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*Master Thesis:*

**Reception of The Royal Opera House Muscat and its Impact on Citizens of Oman**

Student:

Sara Vuletic

Mentor:

Dr. Maja Ristic

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## **Abstract**

Given that the Royal Opera House Muscat is unique institution not only in Oman but entire Gulf region and broader, the aim of this research is to analyze the reception of this institution during its first year. First of all, in order to better grasp all the details Thesis will contain, I will explain the opera and world opera houses as a cultural phenomenon and their development through history. The study will in the end of introduction part introduce Royal Opera House Muscat explaining why it is extraordinary, highlighting the motives of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said for building it, giving a special emphasis on explaining the interesting tendency of the management for bringing world's most popular artists and portraying the diversity of the programme The Royal Opera House gave to its audience in the first two seasons (first is September 2011 - January 2012 and second is February 2012 – April 2012).

Furthermore, in the second chapter which explains the methodology of the research I will briefly explain my motives for choosing specifically this theme for my Master Thesis. Reasons and motives are various (professional and educational – I am a linguist for Arabic language, living and working in Muscat and a student of the Cultural Policy and Management; personal - I am an avid admirer of music and opera). The aims of the research will be given through theoretical work determining why opera is important in Oman, sketching its role in the society. The aim is also to present through the studies of reception of the opera in Oman cultural atmosphere and readiness for accepting opera among people in this country. Several methods of research will be used in order to prove two hypotheses which are: First: Despite cultural differences between East and West, the prejudice as regards to accepting of Opera; opening of ROHM still contributes to the forming of Opera audience. Second: Interesting tendency and focus of the management of Royal Opera House Muscat on bringing famous artists and popular programme.

The analyses used are qualitative and quantitative, with the emphasis given more the qualitative. In order to present as accurately the role of the Royal Opera House in the society, the thesis is helped with the in-depth interviews with the Royal Opera House high management team as well as survey analyses of the opera audience and Omani musicians. Research has shown that there is a need for opera in Oman and despite being completely new cultural habit it is already well received (fast selling of the tickets is the proof for it and generally positive attitude) and has a big potential to develop provided adequate marketing strategies are adopted above all.

Also, bearing in mind that opera is the product of the west, however created in the east, the thesis will analyze similarities and differences in the reception of the theatre and opera performance in different cultures thoroughly explaining the terms: globalization, hybrid culture, cosmopolitanism, spectacle and correlating these terms with the research subject, the cultural atmosphere in Oman and its opera. It is very important for proper understanding of the subject research which is the audience and the reception of the opera, to clarify the cultural grounds in which Oman stands. Oman is a cosmopolitan country with citizens from all around the world. Therefore, the questions such as whether the opera was created from the need to satisfy cultural needs of western community or to outreach and invest in an Omani citizen will be introduced and elaborated. Views of Omanis and Non Omanis on the Royal



Opera House will be researched and analyzed from different cultural, financial and motivational perspectives. Also, Oman is solely under the patronage of His Highness Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, and it is impossible to understand the creation of the Opera in Oman without explaining the reasons behind His Majesty's vision. Throughout the research this question will be introduced in accordance with the content and the meaning.

After explaining the development of the opera through history and its situation during the first year in Oman, the research will focus on an interesting and useful partnership the Royal Opera House established with the Aspen Institute, the worldly renowned international institute for diverse cultural affairs. The research will discuss huge benefits of this collaboration for the Royal Opera House Muscat and future perspectives of this partnership.

This thesis would be impossible to be written without immense help of Dr Nasser Al Taei (Director of Education and Outreach at the Royal Opera House Muscat) and Dr. Issam Al Mallah (Director of Programme and Events at the Royal Opera House Muscat) who were very resourceful and helpful regarding many questions about the incubation of the idea, realization of the idea, creation of this extraordinary Opera House etc. Moreover, the idea to create the Opera in the Middle East originated from His Highness Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, however the Opera was first intended to be the house of music as His Majesty himself prays music as much as politics and regularly travels with his orchestra. The chapter, Establishing of Opera and its impact on society, will analyze in detail these questions and the road map to the creation of The Royal Opera House Muscat.

The difficulty encountered as regards to the determination of organizational structure of the Royal Opera House Muscat is the fact that organigram is not made public. Therefore, information used is the one related to my conclusions and what has already been advertised in the press and made official. However, through research and analysis of Opera and similar ballet and art organizations that already exist, the idea of organization of the Royal Opera House Muscat is also given.

The especially interesting part of the research will discuss the audience, with the aim to research the reception of the opera in Oman. The reception of the theatre performance in Asia and west will be portrayed in order to better understand the way Western performance is received in the Royal Opera House Muscat today. The chapter on Audience specifically (next to the last) will contain definition of audience in general-containing definitions of different audiences. Also the analyses of audiences in different time and space (Opera in Italy in 19th century, opera in North America today and opera in Oman today) will be portrayed in order to better understand the potentials and obstacles of opera reception in Oman. Finally I will analyze the reception of the Opera in Oman by survey analysis conducted among 200 randomly questioned people.

Opera House can do a lot by integrating the very best of Arab, Western and Eastern cultures and by truly fostering cultural exchange. While for example in the United States there are episodically mounted cross-cultural projects, the Royal Opera House Muscat can do it consistently and at the highest levels of quality.

While the opening performances in the Opera House primarily include major Western performers (including Plácido Domingo, Renée Fleming, Yo-Yo Ma, American Ballet Theatre, Mariinsky Ballet), future seasons in the Royal Opera House Muscat have the potential to include performances that highlight Omani art, as well as collaborations between



leading Arab, Indian, Asian, African and Western artists. The possibility to create new and dynamic work there is limitless.

Finally, the conclusion will elaborate the two hypotheses the research was based upon and give conclusions on the basis of the research conducted for the purpose of this thesis.

This incredible new facility in the nation of less than 3 million people, many of whom are foreign-born, will accomplish what, to date, has yet to be accomplished in the other larger, better known, GCC nations. Arts centers have been on the drawing board for years in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi but they are still unrealized.

The new Royal Opera House Muscat has the opportunity to change its nation and, in fact, the arts world.



## Sommaire

Étant donné que Royal Opéra House Muscat est une institution unique non seulement en Oman, mais dans toute la région du Golfe et plus large, le but de cette recherche est d'analyser la réception de cet institution au cours de sa première année. Tout d'abord, afin de mieux saisir toute la thèse, je vais expliquer le phénomène de l'opéra en général comme un phénomène culturel et leur développement à travers l'histoire. À la fin de l'introduction de mon étude j'expliquerai pourquoi Royal Opera House Muscat est extraordinaire, mettant en évidence les motifs de Sa Majesté Sultan Qaboos Bin Said pour le construire, ja parlerai aussi de la tendance intéressante de la gestion d'amener des artistes étrangers populaires et je dépeignerai la diversité du programme du Royal Opera House dans les deux premières saisons (premier Septembre 2011 - Janvier 2012 et Février 2012 seconde est - Avril 2012).

En outre, dans le deuxième chapitre qui explique la méthodologie de la recherche, je vais brièvement expliquer mes motivations pour choisir spécifiquement ce thème pour ma thèse de maîtrise. Les raisons et les motivations sont diverses (professionnels et éducatifs - je suis linguiste de la langue arabe, qui vit et travaille à Muscat et je suis à présent étudiante de la politique culturelle et de la gestion; personnellement - je suis un grand admirateur de la musique et de l'opéra). L'objectif de la recherche est de déterminer, par le travail théorique, pourquoi l'opéra est important à Oman, en esquissant son rôle dans la société. Le but est aussi de présenter l'atmosphère culturelle à travers l'étude de réception de l'opéra en Oman et la volonté des gens de le fréquenter.

Plusieurs méthodes de recherche seront utilisés afin de prouver deux hypothèses qui sont: Premièrement: Malgré les différences culturelles entre l'Est et l'Ouest et le préjudice en ce qui concerne l'acceptation de l'Opéra, l'ouverture de ROHM contribue à la formation de l'audience de l'opéra. Secondement: C'est une tendance intéressante du management du Royal Opera House Muscat de se concentrer sur des artistes célèbres et le programme populaire.

Les analyses utilisées sont qualitatives et quantitatives, avec l'accent mis plus sur la valeur qualitative. Afin de présenter plus précisément le rôle de la Royal Opera House dans la société, la thèse est aidé par des entretiens profonds avec l'équipe de gestion de l'opéra ainsi que des analyses de l'enquête de l'auditoire de l'opéra et des musiciens omanais. La recherche



a montré qu'il existe un besoin pour l'opéra en Oman et en dépit d'être complètement nouvelle habitude culturelle, il est déjà bien accueilli (la vente rapide des billets est la preuve de ce fait et l'attitude généralement positive). Cet institution a un grand potentiel pour le développement si le management applique les stratégies de marketing adéquates .

En gardant à l'esprit que l'opéra est le produit de l'ouest, même si la thèse est créée dans l'Est, le but sera d'analyser les similitudes et les différences dans la réception du théâtre et de l'opéra dans les différentes cultures en expliquant plus précisément les termes: la mondialisation, la culture hybride, le cosmopolitisme, le spectacle et la corrélation de ces termes avec le sujet de la recherche, l'atmosphère culturelle en Oman et de son opéra. Il est très important pour la bonne compréhension du sujet de la recherche, c'est-à-dire pour la compréhension plus profonde du public omanais et de leur réception de l'opéra, de clarifier leurs motifs culturels. Oman est un pays cosmopolite avec les citoyens de partout. Par conséquent, la question se pose si l'opéra a été créé à partir de la nécessité de satisfaire les besoins culturels de la communauté occidentale ou pour sensibiliser les gens de ce pays et à investir dans un citoyen omanais sera mis en place et développé. Les points de vue des omanais et non-omanais en ce qui concerne Royal Opera House seront étudiés et analysés à partir des différentes perspectives culturelles et financières. En outre, Oman est complètement sous le patronage de Son Altesse Sultan Qaboos bin Saïd, et il est impossible de comprendre la création de l'Opéra à Oman sans expliquer les raisons et les motifs pour lesquelles il est construit et sans comprendre la vision de Sa Majesté. Tout au long de ma thèse cette question sera élaborée.

Après avoir expliqué le développement de l'opéra à travers l'histoire et sa position au cours de la première année à Oman, la recherche sera axée sur un partenariat intéressant et utile entre Royal Opera House et l'Aspen Institute, l'institut international renommé et connu pour les diverses affaires culturelles. La recherche sera concentrée autour de la discussion sur les avantages énormes de cette collaboration pour Royal Opera House de Mascate et les perspectives de ce partenariat.

Cette thèse serait impossible d'être écrite sans l'aide immense de Dr Nasser Al Taei ( le membre du Conseil d'Administration qui se trouve à la tête du programme de l'éducation) et Dr Issam Al Malla (Membre du Conseil d'Administration et Directeur du programme dans Royal Opera House Muscat) qui étaient pleins de ressources et secourables en ce qui concerne des nombreuses questions liées à l'incubation de l'idée, la réalisation de l'idée, la



création de cet extraordinaire opéra, etc. L'idée principal de créer l'Opéra au Moyen-Orient était avant tout le désir de Son Altesse Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, même si au début l'Opéra a été conçu comme la maison de la musique puisque Sa Majesté lui-même joue de la musique et voyage souvent avec son orchestre. Le chapitre "La mise en place de l'Opéra et son influence sur la société" permettra d'analyser en détail ces questions, aussi que la description de la création du Royal Opera House de Muscat.

La difficulté liée à l'impossibilité de déterminer la structure organisationnelle de Royal Opera House à Muscat provient du fait que l'organigramme ne est pas publique. En fait les informations utilisées dans ma thèse et qui sont finalement liées à mes conclusions sont celles qui ont déjà été annoncé dans la presse et qui sont devenu officielles. Cependant, à travers la recherche et l'analyse de l'opéra et des organisations artistiques semblables, l'idée pour l'organisation de Royal Opera House à Muscat est également donnée.

La partie particulièrement intéressante de ma thèse parlera du public omanais et de la réception de l'opéra en Oman. La réception des pièces du théâtre en Asie et à l'Ouest sera représentée afin de mieux comprendre la façon dont la performance occidentale est reçu dans Royal Opera House à Muscat à présent. Le chapitre sur le public contiendra la définition du public en général et les définitions des différents types de public. En plus, les analyses des publics différents des divers périodes (l'opéra en Italie au 19ème siècle, l'opéra en Amérique du Nord et de l'opéra d'aujourd'hui en Oman) seront présentés afin de mieux comprendre les possibilités et les obstacles de la reception de l'opéra en Oman. Enfin je vais analyser la réception de l'Opéra en Oman à l'aide de l'analyse de l'enquête menée auprès de 200 personnes interrogées au hasard.

Opera House peut faire beaucoup en intégrant les meilleures parties des cultures arabe, occidentale et orientale et en favorisant vraiment les échanges culturels. Alors que dans les divers pays, par exemple aux États-Unis, il existe le monté épisodique des projets interculturels, Royal Opera House à Muscat pourrait le faire de manière cohérente et aux plus hauts niveaux de qualité.

Alors que les performances d'ouverture de l'Opéra comprennent principalement les grands artistes occidentaux (y compris Plácido Domingo, Renée Fleming, Yo-Yo Ma, l'American Ballet Theatre, Mariinsky Ballet), les saisons à venir dans le Royal Opera House à Muscat ont la possibilité d'inclure des spectacles qui mettent en évidence l'art omanais, ainsi que des



collaborations entre les meilleurs artistes arabes, indiens, asiatiques, africains et occidentaux. La possibilité de créer des nouvelles œuvres dynamique est illimité.

La conclusion de ma thèse élaborera les deux hypotheses qui étaient l'axe de ma recherche. Ce nouveau établissement culturel qui est vraiment incroyable dans le pays de moins de 3 millions de personnes, dont beaucoup sont nés à l'étranger, permettra d'accomplir ce qui, à ce jour, n'a pas encore été accompli dans les autres grandes nations, mieux connus du CCG. Le projet de la construction des centres culturels a été élaboré depuis des années au Koweït, en Arabie saoudite et Abou Dhabi, mais il ne se réalise encore pas.

Royal Opera House à Muscat a la possibilité de changer sa nation et, en fait, le monde des arts tout entier.



## ● INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1. Origins - Opera

Opera, which name originates from the Italian word for a work, realizes the Baroque ambition of integrating all the arts. Music and drama are the basic components, as are the arts of staging and costume design; opera is therefore both visual and audible art. Throughout its rich history, opera has reflected trends current in the several arts of which it is composed. Along with developments in architecture and painting that have been manifested on the operatic stage in the design of sets and costumes for specific performances; opera has also affected the visual arts beyond the stage in such domains as the design and decoration of opera houses and the portraiture of singers and composers. However, a feature unique to opera is actually the power of music, especially the one written for the several registers of the human singing voice, which best suited to the expression of emotion and the portrayal of character.

#### **The road of Opera from the Court to the Public Theater**

In its roots, opera, like every other type of spectacle of the time, expressed noble prerogatives and was staged in courtly settings. In Italy, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the birthplace of the form, lavish entertainments featuring different sensational effects and fireworks and as well as a lot of singing, dances, instrumental music and various speeches were staged to celebrate royal weddings or to welcome regal guests. Even though these were not operas in the modern sense, they did integrate entertainment fostered cooperation among the arts and prompted the theoretical justifications upon which true opera—and ballet, whose early development runs parallel—was built. The Florentine Camerata, a group of composers and dramatists active in Florence around 1600, set out to revive the great traditions of the classical Greek stage, in which music and drama reinforced each other. In this respect, they developed a type of sung speech featuring the solo voice and an unadorned vocal line expressive of the text called



recitative. Early operas were mainly based on mythological themes and promoted aristocratic ideals.

In spite of the fact that music and drama were the essential features of opera, visual effects often dominated the court productions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the designers of sets and theatrical machinery sometimes received greater acclaim than the composers who wrote the music. The audiences for court performances were part of the spectacle, since the convention of darkening the theater did not yet exist. Magnificently garbed and seated in orderly ranks, the spectators followed the action of the opera, which might last several hours, in a printed libretto, literally "a little book" produced for the occasion. Today the word *libretto* means the text of the opera, the drama that is set to music, however interestingly in the days of court opera, librettos were attractively illustrated and therefore involved the talents of draftsmen and engravers, who were also engaged to commemorate the festivities.

