle Léandre:** Bassist, born 1951. Has known Schweizer since 1978. Countless appearances together, including the trio Les Diaboliques with Maggie Nicols since 1991. Various recordings and releases together on Nato, FMP, and Intakt. Lives in Paris.

**George E. Lewis:** Trombonist, composer, professor of composition at Columbia University in New York. Born 1952. Many concerts with Schweizer in a wide variety of ensembles. Recordings together: *Les Douze Sons* (Joëlle Léandre, 1983), *Live at taktlos* (1984), and *The Storming of the Winter Palace* (1986). Lives in New York.

**Paul Lovens:** Percussionist, born 1949. Has known Schweizer since 1975, from the WG am Wasser. Played with Schweizer at the first taktlos festival in 1984; the recording appeared as the first Intakt LP, *Live at taktlos*. Lives in Nickelsdorf, Austria.

**La Lupa:** Folksinger, born 1947. Has known Schweizer since 1985, is her friend, and developed a concert program together with her. Lives in Zürich.

**Rosmarie A.Meier:** Sociologist, concert organizer, born 1955. Directs the Alterszentrum Pfrundhaus-Bürgerasyl elder living facility in Zürich. Has known Schweizer since 1979 as a close friend and confidante. Organized the first Swiss Women's Jazz Festival Canaille in 1986. Has organized concerts and tours for Schweizer, and founded the Intakt label with Patrik Landolt. Lives in Zürich.

**Tommy Meier:** Saxophonist, born 1959. CDs with Schweizer and his band Root Down: *Root Down* (2007), and *The Master and the Rain* (2010). Lives in Jönen.



**Louis Moholo:** Percussionist, born 1940. Has known Schweizer since 1964; countless concerts together in a wide variety of ensembles. Recordings and releases in trio with Schweizer and Rüdiger Carl from 1975 to 1978: *Messer* and *Tuned Boots*; duo CD *Irène Schweizer – Louis Moholo* (Intakt, 1986). 2003 tour of South Africa with Schweizer. Lives in Cape Town.

**Mani Neumeier:** Percussionist, born 1940. Has known Schweizer since 1963; played in the Schweizer Trio from 1964 to 1967. Recordings together: *Early Tapes* (1967) and *Jazz Meets India* (1967). Lives near Heidelberg.

**Maggie Nicols:** Singer, born 1948. Has played with Schweizer in a wide variety of ensembles since 1978, first in the Feminist Improvising Group FIG, later also in the taktlos group, and since 1991 in the trio Les Diaboliques with Léandre. Various recordings and releases together. Lives in Carmarthen, Wales.

**Lucas Niggli:** Percussionist, born 1968. Works as board member with Schweizer in the Intakt Records Association. Lives in Uster.

**Makaya Ntshoko:** Percussionist, born 1939. Has known Schweizer since 1962, countless concerts in many different groups. Recordings and releases together: *Willi the Pig: Live at the Willisau Jazz Festival* (1975, with John Tchicai and Buschi Niebergall) and *Can Walk on Sand* (Where's Africa Trio with Omri Ziegele, 2009). Lives in Basel.

**Evan Parker:** Saxophonist, born 1942. Worked with Schweizer sporadically over many years, beginning in 1969 in the Pierre Favre Quartet. Recordings with Schweizer and the London Jazz Composers Orchestra: *Theoria* (1991) and *Radio Rondo* (2008). Lives in Faversham, England.

**William Parker:** Bassist, directs the New York Vision Festival. Born 1952. With Peter Kowald, organized the Sound

Vision Festival in New York in 1984, at which Schweizer appeared. Occasional appearances together since then in New York and Zürich. Lives in New York.

**Barre Phillips:** Bassist, born 1934. Occasional concerts with Schweizer in various groups since 1970; recordings with her and the London Jazz Composers Orchestra: *Theoria* (1991) and *Radio Rondo* (2008). Lives in France.

**Marianne Regard:** Neuropsychologist, born 1946. Has known Schweizer since the late 1960s; they have been friends since 1975. Since then she has become one of Schweizer's closest friends, and has accompanied her on many concert tours. Lives in Zürich.

**Urs Röllin:** Guitarist, founder and director of the Schaffhausen Jazz Festival, born 1959. Organized many of Schweizer's concerts, and has presented her work since 1990 at the festival in many different ensembles. Also a member of the festival's advisory board. Lives in Schaffhausen.

