May/June 2013 issue (#25)

yerevan

A MAGAZINE WITH AN ACCENT



David Yang
Organizing the World

Blake and Jason Krikorian
Slinging Ideas with Brotherly Love

Samvel Sevian
Kingly Kid of Chess

Michael Poghosyan
Versatility in Action

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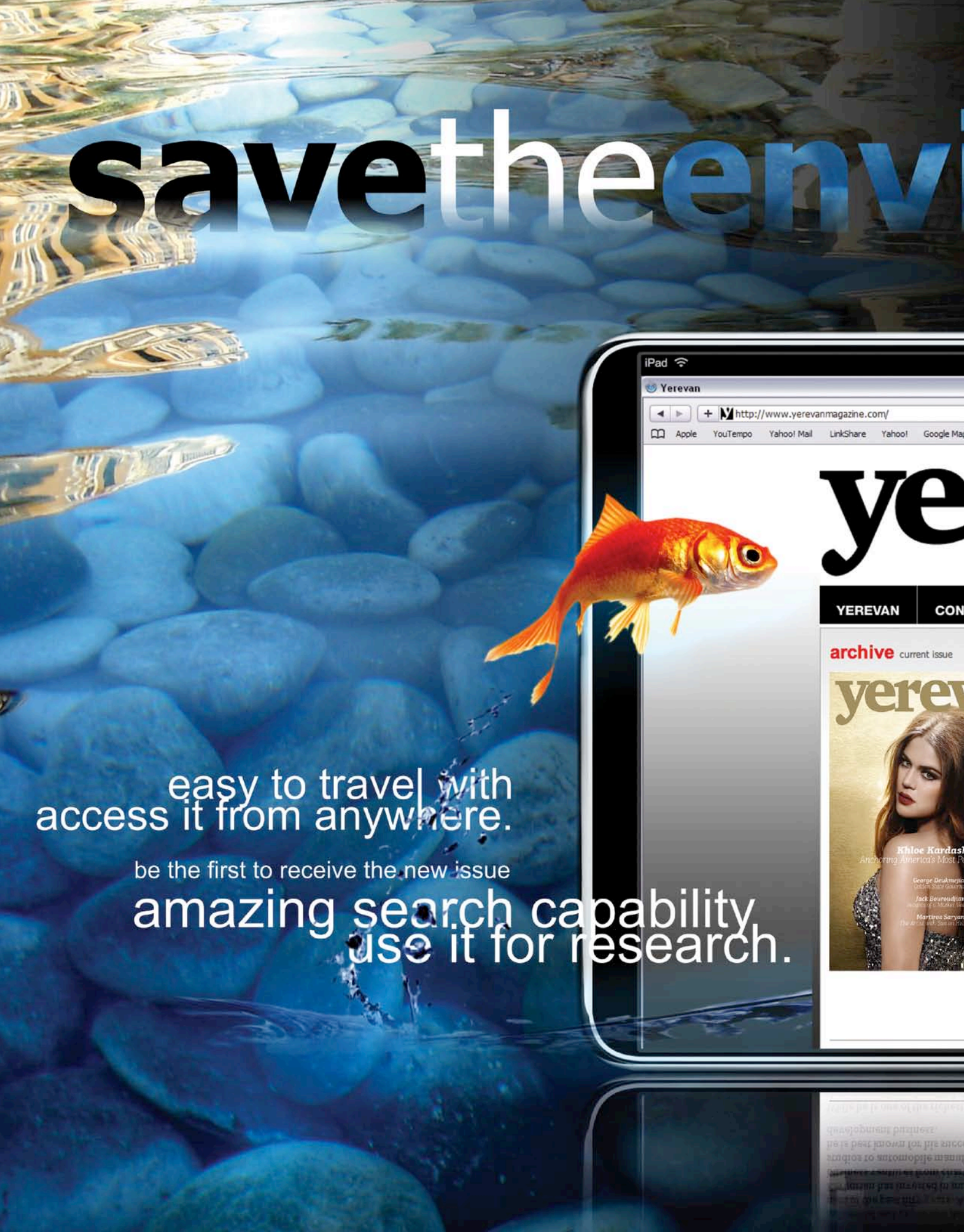
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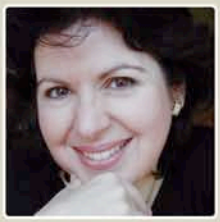
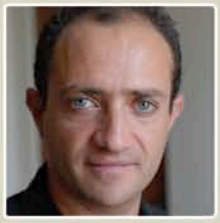
Greg Hampikian, PhD, is Professor of Biology and Criminal Justice at Boise State University, and Director of the Idaho Innocence Project. Dr. Hampikian will be speaking on "Amanda Knox: From DNA Error to DNA Exoneration."



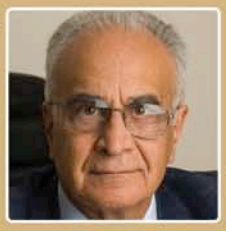
Claire Panosian Dunavan, MD, FIDSA, DTM&H (London), is the Past-President of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene and is Professor of Medicine and Infectious Diseases at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. She will be speaking on "Global Health Equity in Infectious Diseases: the Case of Malaria."



Sarkis K. Mazmanian, PhD, is Professor of Biology at the California Institute of Technology and a Phi Beta Kappa graduate from the University of California, Los Angeles. He is one of 23 people to receive the prestigious 2012 MacArthur Fellowship, by popular name the Genius Grant, for his pioneering research of beneficial microbes. Dr. Mazmanian will be speaking on "Identification of Novel Probiotic Therapies for Disease From Human Gut Bacteria."



Daniel Stamboulian, MD, is Professor Emeritus of Infectious Diseases at Universidad de Ciencias Empresariales y Sociales (UCES, University of Social and Entrepreneurial Sciences), Voluntary Professor of Medicine at the University of Miami, and Honorary Professor at Instituto Universitario CEMIC. He will be speaking on "New Facts in the Prevention and Treatment of Adulthood Infectious Diseases."



Roger J. Hajjar, MD, is The Arthur and Janet Ross Professor of Medicine and Director of the Cardiovascular Research Center at Mount Sinai School of Medicine. He will be speaking on "Gene Therapy for the Treatment of Heart Failure."



Ara Tekian, PhD, MHPE, is the Associate Professor and Director of International Affairs at the Department of Medical Education and the Associate Dean for the International Affairs at the College of Medicine at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He will be speaking on "Patient Safety and Medical Mistakes."



Robert S. H. Istepanian, PhD, is Professor of Data Communications for healthcare at Kingston University, London, UK. He is also the founding director of the Medical Information and Network Technologies Research Centre (MINT) at Kingston University, London, UK. He will be speaking on "From M-Health to Cognitive Health; the Role of Mobile Health for Improving Medical Care of Armenians."



Barbara J. Sahakian, PhD, is Professor of Clinical Neuropsychology at the Department of Psychiatry, University of Cambridge School of Clinical Medicine, and Honorary Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. She will be speaking on "Psychopharmacology and Cognition."



Caroline M. Apovian, MD, FACP, FACN, is Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics, Section of Endocrinology, Diabetes, and Nutrition at Boston University School of Medicine. She is also Director of the Center for Nutrition and Weight Management at Boston Medical Center. She will be speaking on "Bridging the Gap in the Management of Obesity: Diet Exercise, Medical and Surgical Approaches."



Richard J. Deckelbaum, MD, CM, FRCP(C), is Professor of Pediatrics, Professor of Epidemiology, and Robert R. Williams Professor of Nutrition at the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University. He is Director of Columbia's Institute of Human Nutrition. He will be speaking on "Nutrition as a Key Towards Economic Development: The Case for Armenia."



Shant Shekherdimian, MD, MPH, is a fellow in pediatric surgery at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Canada. He completed his Master's in Public Health with an emphasis on global health. Dr. Shekherdimian will be speaking on "Healthcare in Armenia: Identifying Needs, Measuring Success, and Defining the Role of the Diaspora."



Asadur J. Tchekmedyian, MD, is Professor of Gastroenterology in Uruguay and Vice-President of the Uruguayan Society of Gastroenterology. He serves as a member of the Education Committee of the Interamerican Society for Digestive Endoscopy (SIED). He will be speaking on "Advances in the Early Diagnosis and Management of Colon Cancer."



Sarkis Anac, MD, Oncologist/ Hematologist, is Medical Director of the "Woman Health Project" program of Fighting Infectious Diseases in Emerging Countries (FIDEC) in Miami, Florida. He will be speaking on "Targeted Therapies, New Frontiers in Pharmacology."



Yerem Yeghiazarians, MD, is Associate Professor of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, and Director of Translational Cardiac Stem Cell Program. He will be speaking on "Advances in Cardiac Stem Cell Therapies."



John P. Bilezikian, MD, is Chief, Division of Endocrinology and Professor of Medicine and Pharmacology at the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University. He will be speaking on "Sugar, Fat and Bone, Exploring New Frontiers."



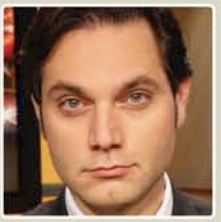
Silva A. Arslanian, MD, is the Richard L. Day Endowed Chair in Pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Chief, Weight Management and Wellness Center, and Director, Pediatric Clinical and Translational Research Center. She will be speaking on the "Trials and Tribulations in Treating Childhood Type 2 Diabetes."



Derenik Dumanyan, MD, PhD, DSc, is a Professor and Minister of Health for the Republic of Armenia, academician of RANS and RAMTS health care organizer. Dr. Dumanyan will be speaking on "Healthcare Policy in Armenia."



Nerses Sanossian, MD, is an Assistant Professor of Neurology and Director of Vascular Neurology at the University of Southern California. He serves as President of the Board of Directors for the American Heart Association of Greater Los Angeles, blog editor for the journal *Stroke*, Director of fellowship training in Vascular Neurology and leads the Roxanna Todd Hodges Comprehensive Stroke Clinic at USC. He will be speaking on "Reducing the Global Burden of Stroke: Recent Advances and Future Directions."





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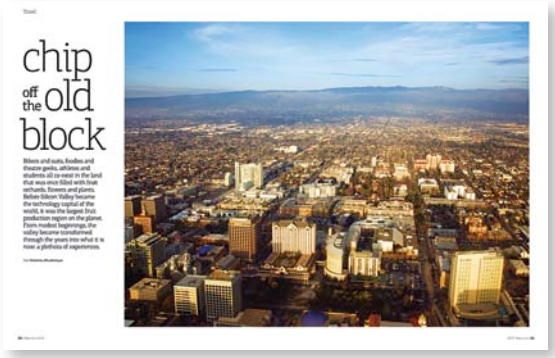

Silicon Valley is colloquially known as the capital of technological innovation, but it offers much more than computers and video games.

Cover Story

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David Yang has been at the forefront of Russia's IT industry, and is jokingly called "a man with the shortest Armenian surname." He implemented his first successful project back in 1989: the now legendary electronic dictionary Lingvo.

Top List

page 46



Armenian Apps

Interested in looking up an Armenian word in the dictionary or playing the duduk? There's an app for that!

Roundtable

page 48



Women Grounding IT

Three bright minds shine light on the inner workings of the tech industry.

Names

page 54



Abiding by the Dudes

Did you just watch an episode of your favorite show on your mobile device? You can thank Blake and Jason Krikorian for that.

Career

page 60



Optimized Reality

Tony Adams, CEO of EventUp, is a start-up king who has no intentions of hanging up his crown.

ART MONACO 2013

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ROYAL MONACO

Image courtesy of Blue Baum Gallery - Korea
Artist: Jeong, young-hoon



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Business

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High-tech startups are competing for venture capital and attracting attention from all over the world to Armenia. Outsourcing research, technology, and computer design are increasing demand for techie skills.

Mobile

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Mission Deploy

Alex Seropian founded Industrial Toys to bring the first person sci-fi shooter to mobile devices. A year later, with that being the sole mission of his start-up, they're launching *Morning Star*.



Social Media



page 78

Rules of Engagement

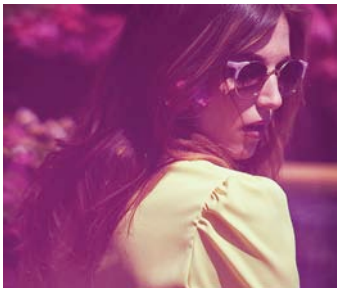
Bryan Srabian is the gate-keeping guru of the San Francisco Giants, using online platforms to highlight the eccentric personalities of a team that's seemingly winning in all facets of baseball.

Fashion

page 82

Femme Approach

Sarine Marie has opened its doors in Los Angeles, bringing classic back with its inventive designs.



Cinema



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Perpetual Dreamer

Famed actor and filmmaker Michael Poghosyan speaks about his inspirations and legacy in Armenian cinema.

Music

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Metal Over Matter

What do candles, the state of Utah, and heavy-metal guitarist Mike Sarkisyan have in common? Take a break with the Grammy-nominated musician and find out.



Autograph



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The Soloist

A clarinetist and student at the Julliard School of Music, 20 year-old Narek Arutyunian impresses audiences with his instrumental mastery.