Even though the grand emphasis of court performances continued as opera evolved, musical considerations guided its evolution all way long. It was early noticed that music had a power to express mood, define character, and enliven dramatic situations, sometimes more eloquently than verbal expression alone. Arias for solo voice might express a sentiment both musically and verbally; ensembles, choruses, and orchestral interludes likewise produced effective color. Claudio Monteverdi<sup>1</sup> (1567–1643), who used recitative as well as lyrical solos, madrigals, and instrumental color in operas on a variety of classical themes, is considered the first genius of operatic composition, and his "favola in musica" *Orfeo*(1607) is often seen as the first true opera. The public became and still remains the primary audience for the opera, although court productions continued to be devised wherever courts existed.

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<sup>1</sup> Claudio Monteverdi was Italian musician, composer, gambler and singer. Monteverdi's work, often regarded as revolutionary, marked the transition from the Renaissance style of music to that of the Baroque period. He developed two individual styles of composition – the heritage of Renaissance polyphony and the new basso continuo technique of the Baroque. Monteverdi wrote one of the earliest operas, *L'Orfeo*, an innovative work that is still regularly performed. He was recognized as an innovative composer and enjoyed considerable fame in his lifetime.



## 1.2. The blooming of Opera in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

In the nineteenth century, conditions were ripe and ready for expanding the audience for opera and for changes in the form itself. Bourgeois taste displaced court concerns in the selection of dramatic subjects, while composers, singers, and theater impresarios vied for popular success. It is historically and culturally important to mention that in Italy and France, broad cultural movements like Romanticism, Orientalism, and Realism manifested themselves in opera as in the visual arts, while the rise of nationalism produced vigorous new operatic traditions in Germany and Russia.

The Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century launched a burst of interest in the irrational, the otherworldly, the exotic, and the historical, all subjects suited to operatic portrayal. Amazingly it was the devil himself who was a primary character - *Faust* (1859), written by Charles Gounod<sup>2</sup> (1818–1893). Due to the fact that nineteenth-century operas were often based on earlier stage plays or literary works, Romantic subject matter prevailed in opera long after writers and painters had turned to other concerns. Georges Bizet<sup>3</sup> (1838–1875), for instance, based his *Carmen* (1875) on an early nineteenth-century novella of a Spanish writer and, like its source, the opera is full of the Spanish flavor that so appealed to French nineteenth-century audiences. Violence, passion and impropriety so prominently featured in opera ran contrary to the ideals of contemporary bourgeois society, and artists' portrayals of spectators, particularly women, watching from the privacy of their boxes suggest the constraints placed upon them as well as the attraction of opera's cathartic subject matter.

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<sup>2</sup> Charles-François Gounod was a French composer, known for his *Ave Maria* (based on a work by Bach) as well as his operas *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette*.

<sup>3</sup> Georges Bizet formally Alexandre César Léopold Bizet, (25 October 1838 – 3 June 1875) was a French composer, mainly of operas. In a career cut short by his early death, he achieved few successes before his final work, *Carmen*, became one of the most popular and frequently performed works in the entire opera repertory.



Furthermore, high tragedy dominates the operas composed by Giuseppe Verdi<sup>4</sup> (1813–1901), whose feeling for drama helped him produce wonderfully expressive music for chorus, ensembles, solo voices, and the orchestra.

Verdi's contemporary Richard Wagner<sup>5</sup> (1813–1883) took a totally different and new approach to opera. His ideal was the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or absolute work of art, in which drama, staging, and music would forge a powerful unity. Wagner realized these aims by meticulous dedication and work by controlling every aspect of his works, writing his own librettos and supervising set design as well as composing the music. In many ways, revolutionary Wagner magnified the opera beyond any proportions it had attained before.

The culmination of Wagner's career in Germany coincided with the building of a new opera house in Paris, designed by Charles Garnier<sup>6</sup> and opened in 1875. The prominent position of the Opéra within the new system of boulevards demonstrates the social importance of opera at the time, while the lavish ornamented buildings making it seem at once as a temple and a palace.

By the late nineteenth century, opera was viewed as a form of art suitable for portraying the grandest aspirations not only of heroic men and women but also of peoples and nations. The vigorous Russian literature of the period furnished rich material for such operas as Pyotr Tchaikovsky's<sup>7</sup> (1840–1893) *Eugene Onegin* (1879), based (like *Boris Godunov*) on a work by Aleksandr Pushkin<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> **Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi** (10 October 1813 – 27 January 1901) was an Italian Romantic composer, mainly of opera. He was one of the most influential composers of the 19th century. His works are frequently performed in opera houses throughout the world and, transcending the boundaries of the genre, some of his themes have long since taken root in popular culture – such as "La donna è mobile" from *Rigoletto*, "Va, pensiero" (The Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves) from *Nabucco*, "Libiamo ne' lieti calici" (The Drinking Song) from *La traviata* and the "Grand March" from *Aida*.

<sup>5</sup> **Wilhelm Richard Wagner** (22 May 1813 – 13 February 1883) was a German composer, conductor, theatre director and polemicist primarily known for his operas (or "music dramas", as he later called them). Wagner's compositions, particularly those of his later period, are notable for their complex texture, rich harmonies and orchestration, and the elaborate use of leitmotifs: musical themes associated with individual characters, places, ideas or plot elements. Wagner wrote both the music and libretto for every one of his stage works.

<sup>6</sup> **Charles Garnier** (6 November 1825 – 3 August 1898) was a French architect, perhaps best known as the architect of the Palais Garnier and the Opéra de Monte-Carlo.

<sup>7</sup> **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** (May 7, 1840 – November 6, 1893) was a Russian composer whose works included symphonies, concertos, operas, ballets, and chamber music. Some of these are among the most popular concert and theatrical music in the classical repertoire. He was the first Russian composer whose music made a lasting impression internationally, which he bolstered with appearances as a guest conductor later in his career in Europe and the United States. One of these appearances was at the inaugural concert of Carnegie Hall in New York City in 1891. Tchaikovsky was honored in 1884 by Tsar Alexander III

<sup>8</sup> **Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin** (1799–1837) was a Russian author of the Romantic era who is considered by many to be the greatest Russian poet and the founder of modern Russian literature.



Although the great operatic composers dedicated much of their attention to subjects tragic, macabre or awesome they also produced comic operas that are still staged and loved. Mozart's<sup>9</sup> operas contain much that is humorous, both musically and visually. Verdi scored a colossal failure with an early comic opera but ended his career with *Falstaff*(1893), based on the antics of the jolly Shakespearean knight. The comic operas of Gioacchino Rossini<sup>10</sup>, such as *The Barber of Seville* (1816), are rife with tunes that brilliantly express fast-paced intrigue in hilarious situations. Even Wagner composed one masterpiece, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868), with a happy ending and a number of comic features.

### 1.3 Opera Houses Summary

An opera house is a theatre building used for opera performances that consist of a stage, audience seating, an orchestra pit as well as backstage facilities for costumes and set building. On one hand some venues are constructed specifically for operas, and on the other, some opera houses are part of larger performing arts centers.

The first public opera house was built in Venice, Italy, it was Teatro San Cassiano which opened in 1637. Italy, where opera has been popular through the centuries among ordinary people as well as wealthy patrons, still has a large number of opera houses. The first opera house in Germany was built in Hamburg in 1678. Early U.S. opera houses served a variety of functions in towns and cities, hosting community dances, fairs, plays, and vaudeville shows as well as operas and other musical events.

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<sup>9</sup> **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** baptismal name **Johannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart** (27 January 1756 – 5 December 1791), was a prolific and influential composer of the Classical era. Mozart showed prodigious ability from his earliest childhood. Already competent on keyboard and violin, he composed from the age of five and performed before European royalty. At 17, he was engaged as a court musician in Salzburg, but grew restless and travelled in search of a better position, always composing abundantly. While visiting Vienna in 1781, he was dismissed from his Salzburg position. He chose to stay in the capital, where he achieved fame but little financial security. During his final years in Vienna, he composed many of his best-known symphonies, concertos, and operas, and portions of the *Requiem*, which was largely unfinished at the time of his death. The circumstances of his early death have been much mythologized. He was survived by his wife Constanze and two sons.

<sup>10</sup> **Gioacchino Antonio Rossini** (29 February 1792 – 13 November 1868) was an Italian composer who wrote 39 operas as well as sacred music, chamber music, songs, and some instrumental and piano pieces. His best-known operas include the Italian comedies *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (*The Barber of Seville*) and *La Cenerentola* and the French-language epics *Moïse et Pharaon* and *Guillaume Tell*. A tendency for inspired, song-like melodies is evident throughout his scores, which led to the nickname "The Italian Mozart". Until his retirement in 1829, Rossini had been the most popular opera composer in history.



In the 17th and 18th centuries, opera houses were often financed by kings, rulers, nobles, and wealthy people who used patronage of the arts to endorse their political ambitions and social positions or prestige. With the rise of bourgeois and capitalist social forms in the 19th century, European culture moved away from its patronage system to a publicly supported system. In the 2000s, most opera and theaters raise funds from a combination of government and institutional grants, ticket sales and, to a smaller extent, private donations.

Europe's major opera houses built in the 19th century contained between about 1,500 to 3,000 seats. Modern opera houses of the twentieth century such as New York's Metropolitan Opera (with 3,800) and the San Francisco Opera (with 3,146) are larger. Many operas do not require large-scale productions and may be presented in smaller theaters, such as Venice's La Fenice with about 1,000 seats.

Royal Opera House Muscat is the leading arts and culture organization in the Sultanate of Oman. Located in Muscat, Oman, the vision of the Opera House is to serve as a centre of excellence in global cultural engagement.

Royal Opera House Muscat, later in text referred as ROHM<sup>11</sup> strives to enrich lives through diverse artistic, cultural, and educational programs.

The multidisciplinary work of Royal Opera House Muscat showcases rich and diverse artistic creations from Oman, the region, and the world; provides a space for culture and socioeconomic development reflections and actions; inspires audiences and nurtures creativity with innovative programs; fosters cultural vitality and unleashes talent; promotes cultural tourism; and puts cultural diplomacy into practice by reinvigorating global and multi-disciplinary collaborations and exchanges.

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<sup>11</sup> The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) is Oman's premier venue for musical arts and culture



## **1.4 INTRODUCTION – Royal Opera House Muscat**

October 14<sup>th</sup> 2011, was indeed a unique day for Oman, it was a day where country joined together Vienna, Berlin, London, New York and Prague. The inauguration of the new hub of cultural excellence, The Royal Opera House Muscat. His Majesty's Sultan Qaboos Bin Said (later in text referred as HM<sup>12</sup>) vision opened the doors to welcome wholeheartedly the world's best classical music, opera and ballet and in doing so marked the new era of artistic brilliance in the region. The task of the ROHM team was two sided; they had to on one hand regionally establish The Royal Opera House as a world class venue, and on the other hand they had to resonate with local Omanis many of whom were not familiar with the concept. Walking into the Opera House is truly like entering a surreal dream. The sights and sounds of place and a performance blur the lines of reality and evoke imagination. The Opera House Muscat is the place where the extraordinary happens. 15 world class performances were showcased to invite people through a series posters, invites and stationary, including an exclusive coffee table book as a souvenir. Official fan pages were created on a social media for upcoming performance details, sales updates and for people to express how they felt about coming of the Opera House to their region. The campaigns created the huge euphoria on a day of its launch both regionally and internationally, with a big fan following from Oman and even from all around UK, India, Italy and the USA. The Opera House Muscat was the one to put Oman on the world map for the first time. Timeless stories will be told on a magical journey that continues.

As said, Royal Opera House in Muscat has a revolutionary meaning for Muscat, Oman and its people. It opens the door of this charming country to the whole world of art and culture. It is the benchmark of Muscat, giving the city an epithet of the world metropolis. It is important to mention that Arabic culture is not very familiar with

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<sup>12</sup> His Majesty **Sultan Qaboos bin Said** was born in Salalah in Dhofar on 18th November, 1940, the only son of Sultan Said bin Taimur (1932-1970) and the eighth direct descendant of the royal Al Busaidi line, founded in 1744 by Imam Ahmed bin Said.



opera and theatre performance in western terms. However, Oman is blessed to have a ruler as Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said who has always been an admirer of classical music and arts and who has a vision of enlightening and educating his people through culture, arts; the result of which is building of ROHM. In 2001, the Sultan ordered the building of an opera house. Initially called 'House of Musical Arts', the name 'Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM)' was finally chosen.

**The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM)** is Oman's premier venue for culture and musical arts. It was officially opened in October 12th, 2011, with a production of the opera *Turandot*, conducted by Spanish tenor Plácido Domingo<sup>13</sup>. The opera house is located in Shati Al-Qurm district of Muscat, Oman. The Royal Opera House reflects contemporary Omani architecture, and has a capacity to accommodate maximum of 1,100 people. It was built on the royal orders of Sultan Qaboos of Oman. It is interesting to mention that this opera house is first in the world equipped with Radio Marconi's multimedia interactive display seatback system, Mode 23. The opera house complex consists of an auditorium, concert theatre, cultural market with retail, formal landscaped gardens, luxury restaurants and an art centre for musical, theatrical and operatic productions.

The success and prestige of the Opera can best be seen through the renowned performers it hosted in the first year when it was opened. As planned, the first season was truly impressive with performances by Plácido Domingo, soprano Renée Fleming<sup>14</sup> and Andrea Bocelli<sup>15</sup>.

Also, there were music performances by world-renowned cellist Yo Yo Ma<sup>16</sup> and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the American Ballet Theatre in a production of Don Quixote, the performance of Swan Lake by the Mariinsky Ballet, and trumpeter

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<sup>13</sup> **Plácido Domingo** born 21 January 1941 is a Spanish tenor and conductor known for his versatile and strong voice, possessing a ringing and dramatic tone throughout its range. In March 2008, he debuted in his 128th opera role, and as of July 2011, his 136 roles give Domingo more roles than any other tenor.

<sup>14</sup> **Renée Fleming** (born February 14, 1959) is an American soprano whose repertoire encompasses Richard Strauss, Mozart, Handel, bel canto, lieder, French opera and chansons, jazz and indie rock. Fleming has a full lyric soprano voice. Fleming has performed coloratura, lyric, and lighter spinto soprano operatic roles in Italian, German, French, Czech, and Russian.

<sup>15</sup> **Andrea Bocelli**, born 22 September 1958) is an Italian tenor, multi-instrumentalist and classical crossover artist. Born with poor eyesight, he became blind at the age of twelve following a soccer accident.

<sup>16</sup> **Yo-Yo Ma** (1955) is an American<sup>1</sup> cellist, virtuoso, and orchestral composer. He has received multiple Grammy Awards, the National Medal of Arts in 2001<sup>[2]</sup> and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011. Ma is regarded by some as the most famous cellist of the modern age.





*great artists speak to us no matter what the language is.”* (Another Visit to Oman, Michael Kaiser, 9<sup>th</sup> January 2012)

The ROHM official season commenced on October 12<sup>th</sup> 2011 and was attended by HM and hundreds of distinguished guests from around the world. As mentioned above, the first part of the season included 2 newly commissioned opera productions by Franco Zafarelli of Puccini’s *Turandot* and Bizet’s *Carmen*; concerts by Plácido Domingo, Rene Fleming, Yo Yo Ma and London Philharmonic orchestra. There were 3 ballets including *Don Quijote* by American Ballet Theatre, *Gizzele* by Teatro de la Scalla and *Swan Lake* by Marinsky Ballet. Arab music was represented only by 2 performances in a one night concert by The World Of Magida El Roumi featuring Magida El Roumi and Riham Abdul Hakim and the Arab Music Ensemble paying tribute to legendary Um Kulthum. Efforts to bring legendary Lebanese diva Fairouz failed and programme lacked music from the Gulf and North Africa. Regardless, Arabic Programme remained traditional centering mainly on Egypt and Lebanon. This mission of inaugural season clearly focuses on big international superstars performing works that are definitely Eurocentric in nature.