**Isolde Schaad:** Writer, publicist, works for the left-wing weekly paper *WoZ*, born 1944. In 1967, she wrote her first article about Schweizer, and in 1990 she gave the honorary address when Schweizer was awarded the Georg Fischer prize. Originally from Schaffhausen. Lives in Zürich.

**Margrit Schlatter:** Younger sister of Irène Schweizer, pharmacist, born 1942. Married with a son. Lives in Schaffhausen.

**Alexander von Schlippenbach:** Pianist, born 1938. With Schweizer, was part of the recording of *European Echoes* by Manfred Schoof. Lives in Berlin.

**Manfred Schoof:** Trumpeter, born 1936. Appeared with Schweizer in 1967 at the Donaueschingen Music Days and the Berlin Jazz Days, in the project "Jazz Meets India." Schweizer also took part in the recording of his *European*

*Echoes* in June 1969 in Bremen. This influential LP was the beginning of the FMP label. Lives near Cologne.

**Günter Baby Sommer:** Percussionist, born 1943. Numerous appearances and tours with Schweizer since 1984. Recordings together: *Live at taktlos* (1984), *The Storming of the Winter Palace* (1986), and *Irène Schweizer – Günter Sommer* (1987). Lives in Radebeul.

**Bruno Spoerri:** Saxophonist, born 1935. Has known Schweizer since her first appearance at the National Amateur Jazz Festival Zürich in 1958. They performed together with his band Jazz Rock Experience in 1970. Lives in Zürich.

**Co Streiff:** Saxophonist, born 1959. Met Schweizer at the 1986 Canaille Festival; since then has played with her in various groups. Duo CD: *Twin Lines* (Intakt, 2001). Lives in Jönen.

**Fredy Studer:** Percussionist, born 1948. Played with Schweizer in the Jazz Rock Experience. In 1972, he took over Pierre Favre's position at Paiste, where Schweizer worked as a secretary until 1974. Lives in Lucerne.

**Niklaus Troxler:** Graphic artist, founded the Willisau Jazz Festival in 1975, born 1947. Organized numerous concerts for Schweizer, and presented her work continuously and comprehensively in a wide variety of ensembles between 1968 and 1992. Presented Schweizer's first solo concert, in Willisau in 1976. Lives in Willisau and Berlin.

**Nikola Weisse:** Actress with the Marthaler company in Basel, born 1941. Has known Schweizer since 1985; has been her friend and neighbor since 2004. Lives in Zürich.

**Jürg Wickihalder:** Saxophonist, born 1973 in Glarus. Recorded the Intakt CDs *Jump*, by the Jürg Wickihalder European Quartet feat. Irène Schweizer, and *Spring*, by the Irène Schweizer – Jürg Wickihalder Duo. Lives in Zürich.

**Reggie Workman:** Bassist, born 1937. Concerts with Schweizer, Lake, and Cyrille in 2007, in Bern and Zürich, were released on Intakt as *Berne Concert* with Trio 3 + Irène Schweizer. Lives in New York.

**Omri Ziegele:** Saxophonist, born 1959. Numerous duo concerts with Schweizer since 1997; founded and worked with her in the musicians' initiative OHR. With Schweizer, recorded the CDs *Where's Africa* (2005) and *Can Walk on Sand* (2009). Lives in Zürich.

### *A note on references*

All publications are cited to the fullest extent possible. Missing or partial citations are due to unobtainable source information (for example, newspaper clippings with no date/author/publication title, from a personal archive).

**THIS UNCONTAINABLE  
FEELING OF FREEDOM**

*This music is the music of the hidden force of the universe*  
– Louis Moholo

Zürich, February 2013. A clear, cold winter's day. Behind the city, the Alps are visible. From the main station, she's told me, I should take tram line 3, direction Albisrieden, five stations. I'm on time, and at the Kalkbreite station she's waiting for me: Irène Schweizer, pianist, avant-gardist, icon of Swiss and European free jazz and of the Anti-Apartheid and Women's Movements. From here, it's only a few minutes' walk to her home on the Feldstrasse, in the Aussersihl district. She's a little nervous, because her heating system picked today to break down. Despite this, we sit in her kitchen, drink tea, and begin to talk about her life. This is visibly difficult for her; she has never been a voluble artist. In preparation for our first meeting, she looked up some articles about herself—documents that she considers important and that were used as the basis for a documentary film about her, made by Gitta Gsell. But she hasn't collected anything more than this, she says. There's one longer article that she thinks is particularly good, in which she recounts her life in fifteen pages. More than that isn't really necessary, she says. She opens up to questions reluctantly. Other people, she says, can certainly tell you more about her. Her companions, musicians, artists, friends, and neighbors. Her family. A few days later, she sends a list of names: companions in her life, or at least part of it. After this, we meet regularly in her apartment. Always in her kitchen, with the balcony overlooking the inner courtyard, where she sat in the past with Günter Baby Sommer and so many other musical colleagues and friends. Not in her studio, where her piano (a Grotrian-Steinweg) and computer

