

REGIONAL POST

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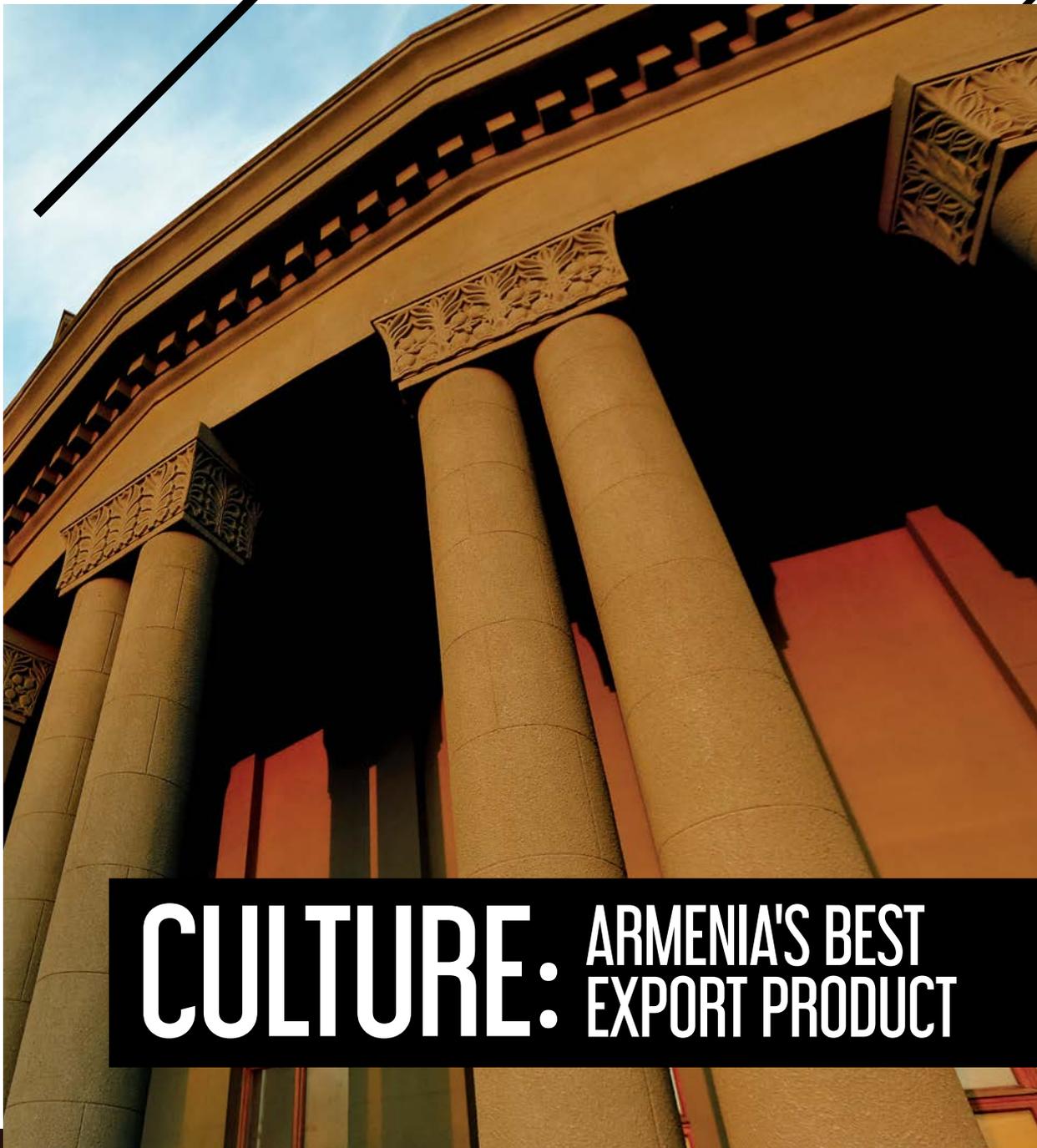
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ARMENIA
ART FAIR 2019:
Creating a culture



**CULTURE: ARMENIA'S BEST
EXPORT PRODUCT**



MUSCARI
Caring for Land, People & Culture

Gyumri Ceramics

Inspired by the know-how of the Armenian potters of Kütahya

The prestigious galleries such as “Galerie de la Tour” in Lyon in 2016 and “Galerie de Gourney” in Paris in 2017 held exhibition-sales of unique pieces of ceramics made by the craftsmen of Gyumri using the know-how of Armenian potters from Kütahya, a major center of ceramic production in the Ottoman Empire during XVI-XIX centuries.

The exhibitions were initiated by Muscari, an association for the promotion of Armenian and French cultural heritages, and its president Manoug Pamokdjian.

The events were organized as part of the global project aimed at the promotion of the economic and artistic prowess of Gyumri, initiated by Antonio Montalto, Honorary Consul of Italy in Gyumri, and the Pamokdjian family.

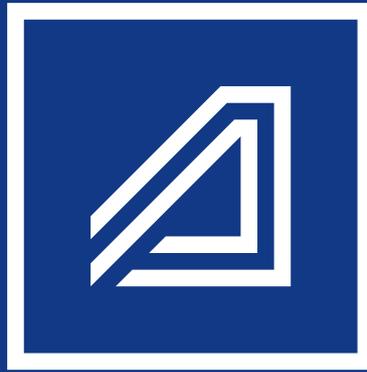
The Muscari association plans to establish several Houses of Armenia (les Maisons d’Arménie), centers for the distribution and promotion of Armenian crafts across France and other European countries.

In addition to the unique nature of the presented items, the goal of the exhibitions is to use art as a way of reviving Gyumri, a city devastated by a powerful earthquake in 1988 as well as continued economic crisis.

The exhibition will also take place in other prestigious locations in France followed by a tour in various European cities throughout 2018-2019.

These events are supported by Muscari association, Family Care and Friends of Gyumri foundations.





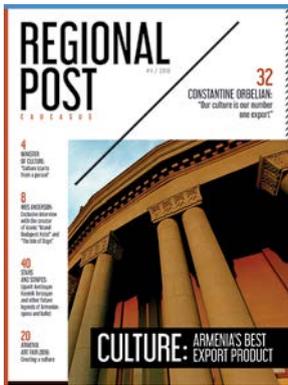
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BANK OF THE YEAR IN ARMENIA





Cover Photo: ARNOS MARTIROSYAN

Executive Director
ARSHAK TOVMASYAN

Art Director
NONA ISAJANYAN

Editor in Chief
ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN

Layout Designer
ARTAK SARGSYAN

Proof Editing
SILVA HOVAKIMYAN

Sales Manager
MARIAM CHAKARYAN

Contributors

KARINE GHAZARYAN, AMALIE KHACHATRYAN, DIANA MARTIROSYAN, AREG DAVTYAN, ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN

Photos and illustrations
TIGRAN ARAKELYAN, ACBA CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK,
ED TADEVOSSIAN

Regional Post LLC
Address: Aghedzor 62/1
regionalpost.org
email: contact@regionalpost.org
phone: +374 55 387887

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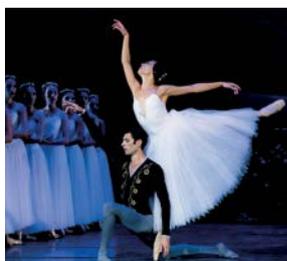
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The most important events in the Opera and Ballet Theater.

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From the late 19th century to our days.



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OPERA SET SKETCHES
From giants of the Armenian art, Minas Avetisyan and Martiros Sarqan.

LILIT MAKUNTS:

“Culture starts from a person”

This May, Armenia formed a new government, and among the ministries the most problematic one was probably the Ministry of Culture. 34-year-old university professor Lilit Makunts was appointed to lead the field of culture to the new age. Regional Post discussed with Mrs. Makunts her first months on the post, the future of the Armenian culture, and the role of the Opera and Ballet Theater in it.

INTERVIEW : ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN



Mrs. Minister, what are the results of those first months for the Ministry and yourself personally?

— Four-five months is not enough time for some big results, but it's long enough to define our biggest problems – system problems, separate problems, problems that lead from one to another, etc. Actually, just after a month we already had a clear picture of what we were dealing with here.

And what was done to start solving them?

— It was very important to address those problems to the right people. And to do that, we came to the idea of working with “bottom-up” principle. Before, everything was the other way around: there were orders and resolutions coming from the top and the problems often didn't get solved. So, we thought that it would be much better to involve more people from their relative cultural fields trying to hear them all, and only after that, with their help, start to fix those problems. Thus, the ministry held a series of discussions...

WE THOUGHT THAT IT WOULD BE MUCH BETTER TO INVOLVE MORE PEOPLE FROM THEIR RELATIVE CULTURAL FIELDS TRYING TO HEAR THEM ALL, AND ONLY AFTER THAT, WITH THEIR HELP, START TO FIX THOSE PROBLEMS



^
Nikol Pashinyan at the “Armenia!” exhibition in Met

Could you hear anything, because some of the discussions were, really, noisy...

— It was not easy, but we were ready for that and we did everything very systematized, so it was really helpful. First, we tried to have a listen to the problems which they found important, then we discussed some ways of solving them, after which we talked about those ways with a wider range

of professionals, like lawyers, finance specialists, etc., and finally, we set about solving the problems.

What are the best examples of such method?

— I would mention the actions we made in the field of literature. Well, it relates to all fields – we've decided from now on to support not the artist, not the company or the publishing

house, but the project. For this purpose, we have announced two programs – first one is a grant program for literary works development, and the other – a literary contest in the frames of the Yerevan Book Fest. One more thing: starting from next year, when buying new books for the libraries, we're not going to buy them just from the publisher or the writer, but from the bookstores, so that it includes all the parties – the store, the publisher, the author, and, finally, the user of the library.

For years, the Ministry of Culture has been supporting only state organizations. Let's say, we subsidize state theaters, which means we cover all expenses of the building and pay salaries – no matter how many plays they've staged, while the independent artists have to solve all those problems, including finding a space to rent. So, now, we've decided to rethink the prices for the potential venues, so all interested parties can use them. As a result, we have a huge variety in the sense of charge and type and quality.

But, are all the venues ready to change the fees?

— No, not all of them: for example, the Opera theater. But I totally respect that decision, because we all understand that it would make it easier to rent that space for any project. Besides, Mr. Orbelian, head of the theater, says it's a big problem when side projects make them change the repertoire. The most important thing here is the choice that now the artists will have in this case.

You've just mentioned the Opera and Ballet Theater, and its special value. We all know how important it was in the 20th century. What is the role of the theater in the future of the Armenian culture?

— Not many countries have an opera and a ballet. We have them both. We have great artists – singers and dancers, who perform on the best stages all over the world. So, this theater is



^ Ministry of Culture
headquarters,
Yerevan

WE'VE DECIDED TO RETHINK THE PRICES FOR THE POTENTIAL VENUES, SO ALL INTERESTED PARTIES CAN USE THEM. AS A RESULT, WE HAVE A HUGE VARIETY IN THE SENSE OF CHARGE AND TYPE AND QUALITY

a flagship organization for our culture. We had hours and hours of discussions with Mr. Orbelian about the future developments. And, we came to an agreement. My idea was that the roles should be rearranged inside the theater. A general director and an artistic director are very different and very huge positions. And though Mr. Orbelian is a great professional who is doing all the possible and impossible for the theater, it is difficult to do both management and artistic leading at the same time. If we want to bring the theater to a totally new level, we have to separate these positions. Very soon we are going to have a new artistic director, while Mr. Orbelian will continue

LILIT MAKUNTS' PROFILE

Date, birthplace

November 7, 1983, Yerevan

Education

1990-1999 – N195 secondary school in Yerevan
1999-2003 – Yerevan State University, the department of Romance and Germanic Philology, Bachelor's Degree
2003-2005 – Masters' Degree from the same department
Since 2014 – Candidate of Philological Sciences
In the summer of 2015 – training within the framework of America's Tufts University's Fletcher Summer School, Certificate

Work experience

Since 2005 – a professor at Russian-Armenian University
Since 2016 – a contract specialist at the American Peace Corps
Since February, 2018 – head of the Department of International Cooperation at the Russian-Armenian University
Since May 12, 2018 – the Minister of Culture of RA

the post of the general director. I think he is a great professional and a leader: we all can see what he's done in the theater recently.

What are the biggest obstacles in doing all the reforms you and your team are planning?

— The thing is that all artists, people from the sphere of culture, want to be free. But many of them forget that freedom also includes responsibility and self-sufficiency. Also, sometimes it seems to me that most of the time we are dealing with



▲ Minister of Education and Science Arayik Harutyunyan, Lilit Makunts and PM Nikol Pashinyan

◀ Writer Sargis Hovsepyan (right) announced as a winner of the Yerevan Book Fest prose contest

culture is what we show them. We all must be responsible for our culture. Not long ago I was in New York to attend the Armenian exhibition in Metropolitan museum. It was such an astonishing project, and it made me so proud! Of course, it was a one specific period of Armenian art, but still, it was ours and it was shown to the whole world. I was so proud to see hundreds and thousands of non-Armenians walking through the exhibit and discovering the wonder of the Armenian culture.

Our culture is also brought to the world by great individuals, isn't it?

— Indeed! On the Francophonie days we all were waiting for our great Charles Aznavour who, unfortunately, passed away not long before. And even after his life he was a real ambassador of the Armenian culture. Francophonie days were very important platform for new cooperation with different countries. The Ministry of Culture was not much involved in the process, it was more about foreign affairs, but I'm still very happy for what those days brought us. Another important ambassador is William Saroyan, whose house-museum was opened this Summer in his hometown of Fresno... I'm sure, we will have much more to say and to show to the world. And to us.

social problems and not cultural. Step by step we are going to change the mechanisms of subsidizing. We are ready to support good projects, but this can't be done the same way. It may cause misunderstanding, but we need to change. For example, let's take the festivals. We are still happy to support traditional ones, like the Golden Apricot Film Festival. But not just X money for Y festival. We need to understand on what exactly this money goes to, what impact we expect, and who knows, maybe we are giving more than it was applied. Besides, established festivals should already find sponsors from the private sector, and state's role in their financial support

should decrease eventually. And, with the saved finances we plan to create new, fresh festivals, especially ones in the regions of the country. Another important cultural event was the International Contemporary Art Exhibition, ICAE 2018, held in Armenia this year. The idea is not only to show our culture to the world, but also to bring the world trends to Armenia. Our artists, and all of us, must be aware of what's going on in the world to be part of it.

What is culture for you?

— Culture starts from the person, from the citizen of Armenia. When we meet other nations, for them Armenian

WES ANDERSON

In frames of ReAnimania festival Regional Post and festival's head Vrej Kassouny talked to "Grand Hotel Budapest" and "Fantastic Mr. Fox" director Wes Anderson who turned to animation this year again with "The Isle of Dogs." This unique ode to Japan and dogs many think is one of the best films of Anderson, so we discussed with the filmmaker the why he likes to make animated films from time to time.

INTERVIEW : ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN, VREJ KASSOUNY



What makes you turn to animation from time to time? It must be quite different experience from live action?

— Well, the first animated movie I made, "Fantastic Mr. Fox", it seemed like the only way to tell that story was a book that I had like since I was a child, and I've always liked stop-motion animation in particular, and... So, it really began with that story, with the way that I thought that story needed to be told.

How did you come to "Fantastic Mr. Fox"? What was it like, when you thought: "Oh, my next film will be an animation"?

— It was many years of getting to the point where we actually made the film. I think it must have been 1999 or 2000 when we started the process, and we didn't make the movie for many years after that. But I always thought it would be a fun because it's such a different experience from making a live-action movie. Everything is slowed down, and it happens in a different order but the work is still continuous, and I get with different set of collaborators but I've come to rely on them the same ways and I am inspired by them the same ways, so I've really loved making animated films.





^
Wes Anderson
preparing for the
"Isle of Dogs"



Would you consider to make a movie, where we can see both, animated characters and live action actors next to each other?

— Well, it wouldn't be the first time but I don't really think that's for me. I imagined to do something with animation and live action, maybe intercut in different sequences or something like that but I'm not so excited to do them altogether.

Which one is much difficult, working with live actor or with animation character and animator?

— I don't really know if I would think about the difficulty of that. They're very similar. Working with an animator and working with an actor on a set of the movie are very similar experiences in a lot of ways. And they each bring their own personalities, they each take the same material and they would do something completely different with it. And each one has his or her own approach... and voice. So, you know, the spontaneity of being on a movie set is hard to replace. But even the process of recording actors for an an-

imated movie has a great spontaneity. It is almost like recording a rehearsal.

What kind of animation technique do you prefer? What was the latest animation you've seen?

— The last one I watched with my daughter was the Miyazaki "Castle in the sky". That's one of my favourite Miyazaki films. I love stop-motion but some of my favourite animated films are the Miyazaki's.

Have you ever thought about making an animated film in other technique?

— I did in the last one, "Isle of Dogs", we had some sequences in drawn animation.

Why "Isle of Dogs"? How did you get to this topic?

— Jason Schwartzman, Roman Coppola, and I, and later our friend Kunichi Nomura, we developed this together. It didn't start out as being a story in Japan. It started out, I think we were considering it in America. It also didn't



> On the set of
"Fantastic Mr. Fox"



started as a story on island. It grew around our characters of these dogs. They were on a garbage dump. And we eventually made the garbage dump on an island, and we moved it to Japan from America. And it revealed itself to us step by step.

Did you know about the other “Isle of Dogs”, the short animated movie by Serge Avedikian?

— I didn’t know about the film, I didn’t really know much... I didn’t know the event but I think at some point during the making of our film “Isle of Dogs” we read about this, about the actual events that Serge’s film is based on. I only heard about Serge’s film when I was contacted by Serge. And then I saw the film which I loved.

What was your first reaction when Serge first contacted you?

I was very intrigued to know there was something so close to our film, and when I watched it, I saw so much in common, not just in what happens in the film, these dogs are exiled to an island, and why. Even though Serge’s



^
“Grand Budapest Hotel”



>
“Moonrise Kingdom”

film is based on the real events, and ours is a fantasy, they’re inspired by, I think, very similar events in history. The kind of thing that happens in a historical cycle.

Did you know that artist could think alike and come up with not only the same topic or subject but also with the very same title. Did it create a conflict or misunderstanding?

No, it didn’t create a conflict or misunderstanding for one thing: I didn’t know about it until after our film was already done and had been in cinema, so it was really too late to do anything like change our title. And I liked that there was someone else, another artist, whose work I admired, who was exploring the same territory in the completely different way and in his own unique voice.

It’s a common story, when before filming director shares some sources of inspiration with his team. Did you have such screenings before making the Isle of Dogs?

Well, before we made “The Isle of Dogs” we watched together many-many Kurosawa films. Miyazaki too, but really our greatest inspiration were the films of Akira Kurosawa, especially his urban films.

You have a whole bunch of great stars. Were the appearance of characters influenced by the particular actor?

Not really. The puppets in our story are invented separately from the actors. But I think the animators channel the actors in the way that they animate those puppets. So I do feel like the actors come through not just in their voices but in how their voices inform each animator.

Would you accept ReAnimania’s invitation for 2019 11th edition?

I certainly hope so. I’m starting a new film which has some bit of animation element to it. But I would look forward to being there some time soon. ♦



A NEW FORMAT OF ARMENIAN-ITALIAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS:

A bunch of cultural events in Yerevan and Gyumri

During last two months, Yerevan and Gyumri were flooded with the vibes of Italian culture, which included culinary, cultural, and various charitable events. Today we will speak about these events with the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Italian Republic in the Republic of Armenia Mr. Vincenzo Del Monaco.

Honorable Mr. Ambassador, we are very happy to host you here. We know that you are implementing various programs to strengthen the diplomatic relations between our countries. Especially remarkable are the recent cultural events, such as Italian film screenings, different lectures, master classes of distinguished Italian chefs and the introduction of Italian art in National Gallery of Armenia.

Can you please elaborate on them, what were your expectations, and whether they have been justified.