Sports

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Samvel Sevian shattered Bobby Fisher's chess record when he was eight. Only 12 years-old, he has years of checkmates still left in him.



TALK BACK TUESDAYS
JUNE 18, 25 & JULY 2, 9

Enjoy complimentary Peet's Coffee & Tea before the show in the Gil Cates Theater lobby and dig deeper into plot, characters and themes with Geffen artists post-performance. It's interactive, intellectual and thought-provoking.

GIRLS NIGHT OUT
THURSDAY, JUNE 20

This post show party held at the Geffen Playhouse will feature fashion retailers Le Fashion Truck and J.D. Luxe for a shop 'til you drop night to remember! After-party also includes a Martian Ranch & Vineyard wine bar, food buffets & signature cocktails. Plus a take-away gift from Pixi Beauty and photo booth.

LOUNGE FRIDAYS
JUNE 28 & JULY 5

Ease into your weekend with an enticing cultural happy hour, hosted by LAArtsOnline.com! Enjoy tray passed champagne, sparkling cider & other delicious sparkling beverages in the Gil Cates Theater lobby during this festive, pre-show reception.

WINE DOWN SUNDAYS
JUNE 16, 23, 30 & JULY 7, 14

Marvelous ambiance enhances the mood Sunday nights with complimentary pre-show wine tastings in the Gil Cates Theater lobby courtesy of Domaines Paul Mas, high quality, high value French wines from across the esteemed Languedoc region, and 100.3 FM The Sound.

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Gallery

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Muse of the Whimsical

Discover the multidimensional life and canvases of Russell Aharonian.

Expert

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Beauty of the Unconventional Art

Hrag Vartanian has taken the world of art into his own hands and isn't afraid to share his thoughts.



Events



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Revisit two art events that were organized to make a change, UCLA's cultural festival, and the unveiling of the Icis Apartment Homes.

Lifestyle

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Destination Janapar

Raffi Kojian once packed two suitcases and repatriated to Armenia hoping to contribute the country in some way. He eventually initiated a number of successful projects, one of them being the now famous Janapar Trail in Artsakh.

Nation

page 122



A True Inspiration

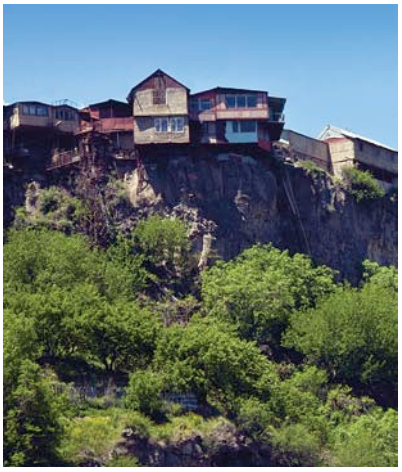
Julie Ashekian's passion for Mer Doon, the home she founded for girls aging out of orphanages in Armenia, changed the girls' lives by providing something they never had before – a home.

Journey

page 128

Dry Water

The descendants of the ancient Assyrian people founded the village Arzni in the picturesque Hrazdan Gorge. Legend says that in ancient times Armenian King Ara the Beautiful and the Assyrian Queen Shamiram clashed their arms in battle on these green hills.



Legacy

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pioneering computer technologies

The biography of Vardan Amirbekian is parallel to the rise and fall of computer technology in Soviet Armenia. He was a typical representative of the generation of the '60s, the post-WWII generation of Soviet intellectuals who immersed themselves in science and technology. He was a celebrity among those who knew him, with his movie-star looks, sharp brain and unique sense of humor. Like many of his era, he displayed criticism toward the official establishment and optimism toward life in general.

The Institute of Microelectronics became the first Soviet organization to mass-produce floppy disk-drives.

The prototypes of today's computers were designed and produced in Armenia since the 1960s. The life story of a pioneer of computer technologies in Armenia, Vardan Amirbekian, is an illustration to the risks and challenges his generation was facing.



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Managing Editor
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Art Director
GEGHAM VARDANYAN

Senior Editor
AZZIE MEKHITARIAN

Copy Editor
CAROL VAN KIRK

Contributing Writers
NANE AVAGYAN
FLORENCE AVAKIAN
PATRICK BAIRAMIAN
JOANNA BUICKIANS
ANI GARIBYAN
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ANUSH HOVSEPYAN
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SAULINE KOJABABIAN
ANI NAZARETYAN
ARA TAHMASSIAN
RUZANNA TANTUSHYAN
RUTH THOMASIAN

Translations
ALEXEY MIRONOV

Photo Editors
ARMEN POGHOSYAN
TIGRAN TOVMASYAN

Russian Edition

Editor-in-Chief
EDUARD AYANYAN

Art Director
ARSEN KIRAKOSYAN

Deputy Editor
ANAHIT HOVHANNISYAN

Production Editor
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Contributing Editors
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NUNE MELKOUMIAN
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Fact Checking
SONA PARSADANYAN

Copy Editor
MARIANNA NIKOGHOSYAN

Director of Photography
MARIANNA ISKANDARYAN

Photo Editors
HAYK MELKONYAN
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Photo Coordinators
ARMEN HAYRAPETYAN
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Design
NONNA ISAJANYAN
ANI KARAMANUKYAN

Page Layout
ARMEN YOLYAN
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Yerevan Charity Fund

Chief Operating Officer
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KRISTINA GUKASYAN

Marketing Consultant
JUNE MILLER RICHARDS

Marketing Coordinator
ARAKS GALSTYAN

325 N. Victory Blvd.
Burbank, CA 91502
Tel: +1 (818) 953-5049
Fax: +1 (818) 953-5161
email: info@yerevanmagazine.com

Yerevan Productions (Armenia)

Editorial Director
EDUARD AYANYAN

YEREVAN PRODUCTIONS

Babayan 2,
Yerevan 0037 Republic of Armenia
Tel: +374 (10) 20 26 89
Fax: +374 (10) 20 22 89
Advertising: +374 (10) 20 26 89
Distribution: +374 (10) 20 23 89
email: info@e-productions.am

Contributing photographers: ARMEN POGHOSYAN, TIGRAN TOVMASYAN, ARNOS MARTIROSYAN, HAYK MELKONYAN, SUREN MANVELYAN, MARIAM LORETSYAN, ANI VARTIVARIAN, MATT HELD, DENICE BROWN, ROB TAYLOR, JODASTEPHEN, VICKI & CHUCK ROGERS, DAVID BARON, CAPT HOPS, CONNY LIEGL, ANIRUDH RAO, WALLY GOBETZ, MICHAEL VITO, THE TAHOE GUY, TOFU, ANTHONY GOTO

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Brand Manager
VALERIYA GARBAR

Executive Editor
ANNA RULEVSKAYA

Distribution and Circulation
ARTYOM CHIZHOV

5 Romanov Street,
Moscow, 125009 Russia
Phone: +7 (495) 926 38 66,
email: info@ethnopress.ru,
info@e-magazine.am

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On the Cover
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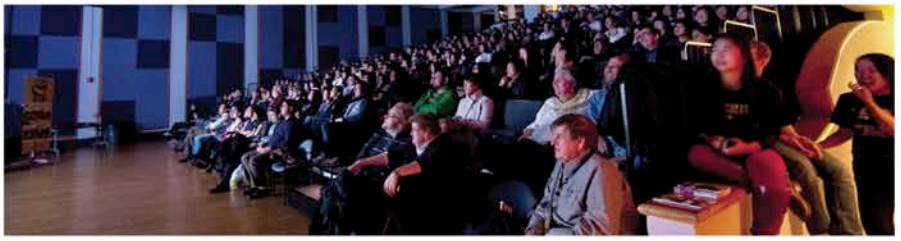



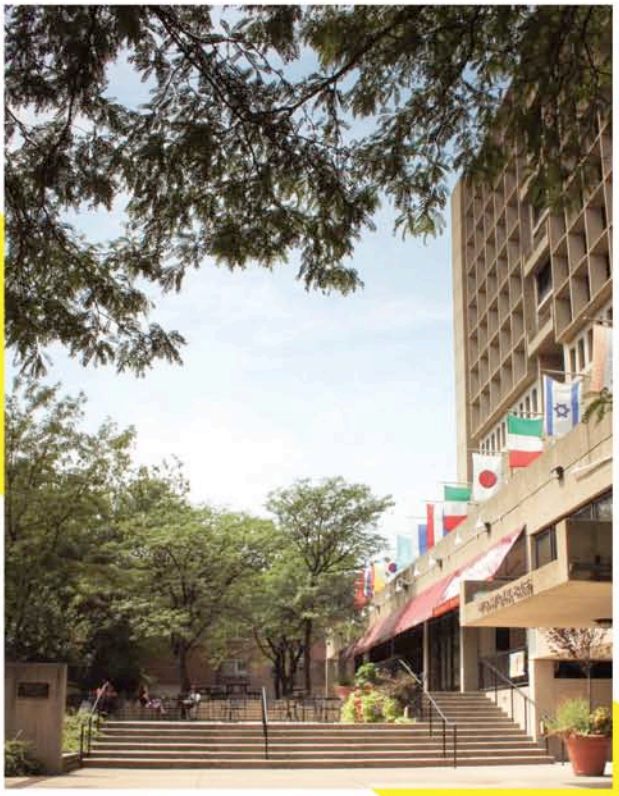





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You Can't Turn IT Off

The digital revolution is arguably behind us. We are now in assimilation mode. The virtual has become second nature for this generation. Team Yerevan "friended" many professionals in the field of Internet technologies to find out what drives our dynamic and creative group of cyber citizens. Our findings trace certain unifying trends.

We easily move on our career paths trying to find venues that match our interests and passions and implementing ideas into new business models. The results of these efforts are gratifying both intellectually and financially.

We are creative and tech savvy, and it appears our brains now function differently. The contemporary intellect is not wired to store large amounts of information and is rather flexible and quick in locating the sources of it. The Internet provides new ways and opportunities for learning.

We possess a certain sense of freedom, particularly freedom of expression. Speaking openly when criticizing the establishment in search of truth, our honesty frequently diminishes when we try to present ourselves from the best retouched and polished angle in social media. Hence a new popular toast, "May we look and feel the way we present ourselves on Facebook!"

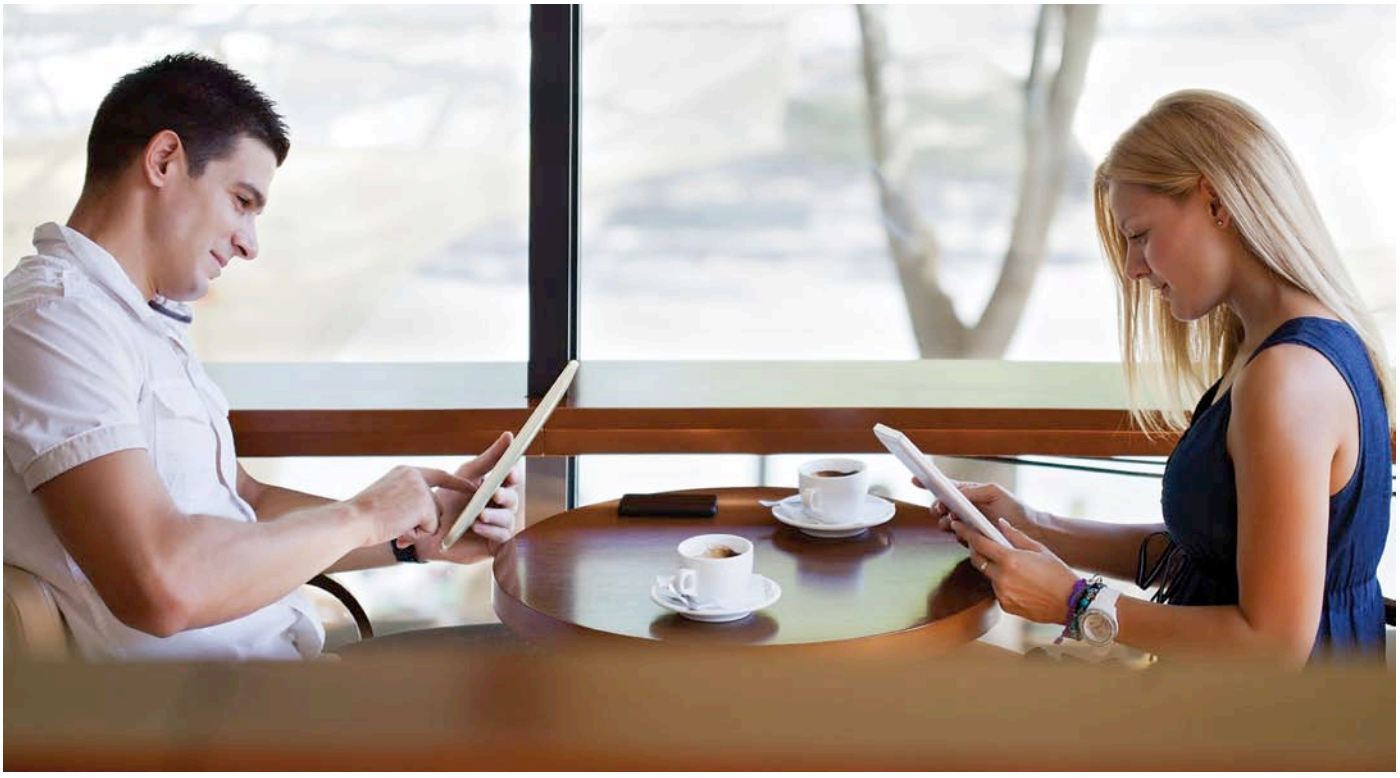
The generation of thirty-somethings started it, and now teens have picked up a new Internet lingo. So DBA (don't bother asking) and don't make a VBD (very big deal) if your teenager is with FHO (friends hanging out). Just text him/her to get home as QAP (quickly as possible) because the normal language for them is TLTR (too long to read.)

