

Community

Concert highlights continuing Armenian musical heritage

Ara Sarkissian's composition for viola and piano gets world premiere

by Ara Arakelian

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. ▣ - In his *Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, T.S. Eliot reminds us that tradition cannot be blindly inherited and that it must be recovered for every age, at the cost of great labor. He goes on to say, "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past." This notion was evident at a concert presented by the Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge on Sunday, November 9.

The event, titled "Celebrate Armenian Culture!" featured pianist-composer **Ara Sarkissian & Friends** in a program that juxtaposed works representing three generations of Armenian composers: **Aram Khachaturian, Tigran Mansurian**, and Mr. Sarkissian himself.

Mr. Sarkissian, 36, is a graduate of the Boston Conservatory of



Violinist **Billana Voutchkova** and cellist **Junko Fujiwara Simons** with **Ara Sarkissian** at piano performing **Tigran Mansurian**

Music. An accomplished pianist, he led the musicians in satisfying readings of the Khachaturian's Trio for clarinet, violin and piano; Mr. Mansurian's introspective Piano Trio, and his own piece for viola and piano, which received its world premiere performance. It was interesting to observe that while different in age, backgrounds, and life

experiences - Khachaturian was born in Tbilisi, Mr. Mansurian in Beirut, and Mr. Sarkissian in Cyprus - a common thread of musical lineage linked the composers.

Throughout the clarinet trio, a relatively early work of Khachaturian's, the colorful and sunny passages exuded youthful optimism. In the shepherd-song melodies of the

second movement, performed with brio by Mr. Sarkissian, clarinetist **Todd Brunel**, and violinist **Harris Shilakowsky**, one detected the developing style of a composer negotiating folk melodies with Western classical forms.

Tigran Mansurian, who was born in Beirut in 1939 but immigrated to Armenia in his youth, has emerged as Armenia's most formidable living composer today. His enigmatic piano trio from 2001 is a dedication to the late composer **Alfred Schnittke**. Consisting of five movements and written in lean textures, it is a moving testimony to the affection and admiration the composer felt for his friend. It was at times nostalgic and at times emphatically defiant; the memorable duet in *canzone*, rendered sensitively by violinist **Billana Voutchkova** and cellist **Junko Fujiwara Simons**, was nothing short of a prayer. In between the two trios, Mr. Sarkissian delivered a terse piano piece by Mr. Mansurian, titled *Nostalgia*.

Mr. Sarkissian's own composition for viola and piano, titled *After the Fog*, which closed the concert, proved to be an effective work. Though short in duration, it was substantial in content. Here, as Mr. Sarkissian describes his own writing style, the Armenian

element was not operating at the surface, but rather subconsciously in the structure itself. The viola, always the closest to the human voice among the string instruments, would attempt in vain to transcend and soar, only to be anchored by its own weight. This "struggle," manifested by the dissonance of the semitone, is somewhat resolved at the end with the return of the viola's original melody, albeit in a different harmonic setting. Sarkissian describes this blurring effect of the dissonances in play as "seeing through the fog." He adds, "When the fog is finally cleared, only the listener's impression of the reality is affirmed." Violinist **Alexander Vavilov** brought his unreserved musicality to this performance, gently and caring supported by Mr. Sarkissian at the piano.

This was a deeply satisfying concert and the attentive audience showed its appreciation with a standing ovation. One only wished there were younger listeners in the audience. It was nonetheless heartening to be reminded that the art of composition continues its march through the decades of Armenian life and strife, and that human creativity has no boundaries. ♣

In Ann Arbor, Hratch Tchilingirian discusses church-state relation

ANN ARBOR, Mich. ▣ - "The Church hierarchy can no longer simply pontificate about complex problems of society without real engagement in the life of the people," declared Cambridge University scholar **Hratch Tchilingirian** in a recent lecture at the University of Michigan. "What is the relevance of a 1,700 year-old Church and religious faith to contemporary Armenians living in Armenia and outside, all around the world?"

