

MIDWEST NEWS - MIDWEST NEWS - MIDWEST NEWS

Concert and Presentation of the Life and Music of Grikor Mirzaian Suni

Grikor Suni's Music Heard Again!

SOUTHFIELD, MI - For many decades the music of Grikor Suni, one of the founders of modern Armenian music, could be heard only in concerts given by his son, Gourgen, and a few loyal proponents. Banned in Soviet Armenia since the end of the 1930s because of Suni's criticism of Stalin, the music of this renowned ethnomusicologist was largely forgotten outside of Philadelphia, a few cities in the U.S. East Coast and Midwest and some centers in the Middle East and Brazil. Composer, ethnomusicologist and conductor Grikor Mirzaian Suni created many concert works from his fieldwork studies of Armenian folk music and from his own creative spirit. On Friday, November 13, some of Suni's music was heard again in live performance at the AGBU Alex and Marie Manoogian Armenian School here.

A chamber group, led by Armena Marderosian, granddaughter-in-law of Grikor Suni, and including Holly Near (flute), Brooke Hoplamazian (violin), Scott Stefanko (viola), Nadine Deleury (cello), and Armena Marderosian (piano), performed six choral works that showed the versatility of Suni's music. "Ha Gior," "Shogher Jan," "God oo Ges," "Hootz," and "Aghgeg Es" illustrated Suni's mostly folk-based lighter side. The quintet's last piece was Suni's

complex working of "Lo-Lo," a long and serious depiction of a battle at Mount Sipan. The cello opened this drama. The mender in the darkness before dawn, calling "Lo-Lo" to find each other. Then the men descent from the mountain to the field below where they engage with the enemy. Blood is spilled. They ascend back up the mountain victorious.

Sevan and Anoush Suni, great-granddaughters of Grikor Suni, performed a group of eight pieces with their mother, Armena Marderosian, at the piano. Sevan, 16-year-old violinist, played "Tooy-Tooy" and "Nenni Bala." Anoush, 11-year-old violinist, played "Oy Yaro," "Kyankn Anoush," "Tsoren Em Tsaner" and "Oy Nazanum," then sang "Dil, Lyoo, Lyoo." Then Sevan and Anoush raised their violins to each other in the playful duet "Aghji Ari."

A talk entitled "Grikor Mirzaian Suni (1876-1939), Artist and Activist" was given by Suni's grandson, Professor Ronald Grigor Suny, historian and political scientist (University of Chicago). "Suni was apparently a man whom no one could take lightly," the lecturer recalled.

"When he entered a room, conversation stopped, and all attention focused on him. He was a gifted musician, certainly, but also a public figure, a man of

politics and culture, and a bit of a rogue. At one time he was a fierce Dashnakstakan, and wrote many patriotic marches; later, and to the end of his life, he was a Communist and an enthusiastic supporter of Soviet Armenia, which he saw as the best possible future for Armenians. He was a proud artist, whom many called a genius, and he often flaunted his bohemian convictions in the face of most conservative national mores."

Suni died on December 18, 1939. He never gave up his convictions, even though he was unable to follow blindly either

the Dashnak or the Communist party line. He was a man of extraordinary artistic and political integrity and that got him into trouble.

Professor Suny concluded by noting that "Suni was a patriot but in his own way, without compromising his own vision. His successes and his failures were a kind of test of the limits presented by the Armenian community at that time. Suni's story raises interesting questions about what it might mean to be an Armenian, to be a patriot, and what price one might have to pay to tell his or her own truth."

Professionally recorded music of Suni's has been unavailable until Professor Suny's wife Armena Marderosian, working with her father-in-law. Suni's son Gourgen, prepared a compact disk, "Armenian Songs of Grikor Mirzaian Suni (1876-1939): Vocal Solos and Duets." At the end of the program, she played selections from this CD, which is available from The AGBU Bookstore in New York, and from The Suni Project Music Preservation (\$17 plus \$3 shipping) at 1723 Wells Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104-3601.