A new code of etiquette, a "netiquette," has been developed for e-mailing. It includes the courtesy of spell checking, not sending e-mails at night and not spamming. And by the way, using all caps in emails is equivalent to SHOUTING or YELLING!

All this transformation could be time consuming, and we often feel overexposed and sleep-deprived. In small print we are told that our privacy is lost and that we are a target of product research. We have lost the mere notion of the end of the workday, as employers expect a response to work-related questions at any time of the day.

Yet the Internet does not have an "off switch," says Tim Berners-Lee, the British inventor of the World Wide Web – and that is a good thing, because it could only be undone by governments coordinating to turn it into a centralized system, which simply means that they have to come to an agreement to be able to turn it off.

Would that also mean peace on Earth?



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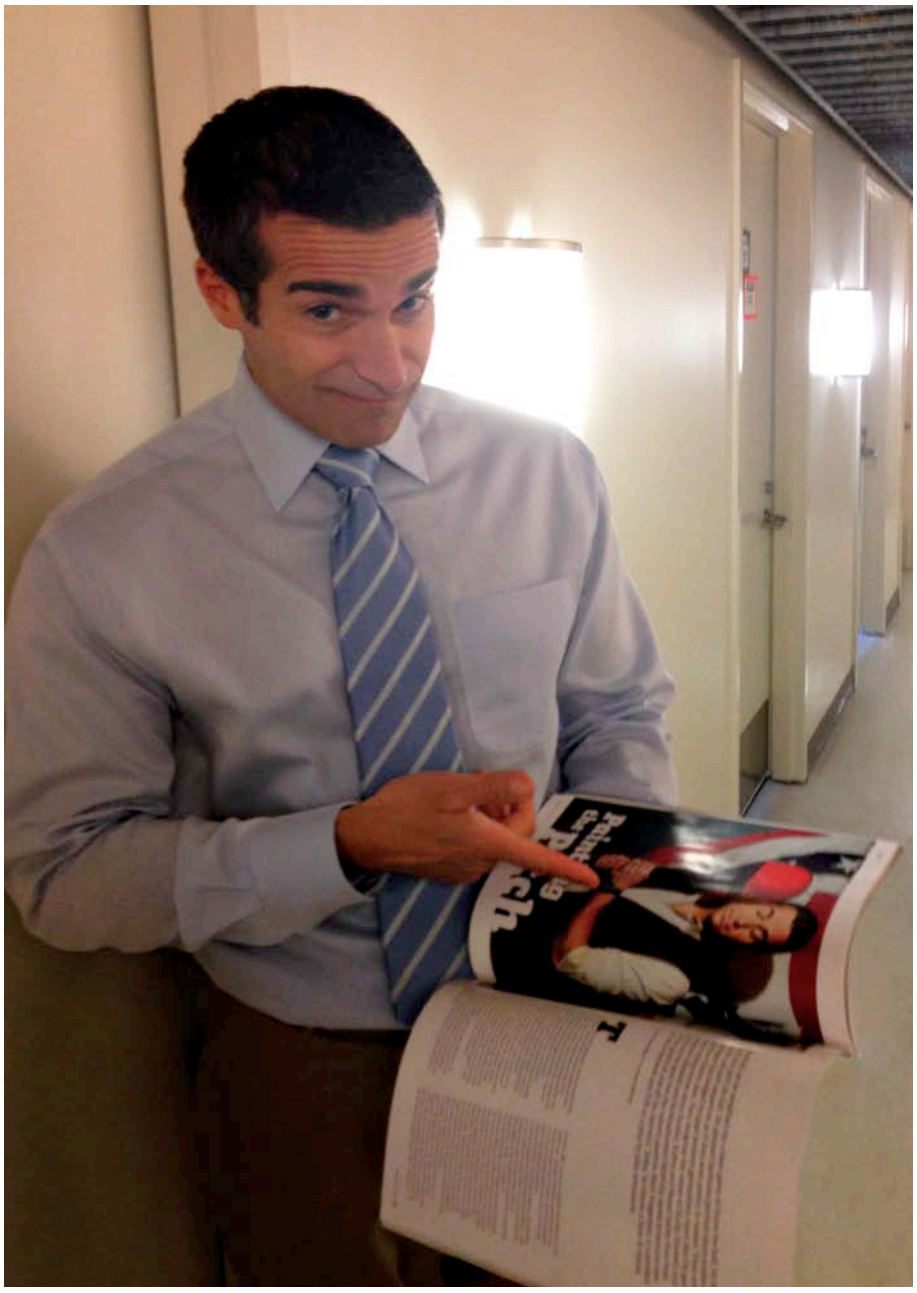

Dear Editor,
We want to thank you for the story you did on Matt Vasgersian in the March/April issue of Yerevan *magazine. It would be easy enough as his parents to say what a wonderful article, since you paid him so many compliments. The point remains you did a great deal of research and with your interviews showed an accurate account of Matt's professionalism and personal character. Sincerely, and thank you once again!*

Ed and Suzy Vasgersian
Moraga, California

If it weren't for your magazine, where else would these amazing individuals shine? Yerevan *magazine is truly an extraordinary outlet for Armenians across the globe. I loved reading the cover story in the latest issue with Pierre Terjanian and Lee Abrahamian. Time to time, I enjoy articles in a question and answer format; I would have asked a lot of the same questions. After reading interviews, I felt empowered. It is refreshing to read about high-powered figures in decision-making positions. Terjanian seemed humble and wise. His advice about pursuing what you are good at is golden. Many of us are pushed by peer pressure to succeed in fields that are titled "prestigious" when in reality we should just follow our passion. After all, you have only yourself to impress at the end of the day. As for Abrahamian, she is a wonderful role model for young women who want to be in the industry without having to fall under the hardships. She exemplifies sophistication and strength.*

Joanna Malikian
Syracuse, New York

I enjoyed reading about Peter Aznavoorian and his talented daughters in "A Cello for his Daughter." It was a particularly touching story. What a sweet honor for a daughter to play an instrument handcrafted by her father. Not only does it represent the love for music but family as well. It is a positive message to continue to feature heroes such as Mr. Aznavoorian. It was a short yet sweet read. Keep them coming Yerevan*!*

Jon Malikian
Syracuse, New York

I've seen advertisements for your publication in many different outlets but never pursued what it was all about. I thought it was just another magazine aiming to attract attention to topics that don't interest a younger generation. I want to apologize for my assumptions because I was clearly wrong. I picked up the current issue from a friend and read it cover to cover without realizing it. I am a student studying fine arts and can proudly say I am a new supporter of Yerevan *magazine and wish I had signed up earlier. The quality of content is remarkable. The magazine really speaks to a variety of individuals. I want to shine light on the Los Angeles Art Show piece written by Ara Tahmassian. I attended some of the galleries and could not have better portrayed its livelihood. Armenians are such creative people and it was an honor to be in the same room with artists such as Yuroz, Edgar Chahine, and KOKO. It is more often than not, speaking from a youth's perspective, that attending art galleries is a lost art – literally. There is a real energy that cannot be mimicked via the computer screen, or even in a magazine. I hope that others have read the magazine and will make it a point to support local artists and explore the beauty that Armenians have to offer.*

Anto Srabian
Los Angeles, California



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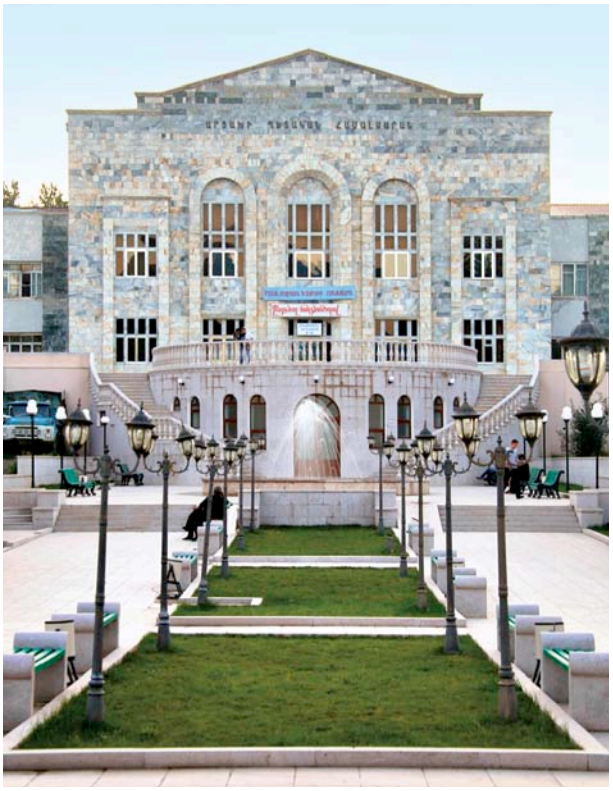
Serzh Sargsyan Reelected

On April 9, the inauguration of Armenia's reelected president Serzh Sargsyan took place during a solemn parliamentary session in Yerevan's Karen Demirchyan complex. The President-elect was sworn in on the RA Constitution and Gospel. "Assuming the office of the President of the Republic of Armenia I swear: to fulfill the requirements of the Constitution in an unreserved manner; to respect the fundamental human and civil rights and freedoms; to ensure the protection, independence, territorial integrity and security of the Republic to the glory of the Republic of Armenia and to the welfare of the people of the Republic of Armenia," he swore. According to the RA Constitution, the inauguration is due 50 days after the presidential election. According to official results announced by the country's Central Election Commission, the incumbent president won Armenia's presidential election with over 58 percent of the vote.



PhotoLure



Synopsys in Artsakh

Synopsys Armenia, Karabakh Telecom and Artsakh State University signed an agreement to promote education in micro-electronic circuitry and systems of communications in Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Within the agreement, an inter-university department will be created at Artsakh State University, providing bachelor's and master's degrees specializing in "Micro-Electronic Circuitry and Systems of Communication Means." The deparment will be equipped with state-of-the-art hardware and software infrastructures and provided with curricula and instructional materials that meet international standards, as well as with qualified teachers trained at Synopsys Armenia Educational Department. As a world-leading company, Synopsys cooperates with more than 1,300 universities. There are four partner universities in Armenia – SEUA, YSU, RAU and European Regional Academy – and now Artsakh State University has joined that list. "By signing the cooperation agreement, we are taking the first steps in a huge process that will make a substantial difference in socio-economic development of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic," said Artsakh State University Rector Stepan Dadayan.

LA Times Travel Show 2013

The prestigious Los Angeles Times Travel Show featured the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Karabakh (Artsakh) for the third time in February. Both countries made their first appearance at the show in 2010, leaving a lasting impression on thousands. The joint Armenia-Artsakh booth represented some of Armenia's major travel companies while offering information guides, films, video clips as well as cultural performances and national delights to its visitors. Armenia and Artsakh's joint participation at the travel show was co-sponsored by the National Competitiveness Foundation of Armenia, the Consulate General of the Republic of Armenia in Los Angeles and the Artsakh Tourism Board. Matthew Karanian and Robert Kurkjian, authors of Armenia's first-ever commercial travel guidebook, signed the new edition of Armenia's best selling travel guide, *The Stone Garden Travel Guide: Armenia and Karabakh*.