In a lecture sponsored by the Armenian Studies Program at the Uni-

versity of Michigan on November 17, Dr. Tchilingirian discussed the Armenian Church's relations with the state, society, and the diaspora over the 16 years of Armenia's independence. Against the background of the Soviet and perestroika periods, he focused on the problems and complexities of transition from official atheism to freedom of religion in independent Armenia.

Independence has brought many positive developments to the Armenian Church and increased the freedom of religion and faith in

Armenia, Dr. Tchilingirian argued. However, the church, the state, and society face many challenges: from religious tolerance and pluralism to fairness and full guarantees of rights, to addressing social and moral issues in a still-evolving post-Soviet country.

State-sponsored atheism in Soviet Armenia, on the one hand, and secularization and globalization, on the other, have strongly affected religiosity in general and church practice in particular. Thus far, the church hierarchy has not

seriously studied or addressed these far-reaching processes, Dr. Tchilingirian said.

During his visit to the University of Michigan campus, Dr. Tchilingirian also participated in a special workshop on "Minorities in the Middle East," organized by the university's Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies, with a paper on Armenian communities in the Middle East. That workshop was co-sponsored by the Armenian Studies Program and other units of the University.

Dr. Tchilingirian is associate director of the Eurasia Program at Cambridge University's Judge Business School, where he teaches on multicultural issues in business leadership and management. He received his Ph.D. in sociology from the London School of Economics. Dr. Tchilingirian has written and lectured extensively on sociological and geopolitical developments in the wider Eurasia region, especially the Caucasus, the Armenian Church, and the diaspora. ♣

Boston community to remember the earthquake

LEXINGTON, Mass. ▣ - The Amaras Art Alliance, in collaboration with Project SAVE and the Cambridge-Yerevan Sister City Association, will sponsor a concert commemorating the 20th anniversary of the earthquake in Armenia, on December 7 at 2:30 p.m. at the Museum of Our National Heritage. Humanitarian Dr. **Carolann Najarian** will share her experiences as one of the first responders to the Boston area to the earthquake zone.

The concert will feature **John Babolian**, guitar; **Karine Bagdassarian**, piano; **Armen Ghaz-**

arian, violin; **Ani Hovsepian**, piano; **Levon Hovsepian**, piano; **Nune Karapetian**, soprano; **Junko Simons**; cello; and the premiere performance of *Canta Mundi*, the Greater Boston Scholastic Touring Choir, conducted by Maestro **Brian O'Connell** and sponsored by Amaras Art Alliance. The Alliance was founded in 1990 to preserve and promote culture and the arts. ♣

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Christina Maranci to show and discuss images of the Nativity in Armenian art

Talk will be highlight of NAASR Christmas open house

BELMONT, Mass. ▣ - An illustrated talk on "Images of the Nativity in Armenian Art" by **Christina Maranci** of Tufts University will be the highlight of the NAASR 2008 Christmas Open House on December 11. The evening's events will take place at the NAASR Center, 6:00 to 11:00 p.m., with Ms. Maranci's talk set for 8:00 p.m.

Both before and after Ms. Maranci's talk, NAASR's bookstore will

be open and feature a one-night-only 20-percent-off sale, with additional discounts of 40 percent or more on selected titles. There will also be refreshments, music, and gift-wrapping. In addition to NAASR items, there will be a special collection of items from Made in Armenia Direct for sale.

Ms. Maranci holds the Arthur H. Dadian and Ara Oztemel Chair of Armenian Art and Architectural History at Tufts University. Her research focuses on medieval Armenia and cross-cultural relations with the Byzantine, Sasanian, and Islamic worlds, as well as issues of historiography. Her publications on Armenian art and architecture have appeared

in numerous journals, including the *Art Bulletin*, *Gesta*, *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, and *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. Her book, *Medieval Armenian Architecture: Constructions of Race and Nation*, examines the role of Austrian art historian Josef Strzygowski in shaping the study of the field.

The NAASR Center, 396 Concord Ave., is located opposite the First Armenian Church and next to the U.S. Post Office. Ample parking is available around the building and in adjacent areas. ♣

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