



# ITALIAN CULTURE: BELLISSIMA!

Opera night brings people together at the Italian Cultural Club in Jeddah

Marriam Mossalli & Michel Cousins  
life.style@arabnews.com

**T**OTO, I DON'T THINK WE'RE IN KANSAS ANYMORE," says Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz.

That was a sentiment shared by many last Wednesday at an open-air concert of Italian opera in Jeddah. It was a very unusual affair for a typical Jeddah evening — selections from *Aida*, *Norma* and other operatic works performed by a chamber ensemble, *I BricconCello*, who flew all the way from Italy.

Sitting out in the open air at the city's Italian Cultural Club, they might just as easily been in an outdoor theater in Catania or Naples. Only the noise of a 747 flying directly overhead served to remind the audience where they were — but only for a moment, as the music took them straight back to Italy.

The Italian consulate—general hosted the operatic event as part of a new program to promote Italian culture and to make use of culture as a means to strengthen the relations between Italy and the Kingdom.

Building bridges between Europe and Arab nations has always been a priority to Italy, explained the new Italian Consul-General, Simone Petroni. "We want to foster dialogue between Italy and Saudi Arabia as we perceive Saudi Arabia as a crucial ally."

Culture, in this case music, can be a bridge between people, said Petroni. He used an anecdotic story about the composer Joseph Haydn as an example. Just before his death in Vienna in 1809, Napoleon had attacked and occupied the city. The French and the Austrians were enemies; however, the French troops placed a protective guard around Haydn's house and a young French officer arrived at the great composer's home to pay homage to him, singing an aria from "The Creation". Joseph Haydn died few days later. Many French officers as well as the Vienna nobility attended his funeral. Their love of music overrode their political divisions.

"The message told by the anecdote is that 'music and

“ I moved to Saudi Arabia in 1979 and never thought that 30 years later, I'd be sitting listening to live opera in an outdoor theater! ”

culture are ambassadors of peace.' They dilute tensions by opening up dialogue and establishing universal understanding," said Petroni.

The idea of music as a bridge was reinforced by Emilio Dini Ciacci, Chairman of the Italian Cultural Club. "This is the Italian Cultural Club, and music is a part of our culture," said Ciacci as he welcomed the audience. "Music brings people together".

The audience reflected just that. Thobes were as much in evidence as western costume. There were Saudi dignitaries, diplomats, a large section of the Italian community in Jeddah, as well as lovers of classical music — Saudis as well as expatriates.

On the proscenium arch above the stage, the following words were written in Latin: "Ars gratia artis." When translated to English, it means "Art for the sake of art". It was just that.

The tenor, Leonardo de Lisi, thrilled with his evocative performance of the songs, which noticeably improved as the evening went on. His mellifluous voice and subtle, yet noticeable, gestures while he sang brought his songs alive. One could easily imagine him in full costume, on stage, performing an entire opera. Figaro's famous aria, "Largo al factotum" from Rossini's "*The Barber of Seville*," was particularly good.

The soprano, Patrizia Morandini, had a remarkable voice. They must have heard her in nearby Hail Street and wondered what was happening. The cellist, Pierlu-

igi Riggiero, played the prelude to Verdi's *I Masnadieri* beautifully and it would be wonderful to hear more of him in Jeddah. It cannot have been easy keeping his instrument in tune in the open air on an evening that started with a pleasant breeze. The pianist, Lucrezia Proietti, who accompanied all three in their separate renditions, was accomplished throughout, never putting a finger wrong.

The only disappointment was the amplification. It made the piano sound metallic, flattened the texture of the instruments and voices and distorted the soprano's voice when she sang loudly. The amplification was not needed as it robbed the performance of its immediacy and made it sound like an old mono record. Furthermore, both the soprano's and tenor's voices were big enough to La Scala, let alone the Italian Club, without any artificial help. Nonetheless, one got used to it.

The performers were at their very best in the renditions of traditional Neapolitan songs, such as "I' te vurria vasa" and "Mama," and brought a standing ovation from the audience.