The second part of inaugural season that commenced in January is more balanced in its offering where programme director and ethnomusicologist Dr Issam El Mallah<sup>20</sup> is keen to distinct from the first half by drawing on myriad of different traditions for the programme. Similar suggestion were made by the president of Kennedy Centre and advisor of the ROHM Michael Kaiser<sup>21</sup>. There was discussion whether first to play *Turandot* or *Traviata*. It was finally decided for *Turandot* to be the first Opera performend in the ROHM as it was said to be more appropriate to open the season

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<sup>20</sup> Prof. Dr. Issam El-Mallah was born in Port Said, Egypt in 1948. After graduation at the Institute for Music Education in Cairo he continued his studies at the Institute for Musicology at the University of Munich, Germany. There he took the doctorate in musicology (Dr. Phil.) in 1979 and completed his Habilitation (Dr. Phil. Habil.) in ethnomusicology in 1993. Since 1980 up to now he has been working as a lecturer, later as a professor at the University of Munich, specializing in Arabic music. Frequently he was also guest lecturer in other universities inside and outside Germany, e.g. in the USA, Switzerland, Austria, Great Britain or Egypt. In 2010 he was appointed Adviser and Director of Programs & Events of the Royal Opera House in Muscat, Oman.

<sup>21</sup> **Michael M. Kaiser** is president of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Dubbed "the turnaround king" for his work at such arts institutions as the Kansas City Ballet, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, American Ballet Theatre and the Royal Opera House, Kaiser has earned international renown for his expertise in arts management.



than Traviata because Traviata's whirlwind romance might not have been appropriate for 1<sup>st</sup> Opera to be played in the region. Traviata however was played as a test opera in preseason in August 2011.

The first season of Royal Opera House Programme mainly focused on promoting international artists and programme, with the aim to advertise itself internationally. Second season involved more Arabic artists and performances in the programme and in the third season western and eastern programme will be as balanced. The board of the ROHM made the selection very smartly, by balancing the programme and bringing world famous names in the first season in order to allure people to attend the shows and then slowly create the habit of regular visits Opera House. With its varied international programme ROHM is creating for itself a very unique image. On the other hand, the careful selection of programme is becoming more and more appealing to local community with the plans for local artists to get more involved in the ROHM as well. The next chapter will focus on the perspectives and ideas about the third season of the ROHM.

Royal Opera House Muscat has left a symphonic mark on the international opera culture in less than a year's time since it was dedicated to the nation with a fabulous more than 92 per cent average attendance to 42 programmes by 38 visiting companies and 69 individual performances by more than 3,228 artistes that set stage for world's most acclaimed maestros in the inaugural season. As many as 54,000 patrons who attended the opera house's seasons are from 40 countries from over six continents. This was revealed by His Highness Sayyid Kamil bin Fahad al Said, member of the Board of Directors of opera house, at the announcement of the iconic opera house's Season 4 which is slated from September 2012 to April 2014. Additionally, more Omani youngsters will be given training before they are being inducted into various positions at the opera house. ROHM team is committed to local community and investing in training Omanis. Additionally, a number of ROHM staff attended the internationally recognized arts management fellowship this summer at the DeVos Institute at the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, DC. The recruitment drive started in the first season



and continues, with new opportunities coming out very soon. Training is offered with most positions, to support individuals with the talent and drive to transition their skill that they acquired into the different fields of cultural and arts management. The third 2012-2013 season is a true manifestation of ROHM's commitment to global cultural engagement with a season composed of international, world-class performances. A diverse variety of attractions from six continents will start on September 12 with Verdi's grand opera Aida, performed by the Warsaw National Opera.

From world famous operas such as La Bohème, Simon Boccanegra and Madama Butterfly to the spectacular soloists Jessye Norman, Roberto Alagna and Joshua Bell the season will also offer diverse selection of attractions such as Arab lute songs by Safwan Bahlawan and Ahmed Fathi, the celebrated musical The Music Man and stunning evenings of dance by Paul Taylor Dance Company, a festival of a cappella music, A Stravinsky Ballet Evening and Ballet Folklórico de México. Dr Rawya bint Saud al Busaidiya, Chairperson of the Board of Directors said that the Royal Opera House Muscat welcomes all the people of Oman and the region to join in celebrating the highly anticipated third season. This newly built landmark has become a majlis<sup>22</sup> for the performing arts in Oman, and continues to develop the cultural skyline of the region. She also added that the third season will present outstanding international artistes and attractions, many of whom are being seen for the first time in the region. The opera house is dedicated to promoting Omani and intercultural dialogue through the arts locally, regionally and internationally. As part of its strategy ROHM is committed to presenting world-class performances that are accessible to all, with tickets starting as low as RO 3, which is 6 euros approximately.<sup>23</sup>

Besides maintaining the ongoing commitment to the highest artistic quality, the opera house's third season will also strike a balance between western, Arabic and international arts as well as music from other parts of the world and diverse

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<sup>22</sup> Majlis, Arabic word denoting a place where people gather to sit, talk and contemplate. Also the parliament of various North African and Middle Eastern countries.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.naeem.pk/> 20 July 2012, 7 pm



performances, according to Prof Dr Issam el Mallah, Adviser to the Board of Directors for Programming and Events. Additionally, for the first time, opera house's patrons will have the opportunity to enjoy the pipe organ in a festival dedicated to this spectacular instrument. The pipe organ is favorite instrument of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said. To the taste of Arabic and Omani audience especially, there will also be folk music from different parts of the world, including artists from Oman, Mexico, India, central Asia and South Africa.

Being keen to present music for all generations and all tastes ROHM will also continue with the well-received series of jazz concerts and 'Music From and For Children'.

As per Dr Nasser al Tae<sup>24</sup>, Head of Education and Outreach initiatives, the ongoing outreach programmes will be full-fledged during the third season too. ROHM team reiterates opera house's commitment to education and outreach through the hosting of shows especially designed for children, families and students; conducting regular school visits; and continuing to engage adults in meaningful dialogue about the culture, opera and arts. Specifically, ROHM will continue to offer an expansive programme of public tours, open house events and pre-performance talks that ROHM launched in the first season. ROHM also plans to offer new exciting initiatives like open rehearsals for students, workshops and educational resources. He continues, "We are committed to the educational and outreach mission of the ROHM to engage, inspire and play a constructive role in our community." ("Observer" newspapers, Saturday, September 8, 2012)

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<sup>24</sup> **Nasser Al-Tae** has been an assistant professor of Musicology at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He specializes in 18th-century Orientalism as well as in the political, social, and cultural exchange between East and West. Dr. Al-Tae holds a B.A. in Music from the University of Washington, and M.A. and Ph.D. in Musicology from UCLA. He has published in *The Opera Quarterly*, *Popular Music*, and *Pride*. Currently Director of Education and Outreach at the ROHM



## **2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

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*Opera does not call so much for an imaginative ear as for an imaginative eye, an eye which can see beyond little absurdities toward great truths. (GEORGE MAREK, J. Merrill Knapp's The Magic of Opera )*

### **2.1. Motives for Choosing This Theme**

The very living in Oman and witnessing the creation of revolutionary cultural institution in Muscat, inspired me to choose ROHM as a subject for my Master Thesis. What more to say than that this institution is the only Opera House in the Gulf Region, and third in the Middle East along with Cairo Opera House and Opera House in Damascus. It is incredible how bold the idea maker (His Highness Sultan Qaboos Bin Said) was to initiate the project of Opera in Oman, a Muslim and conservative country. I am myself a linguist for Arabic Language and Literature and I have been living in Oman for more than 2 years, consequently, for me to explore the reception of opera in the Middle East has multi-layered significance and is interesting on many levels; educational, professional, personal.

Opera in Oman is very young and majority of local population did not have the opportunity to face this cultural phenomenon unless they visited Opera Houses world wide, the luxury reserved only for the wealthy elite. Moreover, the long-term aim of the Opera is rather than to entertain, to outreach to society on educational and cultural level and educate people. I want to find out what opera signifies to different people by analyzing the survey which will contain different questions and will be conducted among different age groups, nationalities and professions. Does it represent an opportunity for social gathering, a place to show off fashion styling (Arab ladies enjoy taking special care of what garment to choose for specific occasion- they have their dresses tailored and designed especially for attending the opera shows for example; for them that is sign of social status and prestige); question here is does opera represent an elite event or food for soul, or both?



My primary goal is to study the importance and impact of this magnificent institution in Oman. I would examine logistics of the institution, long term ideas of founders, their motives, how it attract audience, how it fits to the current socio – cultural context and into the wider landscape and after all how it could contribute to the overall development of culture in the society and how different audience receives it.

## **2.2. Main aims of master thesis research**

First of all, through the theoretical work, I will try to determine and explain opera as a significant genre of exploitation and development and will try to sketch its role in Omani society. Through research on reception of opera the study will show a lot of cultural and social characteristics of the country.

Objectives of the research could be divided into two categories, which provide a better methodological approach, especially in terms of finding answers to core questions and hypothesis of this work. Thus, main objectives could be formulated as descriptive (they provide a theoretical definition of broad research), analytical-explanatory (they determine conditions)

Descriptive goals:

- Explore ways of functioning and organization of Opera in Oman;

Analytical-explanatory goals:

- Analysis of aesthetics of opera through theoretical work of Richard Wagner
- Analysis of Partnership between ROHM and ASPEN Institute
- Analysis of types of opera performances;
- Analysis of opera as a form of spectacle;
- Analysis of opera in Omani culture and society through the work of ROHM. This involves analysis of theater’s organization, repertoire policy and audience characteristic and its present acceptance and possible demand.

Project-modeling goals:

- Determine current situation of this genre in Omani society and culture;



- Determine largest possibilities and obstacles for development of this genre in Oman through case;
- Provide data regarding position of the ROHM in society by conducting different surveys and interviewing audience in order to determine the level of reception

The following terms will mainly be used in the research:

- **Opera** (English plural: *operas*; Italian plural: *opere*) is an art form in which singers and musicians perform a dramatic work combining text (called a libretto literally "little book") and musical score, usually in a theatrical setting.<sup>25</sup>
- Opera incorporates many of the elements of spoken theatre, such as acting, scenery, and costumes and sometimes includes dance. The performance is typically given in an opera house, accompanied by an orchestra or smaller musical ensemble. Opera is part of the Western classical music tradition.<sup>26</sup>

In the Holy Scriptures it is said that: "in the beginning was the Word". And so it is with opera, where it is "the word", which carries the meaningful information, develops the story line and creates the necessary dramatic intrigue. But, opera audiences, participating in an opera experience, want, nay, need to engage with more than just "the word".

"The word" in opera can describe the situation and provoke certain emotional states in the listener. But, "the word" by itself is incapable of elevating the audience to a level of emotional euphoria. It is only when "**the rational words**" are supported by the full specter of sounds that the listener is transposed into a completely different state of emotional heights than that, which can be provided by "the word" alone. And, it is this that the audience subconsciously awaits and yearns for in an opera.

Music ensure that the emotions evoked by words can be developed, deepened and, what is most important for humans, given the opportunity to be sustained in this state, over a certain period of time.

"Rational words" lay the foundation for the melodies, harmonies, vocal and instrumental colours, rhythm, tempi, that develop and guide us, the listener to

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<sup>25</sup> Some definitions of opera: "dramatic performance or composition of which music is an essential part, branch of art concerned with this" (Concise Oxford English Dictionary); "any dramatic work that can be sung (or at times declaimed or spoken) in a place for performance, set to original music for singers (usually in costume) and instrumentalists" (Amanda Holden, Viking Opera Guide); "musical work for the stage with singing characters, originated in early years of 17th century" (Pears Cyclopaedia, 1983 ed.).

<sup>26</sup> Comparable art forms from various other parts of the world, many of them ancient in origin, are also sometimes called "opera" by analogy, usually prefaced with an adjective indicating the region (for example, Chinese opera). These independent traditions are not derivative of Western opera, but are rather distinct forms of musical theatre. Opera is also not the only type of Western musical theatre: in the ancient world Greek drama featured singing and instrumental accompaniment; and in modern times, other forms such as the musical have appeared.



the highest of expressions and emotional states. For the most part, the audience participates in what is going on, on stage not through “the word”, which is sung on stage, but through the emotions evoked by the music. In themselves, the words become secondary.

In classical opera, a full aria may sound from 3 to 6 minutes. And yet, this same aria might consist of one or two sentences, which allows for only the core ideas of content to be transmitted. All else that is born via this content is portrayed and expressly developed through the music leading to what is most important and worthy – **the emotional state**.

For example, in G. Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*, Rosina’s aria “Una voce poco fa” has few words. But, the joy, delight and happy anticipation of a girl in love are clearly communicated through the bright coloratura passages. And they are performed using just a few select words.

In opera “the rational word” is the seed planted to introduce the emotional state. The development of this emotional state, the pleasure of remaining in this state and the ability to relish this process of ever escalating musical drama is this **phenomenon of opera** that is particularly enticing and unique.

But, and this is indeed a big “but”, there is one very important nuance. For the opera phenomenon to occur, it is imperative that brilliant, or at least highly professional performances of opera be staged. Otherwise, opera becomes something that is difficult to understand and frequently, just plain ugly. In a poor production, the “opera phenomenon”, which is the quintessence of the genre, just won’t happen.

Two extremes reign in this genre: brilliance and misery. A third, middle ground just doesn’t exist. (*Myron Yusyovych blog entry* <http://www.yusyovych.com>, 16 Aug 2012, 6pm)

- **Reception** is a noun form of *receiving*, or *to receive* something, such as information, art, experience, or people. In this research I will focus on reception of opera among different audience. Also known as reception analysis, **audience reception** theory has come to be widely used as a way of characterizing the wave of audience research which occurred within communications and cultural studies during the 1980s and 1990s. On the whole, this work has adopted a "culturalist" perspective, has tended to use qualitative (and often ethnographic) methods of research and has tended to be concerned, one way or another, with exploring the active choices, uses and interpretations made of media materials, by their consumers.
- Audiences can be groups or individuals targeted by and often built by media industries. Audience can be active (constantly filtering or resisting content) or passive (complying and vulnerable).



Audience analysis emphasizes the diversity of responses to a given popular culture artifact by examining as directly as possible how given audiences actually understand and use popular culture texts. Three kinds of research make up most audience research: 1) broad surveys and opinion polls. 2) small, representative focus groups brought in to react to and discuss a pop culture text. 3) in-depth ethnographic participant observation of a given audience, in which, for example, a researcher actually lives with and observes the TV viewing habits of a household over a substantial period of time, or travels on the road with a rock band. Each approach has strengths and weaknesses, and sometimes more than one approach is used as a check on the others. Audience analysis tries to isolate variables like region, race, ethnicity, age, gender, and income in an effort to see how different social groups tend to construct different meanings for the same text.

According to the dictionary of theatre terms "Key terms of theatre analysis" An d , the word spectacle has two meanings. Firstly, spectacle represents any situation that humans perform in front of other humans, enjoying mutually. Spectacle is dance, boxing match or football game as well as theatre performance. Only with serious deviation from the term we can consider film or certain TV manifestation as a form of spectacle, considering that these are mere images and not alive presence of the performers. The difference can be made between the spectacle in which there is space given to the fiction and the one that is mere performance, like sport games for example. In between them there is a dance in which contribution of the fiction can be immense. Every visual aspect of theatre performance is considered as a spectacle, and in the act in role that is performance: décor, costume, lightening, gestures and speech of actors, music, and dance. According to Aristotle that is the least interesting side of the theatre, nevertheless the theatre changes significantly since then onwards. In the end, the tools of the theatre provide us with entertainment but that elements the least artistic one and the least important for the poetry" says Aristotle in Poetics"<sup>27</sup>

### **2.3. Subject of research**

Subject of this research is evaluation of reception of opera among the citizens of Oman; the thesis will contain and explain how different genres of opera performances are received among people, what role Opera plays in society and what is the aim of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and board members of the ROHM. I will try to explain

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26 *Theatre Terazije and Opera and Madlenianum Theatre 2000-2009 serb: (Pozorište na Terazijama i Opera i teatar Madlenianum 2000 – 2009)* Mentor: Dr Milena Dragi evi Šeši ., Candidate Ms Maja Risti Beograd, January 2009, page 33



what Opera signifies to people of Oman and will see from the perspective of expats how they see Opera as a cultural phenomenon in the Middle East.

