

OPERA AND THE ARMENIANS

Guest Lecturer

**Prof.
Khatchatur I. Pilikian**

Introduction

**Armenian History
Culture & Heritage**

CAIA – Hayashen

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**105a Mill Hill Road Acton
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Overture:
Audio-Visual Art & Techno
In Culture & Civilisation.

Part I:
The Ensemble of Poetry
Song, Dance & Epic Tale in Armenia.

Part II:
The Birth of Opera
In the Armenian Culture

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Excerpts from
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ARSHAK II.

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Overture

Audio-Visual Art & Techno

In Culture & Civilisation

Popular beliefs about opera are themselves ‘operatic’, hence often grandiose, fabulous and sometimes even majestic. Verdi, “*the only man capable of writing grand operas*” (Rossini) genuinely believed that “*to copy reality can be a good thing, but to invent reality is better, much better*”. Verdi is only echoing what his compatriot Leonardo da Vinci had succinctly expressed three centuries before him that “*the painter contends with and rivals nature*”, a belief shared also by twentieth century’s own Pablo Picasso who said emphatically: “*Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realise truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand.*”

What a fantastic metaphorical term, **Culture**, to denote the social, spiritual, intellectual and artistic endeavours of human societies, indeed of humanity as a whole. **Culture** has no proper antinomy, unlike **Civilization**, which can be contrasted with **Barbarism**. The so-called ‘barbaric’ people or societies were also thought to be in possession of culture, albeit ‘less civilized’ ones. The cultivated human beings became closer to being civilized. For many centuries, the meaning of **culture** was focussed on the concept of a **process**, as in the act of cultivating the soil of the earth, not only individually, but especially as a society of humans. **Civilization**, having the ‘city’ as its core, pushed the development of the metaphor to mean not only the process, but also the **product** of that process. As a result, **Language**, being the most valued commodity of that product, became also the yardstick of **Civility**.

For the Greek citizen of the great Greek Civilization of the 5th century B.C., a foreigner’s language sounded like **bar-bar-bar** or unintelligible to their ‘civilised’ ears (an echo of it resounds in the English language, as “it’s all double Dutch to me.”) Hence a foreigner, like the Nordic German or the highly civilized Egyptian, was a ‘barbarian’ for the Greeks.

Stretching the concept further, the conquered ‘foreigner’ became not only barbarian, but also a foreigner in his own land. Thus, when Germanic invaders conquered the Celts, they called them **Wealas=foreigner**, hence the **Welsh** ‘became’ foreigners in their own homeland! The Welsh in their turn called the invaders merely the **Saxons**, without distinguishing the different tribes constituting the invaders. But the name of one of these tribes, the **Angles**, was used as the name of the Germanic branch of the language they spoke, the **English**, long before the country came to be known as **Englaland** or England, ca AD 1000.

When culture began to be recognised as the end product of a process, civilization was envisaged as the means for that end; in other words, **culture** signified the values and meanings of that process, while **civilization** implied its material organisation. It is in that contextual process that **culture** developed to express the most cherished desire of us all-- **freedom**, ultimately aspiring for its end product-- **happiness**. But it is in civilization or **Civic Society** that the human desire for freedom and happiness can be materialised. A **Civic Society** therefore essentially implies a **non-racist, multi-cultural** society-- the building block of **multi-cultural civilization**. Furthermore, the most cherished essence of the **universality of art** is the product of and witness to that **humane necessity** embedded in culture-civilization duality.

Art is born out of **necessity**, both objective and subjective. As one of the founding fathers of Greek Drama argued, "*Art is feebler than necessity*". Surely the source of the veracity of Aeschylus' message is the cultural history of mankind.

No art form, not even **Theatre**, has ever surpassed the power of necessity. A powerful necessity to combine all Art & Techno forms into a single medium of communication has challenged humanity for thousands of years. **Theatre** was the outcome of that necessity. Happening as a single entity in a socially enhanced and newly created architectural environment, it was given no particular name other than **Theatron**, meaning simply **to watch, view or look at a Drama**, the latter meaning an **act/deed**, performed by a **Chorus=Group of Dancers and Singers**. The performance of the Chorus (in goat-like dresses and masks) had already its name baptised as **Tragoidia=Goat-Song**, dedicated to Dionysus, the deity of dual birth, regeneration and wine.

Hence **Theatron** was a visual phenomenon par excellence, and for the Athenians of 5th century B.C., it was their Forum for **Mytho-Poetic, Audio-Visual Literacy**, alongside its much tormented twin, **Democratia=Sovereignty of the People**, indeed their Forum for **Socio-Political Literacy**. Consequently **Theatron** and **Democratia** were cherished as safeguards against **Timocratia=Sovereignty of the Chosen-Wealthy** and **Ochlocratia=Sovereignty of the Mob**. **Theatre was the Forum where the mob (Ochlos) was transformed into people (Demos)**.

It is fascinating, nevertheless, that the history of that visual phenomenon named **Theatron** pushed the art of **Poetry**, the jewel in the crown of that most valued yardstick of civility, **Language**, to the forefront of all creative expressions. It unified the performances of the Chorus and its Leader with that of the *dramatic personae*. Hence **Poetry**, meaning "**the art of the maker of things/words**", became the single most valuable medium to be assembled at socially enhanced time and place, to recreate the original visual happening/deed (Drama), worthy

to be looked at (Theatron), contemplated on and reacted upon, again and again, by a large audience.

Twenty centuries later, in the 16th century Italy, in Florence, another composite art form was born. Hoping to revive the original Greek Drama, late Renaissance Italy ended up creating something different, **Opera**, which literally meant a **work**. It was a new audio-visual phenomenon, where **Melos=Song**, more than **Poetry=word**, eventually became the *raison d'être* of its drama. Notwithstanding their historic difference in the emphasis of the essential medium, Opera's **Meloidia=Tune-Song** echoed the root meaning of **Tragoidia/Tragedy=Goat-Song**. Hence opera's early names: **Favola in Musica** (Monteverdi) then **Melodrama in Musica** (Verdi).

Just three centuries later, on 31st January 1839, the Englishman Talbot read before the Royal Society his "*Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing, or the process by which natural objects may be made to delineate themselves without the aid of the artist's pencil*". Talbot's 'Drawing', later called **Photography=Drawing with Light, or Light-Pictures**, was a radically new approach to visual communication.

Towards the end of the 19th century and ushering in the 20th century, the state of the Art & Techno gave birth to **Kinematography=Moving-Pictures**, thence **Cinema**, the most popular and the most powerful visual medium ever to be created by the Homo sapiens. Those who believe that "nothing is new under the sun" might link this new twentieth century visual phenomenon to Plato's parable of the cave (in the "Republic"), where an individual soul is watching the shadows of life pass him by. But suddenly in the cinema-theatre, millions of pictures are set into motion to move the souls of tens of thousands of individuals, anytime and anywhere in the world. In 1936 Marconi's **Electronic Television** eventually pioneered the influx of that 'Platonic cave' installed in a box in every household.

Lo and behold, the further advances in audio-visual techno brought us even closer to Plato's parable of the cave, albeit on a gigantic scale. By the end of the 20th century, a new state of the Art & Techno medium, **Holographs=Whole-Pictures**, created **Holograms=Whole-Images** to 'personify' actors on the stage. It eventually paved the way for the computerised visual phenomenon of **Virtual Theatre**, hence **Virtual Reality**, the most powerful audio-visual medium for the manipulation of the senses of the spectator ever created. The probability for such **total manipulation** has the potential to destroy social interaction and entice people to act as a mob and endanger evermore our most precious Socio-Political Forum itself -- **Democracy**. I can now appreciate better what the great scholar of Ancient Greek culture, Dr M. I. Finley meant when he wrote that Plato was

**the most powerful and most radical anti-democratic moralist
the world has ever known.** (M.I. Finley. *The Ancient Greeks*. Pelican Books, 1966, p.140)

There is a petrified rift between theory (abstract knowledge) and practice (concrete knowledge) throughout the human history. Eliminating that rift might be the most humane task that the Info Tech revolution would accomplish, if only driven away from the obscene madness of profiteering at any cost, even at the cost of destroying life on Earth.

I believe preserving our inborn humanity is now a vital necessity. Thus we must keep Info Tech under human control, instead of it controlling us. There is no danger in letting holograms ‘act’ like humanoids. It will be tragic for humanity if we become mere holograms by being really and Globally manipulated in the bliss of **virtual** reality, with no inner mind and soul to breathe **Real Hope**. **Art** (visual, aural, tactile, kinetic and rhythmic) is our childhood sunrise. Engaging in art in **practice** to therein experience the acquired **abstracted literacy**, enhances the **sunrise of hope** of each human being. **Beauty** is its warmth. **Youthful soul** is its reward. **Patience** is its guardian angel.

Part I: The Ensemble of Poetry Song, Dance & Epic Tale in Armenia.