— A really unique year for the diplomatic relations between our countries is coming to its end which was



< Three Michelin star Chef Italo Bassi

characterized by the effective political dialogue and the launch of the cooperation in the scientific and technological fields. Culture is one of the cornerstones of diplomacy, especially for the countries like Italy and Armenia. Both are ancient countries with strong heritage from our ancestors. Culture defines our existence in the world.

How the idea of such largescale and multifaceted activities was born?

— The ideas mature when they find a good soil, and I have found this soil in Armenia. The cultural program of



the Embassy was perfectly compatible with the program of Armenian Government. Several events were also in Gyumri. I am amazed with its history, central streets. The city was broken by the earthquake in 1988, though never knelt has a strong power of life.

Can you tell a little bit about the idea of holding an exhibition of “Bernini school: Roman Baroque” in National Gallery of Armenia, what was its mission and whether this can be considered an opportunity to present Armenian art in Rome as well?

➤ Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Italian Republic in the Republic of Armenia
Mr. Vincenzo Del Monaco



— Baroque embodies the passion for beauty, emphasizes the rise of individual, aspiration for perfection. I really wanted such valuable works to be available in Armenia for Armenian people and many tourists who visit

this wonderful country. In the same way, I would sincerely wish that valuable pieces of Armenian artworks be available in Italy as well.

In November, you invited world-known three Michelin star Chef Italo Bassi to Yerevan, who gave master classes and with famous Italian chefs introduced Italian cuisine in different restaurants in Yerevan. Will you tell a little about these events, with what impressions did Chefs leave Armenia.

— No one could have accompanied us better in this journey of taste, full of experience, culture and history but Chef Bassi. Thanks to the generosity of 17 November Gala Dinner guests and Chef Bassi we had the opportunity to support the children

with disabilities, under the care of Armenian Caritas. With the proceeds we managed to cover the annual rehabilitation of 55 children, the salaries of three physiotherapists and the costs of education materials for 100 children. Italian Embassy along with Ferrero donated 500 kg of sweets to the children of charitable NGO Orran. Chef Bassi took with him to Italy positive impressions about the country, its elegance and the solidarity of Armenian people.

What new projects are expected in future?

— Every achievement should be viewed as a stimulus for more and better. I will do my best in 2019. Italian Embassy is always an open “construction area.” ♦

ARTUYT

Armenia has a huge heritage of visual arts. Sometimes you need new tools to promote it. “Artuyt” was founded to make Armenian art known worldwide. The company creates scarfs using paintings by the most prominent Armenian artists of the past and present. Regional Post talked to its founder Arevik Arakelyan about the origin of the project and their ambitious plans for the future.

INTERVIEW : DIANA MARTIROSYAN / PHOTO : ARTUYT

How and why did you start this project?

— I studied Orientalistics at the university, but I always had that childhood dream of creating some combination of art and fashion. So, after lots of traveling and visiting museums I realized that it's very important for Armenia to represent its culture with something that's easy to show, which can tell and teach about the country. And since I was, and still am, in the fashion history and the modern world of fashion, I've decided to express it via scarfs.

Why scarfs?

— Well, when doing my research, I found out that historically we didn't have much scarfs in Armenia, so I thought, maybe it was time we had. And, also, these new scarfs can tell about the history of Armenian fine art and the modern artists. Actually, no one believed that the project would succeed. Then, I told my good friend and co-worker Hovhannes Petrosyan about my idea of scarf brand, and he said: “Arev, let's do it!” The fortunate and good part of our tandem is that we all have an experience of collaboration. So, we founded “Artuyt” in 2016, and in a short time people really loved it.

➤ Founders of “Artuyt”
Arevik Arakelyan
and Hovhannes
Petrosyan



Where does the title of the brand come from?

— Why we called the brand “Artuyt?” It's because we wanted to use “art”, but at the same time make it sound Armenian, cozy and easy pronounced. And lark is a cute Armenian bird!

In our region scarfs were used for centuries. So, how can we position it as something not conservative and completely different?

— Armenians used to wear headscarves in Eastern Armenia, in the 18th and 19th centuries: it was quite popular in Van, for example. But, in



the beginning of the 20th century, somehow, we skipped the headscarf culture while it started to become popular in France as an accessory and a part of fashion industry. So, as a non-designer, I am more interested in creating something that's not just a fashion stuff but a beautiful piece, an object, which is beautiful by itself and can complement your outfit.

Who is your typical buyer?

— “Artuyt” scarf lady is 30-something, she is stylish, but that conditional style is not overloaded, it's quite simple.



Products of "Artuyt" from different collection



Let's talk about artists. There is a series of modern Armenian painters, there is Sergei Parajanov... How do you decide who's painting will be used on the scarf?

— Even in Armenia people are mostly familiar only with Minas and Saryan, and maybe also Parajanov, but, thank God, there are many talented modern artists, too. They are mainly well-known among professionals and art critics.

I saw some pieces with miniatures.

— It's our first museum collaboration with the Matenadaran. At that time there was no souvenir shop in the museum and we were the first to create merchandise for them. And the first individual artist was Mihran Avetisyan, a chaotic abstractionist. We saw his paintings in the private collections and his colors and style attracted and drew us. So, it's mutually beneficial; we have paintings, the artists get promotion and dividends; we pay museums and individuals from every single sold scarf. After that, we had such collaborations with Yervand Kochar and Sergei Parajanov museums, the Modern Art museum of Yerevan collections, that include works by artists like Vruir Galstian, Minas Avetisyan, Gayane Khachatryan

and Ashot (Deghdz) Hovhannisyanyan. We collaborate individually with Aram Isabekyan, Tatev Ghambaryan, Karen Smbatyan and Sona Banoyan. With Sergei Parajanov, Deghdz and "Treasures of Holly Etchmiadzin" collections we were presented at TB Studio Milano showroom running by Milan Fashion Week. The third one was born after we got a proposal from the Echmiadzin Historical and Ethnographic Museum: the direction of the museum with Father Asoghik came up with an offer and now we have a very interesting collection.

It is a big success to be presented there...

— First, I heard about an Armenian guy called Taniel Bisharyan, who's, in fact, the owner of TB studio, then we accidentally met through mutual friends. After that, we found the manufacturer, also an Italian, but not in Milan but in Como. They produce Moschino scarfs for Moschino S.p.A. So, we were lucky to have this opportunity. And, as it's a handmade silk scarf, handwork without the use of a machine, we talk about limited circulation. But it's not only Italy, we are going to collaborate with Russian and American markets: right now "Artuyt" is presented in Hay-Hay concept store in Zurich and

a Fashion Inn showroom-shop in Glendale, and it's having a great success. But it's not just about California: United States is a big country and we are dreaming about New York.

What's next? What should we expect from "Artuyt" in the nearest future?

— Now we are planning to release Minas Avetisyan collection, collaborations with the Museum of Printing and with the Service for the Protection of Cultural Museum-Reservations: we will have Zvartnots Cathedral scarfs. Plus, "Artuyt" is also active in the field of charity: a year ago, we organized a project with Igityan Culture Centre. The kids drew their own paintings which we turned into scarfs and presented at The Club for special exhibition. The sales during exhibition was then returned to the kids of the Centre in the form painting paper and drawing accessories. And for this year, together with our partners from Easy Pay, we traveled to Norashen frontier village and provided the kids with a year's supply of art supplies and covered one year salary of painting teacher. The kids will have a lot of time to practice, so, next year we are going to take the best paintings and make a special charity scarf collection for June 1st. ♦

YEREVAN GALLERY:

Beyond shopping

This October, when the city of Yerevan was celebrating the 2800th anniversary of its founding, the city's biggest shopping mall – Yerevan Mall, was celebrating the opening of the Yerevan Gallery where one can find dozens of shops and a café, or have a rest near the fountain. Regional Post talked to Yerevan Mall's Marketing Director Shushan Avagimyan about the Gallery and about Mall's other unique services.

INTERVIEW : DIANA MARTIROSYAN / PHOTO : YEREVAN MALL

Yerevan Mall now has a whole new "street" inside. How did you come up with the idea of Yerevan Gallery?

— We had the idea of bringing a new life and new spirit into Yerevan Mall. There's enough marble, tile and stone in the mall, so we thought we might need something new to create a warmer atmosphere. It's not easy to compete with others: the same brands are presented everywhere, there's no huge difference among the ranges, so you need to create some atmosphere, ambiance, flavor, spirit which would let you be distinct from others. And the concept of old, cozy Yerevan street was what we needed – old style facades, cobblestone, a small and cozy fountain and a café – just like in real life. It took us almost two years to complete it, and here we are!

The grand opening of the Gallery took place on Erebuni-Yerevan celebration day...

— Yes! It was kind of a present from us to the city we all love. Of course, it's not that easy to create something of the kind in a quite commercial place, but as we can see from the feedback of the visitors – they like it, as they enjoy the cozy atmosphere here and relax from the fuss. I think the cobblestone gives you that feeling, creates the climate of calmness and comfort as at leisure. Be-

cause it's not about fast shopping, rush and haste, it's a more peaceful place. And like every shopping mall, we also do our best to create some space for family pastime, and for friends to meet and chat. Armenians don't spend the whole day in the shopping malls as people do it abroad, so we are trying to establish those conditions to suggest something which is beyond just shopping. So, we've also pursued that purpose in our new Yerevan Gallery project.

Yerevan is known not only for its long history, but also for the unique spirit that one can feel while walking in the old-town streets like Abovyan. It feels the same here. What do you think?



— Well, I know for sure that we've created something new in the mall which draws attention. Sitting on the bench in front of the fountain gives you the feeling of being outside, in the charming street. Also, there are presented 16-17 new brands here, which were required to address the needs of the male customers. Plus, now we have a new series of services: delivery, valet parking and personal shopper, a person who helps with shopping, also acts as an advisor-stylist, or just deals with quick shopping to save the time of busy customers. For example, if the customer needs a red clutch and white pants and doesn't want to spend hours on searching





to propose something which is good, new and required, which makes shopping routine much more pleasant and enjoyable.

So, can we say that it's a kind of either Western or Eastern shopping model? Or, is it a mix of the succeeded shopping experience of abroad?

— It could be every successful experience which we have adopted for local customers: we don't invent new stuff, we just want to replicate useful and positive foreign experience. Anyway, it's difficult and sometimes risky to offer new things to the local client. Sometimes people are afraid of new

YEREVAN MALL

Yerevan Mall, opened in 2014, is the largest mall in Armenia in terms of number of its stores and total floor area. It covers an area of 30,600,000 square meters of shopping area with over 150 stores and attractions. Mall offers a unique dining and entertainment at the cafes and food courts, plus amusing attractions like Captain Kid's Treasure Island, the largest indoor entertainment center in Armenia, the KinoPark 4K movie theater and more. The first Carrefour hypermarket in Armenia is located at Yerevan Mall. In 2016, Yerevan Mall launched its customer loyalty program, Club Card program.

▼
Yerevan Mall's Marketing
Director Shushan Avagimyan

them, the personal shopper, who knows everything about the presented items, can be very helpful. Thus, we save the customers' time and provide them with exactly what they need. Also, you can choose an option to order some clothing by sending the photo and getting it to your house. People usually use this option for gifts or for clothes which have been already tried on.

You mentioned about the Mall's new service: the valet parking. That is something new for the Armenian reality. How did you feel its need?

— As everyone knows it's not that comfortable and easy for many people to park the car, drive around other cars in the narrow aisles. Valet parking is also about saving time and avoiding a stressful situation for some people. The same with the delivery; again, it's good if you know exactly what you need but have no time to leave your work place and visit the mall, also it's convenient when you want to order a gift card. Or, maybe, you've already done your shopping and you need to deliver it to your house. I don't like to use the word 'unprecedented', because often people use it out of place, but here I should say that the above-mentioned three offers are in fact unprecedented for Armenian mall business reality. We always work hard



experiences. So, we are doing our best to be innovative by using successful experience.

How do you assess the progress of Armenian shopping? Do you see, let's call it, the advancement of customer needs?

— If we should compare what we had in 2014, when we just opened, to what we have now – there'd be two types of completely different customers. Geographically we are not in the best and the most flattering part of the city, so if then it was just the curiosity of locals, who lived nearby

and visited just to have a walk or have a look, so now, after all those marketing events and activities, we have a customer who knows that here he or she can find a big shopping place, a cinema theater and leisure for their kids and themselves. It doesn't mean that you need a big budget for mall shopping. Absolutely! Now, I think we've broken that stereotype and are looking for something new, new offers for our experienced customers, because if there is someone who is looking forward to your offer you have to always propose something innovative and interesting. ♦

MARKET CHAMPIONS

The Global Banking Alliance for Women (GBA) announced the laureates of its annual Women's Market Champion Awards. This year, the winners' list includes also a bank from Armenia: ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK is awarded the honorable prize for its year-long programs to promote and support women's engagement in the economic development of the country.

TEXT : KARINE GHAZARYAN
PHOTO : ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK

More than 70% of all household buying decisions in the world are made by women. That is to say, if our economy is tailored to meet customer needs, women are those who know the needs best. Consequently, they should be actively involved in production management process, shouldn't they? Well, not in this case. The ratio of women's engagement in production is only about 30% which creates a huge gap between the two modes of the world economy. Overcoming this gap will have a positive effect both in economic and in social sense. That is why ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK attaches particular importance to this problem. ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK marked the year with the development of a whole range of projects aimed at encouraging women to participate more in production management. Along with unique funding opportu-





SHARING EXPERTISE

Along with constant modernization and digitalization of its own structures, ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK provides his clients with assistance in application of latest technologies. The bank organized business training on digital marketing for heads of partner SMEs, including SME female leaders whose share among the bank's partners comprises around 1/2. This event is part of ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK's years-long tradition of providing high-quality and completely free trainings for SMEs. More than 700 entrepreneurs and 470 companies have already benefited from this initiative.

➤ ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK won GBA's annual Women's Market Champion Awards

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK, together with European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), developed a project for supporting women entrepreneurs both with funding and with high-quality consulting. "Women in Business" program offered funding opportunity with very low interest rates, and was aimed not only at helping acting entrepreneurs, but also at encouraging women to start their business.

nities, the bank designed a series of special solutions for its female partners. ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK specialists explained that the bank had had two ways to build its programs for women: the first was about setting a lower interest rate and special offers for certain financial instruments, which would for sure help businesses to save money; the second option implied providing the participants with something even bigger, something that could create value for their businesses. So, ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK created a unique strategy: the bank identified and provided a specific ready-to-apply solution for the given link of the chain of research-production-sales. For example, women entrepreneurs made use of outdoor advertising completely free of charge: the bank provided its own promotion platforms in prime locations of the city, including near the Opera theater, where the cost is usually not affordable for small or medium companies. The amount saved from low interest rates could not be enough to purchase advertisement at any prime location in Yerevan (the locations are

not only too expensive, but usually taken month ahead). ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK's marketing specialists also provided free consulting to participants, helping them to define the best location for effective promotion and boosting sales. Furthermore, earlier this year, a multi-stage event was held in the frames of which participants had a chance to attend a professional digital marketing training.

To reach businesswomen who could really benefit from such solutions, ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK used a set of criteria distinguishing the country's economy in general. An enterprise should correspond to the criteria, but any woman business-owner can apply and become a participant of the project. The project will be continuous and will include financial mechanisms for providing easier access to capital, value-creating solutions as well as training and sharing expertise. ACBA's transparency and value-oriented approach was praised by The Global Banking Alliance for Women, a large consortium of financial institutions working for empowerment of women



entrepreneurs. Established in 2000, GBA has built a wide-scale network reaching 135 countries throughout the globe. ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK is the only partner organization in South Caucasus.

In 2018, ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK became laureate of the GBA's annual Women's Market Champion Awards for "having launched a holistic program that strongly supports the Women's Market in the last 12 months". Not only the bank, but all the contributors are the champions when the goal is to overcome significant production-consumption gaps and strengthen the economy of Armenia. ACBA-CREDIT AGRICOLE BANK emphasizes that they are not standing in front of women entrepreneurs, but walking next to them, supporting and helping them to build a prosperous future for everybody. ♦



**ARMENIA
ART FAIR
MODERN
CONTEMPORARY**

ARMENIA ART FAIR 2019:

Creating a Culture

Despite coinciding with unexpected political events the debut Armenia Art Fair was a surprising success. In the aftermath of mass protesting across the country, and the election of a new Prime Minister, the four-day event that ran from 11th to 14th May 2018 attracted more than 2,000 visitors and galleries from across Europe and the Middle East. In several months Yerevan will host Fair's second edition.

APPROACH

The establishment of an international art fair in Armenia is an important development in raising the country's profile on the world art market. Art fairs attract artists, curators, dealers and buyers from around the globe, and offer an alternative exhibition space to traditional venues such as museums and galleries. They give visitors an enjoyable opportunity to discover and buy new artworks, and provide a space to get involved in discussion and debate about contemporary art.

Preparations for the first Armenia Art Fair in May 2018 coincided with the dramatic political changes that swept through the country in the Velvet Revolution. The modern, active Armenian society found its reflection in the art fair, which attracted attention and more than 2,000 visitors during the four days of the exhibition, whose opening night was attended by President Armen Sarkissian. Art and galleries from across the region as well as Russia, the U.K. and the Middle East were represented.

The challenge now is to build on this success in 2019 so that Armenia can gradually take its place alongside such well-known counterparts such as Istanbul and Dubai as an important venue for showcasing contemporary art. In this way, Armenia raises its international profile while also promoting the unique style and culture of the country.



**JUNE
1-3
2019
YEREVAN
EXPO CENTER**



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Unlike many international art fairs – where booths can cost thousands of dollars – Armenia Art Fair offers young and emerging galleries and curators the chance to gain visibility. “With affordable prices for representation, Armenia Art Fair is attractive to midsize galleries that are often squeezed out by big and expensive events in other cities,” said Zara Ouzounian-Halpin, the fair’s co-founder. “It also aims to make contemporary art affordable for buyers who may be new to collecting.”

This approach helps to give access to fresh young exhibitors. The first edition, for example, included Antonina Seryakova’s “Belarus Inside” project, “Perpetual Movement”, an exhibition curated by British-Armenian curator Lizzy Vartanian Collier that consisted of artworks from 7 young Arab women artists, and presentations by the 7th Contemporary Art Fair (St. Petersburg), an independent, nomadic group of artists from Russia.

The Armenia Art Fair is committed to building links with related institutions and cultural organizations to broaden the event’s cultural impact. “Through support from various sponsors, it aims to engage the widest possible public audience to increase engagement with contemporary art and encourage the growth of the creative economy in Armenia,” said the fair’s co-founder Nina Festekjian, who is based in Boston in the U.S. “The fair also encourages good-will projects to promote community education and outreach.”

The art fair hosts a program of roundtable debates and workshops during the exhibition. In addition, it runs a blog featuring guest columnists throughout the year on its website that helps to spread its influence and offers a space for dialogue and discovery of new perspectives.

Looking toward 2019, the Armenia Art Fair will expand in both size and geographical scope. It will feature increased representation from the European Union’s Eastern Partnership countries (which includes Armenia) and present a new program examining the growing relationship between art and technology. In our technological world, even classical art exhibitions include new media that change how audiences interact with artworks.

The Art and Technology section will stress the impact of new technologies in the cultural and creative sectors, as part of the fair’s commitment to encourage innovation in art production. Organizers are already in talks about a workshop by a prominent Polish visual artist who works at the intersection of engineering, art and science using a range of technologies from paper construction to artificial life-management systems. “The theme is particularly appropriate for the fair since Armenia has such a strong tradition of science, technology, engineering and mathematics as well as a thriving modern computing and IT sector,” Ouzounian-Halpin said.

This year, too, the Armenia Art Fair will extend its social outreach. We are pairing Intra, a local health facility, with an artist in a project to highlight and underscore the role of art in mental health. Results of the workshop and public awareness of mental health issues will be presented in an artistic format at the fair.

The 2019 fair will also include a greater range of vendors and an expanded area for children’s activities in conjunction with Children’s Day, June 2. A food court area will include offerings by local restaurants.

Finally, Armenia Art Fair will expand its “footprint” in Yerevan through its Art Week, an extended program of cultural events around the city that will present more local and international artists and run alongside the main exhibition. “The Armenia Art Fair 2019 is shaping up to be another important step in raising Armenia’s profile as an emerging center for international contemporary art,” Festekjian said. “It’s another great opportunity to promote the new Armenia and benefit Yerevan’s economy through increased revenues from international visitors to the fair, who may also wish to discover what else the country has to offer.”



