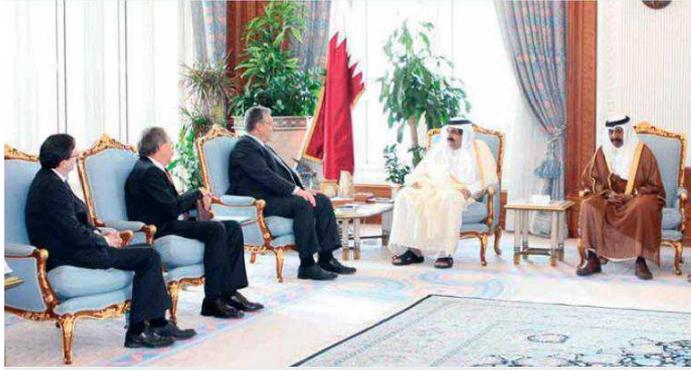


Qatar-Swiss relations discussed



HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani holding talks with Filippo Lombardi, the president of the Swiss Senate at the Emir Diwan yesterday. Talks dealt with bilateral relations and other topics of mutual concern. The meeting was attended by HE Mohamed bin Mubarak al-Kholeif, the speaker of the Advisory Council. Separately, HE the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani also met the president of the Swiss Senate and his accompanying delegation. Talks during the meeting dealt with bilateral relations especially in the parliamentary field. **Page 10**

Switzerland to co-operate with Qatar on Palestine

By **Salman Siddiqui**
Staff Reporter

Switzerland is looking forward to co-operate with Qatar to seek a solution to the Palestine issue and find a way to push international humanitarian aid into Syria, president of the Swiss Council of States (Senate) Filippo Lombardi told the *Gulf Times* in an interview yesterday.

Speaking on the sidelines of a ceremony to mark the opening of the Swiss embassy in Doha, Lombardi said: "We look forward to co-operation in international peace conferences for all the Middle East. We are interested, for instance, for a solution to Palestine."

"And we've been talking once again about this Arab peace initiative, where Switzerland wanted to add some years ago, some additional initiatives, which is the Geneva initiatives and what can be done now together to go forward."

At present, it is almost next to impossible to push the international humanitarian aid into Syria because of the explosive situation there.

"We are also very much present in the humanitarian level with the International Red Cross Committee in Syria. But it's very difficult to enter Syria in the present condition. So we are looking at what can be done with Qatar's support in order to improve the situation and allow the international humanitarian aid to come into Syria," he said.

Switzerland is also interested in placing its bid in the Doha Metro project.

"There is a Swiss company which is now taking part in the bid for the Metro. We have great experiences with tunnels; I gave HH the Emir a stone this morning, which came from the heart of Switzerland, where we are boring a 57km-long tunnel for railway that will be opening in three years time where trains will be travelling 230km/hr."

About Qatari investments in Switzerland,



President of the Swiss Council of States (Senate) Filippo Lombardi, HE the Speaker of the Advisory Council (Majlis al Shura) Mohamed bin Mubarak al-Kholaifi and Swiss Ambassador Martin Aeschbacher cut the cake to mark the opening of the new Swiss embassy in Doha.

he said: "The important investments of Qatar in Switzerland have been in the hotel and tourism business."

He added that there is co-operation in other sectors such as defence as well. A Swiss company already has a deal to sell

trainer aircraft to Qatar.

According to the embassy, Swiss exports to Qatar in 2012 were valued at 587.9mn Swiss francs (or \$621mn) and Qatari exports to Switzerland in 2012 were 228.6mn Swiss francs (or \$241.6mn).

Explaining the reason for the need to open an embassy at this point in time in Qatar, he said that today there were more people travelling to Switzerland from Qatar than ever before. Many are going to Switzerland to study, while Qatari enterprises are also investing there.

Swiss Ambassador Martin Aeschbacher agreed that more than the Swiss nationals, it is the non-Swiss who will benefit the most. "The main advantage of the opening of the embassy would be for the non-Swiss nationals who want to visit Switzerland. Once we open the visa section in May, people will no longer have to go Kuwait for the visas and they will be able to do it from here."

