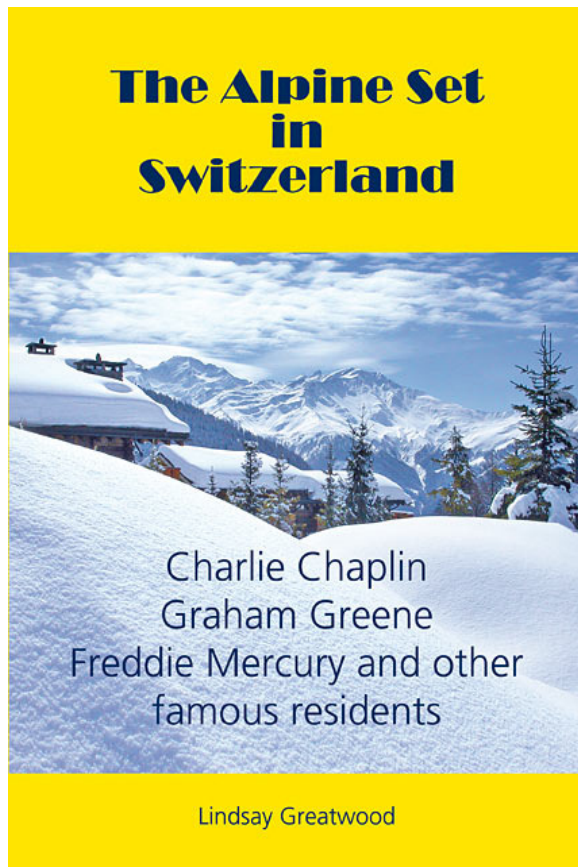


The Alpine Set in Switzerland

Darling, we're known as The Alpine Set! wrote the actress Benita Hume to a Hollywood friend in the late Sixties. She had just moved to the picturesque tax haven of Lausanne on Lake Geneva with her husband, matinée idol George Sanders. George had many reasons for wanting to enjoy the clean air and mountain views of Switzerland: he could keep most of the money he earned from various and unusual sources and enjoy the highest standard of living; he was only an hour by air from the major European movie capitals and he would avoid being hounded by Hollywood gossip columnists who wanted to know more about his past and present. Most of all, he could continue to build a financial scam that stretched from Italy to Los Angeles and would take in the British government and a good number of famous Swiss residents.



If you want peace, come to Switzerland, the rock singer and Montreux resident Freddie Mercury was to tell the world a decade or so after George Sanders was obliged to leave the country. Peace was certainly what Belgian thriller writer Georges Simenon sought when he moved to Lausanne from the United States at the end of the 1950's. There, he would build a magnificent ranch-style house on a hillside above Lake Geneva where his neighbour Charlie Chaplin would visit him. The two men would often compare begging letters they had received and be amused to find they were getting requests for money from the same individual. It could have been the kidnapping of Charlie Chaplin's body, not long after the world-famous comedian had been laid to rest, that influenced Simenon's decision to be cremated.

The writer Graham Greene was sure he'd found a brilliant lawyer in Lausanne who would take care of the fortune his books and films were generating. The lawyer was a business associate of the actor George Sanders. Greene would be a lot poorer as a result of the lawyer's arrest, but not as poor as Sanders, who would be found dead in a hotel room, not many years afterwards.

When singer Freddie Mercury first stayed at the Montreux Palace Hotel, he was exuberant enough to swing from one of the hotel chandeliers. He would eventually buy his own home on the waterfront and record his last songs with his group, Queen, in their Mountain Studios, where other names in rock, such as David Bowie, Status Quo, Iggy Pop and The Rolling Stones would also record their hits. Freddie Mercury composed his famous music hall pastiche Killer Queen with Montreux resident Noel Coward's style of melody and lyrics in mind. Like Freddie, Noel experienced setbacks before he became rich and famous and moved to Switzerland. There, he entertained many members of the Alpine Set, including Hollywood actor George Sanders. George, like Freddie Mercury, was a singer of songs and lover of life. But his life, like that of so many of Switzerland's Alpine Set, didn't work out exactly as planned.



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