SHADI GHADIRIAN

Witness of her place and time

This fall Cafesjian Center for the Arts, in cooperation with the Muscari Association, presented an exhibition of prominent Iranian art photographer Shadi Ghadirian. Fifty-three of her works, in seven series, are shown for the first time in Armenia. Regional Post talked to the artist on the day of exhibition's official opening.

INTERVIEW : DIANA MARTIROSYAN / PHOTO : SHADI GHADIRIAN, MUSCARI ASSOCIATION

You've had close to 100 exhibitions in Europe and in the Middle East, and this is your first exhibition in Armenia. How do you choose?

— Actually, it's not me who chooses where I should go and where I should exhibit. My exhibitions outside of my country usually are festivals or biennales. Often it's a group exhibition, where my works are part of the bigger thing. But when it comes to my personal exhibitions, then galleries and museums like Cafesjian Center for the Arts want to show the different sides of me and my art, show how I've started and where I am now. So here, in Armenia, I have the retrospective of my works, brought here from Lyon. I have to say it wouldn't be possible without the Muscari Foundation and Manoug, whom I met there in France. It was his idea to organize my first Armenian exhibition.

As Armenia and Iran are connected historically and geographically, do you think that the feedback of the audience will be stronger than in Europe?

— I totally agree with you, here it makes me feel at home. I feel that people are so close to me, it seems that we understand each other. And, it looks like we have the same issues. I do believe that people all over the world are the same and the problems





SHADI GHADIRIAN

Ghadirian is a contemporary photographer living and working in Tehran. Through her work, she critically comments on the pushes and pulls between tradition and modernity for women living in Iran, as well as other contradictions that exist in everyday life. Ghadirian gained international recognition through the series Qajar and Like Every Day in 1998 and 2001, respectively, and is now represented by the Aeroplastics Gallery in Brussels, the Kashya Hildebrand in London, etc. She has produced nine photographic series to date: Miss Butterfly, Nil, Nil, Be Colourful, Like Every Day, Qajar, Ctrl+Alt+Delete, My Press Photo, Out of Focus, and West by East. These series attempt to work through and reveal the issues that women face living in contemporary Iran while also bringing to light the complexities of negative stereotypes that these same women face coming from abroad.

are the same, especially for women. But in such countries like mine or yours we can feel it more directly. We have more women in our universities, more than men, because men usually decide to work and just have money without any educational background. But women still want to study, although among hundreds of graduates there are just few men and women who still work in art photography. Anyway, we have a huge number of galleries in Tehran, it's like a new gallery opening every weekend, numerous

➤ Shadi Ghadirian in Yerevan

▼ Opening ceremony of the exhibition in Cafesjian Center for the Arts



artists and photographers. But that doesn't mean that they don't need another job to continue their art.

You have this powerful series, with these kitchen utensils instead of women faces. Do you think it's a common problem everywhere, not only in our region?

— I think yes, it's everywhere the same, but in some countries like ours, you know, we have very powerful and strong traditions. Women should take care of their children. And, while the best husbands in the world can help them, taking care of children is the responsibility of women. In Armenia and Iran we should talk about women's rights, work on this issue.

What's the war issue for you? We can see war in your White Square series.

— We've had the Iran-Iraq War for eight years, but I believe that we still live with war. I think that when a country has a war it takes about hundred years to let it go, "clear" all the effect. I was a teenager when the war happened and still I have some memories, still in my everyday life I can feel my fear. It is with me even in my dreams. The war effect is still continuing. And,



**SHADI GHADIRIAN, PRAISE OF THE OXYMORON
BY MANOUG PAMOKDJIAN**

"One of Shadi Ghadirian's photographic techniques to break the infertile codes of tradition is based on the oxymoron, that is to say, the meeting of opposites. Where the eye is used to see images of normality, Shadi Ghadirian imposes a vision that contradicts the generally accepted rules. This marriage of opposites produces on the audience a psychological discomfort of such brutality that it enters its mind to the point of causing a real puncture of awareness. Thus her portraits of veiled women, completely covered, while their figure remains masked by a daily utensil: iron, teapot, cleaning glove, rasp, etc. It is to show, in this way, that the woman is reduced to her domestic function to the detriment of her identity.

De facto, Shadi Ghadirian plays ironically on marriage of tradition with modernity, knowing that this marriage is impossible in a society where modernity is the exclusive property of men. In other words, the photographer shows the cruelty of the situation: men having full freedom to enjoy technological innovations or elementary leisure while the woman is forced to languish in the unchanged and the dogma of a sclerotic mentality. Universal photographer because she introduces the debate in the heart of societies that humiliate, manipulate and trap the living in the name of unnatural interests, Shadi Ghadirian summarizes her time by taking the woman as the paragon of the worst offenses made to life, to the joy of living, to the beauty of a world that has no other vocation than to escape to the shackles and oppressions."

> Manoug Pamokdjian



IN MY PHOTOS I WANTED TO SHOW THAT WAR IS NOT ONLY ON THE BORDER, IT'S ALSO IN OUR HOUSES, FOR WOMEN WHO ARE WAITING THEIR MEN TO COME BACK. IT'S REALLY NEXT TO US



I think this feeling is common for my generation. Our neighbors also had war: things that happened in Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, everywhere... And here in my photos I wanted to show that war is not only on the border, it's also in our houses, for women who are waiting their men to come back. It's really next to us, beside us, in our houses. This is the other point of view.

It's clear about the ideological inspiration. Can you name the esthetic part of your inspiration, how you create not the idea but the visual part of your art, what's the inspiration and what is the next?

— As an artist who lives and works in Iran, in Tehran, which is the capital, Iranian symbols come naturally to my works. I am living with these

issues, I am inside. So this "Iranism" comes inevitably. When I had a daughter, the issues of women's rights became very important for me. I was really worried about her future. Now, as she is older, I want to talk about human rights. I am talking about the subject of loneliness, I feel that people have become so lonely now...

And you made series about internet, social media...

— Social media made us so close to each other. There is just a mobile phone: no friends, so, no people around. So, this is a topic that I am going to think about. But it's a dream that an artist can change the situation, it's a dream. All the artists want to change the world, but in my opinion it will not happen. Artists can show, make people think about something. And these people are limited. Our works are in the galleries and in the museums, so who goes to the galleries and the museums? If it was outside, like a billboard in the center of the downtown for walking people, then yes, it could be. But not now. We just can be witnesses of our places and our time.



GYUMRI INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

After the Velvet Revolution and the events that some are calling the “Armenian Spring,” Armenians from all over the world are looking back towards the homeland to understand the next steps. For Gyumri, Armenia’s second largest city and cultural capital, part of the answer lies in a new center that will combine performance arts, education, and research.



The Kharatian Experiential Centre for the Performing Arts is set to begin construction in 2019, and to open in 2021. It’s conceived as a state-of-the-art multi-purpose centre that will act as a hub for a new and interdisciplinary approach to dance and high culture. Its performance space, humanities and movement research centre, dance academy, and choreography programme are among the many facets of the projects that are designed to bring people from all over Armenia, and all over the world, to Gyumri. 30 years after the earthquake that shook the city in the midst of an economic crisis, Gyumri is known today more for the dissonance between its status as Armenia’s second largest urban centre and its lack of develop-

The future Arts center will be located in one of the historic buildings of Gyumri, the former cultural Palace of Railway Employees, known as the Sevyan Club. The building is situated across from the railway station of Gyumri. This place used to be busy and bustling – but after the 1988 earthquake this quarter of Gyumri was left derelict.





ment opportunities. This project, large in both size and financial investment, will reinvigorate the now lackluster area surrounding the train station. With its education programs for people of all ages, it will promote creativity. By encouraging citizens to use this creativity in their homes and streets, it will help weave back into Gyumri's social fabric the famous artistic culture that had enriched it so much.

At the front and centre of the the project is former Washington Ballet teacher Roudolf Kharatian's world-renowned dance philosophy. He sees both ballet and Armenian identity as concepts that have diverse roots and influences, and through this project seeks to delve deep into each source to understand its impact. Indeed, his method focuses on meshing together different components of the American, European, and Russian approaches to dance. From America, he takes speed of movement and learning; from Europe, he takes precision and the broadening of movements beyond the cultural catalog of social gestures; and from Russia, he takes a respect for space and grandeur and a high athletic rigour. The synthesis



^
Rudolf Kharatian

of these three approaches creates an understanding of ballet that is uniquely disciplined and innovative. With this technique, he seeks to highlight Armenia's most important characteristic: its position as a bridge connecting North and South, and East and West. Armenians have found themselves standing at a global crossroads, a place of trade for cultures, philosophies, and arts. Because of this, adaptability is at the very core of what it means to be Armenian. By pulling Armenia's diaspora from all over the world and international artists towards the country, the centre will experience the greatest artistic achievements from all over the world. In this

∨
Azad Chichmanian



way, the centre will help develop new forms, ideas, and movements that can be shared with the world. By finding these connections between peoples, rituals, and dances, the Kharatian Centre for the Performing Arts seeks to promote the development of ballet. But more importantly, it also aims to further our understanding of how we, as people, are physically beholden to the world around us, and to unite the people who frequent it in this understanding. Within all of these concepts, it seeks to push Gyumri to the forefront of the new Armenia that is being built, and to help this new Armenia itself emerge onto the international scene. ◆



Victor Ehikhamenor, "My last dance as King before Sir Harry Rawson's army arrived", 2017, rosary beads on lace textile, 320x191x10 cm



Victor Ehikhamenor, "I am Ogiso, the King from Heaven", 2017, rosary beads on lace textile, 262x177x10 cm

ICAE 2018

On the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan opened its doors to contemporary art with the grand exhibition "International Contemporary Art Exhibition: Armenia 2018" (ICAE2018). Artworks by more than seventy international artists were exhibited in seven important locations throughout Armenia's capital.

PHOTO : ED TADVOSSIAN

The exhibition combines contemporary painting, sculpture, photography, video, and installation of iconic works on loan from the world's top galleries and collections, as well as commissioned works realized by the artists in situ. A number of the invited artists will be holding presentations and workshops with the students of the Fine Arts Academy of Armenia, Terlemezyan State College of Fine Arts, and at the Tumo Center for Creative Technologies. Through exhibition, workshops, and presentations, the event aims to engage the territory in international artistic debate and cultural exchange. The exhibition and program extend across seven locations that include the following cultural venues: Armenian Center for Contemporary Experimental Art, Aram Khachaturian Museum, Cafesjian Center for the Arts, HayArt Cultural Center, Artists' Union of Armenia, A. Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet National Academic Theatre, Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU).

"We decided to enter the art and cultural scene because we realized that there is a infrastructural gap in Armenia



Imran Qureshi, "And They Still Seek the Traces of Blood" 2018, on-site installation

Director of ICAE2018
Fabio Lenzi

when it comes to international exhibitions and events within this segment,” Director of ICAE2018, Fabio Lenzi said. “So we saw a very interesting opportunity in this gap. While we, of course, studied similar events arranged in other countries and some aspects are based on the Biennale of Venice, the concept of ICAE2018 in general is entirely developed by Shaula International. At the beginning we even thought of having country pavilions, but we decided against such an idea and chose to involve many international artists.”



Julia Krahn, "Siren 04" (ear), 2014, wallpaper, 300x400 cm

Julia Krahn, "Siren 02" (horizontal wing), 2014, wallpaper, 300x400 cm

Sahand Hesamiyan, "Tavizeh II", 2015, steel, 300x189x189 cm



Walid Siti, "Elusive Mountain", 2018, barbed wire and thin aluminium wire, 400x800x300 cm



Among artists, represented in the expo are Lida Abdul (Afghanistan), Adel Abidin (Iraq), Aboudia (Abdoulaye Diarrassouba, Ivory Coast), Etel Adnan (Lebanon), AES+F (Russia), Arman Grigoryan (Armenia), Shilpa Gupta (India), Diana Hakobyan (Armenia), Sarkis Hamalbashyan (Armenia), Mona Hatoum (Lebanon), NeSpoon (Poland), Nicky Nodjoumi (Iran), Melik Ohanian (France/Armenia), Adrian Paci (Albania), Sahak Poghosyan (Armenia), Imran Qureshi (Pakistan), Jon Rafman (Canada), Tomas Rajlich (Czech Republic), Anri Sala (Albania), Ararat Sarkissian (Armenia), Lawrence Weiner (USA), Sislej Xhafa (Kosovo), Chen Zhen (China) and others. ♦





CULTURE:

ARMENIA'S BEST EXPORT PRODUCT

CONSTANTINE ORBELIAN:

“Our culture is our number one export”

This past October, Yerevan was the host of Francophonie: dozens of state leaders and thousands of guests visited Yerevan and a number of unique cultural events took place. Among them was the Armenian premiere of the brand-new production of Massenet’s famous Manon opera in the Opera and Ballet National Theater. A remarkable project is going to open a new era in the history of the 80-year-old theater with renovations, premieres and tours. About all of that, Regional Post talked to the man behind the new Opera and Ballet Theater – Grammy-2019 nominee, conductor Constantine Orbelian.

INTERVIEW : ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN / PHOTO : TIGRAN ARAKELYAN

Do you remember your very first visit to this theater?

— It was in the summer of 1970. I was a 17-year-old teenager when I first came to Armenia and finally met my uncle, composer Konstantin Orbelyan. I went to his concert in this very theater, where I met Gohar Gasparyan, Edward Mirzoyan, and many others. And, the weather, too, was great, and I was very delighted. Then I was offered to come and study here, which I did, studying for six months at the Conservatory.

Then there were years of performing in America, after that – working in the USSR and in Russia...

— In 1990, I came to the Soviet Union to play with the State Chamber Orchestra conducted then by Andrey Korsakov. Two months later, he died of heart attack, at 43. Unexpectedly, they offered the position to me. But I didn’t know how to conduct! I met the orchestra and said I had never conducted before. The concertmaster

said, “We like you as a musician, we’ll teach you how to conduct. I decided to give it a try.”

Then, the next stop was in Yerevan.

You moved here in 2016. How did it happen?

— First, Gegham Grigoryan, the great tenor and artistic director of the theater, was my good friend of many years, whose art and personality I respected greatly. My wife was close to his family in Saint Petersburg. Also, I used to work with his daughter; we had met in Lithuania, and I can say that she’s a superstar, a brilliant opera singer. So, I knew the family. (And, I was deeply saddened by the news of his death). Then, there was a call from the Minister of Culture of that time who suggested that I come to Armenia and meet him and the first lady Rita Sargsyan. We met and talked and discussed and ended up with my taking up the position of the Artistic Director of the theater. Six months lat-

er, I became also the general director. By that time, I already knew how the theater worked by then.

Was it much different from what you had expected?

— The problem was that I didn’t know what to expect, because I had never run a theater before. And this theater is a huge establishment with about seven hundred people working, and with huge moving parts. It was very interesting for me to understand how things worked or didn’t work. Slowly, I tried to change the things that needed to be changed.

What was to be changed in the first place?

— We have a huge maintenance issue. The roof is leaking, the toilets have problems, finally, there is this so-called Opera nightclub, which occupies thousand meters on the first floor, while we don’t have enough room for rehearsals and don’t have space for the children’s theater. Those things for





◀
Head of State Opera and
Ballet Theater of Armenia
Constantine Orbelian



OVER THE LAST 17 YEARS THE THEATER HAS ONLY HAD EIGHT NEW PRODUCTIONS. AND NOW, IN THE COMING SIX MONTHS WE ARE DOING **THREE NEW OPERAS AND THREE NEW BALLETS**

me are priority. Not only new plays are important, but also heating in the winter – it's cold in the mezzanine! – and air conditioning in summer. The quality of pianos is bad. I mean, there are so many problems that emerge because of many years of neglect: they come up and they need to be solved.

Do you think that the theater has lost big part of its audience because of that neglect? For many the opera house is just a nice building in the center of Yerevan.

— Now, it's not me saying, but pure statistics: Over the last 17 years the theater has only had eight new productions, four out of which have not been on after the first few performances. And now, in the coming six months we are doing three new operas and three new ballets. And they are big things. Never had Armenia seen anything like Manon we premiered in October: the grandiose stage sets with vehicles and fog and fantastic costumes! ▶



How did you choose the project? Why Manon?

— It started with the Stage Director of the LNO, Andrejs Zagars. We'd been friends with him since I was the artistic director, so one day I just invited him to Yerevan as a guest in the frames of the Khachaturian conducting competition. He looked around, talked to the singers, gave it some thought and then came back again to discuss what we could do together. And, he had just finished the production of the new Manon with our tenor Liparit Avetisyan performing at the Stanislavsky theater in Moscow and had won the Golden Mask for that performance. Next, I had a meeting with the Stanislavsky theater

about bringing it to Yerevan. Soon we had four trucks bringing the sets to Yerevan. We were planning to stage it last fall but didn't manage. It was an extremely complicated production. I was planning to bring 25 troupe members from Moscow, but they couldn't come. Then, we had the revolution in April. Later, we found out that Manon is the favorite opera of French president Emmanuel Macron. So, we moved the premiere to the Francophonie days.

How expensive it was?

— Much more expensive than I had first thought. Mainly, because we had to invite so many specialists from Moscow

CONSTANTINE ORBELIAN

Born in San Francisco, Constantine Orbelian made his debut as a piano prodigy with the San Francisco Symphony at the age of 11. After graduating from Juilliard in New York, he embarked on a career as a concert pianist appearing with major symphony orchestras throughout the U.S., U.K., Europe, and Russia. Orbelian's appointment in 1991 as Music Director of the Moscow Chamber Orchestra was a breakthrough event: he is the first American ever to have become the music director of an ensemble in Russia. Orbelian and his orchestras have also participated in cultural enrichment programs for young people, both in Russia and the U.S. In 2001, Orbelian was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, an award given to immigrants, or children of immigrants, who have made outstanding contributions to the United States. He was awarded with the Order of Friendship of Armenia in 2015. He has been chief conductor of the Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra in Lithuania since 2014. And in 2016, he was appointed the artistic director of Armenian National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet. Recently, baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky's recording of "Rigoletto," with Orbelian as the conductor of Kaunas State Symphony Orchestra, has been nominated for Grammy 2019 in the Best Opera Recording category.



which I first didn't know. And, as the Ministry of Culture wasn't ready for that either, I had to cover all the expenses by myself, finding sponsors on the side. When we get into it, we get into it.

Besides the big premieres in Yerevan, the theater was also on tour this year...

— At the same time, I met Italian producer Mario Dradi, famous for the legendary Three Tenors project, and he told me about the opportunity to visit Dubai. They requested the “Magic Flute” and “Carmen,” but with some special technical requests, as their stage was previously a concert hall and had some limitations. To have it the way they wanted, I contacted my Italian friends, who made the production of the “Magic Flute” by using projections, and there it went. Again, without the Government's help.

Armenian opera on tour – sounds strange to me.

— That's because Armenian opera hadn't gone touring for decades! Last time it was in Los Angeles 25 years ago with Gohar Gasparian. It ended up with the investor going bankrupt and the troupe trying to collect money to come back. It was a real mess. In 2002, Norma was performed in Moscow, with Gegham Grigoryan and Anahit Mkhitarian. So, this new touring is really a big deal for us, both for the singers and the country. Also, it turned out that this year is the 20th anniversary of Armenian-UAE relations. The other big thing was our performance in Bolshoi. We went there to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the First Republic with the ballet Gayane. We took our phenomenal Minas Avetisyan design sets, beautiful costumes, and a team of two hundred people with Anna Hakobyan, Lilit Makounts and others. It was very moving and touching, and our dancers were fantastic. We had a huge success. To realize its great importance, you must know that the last time Gayane was in Bolshoi was sixty years ago, and it



THE ARMENIAN BALLET HAD NEVER EVER PERFORMED ON THAT LEGENDARY STAGE OF BOLSHOI BEFORE. THAT DAY I ONCE AGAIN SAW THAT OUR CULTURE IS OUR NUMBER ONE EXPORT PRODUCT

was performed by the theater's troupe, not by our dancers. The Armenian ballet had never ever performed on that legendary stage before. That day I once again saw that our culture is our number one export product.