Historical Armenia lies between the Taurus mountains and Caucasus, embracing the three lakes of; *Urmia* (now in Iran), *Van* (now in Turkey), and *Sevan*, (the only one left for contemporary Armenia). Armenia is a mountainous country. This geographical fact is manifested in a hundred of different elemental ways, images, metaphors, idiomatic expressions, in the poetry and dance of its people. It is dramatic poetry, of dialogue, or rather, multilogue between Humans and the Elements.

An Armenian legend tells us the following story of the ‘nature’ of those mountains.

In very old times, Armenian mountains were giant brothers. Every morning, as soon as the giants awoke, they tied their belts and only then greeted each other. But one morning they hailed each other before tying their belts. For that God punished them. And the giant brothers thus, became mountains. Their belts became green fields and their tears, eternal fountains.

(A. Ghanalanian, *Avandapatoom: (Legends)*. 1970. Yerevan. *Mountains, Rocks, Hills. no.9*)

Having belts on their waists symbolised manhood and courage for an upcoming youth. It had magical powers to cast away evil, eventually ascertaining goodness in maturity. Male dancers always kept their belts while dancing, as was the case with the narrators of epics adamant to glorify courage against evil.

Maxim Gorki visited the 2nd Armenian Republic, in 1928. In his travel notes he describes **The Dance of the Sasoontsi**, one of the most dynamic Armenian group dances, named after its place of origin, the legendary mountain range of Sasoon. It was there that one of the masterpieces of world Epic Poetry was born -- the Folk Epic of David of Sasoon, created during 9th -11th century AD. Witnessing the group dance of the people of Sasoon, M. Gorki was enchanted. He wrote:

The dance of the Sasoontzi is a perfect example of unique beauty...it is not meant to surprise with manifold variations, but instead manifests a deeper meaning. Two musicians each with a huge drum and a shrilling *duduk* rush out first to the dancing area. After the musicians, there swirls a multicoloured body of twenty young men. They move in unison, side by side, arms crossed in back, hand on hand, advancing with astonishing rhythmic power. This brilliant “body” whirls in a circle, then opens in a straight line while waving in ever-changing curves and spirals...And the rainbow-like “body” of dancers continue enlarging and deepening the impression of force and unity... In that dance, lies no doubt a symbolic meaning...Is it a “temple dance” or a “battle dance”? Probably *The Dance of the Sasoontzi* Armenians was a victorious battle dance. (Haireniki Dzain Weekly. March 22 1968. Yerevan)

The eminent musicologist Curt Sachs, examining the various styles of the art of dance, thinks that

The whirl dance is the purest form of dance devotion...its significance is apparently astral.

(Sachs, Curt. 1963. *World History of the Dance*. Norton: New York. p.44)

Sachs continues, sketching some patterns of gestures of hands during the circle dance,

The closer the social contact, the stronger is the social character of the Choral. They hold hands, they place their hands on the shoulders or hips of their neighbours, or they lock arms...The circle as a dance motif is older than sun worship. (Ibid. pp 143-144)

We might as well remember, after all, that **Dithyramb**, the Greek Choral Dance, began as a circular dance of fifty dancers which gave birth to **Tragedy**,

It was in the year 534 BC when the leader of this choral dance, a singer and dancer named **Thespis**, created the “goat-song” (**Tragoidia**) -- singing and dancing with a goat mask. This ritual was dedicated to **Dionysus**, who, according to Greek Mythology, was brought up in upper Armenia, the land of grapes and wine. (Larousse World Mythology. New York 1971. pp 137-138)

Originally in Armenia, dancing was accompanied by songs. No musical instruments were used other than the human voice. Clapping had the twofold function of accentuating the rhythm, and imbuing enthusiasm. Such dance-song performances were called **Geghon**, which might well be thought as being vocal accompaniments for dance-miming.

This was true of all musical cultures because, as Curt Sachs points out,

Instrumental dance melody is not a development from instrumental rhythmic music but rather the instrumentalising of dance songs. In all probability, the first songs to be instrumentalised are those for which words have been forgotten...

A melodic instrumental music in the full sense appears as a dance accompaniment surprisingly late. (Sachs, C. op. cit. p 181)

The **Pandirn** is an early Armenian professional musical instrument. Movses Khorenatzi (5th c), the “Father-Historian” of the Armenians, refers to the

men of the ‘Armenian race’ telling legends, myths, fables, stories, historical events and glorifications of valiant deeds of national heroes in ‘tzootzk’ and dance songs accompanied by pandirn...(Malkhassian Stepan, *Movses Khorenatzi: History of the Armenians.* Haypethrat. Yerevan. 1961. p 94)

Khorenatzi’s **Tsootzk** has puzzled many scholars. **Tsootzk** in Armenian means ‘showing’ or ‘show’. Therefore, **Tsootzk** accompanied by a **Dance-Song**, might be well visualised as a **Pantomime** (in its original meaning of total-miming with no verbal uttering of the **Tsootzk** performer).

Lucian (b 120 AD in Samosata, on the Euphrates neighbouring closely Armenia.), might give us a better clue for our understanding of **Tsootzk** as **Pantomime**. In his **Orchesis** (his naming of **Pantomime**) of 150 AD, which is a dialogue on the art of dramatic action without words -- Lucian writes:

The dancer’s principal task is to draw continually upon his unfailing memory of ancient story; the memory must be backed by taste and judgment... He must be familiar with every detail... Since it is his profession to imitate, and to show forth his subject by means of gesticulation, he, like the orators, must be intelligible without the aid

**of an interpreter; to borrow the expression of the Pythian oracle
'Dumb though he may be, and speechless, he is heard.'**

(Sachs, C. op. cit. pp 246-247).

Khorenatsi's **Tsootsk** and dance-song accompanied by **Paandirn** were also narrations, hence **Tsootsk** were most certainly **Pantomimes** (in its classical meaning) accompanied with **Tsootsk-Song** or **Dance-Song** to the sound of **Pandirns**.

Thus **Pandirn** in the Armenian musical culture might well be therefore thought of as the accompaniment musical instrument "par excellence" for **Pantomimes** or **Tzootzk**.

In 1664, the French aristocrat Chevalier Chardin visited Armenia. He wrote about his voyages in the Orient. In the town of Yerevan he witnessed a popular theatrical presentation and observed that:

The musicians and the dancers are the mimes or the comedians of the Orientals, or better said, these performances are their kind of opera, because they sing only in verse, and prose never enters their song.

(Voyage du Chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient. Paris 1911, v. II, p. 207)

Chevalier Chardin was right. That innermost drive to combine the audio-visual art forms into a single, unified whole, has never been absent in the creative impulse of folk artists. The eminent Armenian art historian and critic, Garegin Levonian, was keen to insist that,

Music, dance and theatrical acts are all woven in ancient epic songs. The Ancient Armenian dances already embodied dramatic elements whereby the dancers also sang while dancing, enacting thus a specific subject matter. (G. Levonian, *Theatre in Ancient Armenia*. Yerevan, 1941, p. 8)

In his turn, Spiridon Melikian, the renowned Armenian musicologist and ethnographer, examining the hours long cyclic performances of the Armenian epics and lyric folk tales, noted the following,

During the long winter nights, gathered in their warm dwellings, they narrate and sing their own operas. (S. Melikian, *A Glimpse at the History of Armenian Music*. Yerevan, 1935, p. 10)

It is worth mentioning here that **Goosan**, the title name given to an Armenian folk musician and poet, is a multi-meaning word embracing a whole range of attributes given to a performing artist, such as, ancient bard, minstrel, troubadour, lyric poet and actor-singer, singer-musician, etc. In fact **Goosan** is the prime poet-singer-actor of the Ancient Armenians, frequently mentioned and illustrated in the Armenian manuscripts. **Goosan's** lyrical poems/songs with

wide ranging contents titled **Hayrenner** enriched the musical and poetic heritage of Armenian culture.

There appears another performing ensemble which accompanied the **Goosans** in their more spectacular and melodramatic performances. They were called the **Dzaynarkous**, meaning the **Vocalists**. With loud voices and lamentations, the **Dzaynarkous** dramatised the tragic moments of the Epic tales, often with musical accompaniments of wind and string instruments.

All the above mentioned, point to the fact that Armenian folk poetry, music and mime-dance had certainly produced an exciting union of the performing arts which appeared as a metamorphic art form foreshadowing the sophisticated craft of the European musical drama called **Opera**.

Writing about the period before the creation of Opera, the distinguished musicologist, Egon Welesz is keen to emphasise the following:

When monks, artists and craftsmen from Persia, Armenia, and Syria brought their native culture in the parts of Italy and France, and workers and musicians penetrated as far as the Rhine, yet even this last effort of a culture which was continually losing ground before the increasing power of the West, must be accounted of great importance.