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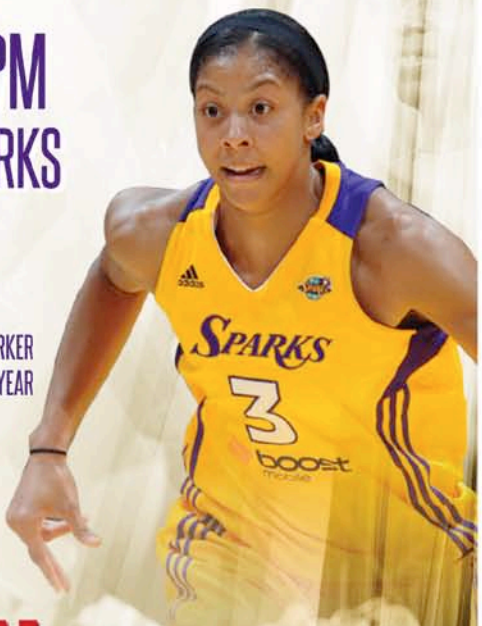

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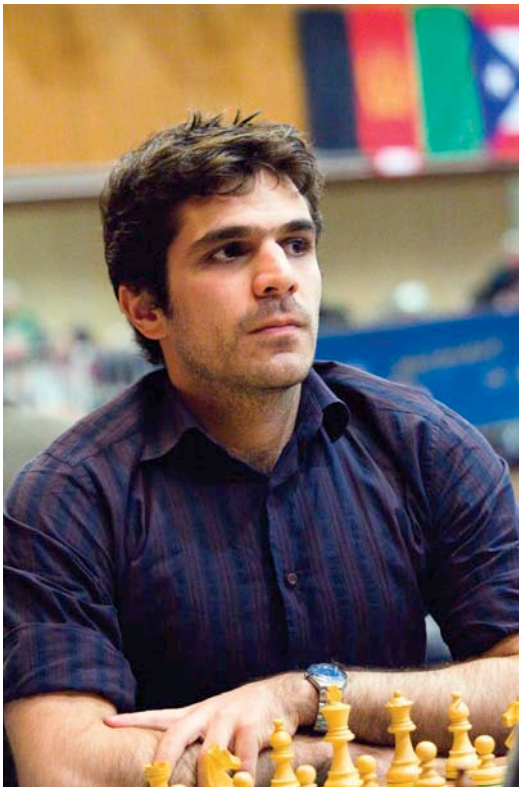

Brazil's Chess Championship

Grandmaster Krikor Sevag Mekhitarian won Brazil's chess championship in São Paulo. A Brazilian Armenian, Mekhitarian secured the title with seven wins, three draws, and one loss, finishing the championship with 8.5 points out of the possible 11. The 27 year-old Mekhitarian was born in São Paulo and learned chess from his father at the age of six. In 2000, he trained in Yerevan with renowned chess trainer Vrej Ordian. Mekhitarian won Brazil's junior (U20) championship twice, in 2003 and 2004, and became a Grandmaster in 2010.

Maine Recognizes Artsakh Independence

Maine's House of Representatives and Senate passed a joint resolution on April 10 recognizing the independence of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic. The state resolution also urged the U.S. President and Congress "to support the self-determination and democratic independence of NKR." The resolution was introduced by Rep. Scott Hamann (South Portland) and co-sponsored by Reps. A.M. Gattine (Westbrook) and S. Gideon (Freeport). Rep. Hamann worked closely with the ANCA of Maine and key community leaders, among them Anna Astvatsaturian Turcotte, a Baku pogroms survivor, lawyer and noted author of the book *Nowhere: A Story of Exile*. The adopted unanimously measure makes Maine the third state to pass legislation recognizing the NKR. On May 17, 2012, the Rhode Island House passed a resolution calling on the U.S. president and Congress to recognize the independence of NKR. On Aug. 6, 2012, the House of Representatives of the State of Massachusetts adopted a similar resolution.





Tamar Manoukian Center in Scotland

Prince William and Kate Middleton, accompanied by Prince Charles, officially opened the Tamar Manoukian Outdoor Centre at Dumfries House in East Ayrshire. They were greeted by children from the uniformed youth services represented by Youth United, as well as Brownies, Guides and Scouts. The center is part of a regeneration project that Prince Charles has led since 2007. The Prince said he was "enormously grateful" to the Manoukian Foundation for funding the project. The Tamar Manoukian Outdoor Center can host up to 52 young people and six adults. It will be open to youngsters from the uniformed youth services from across Scotland. The names Vatche and Tamar Manoukian has become synonymous with not just philanthropy but in active participation in building a stronger Armenia and Diaspora.



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Armenian Embassy in Mexico

Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan signed decrees on the opening of the embassies of the Republic of Armenia in Mexico, Sweden and Indonesia. The diplomatic relations between Armenia and Sweden have intensified over the past decade. Sweden is the only Scandinavian county to recognize the Armenian Genocide on the parliamentary level. The Embassy in Mexico will provide an opportunity to extend the diplomatic coverage to the northern and northeastern parts of North America, Central America and the Caribbean region. As for Indonesia, it is one of the most dynamically developing regions in Southeastern Asia.

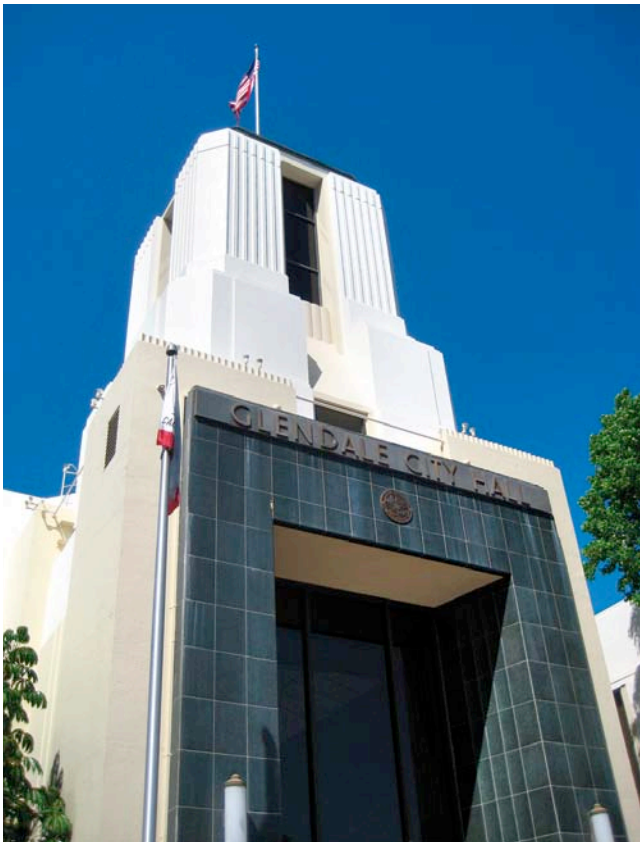


"Garun a" by Komitas

System of a Down lead vocalist and human rights activist Serj Tankian recorded the Komitas composition "Garun a" with famed pianist Tigran Hamasyan. Tankian dedicated the song to "all those who struggle for positive changes in Armenia." The recording is part of an upcoming album *Jazz-iz-Christ*, scheduled to be released this summer. The album has 13 tracks that weave in and out of the jazz genre, infusing elements of traditional jazz, electronic music and other non-traditional elements. The album is mainly instrumental, but does have three tracks with Tankian singing vocals.

Glendale Municipal Elections

Armenian candidates had a sweeping victory in the Glendale, Calif. municipal elections for the offices of treasurer, city clerk, and city council. Incumbent City council member Ara Najarian was reelected with 10,165 votes and Zareh Sinanyan won the race for Glendale City Council with 7,379 votes. Incumbent City Clerk Ardashes Kassakhian handily won with 12,319 votes. City Treasurer Rafi Manoukian, who ran unopposed, gathered 14,560 votes. In the Glendale Unified School District race, Greg Krikorian and Dr. Armina Gharapetian won with 10,823 and 7,696 votes, respectively.



Armenian *Duduk* at UNESCO

Armenia, Lithuania and Bulgaria presented their national and cultural assets included in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List at the large hall of UNESCO in March. This event was organized to celebrate International Francophonie Day and the tenth anniversary of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Armenia was represented by the famous French-Armenian *duduk* player Levon Minasyan, whose unique performance in front of hundreds of foreigners underlined the universal value and uniqueness of the Armenian musical instrument. The Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage are established by UNESCO, aiming to ensure the better protection of important cultural heritages worldwide and the awareness of their significance. The *duduk* was registered in the 2008 Intangible Cultural Heritage list.



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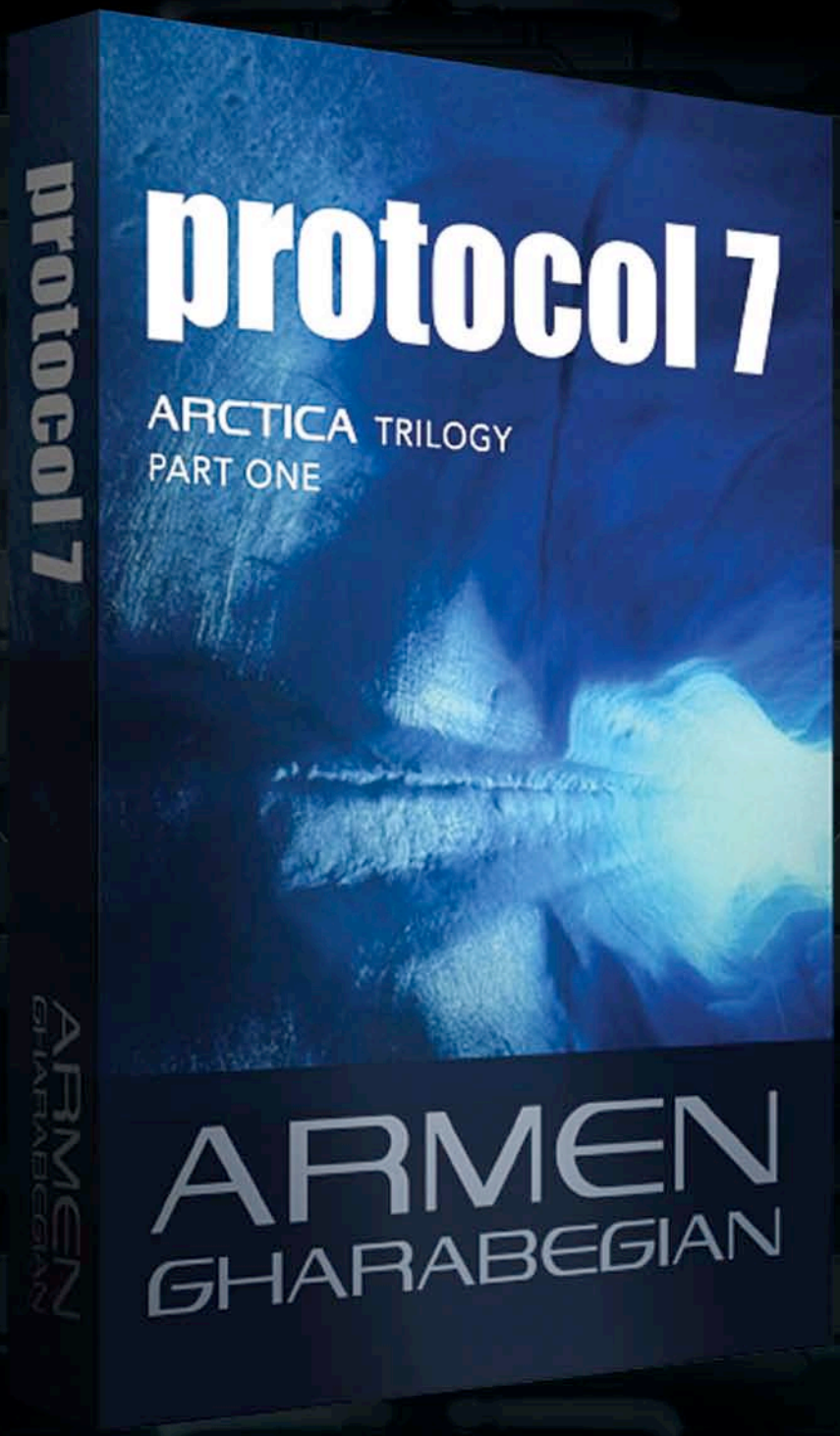

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Gor Sujyan and Dorians at Eurovision 2013

Lonely Planet is the title of the Armenian entry in the 2013 Eurovision Song Contest. It will be represented by Gor Sujyan and the popular Armenian rock band, Dorians. The music is written by the world-famous guitarist and songwriter Tony Iommi who also is a founder member of the pioneering heavy metal band Black Sabbath. The lyrics are by Vardan Zadoyan. This song is a story about the planet and someone who can save it. "It is a great honor for us to represent our country at Eurovision with the song written by that kind of a true legend," Sujyan said. At only 25, Sujyan is famous for his unique voice. In 2010 he was crowned "Best Male Singer" in the annual Armenian National Music Awards.



ARS Celebrates 103 years of Service

Three generations of Armenian Relief Society (ARS) members participated in the ARS Day Celebration on April 7 at the First Baptist Church of Glendale. The program, which was attended by a full house, also included ARS Saturday School students and the Glendale Chamber Orchestra. An overview of the history of the ARS, since it was founded in New York City in 1910, was presented on video covering the ARS of Western USA and the activities in Armenia, Artsakh and Javakhk. Throughout its history, ARS has reached out to those most in need, has provided young generations opportunities to excel, and has supported the preservation of the Armenian culture. The videos provided the progression of the ARS accomplishments through the Genocide, wars and conflicts, and demonstrated how certain programs, such as the *bnag meh geragoor* (a bowl of food), were implemented in different parts of the world at different times to meet needs. The ARS of Western USA, established in 1984 and with regional headquarters in Glendale, has 27 chapters and more than 1,500 members in five western states. The ARS-WUSA operates a Social Services Division and Child, Youth and Family Guidance Center, and funds numerous youth programs, scholarships and relief efforts.





