

The Gulf is Coming of Age

A new Qatari orchestra highlights the Gulf States' ambition to take a leading role on the world stage

On 30th October, an orchestra of more than 100 talented young musicians successfully negotiated their way through Beethoven's *Fifth* and Ravel's *Bolero* under the baton of Lorin Maazel.

Nothing odd in that perhaps, but there was something deeper going on here: something emblematic of the way the world is changing and the tectonic shifts of geo-political power and influence that result.

The orchestra in question was the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra and it was playing its inaugural performance to a powerful audience of royalty and dignitaries in Doha, the capital of the tiny state that juts into the Arabian Gulf from Saudi Arabia.

This city, with its brand new skyline is now their home. This was no quick fly-in-and-play before returning to some European city, perhaps better known for its musical tradition.

At some point in the future, however, these players will leave, but only when they can be replaced by Qataris who (by dint of the planned music academy) will no doubt be equally adept at rattling through Beethoven's *Fifth*.

This subtle shift is as indicative of the new found confidence and ambition of the Gulf as any new skyscraper or corporate take-over. It marks a coming of age that is witnessing the Gulf States taking a leading role on the world stage, as responsible providers of scarce energy resources, a source of much needed financial capital, finally, as investors in their own future – be that financial, political or cultural.

To be sure, this shift is being financed by energy receipts (estimated by the McKinsey Global Institute to be worth some \$9 trillion by 2020), but the shared vision of the Gulf States is of a sustainable economy that takes the region beyond oil and gas.

Across the region, a wealth of sectors and a client base that ranges from governments to cultural and educational foundations, multi-nationals, finance houses and even the religious arena, Bell Pottinger has become attuned to this new leitmotif: one that speaks of the responsibility that comes with the region's newfound global significance.

It is a theme that we have built into our work in the region over almost a decade, messaging around some of the most fundamental issues in the world today.

We have fought on behalf of DP World, during the furore that followed its purchase of P&O.

We have advised on either the creation or positioning of national visions.

We have championed the virtues of transparency and good corporate governance for the financial centres of Dubai and Qatar.

We are working with the new breed of sovereign wealth funds, while also promoting education reform.

We have even played a role in developing a crucial dialogue of understanding between Islam and the West.

Common to all this work – orchestra included is this notion of responsibility; of a people and a region of responsibility; of a people and a region determined to grow their skills and capacity indigenously; to treat their wealth seriously – and productively and to demonstrate to the world what they and their culture can do.

Living and working in the region, as our teams do, gives us a privileged seat with a front row view of how the world is changing. But more than that, it affords us the privilege of influencing how the world comes to perceive and ultimately accept some of these changes.

As a result, we are uniquely positioned to help shape perceptions of what is going on in the Gulf through our ability to communicate the connections between what can at times seem like hugely diverse and unrelated issues.

Views in brief

Which Middle East media outlet do you most respect?

The most significant new entry to the market has been The National newspaper – a serious attempt to introduce quality journalism to the region.

Who is the in-house comms person to watch?

One of the liveliest and most informed is Dina Kasrawi, Director of National Comms at Bahrain's Economic Development Board. She is currently working on the launch of the nation's Economic Vision 2030 plan.

Where in the Middle East do you go to relax?

The Banyan Tree, Al Areen, Bahrain – a real retreat with a fantastic spa.

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