(Egon Welesz. *Essays on Opera*, London 1950. pp 26-27)

The style of singing is also an important aspect of that majestic art form named **Opera**, which has to be considered and closely examined. **Opera** came into being as an antithetical response to **Polyphony**. After five centuries of development that resulted in the enrichment of the culture of sound with magnificent creations of vocal tapestries – befittingly called **Polyphony** – it nevertheless fell out of grace. For the new merchant class nobility and middle class intellectuals of late 16th century, **Polyphony** started to be regarded as the “enemy of music”-- in Italian, “**nemico della musica**”. For them, it destroyed **Poetry**, the art for which the **meaning of the word** was, they thought, its ultimate ‘raison d’être’, according to their highly esteemed ‘the ancients’—the Greeks, of course. In **Polyphony**, the **word** gradually becoming **unintelligible**, hence its meaning was eventually lost in the tapestry of sound, unlike in **Monody** that was destined to characterise the style of singing in **Opera**.

And it did,

The truth of the matter is this. The **Monodic** style of singing had developed in such a way as to contain several oriental musical elements, like **Melisma**, **Tremolo**, **Flautato**, **Messa di Voce** and the freedom given to the interpreter to **Improvise** the vocal **Ornamentations**. Later on that style of singing had its Italian name **Bel Canto**, which became the most sought after singing style in the art form called **Opera**, for at least two centuries.

It's good to bear in mind that all those stylistic elements of the **Bel Canto** are the common stock of the Oriental vocal practice. Moreover, they are the quintessence of their art form of singing. In 9th century Cordoba, during the Ommayads of Andalusia, the great singer and singing pedagogue **Ziriab** had his Academy of Music, where he taught the art and techno of singing, called **Al Ghinaa al Mutqan = The Perfected Singing**. (In November 1970, I had the pleasure of presenting my paper, in Italian, titled *Bel Canto e Ziriab*, at the Italian Institute of Culture, which was followed by my vocal recital at AUB Chapel Hall, in memory of **Ziriab**, with a programme of Western Bel Canto repertoire).

Armenia certainly shares that Oriental musical heritage too, not only in Armenian folk music, but also in its centuries old music for rituals and worship, where those stylistic elements predominate. The Armenian church has been a sort of conservatory of music throughout the ages for such a virtuoso singing style. **Sharakans** or Hymns, **Taghs**, or Laudi exemplify those **Bel Canto** traits as early as the 10th century.

In his essay on **Eastern Chant**, the same Egon Welesz has expressed with learned enthusiasm about his admiration of the **Armenian Chant**, saying:

The highly developed state of Armenian ecclesiastical music as we know it from present-day practice suggests that the music of the Armenian Church in the Middle Ages must have been of outstanding beauty, comparable only to that of the Byzantine Church, if not superior. Indeed we might go further and say that we shall never be able to understand fully the development of Eastern Church music until we know more about Armenian music and its role in the development of Eastern Chant.

(Egon Welesz, in *New Oxford History of Music. Early Medieval*)

While the Armenian folk poetry, music and dance produced a synthesis in the Armenian Epic and Lyric folk tales, the Armenian Church became the stage where the development of a sophisticated singing style was to flourish, acquiring the label as a **Ritualistic Monody**, not devoid of theatricality. The vastness and diversity of Armenian Chant necessitated, even as early as the 7th century, a scrupulous collection, chosen, assembled and edited by Barsegh Jonn. It soon became the source-foundation of Armenian Hymnology for centuries.

(N. Tahmizian. *Music in Ancient & Medieval Armenia*. Yerevan, 1982. p. 16)

Raman Rolland visiting the 2nd Armenian Republic has jotted down these telling words:

Their melodies have such richness and fascination that they transform Armenia into...Italy

. (Letter to the Armenian State Publishing House, Literary Journal. Nov. 7th, 1969, Yerevan)

No wonder why the encyclopaedic writer, philosopher and composer Jean Jacque Rousseau (1712-1778), recorded down his impression about an Armenian from Venice, while the latter was listening with overwhelming indulgence to Italian music at a concert,

He was enchanted, he surrendered his soul to the impression of the music, the mere sounds visibly enraptured him. From that moment he could not be inclined to listen to any French air.

(Source Reading in Music History. Selected and annotated by Oliver Strunk. N.Y., 1950)

As if contradicting Rousseau's impression, the great French musician, Claude Debussy wrote about his admiration of Armenian music of Reverend Komitas. Mailing some of Komitas' music to his sister-in-law, Eleanor Debussy, the eminent composer wrote, in his accompanying letter, that he

could not have selected a more captivating type of music to send to her.

(Henry Begian, Gomidas Vartabed, Dissertation, University of Michigan. 1964)

Meanwhile, one of Komitas' most original articles on Armenian Folk Dances, which was published in Leipzig in 1901, in German, now appeared a year later in Tiflis – Tbilisi, in 1902, in Russian, published in the Russian Periodical of Caucasus – *Kavkazskaya Viestnik*. Komitas' paper appeared in a whole section dedicated to him as the most revered musician of the Armenians. It was part of an article on Caucasian music authored by the most authoritative music critic and historian of the day, Vasili Davidovich Ghorghanov (V. D. Ghorghanian, 1865-1934).

Vasili Ghorghanian was the representative of the Russian Musical Society in Tiflis. To him belong the reviews and critics on the Tiflis Opera productions which, among others, included the appearances of the much admired Bass singer F. Chaliapin. The list of Ghorghanian's monograph articles/essays was impressive: *Schiller in Music, Shakespeare in Music, Pushkin in Music, and Chaikovski in Caucasus*. (in the *Chaliapin, an Autography as told to Maxim Gorki*, Ghorghanian is mentioned as Korganov. Stein & Day. N.Y. 1969). Furthermore, the earliest important monographs in the Russian language on Beethoven and Mozart belong to his pen -- likewise the first biography in the Russian language on Giuseppe Verdi.

Part II: The Birth of Opera in the Armenian Culture

All the above mentioned theatrical and musical elements – as the historical and scholarly studies and impressions abundantly witness -- were mature enough in Armenia for a final synthesis, but it lacked the indispensable socio-political conditions for achieving it.

In Italy, for example, it was not only the dominance of monody and the passion for Greek tragedy that were responsible for the creation of Opera. The courts and the courtyards of the merchant class nobility were also the cauldrons wherein the elements of Opera were amalgamated. (Its worth remembering that the same was also true for the rise of the prestigious **Chinese Opera**, the exuberant Japanese musical theatres called **Noh**, the magical **Bunraku** and the popular **Kabuki**).

Opera's *raison d'être* today, reflects in its turn Democracy's transmutation. An aristocracy of talent performs opera. It has become the hobbyhorse for the rich, who can afford the exuberant prices of its productions. The Rule of the Chosen/Wealthy -- **Timocracy**, has placed its own elitist mask on opera's flexible image. The eminent historian and musicologist Manfred Bukofzer is keen to point out:

The extravagant expenses of the court opera could only be covered if the patron received a steady revenue [...] The Duke of Brunswick, for one, relied not only on the most ingenious forms of direct and indirect taxation but resorted even to slave trade. He financed his operatic amusements by selling his subjects as soldiers so that his flourishing opera depended literally on the blood of the lower classes.

(M. Bukofzer. *MUSIC IN THE BAROQUE ERA*. New York, 1947, p 398)

Alas, the Baroque epoch too was emulating even the darkest aspects of Greek culture, as the eminent scholar George Thomson concluded, in his pioneering "Study in the Social Origins of Drama", saying:

It is necessary for us to remember the blood and tears that were shed on the raw materials of Greek Art. (G. Thomson. *AESCHYLUS AND ATHENS*. Lawrence & Wishart, 1946, p.150)

It becomes obvious then why in the century of national reawakening, **Opera**, the most popular art form, was to trigger not only mass demonstrations but even, for that matter, a revolution, as the late venerable historian E. J. Hobsbawm has pointed out:

Even the apparently least political of arts, music, had the strongest political associations. This was perhaps the only period in history when operas were written as, or taken to be, political manifestoes and triggered off revolutions. (E. J. Hobsbaum, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*. Mentor Book, 1962, p.302-303)

On the 25th of August, 1830, at Brussels, a performance of Auber's opera, *La Muette de Portici*, or *Masaniello* set off the Belgian popular uprising against the Dutch rule, which resulted in Belgium becoming an independent state. And it is worth mentioning that the hero of the opera of Auber, Masaniello, was a historical figure --- a Neapolitan fisherman who had led a revolution at Naples, in 1647, against the Spanish rule.

Opera indeed as a popular art form had gone a long way since the first ever public opera house was opened in the Republic of Venice, in 1637, just ten years before Masaniello's Neapolitan revolution and nearly two centuries before the Belgian uprising. Opera had thus become the democratic art form supported by the new merchant and middle class, just like in ancient Greece, where **Theatron=Theatre had become Greek society's greatest cultural achievement which exemplified its civilization. To my mind, Theatre became its Democracy's Artistic Parliament.** In mid nineteenth century Europe, the radical democrats had re-molded opera in their own image.