reside. Not in her living room, between the paintings—one by Sonja Sekula, which Schweizer bought, and one by Gottfried Honegger, who invited her to choose one from his studio—and among her books, her movies, and an impressive collection of jazz records from the late 1950s to now. Amidst these markers of her life, her apartment is very well-organized and tidy; everything is in its place, as if she needed this orderly framework so that, within it, she could have a place to break the order, to split it open. To deploy this physical force, playing with her forearms and the edges of her hands, with cymbals and beaters, the work on the keys, the strings, the piano's entire body. Jagged fragments woven into melodies as fine as spiderwebs.

A year and a half later: November 2014. A welcoming fall day. The Zürich “unerhört!” festival, which she co-founded, is in full swing. When I ring her bell at the appointed time, she's surprised to see me—she thought I was coming the next day. Despite this, she invites me into her kitchen. In the months preceding and following this, there were many meetings and conversations: with her producer, Patrik Landolt of Intakt Records; with her musical companions of many years, Louis Moholo, Pierre Favre, and Han Bennink; with Maggie Nicols and Joelle Léandre; with Jost Gebers, longtime head of Free Music Production (FMP); with Peter Brötzmann and Alexander von Schlippenbach, comrades from the FMP era; with English saxophonist Evan Parker; with Niklaus Troxler, director of the Willisau jazz festival; with her American colleagues Andrew Cyrille and George Lewis; with Swiss saxophonist Co Streiff; with Rosmarie A. Meier, sociologist and founder of the Canaille festival in Switzerland; and with many more. These interviews, nearly 100 of them, are the basis of the present book, together with countless articles and liner notes from newspaper archives, the archive of the Darmstadt Jazz Institute, and Intakt Records, the record label that has promoted, distributed, and documented her work since 1984.



On this day in November 2014 she has a surprise for me: five file boxes full of articles she's collected over four decades, from 1968 to 2008. Later that evening, when I tell Patrik Landolt about it, he tells me he's heard about these boxes, but has never seen them. The fact that she has not only shown them to me, but has given them to me in a huge trunk to take to Berlin, is a real show of trust. With her life literally in my briefcase, I set out on my journey.

## **Childhood in the Landhaus: The Innkeeper's Daughter**

Schaffhausen, June 2, 1941: on this Whit Monday in early summer, Irène Schweizer was born, the second daughter of Frieda and Karl Schweizer, restaurateurs in Schaffhausen, the northernmost city in Switzerland. Next door, Germany was at war with the rest of the world. In this city close to the border, bomb alerts were frequently heard, forcing the family to retreat to one of the air raid shelters. Three-year-old sister Lotte and baby Irène were joined in 1942 by Margrit, the youngest (the Schweizers' first child, Helene, had died of a blood disease in 1936, at the age of nine months). Karl and Frieda ran the Restaurant Landhaus, across from the train station, which Karl rented from the local agricultural cooperative. This was not the picturesque part of the medieval city, with its wooden gabled houses. It was much more a working-class neighborhood. World War II had been raging for two years, and was now pressing against the border of Switzerland. Despite their declared neutrality, the Swiss had to perform military service at the border to secure it. This meant that Karl often had to be away from the family for long periods of time, during which Frieda had to take care of the inn and the children by

herself. In 1941, Schaffhausen had a population of about 22,000; today it is almost 36,000.

When Schweizer was just 18 days old, the first meeting of the Schaffhausen Trust Agency was held in the Restaurant Landhaus. The agency was formed to address the question of distributing produce in Switzerland. The Schaffhausen newspaper, *Schaffhauser Nachrichten*, later reported: "As World War II drew ever closer to our country, measures were taken to ensure normal distribution of vegetable products within the country. Following the trust agencies successfully initiated and operating in Basel, Bern, Graubunden, Lucerne, and Zürich, such an agency was also started in Schaffhausen and in other areas." (*SN*, January 17, 1948).

