



DOHA 27°C–35°C TODAY

PUZZLES 14 & 15

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Round & About

Birla Public School hosts the 18th inter-school quiz competition at the school auditorium this Friday. The preliminary contest will be held tomorrow.

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Cinema

The versatile Irrfan Khan is heading the top Narrative Feature Competition jury at the Abu Dhabi Film Festival.

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Community

The Katara European Jazz Festival will feature top jazz artistes from around the world.

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REHEARSAL: Claudio Cohen conducting the rehearsal at the Katara Opera House ahead of tomorrow's grand concert.

Photo by Shemeer Rasheed



The maestro

Be it conducting operas, ballads, or Mahler symphonies, Brazilian Claudio Cohen is at ease across all styles. **P4-5**



Hollywood

After two Tony awards and a pair of Oscar nominations, Viola Davis finally arrives as a star in *Murder*.

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Community

Celebrating Global Customer Appreciation Week in Doha, Marriott Marquis Hotel reached out to its loyal patrons in special ways.

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Kids' day out at the opera house



GROUP PHOTO: Students pose with guest conductor Claudio Cohen as QPO plays on in the background.

By our correspondent

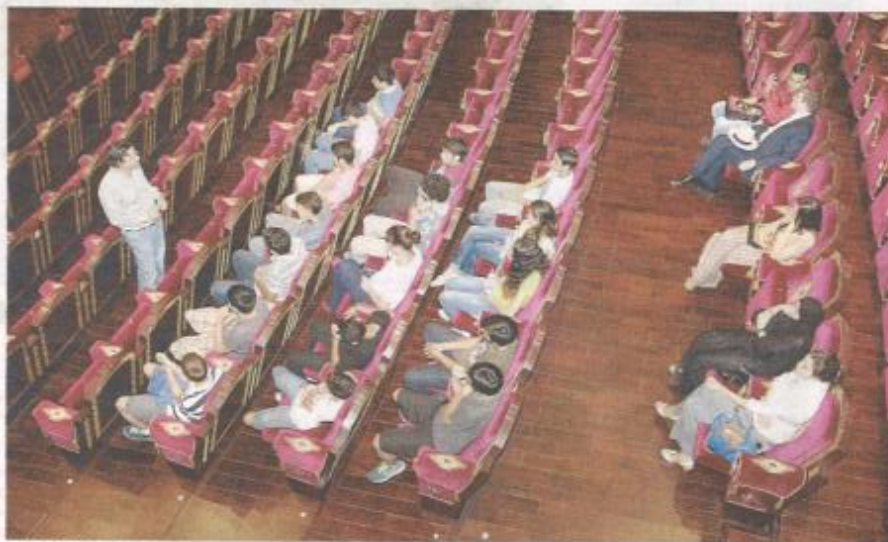
It was a special kind of rehearsal for the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO) yesterday morning at the Katara Opera House. For once, twenty students from the International School of London in Qatar were the orchestra's dedicated audience.

The visibly excited children got to experience the ensemble's musical prowess as noted Brazilian conductor Claudio Cohen introduced them to the various facets of a western classical music ensemble.

Qatar Museums and the QPO are all set to host a grand musical event with Cohen on October 30 at the Katara Opera House, where the conductor will enthral audiences by conducting Dvořák's *New World Symphony* as well as special pieces from Brazilian composers Antonio Carlos Gomes and Heitor Villa-Lobos.

On Monday, Qatar Museums celebrated the educational aspect of the Qatar Brazil 2014 Year of Culture, by inviting the 20 children to soak in a full-fledged rehearsal conducted by Cohen.

From taking the children through the various instrument sections such as strings and woodwinds to making them understand the significance of the sound and tone of each section by making the



INFORMATIVE: Claudio Cohen discusses with students the various aspects of an orchestra.

orchestra play various parts, Cohen was spot-on in delivering a quick crash-course on the various facets of classical music.

"Watching the musicians perform such complex pieces opened our minds to the kinds of instruments and styles of music that we can pursue," said one of the students, soon after the rehearsal.

On October 30, audiences will be treated to pieces from the Brazilian composers, Antonio Carlos Gomes

(*Alvorada-Dawn*, from the opera *Lo schiavo*), Heitor Villa-Lobos (*Bachianas Brasileiras No.7*), as well as from the Czech composer Antonín Dvořák, (*New World Symphony*).

The Qatar Brazil 2014 Year of Culture continues to build on a legacy of connecting people through cultural exchange as part of the Qatar National Vision 2030.