"I found those songs the most emotionally touching," revealed Arlene Attar whose favorite opera is Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. "I moved to Saudi Arabia in 1979 and never thought that 30 years later, I'd be sitting listening to live opera in an outdoor theater!"

Another opera aficionado, Raha Farsi, convinced her friends, whom she admits weren't quite accustomed to classical music, to attend. "It really was a lovely evening, and it was nice to do something so different in Saudi Arabia," she explained. "It's not everyday you get to attend such an event."

Lucky for us, there will be more to come. "We are starting to do many more cultural events such as these," promised Petroni. "Next year marks the 150th anniversary of Italy's unification and independence. In celebration, we are planning a series of cultural initiatives, which will definitely include opera and other musical concerts."

Perhaps live performances of *Madame Butterfly* or *The Magic Flute* will become a typical Wednesday evening event in Jeddah? Here's to hoping...

## 1. The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader

Genre: Fantasy. Total Gross: \$105,500,000



Lucy and Edmund Pevensie return to Narnia with their cousin Eustace where they meet up with Prince Caspian for a trip across the sea aboard the royal ship The Dawn Treader.

## 2. The Tourist

Genre: Romantic/Thriller. Total Gross: \$25,000,000



Revolves around Frank, an American tourist visiting Italy to mend a broken heart. Elise is an extraordinary woman who deliberately crosses his path.

## 3. Tangled

Genre: Comedy/Family. Total Gross: \$192,123,000



The long-haired Princess Rapunzel has spent her entire life in a tower, but when she falls in love with a bandit who was passing by she must venture into the outside world for the first time to find him.

## 4. Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1

Genre: Action/Fantasy. Total Gross: \$777,988,000



As Harry races against time and evil to destroy the Horcruxes, he uncovers the existence of three most powerful objects in the wizarding world: The Deathly Hallows

## 5. Unstoppable

Genre: Action/Drama. Total Gross: \$125,091,014



With an unmanned, half-mile-long freight train barreling toward a city, a veteran engineer and a young conductor race against the clock to prevent a catastrophe.

## 6. Black Swan

Genre: Drama / Thriller. Total Gross: \$5,611,000



A thriller that zeros in on the relationship between a veteran ballet dancer and a rival.

## 7. Burlesque

Genre: Drama/Musical. Total Gross: \$32,590,539



A small-town girl with a big voice escapes hardship and an uncertain future to follow her dreams to Los Angeles. She finds her place in a neo-burlesque club run by a former dancer.

## 8. Love and Other Drugs

Genre: Comedy/Romance. Total Gross: \$22,622,000



Maggie is an alluring free spirit who won't let anyone — or anything — tie her down. But she meets her match in Jamie, whose relentless and nearly infallible charm serve him well with the ladies.

## 9. Due Date

Genre: Comedy. Total Gross: \$177,384,000



High-strung father-to-be Peter Highman is forced to hitch a ride with aspiring actor Ethan Tremblay on a road trip in order to make it to his child's birth on time.

## 10. Megamind

Genre: Comedy/Family. Total Gross: \$188,789,129



The supervillain Megamind finally conquers his nemesis, the hero Metro Man... but finds his life pointless without a hero to fight.

## WEEK'S TOP 10 MOST POPULAR SONGS ACROSS ALL GENRES

ITUNES.COM



1. Firework  
Katy Perry



2. Grenade  
Bruno Mars



3. The Time  
The Black Eyed Peas



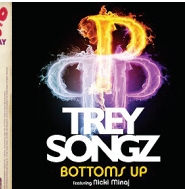
4. What's My Name?  
Rihanna ft. Drake



5. We R Who We R  
Ke\$ha



6. Just the Way You Are  
Bruno Mars



7. Bottoms Up  
Trey Songz ft. Nicki Minaj



8. Just a Dream  
Nelly



9. Only Girl (In the World)  
Rihanna



10. Like a G6  
Far East Movement (ft. Cataracs & Dev)