## **2.4. Hypothesis**

This study will be based on following basic hypothesis:

### *Hypothesis 1*

*Despite cultural differences between East and West, the prejudice as regards to accepting of Opera; opening of ROHM still contributes to the forming of Opera audience.*

### *Hypothesis 2*

*Interesting tendency and focus of the management of Royal Opera House Muscat on bringing famous artists and commercial repertoire.*

## **2.5. Methodology and Instruments of Research**

My methodological approach will be based on both quantitative and qualitative research strategy, with the advantage given to the qualitative. The hypothesis will be examined from the perspective of the current socio-cultural context. The methods I will use will be theoretical (interdisciplinary approach, culture studies, psychology of management) and empirical (surveys, interviews, questionnaires, field research).

In order to prove my hypothesis I will base my research on methods such as observation, content analysis, and deduction from the literature, in-house framework analysis, and in-depth interviews.

So as to understand the aims which opera wants to achieve and outreach to community I will address and talk to people who are idea makers and management team. In order



to determine which shows are mostly visited by audience I will access the in-house records of the Opera which will give general outline of visits to opera. In terms of empirical methods, I see surveys as extremely important as they will show the real situation in the society. Also it will provide direct opinions. Through surveys I will be able to assess where Opera stands among the community of Oman. As the means of evaluating the meaning of opera in Oman/Middle east firstly I am writing where it stands in western culture, what it represented and represents to people in the west. This is very important as it will reveal actually the very aim why the institution is built in the east being the invention of the west. Is it for the glory of His Majesty Sultan, to depict prestige in the region or to contribute to cultural level of Omani people? (Dubai is already more than well-known for its touristic allure, Doha (Qatar) as a great business centre, Kuwait for oil, Saudi Arabia as a holy place of Muslims..But Oman can actually gain a great reputation by being a focal cultural centre in the Middle East by having The Opera House who gathers most renowned artists from all around the world. The Sultan very boldly wanted something everlasting for Oman, as it is known only art lasts forever, he wants to invest in the human being by sophisticating his citizens for generations to come. I see all these questions as very thought provoking and they require an interdisciplinary approach and interviews with relevant people that I have conducted for the purpose of this research.

Moreover, a relevant focus will be put on the management strategies and the choice of artists, performers who are brought to perform. Interestingly, ROHM is characterized by bringing glamorous guests such as Placido Domingo, Adrea Boccelli, Rene Fleming, Ballet La Scala from Milan, the Choir of Vienna boys, best Argentinean Tango Dancers. The question here again is: Is such a strategy made for the cause of satisfying the audience, or such a glamorous repertoire is made in order to advertise Oman on an international level in the best way, or both? Now, another provoking notion is whether the audience that has never encountered Opera as a cultural phenomenon really praises all the Opera can give? I want to research how interested and aware ordinary audience is about this revolutionary institution for their country. It is important to mention that due to improper content as per Muslim religion and traditional customs, Opera is not exposed to media neither it is well advertised in



newspapers and other means of publications. Survey and some media analysis will show how people come to know about events in the Opera. I would doubt that everyone visits website regularly. One of the ways is that Opera offers certain amount of tickets to specific companies and organizations, however this is restricted. Radio and newspapers do cover a significant campaign, but there are no posters of performers attached publically nor there are a lot of TV commercials promoting shows.

Only audience can make certain cultural institution live or disappear. Therefore by studying the reception of ROHM among the people of Oman, certain useful conclusions as regards to the very prospective of the opera in Oman can be drawn.

### **3 OPERA THROUGH HISTORY**

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#### **3.1 OPERA BETWEEN EAST AND WEST**

*East not only has resisted the cultural imperialism of the West but has transformed Western culture into local tradition at the same time as Western performances have poached images, themes, and characters from the East. (East of West Cross-Cultural Performance and staging of Difference, Claire Sponsler and Xiaomei Chen)*

The **East-West dichotomy** is a sociological concept used to describe perceived differences between Western cultures and the Eastern world. Cultural rather than geographical in division, the boundaries of East and West are not fixed, but vary according to the criteria adopted by individuals using the term. Historically, Islamic and Asian nations have been regarded as East, while the United



States, Australasia and Western Europe are regarded as West. Used in discussing such studies as management, economics and linguistics, the concept is criticized for overlooking regional hybridity.

Conceptually, the boundaries are cultural, rather than geographical, as a result of which Australia is typically grouped in the West, while Islamic nations are, regardless of location, grouped in the East. The culture line can be particularly difficult to place in regions of cultural diversity such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose citizens may themselves identify as East or West depending on ethnic or religious background. Naturally, art and reception of art is different in the East and in the West. Opera in particular is a western product, however Opera being universal in nature was created in the East as well, it is just that in the East together with fusing within local culture it must preserve its original concept.

It is hard to talk about Opera in the Middle East as practically there was no opera house in the Middle East before ROHM was opened. The only other in Arab world as mentioned before is The **Cairo Opera House** (Arabic: دار الأوبرا المصرية; D r el-Opera el-Masreyya; literally "Egyptian Opera House"), part of Cairo's **National Cultural Center**, is the main performing arts venue in the Egyptian capital and the one in Damascus, Syria.

The opera house was inaugurated on October 10, 1988. The funds for the complex were a gift from the nation of Japan to Egypt as a result of President Hosni Mubarak's visit to Japan in April 1983. Construction began in May 1985 and lasted for three years.

In order to understand better penetration of new forms of art into the conservative world, influence of Japan is important.

In October 1988, President Mubarak and His Imperial Highness, Prince Tomohito of Mikasa, the younger brother of the Japanese Emperor, inaugurated the National Cultural Centre Cairo Opera House. It was the first time for Japan to stage a Kabuki show, a traditional popular drama with singing and dancing, in Africa or the Arab World. We can say that Cairo Opera House is really between East and West.



It can be said that the differences between East and West opera is that Chinese opera (the oldest in the East) is uniquely different from Western opera because there are so many details such as origins, storylines, costumes, facial painting, stage rituals, customs, character types etc.

And the 'music', well one must listen because it is impossible to describe except to say it is totally unlike 'Western' opera music and the singing is just as different - factually it is an acquired taste. Chinese opera has little in common with Western opera, and the screeching falsetto of the singers, the loud clacking of the clappers and the noisy banging of drums and cymbals can sound strange to Western ears. But it is the costumes, variety of facial expressions, the actors' eye expressions and martial arts movements that mostly attract Western audiences. Chinese opera is older than Western opera. It has a heritage of over 5000 years. Many operas date back to the Tan dynasty. Just about everything about classical Chinese opera is distinctive—the music, acting, gestures, makeup, and magnificent costumes.

One of the first tasks of an Emperor, whenever a new dynasty began, was to establish rituals and write music. By the time of Confucius, music and dance had reached a high degree of development. To this day over 280 dramas have been preserved.

Chinese operas are usually written from historical events, poetry, folklore, legends and mythologies of immortal Gods and Goddesses. An opera student must study history, poetry, and literature in addition to basic reading, writing and 'rithmetic. An opera student must also practice physical endurance through martial arts and acrobatic exercise, along with acting and singing. As in "total" theatre, there is "total" physical and mental endurance. Contrary to what most people believe, Chinese opera is written with very high standards.

Prior to the early 19th century, females were forbidden to perform Chinese opera. They were taboo and considered bad luck. Males, as seen in the movie "Farewell My Concubine" portrayed female roles. The most famous and revered female impersonator was Mui Lan Fong.



Chinese opera is steeped in symbolism and traditional gestures, costume, and makeup. The headdress worn signifies the role that is being portrayed. The audience must often use their imagination to follow the plot by conceiving mentally mountains being climbed, rivers being crossed, riders on horseback, and performers stepping over thresholds, and more. Pay close attention to hand gestures and movements, they help to understand the plot. There are 107 different hand movements, each with its own meaning.

Chinese opera is probably one of the most difficult performing arts to learn, train and master. It requires many, many years of training to attain a level of perfection. Students begin Chinese opera training as early as age eight. Disciplined traditional training for the art requires a minimum of 6-7 vigorous years.

The new opera in the Middle East, ROHM relies completely for now on bringing artist, famous artists from abroad with the idea to have in future its own orchestra, but it does not have its own troupe at the moment. Being very traditional and fond of brotherhoods, for Omanis it would be very important to have their own assemble within the ROHM in order to grasp the ROHM as a part of their culture. ROHM differs from Cairo Opera house and Opera House in Damascus mainly as regards to programme (Egypt and Syria cannot financially afford to host world famous names including apart from opera and classical music and ballet; best of jazz, Arabic musical scene, world musicals etc). The ROHM is an institution which which has the aim to balance between East and West. The variety of programme is fascinating and the balance it strives to maintain best describes its main aim and vision, and that is equality and equilibrium among all; the idea of co-existence and peace between East and West. While patiently preparing for introducing their own assemble, management is preparing the ROHM to become worldly renowned opera by introducing varied programme and bringing most famous artists.

The ROHM is designed to establish Western art music as an integral component of Omani culture. In the process, it also aims to include Oman in the global community. The initial concept of the ROHM was outlined in 2002. By 2004, the architectural competition was presented, and construction commenced in 2007. Reflecting on this



long process, His Excellency Muhsin Al-Shaikh, who was the head of the Royal Estate at the Royal Court Affairs, stated: "Ten years ago, this project was a dream. Today it is a reality...it's a unique building. You don't find many in the world"<sup>28</sup>

### **3.2 Esthetics of Theatre Reception in Asia**

By introducing the element of spectator the exchange of messages between audience and performers becomes crucial (the reader and the book). The term communication, creation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century contributed to the phenomenon of reception of art in the West.

Popular stories about one Bavarian and Spanish king (the most powerful one) about their wish for their court theatres to perform only for them and how the product of that desire never gave a good artistic result are the proof of deep curiosities of the theatres. Also the word that denotes theatre derives in the majority of the European languages from the verb "observe", something that is seen, that way pointing not towards the creation but reception of the theatre act. All this becomes much clearer if seen in the context of Asian theatre tradition where theatre is an aspect of everyday life and everyday communication, therefore the audience behaves in it in a specific way. According to Natia Shastra, the spectator in the Indian classical theatre yells out loud: Well played! Great! Whenever there is heroic or sensual scene on the stage. During pathetic scenes they will openly cry. Even negative reactions are permitted. This kind of behavior however does not imply disrespect of the play or the performer, on contrary it signifies specific and open expression of their respect to it. Richard Schechner describes this as selective inattentiveness, characteristic for integral audience in which the theatre is a part of life, opposite to accidental audience in which the theatre represents attending the glamorous event. The selective inattentiveness is a certain stimulant towards the quality of the performance. Only these performers can play what they play and only this audience can do what they do – support the performance while it is happening. No aftermath applause or later critics.

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<sup>28</sup> Nasser Al-Tae, "Mozart in Muscat...." Unpublished article.



The joining of Asian and West theatre avangarde is the result of integral audience, the need of west to create its own integral audience. Created within hipi movement and with the wish to increase the number of integral audience even only mechanically, rude and drastic attempts of bringing the audience to the stage were being made in the 70ties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the West.

This lead to the creation of the “third theatre|” – revolutionary - along with the first (traditional) and second (avangarde). Revolutionary in the sense of revolutionizing the theatre praxis, by being categorized to serve to people. Presence and acting of the performer together with presence and act of the spectator provide unique experience that can only happen in the theatre.<sup>29</sup>

It is very important to understand the development and differences in the way theatre performance has been received in Asia as well as in the west, in order to better perceive the reception of the opera in Oman. For that purpose in this chapter we used the book (Pozoriste Azije engl Theatre of Asia, Tvrsko Kulenovic, Zagreb, 1983 page 217-226)

### **3.3 DID COSMOPOLITISM INFLUENCE THE CREATION OF HYBRID CULTURE**

*Culture' and 'civilization' are the two coterminous terms, though each one possesses a distinctive semantic domain with clearly defined meanings.( Continuity and Change in Indo-Arab Cultural Relations: A Survey with Special Reference to Oman, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi)*

Homi K. Bhabha has written that authorized power in a hybrid culture ‘does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through conditions of contingency and contradictoriness’ (Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 2). This view of culture is one aligned with concepts of flux and transition. Hybrid cultural identity is created as time progresses, in part based on contingency. The boundaries of hybrid

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<sup>29</sup> Pozoriste Azije, engl Theatre of Asia, Tvrsko Kulenovic, Zagreb 1983, page 217-225



cultures are negotiated and able to absorb diverse cultural influences: borders are active sites of intersection and overlap, which support the creation of in-between identities. Hybrid cultures are antagonistic to standing authority and cultural hegemony - hybridisation engenders diversity and heterogeneity, once framed as bastardisation. Heterogeneity and multiplicity are here underlined as important aspects of hybrid cultures.

Hybridity refers in its most basic sense to mixture. The term originates from biology and was subsequently employed in linguistics and in racial theory in the nineteenth century. Its contemporary uses are scattered across numerous academic disciplines and is salient in popular culture.

Hybridity originates from the Latin *hybrida*, a term used to classify the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar. A hybrid is something that is mixed, and hybridity is simply mixture. As an explicative term, hybridity became a useful tool in forming a fearful discourse of racial mixing that arose toward the end of the 18th Century. Scientific models of anatomy and craniometry were used to argue that Africans, Asians, Native Americans and Pacific Islanders were racially inferior to Europeans. The fear of miscegenation that followed responds to the concern that the offspring of racial interbreeding would result in the dilution of the European race. Hybrids were seen as an aberration, worse than the inferior races, a weak and diseased mutation. Hybridity as a concern for racial purity responds clearly to the zeitgeist of colonialism where, despite the backdrop of the humanitarian age of enlightenment, social hierarchy was beyond contention as was the position of Europeans at its summit. The social transformations that followed the ending of colonial mandates, rising immigration, and economic liberalization profoundly altered the use and understanding of the term hybridity.

The development of hybridity theory as a discourse of anti-essentialism marked the height of the popularity of academic "hybridity talk". However the usage of hybridity in theory to eliminate essentialist thinking and practices (namely racism) failed as hybridity itself is prone to the same essentialist framework and thus requires definition and placement.

The next phase in the use of the term has been to see hybridity as a cultural effect of globalization. For example, hybridity is presented as the 'cultural logic' of



globalization as it ‘entails that traces of other cultures exist in every culture, thus offering foreign media and marketers transcultural wedges for forging affective links between their commodities and local communities’ (Hybridity: The Cultural Logic Of Globalization Kraidy 2005:148) as. Another promoter of hybridity as globalization is Jan Nederveen Pieterse, who asserts hybridity as the rhizome of culture. He argues that globalization as hybridization opposes views which see the process as homogenising, modernising, and westernising, and that it broadens the empirical history of the concept. However neither of these scholars have reinvigorated the hybridity theory debate in terms of solving its inherent problematics. The term hybridity remains contested precisely because it has resisted the appropriations of numerous discourses despite the fact that it is radically malleable.

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In order to better understand the cosmopolitan nature of Oman, we will briefly explain recent history of the country. Oman has a diverse history of invasion and economic fortune because of its position on one of the significant trade routes of the ancient world. The countries they inter-crossed the most are for sure Zanzibar, which was under the rule of Oman from 1861 to 1964. The result is very strong influence of Zanzibari and African culture and customs. Traditional Omani dance is under the huge impact of African Zanzibari rhythm and moves. Also as Oman has traded with India for centuries, the impact of Indian culture is enormous as Indians and Indian-Omanis are very significant part of population. In its third season the ROHM will be hosting Indian performances, including Nine Jewels of India that will present Panchtatva (Multi media musical on the 5 elements of nature). The relations between India and Oman started strengthening on the basis of mutual cooperation and self interest. Many Indian merchants have settled in Oman during the British rule. Under the British rule in India, Indo-Omani relations have entered into a new phase. In 1875, Britain proclaimed a law that “anyone who had settled in Muscat after the British

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<sup>30</sup> Bhabha, Homi K., *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994

<sup>31</sup> Kraidy, Marwan M., *Hybridity: or the cultural logic of globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple 2005).



assumed direct control over his native territory in India could obtain British protection”. The Indian expatriate community in Oman has immensely impacted on the life and culture of Omanis. Their influence is obvious in all spheres of life including official events. It is amazing to note that at the banquet reception which Sultan Qaboos bin Said hosted in honor of visiting Indian president, the band played was popular Hindi song from the film, Sholay ‘Yeh dosti hum nahin chodenge’. This symbolizes the deepness of bilateral cultural relations that both the countries are enjoying. Indian Cinema and music are very popular among the Omanis and they play an important role in augmenting bilateral cultural relations of both the countries. To promote the cultural relations, many agreements and Memorandum of Understandings have been signed between the two countries. Even though it is not accepted and common for Omanis to marry people of different countries marriages do happen, even with Europeans in recent years, though this is very difficult due to customs and traditions of Oman. Therefore the cosmopolitanism did contribute greatly to the birth of hybrid culture. Oman’s politics balance between East and West. Britain left the strong roots (the queen visits Oman regularly and HM Sultan Qaboos maintains solid relations with Britain) It is due to open-mindedness of, HM that Oman has the opportunity to witness many forwards looking cultural policies, one being the opening of the Royal Opera House. It is this interesting mix and history of the country that also contributed to Oman’s receptiveness and readiness to embrace something non-inherent to them alone – Opera.