Who is the main audience of the theater?

— In the summer, we have lots of tourists who want to see Gayane, Anush, and Spartak. In the winter, we have more local audience. Unfortunately, we don't have a wide variety. And, productions are not easy. For example, if we want to have Aida, we need five days to build the stage, and another five days to put it down. That means, this one performance will need ten days. Whereas, I would love to have 3-4 plays a week. For that purpose, we need some new and easily moving productions. Also, we don't have children's opera or ballet. But, we have already bought Karen Khachatourian's children ballet Cipollino from Bolshoi theater, and famous Russian ballet master

Genrikh Mayorov is now in Armenia to produce it, which will be followed by Nutcracker. It's very important to bring kids closer to opera and ballet. All the big theaters have them on Saturday and Sunday mornings, where kids can have fun and understand that this is not something for adults and boring. They must feel home here.

I noticed big photographs in the mezzanine...

— It's something new. We want to make this place interesting not only on the days of concerts. It's a place of culture. We've hung thirty portraits of our famous composers and will do much more if we get back the club's space. I already have a deal, and we are going to become a branch of the Tretyakov art gallery, with exhibitions changing every six months. Plus, a conference hall for lectures and meetings, plus a new cafe, and other staff: lots of plans, lots of potential square meters. Opera and Ballet Theater is going to shine as never before. ♦

IRINA LYCHAGINA:

“Isolation is destructive for any cultural institution”

Irina Lychagina, assistant director and choreographer of the most celebrated recent production of the Opera and Ballet National Academic Theatre of Armenia, told Regional Post about the dangerous isolation the theater found itself in over years, and about the impressive potential it has to become not a symbolic but a true center of the country's cultural life.

INTERVIEW : KARINE GHAZARYAN



You work at the prominent Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko Moscow Academic Music Theatre where the latest staging of “Manon” was originally created. How did the opera arrive in Yerevan?

— We had two productions – a ballet and an opera, and in order not to confuse the audience we stopped the opera shows and played only the ballet for a while. So, the costumes and decorations would gain dust if we didn't rent them to other theaters. In a conversation with Con-

stantine Orbelian, our director Andrejs Žagars (read his interview on page NN – edt.) suggested that we bring “Manon” to Armenia. Maestro Orbelian picked the idea with great enthusiasm, he watched it in Moscow and decided that it was exactly the fresh and unusual staging Yerevan theater needed. They spoke to the Moscow theater where the idea was also approved. “Manon” premiered successfully in October. We had a very international group of Latvian, English-Swedish, Russian and other specialists.

You have a quite impressive international experience. How was the work with Yerevan theater?

— To be honest, when we just arrived at the theater, it left somewhat archaic impression on us. Due to different reasons, not many performances had been produced and the theater hadn't been touring for over 20 years which brought it to isolation and, kind

of, wiped it off from the cultural map of Europe despite Armenian singers performing in leading theaters of the world: from Bolshoi to Metropolitan. This isolation is destructive for any cultural institution because when it stews in its own juice without any input or output it starts producing and multiplying the same things. That is why on our first days in Yerevan theater we had the feeling of “back in the USSR.” The opera world went through tremendous changes long ago: drama theaters could only dream of the technologies and approaches applied in modern opera!

Unfortunately, all these were not being practiced in Armenia, but at the same time Yerevan theater has developed a great selection of voices which allows staging nearly any opera, be it Wagner or Mozart or any other composer. Plus, the national character plays a key role: the singers are very emotional and hard-working, they invest all their

YEREVAN THEATER HAS DEVELOPED A GREAT SELECTION OF VOICES WHICH **ALLOWS STAGING NEARLY ANY OPERA**, BE IT WAGNER OR MOZART OR ANY OTHER COMPOSER



energy in work. This year, the young performers won several international competitions and travelled to world theaters for work: singer Julietta Aleksanyan now cooperates with Dutch National Opera and Ballet Theatre, Mary Movsisyan and Hovhannes Andreyan, who perform main parts in “Manon,” took part in a festival in Latvia, and so on. Already this international cooperation – short but intense experience-gaining, helped them to improve and develop professionally. Now, Armenian theater work on the “Magic Flute” where they work with colour-projection techniques, which is also new experience.

What would you name the biggest problem of the theater?

— You see, opera theater is like a factory: you may have one rehearsal in the morning and a completely other performance in the evening, every day. Unfortunately, it is difficult to organize in Yerevan theater as the orchestra cannot be booked twice a day, which affects the normal functioning of the theater a lot. Currently, Yerevan theater have five premieres planned, and this has been the maximum for the last 15-20 years. A regular opera theater should play minimum 18 performances a month, but here the maximum possible load is 12: the orchestra is simply too small. On the other hand, the number of soloists is, in my opinion, too big. Our theater in Moscow is bigger but it has smaller number of full-time employed soloists. The administrative staff could be shortened as well. But all of these is impossible to implement without long negotiations with Ministry of Culture, so I think the theater should have freedom to be more flexible. But at the same time, the support of the government should be more tangible: the theater hasn't been renovated for many years. I walked it all from basements to the roof, and it really needs some repair works.



THERE SHOULD BE AN INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM ALONG WITH THE NATIONAL ONE BECAUSE THERE ARE CLASSICAL, MUST-HAVE WORKS THAT HELP ARTISTS TO GROW PROFESSIONALLY

Do you think the program, the repertoire needs to be updated?

— There should be an international program along with the national one because there are classical, must-have works that help artists to grow professionally. Then, one needs to prepare the audience and work on engaging people from the very young age. There are classical musical compositions which help to prepare children for watching opera: most famous ones are, for example, Sergei Prokofiev's symphonic tale Peter and the Wolf or Benjamin Britten's The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra. The theater already have some preliminary agreements with an ani-

mation studio, and famous TV host Mko agreed to take part in it if there is future production of Peter and the Wolf. For now, there is a short concert version of Anush which is played in schools and is quite popular, but the experience which kids can have in theater watching a real-scale staging is completely different. Attracting listeners requires at least four-five years of work. Maestro Orbelian leads the theater for only two years, but I'm already optimistic about the future.

Gayane ballet in Bolshoi theater certainly became an important event, and not only for Armenia. Do you think this indicates overall improvement in the quality of productions?



— International public, as well as many prominent ballet critics came to see the show. I personally invited some of them. And the reviews were very warm and welcoming by Moscow standards (some people were even a bit surprised). Several singers literally astonished the public. Of course, we should acknowledge that “Gayane” is a “museum” staging: it’s over 50 years old. But it certainly demonstrated the potential of Armenian National Theatre of Opera and Ballet.

There are hot discussions after only a couple of performances of “Manon.” How do you personally like the results?

— I think “Manon” is a very modern and stylish European production which interests and touches the audience very much. Many people were crying after the first night. The Minister of culture, for example, later told us that she was particularly impressed. What we did in “Manon” is a tremendous experience for young performers

of the theater, and the inspiration and desire for work is evident in them. When I first attended an evening in Yerevan opera theater, I was amused by how empty the hall was. I wouldn’t say “Manon” was completely sold out, but they told me that in comparison with what had been before – it was unusually active: the hall was almost full. I have to pay tribute to Christopher Ocasek who worked out some magic with the orchestra. When a musician plays just five or six works for years, some skills are inevitably weakening. But French music like “Manon” requires a very specific style of playing. They themselves were very interested, and not only the sound but also the cooperation between singers and the orchestra has changed. Ocasek also conducted “Carmen”, substantially improving the performance.

Is the staging different from the classical one?

— The events are transferred to Paris of 1968, the time of student protests, the time of freedom. Actors understand the context better therefore it is easier for them to transfer the emotions to the audience. At the same time, it is very different from Moscow version. For one, here we have simply tremendous work of chorus. During the big rehearsal back in spring, Andrejs Žagars told me he had forgotten about the soloists because it was too interesting to follow the chorus! By the way, the chorus left our last-day rehearsal on October 2 to go to a protest. Fortunately, I found the team in its full number the next morning.

And what are the general impressions of working in Armenia?

— I had a feeling of being home. Armenians are always hospitable but also have this fantastic readiness to work. We were very limited in our freedom to travel, but we managed to see some cultural and natural landmarks, and I would say Armenia is a place which combines minimalism with very rich content. It is difficult not to fall in love. ♦



STARS AND STRIPES

With long and rich history behind, Opera and Ballet Theater is heading to even brighter future. And as in any theater, its success heavily depends on its stars. Here are some of the brightest opera singers and ballet dancers one can meet on stage in Yerevan.

PHOTO : TIGRAN ARAKELYAN



SYUZANNA PIRUMYAN

Honored Artist of Armenia. Pirumyan has been the leading ballet dancer at the Opera and Ballet National Academic Theatre after A. Spendiaryan since 2001.

In 2012 at the “Evening of Young Choreographers” Syuzanna Pirumyan presented contemporary ballet pieces – “Still Loving You” and “Moon Sonata”. Throughout her artistic activity she has collaborated with the choreographers Maxim Martirosyan (People’s Artist of Russia), Yuri Grigorovich (People’s Artist of Russia), Roudolf Kharatyan (People’s Artist of Armenia), Vilen Galstyan (People’s Artist of Armenia), Hovhannes Divanyan (People’s Artist of Armenia) and Armen Grigoryan (Honored Artist of Armenia). Pirumyan performed in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Egypt, Turkey, Dubai, Syria, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, etc.

REPERTOIRE

- A. Adan “Giselle” (Giselle)
- L. Minkus “Don Quixote” (Kitri, Fairy, Street Dancer)
- A. Khachaturian “Spartacus” (Frigia)
- A. Khachaturian “Gayane” (Gayane)
- S. Prokofiev “Romeo & Julietta” (Julietta)
- G. Bizet - R. Schedrin “Carmen-Suite” (Carmen)
- E. Hovhannisyan “Vardanank” (Shushanik)
- F. Chopin “Chopiniana”
“Tango”, music by
“Gotan” project
- G. Pergolesi “Stabat Mater” (Saint Mariam)
- M. Mavisakalyan,
L. Tchgnavoryan “Saint Hripsime & Trdat” (Hripsime)
- C. Pugni “Korsar” (Pas de Deux)
- A. Vivaldi “La Primavera” (Spring)



REPertoire

A. Khachaturian "Gayane"
(Nune)

L. Minkus "Don Quixote"
(Kitri)

A. Adan "Giselle" (Giselle)

G. Bizet - R. Schedrin
"Carmen-Suite" (Carmen)

P. Tchaikovsky "The
Nutcracker" (Masha, Pa
de Deux)

"Tango", music by Gotan
project

A. Khachaturian "Spar-
tacus" (Aegina)

MARY HOVHANNISYAN

Honored Artist of Armenia, entered A. Spendiarian Opera and Ballet National Academic Theatre in 2003 as a soloist and danced the main role-1st violin in the ballet "Eternity" based on the music of "Concert for the Violin" by A.Khachaturian. After graduating the college has been a leading soloist at the Opera and Ballet National Academic Theatre after A. Spendiaryan. Performed in Russia, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, etc.



REPERTOIRE

G. Bizet "Carmen" (Don José),

G. Verdi "Aida" (Radames),

G. Verdi "Rigoletto" (the Duke of Mantua)

G. Verdi "La Traviata" (Alfredo),

S. Cammarano "Il Trovatore" (Manrico)

R. Leoncavallo "I Pagliacci" (Canio)

G. Puccini "Madam Butterfly" (Pinkerton)

G. Puccini "Tosca" (Cavaradossi)

P. Tchaikovsky "Eugene Onegin" (Lensky)

HOVHANNES AYVAZYAN

Since his 2010 stage Debut, Hovhannes Ayvazyan has frequently performed at various venues including Opera Belcanto of South Simcoe in Toronto, Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, Mariinsky Concert Hall, Tatar State Opera in Kazan, Big Hall of the Moscow State Conservatoire, Musikverein Vienna, Novaya Opera and Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, etc. He has often performed under the baton of Maestro Valery Gergiev, and had the pleasure to work frequently with such legends as Maria Guleghina, Anna Netrebko, Olga Borodina, Lyudmila Monastirskaya, Ekaterina Semenchuk, Tatyana Serjan, and many others. Most recent successes included a performance of Mozart's Requiem at the Musikverein in Vienna, a concert at the Geneva's Victoria Hall, performances at the Yerevan Opera House as Canio, Turiddu, Don Jose, Radames and Pinkerton, as well as many title roles at the Mariinsky Theatre including Don Carlo, Manrico and Cavaradossi. He was on tour with the Berliner Symphoniker under Maestro Lior Shambadal for which he received outstanding reviews.



REPertoire

A. Adan "Giselle" (Count Albert)

K. Khachaturian "Gayane" (Armen, Karen)

L. Minkus "Don Quixote" (Basil, Espada)

A. Khachaturian "Spartacus" (Spartacus)

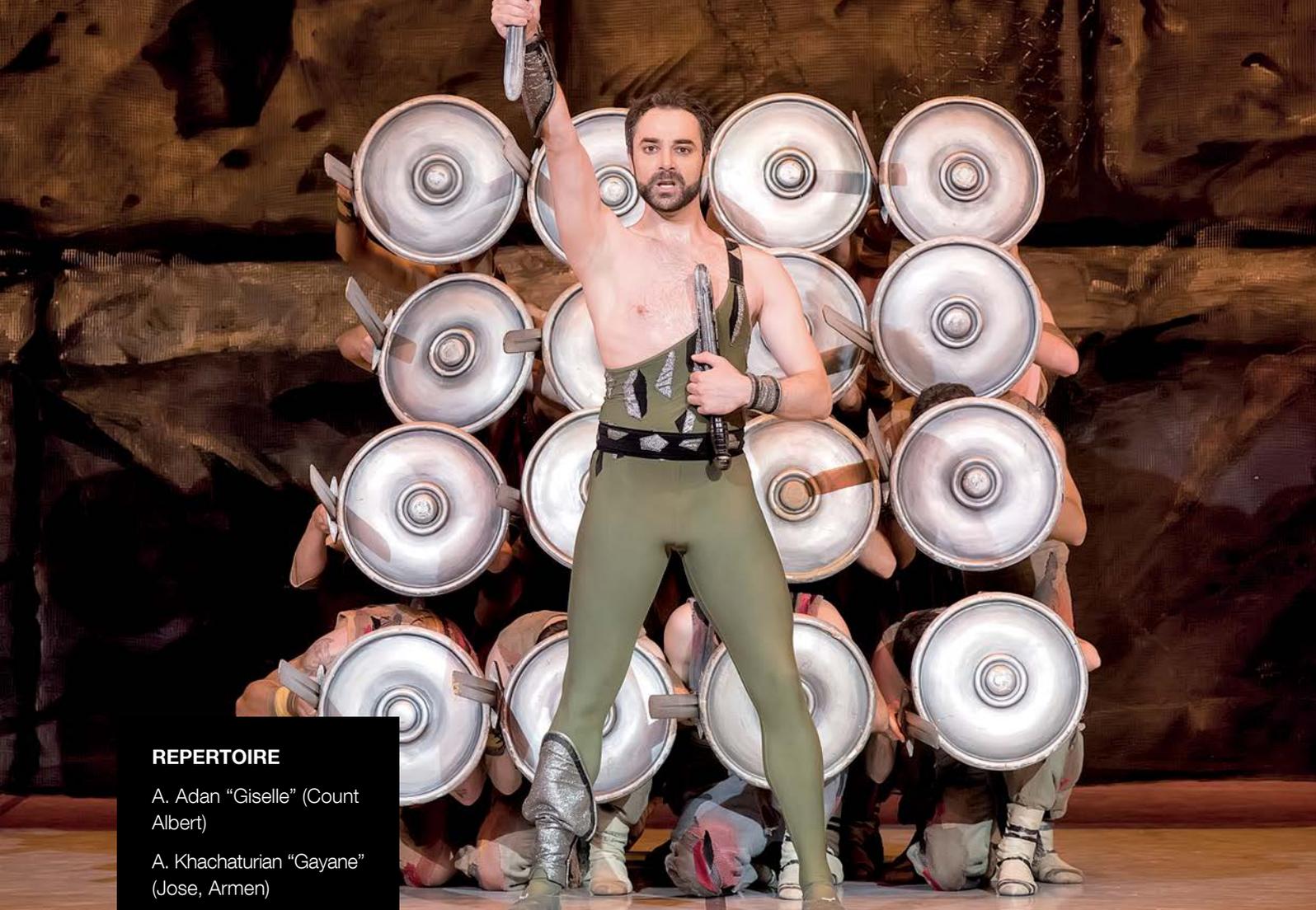
E. Hovhannisyan "Vartanank" (Vartan, Ishkhan)

G. Bizet-R. Shchedrin "Carmen-Suite" (Officer)

A. Khachaturian "Masquerade" (Arbenin)

SEVAK AVETISYAN

Honored Artist of Armenia, became a ballet dancer at the Opera and Ballet National Academic Theatre after A. Spendiaryan in 2004. Since 2005 is a leading dancer. In 2008 in Sochi, he participated in the 2nd International festival after Yu. Grigorovich and received 2nd prize along with the status of laureate. In 2012 received Movses Khorenatsi medal.



REPertoire

A. Adan "Giselle" (Count Albert)

A. Khachaturian "Gayane" (Jose, Armen)

G. Bizet-R. Shchedrin "Carmen-Suite" (Toreador)

L. Minkus "Don Quixote" (Basil)

F. Chopin "Chopiniana"

E. Hovhannisyan "Vartanank" (Vartan)

A. Khachaturian "Spartacus" (Spartacus)

Liza and Colen's "Raymonda", "Swan Lake", "Shelkunchik"

A. Khachaturian "Masquerade" (Arbenin)

RUBEN MURADYAN

Honored Artist of Armenia. Since 2004 has been the leading ballet dancer at the Opera and Ballet National Academic Theatre after A. Spendiaryan. He was invited to the United States with Moscow's "Great Theatre" where he played the role of Spartak in "Spartacus". He has also toured in Spain, Italy, France. In 2013 he has cooperated with Tbilisi's Z. Pavliashvili National Academic Theatre.

In 2007 participated at Brazil's Joinville city's competition where he gained 3rd place and was awarded a bronze medal. In 2008 participated in the 2nd international competition named after Y. Grigorovich in Sochi where he gained first place and a gold medal. In 2010 he was awarded with the "Movses Khorenatsi" medal of the Republic of Armenia.



REPertoire

G. Verdi "Aida" (Ramphis,
The King of Egypt)

V. Bellini "Norma"
(Oroveso)

G. Verdi "Il Trovatore"
(Ferrando)

G. Rossini "La Ceneren-
tola" (Alidoro)

G. Puccini "Tosca"
(Il Sagrestano)

L. W. Beethoven "Fidelio"
(Rocco)

G. Bizet "Carmen" (Zuniga)

W. A. Mozart "Don
Giovanni" (Mazetto)

G. Verdi "Rigoletto"
(Sparafucile)

P. Tchaikovsky "Eugene
Onegin" (Gremin, Zaretsky)

P. Borodin "Prince Igor"
(Polovtsian Khan)

G. Puccini "La Boheme"
(Colline)

HAYK TIGRANYAN

Honored Artist of Armenia, became a singer at the Opera and Ballet National Academic Theatre after A. Spendiaryan in 2004.

From 2008 Hayk is the principal soloist of Armenian National Academic Opera and Ballet Theater after A. Spendiaryan. Hayk won numerous awards: In 2015 he won the 4th International Competition Jazeps Vitols at the Latvian National Opera theater. In 2013 he was awarded with a diploma by the International Association of Lawyers and psychologists as a devotee of Armenian Music Art. He was honored with a certificate of appreciation from the Minister of Youth and Culture of Nagorno Karabakh N. Aghabalyan, as the best singer in the role of Avo in the opera Artsvaberd. In 2012 he won the 28th world competition called "Spring of April" in the Democratic Republic of South Korea. In 2012 he was honored on national radio for the great record of Korean national music.