Functions and events of all kinds regularly took place in the main hall of the Landhaus, and the Schaffhausen paper reported on them as well. The paper was founded in 1861 and operated until 1940 as the *Schaffhauser Intelligenzblatt*; since then it has been known as the *Schaffhauser Nachrichten*. The paper often reported on gatherings in the decorated banquet hall: "On December 2, 1949, 72 women from the working school commissions of 31 communities gathered at the Restaurant Landhaus. The Schaffhausen Charitable Women's Association was represented by its president and two members of the board, and the teachers' association and school commission of the city of Schaffhausen were represented by four members. The topic of discussion was 'Education of girls of post-school age.'" (*SN*, December 9, 1949).

Schweizer relates that before he became the innkeeper at the Gasthaus, her father Karl traveled all over Switzerland as a cook, "from hotel to hotel, from season to season. He worked all over, in the most important hotels, especially in Lucerne. That's how he met my mother, when she was also working there. My father, who originally came from Hallau, wanted to open his own restaurant with my mother in Schaffhausen, and was able to rent this Landhaus. The

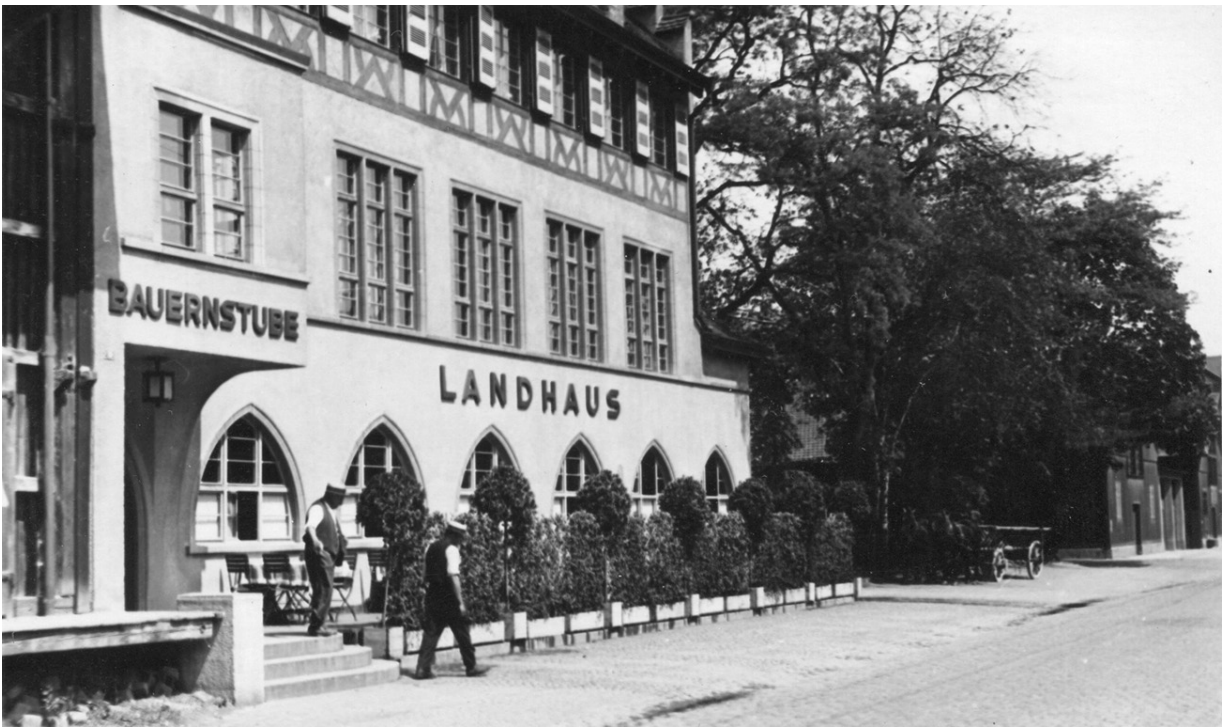
offices of the Agricultural Association were also in the building. There was a room for meetings, parties and weddings, and, above that, there was our very large apartment, where the employees also lived. The assistant cook, the kitchen maid, and the house boy all had a room there. I shared a room with my younger sister.”

