



gala concerts

For the first time in Kuwait's musical history, the National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra (NOSPR) will perform two gala concerts on March 17 and 18 at Al-Hashemi Grand Ballrooms, in Radisson Blu Hotel. The event is being organised by Kuwait Chamber Philharmonia.

The orchestra is conducted by Michal Klauza and features world renowned pianists Krzysztof Jablonski and Philippe Giusiano among others. The concerts are part of regional NOSPR's tour in the Gulf celebrating Chopin Year 2010 organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture of Poland, Embassy of Poland in Kuwait and Radisson Blu Hotel.

The NOSPR is considered as one of the world's leading orchestras, renowned for its performances around the globe. The International Chopin Year, 2010, marks the 200th birth anniversary of Fryderyk Chopin.

The tickets for the concerts are available at Radisson Blu Hotel and Virgin Megastore from Feb 10 onwards. The tickets for March 17th concert are priced at KD 15 and KD 10. The price of tickets for the March 18th concert, which also includes a gala dinner, is KD 30. For more information call 25756000.



'Need to harmonize old tradition with new'

True essence of Sadu weaving dying

By Chaitali B. Roy
Special to the Arab Times

As Kuwait celebrates its Liberation Day and National Day with traditional enthusiasm and fanfare, it casts an indifferent eye on one of its disappearing traditions, the art of weaving. With increasing technological development man has become fascinated with what is new, overlooking that, which is old, which has roots, which is taken for granted and ignored. Sheikha Altaf Al Salem Al Sabah, patron of Al Sadu Cooperative Society, who has been fighting an almost single-handed battle against the slow erosion of certain facets of material culture, a result of social change, notes in her book "Kuwait Traditions" "I believe we can blend tradition with modernity, continuity with change... we can harmonize the old with the new," thus granting continuity to meaningful aspects of the past and giving the future generation a sense of roots. A belief that is shared by Dr Keireine Canavan, senior programme director at the Cardiff School of Art and Design at the University of Wales Institute in Cardiff, who is in Kuwait on an Extended Research Leave sabbatical to research Al Sadu weaving patterns and traditional symbolism at the National Museum of Kuwait: Sadu House Textile Museum and in her own words 'learn something of the spirit and greatness of Arabia'.

The story of 'Sadu' is fascinating. Using simple tools, techniques and designs, Bedouin women manufactured their families' shelter, rugs, containers, cushions and clothing as textiles which in the words of Dr Canavan is 'simple, and pure in structure and composition, yet rich and colourful in tradition and culture'. The focus of her research is the tent divide or shajarah; the decorative woven panel that divides the men's quarters from the women's, in the traditional Bedu desert tent or Bayt al Sha'ar.

As we sat over a cup of coffee, we discussed Bedouin folklore beliefs, Semiotics (oral communication via symbols & signs), the role of Bedouin women in weaving and the need for future research and recognition.

Arab Times: How would you define folklore in this part of the world especially in Kuwait? Does the term imply 'orally transmitted cultural traditions' or does it embrace the material and social culture that defines who we are?

Dr Canavan: I work with textiles, and my answer is with specific reference to textiles. The items the women culturally created were functional items they required for their daily life in the desert. It is a sort of practical expressive creative genre that informs or gives information in an art form. It is a way of informing the cultural ways through textiles, and through symbolism and patterns.

Interestingly from the beginning, Man recognized pattern for decoration's sake and portrayed his environment or the society around him through practical means which in this case is through textiles and through the patterns and motifs within them.

Arab Times: Through your association with Bedouin weavers in Kuwait, where in textiles do you find the presence of folklore?

