

AGENDA

LEBANON

PHOTOGRAPHY

**'Abandoned Dwellings'**  
*Sursock Museum, Ashrafieh*  
 Until Feb. 11, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
 Gregory Buchakjian presents a 9-year photography project devoted to abandoned buildings and houses in Beirut.

PERFORMANCE

**'Vamos Cuba!'**  
*Casino du Liban, Jounieh*  
 Nov. 23 to Dec. 1, 8:30 p.m.  
 ticketingboxoffice.com  
 This Cuban dance spectacular created by Nilda Guerra takes viewers to the chaos of Havana airport. It's a mix of traditional and modern dance styles including salsa, rumba and reggaeton, with a live band led by Rodney Barreto.

THEATER

**'The Story of The Man Who Inhabited His Shadow'**  
*Station Beirut, Jisr al-Wati*  
 Until Nov. 11, 9 p.m.  
 Hashem Adnan and Fadi Toufic's performance takes the audience on a tour of an exhibition to explore installations comprised of unfinished work by a forgotten artist.

ART

**'The Visit'**  
*Galerie Tanit, Mar Mikhael*  
 Opening Nov. 20, 6 p.m.  
 Chafa Ghaddar's series attempts to merge natural painting techniques with contemporary practices, such as exploring Fresco with media.

**'Anachar Basbous'**  
*Saleh Barakat Gallery, Clemenceau*  
 Until Dec. 29, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.  
 Sculptor Anachar Basbous' latest works are produced and displayed as if from the inside out. This show displays his new artistic practices.

**'Things That Shine and Things That Are Dark'**  
*Beirut Art Center, Jisr al-Wati*  
 Until Dec. 23  
 Joachim Koester's exhibition is interested in using still and moving images and installations to examine matters of movement and identity.

**'The Third Window'**  
*Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Karantina*  
 Until Jan. 4  
 01-566-550  
 Akram Zaatar's show draws from his study of photographs and their histories while working with the Arab Image Foundation, specifically the different transactions that leave material traces on the bodies of photos.

**'Sensible Expression'**  
*Mark Hachem Gallery, Mina al-Hosn*  
 Until Nov. 20, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.  
 This retrospective exhibition will showcase the exhibition the reliefs and sculptures of Alfred Basbous.

MUSIC

**Swiss Quartet Jazz Concert**  
*Armenian Evangelical Church, Kantari*  
 Nov. 16, 9 p.m.  
 A Jazz show featuring Houry Apartian-Friedli, pianist Oliver Friedli, contrabassist Andre Pousaz and drummer Pius Baschnagel will be performed.

JUST A THOUGHT

Fun can happen on the interior. Nobody knows about it, but there are fireworks going on inside your spirit when you hear a great orchestra playing great music.

David Ogden Stiers  
 (1942 -)  
 Actor

REVIEW

Shaabi music goes experimental

New suite of tunes performed by Praed Orchestra proves surprisingly musical

By Jim Quilty  
 The Daily Star

SHARJAH, United Arab Emirates: In the historic quarter of this emirate's capital city squats a square honoring penmanship. Facing Calligraphy Square is an ensemble of historic-looking single-story structures, part of a warren of contemporary art exhibition spaces – renovated older rooms and state-of-the-art halls designed to conform to the old-town ambience of the place – owned and operated by the Sharjah Art Foundation.

Naturally the square is best-known not for its calligraphy, nor for the visual art it's exhibited, but the musical events it's hosted.

In 2012 it was the venue for a beefed-up version of "Revisiting Tarab," a 5-1/2-hour-long concert conjured up by sound artist Tarek Atoui, featuring the cream of the international experimental music scene and a smattering of Arabic classical players. Earlier this year, the square staged contemporary artist Wael Shawky's "The Song of Roland: The Arabic Version," which saw the medieval European tale of Muslim-Christian conflict retold in a choral mode, specifically fidjeri – associated with the Gulf's pearl harvesting tradition.