Schweizer’s younger sister, **Margrit Schlatter**, remembers the Landhaus, which was torn down in 1999: “The innkeeper’s house was on the other side of the tracks, where workers lived. The restaurant did very good business, especially as long as my father was cooking there. It was actually the most popular restaurant in Schaffhausen, *the* place to eat. That meant that my parents could save a little money so that we children could have some opportunities. All the farmers came to the inn, but also businesspeople from Schaffhausen came to eat lunch there on Sundays. Many clubs also met there, because on the first floor there was the hall with the piano.”

The origin and history of the Landhaus restaurant was closely connected to the farmers’ political movement at the beginning of the 20th century, and also influenced the milieu in which Schweizer grew up. “In the first decades of this century, a mood of optimism prevailed among the Schaffhausen farmers: throughout the canton, agricultural cooperatives were set up to help the mainly small farms to help themselves. In 1911, the Agricultural Cooperative Association of Schaffhausen [*Landwirtschaftlicher Genossenschaftsverband Schaffhausen*, GVS] was founded as a member of the Cantonal Agricultural Association [*Kantonaler Landwirtschaftlicher Verein*, KLV]. In 1914, the GVS rented space in the old peat shed on Spitalstrasse. In 1920, they acquired a storage area in a good location near the railway station and built their own mill. In 1918 the farmers asserted their right to have their voice heard politically and founded the Schaffhausen Farmers’ Party.

From 1924 to 1928 they held three of five government-mandated seats as representatives.” (SN, April 1, 1999).

In 1932, the GVS went into the wine business, and a new building was opened, with its own meeting room and restaurant. The new “Landhaus” quickly became a center for agricultural trade for the entire region from Trasandingen to Stein am Rhein, and from Bargaen to Rüdlingen. The GVS management and farmers’ secretariat, as well as the editorial staff of their own daily journal, the *Schaffhauser Bauer*, had their offices in the Landhaus. The hall hosted not only all of the cantonal farmers’ meetings, but also events such as a “Charlottenfels school examination post-party with folk tunes from Lüpfig, followed by student theater.” The well-run restaurant on the ground floor was also popular with those of differing political persuasions. On Saturday mornings for years, it was a meeting place for a rather unusual group from the city: “Walther Bringolf, Hermann Erb, Hermann Huber, Georg Leu, Armin Walter, and other true believers wearing the broad black hats of the then Socialist Workers’ Party felt right at home ‘with the farmers.’ Meanwhile, at the piano in the hall the host’s daughter—the now world-famous jazz pianist Irène Schweizer—could often be heard practicing” (SN, April 1, 1999). Schweizer was 18 years old when, on the night of February 25, 1960, a major fire destroyed most of the farmers’ center. Only the Landhaus survived.



The Landhaus restaurant and inn

## **Daily Family Business: Guests First**

Day-to-day family life in the inn was organized around the opening hours of the restaurant. According to Schweizer, the kitchen maid was responsible for getting the schoolchildren out of bed and giving them breakfast. “I never knew when the employees got up, or where they had breakfast. The restaurant was always open until half past midnight, and then everyone went to bed late. The restaurant didn’t open before 9 AM, so we children were awake before that and had to go to school. We didn’t get anything to eat until all the guests had been served, the guests always came first. On Sunday afternoons, we were fed around 3 o’clock. There was a little room downstairs where the family and the employees ate.”

## **Father: Cooking for 100**

Karl Schweizer was born January 2, 1902 in Hallau, a small town in the Blauburgunder wine region around Schaffhausen. He trained as a cook and worked in various restaurants in Switzerland, including in Lucerne, where he met Schweizer’s mother, Frieda Bösch. At the Landhaus, Karl did the cooking, while Frieda was responsible for the buffet. “We had a waitstaff: one woman who was temporary help and one who was a permanent employee. My mother organized all that. They both always had a lot to do; they worked themselves to death. My father died of a heart attack suddenly one day. I don’t remember him ever being sick. He just overexerted himself. He did a crazy amount of work. In the hall there were a lot of gatherings, and he

would cook for 100 people. Really, innkeepers like that shouldn't have had children. They hardly had any time for the children."

Schweizer's sister **Margrit** says that the meeting hall was booked almost every Saturday: "About 100 people would be there. Sometimes there were concerts, or the city musicians rehearsed there. And whenever the hall wasn't occupied, our older sister Lotte played there, from the time she was a small child. Later Irène did too, of course—they always went to play piano as soon as they were able and had the time." Their father sang in the men's chorus, and probably also had a clarinet, which the children later found among his possessions. Margrit thinks that Irène's musicality came from their father, "who could pick up any instrument and play something on it. I remember him playing fiddle and harmonica. He was never allowed to learn to play an instrument as a boy. He probably would have been quite a good musician if he had had time and had learned an instrument." Schweizer commented: "Unfortunately, when I started playing piano he wasn't there to hear it."