### **3.4 Characteristics of Globalization**

The fact that ROHM is the opera created as a part of traditional eastern culture, however with a tendency to commercialize its programme by bringing the western artists, shows that the ROHM possesses the characteristics of globalization. Therefore we consider that it is important to explain the term of globalization through different theories.



Different cultural networks around the world are significant characteristic of the globalization.

Musical as a combination of popular and elite culture also defines globalization.

In the past, people across the globe did not have the ability to communicate and could not interact without difficulty. Nowadays, a phone, instant message, fax, or video conference call can easily be used to connect people. Additionally, anyone with the funds can book a plane flight and show up half way across the world in a matter of hours. In short, the "friction of distance" is lessened, and the world begins to metaphorically shrink.

A general increase in awareness, opportunity, and transportation technology has allowed for people to move about the world in search of a new home, a new job, or to flee a place of danger. Most migration takes place within or between developing countries, possibly because lower standards of living and lower wages push individuals to places with a greater chance for economic success.

As countries are connected to the rest of the world (through increased communication and transportation) they immediately form what a business would call a market. What this means is that a particular population represents more people to buy a particular product or service. As more and more markets are opening up, business people from around the globe are coming together to form multinational corporations in order to access these new markets. Another reason that businesses are going global is that some jobs can be done by foreign workers for a much cheaper cost than domestic workers; this is called outsourcing.

At its core globalization is an easing of borders, making them less important as countries become dependent on each other to thrive. Some scholars claim that governments are becoming less influential in the face of an increasingly economic world. Others contest this, insisting that governments are becoming more important because of the need for regulation and order in such a complex world system.

Is Globalization a Good Thing?

There is a heated debate about the true effects of globalization and if it really is such a good thing. Good or bad, though, there isn't much argument as to whether or not it is



happening. Let's look at the positives and negatives of globalization, and you can decide for yourself whether or not it is the best thing for our world.

#### Positive Aspects of Globalization

- As more money is poured in to developing countries, there is a greater chance for the people in those countries to economically succeed and increase their standard of living.
- Global competition encourages creativity and innovation and keeps prices for commodities/services in check.
- Developing countries are able to reap the benefits of current technology without undergoing many of the growing pains associated with development of these technologies.
- Governments are able to better work together towards common goals now that there is an advantage in cooperation, an improved ability to interact and coordinate, and a global awareness of issues.
- There is a greater access to foreign culture in the form of movies, music, food, clothing, and more. In short, the world has more choices.

#### Negative Aspects of Globalization

- Outsourcing, while it provides jobs to a population in one country, takes away those jobs from another country, leaving many without opportunities.
  - Although different cultures from around the world are able to interact, they begin to meld, and the contours and individuality of each begin to fade.
  - There may be a greater chance of disease spreading worldwide, as well as invasive species that could prove devastating in non-native ecosystems.
  - There is little international regulation, an unfortunate fact that could have dire consequences for the safety of people and the environment.
  - Large Western-driven organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank make it easy for a developing country to obtain a loan. However, a Western-focus is often applied to a non-Western situation, resulting in failed progress.
- Globalization in Oman is a result of bringing together different nationalities and creating ground for globalization. America in the beginning of 20ties is Middle |East in the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup>.



We see the creation and role of the ROHM as a positive aspect of globalization (it brings people of different nationalities together, introduces new art to Oman, but it must not let Oman's art and culture be over shadowed by all the outside influence)

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### **3.5 Approach of People to the Opera Omanis/Non-Omanis**

Culturally speaking Western cultures prize individual achievement and success. Asian cultures most value modesty and consensus. Eastern cultures focus on the contribution of the individual to social harmony and improvement. They are duty-oriented people who work hard to fulfill responsibilities to family, community, work group, society and country. Decision making in east cultures is based on gathering consensus and the final decision is made by the leader of the group after all range of views are considered. In the Chinese language as well as Arabic, the word for "self" carries a negative connotation which is similar to selfishness in interpretation. Even majority of east countries business letters have a red seal, which represents the whole company or government agency, rather than being signed by an individual. There is a proverb in Asia which says, "The nail that sticks up gets hammered down." Even though the country of China is massive and spans six time zones, there is only one standard time, which is that of Beijing. Even Arabic countries are 20 they all have the same official language from time of Prophet Mohammed from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, same religion and festivals. East cultures traditionally view others who don't consider the benefit of the group ahead of themselves as lacking in piety and duty.

Furthermore, what I found interesting is that according to the brain researches, West culture conditions people to think of themselves as highly independent entities. And when looking at scenes, westerners tend to focus on central object more than on surroundings. On contrary East Asian cultures stress independence. When Easterners

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<sup>32</sup> <http://geography.about.com/od/globalproblemsandissues/a/globalization.htm>, August 25th 2012, 8 am



take in a scene, they tend to focus more on the context, as well as the object: the whole block let's say rather than the car for example parked in the foreground.

These can lead to what was previously mentioned regarding individualistic and collective approach to life. The focus on group and community rather than individual among easterners, and focus on individuality in the west, both in life in general and art in particular. It is interesting that in Mandarin language the word privacy does not exist. The way art is perceived and received in the east and the west differs. In terms of aesthetic differences Realistic depiction of the human body has been important in Western art for centuries. The illusion of three-dimensional space being created on a two-dimensional painting is also a central part of Western art. Non-Western art may or may not focus on the human form, however. For example, geometric patterns are much more important than the human form in some forms of Islamic art, in fact drawing human figure is prohibited in Islam.

Culture plays a vital role in determining artistic products. Art can be affected by everything from food, language, social customs, music and literature and geographic location. As mentioned, many non-Western cultures focus on the family and the society, and art is often seen as communal. In fact, throughout history many painters and architects in Japan, West Africa, and all over the world have left works without their names on the art. Western culture places primary importance on the individual, which can be seen in the more self-expressive nature of much Western art. Philosophy and religion are important influences on many artists in all cultures. Christianity has been a powerful influence on Western art, as have secular philosophies that may have been reactions to Christianity. In much of Asian art, Buddhism and the depiction of the Buddha has shaped many artists. Hindu deities hold vast symbolic significance in India. The geometric patterns that are common in so much Islamic art are thought by some to represent the eternal nature of Allah, or God.

Now even though the Opera is the product of the West the fact that it is well received and not rejected by the audience from the East breaks *the prejudice as regards to accepting of Opera; opening of ROHM still contributes to the forming of Opera*



*audience.* The universal meaning of the Opera “the word” and smart and experienced management team of the Opera succeed in outreaching to the people and creating out of Opera a cultural habit of its people in generations to come.

It is very interesting to analyze the way Omani intellectuals perceive the opening and idea of Opera, a western musical and cultural phenomenon in the Middle Eastern country. The words and opinions of several part time performers and local folk musician Ahmed al Aرامي as well as the director of the Opera Mr. Ghazali will best show their perceptions.

Opinions of Omani musicians are ambivalent about the project, and they doubt and question whether its focus on western performers will overshadow promises by opera house officials to promote traditional local music. Abdulrahman al Dhahab, 78, a retired folk dancer based in Bani Bu Ali, in the eastern region of Oman, said: "Our own folk music and dancing traditions are dying and this expensive structure is going to promote somebody else's musical traditions. Aren't we importing right in our front yard foreign influence and watching our own culture going out of the window?"(The National, May 2011, 10 pm)

On the other hand the opinion of the opera house director, Hamed Abdallah al Ghazali, is different as he claims that the facility will promote local talent and revive interest in the local folk music. According to him, the opera house will be happy to host local musicians and dancers. At the same time, it will also serve as a pedestal to harmonize the local musical culture and that of the West, never conflicting with own rich musical traditions.

However, young local musicians who are struggling to preserve traditional Omani culture see the opera house as a golden chance to advance their musical ambitions. Ahmed al Aرامي, 28, a folk musician from Sur, in the eastern region mentioned that they currently perform only in weddings and rare corporate or official occasions and that is not enough to make a living out of music. With the opera house, we can perform regularly and have paying audience which will also give us the opportunity to revive the traditions of our forefathers," (The National, May 12<sup>th</sup> 2012, 2 pm)



Mr al Araithi is the leader of a troupe of 14 young men and women dancers and musicians, who want to carry on the traditions in the coastal town of Sur, which was a vital part of the ancient trade route to east Africa. To quit the job and become a full-time performer as per Aisha Rajab a member of Mr al Araithi's group who works as a hotel receptionist would be great. For now this is a wishful thinking. It is true that the efforts to involve Omani artists are being done, however first of all Opera is making the solid base by affirming itself internationally with the focus on popular repertoire and in later stage involve local artists who are working hard on achieving the artistic level opera entails

Others question the timing of such a project when many of the country's infrastructures are lagging behind:

"People think that before we build an opera house we should have thought about other crucial issues the Omani street defines as its everyday anguish that we need to get rid of. Some of the issues I am pointing at in here as some wouldn't know about or would know but may turn a deaf ear at are; the deprived, education, health, poor infrastructure, and the everyday hitches you and I felt fed up of repeating over and over again...maybe it was not the perfect timing or may be some issues must be addressed first and resolved before the inauguration of such venture."<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, the building is designed to promote local heritage. It is designed to feature an on-site cultural souq with museums, retail and coffee shops, and a village square. Some European expatriates living in the Sultanate, although surprised by the construction of the opera house, are very excited about the ROHM project. An opera house in the middle of a desert? Incredible! Random European interviewees shared great excitement about the ROHM. I hope they bring in the London Symphony Orchestra," Helen Blunden, 36, a British resident in Muscat, said on opening of the ROHM. (The National June 15<sup>th</sup> 2012, 11 am)

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<sup>33</sup> Nasser Al-Taei, "Mozart in Muscat..." Unpublished article



It was very interesting for me how one University Professor explains her impressions on meeting an artist and conveying message to young people.

While she had read in the papers that this prestigious opera house was built for Omanis, by being introduced to Andrea Bocelli by H E Rawiyah al Busaidiyah made her realize it was really true. She explained how welcome she felt as a lover and a champion of the Omani opera house.

This is the message she wanted to deliver to young Omanis out there. Few days after her wonderful experience as she was leaving the opera house after collecting her tickets, she noticed a few young Omanis at the door looking apprehensive. Being a strong supporter of the Omani opera house and an expert on intercultural communication, she approached them. What she found from one-hour conversation with them was astonishing.

She was informed that while those young Omanis wanted to pay a visit to this majestic building after seeing the out-of-this-world opening day on national television, they were afraid because the building and its accompanying security represented something they could not grasp; they thought it was something foreign made for foreigners.

She said that since she knows the opera house is an Omani establishment aimed at becoming a cultural centre serving first and foremost Omanis, she started explaining to them the idea behind ROH Muscat. She then described to them the magic of the opera and ended by explaining the role the establishment is playing in encouraging tourism and intercultural communication. By the end of her talk, they all enthusiastically promised that as soon as the programmes for the new season were in, they would go online and get tickets.

They also gave her a few key suggestions on how to make the opera house more welcoming to Omanis that she said she would gladly share with the opera board members.

In addition to speaking with these young people, she has also been preaching to her students at Sultan Qaboos University about the magic of classical music and the meaning of hosting the first opera house in the region. A few of her visually-impaired students were flabbergasted when she shared with them that she would personally buy them tickets for the new season so that they get a taste of what she was talking about.



Being skeptical at first, after through and passionate explanations, she made them realize they couldn't wait to hear what she was talking about.

It is no secret that the number of Omanis attending the great operas in its first season is not as large as it should be, and that most attendants are expatriates and tourists, which is great in its own way. However with great outreach programmes the situation is to improve.

People are usually apprehensive of what they don't understand. Dialogue is the only demystifier of that which causes us fear.

As per words of H.H. Sayed Kamel Bin Fahad Al Said-Member of Boards ROHM people should realize the importance of having a performing arts centre. “We could build roads, we could build hospitals, we could build schools, but there needs to be a cultural hub, you need to have performing arts centre, and I really wish Omanis see importance of this now and in the future. This will bring in tourism, it will enrich Omani educational programmes, this will inspire people to perform arts, this will create job opportunities. The effect ripple will be great and with time people will be seeing more and more.” (Times of Oman, July 20<sup>th</sup> 2012, 8pm)

#### **4. PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN ROHM AND ASPEN INSTITUTE**

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Considering very concept and visions of the Opera, it is important to highlight its multicultural role. The management of the ROHM has adopted western organizational methods and a majority of personnel on the high management positions are either expats or Omanis who have spent their lives abroad and acquired western education. Attempts to approach students especially are being made, as the staff and lecurers from ROHM are visiting Universities, mainly the biggest one Sultan Qaboos University in order to inform, educate and motivate the students to consider employment opportunities in Opera. The aim of Opera is to become a part of Omani



culture, a benchmark, a spontaneous cultural habit. In addition to this, a particularly interesting and forward looking exchange has been done between ROHM and Aspen Institute.

The Aspen Institute is an international nonprofit organization founded in 1950 as the Aspen Institute of Humanistic Studies. The organization is devoted to the fostering enlightened leadership, the appreciation of timeless ideas and values, and open-minded dialogue on contemporary issues. Together with its international partners the institute promote the pursuit of common ground and deeper understanding in a nonpartisan and no ideological setting through regular conferences, policy programs, seminars and leadership development initiatives. The institute has its headquarters in Washington, D.C., USA, and its campuses are in Aspen, Colorado(its original home) and near the shores of the Chesapeake Bay at the Wye River in Maryland. It has partner Aspen Institutes in Europe ( Berlin, Rome, Madrid, Lyon and Bucharest) Asia ( Tokyo, New Delhi) as well as leadership initiatives in the United States and in Africa, India, and Central America.

As a way to approach to the global world of culture ROHM organized a World Summit for creative arts on Aspen Institute's Global Initiative on Culture and Society. The event was organized by the opera house in conjunction with Aspen Institute.

### Opera house hosts creative arts world summit

The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM), in association with the US-based Aspen Institute, organized a three-day creative arts world summit titled "Arts in Motion".

Participants from over 30 countries, including nearly 80 Omanis took part in the summit and discussed a range of topics on performing arts and global dialogue.

"With summits like these, it creates a new space for global dialogue on culture where intellectual exchange and policy dialogue between Omanis and international participants will not only boost the image of the Royal Opera House Muscat but also make it one of the most influential and regular meeting place for the cultural world,"



said His Highness Sayyid Kamil Al Said.(Observer Newspapers 1st of December 2011 09:45:11 AM)

Numerous academics, artists, producers, policy-makers, designers, and other leaders in the sphere of arts, culture, and civic dialogue engaged in conversations on various topics. Topics included the effect of globalism on indigenous cultures, art and technology, storytelling, the development of cultural markets, and professional development for artists and arts practitioners.

"This summit recognizes and celebrates Oman's distinguished history of exploration, diplomacy, and exchange, as well as the Royal Opera House's commitment to continuing those traditions through performance and dialogue," said Brett Egan, Interim CEO of ROHM. (Observer Newspapers 1st of December 2011 09:45:11 AM)

According to Dr Rawiyah bint Saud Al Busaidiyah, minister of higher education, and chair of the Board of Directors at Royal Opera House Muscat, noted that the partnership is a unique momentous occasion and signals the commitment of the Royal Opera House Muscat to its mission of enriching lives through diverse educational, artistic, cultural and programmes that engage difference and promote timeless values. Aspen Institute Global Initiative on Culture and Society and the newly built state-of-the-art Royal Opera House Muscat (ROH Muscat) used this occasion to announce mutual strategic partnership and the planning of an unprecedented *ROH Muscat - Aspen Creative Arts World Summit* that was held in Muscat, Oman, November 28-30, 2011.