Executive Director Sara Bogosian

In a move to further professionalize and energize fund-raising and promotional efforts, the board of trustees of the Whistler House Museum of Art has recruited the president of the board of trustees, Sara Bogosian, as the museum's new acting executive director. She has been performing the museum duties as board president since July of last year. Bogosian brought international recognition to the Whistler House Museum of Art through the acquisition of works by the famous abstract expressionist, Arshile Gorky. She traveled as part of the Arshile Gorky Foundation team, promoting the Whistler House and the major exhibition, Arshile Gorky: A Restrospective, to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the London Tate Modern and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. Recognizing April as International Genocide Month, she is currently presenting Pursuing Justice Through Art, A Multi-Cultural Genocide Exhibition and Symposium, featuring Armenian, Jewish, Cambodian, Sudanese and Rwandan artists whose works are rooted in genocide commemoration. The symposium features international panelists who are specialist in genocide studies. "The project was inspired by Arshile Gorky, the Father of Abstract Expressionism, who is one of the artists in the Whistler House's art collection." "Gorky is considered to be one of the most famous survivors of the Armenian Genocide," said Bogosian.
Bogosian was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, (Mezian-Yemenidjian), speaks a number of languages and grew up in Pennsylvania, but has lived in Massachusetts for 30 years. In addition to the Whistler House Museum of Art, she has been involved with almost 20 organizations. The Whistler House Museum of Art, established in 1878 as the Lowell Art Association Inc., is the oldest incorporated art association in the United States. It is known internationally for its distinguished collection of 19th and early 20th century New England representational art.

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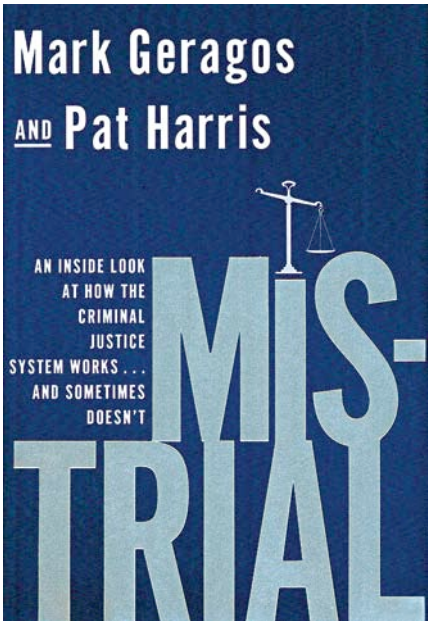
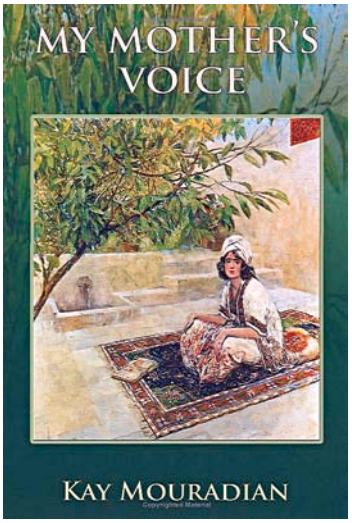


Mark Geragos and Pat Harris

Mistrial: An Inside Look at How the Criminal Justice System Works... and Sometimes Doesn't

Gotham Books, 2013

A searing and entertaining manifesto on the ills of the criminal justice system from two of America's most prominent defense attorneys. From the rise of the Internet and the 24-hour news cycle to the television ratings bonanza of the O.J. Simpson trial, a perfect storm of media coverage has given the public an unprecedented look inside the courtroom, kicking off popular courtroom shows and TV legal commentary that further illuminate how the criminal justice system operates. Or has it? In *Mistrial*, Mark Geragos and Pat Harris debunk the myths of judges as Solomon-like figures, jurors as impartial arbiters of the truth, and prosecutors as super-ethical heroes. Geragos and Harris are legal experts and prominent criminal defense attorneys who have worked on everything from celebrity media-circuses – having represented clients like Michael Jackson, Winona Ryder, Scott Peterson, Chris Brown, Susan MacDougal, and Gary Condit – to equally compelling cases defending individuals desperate to avoid the spotlight. Shining unprecedented light on what really goes on in the courtroom, *Mistrial* is an enjoyable, fun look at a system that rarely lets you see behind the scenes.

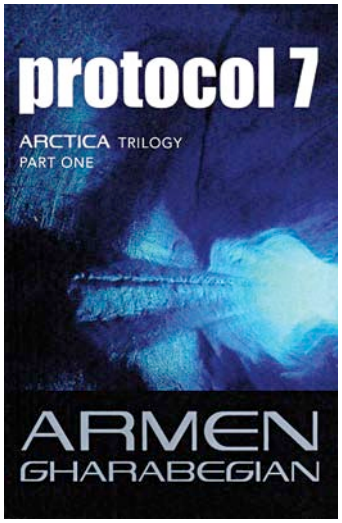


Kay Mouradian

My Mother's Voice

Balboa Press, 2013

Researching through volumes in libraries and archives, Kay Mouradian visited the village in Turkey where her mother and her mother's family were forced to leave their homes. Traveling over the same deportation route to the deserts of Syria where more than a million Armenians perished, the author became acutely aware of the suffering of her mother's generation and the lingering sense of injustice they carried. This story of 14-year-old Flora Munushian, the author's mother, brings an epic chapter in Armenian history to life and takes it to heart. Flora's incredible story honors her people with dignity and personifies the human spirit of hope, love, and justice. Her voice is that of all the victims and survivors of the Armenian Genocide, a story that must not be forgotten. "I am my mother's voice," says Dr. Mouradian, "and this is her story."



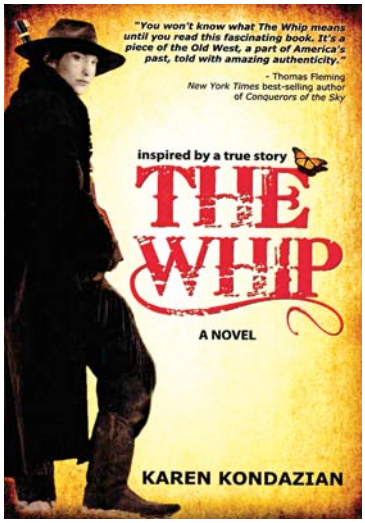
Armen Gharabegian

Protocol 7 (Part One of the Arctica Trilogy)

Arctica Studios LLC, 2013

2039: Simon Fitzpatrick, a brilliant Oxford professor, grieves over the recent and mysterious death of his father Oliver, who has disappeared in Antarctica. An unexpected friend from Simon's past appears on his doorstep with an encrypted message from Oliver, leading him to believe his father may still be alive. Simon soon embarks on a mission which takes him halfway around the world in search of his father.

A recent quarantine of Antarctica by the United Nations makes his journey almost impossible and dangerous. Through this perilous journey to find his father, Simon uncovers a conspiracy beyond his imagination, a revelation of global consequence and one of the greatest secrets ever kept.



Karen Kondazian

The Whip

Hansen Publishing Group, 2012

Award winner in the "Fiction: Historical" category of the 2012 USA Best Book Awards, *The Whip* is inspired by the true story of Charlotte 'Charley' Parkhurst (1812-1879), a woman who lived most of her life as a man. Charley killed a famous outlaw, had a secret love affair, and lived with a housekeeper who, unaware of her true sex, fell in love with her. She was the first woman to vote in America (as a man). *The Whip* is Kondazian's debut novel. "Karen Kondazian has gathered what exists about Charley Parkhurst and allowed her imagination to weave Charley's life into an intriguing pattern. She's done so in a fast-moving tale that quite possibly could be true. *The Whip* provides an interesting speculative life history for one of the more enigmatic characters of the Old West," wrote John Manhold from Historical Novel Society.

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Rob Taylor

European Capital of Culture 2013

Marseille, the second largest city in France, has been named the European Capital of Culture for 2013. Gaining the title, designated by the European Union annually since 1985, is something like winning the Olympics. Marseille has developed an ambitious program that aims to "blend high art and popular culture," with nearly 80 projects: shows, exhibitions, festivities, concerts, popular gatherings. The Workshops of the Mediterranean will give support to exchanges and encounters between professors and students, scholars and artists in liaison with universities and research institutions, centered on some of the greater themes of the European Capital of Culture project. In addition, The Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations in Marseille opens to the public on June 7. It is a groundbreaking project of the 21st century, which is dedicated to the civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean Sea from international and research-originated collections. Marseille also has the second-largest Armenian population of France with more than 90,000 Armenians. There are eight Armenian churches, a cathedral, a bilingual private school, an Armenian chamber of commerce, and many other Armenian organizations in Marseille. Within the framework of Marseille as the cultural city of Europe, Armenian cultural week will take place from June 17-23. Among the guests attending the event will be famous and influential Armenian artists, businessmen, public and political figures from different countries. The week-long program includes the opening of the Henri Verneuil exhibition and the square named after Verneuil. Among the honorary speakers will be Charles Aznavour, Claudia Cardinale, Alain Delon and Omar Sharif. There will also be other events dedicated to youth, the Lori and Nagorno-Karabakh regions, fashion, and Aznavour.

La Biennale di Venezia

One of the most prestigious contemporary art exhibitions in the world is the Venice Biennale that takes place from June 1 to November 24, in Venice, Italy. This huge art exhibition includes national pavilions from numerous countries plus a comprehensive curated exhibition. The Venice Biennale will continue to be a beacon for the veneration of great art for patrons worldwide as it has done now for well over a century. Since 1895, Venice has been enlightened by the works of some of the most talented, cutting-edge artists in the world. The 55th International Art Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia, under the artistic direction of Massimiliano Gioni, is titled "The Encyclopedic Palace." The exhibition draws inspiration from the model of a utopian dream by Marino Auriti, who filed a design with the U.S. Patent office in 1955 depicting his Palazzo Enciclopedico, an imaginary museum that was meant to house all worldly knowledge. The Encyclopedic Palace will be laid out in the Central Pavilion and in the Arsenale, forming a single itinerary with works spanning the past century alongside several new commissions and including over 150 artists from 37 countries. Also exhibited will be 88 National Participations. The Biennale is a big cruise liner gliding into one of the few cities in the world that can be truly described as simply stunning and completely unique.



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Ն [n]

Text **Aram Khachatourian**

Ն [n] is the twenty-second letter of the Armenian alphabet. Its name is - **Նու** [now] and the numerical value is 400.

Ն Ն

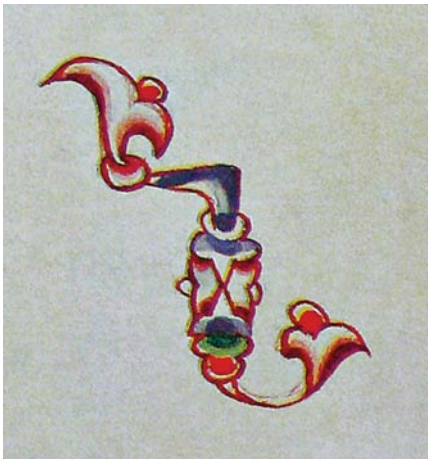


Suren Manvelyan

The graphic representation of letter Ն in the manuscripts of various centuries



862 1007 1063 1169 1457 1853



Ornamented Initials, Arahit Publishing House, 1992

The prototype of the Armenian letter **Ն** is considered the Greek letter N – not the classical N, but one of its many variants. The exact variation chosen by Mesrop Mashtots, creator of the alphabet, is impossible to determine now because of the large number of variations of the **Ն** used back in the 4th and 5th centuries. We can only assume that the prototype served as the variation *Ν* presented in the book An Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography by the British paleographer, the first Director of the British Museum, Earl Edward Thompson.

In favor of such assumption could be, in particular, the fact that the early variations of the Armenian **Ն** had similar horseshoe shapes. Also, the shape of the Armenian **Ն** is a mirror reflection of another Armenian letter – **Մ** [m]. Moreover, the correlation between these letters is hardly coincidental, as these characters denote similar sounds. This correlation becomes more apparent in lowercase versions of **ն** and **մ** and to some extent the similar sounds that the [n] and [m] represent in other alphabets as well.

As for the name of the **Ն** or "now," the researcher of the history of the Armenian language, Hrachya Acharyan, states it may be derived from the Greek or Semitic nun with omission of the final letter.

Interesting examples of ornamented letters **Ն** can be found in an ancient Armenian manuscript – Gospel of 1604 of Hizan by miniaturist and scribe Sarkis Hizantsi in one of the first words, **Գիրք Ծննդեան** – A Book of Birth, in which two consecutive letters **ն** are depicted as musicians. The first letter **ն** depicts a musician who beats the rhythm on the tambourine, and the second **ն** is a musician who is playing the duduk. In fact, as mentioned by Grant Khachikyan, researcher of Armenian medieval manuscripts, to ensure the full resemblance of the musicians' outline with the graphic shape of **ն**, the artist added blue flowers to the head and heel of the left foot of the musicians.