Their memories of their childhood are fragile and selective. Schweizer remembers only a few hours spent with her father: "We didn't have a car then, and my father couldn't drive. But I know that he took me with him sometimes when he went somewhere in the country with a guest, visiting other inns. Afternoons, when he had a few hours free. Sometimes it was just me with them, sometimes my little sister was there also. Then I sat in the back, we'd stop for something to eat, and I was allowed to have a Fanta or a cola. Once I felt so bad that I threw up in the car—he was a little angry with me about that." **Margrit** describes their father as "very emotional. Chefs are all a little like that, trying things out and getting upset when they don't work. Irène gets impatient very quickly, and our father was like that too. If things don't go the way she wants, or she has to wait, she also has this impatience. And she was already like

that as a small child. She'd throw something out the window on impulse, not even knowing what she was doing. Once she broke a windowpane that way, just in the moment, in a frenzy." Irène, though, doesn't remember her father that way: "My father was a very energetic man—people said he had a short temper. I probably inherited that, as a child I also had a short temper. If I didn't like something, I flipped out and broke things. I was very impulsive."

### **Mother: Always Working**

Their mother, Frieda Sophie (née Bösch), was born October 8, 1907 in Lucerne. She had to work as a waitress from a young age. **Margrit** remembers: "Our father died very young. Our mother was very busy and had little time for the three of us children. Irène soon created her own world to live in. It was a similar story for my oldest sister, Lotte – she left quickly and, after interning in Vevey, lived in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. She didn't come home until our mother fell ill; then she found work here in Schaffhausen and stayed with her mother until she died. But the three of us never really had what I'd call a close family life. When I was 17 or 18, our mother couldn't go on any longer, she had simply worked too much. At the end, she only lived a couple of years apart from the restaurant before she died."

Schweizer says her mother had always wanted to be a dancer, "and my younger sister had a little ballet career—she learned ballet, the ballet school held classes in our hall, and she danced ballet for years. My mother liked that direction, but she never forced us to do anything. Later, she knew that I played in Berlin and all over, but she never said anything about it, and she didn't really know what I did. We were raised freely and our mother trusted us. At night, we could've brought men home with us, the bar was open until



half past midnight. But maybe because we weren't being watched so closely, we weren't really interested in doing anything stupid. Nor was Lotte. She had a boyfriend, a pianist, and I had many friends, including the ones from school, and we visited each other." She felt the lack of parental affection, even if this was partly compensated for by Odette, the server in the restaurant who took care of the children and who Schweizer calls her "second mother." "My mother had no idea, never said anything about it, that in 1960 I won first prize at the amateur festival in Zürich. We didn't talk about it."



The Schweizer family, 1940s. From left: Frieda, Margrit, Karl, Irène, Lotte

## **Lotte: The Older Sister**

Lotte was born January 30, 1938. **Margrit** says that their father was very proud of Lotte's gifts: "He even bought the piano. She went to the music school in Schaffhausen, and the teacher always praised how well she played. She gave her first performance when she was eight years old—our father was very proud. He wasn't around long enough for Irène to have much time with him, which is a pity. But he was fiercely supportive of Lotte." Later, Lotte underwent psychiatric treatment repeatedly, and "was in the psychiatric clinic for a relatively long time on two or three occasions. She just couldn't adapt to life. She didn't try anything new; she was no longer interested in anything, really. Quite different from Irène—I've always admired that about her, she has so many interests, political, musical, she loves to visit museums. Lotte didn't do any of that. She withdrew completely and lived entirely alone. And she hardly played piano anymore. She had a job, and she played at home or for her girlfriend, when she came over. Or when there was a party she was often asked to play, and she always did. At some point, everything became too much for her. She reduced her working hours, first from 100 % to 80 %, and later less than that. In fact, Lotte could play anything on the piano, it was incredible, she was really talented, particularly with Chopin. But she was never able to make anything of her gifts. Sometimes with Irène as well I get the feeling that she doesn't like to be alone; luckily she now has such a dear partner. I'm really happy that she has someone. Because she's not a simple person, who would be able to live happily by herself."