The embassy will start processing visas on May 12. Opening hours for consular affairs will be between 9am and 11am.

The number of Swiss citizens in Qatar is 210.

Earlier, at the ribbon cutting ceremony, Lombardi said in his speech that although Switzerland and Qatar are very far from each other geographically and also have different weather conditions, there are many aspects common to both countries. "They both are small countries, but both are peaceful and doing well at the economic level, who are developing and who are trying to make use of their neutrality in order to help others, to promote dialogue with other countries," he said.

HE the Speaker of the Advisory Council (Majlis al Shura) Mohamed bin Mubarak al-Kholaifi was also present on the occasion. A song by schoolchildren was also present after the Swiss national anthem was played for the first time at the embassy.

Many Swiss nationals living in Doha were also present at the event. Catrine Suter said she was overjoyed with having her country's embassy in Doha, which would also help her and other Swiss nationals in renewing their passports.

The new embassy is located at Villa # 60, Wadi al Hamra Street 87, Area 66, Al Dafna area.



Swiss Ambassador to Qatar Martin Aeschbacher.

Swiss Week to mark opening of embassy on April 3

President of Swiss Council of States Filippo Lombardi expected to visit Qatar

By Salman Siddiqui
Staff Reporter

The Swiss embassy will formally open in Doha on April 3 in the backdrop of a Swiss Week that will feature musical performances by international artistes, Switzerland's Ambassador to Qatar Martin Aeschbacher told Gulf Times.

President of the Swiss Council of States Filippo Lombardi is also expected to visit Doha on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the embassy, which will be located in West Bay.

Aeschbacher, who has been in Qatar for the past one year, said the embassy had been under consideration for a while. "Qatar and Switzerland have strong ties for a long time and the opening of the embassy in Doha will further strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries," he said.

Asked about the need to open the embassy now and not a decade ago, the ambassador said

the decision was prompted by the fact that Qatar had grown in terms of importance and influence in the region over the years.

The ambassador said the embassy would become fully operational by May and provide visa and consular services.

The events will celebrate the present, future and historic bridges between Switzerland and Qatar with the patronage of the Ministry of Culture in Qatar, in collaboration with the Swiss embassy

At the moment, there are about 180 Swiss nationals in Qatar who work as professionals in companies in the economic and sports sectors.

The upcoming events will also introduce Desert Bridges as both a musical ensemble and a non-profit organisation.

Desert Bridges will stage a small performance on the occasion of the official opening of the Swiss embassy on April 3 at Grand Hyatt Hotel, a musical performance at Qatar National Theatre on April 4 and a storytelling performance of Heidi in

Arabic for children at QNT on April 2.

Top-class musicians and performers from the US, Switzerland and Egypt have been flown in to join Qatari and international musicians based in this country.

The blending of saxophone, tuba and keyboards, Swiss alghorn, Indian, Qatari and Swiss-jazz rhythms is expected to create a musical bridge and a cultural journey to celebrate Switzerland and Qatar's contribution to the culture of peace and the alliances of civilisations.

The international musicians will also hold a workshop at Katara Music Academy today.

The events will celebrate the present, future and historic bridges between Switzerland and Qatar with the patronage of the Ministry of Culture in Qatar, in collaboration with the Swiss embassy.

The events have benefited from the partnership and sponsorship of Katara Music Academy and Alfarhan Group (main sponsor).

A Swiss-Qatar cultural event in Geneva, Switzerland, is also expected in the summer of 2013.



Fusion concert earns a standing ovation

By Salman Siddiqui
Staff Reporter

There is always an element of surprise involved when any attempt is made to fuse the music of the East with that of the West. In fact, if not done properly, the experiment can bomb on the big day, no matter how noble the intentions are said to be.