Hayk Tigranyan recently performs in Estonia, Libanon, Austria, Italy, Latvia, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, South Korea, Russia with different concert projects.



REPERTOIRE

A. Tigranyan "Anush"
(Anush)

J. Massenet "Manon"
(Manon)

W. A. Mozart "Magic
Flute" (Pamina)

G. Bizet "Carmen" (Mi-
caela)

MARY MOVSIKYAN

In 2010 received a golden medal and a special prize in the competition of young singers "Darclee" in Romania. In 2011 became a laureate and took the first prize in the classic vocal competition after Tetevik Sazandaryan. Participated in Glinka International Competition (2011) and "Queen Elizabeth" international competition in Belgium (2014). In 2009-2010 participated in several concerts with the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia headed by Sergey Smbatyan. In 2010 participated in the festival "Rising Stars in Kremlin" in Russia. The performance was accompanied by the "Moscow Virtuosi" orchestra headed by conductor Vladimir Spivakov. In 2011 participated in the festival "Moscow meets friends" and received a certificate from the international charity fund after Vladimir Spivakov. Same year took part in the concert for young singers of Armenia in St. John Smith Hall in London.



REPERTOIRE

A. Tigranyan "Anush"
(Saro)

G. Verdi "La Traviata"
(Alfredo)

S. Rakhmaninov "Aleko"
(Young Gypsy)

G. Bizet "Carmen" (Don
Jose)

W. A. Mozart "The Magic
Flute" (Tamino)

Tenor parts in the Re-
quiems of Mozart, Verdi
and Dvorjak, "Song of
the Land" by G. Mahler,
"Christmas Oratorio" by
Saint-Saens, "Magnificat"
by Bach, operas "La Bo-
heme" by G. Puccini and
"Rigoletto" by G. Verdi.

LIPARIT AVETISYAN

Born in Yerevan in 1990, from 2008 to 2011, Avetisyan studied with B. Kudryavtsev at the Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory, later transferring to the Komitas State Conservatory of Yerevan to study with R. Hakobyants. During his studies, Avetisyan won Second Prize in both the Maria Biesu International Singing Competition and the Ill Muslim Magomaeu International Vocalists Contest. At the Armenian National Academic Opera, he has sung Alfredo, Don Jose, and the young Gypsy in Aleko. Avetisyan sang his first performances of Rodolfo, the Duke in Rigoletto, and the Verdi and Mozart Requiems with the Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra.

Also active on the concert stage in recent years, Avetisyan has appeared at the XXI International Music Festival Stars of the White Nights in Saint Petersburg, Easter Festival in Moscow, Beethoven Fest in Poland, Mustonen Fest in Estonia, and Midem Fest in France. He also performed in benefit concerts dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide with Evgeni Kissin at Carnegie Hall and the Music Center at Strathmore in Washington.



REPERTOIRE

W. A. Mozart "Idomeneo"
(Ilia)

W. A. Mozart "The Magic
Flute" (Queen of the night)

G. Puccini "La Bohème"
(Musetta)

G. Puccini "Gianni
Schicchi" (Lauretta)

G. Rossini "Il Barbiere di
Siviglia" (Rosina)

G. Rossini "La cambiale
di matrimonio" (Fany)

G. Verdi "La Traviata"
(Violetta)

A. Tigranyan "Anush"
(Anush)

W. A. Mozart "C-moll
Mess"

W. A. Mozart's "Requiem"

L. Beethoven "Mess
C-Dur"

J. Haydn "Nelson Mess"

T. Mansuryan "Requiem"

HASMNIK TOROSYAN

Graduated from the Romanos Melikyan Musical College in 2004 and, later in 2010 the Komitas State Conservatory. Hasmik won several competitions in 2004 and 2006 including Special Prizes in the Republican Competitions after T. Shahnazaryan and T. Sazandaryan. In 2008 she won the First Prize and the Gold Medal in the Republican Competition after G. Gasparyan. In 2009 she won the President's Prize for Young Singers of Armenia, in 2010 the First Prize in the "Bella Voce" International Music Competition in Moscow, Russia and became the finalist of the 6th Seoul International Music Competition in Seoul, South Korea (2010). In 2011 Hasmik won the First Prize in the "Musica Sacra" International Music Competition in Rome, Italy.

Hasmik Torosyan recently performs in France, Germany, Belgium, Austria, Finland, Great Britain, USA, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Italy, South Korea, Russia, Lebanon, Turkey with different concert projects. From 2011 Hasmik is the principal soloist of Armenian National Academic Opera and Ballet Theater A.Spendiaryan.



REPERTOIRE

P. Tchaikovsky "Iolanta"
(Ibn-Hakia)

P. Tchaikovsky "Eugene
Onegin" (Onegin)

T. Chukhajian "Arshak II"
(Arshak II)

A. Tigranyan "Davit Bek"
(Davit Bek)

G. Puccini "Madam
Butterfly" (Sharpless)

G. Bizet "Tosca" (Baron
Scarpia)

G. Verdi "Aida" (Amonasro)

G. Verdi "Nabuco"
(Nabuco)

GEVORG HAKOBYAN

Honored Artist of Armenia, baritone Gevorg Hakobyan studied at the Komitas State Conservatory in Yerevan with Maestro Sergey Danielyan. In 2008 he was awarded both the Gold Medal and First Prize at the prestigious First International Pavel Lisitsian Baritone Competition in Moscow, and in 2011 was recognised as a Merited Artist of the Republic of Armenia.

Since 2003, Gevorg has been a soloist with the Yerevan Opera Theater, where he has performed in several productions including "Aleko," "Arshak II" and "Yolanta," to name a few. Gevorg begins the 2017/18 season by performing Tomsy in Pique Dame at Stuttgart Opera before returning to Teatro dell'Opera di Roma as Scarpia in "Tosca." In November 2017 he appeared as Grigory Gryaznoy ("The Tsar's Bride") at the Bolshoi theater.



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ETERNAL FLIGHT INTO THE SKY

This past October, Vahagn Margarյan – a rising star of the Armenian ballet – died in a tragic accident. At our request, the head of the auxiliary actors' staff Arpi Maghakyan of the Yerevan Opera and Ballet Theatre talked with the Regional Post about Vahagn.

TEXT : ARPY MAGHAKYAN / PHOTO : TIGRAN ARAKELYAN



You could endlessly admire Vahagn: his dance was swift, clean, rhythmic and emotional. Few ballet artists succeed in creating an organic and interesting character in a challenging performance in terms of dance. Vahagn mastered it.

Vahagn could leap so high on the stage that the audience kept its breath and followed him with awe as he touched back on the floor with the tight toes of his strong muscular feet and stood firmly. Many admired the speed, aesthetics, cleanness, flexibility and the emotionality of the soloist's dance performance.

The National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet mourns the loss of the 23-year-old artist: "That car crash took from us not only the life of a talented artist, but also our modest and joyful, kind and much beloved friend," said his colleagues.



CITATION

On July 24, The Yerevan Opera and ballet National Academic Theater was hosted by the stage of the Bolshoi Theater in RF, with Aram Khachaturian's *Gayane* ballet.

On this occasion, the commentator of the Kommersant.ru Russian newspaper Tatyana Kuznecova, famous for her sharp pen and professional, sharp critical approach, evaluates the dance of the soloist in *Gayane* as: "... the swift virtuosités of the light-footed and fast Vahagn Margaryan."

Meanwhile, not long ago, on November 4, there was a great celebration at the theater – it was the premiere of Karen Khachatryan's children's ballet *Chipolino*.

The stage was bright and beautiful. All the decors and costumes were brought to Armenia from Russia's world-famous Bolshoi Theater with the support of the Constantine Orbelian Foundation.

Chipolino's first choreographer Henrich Mayorov himself had arrived in Armenia and was working diligently with the artists of the ballet.

During his meetings, Henrich Mayorov told the Armenian mass media that the performance of *Chipolino* children's ballet is very complex, and it's not accidental that at the Bolshoi it is called the children's *Spartakus*.

"I am amazed at the Armenian cast. And, the leading actor, Vahagn: he is

crazy... he is magnificent... just magnificent," said Mayorov when giving an interview to the A1+News before the premiere.

Vahagn created a *Chipolino* who was not only dancing excellently, soaring and spinning in the air, but who was also a vivid and featured character, children's favorite.

The very next day of the audience's standing ovations in the sold out hall the leading actor dies in a car crash. The second performance scheduled for November 12 is, alas, taken down from the repertoire.

Vahagn Margaryan's memory will never fade. He will always be remembered for his artistry, talent and human values, and will always remain in the hearts of his audience, colleagues, friends and family. The soloist dancer performed another of his excellent flights, a flight to heaven... alas, so untimely. ♦

VAHAGN MARGARYAN

Vahagn Margaryan was born on September 5, 1995, in Echmiadin. He completed 8 years at the secondary school in village Apaga of Armavir region, then he was transferred to the Yerevan State College of Dance, where he studied first in the department of Armenian folk dances and afterwards – the Classical Dances.

While in college, he danced in various performances. In his last year, he participated in Eurovision Young Dancers' international contest in Gdansk, Poland, representing Armenia. In 2013, he graduated from The State College of Dance and started to work at Yerevan National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet after A. Spendiaryan as a ballet artist.

He performed in the following ballet performances: A. Khachaturian's *Gayane* (Karen), *Spartakus* (Shepherds), J. Bizet's – R.Shchedrin's *Carmen* (Officer), Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* (the pas de deux), L. Minkus' *Don Quixote* (the pas de deux), etc.

In *Blind Alley* of the 2016 Gala Concert of the Estonian National Opera House he won the III PRIZE in combined C and D age categories.

In 2018, at the Fourth Baltic Ballet Competition in Latvia, he took the second principal place. It's worth mentioning that there was no first place that year.

MANON

This October Armenian audience saw the premiere of the brand new production of Jules Massenet's "Manon" opera. The production is thought to become a flagship project of the Armenian opera.

PHOTO : TIGRAN ARAKELYAN





“Manon” is an opéra comique composed by Jules Massenet’s with a French libretto by Henri Meilhac and Philippe Gille. It’s based on on the 1731 novel L’histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut by the Abbé Prévost. Opera was first performed in Paris in 1884 and became Massenet’s most famous work.

Armenian premiere was visited by 54 heads of state as part of the Francophonie Summit, that took place at the same days in Yerevan. The new version of “Manon” is produced by Andrejs Zagars, the famous Latvian director, who changed the set of the opera. The story here takes place in the 1960s, so what was happening on the stage reminded the well-known urban life of France with its bohemian lifestyle.





Production's conductor is Christopher Ocasek, famous for his works in Europe, USA and Asia, who is also involved in Yerevan opera theater's production of "Carmen." The leading parts of the opera were performed by theater's stars Mary Movsisyan (Manon) and Liparit Avetisyan (Le Chevalier des Grieux).





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ANDREJS ŽAGARS:

“Opera theater is not a church”

Andrejs Žagars has led Latvian National Opera for 17 years. He has worked with eminent theaters around the world and has cooperated with Armenian National Theater of Opera and Ballet recently to stage one of the most large-scale performances in the latest history of Yerevan theater. We spoke to Andrejs Žagars about the modern opera of the world and changing the opera of Armenia.

INTERVIEW : KARINE GHAZARYAN

The opera is still perceived as academic art difficult to digest and enjoy. Do you agree with this view?

— Opera is not just an academic concert, it is a form of performing art. Sure, for understanding classical opera it is better to have basic education, have at least some musical training, know a bit of history of art to understand the context. But things change when it comes to contemporary opera. First, there are operas created just five or ten years ago. Second, directors constantly interpret the classical stories differently trying to engage more people, and it does work. In Germany, for example, opera is very popular. The country has over 70 concert houses, Berlin alone has three. And people of different generations and ages attend performances.

You've led the Latvian National Opera for 17 years. What was your strategy of building a successful opera theater?

— I think it was because I saw and understood the changes that took place. I became director of Latvian National Opera in 1996. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union Latvia had had several years of independence, and the private institutions – banks, law companies, healthcare companies – adapted very quickly to market economy. But theaters were struggling because they had very old-fashioned management. So, I just gathered



a team of people who loved opera and who were able to learn and apply new approaches by discovering the best examples from across the world on how to manage art institutions. We were learning from our colleagues, participating in international organizations and initiatives which is very important. We became part of Opera Europa and other programs; we had sponsors who paid for trainings specifically on how to better run an opera house, how to manage it in a modern way, because for decades, the government had been giving money and it didn't matter whether the production

was good or bad, whether the performance was sold out or not, and so on.

But the time came when Latvian National Opera had to also become a modern organization and not just a state institution spending money regardless of its product. Opera theater is not a church: it has to produce quality product. People tend to forget about this. Yerevan, for example, is a beautiful modern city with vivid architecture, bright people, great restaurants – the modern style is everywhere: why then the opera house should be old? In Cascade



ARMENIA IS A VERY MUSICAL NATION WITH GOOD MUSICAL TRADITIONS AND HENCE **A VERY GOOD POTENTIAL OF RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL MODERN THEATER**

Latvian National Opera

you have a museum with works of world-famous contemporary artists, and there has to be some reflection of this in the opera also, this modern spirit has to penetrate the scenography and production. The problem with the Armenian opera is that you've had little production for a long time. To maintain a working theater, to keep it alive – it is necessary to conduct a minimum of six-seven stagings per year – both opera and ballet. And again, good management is crucial: you have to engage people who are able to apply modern approach to their work.

Speaking of good management, do you think an opera theater – just like any other corporate organization – is able to function without state or sponsor funding?

— No! In no country it is possible. Opera is too expensive because simultaneously it demands work of orchestra, chorus, singers, technical staff, etc. The amount of people who are engaged in production is too big, and governments need to subsidize. In the USA, the model is different: the theaters do not have state support, they rely on private sponsorship. The Metropolitan does fundraising but this is big fundraising: more than \$300 million a year.

The names like Bolshoi or Metropolitan are known to the world, but what do you think smaller



theaters like Armenian opera theater should do to engage the public?

— It is different culture. You see, opera as genre demands very high quality. A drama theater, for example, can be a very small company. There may exist a big national drama theater, but there can also be smaller, underground ones, performing with big success at festivals. Opera is different: it is a huge institution, demanding resources and skills. The quality here is not an arbitrary notion: there are very strict criteria of good and bad performance; it is not just a matter of taste. So, there must be a skilled team of professionals with not only good education, but also well-shaped styles: that is to say, ability to play different composers who demand very different approaches.

You worked with Armenian opera theater on staging Jules Massenet's famous "Manon." How was your experience of working in Armenia?

— Our cooperation started when I met very enthusiastic Constantine Orbelian. He comes from another country and he wants to really help Armenian opera to thrive, and I want to support him. Armenia is a very musical nation with good musical traditions and hence a very good potential of running a successful modern theater. The production can remain classical, but it is crucial that the opera becomes a modern institution structurally – as modern as a bank, if you wish. Somebody needs to reform it, and I wish Constantine Orbelian to have the power and the support of the government to succeed in this. ♦

CHRISTOPHER OCASEK:

“The language of music is international”

This Fall American conductor Christopher Ocasek conducted Jules Massenet’s “Manon” at the Yerevan State Opera and Ballet Theater, as part of the Organization of La Francophonie Summit in Armenia. Christopher Ocasek arrived in Yerevan on the Maestro Constantine Orbelian’s special invitation. We talked to Christopher Ocasek on the previous and upcoming cooperation with the Yerevan State Opera and Ballet Theater and his impressions on the country of Armenia.

INTERVIEW : AMALIE KHACHATRYAN

Performance of “Manon” in Yerevan had an astonishing success, audience could not stop applauding...

— It’s always an honor for the performers when an audience recognizes the artistry and effort put into a production through a standing ovation. I found it a testament to the performers’ quality and dedication of performance. We can’t forget, as well, to thank the audience for joining and supporting the singers and orchestra for this very special occasion – the final bows are also our way of saying thank you to them.

What were your expectations before coming to Armenia and were they fulfilled?

— Armenia is known worldwide for its rich culture. What I found when I arrived were musicians open and willing to collaborate with an outsider like me! They were willing to work, consider things from a different point of view, and make beautiful music collectively. I can’t ask for more than that.

You have collaborated with many opera companies in Europe, the USA, Asia throughout

your international career. What can you say about working with the Armenian orchestra?

— I have a very special relationship with the orchestra at the Yerevan Opera that I really can’t compare with other places I’ve worked. It’s hard to put my finger on, but when we’re making music, it’s as if we’re a group of close friends making chamber music together. We’re always learning from each other, listening and reacting to one another carefully, and for this special type of communication I have tremendous respect. What I can say is that these types of unique relationships between conductor and orchestra take time to come to full fruition and we’ve only just begun our work together. If I have the privilege of being invited back to Yerevan to continue my work with the orchestra and singers, I hope to continue on this path on which we’ve already accomplished so much.

Did you have difficulties while working at the Opera and Ballet Theatre?

— An opera house to me is like a big family. In fact, I often feel most

at home in the complexities of this (sometimes crazy) world. Of course, there are challenges that every opera house faces, Yerevan being no exception. But what I believe with great conviction is that an opera house is reflective of the community in which it lives. If Armenians can support the opera house, it can in turn give back exponentially more to the people, it can represent its people on the national and international stage; a reciprocal relationship if you will. In simpler terms, great art needs people to thrive. This includes those simply seeing an opera or ballet for the first time to tried and true patrons who are at every performance to philanthropists and guests attending fundraising dinners to the very loud and proud support of private companies and governmental institutions. There is huge change happening at the Yerevan Opera





and Ballet Theatre and a remarkable potential waiting to be tapped into, about which I think much of the Armenian community in Yerevan and abroad hasn't yet heard.

So, you asked me about the difficulties. Speaking from an international viewpoint, I'd say the greatest difficulty facing the Opera and Ballet is its desperate need for heroes. Armenia stands out for its traditions of "Anoush," "Gayane," "Arshak II," for example, but the potential could and should viably extend to international recognition of all its repertoire given the immense amount of talent inside those walls. But, I believe, the Opera and Ballet Theatre isn't in a place to do that yet because they are in dire need of the means to make it happen. From lack of instruments, to burned out stage lights, to a leaking roof, to virtually no visiting artist or artistic budget, to a desperate need

OPERA AND BALLET NEED DONATIONS, THEY NEED PHONE CALLS AND FINANCIAL BACKING FROM PHILANTHROPISTS WHO BELIEVE IN MAKING A DIFFERENCE

to modernize and reach the level a national theater must be on to loudly and proudly represent its culture and country, the Opera and Ballet need heroes to come forward and ask how they can help.

Most importantly, opera and ballet need donations, they need phone calls and financial backing from philanthropists who believe in making a difference, they need continued support and involvement of the Ministry of Culture, and they need Armenians coming out in droves to support their talented and passionate brothers and sisters on that stage each week. I spoke about family earlier. Well, for

me a family celebrates together when times are good and holds each other up when times aren't so good. Now is a time when this family needs support, and that support must come from their family near and far.

Is it difficult to collaborate with orchestras from different nationalities and cultures, always traveling because of your international career?

— Traveling is a very normal part of my job. That part is a given. I actually look at my collaboration with different nationalities and cultures as a pure pleasure. Earlier in the year I was in Beijing, Madrid, Washington, Miami,

Vienna, among other places, and in each city I'm pleasantly reminded of just how international the language of music, of personal expression, of passionately communicating can be. Sure, we have our laughs in Yerevan when I come out trying a new phrase in Armenian (to varying degrees of success I might add), but that's the surface. The real collaboration happens when the downbeat comes, and from there we're all for one moment one culture.

Are there any specific national characteristics in the way different orchestras play? If yes, what are they the specific of the Armenian orchestra?

— I was told once that when pairing a wine with food it's always best to choose a wine from the same region as where you're eating. Applied to music, this would mean that German music is best performed in Germany, French music in France, and so on. While I think there is absolutely a relationship between a culture's spoken language and its musical language, and while I do believe there are traditions or style that one consciously or even subconsciously "absorbs" after being in a culture long enough, I don't subscribe to the belief that only Italian music can be properly played by Italians, for example (although I've heard some absolutely striking Verdi in Milan!). My observations have been that when an orchestra, ballet troupe, or singers feel connected to something, they often perform it better – and in working with orchestras, I try to build those connections into the music from the first rehearsal, especially when it's new or quite foreign repertoire to the orchestra.