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chip off the old block

Bikers and suits, foodies and theatre geeks, athletes and students all co-exist in the land that was once filled with fruit orchards, flowers and plants. Before Silicon Valley became the technology capital of the world, it was the largest fruit production region on the planet. From modest beginnings, the valley became transformed through the years into what it is now: a plethora of experiences.

Text **Christina Kharbertyan**





Aboard the plane, I sat in a window seat and gazed down. Below me was a blanket of white clouds, endless like rolling pastures. Clouds so thick they could catch me if I fell. As we sped through the air, the flow of the clouds was disrupted suddenly by a snow-covered mountain peak. Between two mountain ranges was a valley with a long river flowing through it. Following the river with my eyes, I arrived at the vast blue Pacific Ocean in the distance. Green grass, bright from the sun overhead, covered the sides of the mountains and the edges of the river. Heaven was before me, and I was overcome with awe as I beheld the beauty of nature.

Soon after, the plane landed at the San Jose airport. After removing my baggage from the overhead compartments, I made my way out of the plane, down the bustling halls and onto the streets of Silicon Valley. Street signs pointed me in the direction of ground transportation. The bus arrived shortly and drove me around downtown San Jose, past the HP Pavilion and San Jose Museum of Art, down the meandering Highway 17 to the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Under the tall trees and the overcast sky, the earth smelled like pine and mud, like an urban campground. Veiled by a thick night fog that crawled up from the ocean, the redwoods and evergreens cast eerie shadows on the stone-covered ground. Wind stirred up the stranded leaves and shook the weary branches.

This is the stuff of fairytales, but it was where I spent five years of my life pursuing an education. The sunsets were painted with fiery reds, deep oranges and royal purples. The glistening ocean speckled with white sails could be seen from the crevices between the trees.

I have spent countless afternoons sitting on the beach with my feet in the sand, mesmerized by the crashing waves, the sound of their ebb and flow a lullaby for my ears. Each time, I felt like I was in paradise. In reality, I was in the backyard of the world's largest region for technology production. I was always just a stone's skip away from Silicon Valley.

Silicon Valley is a land of many reputations. Nationally, it is known as the technology capital of the world. To businessmen, the valley is a fly zone where they get shuttled straight to work after landing at the airport. To locals, it is the "Valley of Heart's Delight." To me, it is all these things and something else entirely.

↓
Downtown San Jose



anthony_goto



The Tahoe Guy

← Downtown San Jose



Vicki & Chuck Rogers

↓ Hakone Estate & Gardens in Saratoga



Tofu

← The San Jose Museum of Art features modern and contemporary art.

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But to set the record straight, Silicon Valley is not its own city. It's a blanket term for the cities of Palo Alto, San Jose, Santa Clara, Cupertino and the surrounding towns where today's tech companies first got their starts. Downtown San Jose is considered to be the capital of Silicon Valley, and it is the most culturally rich part of the region.

My first experience in downtown San Jose was a bus ride through the town on my way to the airport. I had taken the bus from UC Santa Cruz to San Jose. The two cities are separated by a winding highway lined with forests of towering redwood trees. In a sense, these bus rides gave me a small tour of the city because they passed by the various sculptures, shops, museums, theatres and art galleries that make San Jose such a popular destination in which to work and play. These visual samplings of everything the town had to offer enticed me enough to make the trip "over the hill" to experience it for myself throughout the years.

Every visit brought with it a unique memory. When I was in the mood for a getaway, I drove to the tiny town of Saratoga on the western edge of the valley. The town's center is composed of a few street blocks lined with historic buildings. A creek runs adjacent to the main road and its trickling water soothed me when I sat outside.

My daylight hours were spent strolling through the lush landscapes and relaxing by the pond of the Japanese garden or sipping on a glass of local wine from the surrounding vineyards.

When the sun set, a cool breeze made its way inland to add to the pristine Mediterranean weather of the area. Evening was the perfect time to indulge in a wild boar and exotic mushroom pizza under a magnificent oak tree, listen to live music at a creek-side coffee shop, and browse the art galleries and boutiques.

Other nights I found myself dancing away in a nightclub in Sunnyvale, which is located north of San Jose, or watching a performance of The Nutcracker at the San Jose Dance Theatre during the winter months. The outskirts of Silicon Valley have very low light pollution and smog which make it ideal for stargazing. By far, my most memorable night in Silicon Valley was spent sitting before Stanford University's stone entrance with the brilliant twinkling stars above me, talking philosophy while having a picnic. ▸

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The term Silicon Valley was invented with the creation of silicon chips in the early 1960s. While the area first took off in the '30s, "Silicon Valley" was first used to describe Palo Alto by a journalist in an article published in the '70s. Before becoming a tech haven, the valley was a fertile region filled with fruit crops, primarily prunes, but the land also grew apricots and cherries. From the moment the chip was invented, more and more innovations came forth from this area. The businesses boomed because recent graduates from Stanford University began working at the startups. At the time, the professor of electrical engineering at Stanford, Frederick Terman, urged his students to work for companies in the area or create businesses of their own. He was considered to be the "Father of Silicon Valley." Much of the success of the valley can be attributed to Terman. Two of his students were William Hewlett and David Packard who started the computer company Hewlett-Packard in their garage after graduation. The two men graduated in 1935 and started the company after the Great Depression. Although HP now specializes in computers, their first big invention was the audio oscillator which generates one pure tone at a time. Their earliest customer was Walt Disney Productions who used the oscillator in the making of the movie *Fantasia*. After the oscillator came the microwave followed by medical equipment. It was not until the late '60s that HP invented their first "computer" which was actually a scientific calculator that solved problems ten times faster than other machines. The first documented descriptions of the calculator called it a "personal computer."

While the first computers were used just to calculate numbers, the modern-day version of the computers we know today were first invented in the early 1980s with HP's desktop mainframe. A year later, the touchscreen PC was released followed by a number of printers. In 2007, the HP garage, where the company got started, was named a historic landmark.

Following the legacy of Terman in the '30s, the current professor of electrical engineering at Stanford is Amin Arbabian, who could be considered a modern-day "Father of Silicon Valley" based on the title of his predecessor. The majority of Arbabian's research has been focused on integrated circuits, a complex of electronic circuits and their connections produced on a small piece of material, usually silicon. An integrated circuit is the main building block of all technology, especially the computers and video games that put Silicon Valley on the map.

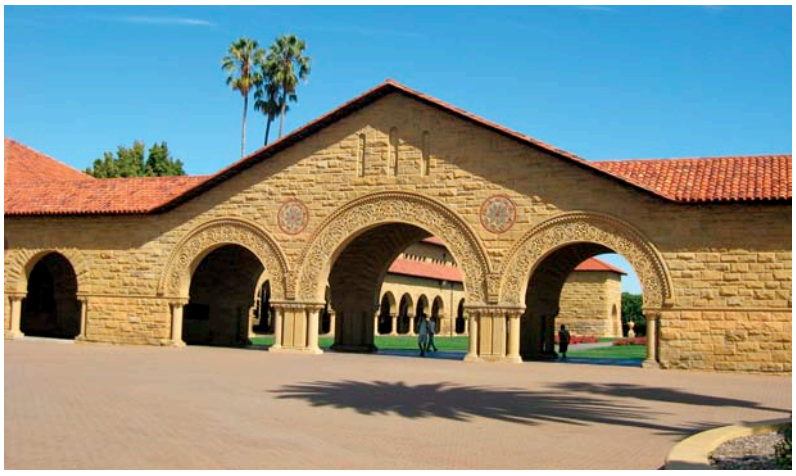
Many companies from the '30s to the present day have found their start in the valley. The companies that now call Silicon Valley home include Adobe, Apple

Many companies from the '30s to the present day have found their start in the valley. The companies that now call Silicon Valley home include Adobe, Apple Inc., eBay, Google and Facebook, among hundreds of others.



Michael Vito

↑ Hewlitt-Packard Company was born in this garage.



Wally Gobetz

→ Stanford University's entrance



Conny Liegl

← David Packard Electrical Engineering Building, Stanford University

↓ James H. Clark Center on the Stanford campus

Inc. (whose founder Steve Jobs' adoptive mother was Armenian), Google and Facebook, among hundreds of others. The world's most popular online auction site eBay was also started in Silicon Valley by Pierre Omidyar who is of Armenian and Iranian descent. Legend has it that Omidyar started the company to help his girlfriend at the time (who is now his wife) trade her Pez collection.

While most legends are grounded in truths, the beginnings of eBay are even more comical. The first item listed for auction on eBay was a broken laser pointer. Omidyar had listed the item as a test so he was surprised when someone actually purchased it. Confused as to why anyone would buy a damaged product, Omidyar contacted the winner of the bid to clarify that the laser pointer was broken and received the reply, "I'm a collector of broken laser pointers." From then on, Omidyar knew he had a successful business on his hands.

But he never realized how successful eBay would actually be. Started at the same time as Amazon and Yahoo!, eBay's market capitalization, or the total dollar market value of all their outstanding shares, is four times the size of Amazon's and 25 percent larger than that of Yahoo!. In 2004, with its $3.3 billion revenue, it was one of the largest growing companies in the world, surpassing Microsoft and Dell.

The successes of Armenians in Silicon Valley do not stop with Omidyar and eBay. In pursuit of the Silicon Valley dream, young Armenian entrepreneurs start their own businesses. Stanford graduate Armen Petrosian started his own company in his dorm room during his senior year at the school. At the time, he was studying for a degree in material sciences



Arinodh Rao

with dreams of conducting research on solar panels. His business venture turned big, and he now runs Xatori, a company that builds innovative software for connected cars, including the creation of solar-powered cars and electric motorcycles. Because he was born in Yerevan and moved to California to attend Stanford, Petrosian says, "I'd like to someday bring the magic of Silicon Valley back to Yerevan."

Petrosian's aspirations may soon become a reality. In 2006, the ArmTech Congress was founded in Silicon Valley. It is an annual event that works to further the success of Armenia's high-tech industry in a dynamic, global free-market economy. Since its establishment, the congress has been held in San Francisco, Yerevan and Silicon Valley. The first congress held in San Jose was in 2009 and was attended by Prime Minister Tigran



Capt Hops

←
Cupertino Center

↓→
St. Andrew Armenian Church in Cupertino

Sarkisyan. While in San Jose, the prime minister met with Intel and Cisco to discuss business ventures and build relationships with tech companies in the U.S. That year, the keynote speakers included California State Senator Joe Simitian, Andre Andonian, the director of McKinsey & Company, Inc., and Vache Kirakosyan, the head of the IT and High-Tech Department at the Ministry of Economy in the Republic of Armenia.

At that time, the congress discussed green and renewable energy, digital media, telecommunications, the Internet, and higher education, among other topics. Each year, the discussions build upon the ideas generated from the year before. After the 2009 Congress, the prime minister hosted an elegant gala complete with a traditional Armenian dance demonstration and a piano recital.

Three years later, the ArmTech Congress returned to Silicon Valley after being held in Armenia. In Dec. 2012, Stanford hosted the Congress which united over 120 executives from the high-tech industry with Armenian government officials to discuss the future of technology in Armenia. Assisted by the United States Agency for International Development, ArmTech became connected to relevant business partners in the valley and facilitated important business-to-business meetings.

Four panel sessions discussed various topics for bringing technology innovations to Armenia. The first session talked about the high-tech industry in Armenia, the recent developments and success stories. Research, innovation and professional development were the topics of discussion in the second session with professors and directors from Stanford, the American University of Armenia and the Armenian Microsoft Innovation Center. The last two sessions discussed the business environment and investment opportunities in addition to looking ahead to the challenges the country will face while pursuing technological advancement.



This conference came at a time when determination to make Armenia a tech hub was at an all-time high. The Information Technologies Council in the country urged the government to ensure that 1,000 graduates from Armenian universities per year are trained to enter the technology work force. If the schools provide the necessary training to the students and more technology is produced in Armenia, the boost in the economy could be monumental.

Even with all these advances, it is difficult to imagine so much technology in a country known for its old world charm and long history. When I think of the Silicon Valley and Armenia, two wildly different and unrelated images come to mind. The first is of the sprawled buildings, metal, and glass of Silicon Valley where the world's leading businesses gather to exchange ideas and create the next big technological innovations. The second image is of the mountains, rolling hills and historic monuments of my motherland. The two seem to be in completely separate worlds with no ties between them. But I managed to find the point where they both intersect.



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Santa Cruz Mountains



David Baron

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Located on the outskirts of San Jose, Cupertino is a small town with the best mix of nature and technology. Apple, Inc. calls Cupertino its official headquarters and parts of the city are situated in the beautiful Santa Cruz Mountains, known for their vineyards. Steven's Creek runs adjacent to Cupertino, fed by the San Francisco Bay to the north. On a warm spring day, the tree-shaded Steven's Creek trail provides clear views of the waters of the creek.

Cupertino does not have the reputation of having a large community of Armenians because Fresno takes all the credit. Throughout the years, the perfect weather and unmatched living conditions of Cupertino convinced many Armenians to make the move from Fresno, the Midwest and the East Coast to the grapevine-covered hills and valleys of this small town. The numbers of Armenians were small, but a community was created among them. In the mid-1950s, a social group called the Armenian Society was established in order to unite the Armenians in the area. It soon became evident that a church needed to be built in the valley.