When she was a child, Schweizer was given a concertina. "I took some lessons, and later I was a member of the

Schaffhausen concertina club. We often rehearsed together, and played folk songs and hits from sheet music. Later, my parents bought a full-size accordion. That didn't work, it was much too large for me, I didn't like it. I stuck it in the corner and changed over to my sister's piano in the living room. Lotte had piano lessons for years and played classical piano very well. She had private instruction, but she never wanted to become a teacher."

### **Margrit: The Younger Sister**

Schweizer's younger sister, **Margrit Schlatter**, was born September 30, 1942 in Schaffhausen. She worked as a pharmacist. "I'm married and we have a son. And I was working, we had our own business, and for 20 years I didn't have much time to spend with my sisters. But now we are in contact more often, and I like that."

### **Odette: Server as Second Mother**

Odette, the server in the Landhaus, played an important role in the Schweizer household. Schweizer relates that she was very involved in taking care of the children: "she knitted things for us and took us to the Rhine Falls, or even to Zürich when she had the time. She devoted a lot of attention to us; she was my second mother. Odette always had one free day a week, while my mother never had a day off, because the restaurant was always open, every day." Odette's father was French, "and she spoke perfect French. She grew up in the canton of Bern, and her father was a language teacher in Schaffhausen; her mother had passed away. From my point of view, her father was already

ancient; he might have been 60 or 70, but to me he seemed like an old man. Odette was around 30 when we were children. She was a very beautiful young woman.”

**Margrit** remembers: “During the war, our father was sometimes away for a few weeks for national defense. Of course, our mother was then incredibly burdened. I don’t think we ever really did anything with our father, he never had time. Odette was very busy taking care of the guests, she was very fast and she had the reputation in town of providing really good service. The primary school and secondary school were only five minutes away, and the canton school was also close by. Odette’s father had a language school at the top of Herrenacker Street, near the city theater. It was a beautiful old house with a schoolroom and a small apartment. Odette was our second mother, sometimes she went swimming with us, or went along with us wherever we children wanted to go. She watched over us closely. She was involved in our upbringing, but you could say that we took care of ourselves and brought each other up to some extent. We were very much left to ourselves.”

## **The Piano in the Festival Hall: I Had no Idea**

In the Landhaus there were three pianos: in the hall, in the small sitting room, and in the apartment on the upper floor.

**Margrit** remembers that first Lotte took classical piano lessons, “and then Irène started to play concertina. But she suddenly changed to the piano; she didn’t want to have anything more to do with the concertina. And after that she played piano, but of course it wasn’t in a classical direction, it was jazz. From the beginning. She also had piano lessons for a little while, but after that she was completely self-taught. The piano was a bond between Lotte and Irène, of course. For our mother, how should I say it, this was always

a crazy world. She never really understood it, probably because she was born in a time when there was absolutely no jazz in Switzerland. She liked Johann Strauss, operettas, that kind of thing. She thought jazz was awful, she never understood it. Besides classical music, Lotte also played piano in her friend's Dixieland band. At the beginning, Irène also played boogie-woogie and ragtime, but the band was very well-behaved, I never saw anything wild."

Once a week, Schweizer took piano lessons from a young teacher, Erwin Schnell. She remembers: "he had some sheet music of pieces by Dave Brubeck and Gerry Mulligan, he was actually quite open-minded. I studied Bach with him, but I always had a hard time reading music. I really just wanted to play jazz." The money for the piano lessons wasn't a problem for their mother: "We just had to want to do it. Until I was finished with school I had piano lessons once a week, and then later in the French-speaking part of Switzerland too, and in England all I did was rehearse with musicians. I practiced a lot and worked out for myself how the chords went. Sometimes saxophonist Rolf Oechslin, who knew the chord changes to all the tunes, wrote some things down. Later he worked as a teacher near Schaffhausen." From a young age, she always watched the hands of the pianist in the festival hall, "looking to see what he was doing, how he played. At that time I still had no idea at all about jazz or notes; I didn't know anything. I always listened carefully, that was the beginning, and later when I heard music, I was very attentive to who was doing what. I was also fascinated with drummers—for many years I played drums, self-taught. I learned the most when I was living in London. Back then you still couldn't get the Real Book, which has melodies and chord symbols for all the important jazz pieces, to play from, and anyway reading music was frowned upon. So I always wanted to learn everything by ear. And I always paid close attention to the musicians' stage presence and how they acted when they played."