

MARIAM NAZARIAN

Talent on the Rise



HARRY KOUNDAKJIAN

At first glance, the 16-year-old Mariam Nazarian appears as a slim and shy girl interested in shopping, pop music and TV shows. Those who know her well, however, are astounded at her thorough knowledge of the classical piano repertoire, which includes virtuoso pieces by Chopin and Schumann.

Mariam, known by her stage name, Marie Nazar, was born in Armenia where as a child prodigy

she received her musical training under Professor Zaven Parsamian at the Tchaikovsky School of Music for gifted children in Yerevan.

Upon arriving in the US, she continued to study with pianist Alexander Fiorillo at Temple University in Philadelphia. She performed a number of recitals which spread her name among a handful of connoisseurs of piano music, who encouraged her to prepare for a major concert.

Earlier this year, Nazar performed with the Boston Pops Symphony Orchestra. On October 21, she made her Carnegie Hall debut performing Bach's monumental Goldberg Variations. She chose to perform the work with all the repeats, therefore playing a total of 75 minutes without intermission – a Herculean task for even an established pianist. For those who had heard her years earlier, a radical transformation was apparent. By the end of the second variation, a listener had to remind himself that this was a tiny teenager playing one of the most demanding works in the piano repertoire. Her fast tempos did not cloud Bach's polyphony or take away from the subtle nuances. The lyric quality of the fughettas, dances and the French overture had a singing quality. Neither hand overpowered the other. The canons were controlled and the effect was mesmerizing.

The hall was half full, and very quiet. New Yorkers favor Russian or European prodigies. However, those who were present knew their Bach, for the customary coughs, sneezes, shifting in seats and other distractions were totally absent. It was as if everyone in the large hall was in a trance, afraid to wake up or disturb the young lady's concentration.

Nazar has recorded the Goldberg Variations for the Ardani Classics label, a company that manages artists of the former Soviet Union. They also organized the Carnegie concert.

The 16-year-old used to play tennis, but doesn't any longer because it's "not good for my hands." Even badminton is only occasionally allowed. Walking and running are acceptable, however. Even school and homework were restructured, so that she is completely self-sufficient at home. Under a home-schooling program, she is able to devote nearly five hours a day to piano practice. Nazar's father is a composer, her mother is a music teacher. Even her nine-year-old sister plays the piano. "When we came to the US, three years ago, they could have changed their careers. But they decided not to," she explains. And she, too, has no dream beyond a life of music, either.

—By George Bournoutian

ARTO TUNÇBOYACIYAN

The Navy Band

Armenian Navy Band, subtitled *Bzdik Zivvor* (Small Soldier) is Arto Tunçboyacıyan's newest CD production (Svota Music 1999).

"When I decided to name the group the Armenian Navy Band, I did not intend any political message," says Tunçboyacıyan. "As you know there is no sea surrounding Armenia. My point was to express how powerful positive belief can be – enough to create trust in people, that they too can imagine how to move a boat without water," explains the 42-year-old, internationally-acclaimed percussionist.

Born in Turkey, Tunçboyacıyan played with one of Turkey's most famous musicians, Burhan Tuguc and his band Metronome when he was just 13. However, as a teenager and budding musician, he was most influenced by his older brother Onno, a well-known musician blending Eastern and Western music in Turkey. Onno was killed a few years ago in a plane accident.

In 1981, Tunçboyacıyan moved to New York where his musical talent and individuality made him stand out in the music industry. He was soon in great demand as a studio musician. Over the years he has worked with famous musicians, including Arthur Blythe, Don Cherry, Jim Pepper, Chet Baker, Paul Winter and Joe Zawinul and has accompanied them on European and world concert tours.

His first successful solo tour came in 1986 when he played in various Scandinavian cities, which was followed by his first solo album *Virgin Lands* in 1986, produced by Chris Hinze. Since then he has produced several CDs which defy conventional characterizations, but could be best described as a melange of jazz, percussion and vocals where East, West and "universal" music meet.

"Arto is indisputably a superb percussionist," says Nareg Antabian, co-producer of *Armenian Navy Band*, who accompanied Tunçboyacıyan during his two visits to Armenia where the CD was recorded. "It was long overdue for him to return to the larger family [of Armenians] and let the sound of his songs soar under the sky of the Fatherland," says Antabian, adding that it was important for Tunçboyacıyan to share his vast experience and avant-garde artistic vision with many talented musicians in Armenia.

"For me, music means love, hope and truth," says Arto. And "until next time," he writes in the jacket of his new CD, "the best nutrition is a smile, the best vitamin is happiness."