Before long, after numerous meetings at houses to organize a parish, the St. Andrew Armenian Church was established. The building is painted in a traditional orange-tan with brown tiled domes atop two steeples. A classic iron cross sits on each pointed dome. Circle-topped windows surround the octagonal towers.

The most growth for the church occurred in the '60s with the introduction of cultural activities, regular church services and an Armenian language class, all of which are still fixtures of the church today. In those early years, annual picnics were held in Menlo Park and Santa Clara Fairgrounds in San Jose. The church also sold luleh kabobs and lahmajoun at several festivals in Silicon Valley, including the Tapestry in Talent street fair, United Nations fairs at the fairgrounds and special events in Palo Alto.

In the '70s, the church became a gathering place for

Throughout the years, the perfect weather and unmatched living conditions of Cupertino convinced many Armenians to make the move from Fresno, the Midwest and the East Coast to the grape-vine covered hills and valleys of this small town.

card parties, luncheons and dinners, and parties for Mother's Day, Vartanantz (to commemorate the Battle of Avarayr), Easter, Christmas and New Year's Eve. In addition to the parties, the church organizes an annual Armenian Festival. Days leading up to the festival, a roomful of Armenian women work tirelessly to prepare cheese bouregs, kabobs and salads. The preparations remind me of every party my family has ever hosted, but on a much larger scale.

Outside, the men are tasked with erecting the booths and Armenian flags, plus roasting whole pigs on an outdoor fire. The festival is the largest production of the year, taking months to plan and days of hard work to execute. On the day of, long tables are filled with traditional delicacies, including baklava, gata, and melt-in-your-mouth sugar cookies. Red, blue, and orange bead necklaces are handed out to the children to represent the colorful Armenian flag.

The festivities last all day into the late night, just like a true Armenian party should. With a lively culture and a rich history, Silicon Valley has much more to offer than the single chip that started it all; it has a bag full of possibilities. ■

Socially Tangled



Vahram Muradyan

"What's on your mind?" has become the loaded question of today. You probably fired off a post right before you opened these pages because it was Facebook's prompt, didn't you? Well, here is breaking news we found on Twitter: social media has become the omnipotent means of communication. Feel like congratulating Kimye on their baby? Send a heartwarming tweet. Do you have a business proposition for Donald Trump? Send him a note on Facebook and who knows, you might even get fired before you are hired. Whether we want to or not, mastering new media is the new means of social adaptation. *Yerevan* magazine addresses it with the following question: "How has social media affected your life?"

Edmond Samsa
Animator
LinkedIn I am not that involved with. Facebook has been good for connecting with my friends in Armenia. They got off Odnoklasniki and now they are on Facebook, so we chat. I am not on Twitter. In terms of pros and cons it's 50/50. It's positive because it connects, but it's also negative because it creates a disconnect. People don't call each other that often. These days communication is mostly through texting, messages and emails. I don't like that because I like talking to my friends on the phone or in person. However, social media allows the element of reconnecting. I am not really that involved with social media, as you can tell. I go the classic way. I call my friends and even write them letters on paper. When I write on paper it is more authentic, my spelling is better and I don't rely on a computer to correct me. When you send a letter with paper it is so authentic, it means you took the time out of your day to write. I still like that.

Christine Chao
Executive Assistant
Social media has changed my life for worse. Basically, you don't have privacy anymore and that is inundating. People are watching your every move. I try not to post anything related to my lifestyle. The upside of it is that you get to keep in touch with friends that you don't really talk to. You kind of know what everyone is up to by just seeing their posts. Your friends get married, have kids and that wows you. Personally, I don't want people to know what I am doing.

Michelle Lee
Student
I use social media as a news source. I find out what's happening with society on Facebook. It's interesting to see how people share their information. I "like" companies or brands so I get to know what their coming promotions are. I appreciate social media and the ability to share things easily. It definitely has positively affected my life.

Marius Andryszewski
IT Professional, Disney
Social media has a profound impact on everyone's lives. We change our behaviors according to social media. We don't have to be face to face anymore. It's really easy to share everything with a group of people. It's become a habit with us to share what's happening. I am connected to so many people that I'd never be if it weren't for social media. The bad portion of it is that when you get together with your friends you don't really have anything to talk about because they already know what's new with your life, as you have already shared with them on social media. Twitter is the lifeline of the world. People immediately communicate happenings with simple messages. Social media is the pulse of the world. It is a constant news feed from everyone. Social media is cool, I am heavily invested. It's awesome!

Shervin Yousefian
Producer
It puts a microscope on your daily life and you really have to become aware of what you are portraying to the public. All that has created a world of its own. People have become semi-celebrities through social media. It has also handicapped real, personal relationships. Everyone simply satisfies that human connection with just digital interaction. Despite the drawback that I just mentioned, I wouldn't get rid of it because it is a natural part of technological evolvement by humans. Why be scared of change?

Mary Galstyan
CEO, Galsti Brand Group
Social media has definitely had a positive impact on my life. Today social media is pretty much everything. It has made me a more social person. Wherever I go and whatever I do, I can share with the world through my iPhone. I take one picture and share it instantly with my friends and family. It definitely is a positive change.

Vardan Molikian
Commercial Producer
For a performing artist, social media is a great way to promote yourself. For normal people who don't make too much money to pay for advertisement, social media is a miracle. Plus, it allows you to maintain your long-distance friendships through pictures and videos.

Danny Simonzad
Producer
I think social media is important not just for its entertainment value, but it has also increased the value of advertising. Not only do you get in touch with old friends, but you also get to see what's new. Because of social media you get to see people all across the world and how they live and communicate. It has made the world much smaller, which I think is a great thing. The downside though is that it starts taking away from your normal life. People are not going out as much and are not meeting face to face. I think society needs to balance all that out. Given the opportunity, I wouldn't get rid of social media. I think the benefits outweigh the negative aspects.

Devin Jonas
Dealer
Social media is overrated. Most of the time, you don't see people's real lives. It creates this overly exaggerated depiction of people's lifestyles. I once saw a guy in the street wearing a T-shirt: "I wish your life to be as great as you pretend it to be on Facebook." I couldn't agree more with that statement.

Andy Dugan
Social Media Strategist
Social media is my work. I make a living off it. You can find jobs, meet celebrities online and start conversations with them. You can talk to Kobe Bryant and he'll respond to you. You couldn't do that two years ago. That's about it from the professional perspective. Personally, it has taken away romance. You can't hide anything anymore. People can see everything.

Lousine Karibian
Founder, World Networks
It has completely changed my life. I've connected with people from all over the world. You used to meet people in person and shake hands, now everything is via messaging or Facebook. You can even have conferences on Facebook. I wish we had more balance when it comes to technology and interpersonal relations but it's what's happening with society and there is nothing you can do.

Leon Zakharian
Gymnastics Coach, YMCA
The fact that you can reconnect with people that you lost ties with is unbelievable. Many years ago, I worked as a gymnastics coach in Iceland. We had many close friends there. After changing countries and continents, we lost all contacts with them. When the volcano erupted in Iceland, I was worried about their well-being. I tried to call, but the old phone numbers were not in service. So I tried to find them through the Facebook. I typed my friend's name, and the first photo that popped up was her familiar face. A month later, she and her husband visited us in Los Angeles.
It was a touching reunion.

Marc Bowdry
IT Manager,
Revolt New Music Channel
Social media allows me to connect with people that I usually don't connect with and reconnect with people I would have otherwise lost touch with. It has changed the way I play and the way I work. The benefits of social media is that it keeps us connected. The downside though is that it mostly keeps us connected through electronics versus interpersonal connection with one another. You see people sitting in a restaurant, and as they are eating they are busy with their phones texting or tweeting. Overall, the change is positive. It's valuable for marketing for startup companies. Look at the value Kickstarter has with the crowd sourcing. All of that would have been impossible without social media.



ORGANIZING THE WORLD

A GRADUATE OF THE YEREVAN PHYSICS AND MATH MAGNET SCHOOL AND GURU OF THE RUSSIAN INTERNET TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY, DAVID YANG IS SOMETIMES JOKINGLY CALLED "A MAN WITH THE SHORTEST ARMENIAN SURNAME." HE IMPLEMENTED HIS FIRST SUCCESSFUL PROJECT BACK IN 1989. IT WAS THE NOW LEGENDARY ELECTRONIC DICTIONARY LINGVO. THEN THE OCR FINE READER FOLLOWED, WHICH IS USED TODAY BY TENS OF MILLIONS AROUND THE WORLD. FOR THE PAST TWENTY-SOMETHING YEARS, HE HAS COMPLETED MANY DIFFERENT PROJECTS. AMONG THEM IS THE RECENTLY-OPENED AYB SCHOOL IN YEREVAN WHICH YANG AND HIS FRIENDS HOPE WILL OPEN THE DOORS TO SUCCESS OF ARMENIA'S YOUTH.

Interview **Artavazd Yeghiazaryan** | Photo **Arnos Martirosyan**

David, you come to Yerevan less frequently and only for business.
Once a year is a must. And each time, walking around the Physics Institute, I have a special feeling. I lived here for 17 years and I know every rock – by the way, they all remained in the same places. Only now everything appears smaller – in childhood all the houses were so huge, and now they seem to be small. Yet Ararat is easily visible now. Probably because the factories stopped working, and the air is cleaner – so the industrial decline has its own advantages.

You left Yerevan in 1985. What have you missed the most?
For many years, when I lived in Moscow, I really missed the sun and fresh air. But recently my family and I moved to the suburbs of San Francisco, to Silicon Valley, where there is plenty of both. By the way, Portola Valley, where we live now, reminds me of my home in the Physics Institute neighborhood not only by its climate, but by the people as well. Only a few thousand live here, many of them are professors at Stanford, and there is a really cozy atmosphere in this town. The only problem is coffee – they don't serve Armenian coffee here or even Italian espresso, only Americano. To work around this predicament, I bought a coffee machine and started learning the art of latte – I even attended special courses.

And how is your life in America? Is it difficult to get used to a new place?
Not really. We like to travel with the family, to live in different places. I am not sure I will eventually settle in America, but for now everything is wonderful. It's especially amazing how different this country can be. For example, about ten years ago I lived for a while in Chicago. It was a rather provincial place where everything is calm and measured. But San Francisco is brimming with life. Nearly 80 percent of residents are foreigners. They are active people – engineers, financiers or businessmen, who are always trying to invent something. In Palo Alto I have a favorite café – a small, five-table place. And from every table you can hear conversations about a new business project or some news from the Stanford Linear Accelerator. You cannot imagine how pleasant it is to be immersed in this environment of huge entrepreneurial potential.

What about all your friends – don't you miss them at all?
In this sense little has changed – many of my friends work here including PhysTech alumni (the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology) and some Armenians. They are open guys, always full of ideas, always looking for potential investors. They often call me in when they want my assessment, want to be heard out. And quite often they offer promising projects in which I could participate, one way or another. But for the foreseeable future Ayb remains my priority.

"PORTOLA VALLEY REMINDS ME OF MY HOME NEIGHBORHOOD NEAR THE YEREVAN PHYSICS INSTITUTE NOT ONLY BY ITS CLIMATE BUT BY THE PEOPLE AS WELL."

The opening of Ayb came as a truly big event in Armenia last year. Do this year's results meet your expectations?
In fact, the history of the school had begun long before it was opened. We came a long way developing the concept, looking for teachers, translating textbooks into Armenian, talking with architects and raising funds. As for the intermediate results, they have already exceeded our expectations. Our purpose is to give the kids an education that will enable them to continue their studies in the best universities of the world, and then return home and become scientists, businessmen, politicians, presidents – the ones on whom will depend the future of Armenia. And I see now we are on the right track. You know, my parents gave money to support the Ayb foundation, but they had a rather vague understanding of the project before they came and met the students in person. After that, they decided to move from Moscow to teach here. My father, who once came from China to Yerevan to study, would instruct in physics and maybe Chinese and my mom would teach Chinese history.

Many of those who founded Ayb were, like you, students of the Yerevan magnet school.
Having studied in that school allowed us later to enroll in the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology and become what we have become. That is why the original idea was to come back and restore the Yerevan Physics and Mathematics Magnet School. Then it became clear that it would be difficult to invest $40 million into a public school. The investors wanted to be sure their funds remained safe. So it was decided to set up our own school.

But Ayb alone will not solve the problems of education in the country.
Of course, our goal is not to build just a school, but to create an environment. That is why from the onset we have been working closely with the Physics and Math School.

What determines the success of educational projects such as Ayb?
There are two important factors – teachers and students. In any learning environment, there should be brilliant teachers and striving students. And one does not make sense without the other. In the magnet school there was a wonderful communication with each other, spending the whole day there and, of course, the teachers were true professionals. But that's not all: succession is important too. A big role in our education was played by the alumni who came back to school every summer and taught us elective courses. Many of my peers spent that time playing soccer while we were coming to the empty school, sitting in a hot classroom, listening to stories of the older guys. But I need to say, we found time for soccer too. ▸



David Yang

David Yang was born in 1968 in Yerevan. In 1992, he graduated from the Department of General and Applied Physics at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology with the specialty "Applied Mathematics and Physics." The title of his thesis was "DSL Dictionaries Descriptive Language." In 2003, he defended his doctoral thesis on the optical character recognition of handwritten text (OCR).