In the next paragraphs we will outline the views of important people on partnership between Aspen University and ROHM.

As the first meeting of its kind, the Summit engaged diverse stakeholders at many levels.

The director of the Aspen Institute Dr. Pwono said that "ROH Muscat has the necessary ingredients to make this nascent organization a strong force in cultural globalization with a significant impact on the worldwide quest for stewardship and cooperative engagement in the cultural sector."(CSR Wire, June 13<sup>th</sup> 2012, 5pm) He added that in order to discuss the challenges creativity brings and the extent to which they enhance or undermine innovation and public participation in cultural life the *ROH Muscat - Aspen Creative Arts World Summit* brings influential media, arts, and



culture professionals and organizations together. The Summit theme of Arts in Motion reflects shifting trends in the interpretation, presentation, and consumption of diverse artistic and cultural expressions in an interconnected world, the impact of social technologies, the status and mobility of young professionals, the emergence of new cultural markets or spaces, and the contribution of the arts to socioeconomic development and social change.

According to Eliot Gerson (executive vice president of Aspen Institute) designing and implementing legacy initiatives not only help in creating human and institutional capacity for cultural development in Oman, but also seed innovation in the broader field of arts and culture.

H.E. Hunaina Sultan Al-Mughairy (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Sultanate of Oman to the United States of America) welcomed the partnership between ROH Muscat and The Aspen Institute highlighting that this historic move will enhance ROHM's efforts to strengthen cultural exchanges and mutually beneficial relationships between the Sultanate of Oman and the United States.

The mission of this first opera house in the region is to enrich lives through diverse artistic, cultural, and educational programs engaging difference and promoting timeless values. The multidisciplinary work of ROH Muscat will showcase rich and diverse artistic creations from Oman, the region, and the world; provide a space for culture and socioeconomic development reflection and actions domestically and internationally; inspire audiences and nurture creativity with innovative programs; foster cultural vitality and unleash talent; sustain livelihoods through the arts and cultural tourism; and put cultural diplomacy into practice by reinvigorating global and multi-disciplinary collaborations and exchanges. The Aspen Institute mission is twofold: to foster values-based leadership, encouraging individuals to reflect on the ideals and ideas that define a good society, and to provide a neutral and balanced venue for discussing and acting on critical issues. The Aspen Institute does this primarily in four ways: seminars, young-leader fellowships around the globe, policy programs, and public conferences and events. Their missions make them perfect partners.



This cooperation is just the beginning and the door opener of Opera's initiatives to becoming famous on an international level within top cultural institutions in the world.

## **5. ESTABLISHING OF OPERA AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIETY**

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### **5.1 Incubation and Realization of the Idea**

A towering beacon shedding light on the various trends of the Renaissance march towards growth, Royal Opera House Muscat is an illustration of the undivided attention that His Majesty has devoted to the cultural sector since the new dawn of the Sultanate. His Majesty has repeatedly asserted that the human being is not only the ultimate goal of any development process, but also its instrument and means. Therefore, sustained investment in educational and cultural infrastructures to promote the wellbeing of the Omani citizens, while strengthening the pillars of the modern State, is a high priority on the list of noble goals that His Majesty seeks to achieve.<sup>34</sup>

In order to promote the Sultanate's cultural heritage and artistic engagement, Royal Directives were issued to develop a set of structures so as to widen people's participation in cultural life. Royal Opera House Muscat has emerged as the leading open house for arts and culture in the country. It was initially conceived in 2001 as the house for musical arts and its development over a decade underwent several changes reflecting the modernist vision of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and other requirements that enabled the Royal Court Affairs, with the assistance of various technical experts, to build what is now viewed as a milestone in the evolution of an Omani architectural style.

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<sup>34</sup> (<http://www.rohmuscat.org.om>, 6 July 2012, 3 pm)



The newly completed building is an interesting mix of Omani tradition and modernity. The construction of this iconic and majestic Royal Opera House Muscat building with stunning handmade ornaments, including the sophistication of its rich interior, is in many ways an embodiment of such complexity and multiplicity of references witnessed in Omani architecture.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said is himself an avid fan and promoter of classical music. His 120-member orchestra has a high reputation in the Middle East. The orchestra consists entirely of young Omanis who, since 1986, audition as children and grow up as members of the symphonic ensemble. They play locally and travel abroad with the sultan. Argentine composer Lalo Schifrin was commissioned to compose a work entitled *Symphonic Impressions of Oman* and the Sultan is particularly enthusiastic about the pipe organ. Originally, His Majesty only wanted to make a concert hall in his country. However gradually, as an idea has been incubating since 2001 the notion of Oman having an Opera House came into the picture.

The ROHM is more than just a medium for performing western music. Its mission is to preserve traditional values and servile constructive role in initiating dialogue between civilizations. Thus critics who highlight this from Omani- dimensional perspective fail to account the importance of the arts in over-all development of the young nation. A proper venue for arts is not only essential but economically and practically viable as it would place Oman on a world map as a leader in tourism, culture, art management and arts in the region. We can trace the development of the ROMH into early 1980s when HM (His Majesty Instructed) the foundation of Oman Centre for folklore and traditional music in 1983. This was followed by the establishment of the Royal Symphony Orchestra in 1985, made entirely of Omani instrumentalists trained in Oman and abroad by western artists; it served as Oman's ambassador, representing the country on high profile national and international celebrations. Two other oriental orchestras were established in the 80s along with Royal Jazz Band. Oman also features several radio stations that specialize in classical music 90.7 especially. Oman's philosophy of arts is nourished by HM's vision for the country which demands the investment in the Omani citizen as the inspiration and energy that fuels cultural, economic and artistic growth.



As Dr. Nasser Al Taei nicely elaborates, Sultan's greatest passion is music. It is more than a hobby and almost as important to him as politics. It is the subject on which he is most knowledgeable. When asked about the Russian composers, he specially likes and immediately answers: Tchaikovsky, Rimsky Korsakov and Rachmaninoff. But HM's passion for western music is always balanced with his love for Arab preservation of Omani folk music. If there is one word that summarizes His Majesty (referred in text as HM) HM's domestic and foreign policy for Oman, it is balance. On the occasion of opening the ROHM, HM issued a statement launching ROHM as a part of Oman's continued effort in establishing dialogue between civilizations. Oman throughout its long history has played prominent roles in various cultural fields and the time has come now to keep the rich march by means of adopting concepts of international and by effective contribution towards its promotion. Towards this end we have established ROHM as a centre for cultural radiance for Omani people and all humanity. ROHM has started a constructive role of Oman in the dialogue among civilizations and enriching cultural exchange, strengthening bonds of permanent friendship and cooperation. HM explained that they are sure the ROHM will play significant role in disseminating world heritage and reinforcing principles of peace, co-existence and understanding among all nations.

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## **5.2 Creating Extraordinary Opera**

A tribute to Islamic architecture, the Royal Opera House Muscat that opened in October 2011 houses an auditorium that is equipped for a sensational acoustic experience.

The eight-hectare sight with its landscaped gardens and interiors, evoke classical Islamic architecture, replete with ornate lightening and every aesthetic detail to please the senses. At the core of this Opera house is the 1,100-seat concert hall. One of the distinctive features of the concert hall's shell is a mobile structure that can be

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<sup>35</sup> Colloquium: "Music in Oman: Politics, Identity, Time, and Space in the Sultanate", 9 January 2012



detached to allow an adjustable proscenium to drop into place to create a traditional theatre format. The building design has evolved with these large moving structures to create a unique adaptable volume, which gives the venue unparalleled natural acoustic potential. This unique venue can be formatted as a 1,000-seat concert hall for musical performances or reduced in seating capacity for dramatic and operatic productions.

This room is extremely flexible, able to accommodate symphony concerts, recitals, chamber music, as well as fully staged productions of opera, dance, musicals and other aspects of more popular entertainment.

From a design standpoint, the challenges have been to try and integrate the technology, the infrastructure and equipment into a building with such a high standard and detail of finishes.

Conscious of the speed with which technology and equipment changes, the team is set about building a full but rock solid infrastructures that would not obstruct or hinder all anticipated uses and configurations. This is supported by high quality equipment throughout.

Envisaged by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said who is well-known for his love of classical music, the planning for ROHM began 10 years ago. Opera House Director, Hamid Abdulla Al Ghazali recalls that the first significant step in the project was in late 2001, when an international consulting company was appointed to study the feasibility of building a major concert venue. The final report of this study was presented in 2002, heading the way for international architectural competition for the design of a 1, 000 seat multi-purpose hall. A selected group of firms was invited by Royal Court Affairs to compete for the project, and after a number of stages, the contract was eventually awarded in August 2004. Over the subsequent few years, the initial designs of the building were reshaped through intense collaboration with Royal Court Affairs, to bring the designs more into the line with a historically inspired Omani style in civil architecture. Work eventually began on-site in the Qurum area in April 2007.

Companies below were involved in the creation of the Opera



**Client:** Royal Court Affairs, The Royal Estates-Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

**Consultant:** Theatre Project Consultants, United Kingdom

**Architects:** WATG and Partner LLC, Muscat Sultanate of Oman, [www.watg.com](http://www.watg.com)

**Main Contractor:** Carillion Alawi LLC, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman;  
[www.carillionplc.com](http://www.carillionplc.com)

**S&C Contractor:** Mustafa Sultan Secom LLC, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman  
[www.mustafasultan.com](http://www.mustafasultan.com) with technological support of Consultancy on Media Systems (COMS) – [www.coms.uk.com](http://www.coms.uk.com)

**Stage Engineering:** SBS Germany

**Production Lightening:** Al Moayad & LSI Projects

## **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE ROHM**

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Before saying anything about organization of the opera as the institution we will highlight that organizational structure of the ROHM was not made public, therefore there was no ground for an in depth research.

(Menadzment u Umetnosti, engl Management in Art, William J. Berns, 2009, Clio, page 206 - 246) was the resource used to explain the organizational system of cultural institutions.

Organization is a group of people that work together and that with the delegation of activities accomplishes mutual goal.<sup>36</sup>

Four advantages of organization are:

- Clear definition of delegations
- Definition of hierarchy and supervision

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<sup>36</sup> John R. Schermerhorn Jr, Management for Productivity, New York, 1968, page 161



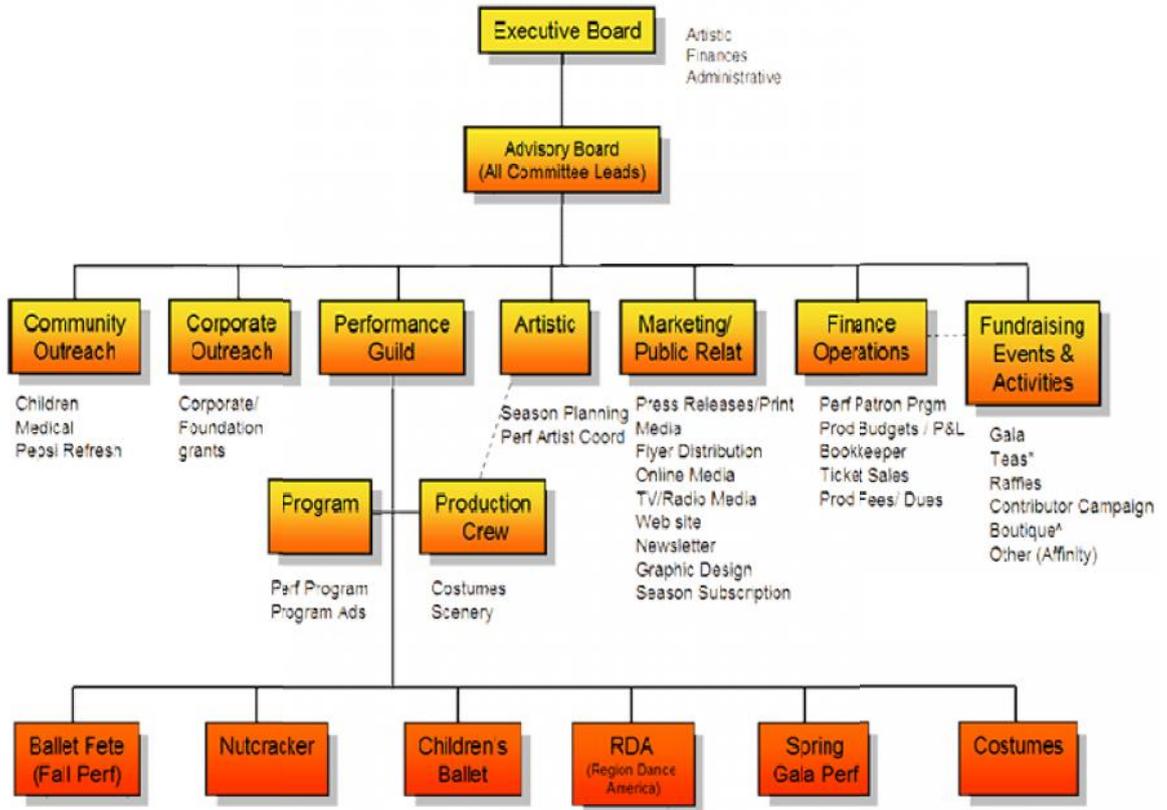
- Definition of specific channels of communication
- The appliance of recourses on defined aims and plans

The aim of organizational design and organization is accomplishment of desired results.

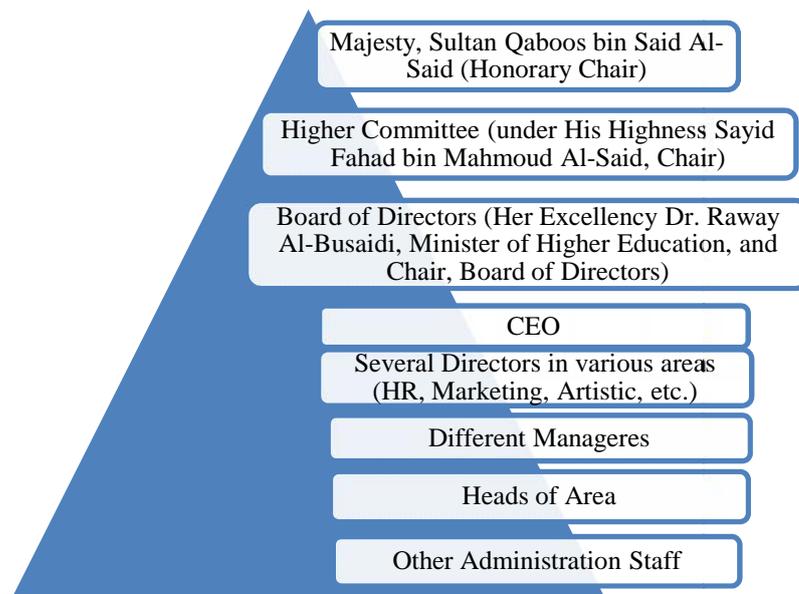
The theory of the management approaches organizational design using concepts such as: mechanical organizations opposed to organic, the relation with outside environment and level of administration within the organization. Characteristics of organic organization are less centralized structure, small number of detailed rules and regulations, often undefined workload designation. Mechanical organizations tend towards bigger centralization, greater number of rules, very precise workload designation. Metropolitan Opera will most probably adopt the aspects of mechanical organization, opposite to some smaller opera, such as for example Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. The ROHM being a grandiose opera most probably also like Metropolitan opera adopts the mechanical organizational type.

Organizational chart should have the role of the map showing the levels of management (high, low, medium). For example, high management in opera, theatre, symphonic orchestra would be art director, Board Director, executive director, music director, general manager. Technical director could be represented as medium management and workshop director as low management.

In order to better understand organizational scheme of opera and theatre we are using sample of organizational chart of Collin County Ballet theatre:



Based on our observation and what is mentioned in the press, the following can be mentioned regarding the organization and the team of the ROHM.



To conclude, every organization has informal structure that needs to be supervised by the relevant manager constantly. Organizations can adopt functional, sector or matrix



structure of work designation, or the combination of them all. The structures can be horizontal or vertical . Their structure, depending on the delegation and activity can either be organic or mechanical. Strong leadership contributes to the defining of the culture. Having realized successful first year since its opening Royal Opera House Muscat most probably also adheres to these principles.