Last Saturday, Calligraphy Square hosted an SAF-supported show by the Praed Orchestra. The concert marked the debut of a suite of seven new compositions by the eponymous Lebanese-Swiss duo – aka Raed Yassin and Paed Conca – performed by them and an ensemble that included some of the more prolific experimental and improv musicians on the scene.

In addition to Conca and Yassin, the players included Sam Shalabi (oud, electric guitar), Alan Bishop (saxophone, vocals), Maurice Louca (keyboards) – a trio otherwise known as The Dwarfs of East Agouza – as well as Nadah El-Shazly (vocals, keyboard), Khaled Yassin and Michael Zerang on percussion and drums, Christine Kazarian on electric harp, Hans Koch and Martin Kuchen on various saxophones, Radwan Moumneh (buzuq, synthesizer, vocals) and vocalist Ute Wassermann.

The SAF concert marked the debut of this particular configuration of players but it wasn't amateur hour. All the performers have flourishing professional careers and nearly all have played together at various concert venues over the past decade or more.

Wassermann commenced the evening with a solo master class in transcultural vocal technique. Standing, palms raised like a statue of the Virgin Mary, she launched into what might have been the opening notes of a soprano aria before veering into a bit of tongue trilling. Subsequent bel canto outbursts



Hans Koch, foreground, and Martin Kuchen during the Praed Orchestra's show.

were all toppled toward something distinctly unconventional – a line of dissonance not unlike electronic feedback, gasps, grumbles, the choking sound of a creaking door, unintelligible cartoon chatter, and throaty lower-register vocalizing that sounded vaguely Tibetan.

After some minutes of Wassermann's virtuoso solo work, keyboards injected a monster movie-cum-sci-fi organ theme into the mix. Saxes and clarinet pitched in discretely until vocals and keyboards fell away, leaving room for some quiet percussion work from Yassin and Zerang.

This discreet percussion duet provided ambience to introduce a maqam-redolent oud improv by Shalabi – the end of which marked the conclusion of the suite's first movement, called "The Last Invasion."

When a few tentative notes of Koch's bass clarinet picked up Shalabi's chain, it seemed the performance would linger over a contemplative mood, until an abrupt blast of sampled Arabic dance music was released from Yassin's laptop.

Koch's solo followed the contours of the beat and Conca's clarinet soon added a third voice to the duet.

By degrees the players superseded the sample – Zerang and Yassin elaborating on the percussive line, horns and electronics adding ornamentation, Wassermann and Bishop vocalizing a tune that might have been lifted from one of the Egyptian sequences of Cecil B. DeMille's "The Ten Commandments."

As the suite's beat-driven second movement (titled "Doomsday Survival Kit") wound down, Yassin and Bishop stood for a duet – actually an exchange of howling, shouting,



Alan Bishop, left, Raed Yassin and Paed Conca, seated.

reverberating, word-free vocalizing that amounted to an entertaining lullaby of duet conventions.

The balance of the concert continued more or less along these lines. Each passage of completely live performance alternated with another that forced the musicians to play with (or against) sampled beats. Each movement featured different clusters of musicians navigating Praed's compositions and ornamenting them with solo, duet and ensemble improvisation.

In an artist talk the day after the Calligraphy Square gig, Yassin and Shalabi discussed their own experiences working in the experimental music scenes in Lebanon, Canada and Egypt. Naturally the discussion

turned to how Conca and Yassin came to compose the pieces performed at the concert.

Yassin said the origin of Praed's latest tunes is Egypt's beat-heavy shaabi music. Praed had a number of these musicians lay down some of their 4/4 beat sequences. These Yassin and Conca dissected and used as the basis of their instrumental composition. The decision to write for horns, Yassin said, had less to do with Egyptian shaabi music than the composers' love of soul and funk.

It was great fun, the intersection of hybrid composition and exceptional musicianship – sheer talent, diversity and improvisational skill – that met at Calligraphy Square.

The show had several highlights

and standout performances – Wassermann's opening solo, Shalabi's oud solo, Moumneh's hyperactive buzuq work in the third movement of the concert ... but it was Alan Bishop – powering through the solo vocals of "The Nerves," the piece's final tune – who stole the show.