Dr Canavan: Apart from the practical requirement, if you go deeper through the different sections within the fabric, they will reveal inner meanings. Take the tent for example. Different parts of the tent have different cultural meaning, the highest of which, and the one I am studying in particular is the 'gata' or the tent divider. Within the gata the strip that is most informative is 'shajarah', the highly decorated panel. The patterns and motifs they portray are images that have passed from mother to daughter through generations, through observation. They are gestures of self belief and religion. Being nomadic they had few possessions, but the ones they had found their way into textiles for instance like the coffee pots and the tea pots, hair combs, pieces of jewelry and camels. As you move into more modern pieces you will find the absence of animals, birds and humans as a form of respect to religion and things that are portrayed are geometric shapes and what they saw in their environment. Each gata tells a story and is woven around a loose theme. It is very much the weaver's personal interpretation of her environment and her association with her family. The symbols and motifs tell a lot about the person who has woven the piece.

It is interesting to note that it is women who created this form of art, and the information and symbolism the textiles portrayed and developed through generations have all come from women. They represented their environment and so the things they portray are pretty much their belongings, their observation of the desert flowers, the pattern that the snake creates when they glide through the sand.

Arab Times: How long have you been associated with the sadu weavers of Kuwait and how fruitful has been your association as far as collection of data for future preservation is concerned?

Dr Canavan: Since 2003 I have been coming to Kuwait as a visitor. During my first trip I visited the Kuwait National Museum, and was introduced to Sadu House Textile Museum, where a collection of beautiful, traditional Bedouin textiles awaited; simple, and pure in structure and composition, yet rich and colourful in tradition and culture. I was smitten. My whole life has been textiles and I have worked with ancient endangered weaving techniques in India and Malaysia. I was obviously interested in doing the same here with the Bedouin weavers and in the last nine months I really got time to research into it. I met the shajarah weavers, did two of the weaving courses at Sadu House and also gave lectures there. I have also been working very closely with Dr Ali who has acted as a knowledgeable translator. We have recorded and interviewed the weavers about gatas, and documented their thoughts and ideas. I have also been working with Mutaira, a master weaver on new symbols and patterns and that has been very enlightening.

Arab Times: You have mentioned that sadu was not a woman's traditional hobby, but a handicraft/ artform, which retains and tells the visual history of traditional Bedouin living and much of Kuwaiti folklore. Do you believe this art form has the recognition due to it?

Dr Canavan: Handicrafts and art forms will always move and progress. Nothing remains static, but I do fear particularly for 'shajarah' weaving since it is not needed as it was before. Even the 'gata' is no longer needed. There are modern interpretations for commercial items such as floor coverings, carpets, rugs, cushion covers and other things. But I have real concerns about the preservation of knowledge and the understanding of the patterns and symbols of 'shajarah' weaving because there are few women left who actually know the technique and as there is no demand, it may die. I am also very surprised how few people know sadu weaving. Sheikha Altaf has a wonderful approach and is very proactive, but you need more people like her. And I do believe that the archiving and conservation of



Photos by Dr Keireine Canavan

Top: Master weaver Muteira Thafeiree spinning yarn in Sadu house. Above: Dr Keireine Canavan researching in Sadu House. Left: Gata Permanent Collection in Sadu House. Right: Shajarah floor covering.

textiles has to be looked into.

I also believe the cultural aspect should be included in education so that the younger generation can appreciate the beauty and the skill. The skill is changing because there is less recognition, less knowledge among the modern generation. Moreover because of the

commercial aspect the weaving is looser, symbols are less defined and there is

a change in the dyeing method. Very few weavers have the same dyeing skills which were there earlier.

Arab Times: Is the movement from the tent to a settled dwelling a major reason for the slow decline of this craft?

Dr Canavan: This is what I mentioned earlier. There is no demand for

creating tents because people aren't living in that environment. There is appreciation for some modern items, but the truly traditional items aren't being woven and the skills are getting lost. That is why it becomes more important to protect and preserve this heritage.

Arab Times: How strong a role has memory played in the preservation of Bedouin weaving?

Dr Canavan: Memory plays a huge role because nothing is written down. It is through interpretations and observations through generations and verbal descriptions that weaving progressed. Personal memory too is important. The memories of the weavers of their social environment, of their family, of their happiness of their cultural ways of life are interpreted in very simple messages through weaving.

Arab Times: Did families have their own stories to tell when it came to transmission of information from mother to daughter? Did different tribes have different tales? Do weavings tell stories of their times when studied in the social and political context (for instance carpets and killims tend to tell stories with their planes, tanks and rifles)?

