

California Musician Captures Dream Job in Land of Sindbad

By Pat and Samir Twair



STAFF PHOTO S. TWAIR

Wael Kakish on home leave from Oman. INSET: The Royal Opera House in Muscat.



COURTESY WAEEL KAKISH

Wael Kakish, founder of the popular Kan Zaman ensemble and most recently of Pasadena, began his dream job in January 2012 in Muscat, Oman as director of education and outreach of the Royal Opera House of Oman. Oman is referred to in *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights* as the land of Sindbad.

Prior to assuming that prestigious position, the Amman, Jordan native and 1985 graduate of Yarmouk University developed, directed and performed musical programs and ensembles for concerts, classes and workshops at the community college and university levels and at arts centers in various cities and communities in Jordan and Southern California. During his 18 years as maestro of Kan Zaman ("Once Upon a Time"), Kakish transcribed and

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arranged music and played numerous Western and Arabic traditional instruments.

It was these impressive abilities that qualified him for the Oman position, which was announced at the time of the October 2011 opening of Muscat's world-class opera house.

Kakish's duties include educating teachers and the general public about the importance and value of music and arts in society and assisting in developing a learning strategy to meet the goals of the opera house. He also assists the general director in organizing, directing and supervising major symposiums and conferences.

Among the perks of his dream job are meeting celebrities wanting to know more about the opera house and occasionally giving them tours of the Muscat he loves. These figures include Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, Tim Berners-Lee, in-

ventor of the World Wide Web, and Arab musicians Marcel Khalife and Mohammed Abdu.

Asked about his favorite pastimes in Muscat, Kakish enthused: "Besides attending the many international pageants expatriates sponsor in Oman, I dearly love to watch fishermen unloading their small boats with amazing sea creatures and strolling in the bazaar of old Muscat taking in the aromas of frankincense, musk and myrrh on sale.

"Camping in the Omani desert is one of the most amazing things I have done in my entire life," he continued, "waking up in total silence at dawn to see the gold color of the dunes or to watch a herd of camels and Bedouins passing by is actually a magazine image that comes to real life—and so true! Also, it's always a pleasure for me to meet other musicians worldwide, jam together and exchange ideas and knowledge."

Southern California Chronicle

Kakish already is preparing a slide show program for his next home leave to California. The venue will be Barnsdall Auditorium in Los Angeles.

Slain Archaeologist Remembered

The authors first met Syrian archaeologist Khaled al-Asaad (see p. 64) in Palmyra in February 1978 when we were doing a story on Palmyra. He put us up at the Zenobia Hotel (frequented in the 1920s by Gertrude Bell and T.E. Lawrence, known as Lawrence of Arabia). He gave us a personal tour of the ruins, museum and tower tombs.

We again met Asaad in 1980, when the Meridian Hotel opened and we went to do a story on it. He accompanied us and made some comments about the foreign flags hanging in the lobby of the hotel, saying: "These flags look like the Crusaders' flags!" He obviously didn't like them.

Traditional Exhibit



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The hosting committee for "A Country Called Syria," including creator Maria Khani (second from right).