When librettos of Operas shifted their interests from Myths and Fables, soon historical subjects with their protagonists as Emperors, Kings, Queens, Rulers and what not, started to rule their days in the librettos, before yielding their stage pedestals to the common people as in the case of the fisherman **Masaniello**, or the courtesan **Traviata**, without forgetting the pioneering and amazing English trope, **The Beggar's Opera**. Surprise, surprise, even Armenian historical events and their Rulers, or tales associated with Armenian history, played their prominent place in Italian, German and French operas, long before an opera as a distinct art form was composed by an Armenian composer. Both the librettos and the music of those operas with Armenian historical subjects were written and composed by the masters of the art of Opera of the day. Here are but few examples:

Tigrane, Re d'Armenia. Music by T. Albinoni. The same also by M Bononcini

Il Tigrane. Music by Alessandro Scarlatti. Text by D. Lalli, in 3 acts. Scarlatti's most famous opera, his 106th on stage. Horns were introduced in the opera orchestra for the first time. 1715, Naples.

Tigrane. Johann Hasse's first opera. Written for Italy and the first that is extant. Text by F. Silvani, in 3 acts. 1723, Naples. Originally titled **La Virtu Trionfante dell'Amore e dell'Odio**, composed by M.A. Ziani, in 1691.

Tigrane. By various other composers, Lampugnani, Tozzi, Piccini, Riccini,

Il Tigrane. C. W. Gluck. 3 acts, 1743. The Text of the opera is Goldoni's version of F. Silvani's La Virtu...of 1691; Goldoni's version was first composed by G. Arena in 1741.

Arsace. C. W. Gluck, in collaboration with G.B. Lampugnani. 1743. Also by various other composers, Gasparini, Giacomelli, etc.

Artaserse. Various composers: Vinci (1730, Rome), Hasse (1730, Venice), Gluck (1741, Milano. His first opera), Graun (1743, Berlin), Terradellas (1744, Venice carnavalle), Jomelli (1749, Rome). Text by Metastasio. 3 acts.

Ariarate. Angelo Tarchi. Text by F. Moretti. 3 acts. Milano, 1786. The most successful of Tarchi's numerous Italian operas. Bologna 1786, Trieste 1787, Palermo 1787, Napoli 1787, Warsaw 1787.

The above mentioned operas are still waiting to be rediscovered and staged, at least and hopefully perhaps in the Armenian Opera & Ballet Academic Theatre in Yerevan.

Armenia had lost its national sovereignty in A.D.1375, and the country was seized by the Ottoman Turks in 1514. The Armenian people suffered under the ottoman yoke for more than four centuries. The 19th century national reawakening and liberation movements of many suppressed nations of the Ottoman Empire, were instrumental for revitalising those national cultures, among them the Armenian culture. Literature, theatre and music began a process of mutual influence. Professional theatrical companies such as those of Vartoovian, Benglian, Menakian, all started commissioning composers to write incidental music for their stage productions. The great poet Petros Dourian was also a playwright. The actors Adamian and Siranoush – both famous for their Shakespearian performances in Armenian – were occasionally appearing as singers in newly written and produced musicals and eventually operettas with Turkish and Armenian librettos.

Around the middle of 19th century the Italian librettos of Metastasio were translated into Armenian and published in Venice. The Armenian revolutionary poet Mikael Nalbandian, a comrade of Herzen and the like, was thrown into the Tsarist prison. From prison, Nalbandian advised his friend, the writer Sahradian, to translate Verdi's opera, **Il Trovatore**, into Armenian. Thus the Armenian

score of **Il Trovatore** was published in 1864, in St. Petersburg, by the said translator, Sahradian, dedicated to the poet Nalbandian. In Tblisi/Tiflis, where Armenians counted at least half of the population, there opened the first Italian Opera House of Transcaucasia, in 1851. Translations into Armenian of various operas started to flourish, the productions of which were also enjoying popular support, as Verdi's **Aida** and **Rigoletto**, Gounod's **Faust**, Bizet's **Carmen**, Puccini's **Cio-Cio-San** (Mme Butterfly), etc. Musicians composed overtures, interludes and songs for stage plays. The famous 4th century Armenian kingdom's turbulent episodes -- soon after Armenia accepted Christianity as its state religion -- captivated the Armenian spectators of 19th century. The much loved composer of songs and choral music, Christopher Kara Murza, composed 24 items, including areas, duets, choruses and orchestral prologue, all part of the dramatic stage play by the noted poet Mekertich Peshiktashlian, titled **Arshak II**, before the latter came to be the title of another libretto for the first Opera of the Armenians, and a Grand Opera at that.

The Armenian Diaspora in the Ottoman Empire was thus experiencing, as in the Russian Empire, its own 'Risorgimento'. On March 17, 1863, the Armenian National Constitution was ratified by the Ottoman government. Astonishing as it might sound, it's worth highlighting that in mid-19th century, the Ottoman Caliphate had even entertained the idea to officially adopt the Armenian Alphabet for the Turkish language. A whimsical joke? Apparently not so. The eminent linguist, Hrachia Ajcharian, had this to say about some Ottoman Pashas' fleeting wish:

Many Turks learned the Armenian Alphabet and were reading *Manzoume* and *Mejmouwai* [Turkish newspapers printed in Armenian letters]. The spreading of Armenian letters through the news-media made the Turkish informed classes to really appreciate the admirable simplicity of the Armenian script. In 1860, both Fouad and Ali Pasha entertained the idea to abandon the Turkish script [essentially Arabic] and adopt the Armenian Alphabet as the official script. Rashid Pasha, the Grand Eparchos, learned to write Armenian to be able to spread its use among the Turks. It is said that the Assembly of the Ottoman Parliament too had agreed for the change, but national vanity or the early cessation of the Assembly did not allow the implementation of the act.

(Hrachia Ajcharian at the Armenian Academy of Art & Science, 1943. A presentation for his forthcoming monograph, titled, *The Role of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire*. Yerevan University Herald. 1967, no. 1)

The above 'temptations' notwithstanding, the victory of the Greek independence of 1829 was not forgotten by the Armenians as well as the other nations still under the Ottoman rule. Around the same time, Eastern Armenia was finally out of the Persian dominance, somehow or seemingly enjoying more liberal status under the Russian Empire. (The cataclysmic upheavals of the

1917 Russian revolution notwithstanding, the historical fact remains that since 1918, all the three Republics of Armenia were established on that same Eastern, so called Russian Armenia.)

Bulgarians, Serbs, Macedonians, Arabs, Armenians and even Assyrians and some Kurdish tribes, were all politically re-awakened, hoping to get self-rule and, eventually independence. In 1867 the Bulgarian struggle for-determination was crushed in bloody massacres, culminating in the massacre of ten thousands in 1875. The heroic insurrection for Armenian self-rule in Zeitoun was already alive and kicking. Meanwhile the entire market at the centre of Van, mostly belonging to Armenians, was burned down to ashes, after a vandalising wholesome plunder. The intolerance of the Ottoman rule was intensifying. The much popular and professionally active **Oriental Theatre** was also axed out of action, albeit on and off. The said theatre was established in 1861 and survived numerous restrictions until 1876, It was the focus of artistic, political and social reawakening of the public who were familiarised not only with the best of Armenian national literary and stage works of the time, but also with the Italian and French stage masterpieces.

Eventually, to try to block the interference of European powers the first ever Ottoman Government Constitution was officially announced, on November 30, 1876. But racial and religious bigotry were already in their most ominous posture and behaviour. It is in such an atmosphere that Kâmil Pasha (1838-1912) was to become Sultan Abdul Hamid's Prime Minister four times over. A statement penned by Kâmil Pasha was cited in the prestigious Armenian periodical of the time *Pordz* (Trial, Attempt), in Tiflis=Tbilisi, in 1879. It graphically formulates a premeditated genocidal plan, even, mind you, before the emergence of the Armenian political parties, later accused by the Young Turks as the *Casus Belli*=war involvement, of their genocidal deed. The Ottoman Grand Vizier stated:

If we nurtured snakes in our midst in Europe, we should not repeat the same folly in Asiatic Tajkistan [Turkey]. [...] Thus, we must eliminate, leave behind no traces of that Armenian nation. And to accomplish this task, we are lacking in nothing; we have all the means we need--Kurds, Cherkez, governors, judges, tax-collectors, police, in short everything. We can declare a religious war--waged against a nation that has no arms, no army, and no defender, whereas, in contrast, we have one of the greatest and richest states of the world as our comrade-in-arms and the guardian of our Asian world.