Held under the patronage of HE Sheikha al-Mayassa bint Hamad

bin Khalifa al-Thani, Chairperson of Qatar Museums, Qatar Brazil 2014 is the third consecutive Year of Culture, organised by Qatar Museums, following Qatar UK 2013 and Qatar Japan 2012. Qatar Brazil 2014 is sponsored by Qatar Petroleum International, Shell, Qatar Airways and Hilton.

Commenting yesterday's rehearsal, Safiya al-Hajari, QM Director of Strategic and Cultural Relations, said: "This event will

serve as a great learning experience for the youth of Doha who will be able to develop an appreciation of the work that goes into becoming a professional musician. It also builds cultural bridges between Qatar and Brazil in terms of music that we hope will extend further into the coming years."

Both the events are key to the educational and cultural dialogue created by the Qatar Brazil 2014 Year of Culture initiative. "With this event, the activities for the Qatar Brazil year of culture continue, however this event is particularly special, as it reflects the international nature of our events," said, HE the Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage Dr Hamad bin Abdul Aziz al-Kuwari.

"Orchestras in general are no longer limited to any one country, thus each one has its own character that is influenced by a number of different cultures, and Brazilian culture is particularly rich and diverse," al-Kuwari added.

Cohen, the music director, conductor and co-founder at the National Theater Symphonic Orchestra in Brasília, Brazil, is the guest conductor. A violinist and teacher, Cohen has travelled across the globe, and has participated in countless music festivals, with renowned musical ensembles. He is the proud owner of a number of accolades which include the OK Culture Prize, the 2006 ALMUB Excellency Prize and the Brazil Accorde Prize.



The rich pitch

Bachianas Brasileiras showcase the depth of Bach's music and the power of Brazilian music, infusing everything from the moods of the big Amazon forest to the sounds of the birds, Orchestra Conductor Claudio Cohen tells **Anand Holla**

A bespectacled gent clad in casuals is seen outside the Katara Opera House, and moments later, inside it. Outside, if not for the giveaway prop of a baton in his hand, it's hard to imagine Claudio Cohen as an orchestra conductor, given how he wears his wisdom lightly even as he grips his baton firmly.

Ever so often, the affable Brazilian guest conductor breaks into a warm smile, dispelling the reticent authoritarian persona that typifies conductors.

On a break from a rehearsal session with the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra (QPO), Cohen muses, "It's good to not confine your head to being only a musician. That's because such a musician's head is pretty much closed. Working in another profession or keeping yourself open to various experiences helps open your mind and feeds creativity in your music."

Cohen, who is down in Doha to conduct an eclectic repertoire with QPO for tomorrow's grand concert at Katara Opera House as part of the Qatar Brazil 2014 Year of Culture, clearly speaks by experience. "When I was four, I started studying music," says Cohen. "At 16, I began working as a professional violin player. But it's very hard to decide to be a musician in Brazil because music is not really a traditional profession."

Spurred on by his lawyer parents, Cohen, along with the music school, also went to law school. "So I am also a lawyer," he says, smiling. However, Cohen never let his legal education interfere with his musical exploration.

The music director, conductor and co-founder at the National Theater Symphonic Orchestra (OSTNCS) in Brasilia, Brazil, went on from touring the world as a violinist in a string quartet to a concertmaster, and finally a conductor.

"Music never escaped from my life. I never decided to be a musician. It is music that decided to have me," says Cohen, who is obviously a fine judge of quality musicianship. "The QPO possesses a very high level of expertise, which is helping me enjoy each of the five rehearsals that we are having before the big day," he says.

The wide-ranging compositions



MUSICALLY SPEAKING: I find the most important aspect is to make the musicians understand the style of music they are dealing with, and the idea of the composer behind a composition, says Cohen.

COVER STORY



CONFIDENT: The wide-ranging compositions chosen for tomorrow's programme may hint at the belief Cohen has in the orchestra's ability to pull them off

Photo by Shemeer Rasheed

chosen for the programme may hint at the belief Cohen has in the orchestra's ability to pull them off. Cohen will conduct legendary Czech composer Antonín Dvořák's New World Symphony as well as special pieces from Brazilian greats Heitor Villa-Lobos (Bachianas Brasileiras No. 7) and Antonio Carlos Gomes (Alvorada - Dawn, from the opera *Lo schiavo*).