Music is, after all, a form of emotion transcribed on to a page, so we must always attach a narrative and emotional logic to what we perform. It's this connection that I think is natural for, say, Armenians playing or singing "Anoush." First of all, the language is inherent, but there is a sound in the ear of many Armenians that doesn't need



MUSIC IS, AFTER ALL, A FORM OF EMOTION TRANSCRIBED ON TO A PAGE, SO WE MUST ALWAYS ATTACH A NARRATIVE AND EMOTIONAL LOGIC TO WHAT WE PERFORM

to be taught or explained – it's already been "absorbed" and can therefore create a remarkably real and emotional performance when done right!

You have shared on Instagram the photos of Aram Khachaturyan's museum that you visited during your stay in Yerevan. Where else you have been during the two-month visit in Yerevan that impressed you?

— I very much enjoyed my visit to this museum, as well as a few other museums in the city I was able to see. I wish I had more time to travel while I'm in Armenia, but the truth is I'm most always working! I had the recent opportunity to visit Garni and Geghard, which were stunning!

You will visit Armenia in November as well. What should we expect from you next time?

— For starters, you should expect "Carmen" and "Manon," which I'm very happy to return to conduct! That aside, my hope would be that those listening to these performances, hear the remarkable and ever-improving

refinement of playing and singing, which has already come so far, but also this deep connection and passion I was talking about earlier. I must say, there is a wonderful team of conductors, coaches, pianists who all deserve immense credit for their role in the opera house, so I can certainly not take credit for all that they do and have done. All that I can bring is my experience and perspective to the projects for which I am responsible and work in an honest and respectful fashion to, hopefully, inspire the players and singers to perform at their world-class best. For that it's my honor to give everything I can to make it the best I can. My thanks must go to everyone in Yerevan, including the general director, for allowing me to share my viewpoints in Armenia, to the orchestra, the dancers, and to the singers for their incredible dedication to passionate performance. There is truly something magical in Yerevan and I hope in the future to be part of bringing it to greater prominence on the national and international stage. ♦



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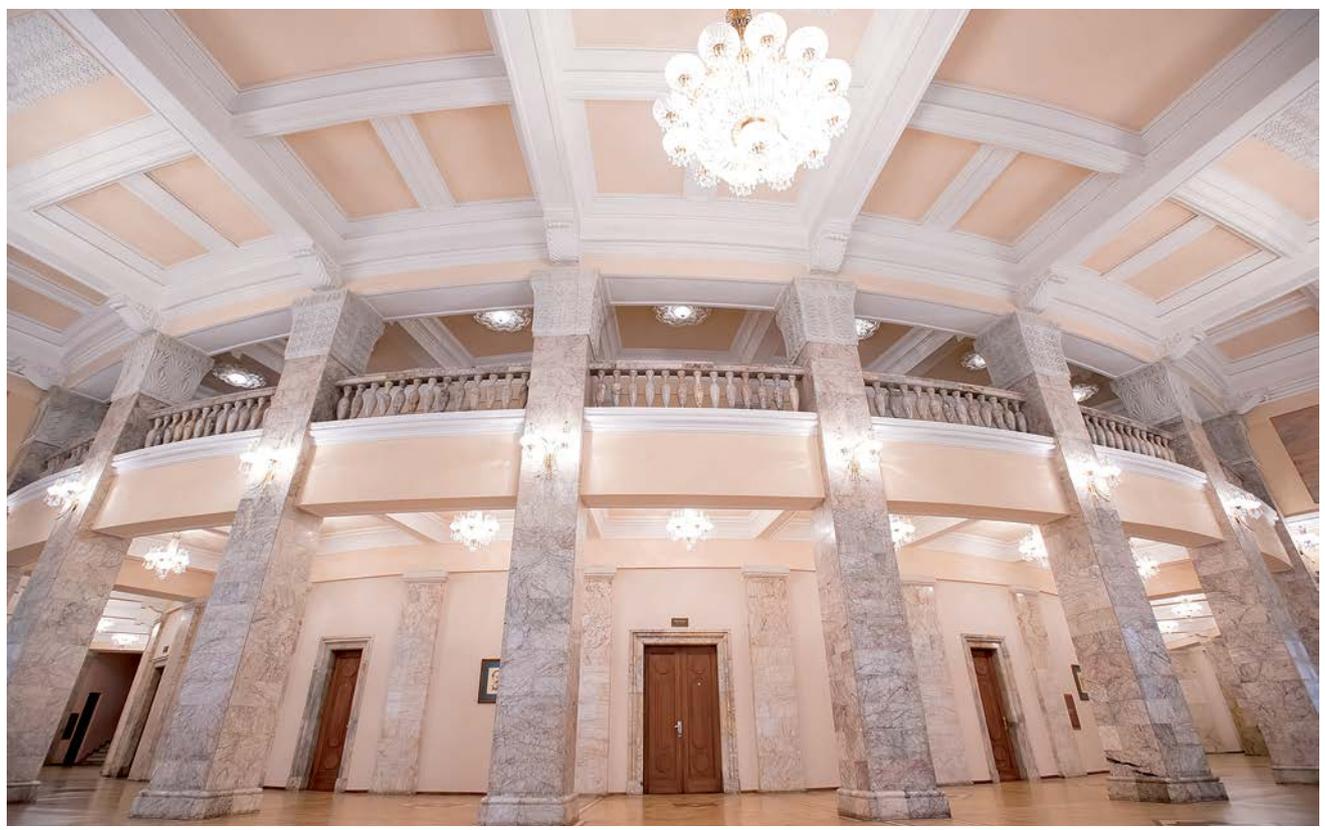
GALLERY OF THE ARTISTS

Yerevan Opera and Ballet Theater is changing. Now it's not just a venue for concerts and performances. The new administration is moving it towards a multi-functional arts center. And, the exhibition gallery on the second floor is part of the process.

TEXT : ASHOT GARUNTS / PHOTO : TIGRAN ARAKELYAN

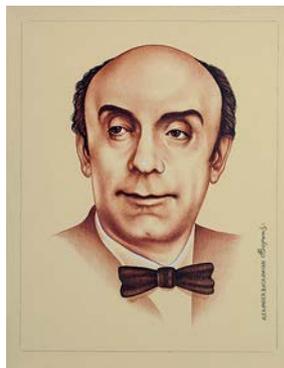
When Constantine Orbelian arrived at the theater two years ago, he noticed the beautiful mezzanine – cold and empty at the time. “I thought that it needed to be filled with something vivid to keep the public excited,” Orbelian says, “The audience often have some free time during the intermissions and we can't let them be bored.” There is a project of a theater museum inside the building, but it's a long way before it can be brought to life. Also, many big theaters all around the world have some kind of an exhibition hall where their big stars' portraits are being exhibited. In Metropolitan opera there is a wall with photographs, Bolshoi has a museum, so,

why not have something similar in Yerevan? “I went to my friend Alexander Baghramyan, who's a fantastic artist, and asked him if he would be interested in doing a whole portrait gallery of great Armenian singers, dancers, directors, conductors, composers, e.g. the most famous people who were involved in developing Yerevan opera as we know and love it,” says Orbelian. The next thing was making a list and then creating the portraits. It took him a year to create 50 portraits – now available at the gallery. Here you can see the portraits of composers Alexander Harutyunyan, Edvard Mirzoyan, and even Arno Babajanyan who, despite never having





Tatevik Sazandaryan



Mikael Tavrizyan



Tigran Levonyan



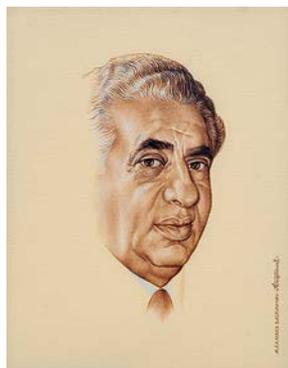
Gohar Gasparyan



Gegham Grigoryan



Haykanush Danielyan



Aram Khachaturian



Gohar Galachyan



Alexander Spendiaryan

written anything for the opera, was indeed one of the greatest composers of his generation. The other part of the wall is dedicated to the great singers who started their careers here but later moved to Moscow to become world-famous performers, like Zara Dolukhanyan, Pavel Lisitsian, legendary Gohar Gasparyan, Tigran Levonyan, and many others. The list is huge. Mr. Orbelian believes it's much more entertaining for people to not only have an enjoyable time here, but also have an opportunity to remember

those great artists who might otherwise be forgotten with time. Next time you happen to be in the opera, pay attention on how people are exploring and discussing the portraits. Orbelian's future plans include publishing a book with the portraits and biographies of those famed people. Armenian opera has a huge heritage to be proud of and to be presented to the world. "We have so much to tell!" says Orbelian, "The stories of our legends are really fascinating and worth diving in." ♦



BEING GRATEFUL

The Opera and Ballet National Theater of Yerevan is not just an iconic building and a landmark: for decades it's been one of the most important cultural spaces in the country. We asked several celebrities about their relationships with opera, ballet and the theater.

TEXT : DIANA MARTIROSYAN



SERGEY SARGSYAN
TV host

I got off on the wrong foot with ballet and opera. This always happens when you are exposed to something sophisticated at too young an age. I first saw the Swan Lake at the age of 6-7 in a Russian popular Tom&Jerryesque cartoon and a Soviet cult comedy film "The Caucasian Captive." Both turned me off so hard that it would take years to rehabilitate the notion of this art form for me. But even at a later stage I could not connect much with either ballet or opera as an art form: with single exceptions of the breath-taking performance and music of Khachaturyan's Sabre Dance and the catchy tune of Bizet's Carmen. That was it. And then, one thing led to another and next thing I knew – I am acting in "Arshak II" (as Ambassador) in 2017, and in "Giselle" (as court guest) in 2018 (as a matter of fact on the day of writing this commentary), on the stage of the Opera and Ballet National Theater. What I gather from all this is: all is good at a good time and in a good proportion. And even better if you actually try the stuff you thought was too weird as a child. Today, I feel my whole essence is somehow correlated with the opera and ballet spirit.



TATEV HOVAKIMYAN

Actress

Actually, as a child I had a dream of becoming a ballet dancer. I still get carried away by beautiful ballet dancers. And, I think it's very important for every country in the world to have its own ballet school. Unfortunately, now we can't call Armenian ballet one of the strongest in the world, and I would like – both as an actress and a spectator – to see modern ballet on the stage of our Opera and Ballet National Academic Theater. Of course, classical ballet is amazing and very important, but the world is moving forward, so I truly believe that we need a modern version, a new ballet, so the audience could choose which they prefer. The most beautiful and wonderful thing is the body in motion, to see how the body moves, how it speaks using the language of movement. Thus, it develops the type of thinking when you don't need any words, you can choose a different way of presenting your idea: the body speaks for you. They say you either fall in love with opera or you learn to love it. At this stage of my life I'm trying to learn, maybe our National Theater will help me in it!



SAMVEL TADEVOSYAN

Actor, director

First and foremost, there is a big difference: the Opera and Ballet Theater is initially something alternative. Even if there are some dramatic things in musicals, in opera and ballet they are done differently. I worked for our Opera and Ballet Theater once, we did a modern play where I was the director, but, anyway, there was a choreographer, so that's how I faced the huge scale of the theater.



MKRTICH ARZUMANYAN

Actor

It's very important to visit first of all for the young people. Our Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra provides such a great and beautiful music under Eduard Topchyan! By the way, I've been honored to be the host of those concerts for several times! Of course, when a theater has great technical equipment it provides a large-scale show on the stage. But I guess it doesn't affect the quality of what you can get as an opera or concert content. Anyway, going to an opera, a ballet or a philharmonic concert has a huge, significant and essential impact on your taste, both aesthetically and mentally. And we must be really thankful to have this wonderful theater with its content in our city. ♦



MIQAYEL VOSKANYAN

Musician

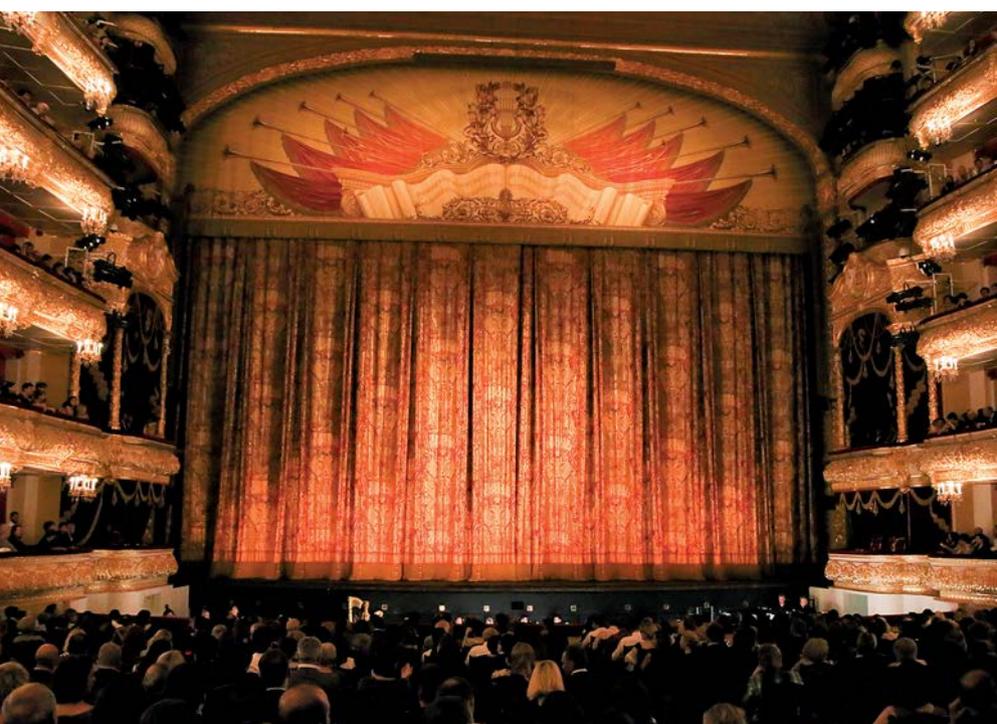
I consider opera and ballet as a high-class art. It's a synthesis of high-class professionals, who work together for something truly huge and important. There are not only librettists and opera singers but also designers, painters and decorators involved. So, everything is made for the spectator, for their aesthetic pleasure. Also, there is no opera and ballet theater building with a bad exterior or interior, so you can also enjoy great architecture here. Although it could be a little bit difficult to perceive all the information at once, frequent visits can train your brain and acceptance. Obviously, people who attend this kind of events often have above-average intelligence, so visiting opera or ballet plays an important role for development and has an educational function. And now when we live in an era of pop culture, it's more urgent than ever to keep our Opera and Ballet Theater alive and keep up the culture of visiting it. I don't consider it as an old type of art, because these performances could be modern and presented in a new way. I think that here, in Yerevan, the return of "Spartacus" played a major and important role for the ballet lovers. Now they have a truly good thing to watch.



SHARING WITH OTHERS

In 2018 State Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet of Armenia had several significant performances abroad, marking theater's biggest tour in years. Here are some of the best moments from Moscow, Dubai and Kuwait.

PHOTO : MIR24.TV, TIGRAN ARAKELYAN



"GAYANE" AT BOLSHOI

After about 60 years of break, on the historic stage of Bolshoi Theatre Moscow, "Gayane," the first ever Armenian ballet, created by Aram Khachaturian was staged in July. Event was dedicated to 100th anniversary of Armenia's first Republic as well as Yerevan's 2800th and Kachaturian's 115th anniversaries. Armenia's Ambassador to Russia, Vardan Toghanyan, Russian Minister of Culture, Vladimir Medinsky, RA Minister of Culture, Armen Ashotyan as well as Artistic Director of the Spendiaryan National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet, Konstantin Orbelian, gave speeches before the performance.

Symphonic Orchestra of the National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre after Al. Spendiaryan and Theatre's ballet group led by Honoured Artist of Russia Konstantin Orbelyan and Atanes Arakelyan, took part in the jubilee performance. Leading soloists were Ruben Muradyan, Syuzanna Pirumyan, Mary Hovhannisyan, Soloists Sona Vardanyan, Vahagn Margaryan and Razmik Marukyan. The director of the ballet group is RA Honored Artist, Armen Grigoryan. Producer of the project is Karen Khachatryan.



“CARMEN” AND “THE MAGIC FLUTE” IN DUBAI

For the first time ever Armenian opera company performed in Dubai. Tour started with “Carmen,” directed by Naire Stepanyan. Cast includes Karine Babadjanian as Carmen and Hovanes Ayvazyan as Don Jose, Meri Movsessyan as Michaela and Gevork Hagopyan as Escamillo, along with other great soloists and the renowned chorus of the Armenian National Opera House.

Audiences at Dubai Opera can expect spectacular costumes designed by Cristine Avetisian and awe-inspiring set designs by Avetis Barseghian to augment the truly brilliant performance of Carmen, which will be performed in French with English surtitles. Carmen will be conducted by American conductor Christopher Ocasek.

The second production, “The Magic Flute,” by one of the most celebrated composers of all time, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, was shown for three consecutive nights after “Carmen.”





“Words are not enough to describe the enthusiasm we all feel as we prepare for our performances of “Carmen” and “The Magic Flute” on the prestigious stage of the Dubai Opera,” said Constantine Orbelian, Artistic and General Director of the Yerevan Opera House, when company arrived in Dubai. “Together with our renowned soloists, and our wonderful musicians, chorus, and designers, I am absolutely delighted to be representing my eternal homeland, Armenia, in Dubai, through the universal language of opera. And I am all the more gratified as our performances at the Dubai Opera will be a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United Arab Emirates and the Republic of Armenia.”



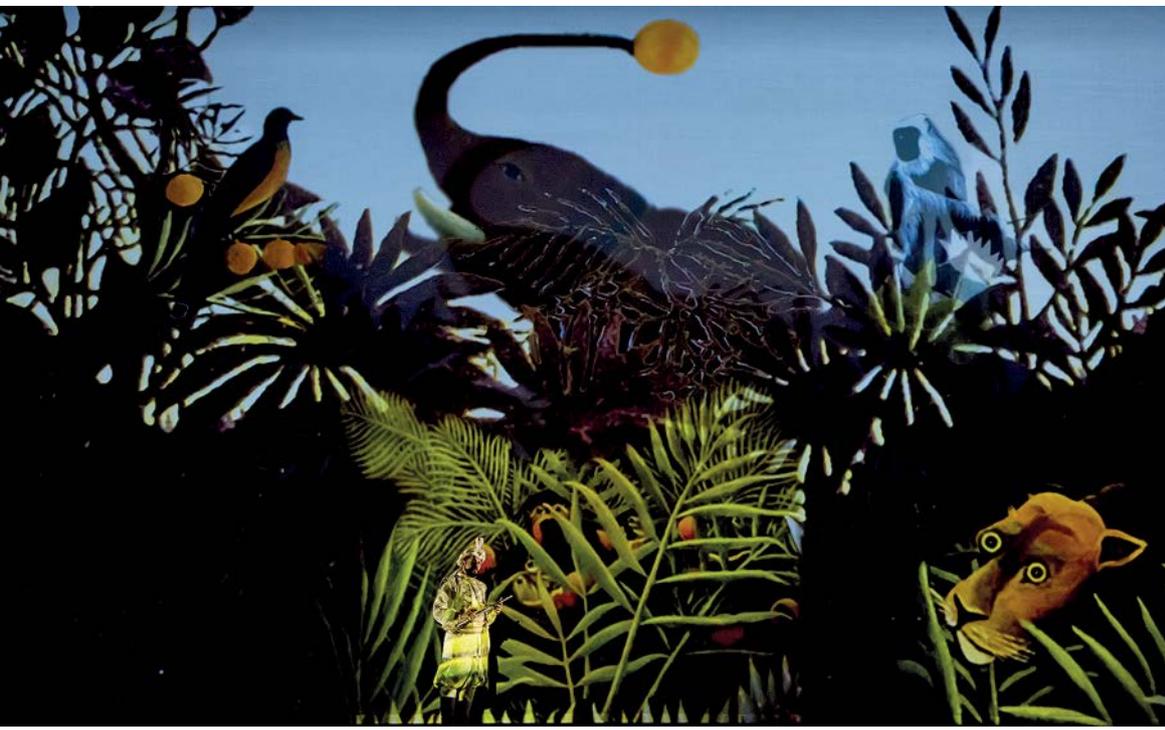
“THE MAGIC FLUTE” IN KUWAIT

Next stop after UAE was Kuwait. “The Magic Flute” was performed on the stage of the Kuwait Opera House twice. Additional Gala Concert took place within the compound of the Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad Cultural Center in Kuwait City, the largest opera house in the Middle East. “What an honor it is for us to present The Magic Flute at the Kuwait Opera House, and what a truly distinct privilege it is to be given the opportunity to perform in front of thousands of appreciative, sophisticated audiences in Kuwait,” said Constantine Orbelian before the first performance.



