

TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2004

# Spiritus Mundi Embraces Muscat



## About Spiritus Mundi

THE *Spiritus Mundi* Cultural Association was created by Henrik Melius in Sweden to encourage a cultural interest in the Arab world on the part of the western world. The project has the support of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The Cultural Association organises the Spiritus Mundi Event, a nine piece professional group of Musicians who perform a fusion of western ambient world pop and traditional Arab music with lute and vocals. The performance includes both Arabian and Swedish poetry, cited in Arabic with a background of ambient new world "landscape" music.

The vision is of a traveling cultural exchange Embassy with the mission of building peace and understanding. Earlier this month performances were held in the Museum of Bahrain the Greater Arab Revolt Plaza in Jordan.

The main sponsor for the Muscat event was the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**. Other sponsors were **Gulf Air**, **The Gulf Agency (GAC)** and **omanoil**.

**A**T stage centre are two beautiful young Swedish singers clad in long flowing skirts, one with a headdress. Next to them is **Falah Sabbar**, a well-known Arab singer and composer, dressed in a traditional black gown holding an ud, or Arabian lute. Six other musicians are wearing universal white, save for the Violin player, **Paul Slawik**, in a casual western suit. This ensemble from Sweden and from the Gulf represents a fusion of Arab and Western culture. The songs they will sing, the music they will perform, go beyond the two cultures to a vision of world harmony. *Spiritus Mundi* is the Latin term for "spirit of the world" and the idea is for all of us to embrace the world.

The setting is the Al Medina Theatre, under the stars, in Qurm Park. The concert is in the presence of HE Moshin Bin Khamis Al Balushi, Undersecretary for Tourism in the Ministry of Commerce, and Krister Nilsson, the Deputy Head of Mission for the Embassy of Sweden in Riyadh. Muscat is the final stop on the Spiritus Mundi tour of the Gulf and they have just played to 2,500 people in Aqaba. Though the Muscat turnout is much smaller, the Spiritus Mundi players are filled with energy and enthusiasm. The singers, **Malin Ekstrand** and **Elin Rennstam**, like the rest of the band, are wear-

## By Patricia Groves

ing running shoes. This promises to be a dynamic, athletic performance.

Love, especially in its broader spiritual manifestation, is the theme for the music of Spiritus Mundi. The opening song, '*Mahela*' written by Falah Sabbar, celebrates the love of a "beautiful spiritual girl" for her neighbour. It is clear, right from the start with this opening piece, that the Arab-Western fusion works. The Swedish singers, Malin and Elin, are choreographed in rock concert stage moves integrated with Arabian dance gestures, their voices blend with the deep evocative tones of the Arab singer — and the result is a wonderfully melodious harmony of voice and movement.

The next piece is about waiting for miracles that will actually happen. Coloured lights flash through misty vapours, but the atmosphere is totally not disco. The band is in a mood of higher celebration, radiating a sense of universal happiness in tune with the visionary idealism of the songs and the optimism of the musical compositions, with their light crescendos and high registers. The pinnacle is utterly original — a haunting scream-singing, wordless — a new

world aria that rises above ordinary song, and stills the audience. Unexpectedly, it comes from the drummer in far corner of the stage. Her exultant voice sails into the far reaches of the night.

A dance interlude by Malin and Elin, clad now in the simple white emblematic of the universality of the band, is an ultra-cool blend of belly dance and hip-hop — kinetic proof that the fusion succeeds.

There are songs to say that "we are made for love in a perfect state of grace". Music and words proclaim the world a scared place for all to be. A song of love under the *Aurelia Borealis*, the other-worldly Northern Lights of the Arctic, brings the cold beauty of northern climes to the starry desert night.

All too soon this lovely concert of high ideals comes to a conclusion, but the mission for world harmony carries on, with increased joy and confidence from their tremendously well received concerts in the Gulf. The next performance of Spiritus Mundi will be in London England, for the Arab women in business, hosted last year by Queen Rania of Jordan.

## About the Composer

The visionary "new world" compositions that characterised the concert were all original works composed by the highly talented Spiritus Mundi Project Creator, HENRIK MELIUS, who is also a pianist and vocalist.

"We believe that there are several wonderful dynamic events that are likely to materialise in the course of this good will work for the welfare of the present and future relations between the people of the west and the people of the world Arab community".

