



Buchs SG, 30.01.2015

## **Annual letter 2014**

Dear Supporters of Education,  
Dear Patrons

Winning an award at the ceremony of the 2013 Schweizer Schulpreis (Swiss School Prize) in the category of 'Niche School' has given the Scuola Vivante fresh momentum. At a party held internally at school – almost exactly a year ago – parents, the staff team and all pupils and students celebrated this great success together. Gaining recognition is always a wonderful thing. It is an acknowledgement of what we have achieved, and it gives us motivation to move on to what's ahead of us. Those who don't shy away from a comparison at Swiss national level stand behind their own concept and its implementation. Having seen the written criteria for this prize, it was immediately clear to the students, staff, parents and headteachers that we should submit an application. The points outlined on the issues of performance, managing diversity, quality of teaching, responsibility and school atmosphere seemed to us to match the strengths of our school perfectly.

Our entry was written with input from the headteachers and everyone involved. But this hard work has paid off in many different respects. It gave us the opportunity to take a closer look at the Scuola Vivante once again; to examine its practices, its rules and its peculiarities. It allowed us to engage on a deeper level with what it is that makes the school unique – from the inside as well as from outside. The strengths of the school, which we have to preserve and maintain, have become clearer – as have those areas where there is a need for development or action.

However, the most valuable and, ultimately, most targeted result is that this process has strengthened the team spirit of the school. The common purpose, mutual trust and the identification with the school makes our everyday work easier and leaves room, with no obstructions, to focus on learning and teaching. Even a year after the School Prize was awarded, the Scuola Vivante is still receiving congratulations. The public have acknowledged this award with respect and have reacted in a very positive way.

The weekend of concerts with Jordi Savall and Hespèrion XXI in April 2014 has also contributed to a good year. Several of you were able to share this musical experience with us in the Herz-Jesu Church in Buchs.

For over 40 years, Jordi Savall has been seeking the language that links cultures, peoples and religions. In this search, not only does he bring traditional songs back to life; he also feeds people's yearning and constant efforts to achieve peace. With Hespèrion XXI, La Capella Reial de Catalunya, as well as three guest singers; twenty exceptional instrumentalists and vocalists from Armenia, Turkey, Israel, Palestine, Greece, Italy, France, Catalonia, Spain and Great Britain stood at Jordi Savall's side. The 'Mare Nostrum' concert combined a varied selection of Mediterranean music, passed on through the oral tradition by Sephardis, Berbers, Greeks, Arabs, Andalusians and Catalans, as well as via

medieval written manuscripts – a musical journey around the Mediterranean with stories of migrations and dialogues between the three largest monotheistic religions. Jordi Savall integrated the choir from the Scuola Vivante into the final part of the concert, in a Turkish, Arabic, Greek and Hebrew variation on the folk song Ghazali – a song that has spread around the Mediterranean and was – and is – sung or danced in a slightly adapted form in the language of each country, yet is still unmistakably the same piece of music.

By involving the children and youth choir of the Scuola Vivante, Jordi Savall has created a link from old music – with his central focus of keeping history alive – to the current situation that is escalating in terms of politics, society and religion between the North and South and East and West: right up to the generation of the future.

Thanks to the financial support from *diction AG*, we were able to record the concerts professionally, under the guidance and direction of Stefan Haupt and Georges Gachot, with three cameras and a fourth camera operated by school students. Over the weekend of the concerts, Stefan Haupt and the students held interesting and moving discussions with several musicians. These interviews were also recorded.

On their sixteen-day school trip in May, one month after this magnificent concert, the lower-secondary level students from the Scuola Vivante covered part of this journey: up to and across the Mediterranean, named Mare Nostrum by the Romans, to their partner school – the école vivante – in the High Atlas mountains of Morocco (the école vivante itself is now in its sixth academic year and last year received valuable impetus thanks to one year of dedicated work and commitment from Isabelle and Daniel Saluz). This journey of approximately 4500 kilometres began in Switzerland and moved through France, Spain, across the Straits of Gibraltar to Morocco, to the blue city of Chefchouen, to Fez and Marrakech and as far as Ait Bouguemez – the home of the école vivante and the final destination on the journey. The return journey was by ship to Italy via the San Bernardino Pass to Switzerland. The weeks on the trip were full of unbelievably rich and profound impressions and experiences. This trip was filmed by the students and teachers themselves, following a professional introduction and training in camera work and sound technology.

At the same time, the primary-level pupils prepared for their trip over the Swiss Alps to the Italian coast of the Mediterranean: the Via Spluga. The pupils had already completed part of the journey two years ago, from Buchs to the top of the pass. In June they then continued their journey on foot and by minibus – from Splügen to Finale Ligure, south of Genoa on the Mediterranean. The group took film cameras and sound recording equipment with them on this trip too.