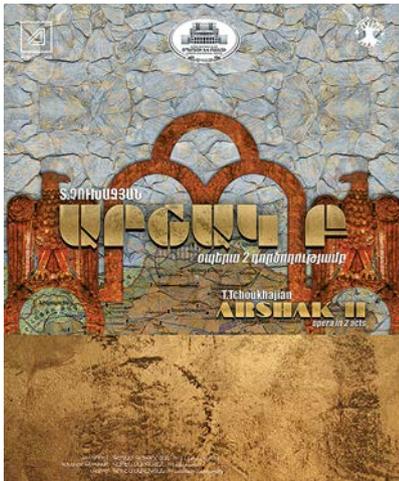


^
Constantine Orbelian with
Ambassador Extraordi-
nary and Plenipotentiary
of Kuwait in Armenia
H.E. Mr. Nawaf Alenezi



DON'T MISS!

Opera and Ballet State Theater has been offering a large variety of performances for decades. And here are some of the most interesting pieces you can catch in the next two months – from the legendary classics to the brand new productions.



T. TCHOUHAJIAN “ARSHAK II” OPERA

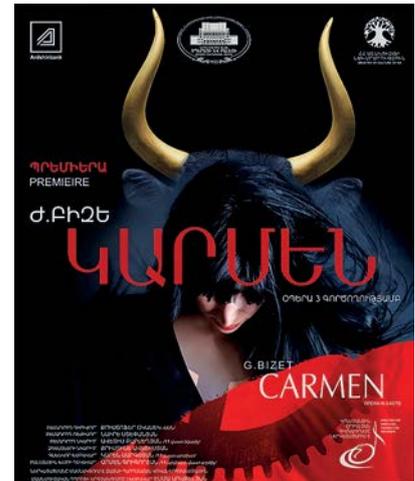
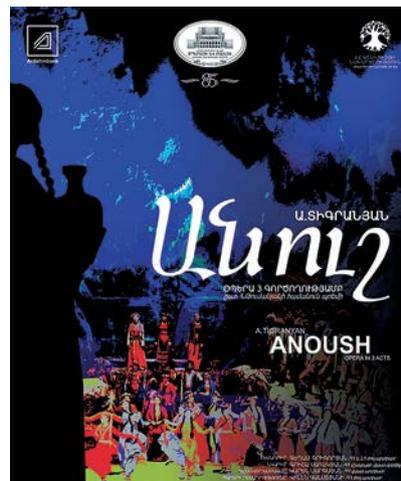
Arshak II is written by the renowned Armenian composer Tigran Tchouhadjian and is considered the first Armenian classical opera. The libretto (in Italian) is by Tovmas Terzian. The music and libretto of the opera were thoroughly re-edited by Soviet Armenian musicologists Alexander Shahverdyan and Levon Khoja-Einatian and literary critic Armen Gulakyan. The revised version of the opera produced by Armen Gulakyan and conducted by Michael Tavrizyan, was first introduced to the audience in 1945. Arshak II is included in the permanent playlist of the theater and is considered one of the favorite performances of the Armenian audience.

Conductor: Harutyun Arzumanyan
Stage director: Gegham Grigoryan
/Honored Artist of RA and RL/
Head chorus master: Karen Sargsyan
/Honored Artist of RA/
Painter: Grisha Sahakyan /Honored Art Worker of RA/

A. TIGRANYAN “ANOUSH” OPERA

Composed between 1908 and 1912 in Alexandropol, Anoush is the first complete Armenian opera inspired by folk music. The music and libretto are by Armen Tigranyan (based on the homonymous poem written by Hovhannes Tumanyan). Anoush was first staged at the Armenian National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet in 1935. In 1939, it was presented in Moscow. The opera contains lyrical songs, duets, choral songs, as well as vibrant scenes depicting national holidays and rituals.

Conductor: Atanes Arakelyan
Stage director: Gegham Griogoryan
/People’s artist of RA and RL/
Staging painter: Grisha Sahakyan
/Honored worker of RA/
Head chorus master: Karen Sargsyan
/Honored Artist of RA/
Choreographer: Vilen Galstyan
/People’s artist of RA/



G. BIZET “CARMEN” OPERA

This new staging of Bizet’s opera Carmen was made on the initiative of theater’s General and Artistic director Maestro Constantine Orbelian and with the support of “Constantine Orbelian” Foundation. The opera premiere was held at the Dubai Opera Theatre on September 6, 7 and 8, 2018. The performance took place within the framework of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the United Arab Emirates.

Principal Conductor of the Production: Christopher Ocasek /USA/
Stage Director: Naire Stepanyan
Staging Painter: Avetis Barseghyan
/Honored Painter of RA/
Costume Designer: Kristine Avetisyan
Head Chorus master: Karen Sargsyan
/Honored Artist of RA/
The Head of Ballet Troupe: Armen Grigoryan /Honored Art Worker of RA/
With the participation of the Vocal Choir of Voice Protection, choirmaster: Emma Arakelyan

G. PUCCINI "TOSCA" OPERA

Tosca is an opera in three acts by prominent Italian composer Giacomo Puccini. It was first premiered at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome on January 14, 1900. The work, based on Victorien Sardou's 1887 French-language dramatic play La Tosca, is a melodramatic piece set in Rome in June 1800, when the Kingdom of Naples's power over Rome is threatened by Napoleon's invasion of Italy. It contains depictions of torture, murder and suicide, as well as some of Puccini's best-known lyrical arias.

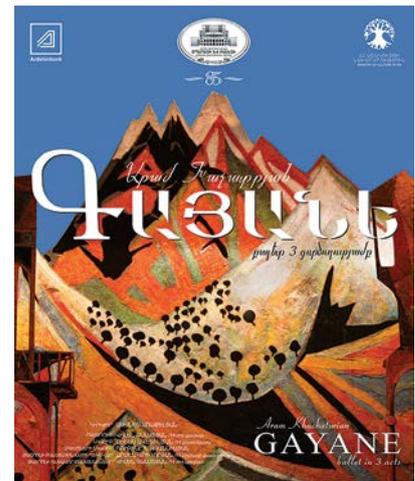
Conductor: Harutyun Arzumanayn
Stage director: Naire Stepanyan
Staging painter: Avetis Barseghyan
/Honored Painter of RA/
Theatrical lighting: Aleksandr Sivayev
/Russia/
Head chorus master: Karen Sargsyan
/Honored Artsist of RA/
Chorus master: Hrach Boryan



G. DONIZETTI "POLIUTO" OPERA

"Poliuto" is a three-act tragic opera by Gaetano Donizetti to an Italian libretto by Salvatore Cammarano, based on Pierre Corneille's play "Polyeucte" written in 1641-1642. It reflects the life of the early Christian martyr Saint Polyeuctus, The score of the opera was brought to Armenia by the efforts of Catholicos Vazgen I and Gohar Gasparyan. The premiere of the opera dates back to 1993, being staged in honor of 1700th anniversary of the adoption of Christianity as state religion.

Conductor: Harutyun Arzumanyan
Stage director: Tigran Levonyan
/People's Artist of RA/
Performance restoring director: Zhanna Tamizyan
Choreographer: Vilen Galstyan
/Honored Artist of RA/
Painter: Eugene Safronov /Honored Painter of RA/
Performance restoring painter: Avetis Barseghyan /Honored Painter of RA/
Head chorus master: Karen Sargsyan /Honored Artist of RA/



A. KHACHATURIAN "GAYANE" BALLET

Gayane ballet by renowned composer Aram Khachaturian is the first Armenian ballet. Initially the ballet was named "Happiness," but after some reconsidering it was revised to a libretto by Konstantin Derzhavin and renamed Gayane. First staging of the ballet was on December 9, 1942, in Perm, with the efforts of Kirov Opera and Ballet Theatre of Leningrad. It was restaged in 1952. Nowadays, Gayane is presented at A. Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet National Academic Theatre under the staging of People's Artist of RA Vilen Galstyan.

Conductor: Atanes Araqelyan
Staging director: Vilen Galstyan
/People's artist of RA/
Staging painter: Minas Avetisyan
/People's artist of RA/
Costume designer: Rubine Hovhannisyann
The head of ballet troupe: Armen Grigoryan /Honored Art Worker of RA/
The head ballet master of the theater: Vilen Galstyan /People's Artist of RA/



“LA BOHEME” BALLET, MUSIC BY CHARLES AZNAVOUR

La Boheme is a one act ballet: music by Charles Aznavour, scenario and choreography by People’s Artist of RA Rudolph Kharatian, sets and costumes by Astghik Stepanyan. The inspiration for the ballet La Boheme was Charles Aznavour himself – his life, his oeuvre, and his indomitable spirit. However, the ballet is not meant to be directly about Aznavour, nor to illustrate the song lyrics, but rather to illuminate through dance the timelessness and universality of his art.

La Boheme ballet was premiered on the stage of A. Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet National Academic Theater on May 29, 2017.

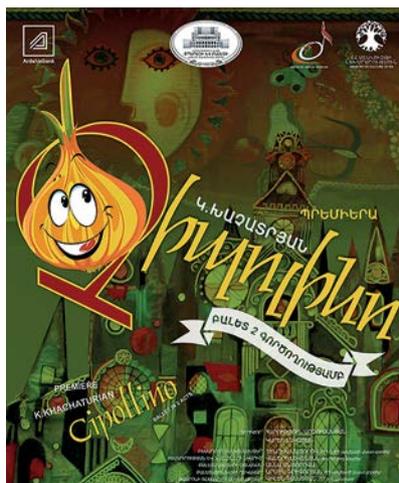
UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

January 16 – A. Tigranyan “ANOUSH” / opera
 January 19 – L. Minkus “DON QUIXOTE” / ballet
 January 24 – A. Khachaturian “GAYANE” / ballet
 January 27 – A. Adan “GISELLE” / ballet

K. KHACHATURIAN “CIPOLLINO” BALLET

Thanks to the efforts and initiative of Constantine Orbelian - General and Artistic Director of the A. Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet National Academic Theater and Honored Artist of the RF - as well as the support of “Constantine Orbelian” Foundation, A.Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet National Academic Theater presented Karen Khachaturian’s CIPPOLINO Children’s Ballet on November 4, 2018.

Conductor: Harutyun Arzumanyan
Staging balletmaster: Henrikh Mayorov
/Honored Art Worker of RF and RB/
Set and costume designer: Valery Levental
Assistant of the ballet master: Anna Mayorova
The head of ballet troupe: Armen Grigoryan /Honored Art Worker of RA/
The head ballet master of the theater: Vilen Galstyan /People’s Artist of RA/



V. MOZART “MAGIC FLUTE” OPERA

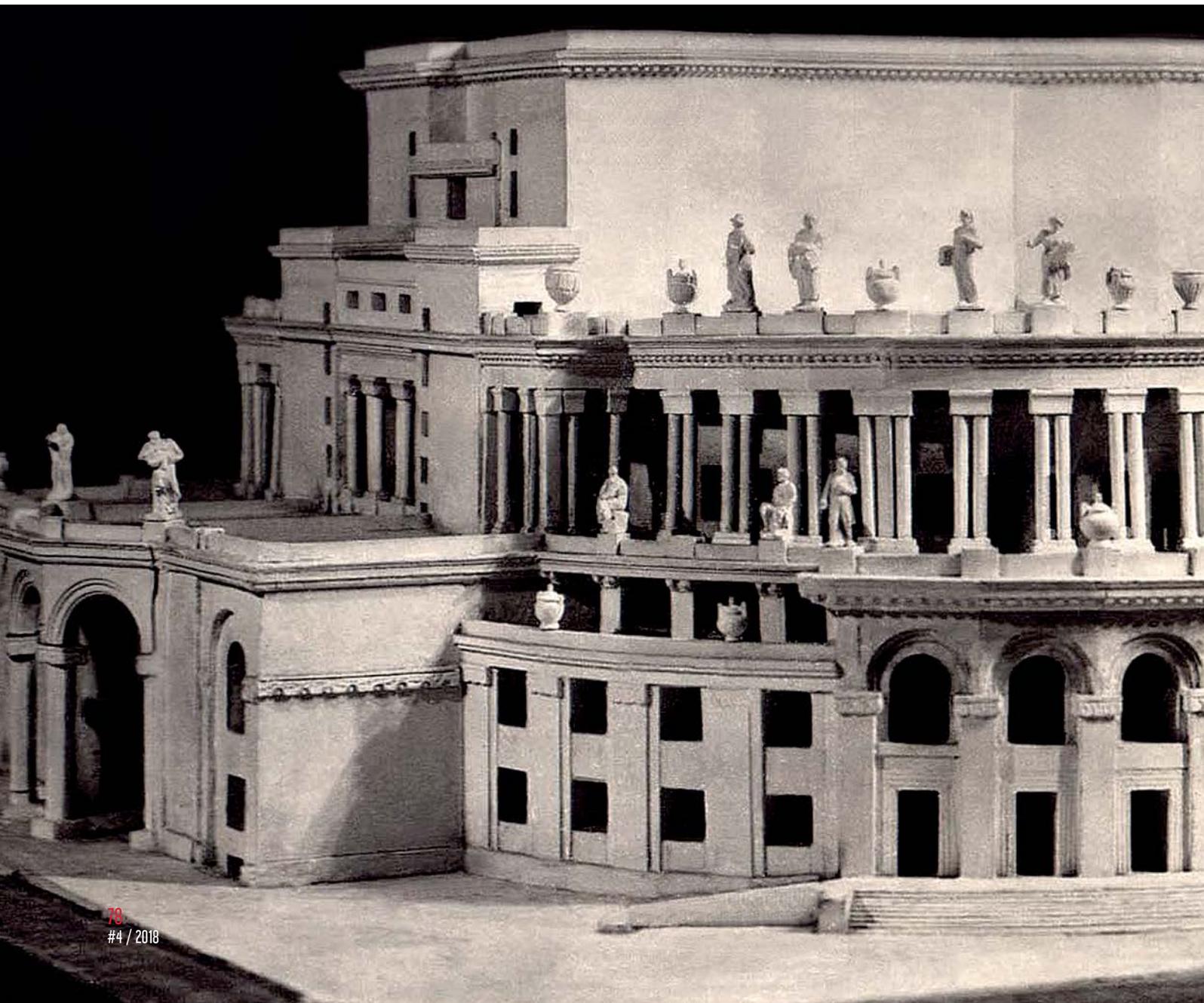
The Magic Flute (Die Zauberflöte), is an opera in two acts by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 -1791), with a German libretto by Austrian actor and theatrical producer Emanuel Schikaneder. The opera - Mozart’s last - premiered at the Rustic Theater auf der Wieden near Vienna on September 30, 1791 and Mozart himself led the orchestra despite not feeling well: he was having health and financial problems. A. Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet National Academic Theater presented The Magic Flute opera at the stages of Dubai and Kuwait opera theaters in September 2018.

Principal conductor: Harutyun Arzumanyan
Stage director: Paolo Micciche /Italy/
Video programmer: Davide Broccoli /Italy/
Costume painter: Alberto Spiazzi /Italy/

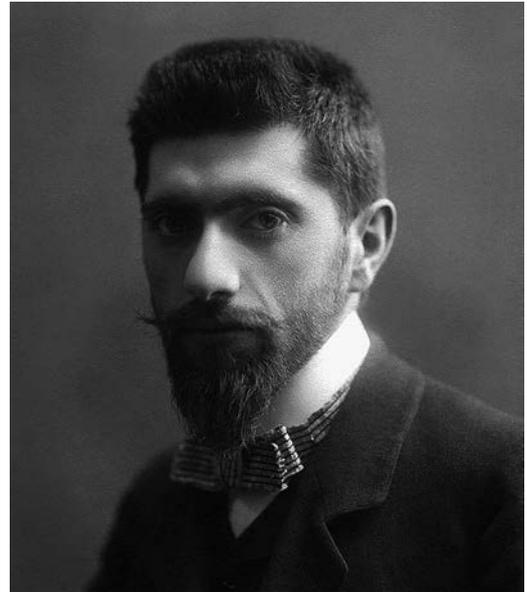
THE ARMENIAN WAY OF SINGING AND DANCING:

A Brief Story of Armenian Opera and Ballet

TEXT : TIGRAN ZAKARYAN



Any iconic panorama of Yerevan necessarily includes the National Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet. Its square, renamed after the 1988 national movement “Freedom Square” became a symbol of Armenia’s way into independence and still is a hub where this country’s most important political, social and cultural events take place. Yet sometimes the fame of the Freedom Square overshadows the importance of the building behind, which continues to host Armenian comparatively young national opera and ballet.



>
Alexander
Tamanyan

<
One of the early
models of theater

A NATIONAL OPERA AND BALLET

Renowned British historian and an influential author on nationalism, Benedict Anderson in his seminal book “Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism” discussed maps, censuses and museums as tools of conceptualizing the space and time of the colonies in late-stage colonialism. Anderson argued that colonialism actually supported through such means local brands of “patriotism”, which were not supposed to be anti-colonial. This can also apply to opera and ballet and their development in the Soviet space, including Armenia.

The specificity of these branches of performative art lies in the fact that their language is to a certain extent limited (especially in the case of ballet) and conservative. Both opera and ballet are considered to be more international in their nature, although their popularity during the whole existence of the Soviet state provided opportunity for the authorities to use them as tools of ideological propaganda.

