

Photo for the Tribune by Brian Kerser
 Palestinian oud virtuoso Issa Boulos performs an improvisational piece Tuesday at the Ravinia Festival during a concert titled "Bridging Cultures: Building Peace."

MUSIC REVIEW

Fulcrum Point mixes Jewish, Arab music

By Michael Cameron
 Special to the Tribune

When events such as the London subway and bus suicide bombings rattle the nerves of urban dwellers, artists of all stripes hope their work can serve as more than a temporary diversion. Daniel Barenboim's controversial visit to Ramallah next month is but one attempt to maintain a dialogue as tensions heat up over the pending Israeli pullout from Gaza.

Conductor Stephen Burns has long showed a fondness for programs with sociopolitical relevance, and for his first appearance at the Ravinia Festival with the Fulcrum Point New Music Project, he assembled a broad sampling of works portraying the human condition as experienced through Jewish and Arab cultures, minus overt political subtext or adherence to a strict aesthetic dogma.

The program, "Bridging Cultures: Building Peace," was preceded by a panel discussion with Burns, James Conlon, Rabbi Steven Stark Lowenstein and Dr. Esmail Koushanpour. Parallels were drawn between compositional devices (counterpoint, dissonance versus consonance) and cultural conflict spanned by a "strain of intolerance and hubris in all of our religions," in the words of Conlon.

The finest work was the opener, Osvaldo Golijov's "Lullaby and Doña," an amalgamation of Yiddish motifs with a dark, languid Gypsy-inflected theme. The composer effortlessly taps into the essence of these idioms without the awkward seams that often mar fusions of the vernacular with Western classical forms.

Palestinian oud virtuoso Issa Boulos

NEW REVIEWS

Now appearing on metromix.com
 ■ Latest local reviews and updates. Plus reviews of current theater productions.

seemed quite comfortable on the Martin Theater stage, and his improvisation had some amazing moments of revelation and when his meanderings caught fire, the rapid runs over open strings were riveting.

Reza Vali's "Folk Songs, Sets #1B and 15" were the sole works on the program to take risks, many of which paid off. The opening Lament cast a spotlight on Paula Kosowser's solo cello, with soulful outbursts that called to mind the plaints of Ernest Bloch. The scherzando was an unapologetically buffoonish romp in waltz time, with the unlikely blend of congas with strings and bass clarinet.

David Schiff's "Consolation," a movement from his clarinet concerto "Canti di Davide," was a nostalgia-tinged elegy played with expressive warmth by Dileep Gangoli.

The closer was "Open Secret" by Behzad Ranjbaran, Iranian born and currently a member of the Juilliard faculty. Scored for chorus and ensemble, the vocal lines scrupulously follow the contours of the text by the Sufi mystic Rumi. Ultimately, the music is hampered by a paint-by-numbers approach to instrumentation and harmony.

The Chicago Chamber Choir sang with style and conviction.

TELEVISION

Van Susteren an unlikely fit,

Ex-defense attorney's no-nonsense attitude gains viewers on Fox

By Matea Gold
 Tribune Newspapers

WASHINGTON — Greta Van Susteren had about 90 seconds until airtime. But seated behind a crescent-shaped desk in a brightly lit studio on a recent night, the Fox News Channel host wasn't paging through her notes or checking her makeup. She was responding to e-mails.

Her fingers flew over a laptop propped up on the desk, dashing off a response to one viewer about a development in the disappearance of 18-year-old Natalee Holloway in Aruba, a case she has followed closely for more than a month. She told another where he could send a letter of support to Holloway's mother. A third gave her an idea for a question she posed to a guest later in the show: Just who was paying the legal fees for two of the suspects?

Van Susteren had already answered hundreds of messages earlier in the day, and there were still 2,822 unread e-mails in her inbox. That's just the way she likes it; she gazed at the blinking screen with contentment.

"I much prefer to interact with the viewers than just talk at them," she said. "It's where I think the business is headed."

At a time when the television news networks are cautiously experimenting with ways to pull back the curtain on the newsmaking process, the former criminal defense attorney has embraced a warts-and-all transparency as a hallmark of her 3-year-old Fox show, "On the Record w/ Greta Van Susteren."

She spends more than two hours a day answering e-mails. She also conducts an online conversation with viewers through her blog, "Greta-Wire," the most popular on the Fox Web site, drawing more than 150,000 hits a day.