(The fuller text is in *PORTS* (Trial), the Armenian periodical, Tiflis, v.7/8, pp. 204-205, cited by Hovsep Shishmanian (1822-1888), better known as Dzerents -- the renowned novelist and historian -- in his monthly column *Armenian Theory*, under the heading: *The Ottoman Autocracy, Turkish and Russian Armenians*, pp.200-211)

The Armenian national reawakening was therefore struggling in an ominously contradictory social, economic and political environment that had its repercussions in the Ottoman Capital where Tigran Tchukhajian (a contemporary to Kamil Pasha, mentioned above) spent most of his creative life. He was born in Constantinople – Istanbul, in 1837. His first music teacher while at school was Gabriel Yeranian (1827-1862), master of the Armenian novel notation, then followed by piano and theory lessons from the Italian teacher active in Istanbul, named C. Manzoni. Advised and recommended by Manzoni, Tchukhajian continued his music studies in Italy at the Milan Conservatory during the years 1861-1864. Returning to Constantinople, where some semblance of tolerance and legality were wrestled with, Tigran Tchukhajian soon became the major organiser of a symphony orchestra and promoter for publications of musical journals too, including the **Armenian Lyre**, the periodical of the homonymous **A. L. Institute**, founded by his first music tutor G. Yeranian in 1862. While never abandoning composing, his fascination with Italian operas, especially those with librettos tackling themes of national reawakening, guided his attention to write music for stage productions of Armenian historical plays. The performance in 1867 of the play *Vartan Mamikonian, the Liberator* by R. Setefjian, with music and songs written by Tchukhajian, occasioned a political demonstration. No wonder, because the play was honouring the memory of the great Armenian revolutionary poet Mikael Nalbandian.

But Tchukhajian's obsession was still on. He had in mind to write his major and first **Grand Opera**. The fresh quality of his musical style was already well received by the music critics. The Italian Critic Riccardo Torre named him as The Italian Verdi (*Il Verdi Armeno*, the title of his article). He thought that Tchukhajian:

By amalgamating the melodies of the Oriental people, he became the creator of a new school.

(Reported In **Bazmavep**. Periodical of the Mekhitarists. Venice, 1909. pp 136-137)

As the French critic Adolpho Talasso wrote in the *Revue Theatrale*,

Tigran Tchukhajian was the first to apply European techniques to Oriental music. His highly original ideas, freshness of musical language, colourful orchestration – all these are impregnated with rays of the orient. His skilful use of harmony and counterpoint has ensured an integral structure of his compositions, so full of power and enchantment.

(Programme Notes for the MELODIA records, 1985 of the opera ARSHAK II)

Finally in 1868, Tchukhajian composes the first Opera of the Armenians, called **Arshak II**. The librettist was Tomas Terzian, a well-known Italian Armenian writer whose name appears in Verdi's letters as Tomasio Terziani.

To let an Armenian King appear on the opera stage, even if tormented in his conflicts with the land owning Armenian aristocracy, the feudal lords, while struggling to hold on the Armenian national sovereignty against two major empires of the time in AD, 4th c, – Persian and Byzantine – proved too much for Ottoman censors. The latter imposed the change of the title of the opera. The Armenian king Arshak's name was dropped and the opera was called **Olympia** -- the name of the Byzantine princess, wife to Arshak II. The main plot of the opera, according to the original libretto, was brought to an end with the death of Olympia, poisoned by a revengeful Armenian princess, Parandzem. The latter's husband Gnel, was condemned to death by his own uncle, Arshak II, who was fascinated by the beauty of Parandzem. The latter then allied herself with the conspiring feudal lords to topple Arshak II. (Historically, Parandzem herself becomes the Queen to Arshak II).

The sad paradox remains that the first Opera of an Armenian composer, who is claimed to have written “the first original opera in Turkish...in 1874” (as mentioned here below), was never produced during the composer's life time, even if its singing language – the libretto -- was originally in Italian. After the opera was composed, Terzian, the librettist, published his opus in 1871, in Armenian and called it **Olympia**. It's good to know that **Arshak II**-s overture, *Sinfonia*, was the only section of the entire work which had its performance in 1868, in Istanbul, welcomed by an enthusiastic audience.

Albeit, the resurgent nationalism was inflaming the racial and religious intolerance of Ottoman rule and igniting the resurgent pan-Turkic sentiments associated with it. Soon, Kâmil Pasha's conceptualised genocidal premeditation was put into an operational program during 1894-1896 at Sasoon, Van, Zeitoon and Diarbekir, resulting in the massacre of 300,000 Armenians, 3000 villages were burned and

Tens of thousands were forced to flee their native land into all corners of the earth...

(E.K.Sarkisian and R.G.Sahakian, *Vital Issuers in Modern Armenian History*, translated and edited by E.B.Chrakian, Massachusetts: Armenian Studies, 1965, p.18)

Prof. Em. Dillon (1854-1933), the Irish linguist and journalist, visited Turkey in 1895. He asserted:

It is already proven that the pillage and the massacres of Sassoon is the deliberately organised act of the Sublime Porte, an act planned in advance meticulously and executed mercilessly.

(Sarkisian and Sahakian, op. cit., p.18)

Failing to produce his opera, **Arshak II**, in the social milieu foreshadowing the forthcoming tragedy as mentioned above, Tigran Tchoukhajian began composing **Operettas**, both with Turkish and with Armenian librettos, The Turkish librettos were also written by Armenian writers. It is a historic truth that Tchoukhajian and the Armenian writers and singers of Constantinople enriched the Turkish musical and theatrical culture with operettas sang in Turkish. The following are Tchoukhajian's operettas and comic operas.

1872 – **Arif**. *Opera Buffa* in 3 acts, Libretto in Turkish by Ajemian, based on Gogol's *Inspector General*.

1874 – **Kyose Kehia** (Kehia the bald). *Opera Buffa* in 3 acts. Libretto in Turkish by Reshdouni. A new libretto was written in Armenian, in 1965, by the distinguished Armenian writer of the Diaspora, Armen Darian, in Beirut, Lebanon. Darian called it **Zvart**. The story echoes the plot of Donizetti's opera *Elisir d'Amore*.

1876 – **Leblebouji Horhor Agha** (The Master Nut-Vendor Horhor). *Opera Buffa* in 3 acts. Libretto by Nalian, based on the story of Verdi's opera *Rigoletto*. It had great success in the Balkans, Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Egypt and London. In 1943, it was revised and given a new name, **Karinè**, which was also performed for a film production in Armenia during 1960s.

1891 – **Zemireh**. *Opera Comique* in 4 acts, Libretto by Galemjian, based on an Arabic legend. It was first performed by Penatti's French company at Concordia theatre in Constantinople, and later, in 1894, by Franzini's Italian company at the new French Theatre.

1897 – **Indiana**. Tchoukhajian's last opera, the manuscript of which and even his watch he had to sell to be able to escape from Constantinople.

Tchoukhajian died in extreme poverty, on 23rd March, 1898, in a village near Izmir. Verdi's opera score of *Otello* was found in his hand.

Here is a quotation from **Wikipedia** where Tchoukhajian is claimed to be the author of the "first original opera in Turkish"....:

One of the earliest Turkish operettas was [Leblebici Horhor](#) (Horhor the chick pea seller), by the Armenian composer [Dikran Çuhacıyan](#) who is also remembered as the composer of what may have been the first original opera in Turkish, [Arif'in Hilesi](#) (Arif's Deception) 1874.

([The Athenæum](#) 1874 Page 616 "Tun Festival of the Ramazan, in Constantinople, has been marked by the production of an opera in Turkish and the foundation of an Opera house for the

Moslem quarter of Stamboul. The name of the piece is ' Arifiu-heiless'; the composer is ... The name of the piece is 'Arifiu-heiless'; the composer is Mr. Digran Chohajian (= Tailor-son), an Armenian ; and the authors of the libretto are [Haled Bey](#), [Mahir Bey](#), and other Turkish gentlemen. The piece was received with enthusiasm by ...")

One wonders if the opera **Arif** of 1872 (libretto in Turkish by Ajemian) mentioned above, is the same **Arif in Helesi** of 1874 (libretto by Haled Bey and Maher Bey, surely in Turkish) mentioned in *The Athenaeum* of 1874. When considered the different names of the librettists, it is fair to conclude that the same opera had different librettos; otherwise deleting the name of the original author seems unethical.

If Tigran Tchukhajian was the first Armenian composer who wrote an opera and operettas, Alexander Spendiarian's opera **Almast** was the first opera to be performed to inaugurate the new Armenian State Opera & Ballet Academic Theatre, in Yerevan, on January 20th, 1933.

Alexander Spendiarian (1871-1928), a graduate of St Petersburg Conservatory where he studied with Rimsky Korsakov during the years 1896-1900, began writing his opera **Almast** in 1916. The libretto was based on Hovhanness Toumanian's poem titled *Temkaberti Aroume* (The Capture of Tmook Castle).