Biography of Grikor Mirzaian Suni

Born near Karabagh, Grikor Mirzaian was related to the ancient Siuni family that had ruled in eastern Transcaucasia in ancient and medieval times. His more recent ancestors had been ashughs (minstrels), and the young Suni was sent to Etchmiadzin to study music. There he met Gomidas, Kara-Murza, Ekmalian, and other early proponents of a new Armenian music based on folk melodies. The years in Etchmiadzin influenced Suni, not only musically, but also politically. His teacher, Kara-Murza, was dismissed from the seminary by more conservative priests when he sided with the students in a dispute over how the school was run. Armenian society at the turn of the century was already being torn between the forces of order and tradition, centered in the church, and more radical and nationalist forces, based in the newly formed political parties, the Hunchakians, the Dashnaksakans, the Social Democrats (Marxists), and the Liberals (eventually the Ramgavars). The 1890s were a period of repression of Armenians in the Russian Empire, but Russian Armenians were even more concerned about the massacres of their fellow Armenians across the Arax River in the Ottoman Empire. An educated young Armenian nationalist like Grigor Mirzaian could not help but become involved in the political movements of the day.

Grigor finished the seminary in 1895, returned to Shushi, and at the age of 19 organized his first chorus and gave his first concert, which was made up entirely of his own arrangements of folk music. Influenced by Kara-Murza and others, he collected the songs of the peasants, which usually were not polyphonic but sung in a single voice, and harmonized them by adding other voices. To complete his musical education he entered the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music in 1898, where he worked with the famous Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, as well as with A. Liadov and Aleksandr Glazunov. He graduated in May 1904 but stayed in the Russian capital, conducting the Armenian church choir, completing folk works, and writing a number of monophonic and polyphonic compositions. In Petersburg he witnessed the events of the first Russian Revolution, of 1905. He was commissioned by the Imperial Musical Society to travel back to the Caucasus to organize in various cities. But after his first concert, in Shushi, the tsarist authorities forbade him from continuing. Already he had turned toward revolution. Along with his romantic songs, "Indz Mi Khndrir" and "Yete Mi Or," he also wrote patriotic songs like "Hog Yev Azadutian" and "Mshak Banvor," which was adopted by the Dashnaksutian as one of their anthems. For Grigor Suni music was not simply for the concert hall but a living, active part of the revolutionary struggle against tsarist autocracy and Turkish oppression.

In St. Petersburg he married a well-educated Armenian woman from Tiflis, Nevart (Natasha) Soniants, who was one of the first women to receive a higher degree in mathematics from a Russian university, and together they had eight children, six of whom survived.

From 1905 to 1908 he worked in Tiflis, teaching music at the Nersisian Jemaran. Through the Armenian Theatrical Society he staged his opera **Aregnazan**, based on the story by Ghazaros Aghayan about ancient Armenian kings. He also wrote the operettas **Asli Kyaram** and **Motsikul**, as well as stage music for Levon Shant's **Hin Astvatsner**, a symphony in C-minor, and orchestral suites, including "Orientale" and the "Sketches of Van." He orchestrated the works of other composers, like Korganov, "Bayati Fantasia on Caucasian Themes," and Valentinov's "Secrets of the Harem." He wrote a history of Armenian music as well as poems and essays, including "What is Art?"

Later in Turkey from 1910 to 1914, he taught at the Sanasarian Jemaran in Erzurum. There his son Gourgen was born in 1910. Four years later, when war was about to break out between Turkey and Russia, a friendly Turkish official, who was grateful that Grikor Suni had written the "Erzurum March" for his city, warned his father of the impending danger to him and his family (they were Russian subjects, after all), and they fled immediately in a carriage to the Russian border. Back in Russia, Nevart taught in a local Armenian school, while Grikor conducted the Symphony Orchestra of Tiflis and founded an Armenian opera company. Once the war ended (November 1918), Siuni traveled to India and Persia to give concerts, but the post-war uprisings in Persia and Turkey prevented him from returning to Tiflis. With the father separate from his family for several years, his wife and children barely survived. They got some help from her sister Vardo's family. But the years of revolution, civil war, independent Georgian republic, and the coming of the Bolsheviks were times of great hardship, near starvation. It was through luck and their wits that the Sunis pulled through.

In 1919 Suni was invited to head the conservatory of the newly independent Armenian republic but was unable to reach Erevan from Tehran. He finally returned to Tiflis in 1922 after the Communists had taken over Georgia. As someone who had been associated with the Dashnak party, Grikor Siuni decided that he had to flee to safety, and he gathered his family, twelve people in all, traveled to Batumi on the Black Sea and took the boat for Constantinople where he had been promised a job with the local Armenian churches. The Sunis lived in occupied Turkey until the Kemalists came to

Handpainted Velvets, Silks and Cashmere to Help Homeless Children Go To School

Local Organization Hosts Couture Fashion Show to Raise Funds For Earthquake Victims

NOVI, MI - Children shiver together, hungry, in need of clothing and a school that is not in shambles. The children of Armenia still suffer from the devastating 1988 earthquake that killed 25,000 people and displaced thousands of others.