## **7. AUDIENCE OF THE OPERA**

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From September 20 to December 21, 2010, the ROHM had its pre-launch season, featuring sixteen different concerts by wide variety of ensembles, performing orchestras as well as dance troupes from Argentina to China. "Musical Echoes," the three- month engagement sought to project various musical sounds from around the world and to test the Omani audience. The pre-launch program's engagements featured different programs: European classical music concerts, jazz, flamenco, Arabic music, Argentinian tango, Russian folk music, Chinese ballet, and Turkish folk music. The least attended were the European concerts by the Prague Chamber Orchestra and the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra while the most popular were the performing art dances This proves the affinity of Omani audience towards performing arts (they are more interested in concerts that include singing and dancing, as an extension of their own music which centers around vocal music and performance) as chamber orchestras are not popular and highly present in their artistic heritage.. Indeed, Arab music has a long tradition of sama (lit. listening), tarab (music ecstasy), and dancing (raqs) Historically it is interesting to note that "abstract music," "music for art sake," and "instrumental music" per se, however, did not exist in Oman, nor has there been many indigenous instruments aside from percussion. Additionally, perserving a strong tradition



in Oman of dance in tribal villages and amongst Bedouins with participation of men and women, dance is viewed from the point of view of celebrating heritage and communal rituals that is often not typically associated with sensuality.

Finally, the last performance was Mozart's early opera *La Finta Giardinera* by the Warsaw Chamber Opera. The premiere was very significant as it marked the first performance of a full opera in the country's history while posing questions concerning modernity, hybridity, interculturalism, , , and construction of the self in the small Gulf state.

ROHM inaugural season was well received by journalists in Oman and worldwide. Most Omani newspapers have included special sections devoted to ROHM and its programme. For most Omani citizens however, the ROHM project remains ambivalent endeavor aimed to promote foreign in Oman. Modernization and globalization in Oman have encouraged reassessment of native identities where indigenous communities adopt self-protective attitude towards foreign culture. In the case of ROHM these protective measures come in the form of ambivalence and prejudice towards the project rejections of its mission. According to one recent survey of 120 participants show the overwhelming opposition to ROHM's 73 % verses 23 % approval.

Similarly, report conducted in regional newspapers show that Omani musicians are divided about the project and question whether its focus on western performances will overshadow, and promotion of traditional folklore music. Abdul Rahman Al Dhab, a retired old dancer, based in Eastern region of Oman said that Omani old music and dances are dying and this expansive structure is going to promote somebody else's musical traditions watching own culture and tradition going out of the window. Similarly, published Omani forum by folklorist at Sultan Qaboos University triggered a one month long debate over the merit of ROHM. In the forum most Omanis wrote about lack of understanding of ROHM and more importantly questioned the wisdom behind such an institution when most Omanis are concerned about their jobs and improving the standard of living. While most Omanis continue to be ambivalent and divide in their opinions about ROHM and its role in creating positions, the ROHM director Hameed Al Ghazali sees the role of the ROHM as the window towards promotion of the local talent and revival of local folk music claiming that ROHM will



serve as a base to harmonize the local musical culture and the west, never conflicting with own rich musical traditions.

## **7.1 Role of the ROHM in the Society**

Oman's notion of identity and of how it relates to the world is evolving. Despite assimilation of nationalities, bonds with heritage, national costume, Islamic religion and architecture, there is strong and gradual trend towards modernization as infrastructure of the country develops. HM's recent speech confirms the policy of modernization and balance. Quote: "Enlightenment is highly important to truly understand issues and give no space for baseless speculation as Sultanate's policy is based on achieving balance and life cooperation and love among all." (Speech of His Majesty at The Opening of the 5th Term of The Council of Oman 31st October 2011)

Institution like music and art can be seen here as reflections of complexity and layering whereof anticity and hybridity collide to form what Simon Frith<sup>37</sup> called "The New Authenticity". The selections of the ROHM to opening season are not surprising. Puccini's Turandot and Bizet's Carmen rare not arbiter as they seek to present Oman to the world as a modern state that is ready to compete with masterpieces and with its own new productions. Turandot and Carmen in Oman delineate adaptation of oriental works as part of Omani history.

### **7.1.1 AUDIENCE BUILDING AT THE ROHM**

One of the most demanding, challenging tasks for ROHM is building audiences. For a culture that has no history of theater going, this can require a lot of endeavor and be a true challenge. It entails careful planning, smart marketing, ticket purchasing, and program selection in advance within a culture that is based on spontaneity. The proof

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<sup>37</sup> **Simon Frith** is a British sociomusicologist, and former rock critic, who specializes in popular music culture. He is currently Tovey Chair of Music at University of Edinburgh.



of the popularity of opera in Oman is the fact that for the first two seasons, many Omanis were unable to purchase tickets for shows because by the time they made up their decisions, the tickets were sold out. This is because Europeans had many advantages: they were already acquainted with the artists as well as the works being performed, they have a long culture of attending concerts and musical events, and in Oman they typically have higher salaries. Omanis, on the other hand, are accustomed to being spontaneous, receiving tickets for free, and, to many, they simply could not afford to buy tickets for an entire season in advance.

Education and outreach initiatives primarily made by the efforts of Dr. Nasser Al Taei, can play a big impact on the young society. The long-term idea is to instill the love of music and the arts from an early age to children and students while at the same time engaging adults in outreach programming. Too often, this aspect of education and community outreach which is pivotal as strategy of promoting the opera, is dismissed in the euphoria of mounting “program” events. It is important to mention that in its second season, education and outreach forged new initiatives towards building audiences and widening the circle of Omani participants through open house events, tours, pre-performance talks, lectures, and by building alliances with local organizations. These initiatives were extremely popular and most targeted events were sold out within days. The aim opening the house to a wider segment of Omani community that did not get a chance to attend the sold out event was achieved. In the process, it served to demystify the elitist concept behind the music presented.

In spite of the adoption of the slogans “ROHM is for all Omanis” and “ROHM is a majlis for all Omanis, there were many misunderstandings emanating from the mission of the house. One event that comes to mind was a press conference by the head of the Omani film Organization who wanted to host the opening of their annual festival at the ROHM. In his interview with newspapers, he claimed that the ROHM is not for Omanis but for those who built it (i.e., non-Omanis). The Board of Directors was quick to rectify this and reassure, but the Board of Directors also realized that this was an inevitable outcome when one launches a new organization and simply do not have the adequate staff to promote the message to the community. While being extremely focused on promoting the programme ROHM’s staff forgotten to market to the public slogan, and the message was simply not getting through.



For the third season, efforts are underway to involve Omani artists. Omani musicians during open house events and students will be able to tour the ROHM. To increase participation, ROHM will need to diversify participation by attracting different kinds of people, broaden their participation, and deepen their involvement. To accomplish some of these initiatives, plans are underway for embarking on new initiatives like: forming a guild of volunteers called Friends of ROHM, visiting schools, establish a teacher's development program, conduct open rehearsals for students, and exhibit our artists' work. It is also important to establish programs outside the ROHM venue, since people are more likely to attend arts and cultural events at community locations, festivals, cafes, and the mall than the prestigious house. Because of the novelty of the concert going culture, Omani are more likely to engage with the arts while doing other things like socializing, drinking and eating, in a less formal setting.

The attendance of the Arabic programs is the reason to concern. Two prominent factors contributed to this: bad programming and lack of educational and marketing strategies. While ROHM attracted few big names in its first two seasons, only the Lebanese Majda Al-Rumi was a great success. Composers like Ammar Al-Sharay and Omar Khairat of Egypt were moderately attended as well as the Syrian Omar Sarmini, Tunisian Sonia M'barek were not sellout events. People attend ROHM events to experience high quality art and to support the organization because it is an important addition to their community.

As Dr Nasser Al Taei beautifully explains, this obstacle can represent an opportunity on the other hand. How? If ROHM plans Arab concerts in advance, market them well, educate our citizens about their historical value and style, the organization can increase and diversify its audiences. Here the role of education and outreach is immensely important. Also as the expats live in Oman, regularly attending Western performances, with the financial means to do so; encouraging them to attend will help diversify audience and enrich the complexity of different events.

Furthermore, it is the lack of marketing that can lead to empty seats. In Oman is the country where culture and habit of purchasing tickets has yet to mature, the staff of the ROHM remains cautious about "papering the house" when tickets are not sold as expected, which can result in attendance over the long-term:



“Once a show starts to give away tickets, the perceived quality of the show diminishes. People think the show must not be any good. Also, if an audience member isn’t paying for a ticket, there’s no incentive for that person to show up.

Overall, ROHM’s first two seasons were great success and the challenge of building a broader base audience that is supportive and committed to the mission of the organization will require marketing, great programming, and ambitious education and outreach initiatives. <sup>38</sup>

## **7.2 Audience in different Time and Space**

### **7.2.1 Definition of Audience**

An **audience** is a group of people who participate in a show or encounter a work of art, literature (in which they are called "readers"), theatre, music (in which they are called "listeners"), video games (in which they are called "players"), or academics in any medium. Audience members participate in different ways in different kinds of art; some events invite overt audience participation and others allowing only modest clapping and criticism and reception.

Media audience studies have become a recognized part of the curriculum. Audience theory offers scholarly insight into audiences in general. These insights shape our knowledge of just how audiences affect and are affected by different forms of art. The biggest art form is the mass media. Films, video games, radio shows, software (and hardware) and other formats are affected by the audience and its reviews and recommendations.

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<sup>38</sup> Nasser Al-Tae, "Mozart in Muscat..." Unpublished article.



## Types of Audience

### **Particular (real) audiences**

In rhetoric, particular audiences depend on circumstance and situation, and are characterized by the individuals that make up the audience. Particular audiences are subject to persuasion and engage with the ideas of the speaker. Ranging in size and composition, particular audiences can come together to form a "composite" audience of multiple particular groups.

### **Immediate audiences**

An immediate audience is a type of particular audience that is composed of individuals who are face-to-face subjects with a speaker and a speaker's rhetorical text or speech. This type of audience directly listens to, engages with, and consumes the rhetorical text in an unmediated fashion. In measuring immediate audience reception and feedback, (audience measurement), one can depend on personal interviews, applause, and verbal comments made during and after a rhetorical speech.

### **Mediated audiences**

In contrast to immediate audiences, mediated audiences are composed of individuals who consume rhetorical texts in a manner that is different from the time or place in which the speaker presents a text. Audiences who consume texts or speeches through television, radio, and Internet are considered mediated audiences because those mediums separate the rhetor and the audience. Understanding the size and composition of mediated audiences can be difficult because mediums such as television, radio, and Internet can displace the audience from the time and circumstance of a rhetorical text or speech. In measuring mediated audience reception and feedback, (audience measurement), one can depend on opinion polls and ratings, as well as comments and forums that may be featured on a website.

### **Theoretical (imagined) audiences**

Theoretical audiences are audiences that are imagined for the purpose of helping the speaker compose, or a critic to understand, a rhetorical text or speech.

### **Self as audience (self-deliberation)**

When a rhetor deeply considers, questions, and deliberates over the content of the ideas they are conveying, it can be said that these individuals are addressing the



audience of self, or self-deliberating. The audience of self, while not serving as the ends to all rhetorical purpose or circumstance, nevertheless acts as a type of audience that not only operates as a function of self-help, but as instrument used to discover the available means of persuasion.

### **Universal audience**

The universal audience is an imagined audience that serves as an ethical and argumentative test for the rhetor. It requires the speaker to imagine a composite audience that contains individuals from diverse backgrounds and to discern whether or not the content of the rhetorical text or speech would appeal to individuals within that audience. Scholars Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca ascertain that the content addressed to a universal audience "must convince the reader that the reasons adduced are of a compelling character, that they are self-evident, and possess an absolute and timeless validity".

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The concept of the universal audience has received criticism for being idealistic because it can be considered as an impediment in achieving persuasive effect with particular audiences.

Yet, it still may be useful as an ethical guide for a speaker and a critical tool for a reader or audience.

### **Ideal audience**

An ideal audience is a rhetor's imagined, intended audience. In creating a rhetorical text, a rhetor imagines a target audience, a group of individuals that will be addressed, persuaded, or affected by the speech or rhetorical text. This type of audience is not necessarily imagined as the most receptive audience, but as the future particular audience that the rhetor will engage with. Imagining such an audience allows a rhetor to formulate appeals that will grant success in engaging with the future particular audience. In considering an ideal audience, a rhetor can imagine future conditions of mediation, size, demographics, and shared beliefs among the audience to be persuaded.

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<sup>39</sup> The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation, Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, Notre Dame 1969, page 20



### **Implied audience**

An implied audience is an imaginary audience determined by an auditor or reader as the text's constructed audience. The implied audience is not the actual audience, but the one that can be inferred by reading or analyzing the text. Communications scholar Edwin Black, in his essay, *The Second Persona*, presents the theoretical concept of the implied audience using the idea of two personae. The first persona is the implied rhetoric (the idea of the speaker formed by the audience) and the second persona is the implied audience (the idea of the audience formed by and utilized for persuasion in the speech situation). A critic could also determine what the text wants that audience to become or do after the rhetorical situation. Is a group of people who enjoy listening to various music or speeches. The person who empowers them the most. Is it reformed yes or no?

### Characteristics of Opera Audience

A performance of opera in itself is nothing without its audience” ( Graham Vick, artistic director of the Birmingham Opera Company, during a keynote address delivered at the Valencia Conference of Opera Europa on March 11 – 13, 2005).

There are many types of audience. An opera audience is one that likes opera and enjoys it primarily for the music.

Opera is an art form that has a potentially large world audience. Because it tends to be sung in a foreign language, most audience members have come to accept that they needn't understand every word to appreciate and enjoy the performance.

“The audience for opera is growing faster than for any other arts medium except film” was the conclusion reached in the “Opera For Now” report in the United Kingdom.

The audience for all art forms, except opera, are aging faster than did the entire sample”, which included various age groups, is concluded by the “Age and Arts Participation” study funded by the National Endowment for the Arts in the USA, .

For the soloists, choir, musicians, conductor interacting with your audience is not an easy matter. A laughing audience at an opera usually means that something is wrong.



On the other hand, a clapping audience, particularly at the end of a difficult aria or choral ensemble, is very desirable.<sup>40</sup>

### **7.3 Audience of the East and West = Characteristics**

In this chapter I will analyze the Opera of Italy in 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> century, in its blooming period, and then I will explain the reception of the Opera in America today. Finally, I will portray the reception and perception of opera in Oman where Opera is very new cultural phenomenon. Opera in Italy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was perceived as enjoyment and social gathering, like people enjoy popular culture (pop concerts for example today ) after influence of Wagner, opera got the new frame, serious, elite, and was not intended for “everyone”. However, it is interesting that before opera was received as elite culture, audience experienced the relaxing part of it. As opera is a music piece it enables wider impression of the audience, (we are referring to the opera of Italy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Now, audience in Oman enjoys opera in order to socialize and as gateway from everyday life. They enjoy the spectacle, performing arts and not only “the big idea” that elite culture conveys. Therefore, it is important for them to perceive opera as not something untouchable and unknown but as a part of everyday cultural life.

In order to better understand what a modern-day audience experiences in the theaters of North America, it is important to consider what audiences experienced when the major Italian works in the cannon premiered. Who was the targeted audience? Italian opera was depicted as entertainment where people were talking, eating, flirting, even playing cards enjoying the evenings at the opera. The opera house was the most important social environment in most Italian cities. It reinforced social status through the physical placement of spectators in the hall. For instance it is interesting that at Il Teatro San Carlo in Naples the number of candles a man kept in front of his box correlated directly with his ranking in the social hierarchy. This house (constructed in 1737) was one of Italy’s most important opera houses. Yet, San Carlo audiences were known throughout Europe for their lack of manners.

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.yusypovych.com>, August 23 2012, 9pm



So as to obtain a better picture about Italian audiences we will briefly analyze audience of Teatro alla Scala in Milan.

The Milanese audience was better in behavior than their Neapolitan counterparts. La Scala was also, for a time, the only place in Milan where gambling was permitted. Displays of disapproval during a performance were prohibited. It was also forbidden to call back a performer to the stage more than once. Moreover, majority of the evenings in the opera started around 8 and finished after midnight. Both instrumental and vocal numbers were applauded so extensively that several of them were repeated during the performance. After the opera was finally over, Verdi was called onto the stage four times, as people cheered, waving their handkerchiefs.