"We have tried to capture varied emotions that two of the most prolific Brazilian composers explored," says Cohen. Gomes, one of the most distinguished 19th century operatic composers in the world, composed music largely influenced by elements of French and Neapolitan music, along with Italian opera, German waltzes, and native Indian rhythms.

"Gomes was from the romantic era and his music was marked by the diverse cultural traits of Brazil. He followed a European classical tradition in composition while including some elements of Brazilian music," Cohen explains.

The works of pioneering Brazilian modernist composer Villa-Lobos sound distinctly exotic as it was influenced both by Brazilian folk music and European classical tradition elements. The most significant Latin American composer to date wrote 12 symphonies, four operas, and five ballets.

"He was a revolutionary composer, Brazil's principal composer," Cohen says. "In Brazil, I tell students that what we had in 1922 (referred to as the 1922 week of modern art, it marked the beginning of a new phase of modernism in Brazilian arts) was a remarkable event that changed the Brazilian culture-cape. Villa-Lobos was the man at the musical

forefront of that transformation."

To encapsulate Villa-Lobos' natural, 'waterfall-like' personal style, tomorrow's concert will include seven pieces from his *Bachianas Brasileiras* — a series of nine suites he had written for various combinations of instruments and voices between 1930 and 1945.

"The name of this masterpiece itself suggested the fusing of the styles of Johann Sebastian Bach and Brazilian folk music," Cohen points out. "These pieces showcase the depth of his music and the power of Brazilian music, infusing everything from the moods of the big Amazon forest to the sounds of the birds."

As for including Dvořák's composition in the repertoire, Cohen says, "Like Gomes, Dvořák, too, is a romantic composer. This year marks the 110th anniversary of Dvořák's death. So we decided to include his composition and broaden our performance palette."

As for staying open to various experiences and enhancing the personality palette, Cohen, in Doha, has been doing what he does whenever he visits a foreign

land — absorbing the local way of life, the local food, and the local peculiarities. "By doing so, I get to integrate these experiences in Qatar into my personality, and therefore into my approach towards music, too."

As guest conductor, violinist, and teacher, Cohen has traveled across the world, participating in a lot many music festivals with the choicest of musical ensembles. As a member of the Brasília String Quartet, for instance, Cohen recorded nine CDs. But Cohen's musical journey is one with endless destinations.

"When performing with different orchestras, I find the most important aspect is to make the musicians understand the style of music they are dealing with, and the idea of the composer behind a composition. It's only by imbibing this that the orchestra can do justice to that music. This entire process, in turn, helps in a continuous exchange of cultures," says Cohen.

The very nature of differences among oriental music, Latin American music and western classical music add to the

excitement, Cohen feels. "This diversity in the style, tone and mood of the music makes us musicians truly happy."

One can't conduct Johann Strauss' waltz the same way as one can conduct Beethoven's symphony. That's because the requirements for each are very specific. Similarly, Arabic music, too, is very specific and very rich, and you need to handle it with a specific approach."

Regularly hopping across styles of music and kinds of orchestras adds to the challenge for Cohen. "The solution then is to find the sweet spot in every orchestra you work with," he says.

"At the start of this month, I did a concert with a Hungarian orchestra in Budapest," he explains. "Then, I was in Portugal with another orchestra, and now I am here in Doha. So it's very important for me, as a conductor, to analyse the environment, the feel of the orchestra, and understand how fast they can respond to the task ahead."

Be it conducting operas, ballads, or Mahler symphonies, Cohen is at ease across all styles. "A month

later, I will be conducting a Paul McCartney special show with a Brazilian rock band to unveil a new venue," he says, chuckling. Such assignments are also a throwback to Cohen's younger years.

"I was a usual teenager then," he says and laughs. "You know, listening to rock and roll, like AC/DC, Sex Pistols, U2, and even pop like Madonna and Michael Jackson. I even liked jazz and Brazilian bossa nova music. Soon, I began following Brahms, Beethoven, Mozart, Mahler, and so on. Today, I have too little time to allow my focus on classical music to waver."

Today, there's also a bigger purpose that Cohen never loses sight of. "The biggest high of such an initiative is to be able to present to Qatar a little glimpse into the rich heritage of Brazilian music. And by that, also showcase Brazilian artists, like me," Cohen says and laughs.

As he readies for another rehearsal session, the well-humoured conductor has just enough time to end the chat with a funny one. "In fact, sometimes, people tell me you conduct so well... are you really from Brazil?"



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