When Desert Bridges, the brainchild of musicians Anna Grichting and Cheo Jeffery Allen Solder, announced that it would organise a concert by calling artists from as far away as US, Austria, Switzerland, India and Syria, nobody knew what kind of music to expect in the end or whether the endeavor would work out at all.

If truth be told, one could feel the nervous energy at the rehearsals at the studio of Katana's Qatar Music Academy just five days prior to the actual show.

Words of peace, love, unity and humanity were the buzzwords among all the artists present, but when it came to the actual act of playing together as a unit, the uneasiness was visible. A thin



Cheo Jeffery Allen Solder on the saxophone and Eliana Burki on the alghom.

red line existed between the various language barriers, cultural differences and individual egos, which if crossed could derail the entire show.

The question before everyone was

could music really overcome all these challenges?

When the moment of truth arrived on the night of April 4 at the Qatar National Theatre, the people of Qatar,

who themselves belong to a rich and diversified set of backgrounds, including Arabs, Asians and Westerners, were present to give their verdict.

At first, the audience was slightly apprehensive to witness the 11 musicians and a storyteller in strange outfits. The women were dressed in shimmering black dresses and gowns; and the men looked Sufi-like in their attire of pure white shirts and serious unsmiling faces.

But when the music actually began, everything fell into place. The tuba and tabla gelled in; the piano and qanun complimented each other; and the Swiss alghom blended perfectly with the Oud.

The world, at least the one which had gathered inside the Qatar National Theatre that night, had achieved harmony with the universe, it seemed.

Each artist was given the opportunity to improvise during the two-hour long show. One was treated to a solo on the saxophone in one piece and then the goblet drum in another.

In some instrumentals, original poetry by Cheo Jeffery Allen Solder was narrated accompanied with Arabic



A standing ovation from the audience at the end of the concert.

translation by the versatile Egyptian storyteller Abner Soliman.

A very different and absolutely brilliant rendition of 'fever', a song originally written by Eddie Cooley and Otis Blackwell, was also performed, which had everyone tapping their feet. Anna Grichting, who also works as a professor at Qatar University and holds a PhD, crooned "when you put your arms around me, I get fever that's so hard to bear" to everyone's delight.

The real discovery of the show, however, was Amal, the young Qatari singer, who touched everyone's heart by her impressive vocal range.

A painter was also on stage in one corner, whose brushstrokes were inspired by the music.

The only criticism that some people in the audience had was that maybe it would have been better had the poetry

translation been done either completely in English or in Arabic, but not together at the same time, since it was a little hard to catch exactly what was being said.

The show was held with the support of the Swiss embassy and Qatar's Ministry of Culture. President of the Swiss Council of States (Senate) Filippo Lombardi and Swiss Ambassador Martin Aeschbacher were among those who attended the event.

US-based composer and pianist Frank Wilkins, who was also the musical director of the show, said that what they managed to achieve was "simply wonderful" given that the musicians had very little time to jam.

"The show was all about bringing love and spreading the message of peace, and I think we managed to do that here," he said.

Desert Bridges: seeking harmony among notes

By Salman Siddiqui
Staff Reporter

If there is one person in Doha who epitomises the saying that architecture is frozen music, it is Dr Anna Grichting.

Dr Grichting, a Swiss national, is an architect, urbanist, university professor and musician. She also holds a Doctor of Design from Harvard University. Currently, she is associated with Qatar University's department of architecture and urban planning as an assistant professor.

What's really interesting about Dr Grichting is that while she is busy teaching design to her students during the day, she turns into a jazz singer in the night.

Asked how she managed to be a professor and a rock star at the same time in an interview with *Gulf Times*, she laughed: "Well, I'm not quite a rock star, but thank you."

Dr Grichting said she believed that architecture and music were quite closely linked. "I always thought that I should choose between architecture and music. But I never really could make the choice. Architecture and music are linked. There is a saying that architecture is frozen music. If you see architecture, the structure and scales, the proportions, then you get to know that they are quite a lot of similarities," she explained.