Though it draws heavily on the talent, and the music, of this region, this work sounds placeless.

Experimental music is never more alive than during performance, and the suite performed last Saturday was strikingly digestible, at least to open-minded audiences.

For more, see <http://sharjahart.org/sharjah-art-foundation/events/praed-orchestra>.

Foy trades Queen Liz for volatile vigilante Lisbeth

By Jake Coyle  
 Associated Press

NEW YORK: No, "The Girl in the Spider's Web" isn't a Spider-Man spinoff about a young woman ensnared by Peter Parker, but you'd be forgiven for thinking the latest, iteration of Stieg Larsson's thrillers has some superhero DNA.

Lisbeth Salander's third big-screen incarnation in nine years, has morphed the avenging Stockholm hacker into a blander action hero, complete with a Batman-and-Robin-like band of white across her eyes.

Following the spiky Swedish trilogy, with Noomi Rapace, and David Fincher's menacing and murky "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo," with Rooney Mara, we can palpably feel Lisbeth (here, Claire Foy) being lured out of the shadows and toward the movie mainstream.

In this latest chapter, Lisbeth strives, like a Scandinavian 007, to keep a world-threatening atomic weapons program dubbed "Fire-fall" out of the wrong hands.

Directed by Uruguayan-born Fede Alvarez (of "Don't Breathe" fame), the film smooths away some of the rough edges of a saga predicated on them, resulting in a competent but indistinguishable thriller.

Lisbeth, a volatile cyberpunk vigilante propelled by her own demons of abuse, remains a great character in search of a decent plot.

It's a shame, too, because a fear-some woman meting out justice for



Foy in a scene from "The Girl in the Spider's Web."

detestable men is kind of appropriate right now. In the first scene – the most comic book-like of them all – Lisbeth strings up an offending husband like a fish while gutting his bank account and, with a few clicks, transferring his savings to his victimized wife.

But that can do no better.

Such exchanges quickly recede in favor of a larger conspiracy that ropes in the NSA (Lakeith Stanfield

plays an agent), a Russian gang called the Spiders (with Claes Bang) and the Swedish authorities.

It begins when Salander is approached by a former NSA agent (Stephen Merchant) – who built the software program and only now is concerned that the ability to launch every nuclear weapon on the planet might actually be a bad idea.

Soon, all manner of villain is

after him, his young but brilliant son (Christopher Convery) and Salander. The investigative journalist Mikael Blomkvist (Sverrir Gudnason in the part previously played by Daniel Craig and Michael Nyqvist) is around at times but makes little impression.

The story also connects, we sense, somehow to Salander's own past, her incestuous father and a sis-

ter believed to have died years ago. Snippets of flashbacks give a window into the scars beneath Salander's tattoos, while de rigueur action set pieces propel the movie slowly along, as if it forgot to pick up a sense of suspense along the way.

(In one novel twist, Salander, in mid-car chase, hacks into the other vehicle and takes control of it. The so-called Internet of Things may sound the death knell for the prolonged getaway.)

Penned by Alvarez, Steven Knight and Jay Basu, "The Girl in the Spider's Web" is based on the fourth novel in the series and the first written by David Lagercrantz. (Larsson died in 2004.) They haven't done Foy, one of the most exciting actresses around, any favors in saddling her with a forgettable international espionage tale. The superlative cast is wasted, generally, including Vicky Krieps, Stanfield and Bang.

As compelling as Foy is, she's also missing a quality that any Lisbeth ought to have. It has nothing to do with shedding the primness of her Queen Elizabeth II for Salander's jet-black hair and piercings.

The greatest tension in Larsson's "Millennium" series is how Salander so bristles with unease in the world, even while she expertly manipulates everything in it.

There's no such conflict in "The Girl in the Spider's Web," a common thriller for an uncommon heroine.

"The Girl in the Spider's Web" is screening in Beirut-area cinemas.