As a gift of hope to Armenia's children, The Armenian American Business Council of Michigan (AABC) will host an elegant New York couture fashion show and party, and donate the proceeds to reconstructing Vaskin School in Vanadzor, Armenia.

The evening will be held at the new and exquisite 30,000 square-foot, two-level showroom of Hagopian Rugs, Carpet, Home Accents showroom in Novi, which combines hand-crafted and one-of-a-kind rugs and home furnishings in a single store. Guests will behold the collection of Nina Hovnanian Couture of New York, including her line of winter, holiday and resort fashions. Hovnanian's designs feature hand-painted velvet, silk and cashmere couture and ready-to-wear designs for him and her. Guests will also enjoy a holi-

menian delicacies by caterer Gary Reizian and live Armenian and American music by local musicians Ara Topouzian and Sean Blackman.

Part of AABS's mission is to help Armenia overcome its challenges and get back on its feet, says AABC Founder and president Edgar Hagopian, who is chairman of Michigan's oldest and largest oriental rug and carpet cleaning business, The Hagopian Family of Companies. Nina Hovnanian will donate 20 percent of that evening's net clothing sales to the NY-based Armenia Fund USA for building projects in Armenia. Maryann Kibarian, the Fund's executive director, will describe building progress in Armenia.

Hagopian Rugs, Carpet, Home Accents is located at 43-223 12 Mile Road, east of Novi Road, next to 12 Oaks Mall

The couture fashion show and party will take place on Saturday, December 5, 7:30-10:00 p.m. Suggested minimum donation is \$100 per couple.

Those wishing to make reservations should contact Pam Coultis at (248) 466-1100 (ext. 2747).

CALIFORNIA NEWS - CALIFORNIA NEWS - CALIFORNIA NEWS

Dr. Ara Klijian Returns from Fact-Finding Mission to Armenia

LA JOLLA, CA - Dr. Ara S. Klijian, a cardiothoracic surgeon from this Southern California community and a member of the Medical Board of the World Children's Transplant Fund, recently returned from a fact-finding mission to Yerevan. The World Children's Transplant Fund, a nonprofit organization whose mandate is to enable critically ill children across the world to have access to needed organ transplants, is currently considering the development of a Regional Transplant Center in Yerevan to service the medical needs of patients in the Transcaucasus, including Armenia and Georgia.

During his fact-finding mission, Dr. Klijian met with the Chief of Staff of the Armenian National Assembly, Tigran Balayan, Minister of Health, Gagik Stamboltsyan, and the Director of the Mikaelian Institute, Dr. Hamlet Tamazian. He also surveyed the surgical facilities and intensive care units of the Mikaelian Institute, the Arabkir Medical Center and the Nork Marash Medical Center. Finally, Dr. Klijian himself performed a number of open-heart surgical procedures, including coronary bypass, valvular surgery and congenital defect surgery. Dr. Klijian, who is a specialist in minimally invasive cardiac surgery, also presented lectures to the Armenian medical staff on the techniques of such surgeries, and successfully



Dr. Klijian demonstrating minimally invasive cardiothoracic surgery.



Dr. Klijian (2nd from left), Dr. Tamazian (3rd from left) and colleagues.

performed Armenia's first minimally invasive cardiac surgical procedure.

Dr. Klijian will formally report his findings to the Board of Directors of the World Children's Transplant Fund later this month. He returns to his private practice at Sharp Memorial Hospital in San Diego, where he performs all aspects of cardiac, vascular and thoracic surgery, including heart and lung transplantation, minimally invasive cardiac surgery, and thoracoscopic lung surgery.

Armenian American Medical Society Initiates Campaign Against Breast Cancer

GLENDALE, CA - The Armenian American Medical Society of California used the occasion of its 13th Annual Banquet to unveil its project against breast cancer.

"There is a desperate need for a well-organized crusade against this dreadful illness," declared the President of the Medical Society Dr. David G. Davtyan.