The Armenian case is no exception to the rule, however unlike many other soviet republics, Armenian opera and ballet were born in more national environments and had some pre-soviet history. >

BOTH OPERA AND BALLET ARE CONSIDERED TO BE MORE INTERNATIONAL IN THEIR NATURE, ALTHOUGH THEIR POPULARITY PROVIDED OPPORTUNITY FOR THE AUTHORITIES TO USE THEM AS TOOLS OF IDEOLOGICAL PROPAGANDA

The birth of the Armenian national opera is closely connected with the name of Arshak Chukhajian (1837-1898) whose epic opera Arshak II was the first Armenian opera. First staged partially in Constantinople in 1868, it was never fully performed during his lifetime due to technical difficulties (scarcity of performers, financial resources etc.) as well as Ottoman authorities who were watchful lest to allow staging of a potentially “seditious” opera in Armenian. Chukhajian was a person of major importance for the future of the musical art particularly among the western Armenians. Born in Constantinople,

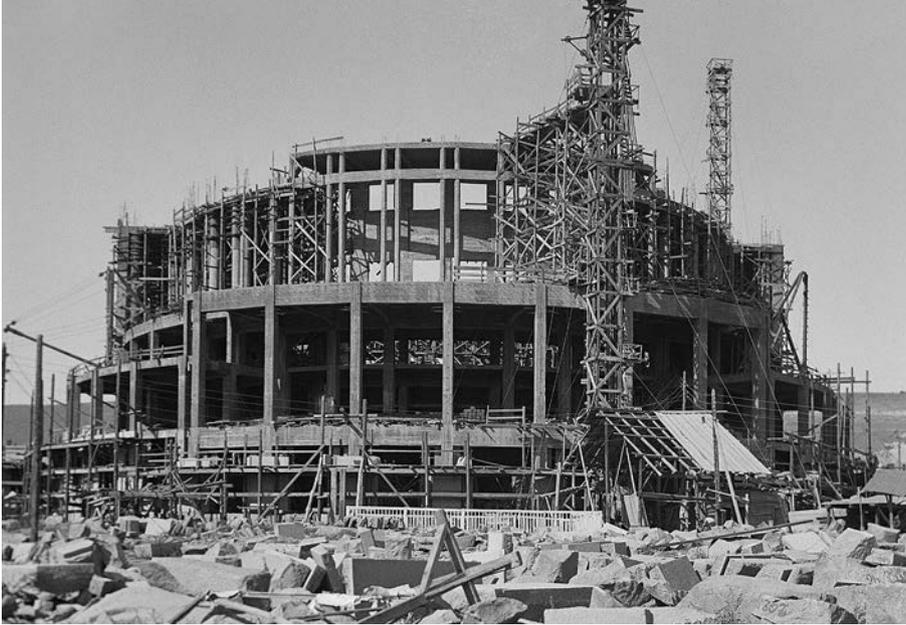


◀ One of the early projects of the theater

he became passionate for music since his childhood, he got a solid musical education in Milan in 1861-1864. In 1872 he became the head of the Armenian musical theater in Constantinople, a pioneer in the Armenian history of the musical art. Two decades after his death in Smyrna, Chkhajian’s widow sent his writings to Armenia, where after another period of oblivion in the wake of national reactivation of World War 2 period in the Soviet Union, the opera was finally staged in Yerevan and in 1956 in Moscow’s Bolshoi Theatre. Although Arshak II is currently Chukhajian’s most renowned musical piece, his other pieces, like the operetta “Leblebiji” (Chickpeas seller) were far more popular and staged in Constantinople as well as in the cities of South Caucasus with significant Armenian population for about 100 times. Conditions for staging operas in Armenia were not favorable until the situation in the country stabilized under the soviet authorities and a mass economic and cultural reconstruction under the tight control of the Bolshevik party began. The first Armenian Opera Theatre was founded in 1932 under the decision of the Council of the

CONDITIONS FOR STAGING OPERAS IN ARMENIA WERE NOT FAVORABLE UNTIL THE SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY STABILIZED UNDER THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES AND A MASS ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL RECONSTRUCTION

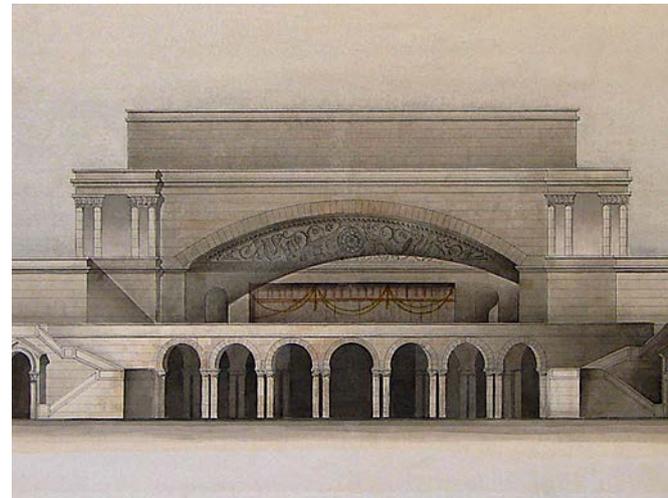
People’s Commissars of the Armenian SSR. Its first staging was held on 20 January 1933 with the opera performance “Almast” by Alexander Spendiarian. The Theatre, which did not have its own stage held its performances in the Workers’ Theatre after M. Gorki (currently Stanislavski Drama Theatre in Yerevan). The staff of the theater initially included 20 opera solo singers, 40 members of the orchestra, 30 choir singers and 20 ballet dancers. A big achievement of the newly founded Theatre was staging of Armen Tigranyan’s opera Anush in 1935, which was penned as early as in 1912. In 1935 the Opera Theatre was renamed Opera and Ballet Theatre and then in 1939 it took the name of A. Spendiarian. The final addition to the name



◀ Construction of the theater

“Academic” was bestowed in 1956. Several people played important role in the establishment of the new opera. One of them was the Armenian composer and director Romanos Melikyan (1883-1935) who took an important part in establishing contacts and inviting opera singers from all over USSR, including Moscow, Leningrad, Tiflis, Baku etc. He also assisted greatly to the staging of the opera Almast.

▼ Gethsemane Chapel was destroyed to build the theater



THE BUILDING FOR A PROLETARIAN MUSE

The building, which was conceived to serve the newly established institution was first called the People’s House. The decision on building the House was made in 1926 however it took more than a decade or two before it took its final shape. The building was designed by the forefather of modern Armenian architecture Alexander Tamanyan, who also authored a general plan for the new Armenian capital of Yerevan. He drew several sketches but none of them was good enough for him and he kept revising and improving it. The style of the building included lots of national details but it also was influenced by the so called “Stalinist Classicism” fashionable in those years. During the construction a small chapel of 17th century called Gethsemane had to be removed, which Tamanyan wanted to have reconstructed somewhere else, however this became impossible under the authorities who propagated militant atheism. ➤

The construction of the People's House came across lots of obstacles and a chief one among them was insufficient financing by the authorities of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Republic, residing in Tbilisi. Alexander Tamanyan was not lucky enough to see his plan realized, as he died in 1936, although his plan won a Grand Prix at an international exhibition in Paris.

The winter hall of the building was finished only in 1940 with significant modifications made to the original plan, while the whole building, including philharmonic hall was not finished until 1963.

Staging for the people and Staging for the Empire

Although Soviet art starting from early 1930's adopted Socialist Realism as the only acceptable expression in art, which excluded all possibility of critical approach, musical art, on the whole quite conservative, was less susceptible to new political trends. Classical style in ballet and op-



< Gohar Gasparyan and Mihran Yerkat in "Arshak II"



era on the whole remained dominant under the Soviet rule, although the topics were diversified to some extent with popular and somewhat national topics, including those of other soviet nationalities. Thus it was not a rare case when the Opera and Ballet Academic Theatre staged operas written by representatives of fellow nationalities of the Soviet Union, such as Azerbaijani (Uzeyir Hajobeyov's opera "Koroglu") Georgian (Zacharia Paliashvili's "Daisi" – Twilight), Ukrainian (Yuliy Meytus' opera "Young Guard" on the World War 2). The repertoire of the opera included a great number of Russian classical operas (such

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A MISTAKE TO THINK THAT THE OPERA AND BALLET IN SOVIET ARMENIA DID NOT REFLECT THE GENERAL IDEOLOGY OF THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES, HOWEVER, THEY DID IT IN A QUITE UNIVERSAL WAY

as "The Tsar's Bride" by Rimsky-Korsakov, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's Eugene Onegin, Mikhail Glinka's "Ivan Susanin" (also known as "A Life for the Tsar") etc.).

Yet it would have been a mistake to think that the opera and ballet in Soviet Armenia did not reflect the general ideology of the soviet authorities, however, they did it in a quite universal way and it was not a surprise that the people of music were comparatively easy in going to the other side of the iron curtain. The Opera troupe held tours in the cultural centers of the Soviet Union, such as Moscow, Leningrad, Tbilisi, Baku, Kiev, Sochi etc. The international language of art and the wishes of the Soviet leadership to represent their empire as great also in terms of culture provided opportunities for both opera and ballet artists to visit both sides of the Iron Curtain bringing the message of peace and normalization.

Yerevan Opera and Ballet Academic Theatre after Alexander Spendiarian also premiered in the Soviet Union staging "Bernstein's musical "West Side Story" (1963), Stravinsky's opera "Oedipus rex" (1963), Bellini's "Norma" (1975) etc.



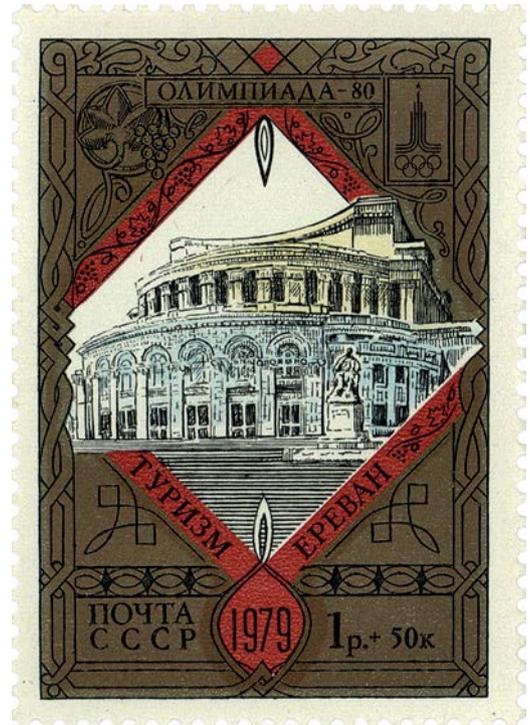
▼ Dancer Elvira Mnatsakanyan



► Theater's orchestra crew, 1937



► Opera and Ballet State Theater on the Soviet post stamp



▼ "Davit Bek" opera, 1950's



Armenian ballet in a glimpse

The first steps in the Armenian ballet were made by mid-19th century in Constantinople, where small performances were staged separately or incorporated into larger musical pieces. By early 20th century there were both eastern and western Armenian dancers performing on various stages.

The Armenian genocide largely put an end to the western Armenian nascent ballet. Meanwhile eastern Armenian ballet was under the heavy influence of the Russian school, which enjoyed prestige all over the world. It continued to be so after the revolution which played a single most important role in shaping of the Armenian national ballet the way we know it. ►

> Tatevik Sazandaryan in "Almast"

OPERA AND BALLET PERSONALITIES

Alexander Spendiarian (1871-1928)

Born in the Russian Empire's south-western regions (today's Ukraine) and raised in Crimea, Spendiarian graduated first as a lawyer from the Moscow Imperial University in 1895. He never practiced as a lawyer, meanwhile along with his study at the university he developed his skills in music with a number of renowned Russian musicians of his time, to name one of them – composer Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov. Established in Crimea, Spendiarian maintained close ties with other Armenian artists and intellectuals of his time. At the offer of the new Armenian soviet government in 1924 he moved to Yerevan and started a prolific work at the newly established Yerevan State Conservatory. In 1926 he was the first to be awarded the order of People's Artist of Armenia. In 1928 he dies unexpectedly. The work of his life was the opera "Almast" based on a poem written by Armenian famous poet Hovhannes Toumanyan. Spendiarian chose the topic following a meeting with him as early as in 1916, however the orchestration took several years and it was about to complete by the time he died.

Shara Talyan (1893-1965)

Born in Tbilisi, Talyan was son of a popular folk singer, ashugh. He started his singing career as a soloist in the Nersisyan Armenian school of Tbilisi before the revolution. After a brief study in Petrograd in 1916-1917, Talyan headed an opera and operetta group in Leninakan (Gyumri) in 1923-1927, after which he moved to Yerevan. Talyan was a leading soloist on the stage of the Opera and Ballet Theatre. Apart from classical opera he performed also Armenian traditional and ecclesiastical music.

Gohar Gasparyan (1924-2007)

Born in Cairo Egypt she moved to Armenia in 1948 and since 1949 played a major role in shaping the art of opera in Armenia, becoming the biggest opera star of Armenia ever. Dubbed as "Nightingale of Armenia" she became a leading female singer of the opera, whose fame spread not all over the Soviet Union and even across the Iron Curtain.



^ Gohar Gasparyan and Avag Petrosyan in "Anush"



> Vanush Khanamiryan (center) in leading role in "Spartacus" ballet



THE FIRST ARMENIAN NATIONAL BALLET WAS STAGED IN 1939 AND THE MUSIC TO IT WAS WRITTEN BY ARAM KHACHATURIAN'S "HAPPINESS" FOLLOWING A 6-MONTH TRIP TO ARMENIA WHERE HE STUDIES FOLK MELODIES AND MUSIC



> Armen Tigranyan with the cast of "Anush," 1912

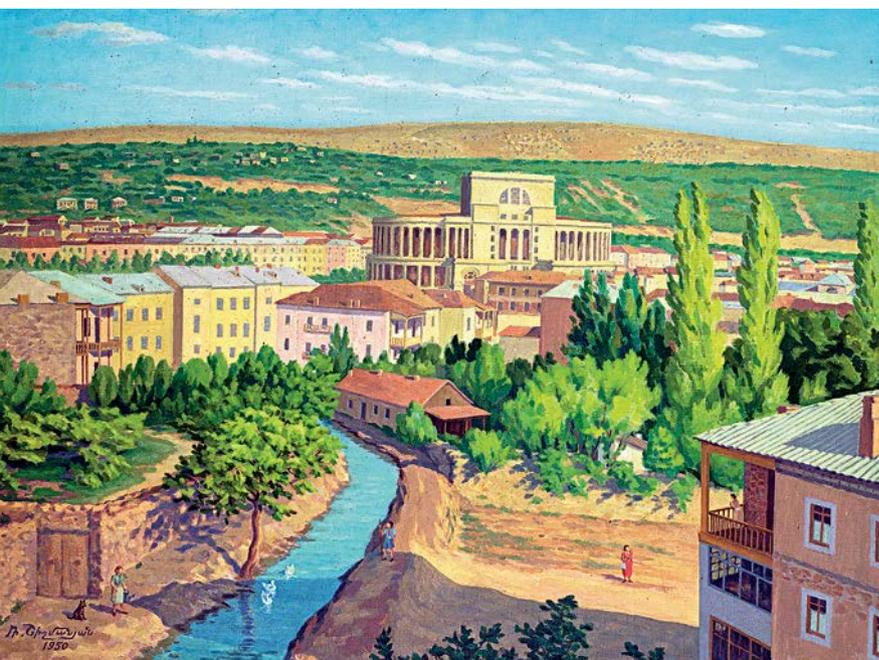


◀ Theater from the Cascade, painting of Peto Poghosyan, 2013

There were ethnic Armenians involved in the Russian ballet rather importantly and before the start of the Armenian national ballet. A prominent figure among them was Agrippina Vaganova (1879 –1951) who started her career before the revolution and developed her own Vaganova method in ballet teaching. The former Imperial Ballet School in St. Petersburg is called Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet.

In the 1930's national ballets were founded in all soviet republics. While in most of them there was no tradition of such institutions, so specialists from Russia were commissioned into national republics. Such was the case of Armenia,

▼ "Opera square" by Rafayel Shishmanyan, 1950



too, which had to develop its own ballet almost from the scratch.

In order to help national republics to shape their own ballet institution the center commissioned its specialist to their capitals. Valentin Presnyakov, who was invited from Odessa, became its first chief ballet master (1933-1938) of the Opera and Ballet Theatre, under whom the ballet troupe was formed. There were other soviet renowned ballet figures like Vladimir Burmester and Yevgeny Kuznetsov, who were ballet masters in Yerevan in different years.

The first Armenian national ballet was staged in 1939 and the music to it was written by Aram Khachaturyan's "Happiness" following a 6-month trip to Armenia where he studies folk melodies and music, which he interpreted and exclusively incorporated into his music.

In general, Khachaturyan was a prolific composer and his ballets "Gayane" and "Spartak" were staged frequently in Yerevan but also a lot of other stages across the Soviet Union and other countries.

Although Khachaturyan, along with other soviet prominent composers, like Shostakovich and Prokofiev were accused of "formalism" (a music considered "too specific" for ordinary people) in 1948 and his ballets stopped being staged. They were resumed only in early 1960's long after Stalin's death.

On the whole Armenia stepped into its period of independence with a quite mature opera and ballet. Regardless of temporary difficulties the prospects of Armenian opera and ballet seem to be promising and the local and international public can expect new and interesting performances. ♦

TO MR. FRANCK RAOUL DUVAL



Dear Mr. Duval,



With this letter, I'd like to express my sincere regards to You and thank for the invaluable contribution of ballet ware of Sansha Company Production Ltd., which you kindly provided to the A. Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet National Academic Theatre, which is one of the oldest cultural institutions in Armenia and a visit card of Yerevan. It is one of my missions to show to the world that Armenia has a fantastic ballet and promising artists, and that we need to build up and strengthen the ballet school in Armenia and attract students and audience from all over the world, in particular the Asian countries, which geographically are close to Armenia. It is no doubt that the contribution of Sansha Company Production Ltd. to the development of a high art form such as ballet will help to pave the way for the further recognition and establishment of the ballet development in Armenia, in particular.

With gratitude,
General and Artistic Director of Theater
Mo Constantine Orbelian





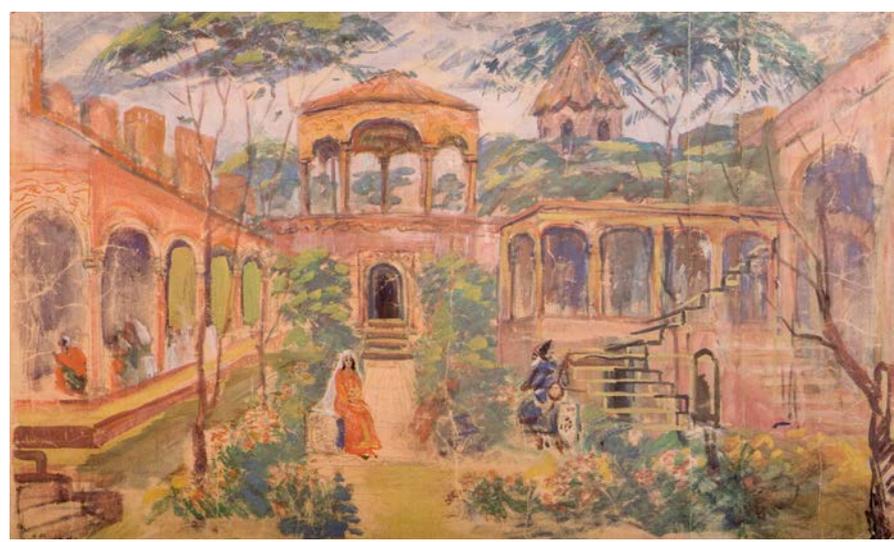
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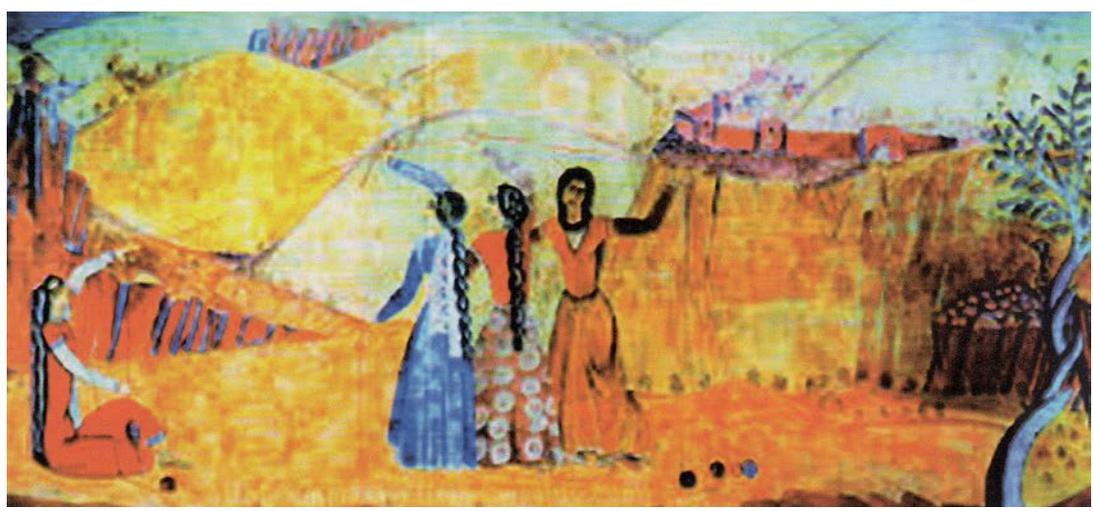
OPERA SET SKETCHES

Some of the best Armenian artists of the 20th century were involved in opera and ballet productions, among them Martiros Saryan and Minas Avetisyan. Here are some of the sketches made by these great painters for different productions.



^
"Almast," sketch
by Martiros Saryan

∨
"Brave Nazar" opera stage design by Martiros Saryan



< ^
"Gayane" stage
design by Minas
Avetisyan

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