41

Opera in Italy during 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century was social, loud, and exciting. The atmosphere of Italian opera houses in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century was quite different from the atmosphere in opera houses today. “ those now accustomed to go to the opera and listen without distractions of any kind should realize that the general public’s habit of listening avidly to an entire performance has been comparatively recently formed”.<sup>42</sup> If that is the case, who or what changed the way we experience opera?

#### Who Turned Out The Lights?

It was Wagner who was the one to “taught” the audience to listen to the opera properly. In theaters influenced by Wagner (like his own theater, Bayreuth) the construction of the theater itself and the parameters surrounding performances demanded that the audience listen to an entire performance. “Wagner turned down the

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<sup>41</sup> (First Nights at the Opera, Thomas Forest Kelly, Yale University Press, 2006, page 373-382).

<sup>42</sup> “Opera Before Mozart” Michael Robinson, Hutchinson University Library (1966), page 40



lights, hid the orchestra, and designed a theater that would keep people in their seats “

43

Wagner believed that by making drama as universally intelligible as possible, everyone would be able to enjoy it. He wanted his audience, through looking and hearing, to be totally transferred onto the stage. Audiences were meant to live the drama and forget that they were in a theater. Wagner hoped this would direct the audience towards a greater humanity. But in order to achieve this goal Wagner had to both create and educate the audience in which he succeeded. This ideal spread and has had a huge impact on the way we enjoy the performing arts today. In the centuries before, Wagner audiences were well aware that they controlled the opera, opera did not control them. The noise they created was evidence to that fact. After Wagner, however, the power dynamic shifted. This is the moment when audiences began to place opera on a pedestal. This new-found silence and focus from the audience finally allows artists to strive for perfection and reach new artistic heights. On the other hand it could be that this was the beginning of the opera crisis - the moment when people began to be intimidated and/or bored by the opera, despite Wagner's good intentions. Opera came to be serious, and the audience wasn't allowed to have its own space for entertainment.

### **7.3.1 Opera as a cultural habit Today**

Attending opera in North America today is a very different experience from the way Opera was attended in Italy centuries ago. Much of the excitement and 'newness' that accompanied opera in 19th century Italy has passed. In North America today, new works are a rarity. "Audiences are conservative and avoid the sometimes difficult sounds of modern art music"<sup>44</sup> (Pleasants, 9-17). The audience has a demand of their favorite operas like *La Bohème* and *The Magic Flute*. Management is in the situation where it promotes performing the most popular operas over and over again. "we

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<sup>43</sup> Grand Opera, Anthony Gishford, London 1972, page 114

<sup>44</sup> Opera in Crisis, Henry Pleasants, IST edition, November 1989, page 9-17



compensate for this inherent lack of newness by creating new productions and wild re-interpretations of old works. This tradition, too, can be traced back to Wagner who championed the theatrical reinterpretation of past works. <sup>45</sup>

Pleasants think that opera institution has almost reached the point of ritual, as most people go to the opera today just as they go to church, sincere enough in their worship, whether of God or Beethoven, but also savoring the respectability of their attendance and the assumption of connoisseurship. Essentially, Pleasants argues that attending the opera as a connoisseur allows a spectator to feel part of an elite club with its own rituals. <sup>46</sup>

Clapping at the wrong moment for example in the opera today is also an embarrassing offence to operatic ritual. This ritual takes place in a custom-built hall designed to keep out all distraction and has been established and maintained by the greatest admirers of opera. music students are included in this group and they are the ones who keep opera on a pedestal, demanding conditions for the best possible musical performance. It is Wagner's ideal audience; trained, initiated and eager to seek a higher purpose in music. Lindenberger, in his book *Opera, The Extravagant Art* recognizes this desire, explaining that "like other ceremonial forms...opera can draw us temporarily out of our individual selves and raise us to what we take to be a higher form of consciousness" (Lindenberger, 285). With this goal in mind, Wagner's 19th century theatrical aesthetic, that focuses all attention on the stage, has become accepted performance practice here in North America. Control over operatic experience has finally shifted completely from the audience to the performer.

The ritual ensures a higher quality of performance, however at the same time it is being very exclusive. Most operatic works are in Italian, French and German, not in English, the native language of most patrons which makes it difficult for majority to fully enjoy it. Many others find opera boring. Lindenberger explores many famous accounts of this, including cartoons from the *New Yorker* that feature a bored middle-class husband being dragged to the opera by his wife. <sup>47</sup> We don't want to thing

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<sup>45</sup> *Sociology of Opera*, David Evens, Arena, 1998, page 200

<sup>46</sup> *Opera in Crisis*, Henry Pleasants, IST edition, November 1989, page 67

<sup>47</sup> *Opera in History: From Monteverdi to Cage*, Herbert Lindenberger, Stanford University Press 1998, page 200



that it is the music that has caused this boredom and intimidation. The problem lies in the way the audience experiences opera. opera's length contributes to audience boredom. If Verdi and Rossini were great composers that knew how to please an audience, would they not take into consideration the audience's usual behavior when composing an opera? Audience demand greatly impacted the numbers of arias written into operas during the 19th century- so why shouldn't audience inattention effect the way a composer wrote opera.

#### **7.4 Audience of the ROHM**

Now, taking into consideration concept of the ROHM it is interesting to observe the reactions of the audience regarding different shows. Opera in Oman is part of elite culture, however ROHM's team wants to outreach to everyone. And by surveying different people we concluded that everyone showed the interest to be a part of it. Local people's only repulsion is reflected through grasping Opera as something foreign. That is why mainly locals attend opera in order to get attain certain social status. They are attracted by the monumentality of the building, new concept of culture and by the fact that attending opera provides them with cultural prestige. Yet, with the efforts of the organizers the prejudice of opera as something foreign will hopefully disappear very soon. The very building attracts the audience with its architecture as it is open on many parts towards outside, symbolically inviting people to come. The whole concept of the opera tells to the citizens, "Come, be a part of Islamic community and our new culture"

In order to find out people's attitude and reactions regarding ROHM I conducted a random online survey (200 participants) named "How do you perceive Royal Opera House Muscat" with following questions:

##### **1. Which age group you belong to?**



Response

|              | Percent |
|--------------|---------|
| 20 - 30      | 16.7%   |
| 30 - 40      | 58.3%   |
| 40 - 50      | 4.2%    |
| 50- - 60     | 12.5%   |
| 60 and above | 8.3%    |

**2. What is your gender?**

Response

|        | Percent |
|--------|---------|
| Male   | 64.0%   |
| Female | 36.0%   |

**4. How often do you attend events at Royal Opera House Muscat?**

|                              | Percent |
|------------------------------|---------|
| Never                        | 41.7%   |
| Once per year                | 25.0%   |
| Twice per year               | 25.0%   |
| Three times a year           | 4.2%    |
| More than three times a year | 4.2%    |

**5. If you do not attend events at Royal Opera House Muscat, why not?**



Response

|                                   | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|---------|
| Cost of Events                    | 12.5%   |
| Show times are inconvenient       | 6.3%    |
| Types of shows do not interest me | 25.0%   |
| Other (please specify)            | 56.3%   |

**6. What types of shows would entice you to attend a performance at Royal Opera House Muscat?**

Response

|                          | Percent |
|--------------------------|---------|
| Classical Music          | 29.2%   |
| Stand-up Comedy          | 8.3%    |
| Theatrical-Comedy        | 12.5%   |
| Theatrical-Drama         | 8.3%    |
| Traditional Music        | 0.0%    |
| Blues/Jazz               | 12.5%   |
| Pop/Rock                 | 4.2%    |
| Children's entertainment | 0.0%    |
| Other (please specify)   | 25.0%   |

**7. What activities would you/ do you enjoy at Royal Opera House Muscat?**

Response

|                        | Percent |
|------------------------|---------|
| Dances                 | 45.5%   |
| Educational activities | 4.5%    |



|                        |       |
|------------------------|-------|
| Galleries              | 27.3% |
| Town Hall Meetings     | 0.0%  |
| Receptions             | 4.5%  |
| Other (please specify) | 18.2  |

The survey also contained following questions: **3. Have you ever seen an opera or theatrical performance?, 8. What is the general public perception of Royal Opera House Muscat? Do people enjoy it or consider it a waste of money? 9. Do you believe that Royal Opera House Muscat is for all living and visiting Oman, or is it just for certain people in the country? 10. What does the older generation think of Royal Opera House Muscat?** By analyzing the answers we discovered opinions are divided mainly concerning whether the concept of opera is for everyone or no. According to half it is only for certain class of people whereas other half thinks it is for everyone, however institution does impose certain characteristics of prestige: clothing, ticket prices, level of education-most of the tickets are purchased online, the very architecture of the building makes it glamorous. Also, the survey showed that 42%, majority, enjoy performing arts (dances in particular) which is typical and more common for Arabic arts.

The answers to question number 5 “If you don’t not attend shows at the Opera, why Not” are varied. But commonly shared attitude is that there is insufficient marketing campaign and people are not informed of the shows at the opera. Also ticket prices are one of the reasons as well as availability of prices which are sold much in advance without giving a proper notice. Significant number of local people and Arabs said that the shows are boring for them and overpriced, thus that is the reason they do not go to the Opera. As regards ticket prices, the third season will offer more affordable packages, starting from OMR 3, which equals to 6 euros.

The answers to question 6, What types of shows would entice you to attend a performance at the ROHM are very different, which is actually very good, as the programme of the Opera encompasses all these different performances from classical music and ballet to jazz, musicals and children’s shows. Among the answers there were 10 people who expressed the wish for more commercial artists to perform, such



as Celine Dion Mariah Carey. And among the surveyed almost everyone said that they do enjoy the variety and mix of different types of performances.

I received interesting answers to question “What is the general public perception of Royal Opera House Muscat? Do people enjoy it or consider it a waste of money?”

The biggest number of questioned audience think that the ROHM is a great asset to the country’s image, that majority of people are enjoying it and are proud to have an institution as the ROHM in their country. Some enjoy it for prestige some for passion According to 13, Arabic people and conservative circles consider it waste of money. People aged between 20 and 30, say that the main reason the ROHM is enjoyed is as there is not much entertainment on Oman. Age group Between 30 and 40 definitely does not consider it a waste of money, on country they claim it is a great value for money. Our favorite answer is by a lady age 20 – 30: It is prestige and an indicator that Oman is interesting itself into developing itself on a human/cultural level that will positively benefit the whole of the country and its general perception abroad. 30% believe that opinions are extremely divided.

Answers to question 9 “Do you believe that Royal Opera House Muscat is for all living and visiting Oman, or is it just for certain people in the country?” are divided.

Half think it is for everyone: locals, tourist, expats, younger generation and older as well. Other half think that Opera is reserved for certain group of people; elite and upper class; or it can be for everyone but certain etiquette needs to be preserved (such as clothing). There are opinions among students of Sultan Qaboos University that it should be for everybody but not enough attempts are made to include a wider spectrum of the population and that it is for entire nation as it is a gift to the nation by the ruler of the country. However, it is not affordable to everyone in the country. They also think that it is for the benefit of all people in Oman, but at the moment most benefiting are those which are culturally more inclined to visit classical music events. Local population mostly benefits through educational exposure to this foreign concept of entertainment.



## 8. CONCLUSION

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Finally, judging by the research, the acceptance of opera in Oman has good potential for development among the local people. Considering survey analysis and interviews, attitudes are rather positive bearing in mind opera is completely new cultural phenomenon in the country. We drew conclusion about this on the basis of following parameters we obtained:

- Audience regularly visits the performances (According to the data we obtained from management of the opera, performances in the one season were sold out well in advanced).
- Survey showed that audience has a welcoming attitude towards the Opera
- Acceptance of foreign performers ,shy acceptance, but acceptance of the elements of western culture and planning for creation of own original opera production is present

Second hypothesis *Interesting tendency and focus of the management of Royal Opera House Muscat on bringing famous artists and commercial repertoire* can be proven by analyzing the following:

- In order for opera to develop itself; production, management and performance wise it needs to show the performances of worldly renowned artists; this is presented by the popular repertoire we explained previously in the text
- Famous artists will express their grandiose impressions about the Middle East in general and Oman in particular, therefore promoting Oman on an international level. With them they bring the cultural memories of one ambience that is unknown to the west
- Performances are visually very rich, technically very demanding. Considering the investments into bringing of artists and entire production it is evident that the ROHM wishes to walk in pace with world best opera houses



However the biggest threat for Opera in Omani circles is to be represented to them as something foreign. In that respect management team of the Opera is doing magnificent job by balancing the programme, big credit goes to Head of programme department Dr. Issam al Mallah and outreaching the society on educational and social level by great efforts of Dr. Nasser Al Tae. This educational outreach is actually amazing long term project and it can impact Oman on various levels and truly accomplish the vision of HM of investing in a human being as the most important aspect of social development.

As regards to management emphasis on bringing famous artists, we must understand that Opera in Oman is something unknown and the only way to make a huge positive impression is to give its people something unique and extraordinary. After getting familiar with opera, after creating a habit of attending performances, audience will have more varied taste, therefore there wouldn't be a need to bring so many famous names in order to allure. So the inaugural season is indeed big promotion of Oman on international level and opera on a local level. The role is two sided, giving to Oman something new and exotic as well as giving the world more knowledge and insight into Arabic culture and Oman. Judging by the survey analysis of the audience and management strategies of the board, the audience of the opera has strong potential to develop out of the opera a continuous cultural habit. Opera also contributes to breaking the prejudice among westerners - that some of them have due to political conflicts with Arabs, because their most acknowledged artists, present and will continue to ambassador Oman as benign friendly and very open minded Gulf country.

“Do not be surprised if a decade from now some of the most interesting arts projects in the world are emanating from a nation that many of us could not identify on the map.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com), Michael Kaiser (President, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts)23 August 2012, 8 am



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## **Biography**

Sara Vuletic was born on May 7<sup>th</sup> 1985 in Valjevo, Serbia. In the year 2004 she completed her high school studies in Valjevo Grammar School. Showing always great talent and interest in foreign languages and exploring different cultures, she decided to enroll in Faculty of Philology at the University of Belgrade at the department of Arabic Language and Literature. The endeavor, passion and dedication which she invested in four year undergraduate studies were awarded when Sara was proclaimed the best student of generation at the entire Faculty of Philology (the best among 2000 students approximately).

Sara's education also involves various conferences. Some of which are: Congress for young talents in art fields in Maribor 2003, where she represented her town as a creative writer in English; Habib Bourguiba Institute, Course and Seminars on Politics, History and Language of the Middle East for Advanced Arabic Students, Tunisia 2007; Ethnography Seminars in Research Centre Petnica (2000-2005)

After university graduation, mainly due to financial reasons but also out of great wish to master Arabic language and learn more about Arabic culture from the perspective of living in the Arab world, Sara started working with Emirates Airlines as a cabin crew. Despite honors received from customers and high management team, after one year and a half in Dubai with Emirates, Sara decided to take upon a different call which suited her professional interests more and started working with reputed International Engineering Consultancy, Energoprojekt Entel in Muscat branch office as *office administrator* where she is the single point of contact as *translator* for 3 of their worldwide branch offices where she is still employed. She also writes, on special request for the local newspaper, Observer - Oman; articles on special events, including culture, fashion and sport's events.

Sara's innermost interests and passion were always related with culture and arts. She has been a solo singer since the age 16 and co-author (text writer) and singer in the



performing arts music project “Amber - The Quest for the Light – within” performed in Norway and Serbia together with Vladimir Puhac. She has been actively involved in the organization of the Oman International Salsa and Dance Festival 2011, 2012.

Furthermore, Sara got involved in work with the Royal Opera House, Muscat as a Spanish interpreter when Tango Metropolis from Argentina performed in ROHM in March 2012. This was a platform for her to learn in details about the institution for which she has great admiration and respect and eventually she decided to write a master thesis on the *Reception of the Royal Opera House Muscat* and its Impact on Citizens of Oman.

Her greatest hobbies are: music, dance, creative writing, tennis, theatre and cinema.

Languages: Serbian (mother tongue), English & Arabic (fluent), French & Spanish (upper-intermediate)