Spendiarian had to his credit, three Glinka prizes for his symphonic poems, **The Three Palm Trees**, of 1905, *Beda the Preacher* of 1907 and the incidental music of 1910 to Anton Chekhov's play, *Uncle Vania*. His fame had spread to Berlin, where the great choreographer Fokin had staged, in 1913, Spendiarian's symphonic poem, *The Three Palm Trees*, with the ballerina soloist, Anna Pavlova.

It was after all these successes that Spendiarian wrote his first and only opera **Almast**. It had its first performance in Moscow at the Bolshoi Theatre Filiale (fringe theatre), in 1929, after Spendiarian's death in 1928. Thus both Tchoukhajian and Spendiarian could not see the production of their first and only operas.

After the inauguration of the Armenian State Opera and Ballet Academic Theatre of Yerevan with Spendiarian's opera **Almast**, in 1933, the Opera House was named after Alexander Spendiarian.

While the 1929 production of **Almast** in Moscow was originally in Russian by the librettist S. Parnok – based on Toumanian's poem – the libretto of **Almast** inaugurating the Armenian State Opera was in Armenian, retranslated and edited by T. Hakhoumian.

The libretto of **Almast** dealt with the historical event of the capture of the Armenian Castle of Tmook by the Persian Shah Nadir, in 18th century. The

betrayal of the princess Almast, wife of the Armenian prince Tatoon was instrumental for the capture of the Castle. In return, Almast hoped to gain the crown of the queen of Persia, as the minstrel of Shah Nadir had promised her. But Almast is thrown in the Shah's harem. Later on when she decides to revenge and attempts to assassinate Shah Nadir, the latter condemns her to death.

In the newly edited version in Armenian, Tatoon's comrade-in-arms, Ruben, leads the rebellious people to free the Castle and force the invading Persian army to retreat. The tragic fate of the betraying princess Almast is kept intact.

The much admired poet of the Armenians, Hovhanness Toumanian, is to the Armenian operas as Pushkin is to the Russian operas. Many Armenian librettos are based on Toumanian's poems.

A contemporary of Toumanian, Reverend Komitas (1869-1935), the most admired musician of the Armenians, met the poet in May 3-7, 1904. Komitas discussed with Toumanian about the need for a proper libretto for him to compose an opera based on Toumanian's popular poem, **Anoush**. Komitas had already composed song excerpts from the said poem. But, alas, a completed opera by Komitas was not to be. His initial attempts did not come into fruition.

But **Anoush** as an opera was born eventually, in 1908. It was composed by Armen Tigranian (1879-1980), to the composer's own libretto. The first performance of **Anoush** took place in Alexandropol (later, Leninakan, and now Gyumri), on August 4, 1912. The role of **Saro**, the lover of Anoush, was sung by one of the most admired singers among the Armenians, Shara Talian, himself the son of the great Armenian minstrel, Ashough Jamal,

Armen Tigranian was born in Alexandropol. While studying in Tbilisi, he won the audition to study at the Conservatory of Music. The noted composer Klenovsky became his tutor in theory and composition. After his graduation in 1901, Tigranian pursued his musical career, directing choral societies. His activities helped to vitalise the musical events in many cities in the Caucasus, as Yerevan, Kars, Alexandropol and Baku. Eventually he started teaching at various schools. It was then that he started writing the libretto and composing the opera Anoush, during 1908-1912. He later elaborated and completed his major opera in 1938, even after Anoush's premières in 1912 and 1933. Tigranian's second and last opera was **David Bek**, yet again to his own libretto, based on the prolific Armenian novelist Raffi's book of the same title.

The story of Anoush is located in the mountainous region of Lori. **Anoush**, a village maiden and **Saro**, a young shepherd, are deeply in love with each other. During one festive day, to enliven a wedding ceremony, Saro and **Mossy**, the brother of Anoush, engage in a friendly wrestling game – traditional youth

game of the villagers. The time honoured habit forbade any attempt to act and claim victory among friends. Excited by the presence of Anoush and with a burning desire to attract her attention, Saro topples his friend Mossy on the latter's back on the ground. Feeling humiliated, Anoush's brother vows to revenge his knock out. He even threatens Anoush and forbids her love towards Saro. Despite all his threats, Anoush dares to elope with Saro to the mountains. Eventually Mossy finds them and shoots Saro with his hunting gun. Overwhelmed by grief and loneliness, Anoush throws herself down the abyss into the Debed River.

Tigranian's **Anoush** became the second opera to inaugurate the newly born Armenian Opera house, on March 17, 1933. Eventually **Anoush** proved to be *the* Armenian National Opera, as Weber's opera **Die Freischutz** is for the German culture, or Mussorgsky operas are for the Russians.

But the first Opera of the Armenians, **Arshak II**, composed by Tigran Tchukhajian had to wait its rediscovery in 1941-1942 by the musicologists Gevorg Tigranian and Alexander Shahverdian. It was diligently revised musically and textually, with an Armenian libretto by A. Gulakian.



Armen Tigranian

Tigran Tchukhajian

Alexander Spendiarian

Finally, Tchukhajian's opera **Arshak II**, had its operatic *première* at the Armenian State Opera & Ballet Academic Theatre, in Yerevan, on 29th November 1945, marking the 25th Anniversary of the 2nd Armenian Republic and celebrating the victorious ending of the WWII against Nazism, the struggle for which the Armenian people had its more than fair share of valiant gallantry and sacrifice. And all that a quarter of a century after the WWI, when, starting in 1915, the proto-Nazi government of the Young Turks committed the ultimate

crime at the onset of the 20th century –the Genocide of the Armenians. Hence the *première* of the opera **Arshak II** to celebrate the crushing of Nazism was an auspicious historical event indeed. The edited version in the Armenian *première* production reflected the mood of tolerance and reconciliation after a major victory against serfdom and foreign rule, notwithstanding the martyrdom of many innocent victims, including King Arshak's nephew, Gnel, and the King's Byzantine wife, Princess Olympia.

The leading role of **Arshak II** was sung by the baritone Poghos (Pavel) Lisitsian, later to become the leading baritone of the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre. After the world renowned Shaliapin, Lisitsian became the first opera singer from Bolshoi to sing at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York.

The three major operas mentioned above, namely **Arshak II**, **Almast**, and **Anoush**, brought a considerable impetus for the creation of other prominent Armenian operas and ballets, apart from the non-stop productions of Italian, Russian, French and German operas at the Spenidiarian Armenian State Opera Theatre. Here are but some of the Armenian operas:

Kaj Nazar (Brave Nazar). Music by Haro Stepanian, Libretto by Derenik Demirchian

Sasoontsi David (David of Sasoon). Music by H. Stepanian. Libretto by D. Demirjian.

Loosabatsin (At Dawn). Music by H. Stepanian. Libretto by T. Hakhoumian.

Herosoohi (The Heroine), Music by H. Stepanian. Libretto by A. Adamian.

Seda, **Aregaki Tsoikeroum** (In Sunshine), **Hro Harse** (Bride of Fire), **Anahit**. Operas by Anoushavan Ter-Ghevondian

Taparnikos. (Wanderer). Music by A. Aivazian. Libretto by V. Adjemian. (Based on H. Baronian's comedy)

Sapho. Music and Libretto by A. Mayilian.

Namous (Honour). Music and Libretto by L. Khoja – Eynatian. (Based on A. Shirvanzate's novel).

Artsevaberd (Eagle's Nest). Music by A Babayev. Libretto by Z. Vardanian and G. Borian (Based on N. Zarian's novel, **Hatsavan**)

Khatchatur Abovian. Music by G.Armenian. Libretto by G. Armenian and V Poghosian.

Krake Oghak (Ring of Fire). Music by A. Terterian. Libretto by V. Shahnazarian.



**The Speniarian Armenian State Opera & Ballet
Academic Theatre in Yerevan.**

Indeed, the whole story of the Armenians and their burning desire to have their operas can be characterised as a Ring of Fire, as if emulating one of the earliest **Sung Poems** accompanied by **Tsoutsk** and the sound of a **Pandirn**, all revealed to us by Movses Khorenatsi of the 5th c., as **The Birth of Vahagn**. Here it is, rendered into English by that most formidable Armenian artist and intellectual of London of the first half of the 20th century, the poetess, painter, playwright and translator, Zabelle Boyajian.