Dr Canavan: You cannot read too much into things, but again the images are there and they tell you something about the weaver after she has passed away. For example some textiles have tribal wazzans or camel branding marks woven and used as pattern form. This pattern immediately gives some recognition of the tribe the weaver belonged. The piece also tells you about the weaver's personal ties. If there is a general feeling of happiness you can get it by reading the symbols as a collective group. There may be messages of weapons and war and also such things as scorpions. If there is a scorpion juxtaposed with a human figure it has been suggested there might be somebody within the family who might have been frightened or killed by a scorpion.

Arab Times: You mentioned the 'pragmatic and practical approach to weaving' - Can you elaborate on this?

Dr Canavan: There are practical and functional requirements associated with weaving, but it was also a creative release for the women involved. I strongly believe that human beings have the need to express themselves through creative arts. Some say it was their hobby and apart from looking after their family, they needed to express themselves. I don't see it as that at all. I see it very much as a creative necessity. They were building their own homes. They created their own dwelling, which is incredible.

They decorated the tent. They celebrated the camel because it provided them with life in the desert.

Arab Times: As a person who is so deeply into textiles what are your suggestions to give this tradition life?

Dr Canavan: First it is very important to document and preserve where we are today with a record of people's memory before they are lost and forgotten. I know that Dr Ali has been looking at an alternative vertical structure of the loom that would enable people to sit on a seat, to make it more comfortable and attractive. The actual symbols and skillful techniques need to be acknowledged and marketed. Cultural recognition from within the community is very important.

The other way to change would be to move into modern digital technique, which is different from handcraft, but will help maintain and retain some of the information from the old textiles in a high quality way. I do not have all the answers. I have found the same problems in India and Borneo. But I do believe it is important to preserve for the future.

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chairman of the EPS. He is a conductor and composer and has worked with orchestras in the Middle East, Europe, and the USA.

Violinist Alexandra Mak has performed as a soloist with the Worenezh Philharmonic and the Moscow Philharmonic. Victoria Kapralova, violincello, is the concertmaster of the cello group of the Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra and is a respected chamber musician. Pianist Mohamed Saleh is in demand for both solo recitals and as featured performer with international orchestras and chamber music groups. Place: Al-Maidan Cultural Centre, Abdullah Al-Salem School, Maidan

Hawally, near Al-Sha'ab Leisure Park, Tel: 25636528, 25636561, Fax: 25653006, Email: membership@darmuseum.org.kw, www.darmuseum.org.kw

March 3

DAI Music Circle jazz concert: Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah Forum will hold a musical concert organized by the DAI Music Circle - Kuwait Jazz Collective on March 3 at 7:00 pm. Performers: Vocals - Tonya Caliph

Ray; trumpet: Edward Timershin, Raafat Elgamal; Alto saxophone: Preslav Petkov; horn: Ravshanboy Aliyev; trombone: Saydiburhon; guitar: Khalid Abuwarda; bass guitar: Raffy Bushman; double bass: Richard Bushman; drums: Sobiryon Mukhamadiyev. Place: Al-Maidan Cultural Centre, Abdullah Al-Salem School, Maidan Hawally, near Al-Sha'ab Leisure Park, Tel: 25636528, 25636561, Fax: 25653006, Email: membership@darmuseum.org.kw,

www.darmuseum.org.kw

March 5

TIK organizes Libre Aral 10: Triskelion International of Kuwait (TIK) will be having their Libre Aral 10 (Photo shop Advance/Auto cad w/Drafting) on March 5 and 12, 09:00 am to 01:00 pm at the Philippine Embassy in Jabriya. For further info contact the following numbers. Chairman Clyde Aldus 66721804/Vice-Chairman External Joffrey

Galvan 66252861 and Vice Chairman Internal Bernie Ibanez 65177611.

Ponguthamizh plans events:

Ponguthamizh Manram is happy to announce a function to commemorate 'The World Mother tongue Day and The International Women's Day'. Many challenging

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