"Fear and lack of awareness contribute to the late diagnosis of breast cancer in tens of thousands of American women every year. We will use the net proceeds from the banquet to help overcome these two factors among Armenian women and improve the chance of early detection and treatment," stated Dr. Davtyan who is a surgical oncologist and Co-chairman of the project.

Dr. Silva Karchikian, the Co-chairwoman of the project and a past president of the Medical Society, explained that the campaign is designed to increase awareness, educate women about breast screening, encourage early detection, and provide information about treatment alternatives. She added that the Medical Society would partner and collaborate with non-Armenian organizations and establishments to maximize the value of the available funds and the effectiveness of the campaign.

The Sr. Director of the American Cancer Society of San Fernando Valley, Mr. John Lazar, informed the more than 350 banquet attendees that the Cancer Society has identified breast health as one of four areas requiring greater education and research. Mr. Lazar also expressed the Society's desire to partner with the Armenian American Medical Society of California. He added that they need the Medical Society collaboration to make their message to the Armenian community relevant and understandable.

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Biography of Grikor Mirzaian Suni - Continued from p. 12

Istanbul in the fall of 1923. With an offer of work by the Armenian Church in America, the Sunis fled once again, this time to New York, Boston, and finally Philadelphia.

In the United States, after 1923, Suni led church choirs, organized choruses, taught music, and continued in Armenian politics. He had left the Dashnaksutun, and forbade them to use his music anymore. But they said they needed his music to inspire, and wanted to keep using it, so he insisted they remove this name. Many of Suni's works are thus still used, and even published without his name (even under someone else's name). Now that Armenia was Soviet he joined the Communist Party, or at least an Armenian cell in Philadelphia. He and his comrades were active in the HOG and other organizations, to aid the fledgling republic. Though he had written liturgical pieces for the church and led church choirs from St. Petersburg to Tiflis to Boston and Philadelphia, there was now a break with the church over his political views.

Suni was invited to return to Armenia to head the Yerevan Conservatory of Music, which he wished to do, but he was diabetic and Armenia had no insulin. He did his best to help by buying old

instruments from pawn shops, repairing them, and sending them off to the Yerevan Conservatory. Through the 1920s and 1930s the Suni choruses were the center of Armenian musical life in America. He gave concerts at Jordan Hall in Boston, where he twice (1925 and 1935) won first prize in international folk music competitions for his Armenian folk chorus, and in New York, Detroit, Chicago, where he won second prize (1933) in the Chicago Tribune's Chicagoland Music Festival, and Philadelphia.

Grikor Suni divided his time between his music and his politics. Many faulted him for this, but in a real sense these were the two forms of expression of his patriotism, his love for Armenia, its culture and its future. In 1934 he published a book called *Nor Kyanki Yerker* [Songs of New Life], which included folk songs, original works, and songs that extolled the achievements of the Soviet republic. In 1935, the fortieth anniversary of his musical performances, his work was celebrated throughout Armenian communities around the world, including concerts, radio broadcasts, and a publication in Soviet Armenia of ten of his works for voice and piano.

Through the years of the Great Depression, the Soviet Union was a beacon of hope for many

in the West. Yet in the Soviet Union Stalin employed massive repression and terror against his own people. Hundreds of thousands of peasants, workers, and intellectuals lost their lives or were sent to prison or exiled to Siberia. In 1936 the young, popular Communist boss of Armenia, Aghasi Khanjian, was killed by Stalin's lieutenant, Beria, in Tiflis. 1937 was the year of the Great Purges in the Soviet Union, when the mass terror reached its height. Tensions increased among foreign communists; some were dismayed at what was happening in the USSR. At a meeting of the Armenian Communist circle in Philadelphia, Suni read a lecture condemning the internal squabbles among his comrades. It was later reported that he was critical of Stalin and upset by the murder of Khanjian, which had been officially reported as a suicide. His was an unheard of insubordination. For this he was censured by his fellow Communists, who later reported Suni's unforgivable sin back to Erevan. From that time on, until the 1960s, Suni's name and his music were not heard in Armenia. Now he had lost the church, the Dashnaks, and the Communists. Alone, he sometimes had to hire singers from Russian and Jew-

ish choruses to perform his music because many Armenians would not participate.

Only many years after his death was Suni's music played once again in Armenia. The renowned musicologist, Robert Atayan, prepared a large collection of Suni's choral work, though the fall of the Soviet Union and the resultant economic difficulties in Armenia have delayed its publication.

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