Her online musings are written in the same matter-of-fact, blunt tone that characterizes her nightly show, which offers little of the sharply opinionated banter for which Fox has become notable. On air, Van Susteren's persona is more dogged investigator than brash talk-show host. She peppers guests with a series of open-ended questions delivered in the flat timbre of her native Appleton, Wis., often challenging an interviewee who makes a strong assertion by asking skeptically, "What is your level of certainty about that?"

Leans toward liberal

The 51-year-old, who acknowledges that she's politically more liberal than most of her Fox counterparts, has developed a strong following at the top-rated news channel, which she joined in 2002 after 10 years at CNN. She's drawn an average of 1.5 million viewers so far this year, according to Nielsen Media Research, far outstripping the competition in her 9 p.m. time slot. Her coverage of the Holloway case has been especially successful. In the last two weeks, her ratings were up 59 percent over the same period last year. "On the Record" has drawn an average of more than 2 million viewers on 18 nights during the last two months, besting out Fox stalwart Bill O'Reilly half a dozen times.

Van Susteren's willingness to expose the behind-the-scenes workings and her dispassionate approach to stories make her an unusual star in the often-shrill world of cable news.

"She's one of the straightest people doing legal analysis because the whole business has gotten progressively over the top," said MSNBC host Tucker Carlson, who worked with Van Susteren at CNN.

Her measured style stands in sharp contrast to that of analysts such as former prosecutor Nancy Grace, whose heated interviewing tone on Court TV and Headline News has drawn both fans and detractors.

"I'm a little old-fashioned," Van Susteren said. "I believe in the Constitution. I don't believe everybody arrested is guilty. I don't believe everybody arrested is innocent."

The former trial attorney, who came to prominence with her commentary on the O.J. Simpson trial in 1995, never believed she would last long under television's unforgiving glare.

"I don't consider myself the glamorous type,"

said Van Susteren, who — even publicized eye-lift — maintains the diminutive host (she's just 5'2") wears boxy blazers and buttons even in the humid Aruba air. "It suits me why I'm still standing," she said. "It suits me why I'm still standing." Bill Shine, Fox News' senior vice president of programming, credits her "scrappy" personality, noting the host's steely competitiveness to the job.

"She has a drive like almost no one else," he said. "She loves to win." With "On the Record," Van Susteren has limited to legal topics, and is often the anchor coverage of major stories, such as the year's presidential election. But her element when she delves into solved cases, such as Holloway's in Aruba on the last day of her hiatus trip in May.

Exploring the facts

The Fox host approached the secutor building a case. She retraced old's last known activities and interviews with the parents of who have been detained for Greta's mother and stepfather show almost nightly.

Some analysts view her fact story as symptomatic of a phasis on entertaining stories o ones.

"It does strike me that the ca try is exploiting the story for ra frey McCations p pauw 1 Greenas it would t to go on straight 'This is you."

Some o agrees. In Susteren blog last described Fox New: stopped program I

cessant coverage of the Hollow "I just wish there was other ne newsworthy — like the war. Lot other missing children."

Van Susteren did fly back to help anchor coverage of the Lo and said she plans to devote si age to the confirmation proces Court nominee. Still, she said s why some disapprove of her fox

"You can put it in the Nation you trivialize it very easily," she also make the argument that t that are very interesting and f the emotional aspect — this is: desperately looking for her chi

Van Susteren describes her j courtroom to the television stu penstance.

She first got a taste for law gr constin, where her father wa judge. After getting a law degr town Law Center, she was hir assistant by litigator John Co immediately struck by her tenaci

"When she used to do cirr would be all over the neighbor witness to know more about recalled.

They married in 1988, and et a firm together. Both are Scie ject they declined to talk abou "I don't discuss money sex t

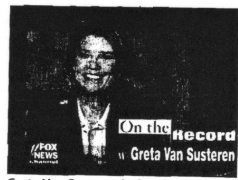
Van Susteren, adding that sh followed Tom Cruise's recent the controversial religion's v ric drugs because she's been b

Van Susteren won her first n she was 27 and worked for aln defense attorney trying "a lot murder cases." She expected reer in the courtroom.

On camera

Then in 1990, the CBS affilia asked Van Susteren to provi tary of then-Mayor Marion I perjury trial. The next year s analyze William Kennedy Si Four years later, Van Susteren Simpson trial gained her a fo trial ended, CNN tapped her legal affairs program, "Burd later a prime-time news ana "The Point."

Los Angeles Times



Greta Van Susteren is drawing 1.5 million viewers per show this year.