In Qatar, Dr Grichting has recently launched Desert Bridges, an NGO registered in Geneva that aims to bring musicians from all over the world to Qatar.

"The idea of this NGO and musical group is to bring together musicians from different parts of the world. The aim is to create bridges through music and create new kinds of music," she said.



Grichting ... bridging the gap.

Already, around a dozen musicians from around the world are in town to perform from the platform of Desert Bridges.

She hoped that Desert Bridges would mature into a platform of learning for not only Qatari musicians to learn from other artistes, but also a unique experience for world artistes to learn about Arab musicians and their different instruments.

Speaking like an architect about music, she said: "What's nice about the idea of a bridge is that we are meeting across the bridge and are also learning from each other. For a bridge to be solid, it has to be built from both sides and should have a good structure."

Born in Switzerland and brought up in England and Ireland, Dr Grichting's first musical encounters were with Celtic mu-

sic. "I started singing when I was living in Ireland. I went to school there and lived there till I was 17. The Irish like to sing a lot and that's where I started singing. When I studied architecture, I started taking lessons in classical music," she recalled.

Back in Switzerland, she was involved in classical music training and workshops for jazz and blues singing. From her English pop and Irish Celtic influences, she turned to rhythm and blues with her group, Mad Hatters, who played across venues from 1985 to 1990.

Later, she formed a jazz group called Songs Trio, with pianist Michel Bastet and trombonist Jean-Jacques Pedretti, and played with pianist and composer Ariane Besson.

In recent years, she has revived her interest in folk music, especially Indian, Pakistani and Celtic music, besides exploring the world of improvised jazz and new technologies. "In fact, we also went on to make a CD with Pakistani Qawwali musicians," she revealed.

With Pedretti, she founded the Sufi Moon project, an encounter between alphorns (alpine horns) and Qawwali music based on the theme of the moon. With Sufi Moon, she toured Pakistan and performed during the Urs of Sufi saint Baba Farid at his shrine in Pak Pattan and also released a CD with musicians Sher Mian-dad Khan, Warisali Baloo Khan and Robert Morgenthaler.

Desert Bridges will perform a short piece today at a welcome reception to celebrate the opening of the Swiss embassy. Tomorrow, it will perform a concert at the Qatar National Theatre, which will be open to the public for free.

On mission to save the art of storytelling

By Salman Siddiqui
Staff Reporter

Storytelling is an art form that is fast disappearing from the Arab world. But there is a woman who is on a mission to save it from extinction.

Abeer Soliman, a published author and storyteller from Egypt, is in Doha to perform in a series of performances planned for the Swiss week that will commemorate the opening of the Swiss embassy in Qatar tomorrow.

In an interview with *Gulf Times*, Soliman says oral storytelling is a dying art form which she is trying her best to revive in Egypt and other parts of the Arab world.

"It used to be very a popular art form in the Arab world. The *Hakawati*, the Arabic word for the storyteller, would sit in a café, sip tea and tell amazing stories to people belonging to any age or colour."

However, because of modern technologies, there are not any *Hakawatis* around anymore.

She insisted that storytelling was still relevant in this modern age because she believed it could help revive human contact that was becoming non-existent from people's lives because of 'takeover' of mobile phones, Internet and television.

"My aim in life is to bring that human contact back into the people's lives through storytelling."

Abeer Soliman is in demand. In her native Cairo, Egypt, she frequently performs her craft to audiences of all ages. Al Jazeera too recently aired a feature story on her as a storyteller and her thoughts on the Egyptian Arab Spring. She is most famous for her rendition of *Shahrazad's: A Thousand and One Nights*.

Speaking about her fascination about the popular tale, Soliman said: "I admire *Shahrazad* a lot. She's an intelligent and smart woman, who is telling stories just not for the fun of it, but because she wants to save the life of women from the power of *Shaheryar*, who was bent upon killing one woman every night."