For months, the pupils had been preparing by working on a variety of topics – route planning, reserving hostel accommodation and train tickets, the history of the Alps, examining the living conditions of people in the Alpine region, levels of vegetation, physical training for crossing the Alps, an intensive course in basic Italian, mathematics work to create altitude profiles, as well as budget planning – to mention only a few examples.

The children involved in 'Basisstufe unterwegs' ('Basisstufe out and about') took the concert experience and its inherent journey through time with them to their new location: They were able to position the wagon (the mobile classroom for the Basisstufe) above the little town of Werdenberg – with a view of the castle. This created a varied learning environment, connected to nature, with the approximately 800-year-old, smallest town in the world and its inhabitants and handicraft

businesses, and with the current excavations by archaeologists, the castle ghosts and the lake at Werdenberg – with numerous breeding ducks, young swans and other animals.

All these children and young people at the Scuola Vivante and their teachers set off, left the familiar world behind, ventured out into the unknown to come into contact with the world that had been expressed through the music of the concert. They came into contact with people and their works, held discussions, formed relationships and looked for the thing that connects – common roots.

Travelling and being out and about conceals one of the most immediate, all-encompassing and most sustainable forms of learning. The person is at the heart of what is happening, is part of it; engaging all physical senses in it. These endeavours, for children to be touched by this world and for them themselves to be able to come into contact with it – a prerequisite of the ability to take on responsibility – is what makes the pedagogy of the ‘niche school’ at the Scuola Vivante.

The ‘Mare Nostrum’ concert and the Scuola Vivante school trips are also stories that move people. The collated film material – and here we are now making a link to the year ahead in 2015 – is something we would like to bring together in a musical and poetic travelogue, with lots of music from the concert, interviews with musicians from eight countries from all around the Mediterranean, and with images from the Oberstufe students on their journey to their partner school in Morocco, the école vivante.

Once again it was our luck that we were brought together with the right people at the right time. Stefan Haupt, director of the films ‘Sagrada – el misteri de la creacio’ and ‘Der Kreis’ – the latter having just received five nominations for the Schweizer Filmpreis (Swiss Film Prize), is directing our film, along with Michelle Brun.

After the summer holidays, Michelle Brun, an experienced director and film editor, installed an ‘editing suite’ in a former storage room opposite the school office. Her suite is a workstation where she is able to watch the approximately 1.6 terabytes of raw footage (a total of 832,439 seconds of film) and, with Stefan Haupt, put together a film narrative. We are still working on the financing of the final version of the film and are looking for more partners. If you would like to receive more details about the film project, please get in touch with us. The invitation to the film premiere will follow.

Michelle Brun is working part-time at the school and, in addition to her work on the ‘Mare Nostrum’ film, also provides internal school courses in camera work, film editing and the production of short film reports. You should, we hope, soon be able to also watch film reports of everyday life at school (e.g. the forthcoming conference for UNESCO-associated schools in March, or a report on the Repair Café) on ‘Tele Vivante’.

As we mentioned in last year's annual letter, the number of pupils on our roll at the school has increased to the point where all learning groups are now full. The demand for school places is increasing constantly.

The Brütwerk – the area devoted to craft, design, technology and experimentation, is now in its seventh year and is practically always fully booked. A loyal community of creative individuals has formed, to realise the exciting and challenging projects in the field of design and technology. This growth also requires us as a team to expand constantly and to train new staff carefully. Very interesting candidates with broad spectrum of training and with many interests have put themselves

forward. Our goal of offering training and professional development training in Vivante pedagogy is becoming more and more concrete. With this goal comes the desire that more people should be encouraged and equipped to set up their own schools.

The growth this year – even in terms of space – has brought us to a limit. The kitchen – with its seating for meals at lunchtime – is too small. The classrooms are almost full and as for further ideas concerning chemistry and physics equipment, a choir room/room for movement and a training room – we don't have the space. Our thoughts are turning towards renovating the existing building, building an extension or building a new school on a new site. All this is also with a view to expanding the Scuola Vivante Buchs to include an upper-secondary level tier (Sekundarstufe 2).

As you can see, there is a lot of movement and innovation at the Scuola Vivante. This is thanks to our 14 members of staff, who are dedicated and give their all day in, day out to bring about the positive and lively development of their pupils and students. Thank you to the parents, who acknowledge their parental responsibility and who are active and interested participants. Thanks to you, our patrons, who have supported the school – a school that still has to survive without public funding.

With this thanks comes the request to support the school in the forthcoming stage of its development, support the Brütwerk workshop, the 'Mare Nostrum' film or the école vivante with a bequest, or a generous financial contribution – which you are able to deduct from your taxes. Merci beaucoup!

We wish you all the best and we look forward to seeing you in person at an event in school. We also recommend that you visit our blog [www.scuolavivante.ch](http://www.scuolavivante.ch) from time to time. The blog brings you closer to the daily life of the school and allows you to become part of it.

Kind regards

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