Concerning the birth of this king the legend says—

**“Heaven and earth were in travail,
And the crimson waters were in travail,
And in the water the crimson reed
Was also in travail.
From the mouth of the reed issued smoke,
From the mouth of the reed issued flame.
And out of the flame sprang the young child,
His hair was of fire, a beard had he of flame,
And his eyes were suns.”**

**With our own ears did we hear these words sung to the
accompaniment of the harp [Pandirn]. They sing, moreover, that he
did fight with the dragons, and overcame them;
and some say that his valiant deeds were like unto those of Hercules.**

(Zabelle Boyajian. **ARMENIAN LEGENDS & POEMS**. London, 1916. **Vahagn, King of Armenia**.
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Sometime university professor of music (USA), Pilikian is a performing musician, painter and writer. He has studied art and music at the Fine Arts and Music Academies in Rome and Siena. “Leonardo da Vinci on voice, music and stage design” was the title of his research as a Fulbright scholar at I.U. School of Music. In 1976, he designed and directed, at Wayne State University, the public radio WDET-FM series *HARC-The Heritage of Armenian Culture*. In 1984, he published *Refuting Terrorism - Seven Epistles From Diaspora* (in English and Armenian). He has contributed the entry *Music and Turner* in the Oxford University Press encyclopedic publication titled *THE TURNER COMPANION*. The Spokesman for the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation published his paper for the 2005 European Network for Peace and Human Rights Conference, *The Spectre of Genocide as Collateral Damage is Haunting the World*. In Dec 2004, Pilikian’s choice of the word *Bareshen=Built-for-Goodness*, graced, as its name, the new AGBU built village in Artsakh-Karabakh. In April 22, 2006, Khatchatur Pilikian produced and directed his original Audio-Visual Libretto—*Harmonic Synthesis of Armenian Poems and Music*, for the AGBU 100th Anniversary, Montreal Chapter, Canada. His latest book is *UNESCO Laureates: Nazim Hikmet & Aram Khatchaturian* (Garod Books, London). In November 2009, he was invited to Athens to mark the 140th birth anniversary of **Komitas Vardapet (1869-1935)**, the most revered Armenian composer, with a song recital, under the auspices of the social and cultural centre ARMENIA of Athens, Greece.

ՉԱՅՆԱԿԵՐՑ ԽՈՐՀՈՒՐԴ ՏԻԳՐԱՆ ՉՈՒԽԱՃԵԱՆ 175 ԱՄԵԱԿ

Օպերան եւ Հայերը

Խաչատուր Ի. Փիլիկեան

Բաւարար չէ ըսել որ Չուխաճեանի Արշակ Բ.ը Հայկական առաջին օպերան է: Պէտք է պատասխան գտնել թէ ինչո՞ւ առանց բազմաձայնութեան եւ ներդաշնակութեան դարաւոր փորձի, Երաժշտական մշակոյթի բարձր ու բարդ ձեւերէն մէկը՝ օպերան պիտի յայտնուէր Հայ իրականութեան մէջ 19րդ դարու երկրորդ կիսուն:

Օպերա (Opera) կը նշանակէ **գործ**, բայց մեծակերտ ու ստեղծագործ աշխատանքի արգասիք, կատարողական արուեստներու համադրուած եւ անտարանջատ **գործ** մը:

Օպերան իտալական մշակոյթի **Վերածնունդ** ը (Rinascimento) արդէն իսկ ապրած Ֆլորանս քաղաքի ծնունդն էր, 16րդ դարու վերջաւորութեան: Օպերան հոն ծնաւ՝ իբրեւ Յունական **Ողբերգութիւն** ը (Tragoidia) վերստեղծելու նուիրական փորձ մը: Ինչ որ Յունական անտիկ մշակոյթի արգասիքն էր արժանի էր եւ պէտք էր վերստեղծագործել-- Վերածնունդի մտասեւեռումն էր եղած այդ: Բայց եւ այնպէս, արուեստի բոլորովին նոր **ձեւ** (Forma) մըն էր ծնածը, եւ ոչ **ողբերգութիւն**:

Համաշխարհային մշակոյթի ցարդ յայտնի կոթողները նկատի առած, յատկանշական է խորհրդածել որ միայն Յունաստանը ծնած է գերակշռող տարողութեամբ եւ դարեր յարատեւող կատարողական իրայատուկ արուեստ մը՝ բազում արուեստներ միացուող **Թատրոն** ը (Theatron), ողբերգութեան արուեստի կատարողական տան անուամբ: Պատասխանը այդ իրայատկութեան՝ Աթէնքի **Դեմոկրատիա** ն էր (Democratia), ժողովրդավար **Ռամկապետութիւն**ը:

Յունական Թատրոնը իր էութեամբ, ծնունդով ու զարգացմամբ, կատարողական արուեստներով արտայայտուած Յունական Ռամկապետութեան Մանրաշխարհն էր (Microcosm): Աւելի բնորոշ խօսքով՝ թատրոնը Յունական ռամկապետութեան գեղարուեստական Խորհրդարանն էր (Parliament):

Վերածնունդի հասուն շրջանին, 1527 ին, Ֆլորանս քաղաքը հռչակուած էր իբրեւ Հանրապետութիւն (Republica Florentina) թէկուզ շուտով վերջ գտած Կլէմէնտէ 7րդ Պապի (Clemente VII) միջամտութեամբ, 1530 ին: Բայց օպերայի ընկերաքաղաքական միջավայրը արդէն իսկ նոր դասակարգն էր տնօրինողը, այդ բարձր-միջին դասու, վաճառականական ազնուականութիւնը, **Քաղքենիութիւն** ը, **Բուրժուազիա** ն (Borghese),: Ահա այս նոր դասակարգն էր որ Վենետիկի Հանրապետութեան մէջ պիտի բանար պատմութեան մէջ առաջին հանրամատչելի օպերայի թատրոնը, 1637 ին:

Պարզ, թէկուզ յատկանշական է յիշատակել հետեւեալ վերաբերմունքները հանդէպ նոր արուեստին, օպերային՝ զորս բարձր քաղքենիութիւնը առած էր իր հովանաւորութեան տակ: Եթէ **Վերածնունդի** շրջանին չէր սպասուեր կիներու երգեցողութիւնը ունկնդիր հանրութեան ներկայութեան, ընդհակառակը՝ քմայքոտ **Բարոք** (Baroque) դարաշրջանի գերազանց երգչուհիները (**Prima Donna**) օպերայի բեմի ‘աստղեր’ կամ ‘աստուածուհիներ’ (**Diva**) կը յորջորջուէին, բուռն մրցակցութեան մէջ մտնելով կրտուած արու (**Castrati**) ‘աստուածացուած’ երգիչներու հետ: Կղերականութիւնն ու քաղքենի ազնուականութիւնը յաճախ բռնկուած կ’ըլլային շողոքորթ մրցակցութեամբ հանդէպ այդ ‘հրաշքներուն’:

Մատակարարելու համար նման թանկ շողոքորթութիւն, հարկաւոր էր պահել օպերայի արուեստը ի գին ամէն ինչի: Գերմանիոյ քմայքոտ իշխանները տէրն ու տիրականն էին նահանգներու, որոնց հասոյթներու ծանրագոյնը օպերա եւ բալետի թատրոններու, երգիչներու ու պարողներու շողոքորթութեան համար կը յատկացուէր:

Եղած են բազում վիճակներ ուր իշխող դուքսը – օրինակ՝ Բրունսվիքի – ոչ միայն կը քամէ հասարակ ժողովուրդը զանազան տուրքերով այլ՝ մետասաներորդ պահուն գերութեան վաճառքին կը դիմէ: Իր նահանգային օպերայի թատրոնին շողոքորթող հասոյթ հայթայթելու համար Բրունսվիքի դուքսը կը վաճառէ իր հպատակները իբրեւ ստրուկ զինուորներ հարեւան նահագներուն...(M. Bukofzer. MUSIC IN THE BAROQUE ERA. New York, 1947, p 398)

Որքա՛ն համահնչիւն է մէջբերուած Բարոքեան վիճակը Յունական անտիկ շրջանի արուեստի արժեւորման հետեւեալ եզրակացութեան

հետ, -- *‘Անհրաժեշտ է մեզի համար ի մտի ունենալ Յունական արուեստի հում նիւթի համար թափուած արիւնն ու արցունքը.’*
(G. Thomson. AESCHYLUS & ATHENS. London 1966, p. 150)

19րդ դարուն, **ռոմանտիկ, Վիպապաշտ** (Romantic) արուեստի դարաշրջանին, օպերան նոր յեղափոխականներու արուեստն էր գերազանցապէս: Եւ օպերան եղաւ ազգային ազատագրական պայքարի դեմոկրատ յեղափոխականներու ամենաուժգին մշակութային գէնքը... Մշակութային յեղափոխութեան մը -- Վերածնունդի -- արգասիք օպերան՝ ինքն ալ իր կարգին յեղափոխութիւն մը պիտի ծնանէր: Եւ եղաւ այդպէս 1830 ին, երբ Աւբեր երաժիշտի **Պորտիսի Համրը** (Auber – “La Muette de Portici”) օպերայի կատարումէն անմիջապէս վերջ ունկնդիր ժողովուրդի պոռթկացող շարժումը Բելջիկան կ’ազատագրէ Հոլանդայի լուծէն:

Վերդիի օպերաները, մանաւանդ Իտալիոյ պարագային, ազգային ազատագրական պայքարի ամենաժողովրդական արուեստն էր արդէն: Պատահական չէր որ մեր Միքայէլ Նալբանդեանը բաղձանքն ունենար, նոյնիսկ բանտարկուած վիճակին մէջ, որ Վերդիի **Գուսան** (Verdi – “Il Trovatore”) օպերան Հայերէն թարգմանուի: Եւ այդպէս ալ կ’ըլլայ 1864ին, իր ընկերոջ Սահրատեանի թարգմանութեան հրատարակութեամբ, Սանկտ Պետերսբուրգ (St. Petersburg), նուիրուած Մ. Նալբանդեանին:

Հայոց մէջ ալ օպերան եղաւ 19րդ դարու Հայ ազատագրական շարժումի եւ ազգային զարթօնքի արուեստի մեծակերտ գանձերէն մէկը՝ Զուխաճեանի **Արշակ Բ** օպերայով, 1868ին:

Կարելոր է մատնանշել որ օպերայի երաժշտական լեզուն չ’ապաւինեցաւ **Բազմաձայնութեան** (Polyphony), հակառակ անոր աւելի քան չորս դարեան վաստակին մինչ օպերայի յայտնումը -- թէկուզ մաս կազմեց օպերայի յառաջընթացքին: Յունական թատերգութիւնը վերստեղծելու համար **Միաձայնութիւնը** (Monody) եղաւ օպերայի երաժշտական բաղադրիչը՝ հետեւեալ պատճառով:

Բազմաձայնութիւնը սկսած էր անհասկնալի դարձնել բանաստեղծութիւնը կամ երգի արձակ բառերը, այն աստիճան որ նոյնինքն բազմաձայնութիւնը որակուեցաւ իբրեւ երաժշտութեան թշնամի (nemico della musica) ըստ օպերայի **Թատերակ** (Libretto) ստեղծող Իտալացի բանաստեղծներու եւ երաժիշտներու շրջանակները բամբասողներուն...:

Թատերգութեան գլխաւոր լեզուն ասքն էր, խօսքն ու տաղը, ասմունքը, բանաստեղծութիւնը ըլլալով իր ստեղծման շրջանի հիմնական տարրը. Եւ օպերան ձգտեցաւ ‘պաշտպանել’ այդ: Ի

հեճուկս ամենայնի, օպերայի գլխավոր լեզուն եղաւ ու մնաց երգն ու նուագն ու ասերգութիւնը, որոշապէս տարբերուելով թատերգութենէն: Վկայ օպերայի անուանումը իբրեւ **Երաժշտական Առասպել** (Monteverdi -- Favola in Musica), կամ **Երաժշտական Թատերգակ** (Verdi -- Melodramma in Musica):

Ուրեմն, բազմաձայնութեան բացակայութիւնը արգելք չէր կրնար ըլլալ Հայ մշակոյթին մէջ օպերայ յայտնուելուն: Առաւել եւս, Հայ մշակոյթը բազմադարեան հարստութիւնն ունէր միաձայնութեան, հոգեւոր եւ աշխարհիկ ու ժողովրդական երգեցողութեան:

Հայ ասերգային արուեստը նոյնպէս ինչպէս իր դիւցազներգութիւնները, պարարուեստը, գեղօճները, թուելեաց երգերը, խմբական ձայնարկու գուսաներգութիւնները, եւայլն, բազմադարեան ճամբայ են կտրած ու հասած 19րդ դարուն եւ մինչեւ իսկ մեր օրերուն – օրինակ՝ **Սասունցի Դաւիթ** կոթողային ստեղծագործութիւնը՝ բազում տարբերակներով: Զարմանալու չէ ուրեմն լսել օպերայի Հայերէն անուանումը նաեւ իբրեւ **‘Գուսաներգութիւն’**:

Ոչ միայն միաձայնութիւնը (monody) այլ նաեւ օպերային **Գեղեցիկ Երգեցողութեան** (Bel Canto) ոճի հիմնական բաղադրիչ տարրերը Արեւելեան են, անցած Եւրոպա՝ Սպանիայէն եւ Միջին Արեւելքէն: Յիշելու արժանի են հետեւեալ տարրերը, -- **ձայնազարդ** (melisma); **շվիանման** (flautato); **յանպատրաստից** (improvvisare) եւայլն: Հայ երգարուեստն ալ բաժնեկից է այդ ոճին եւ հարուստ այդ բաղադրիչներով:

Հակառակ օպերային արուեստի բաղադրամասերու հարուստ ժառանգութեան, Հայ մշակոյթը չէր կրնար ծնանել օպերա, այսինքն անտարանջատ երաժշտական թատրոն, որովհետեւ կորսնցուցած էր դեռ 1375 ին իր պետականութիւնը եւ Օսմանեան թուրքի լուծին կապուած 1514 ին՝ ենթարկուելով բազում գաղթի ու տառապանքի: Պէտք էր սպասել Հայ ազգային զարթօնքին, որը զուգադիպեցաւ, եւ ոչ պատահականօրէն, Եւրոպայի ազգային ազատագրական շարժումներու դարաշրջանին՝ 19 րդ դարուն:

Սակայն նոր Հայկական քաղքենիութիւնը չկրցաւ տէր կանգնիլ նոր ծնունդ ապրող Հայ երաժշտական թատրոնին որուն պաշտպանն ու ոգեւորիչը Հայ ազատատենչ ու դեմոկրատ մտաւորականութիւնն էր: Հայ ունկնդիր ժողովուրդը իր կարգին կրցաւ մատակարարել միայն փոքր ծաւալի օպերէտներ, ի վիճակի չ’ըլլալով ոչ նիւթապէս եւ ոչ իբրեւ դասակարգ տէր կանգնելու Հայկական առաջին օպերային (թէկուզ Իտալական լիբրետոյով օժտուած, գործ՝ Իտալահայ գրագէտ Թ. Թերզեանի) ու զայն ստեղծող Հայ երաժիշտին՝ Տիգրան

Չուխաճեանին: Հազիւ 61 տարեկան եւ առանց ըմբռնելու իր մեծակերտ օպերայի լրիւ կատարումը՝ Չուխաճեանը կը մահանայ ծայրայեղ թշուառութեան եւ քաղցկեղի իբրեւ գոհ,:

Եւ ահա 1930 ին, քաղաքամայր Երեւանի սրտին կը զետեղուի Հայոց առաջին եւ ցարդ միակ պետական օպերայի շէնքի – **Ժողովրդական Տուն** անուամբ-- հիմնաքարը, իբրեւ Հայաստանի Երկրորդ՝ Խորհրդային Հանրապետութեան տասնամեակի նուէր, նախագահութեամբը Ալ. Թամանեանի՝ մեր Նոր Անիի Նոր Տրդատ ճարտարապետին:

1933, Յունուար 20 ին, Ժողովրդական Տան բացումն ու անուանակոչումը իբրեւ **Սպենդիարեանի Անուան Հայաստանի Պետական Օպերայի եւ Բալէտի Թատրոն** տեղի կ'ունենայ բեմադրութեամբը Ալ Սպենդիարեանի ԱԼՄԱՍՏ օպերային, իսկ Մարտ 17 ին կը բեմադրուի Ա. Տիգրանեանի ԱՆՈՒՇ օպերան -- անտարակոյս՝ Հայոց ազգային օպերան:

1937ը Չուխաճեանի ծննդեան 100 ամեակին զուգադիպելով, մեր առաջին օպերայի շէնքը՝ Հայ ճարտարապետութեան գոհարներէն մէկը՝ Ֆրանսայի մայրաքաղաք Փարիզի միջազգային ցուցահանդէսի Գերագայն Մրցանակի (Grand Prix) դափնեկիրը կ'ըլլայ:

Եւ այս բոլորը՝ հիմնաքար, բացում, ազգային օպերայի բեմադրում, մինչեւ դափնեկիրի կոչում, դեռեւս յայտնի չէր մեր առաջին օպերայի **ԱՐՇԱԿ Բ** ի ուր եւ ինչ ըլլալը:

Վերջապէս մեր բազմահմուտ երաժշտագէտներէն՝ Ալ. Շահվերդեանը կը յայտնաբերէ Չուխաճեանի օպերան 1941 –1942 ին, եւ Գուլակեանի Հայերէն թատերակով (libretto) ու բեմադրութեամբ լոյս աշխարհ կու գայ մեր առաջին մեծակերտ օպերան, **ԱՐՇԱԿ Բ** ը, 1945 ին, իր իսկական տան մէջ՝ Երեւանի Սպենդիարեանի անուան Օպերայի եւ Բալէտի Հայոց Պետական Ակադեմական Թատրոնի բեմէն, Նոյեմբեր 29 ին՝ փառաւորապէս իմաստաւորելու Հայոց Բ Հանրապետութեան 25 ամեակն ու Նացի-Ֆաշիզմը տապալող Հայրենական Մեծ Պատերազմի յաղթանակը:

Ուշ լինի, Նուշ լինի,
Եւ եղեւ Լոյս Չայնակերտ