Speaking of the revolution, she said she did many performances that had political messages, some of which were again based on *A Thousand and One Nights*. "After the old regime stepped down, I wrote a story about a city in which the ruler gets killed and the question before the people was how they would choose a new leader, given that they don't know how to make that choice."

She said that the feedback from the people has always been encouraging.

Soliman is also a published author and her book *Diary of a Single Lady* was a bestseller in Egypt. For her short story *My Name is Fatemah*, a frank discussion of provocative religious issues and the status of

women in upper Egypt, she was awarded an international prize for young writers. She is also a respected columnist in some of Egypt's largest newspapers and is an avid photographer.

About her inspirations in writing books, she said: "Life is more surprising than fiction and imagination. An artist is just like a sponge in life, absorbing everything, digesting inside and producing art. So that's how I produce stories by writing or performing them." Her next book is set in India, which she intends to release by the end of this year.

However, it's not always easy as an artist to put the message across to adults, who sometimes refuse to budge from their preconceived notions.

"There was a time when I was really frustrated because you can't really change people. So later I decided to work with children, tell them stories and hoping they will choose better for themselves in the future."

Abeer Soliman has translated *Heidi*, the famous story by Swiss writer Peter Stamm, in Arabic.



Abeer Soliman

Swiss musician ponders an 'Arabic touch' for new album

By Salman Siddiqui
Staff Reporter

Swiss musician Eliana Burki is working on a CD that will incorporate voices and instruments from the Arab world.

In an interview with the Gulf Times, Burki said she has always been fascinated with the Arabic music.

The artist is in Doha to collaborate with musicians from world over who are performing from the platform of Desert Bridges, an NGO-based in Geneva that has begun a music project in Qatar.

The young star plays the very unique Swiss alphorn instrument, which is a labrophone, consisting of a wooden natural horn of conical bore, having a wooden cup-shaped mouthpiece. The instrument traditionally has been used by mountain dwellers in Switzerland and Burki is credited with popularising it the world over through her own original compositions.

"The feedback has been very good in Qatar. It is my second time here. For the people, you are very special because you have this big long horn, which is very different, so for everybody, it is a big surprise. Also the sound of the alphorn just touches your heart in a very special way," she said.

"I love Arabic voices, they're amazing. Every instrument here is unique," she said.

Burki said it's easy to collaborate with other artists from any part of the world only if you know how to do it. "For me I'm a musician, so I just jam. For me, I think it's easy to get in. Of course it is



Eliana Burki playing the alphorn.

hard to make a real song. But it's a great process. It is easy if you know how to do it," she said.

Talking about her new CD that she's been working on, she said: "I'm working on my CD and I think I am going to have some musicians from here to play on it. I will have an Arabic touch in my next CD. I took some Arabic voice lessons as well. I think it's going to be just great when people hear that with the alphorn."

In the last years, Eliana has developed her own style of music, influenced by jazz, rock, funk and Latin, and especially by the many concert tours

she has done throughout Europe, China, India, the Middle East and South America. Today she has her own band iAlpinisti, which has contributed some brilliant original compositions based on the unique sound of the Swiss alphorn.

However, it wasn't always easy for the artist, even though she began playing the alphorn at the very young age of six and performed a concert when she was just nine.

"In the beginning it was very difficult...traditional musicians wrote to me saying that you can't play this instrument differently. Firstly, they were like you're a girl, you shouldn't play this instrument. Secondly, you shouldn't play jazz notes, because it is a traditional instrument and you have to follow the rules."

However, Burki continued to create her own music and played many shows with her mother's support, who herself is an accomplished piano player.

She's a role model to many Swiss youngsters and it is because of her that many have started to play the traditional instrument.

She hoped that the Desert Bridges project carried on. "I hope that we are able to play as a group in other places in the Middle East and Europe like make bridges between different cultures."

She said her ultimate wish was to make people happy, no matter which place or culture they belong to. "I want them to not think about the politics and just fall in love with the music."

Eliana Burki performed with Desert Bridges in Doha at a concert held on Thursday at the Qatar National Theatre.