

A peep into Arab culture

Swedish film-maker's documentary showcases regional bonhomie

By Hubert Vaz
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MUSCAT When Swedish film-maker Henrik Melius toured some of the countries in the Gulf, he found there was a strange distortion in the image of the Arab world projected in the Western media. The best thing that occurred to him was to capture the real friendly spirit of Arabs in the form of a documentary and show it to the world.

Henrik, a skilled musician from Sweden who has performed with his team in many venues in the Gulf, had never made a film in his life. Music was his forte and he believed in exchanging his art with those in other countries. However, he dared to make a debut with a unique documentary that showcases Oman, Bahrain and Jordan in a different hue.

With his nine-member band and three-member cam-



era crew, Henrik toured these nations having healthy exchanges with the Arabs in different cities. In Oman, he visited Muscat, Nizwa and Ibra, wherein he discovered an untold story about the Arabs -- their friendliness.

"There is no goodness from the Arab world which reaches the Western media. What we get to know in the Western

media is a biased projection of this civilisation. That is why I put this film together, to show the world more about the generosity, hospitality and friendliness of the Arabs. There is a beautiful treasure of culture, poetry, art, architecture, etc. which needs to be shared with others," says Henrik, with eyes full of delight. Henrik spent around a fortnight in each of these three nations. His team members mixed around with the locals and shared their experiences while also gaining newer insights into their way of life, their joys and their understanding of those in Western countries.

The team faced no major hurdles during their trips, except for a few sandstorms in

Jordan. "The entire project from conception to realisation took around one-and-a-half years. It was a very enlightening experience, especially the editing part. I had the role of producer and director while my friend Falah Sabbar from Iraq helped me in composing the music for this film," he revealed. Having been to Oman on six occasions, Henrik decided to include it among the three destinations shown in the documentary. The film is being edited in two versions -- a 60-minute version for Swedish television and a 45-minute version for Gulf Air, Bahrain TV and Oman TV. It will also be kept as a reference resource in all Swedish libraries, he disclosed.

Henrik is thankful to the ministries of cultural affairs in all three nations which extended good support as well as travel facilities for him and his team. For shooting 70 hours of footage, the expenditure was around \$50,000, he said.

Treasuring the entire experience, Henrik hopes that his film will change the set opinion of Westerners about the Arab world and bring the two cultures closer. His next project would be another film shot in Syria or Yemen. "I am conversant with these places but I want to know more about them to see the real Arab world," he asserts.



A still from Henrik Melius' documentary.