In 1989, his fourth year at the Institute, he founded Bit Software jointly with Alexander Moskalev, who worked for the Institute of Industrial Technology Engineering Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In 1997 the company was renamed into ABBYY, best known for such products as OCR ABBYY FineReader and the electronic dictionaries ABBYY Lingvo. In 2001, he was listed in the directory "Who's Who" in the United States. In 2001-2002, he was announced "Pioneer of Technology" at the World Economic Forum in Davos. In 2002, he was awarded the State Prize of the Russian Federation for Science and Technology.


ГАННИБАЛ
БЕЛАЯ ГОРА
БЕЛАЯ ГОРА

I am curious, is it possible today?
Why not? Something like that is happening in Ayb right now: the senior students teach various elective courses in other Armenian schools. It is really fascinating when these students talk about their favorite discipline. Their peers from other schools like these lectures very much because it's one thing when your teacher is a grownup, and quite another when you are taught by someone of your age who is simply in love with the discipline. Looking to the future, I have no doubt that the same guys will one day come back to the home school from Stanford or MIT to share their knowledge with the next generation.

In 2000, several years before the tidal wave of social networks enveloped the world, you had presented in the U.S. the world's first pocket-sized communication computer for youngsters, Cybiko. Why did the project not advance any further?
Indeed, at the time it was an innovative idea. Boys could enter data in Cybiko on the girl of their dreams, and the program would vibrate when such a girl appeared within 800 feet. The device was popular for a few months and we sold a quarter of a million of them in the U.S., thereby creating the world's first global positioning social network. By the way, back then the term "social network" did not even exist. But the NASDAQ crisis and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 changed all the plans. I had to sell Cybiko and return to Moscow where I found myself immersed into the just-born flash-mob culture. It is a whole art of how strangers agree to act on a short script, to meet and do something with a common purpose.

You start a new project almost every year. Is it just business or something else?
I have never done business for the sake of business. On the one hand, I do what I like, but on the other hand whatever I do should change the world for the better, however little the change is. And there are a lot of people like me. Richard Branson in his book *Screw Business as Usual* gave a clear description of the role of every person in changing our lives for the better.

And what part of the world are you improving now?
Lately I have been busy with restaurants and a company called Iiko that is implementing a new organizational system for the restaurant industry.

How was an IT person drawn into the restaurant business?
In 2003, I returned to Moscow from America after bidding farewell to the Cybiko project. My house was periodically a place for parties of seventy-plus people with live concerts and performances. One day someone said, "Listen, you should stop doing this at home. Let's find a place where we can meet all year round." Ideally, it should have enough space for many. But the first café called FAQ had an area of only 800 square feet, including the back room

"I AM CONFIDENT THAT AYB GRADUATES WILL COME BACK TO THEIR ALMA MATER TO SHARE THEIR KNOWLEDGE WITH FUTURE GENERATIONS."

and kitchen, with room enough for only 90 people. But it turned out to be enough for a successful start. I promised that FAQ Café would be my first and last restaurant project, but after a while ArteFAQ was opened, then DeFAQto, then Sisters Grimm and so on. True, they have been operating without much of my participation. And I have already switched my interest to Iiko. It can still be called a startup, although it's been in business for several years. About three thousand restaurants in Russia, China, Czech Republic, Vietnam and Armenia use this system now.

And what is its main idea?
To restore hospitality, so patrons will feel welcome. It concerns all of us. Regardless of the country where we live, we all go to cafes and restaurants.

Did you think about opening a branch of one of your restaurants in Yerevan?
Of course it would be nice to open a FAQ Café in Yerevan, but it requires your physical presence – at least for six months you must go there every day, tasting food, working with the waiters. And it is not easy.

Not long ago, you opened free access to the Internet version of your book about a proper nutrition system. Does it interfere with the restaurant business?
The essence of my system is that we must forget about four products: sugar, salt, flour and "bad" fats. On the other hand, in my restaurant they serve, for example, French fries, which is totally out of sync with this principle. But I cannot just remove from the menu all the unhealthy meals. People should be given a choice. In the U.S., for example, many restaurants use an interesting system: when someone makes an order he is shown on the phone the amount of fats, carbohydrates and calories he is about to absorb.

And what are the first reviews of the book?
My father, after reading it, lost 25 pounds in half a month. The count of people who have been helped by my work is already in the hundreds. They also protect children from unhealthy products. It is obvious that everyone loves barbecue, but it all depends on whether you want to be a healthy person by age 45 or to have irreversible changes in your vascular system. I am now 44 but my weight is the same as it used to be in the 10th grade. And I feel the same.

It seems you are successful in all your endeavors. There must be a secret...
The formula is quite simple: we need to learn to complete any task we start. Active attitude, energy or willingness are not enough to change the world for the better. All of it won't matter if you do not learn how to finish the job. We need to understand that life is not as exciting as it should be, and 90 percent of what we have to do to achieve something big is routine. Great people have been saying this in different ways, but physicist James Clerk Maxwell put it succinctly: "Work, finish and publish." It is an amazingly deep phrase. Only over the years you begin to fully realize the weight of each word in it. ■

Armenian Apps

If you want to browse the Web, watch movies, learn a language while listening to your favorite radio station or play games, just lie on the couch and browse through the app store. You'll soon find out that there is an application just for you. Currently there are thousands of different apps available for Smart phones, tablets, or iPods. But the remarkable fact is that we have our own colorful corner in this miraculous world. On this page, you will find Armenian apps which will most likely be useful to our new generation.



Alphabet

The Learn Armenian application is a complex teaching tool to help your children learn the Armenian alphabet and language. They will learn all the letters in the alphabet and more than 250 words and 40 short poems. The application consists of three sections, the first of which is very comprehensive and multi-functional. A special subsection behind each letter allows users to see and hear the letter, and a corresponding image teaches them how to write or draw each letter and learn five words beginning with it. This app also offers learners an opportunity to hear and read a poem corresponding to the given letter. The last two sections are simpler. They are designed for browsing letters and looking at images of animals and objects that begin with that letter.

Media

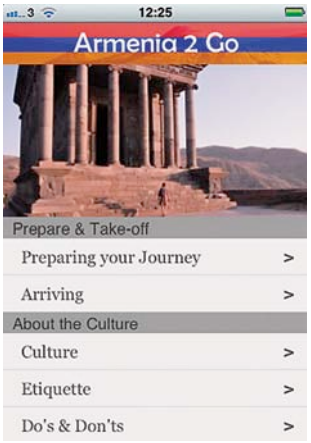
For more than a century, the Asbarez Armenian newspaper has been at the forefront of developments in the Armenian world, bringing comprehensive and up-to-the-minute news, reporting and commentary to Armenian communities around the world. With the launch of Asbarez|mobile, this media outlet widens that reach to include the significant population of iPhone users as their main tool for information and interaction. Asbarez|mobile provides its readers with the latest news from Armenia and the Diaspora as well as complete access to the Asbarez Facebook page and Twitter profile through a built-in native iPhone interface. Through the app, you can engage with Asbarez readers.





Games

Memorizing the Armenian alphabet is easy and fun with Armenian Match. This application is available for iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad users, and Android phones. Armenian Match is a fun, addicting, and educational way to become familiar with the Armenian alphabet. Whether you are fluent in Armenian or just learning, this easy-to-play card game will keep you entertained for hours. The game starts by revealing the location of the letters, which are randomly picked at the start of every game for varying levels of difficulty. Finishing the first set of tiles will take you to the second, and then the third. This game is perfect for all ages. With Armenian Match, you will also exercise your brain and develop your memory skills.



Travel Guide

Armenia 2 Go is a compact travel guide to Armenia giving you the most important travel-related information at a glance. Armenia 2 Go lets you plan your journey, gives you an understanding of the Armenian culture, and helps you get along in Armenia easily. With this application, one can learn the basics of the language including voice playback, local traditions, how to bargain at the markets in Armenian, and see pictures of Armenian coins and notes. Armenia 2 Go will answer your questions regarding Visa applications, tourist and business etiquette in Armenia, and many other helpful activities. This application is compatible with iPhone, iPod Touch, and iPad, iOS4.0 or later.



Dictionary

Powered by nayiri.com, this application gives instant access to well-respected and well-known reference dictionaries on iPhones 3GS, 4S and 5, the iPod Touch (3rd, 4th, 5th generations) and all Android mobile devices. The Nayiri is an explanatory dictionary that includes spell-checking, stemming, and a virtual Armenian keyboard as well as Taroumian fonts for Armenian letters. It translates in both directions between Armenian and English, French and Armenian. The spell-checker is in Western Armenian using traditional (Mashdotsian) Armenian orthography and ensures that none of your text documents, presentations, e-mails, or Facebook messages contain spelling errors in Armenian.



Keyboard

Ever wanted to write in Armenian using your iPhone or iPad? The solution is here: iTetr allows you to write any amount of text and use it wherever you like. You won't get confused with iTetr's design, because it is based on the familiar Notes concept. It uses a phonetic keyboard layout that is most widely used by Armenians with a whole range of special characters. There are also options for instant e-mail, language changes, saving your notes and other useful features. Designed in a style reminiscent of Soviet Armenian copy books, iTetr allows users to write in Armenian for texting, tweeting and Facebook.



Mocak Armenian Magazine

The Mocak Armenian children's magazine publishes fascinating stories, drawings and poems for children, as well as educational articles, riddles and games, all in Armenian. This meticulously crafted musical storybook has loads for kids to get into. In Little Fox Music Box, there's plenty of animation and hidden actions to uncover in scenes based on various classic songs. The magazine has a recognizable character – a little mosquito (mocak in Armenian). It is a unique opportunity for Armenian children in the Diaspora. The application is compatible with iPad. Magazine subscriptions are available for purchase inside this application. Your subscription automatically renews unless auto-renew is turned off.

Radio

Listen, dedicate, enjoy – Yerevan Nights Radio will bring you the best Armenian music from all over the world 24 hours a day. This application has comprehensive programming and a rich musical library. Music of all styles and genres and a wide array of programs for every interest are played on the air from anywhere and at any time. Unique in its nature, this application allows you to listen to Armenian music, dedicate songs and stream Yerevan Nights audio using Airplay. Listening to songs in Armenian is also an important factor in learning the language, and music helps to understand the national culture. Yerevan Nights is compatible with iPhone, iPod Touch, and iPad.



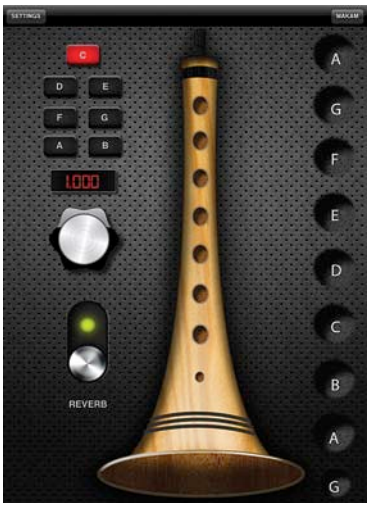


Religion

The Vemkar application places access to the Armenian Church in the palm of your hand. This is the official app of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America that aims to bring the light of Christian heritage to Armenian people across the globe. In Armenian, a "Vemkar" is the specially anointed stone that serves as a movable altar, which can be used for ritual functions in the absence of a permanent sanctuary. As a portable tablet, it allows the sacred power of the Armenian Church to be brought to people in even the most remote places. Vemkar offers daily scripture readings, a calendar of events, a prayer request function, spiritual and folk music selections, photos and videos. It is available for free download on the iPhone, Android, and iPad platforms.

Musical Instrument

Familiarize yourself with one of the oldest and most popular ethnic woodwind instruments of all time. It is believed that no other musical instrument is able to convey the emotions of the Armenian people as eloquently as the duduk. Now you can play duduk by just downloading iDuduk LT. This application will teach you the fingering guides and note reading skills required to play this instrument. The iDuduk LT also features the Drone option within the Duet Mode. Other features of the application include the Info section where you can learn more about duduk recording virtuosos such as Djivan Gasparyan and Vache Hovsepyan. One can also play other ancient Armenian musical instruments using the iShvee and iZurna applications.



The continuous development of technology has advanced society in significant ways, and while we now live on the Internet, it's time to adapt to the rapidly changing environment. In having apps geared toward Armenians, we are being progressive and staying current with these exciting new trends.



ZORINA OHANIAN:
46, is Divisional CIO, Senior Vice President for Television at Sony Pictures Entertainment.

WOMEN GROUNDING IT

Text **Joanna Buickians** | Photo **Tigran Tovmasyan**



PAMELA MARKARIAN, 33, is a creative specialist for Lockton Companies, doing graphic and web design.

MARIETTA PASHAYAN, 45, is Director of Disney Interactive's Mobile QA and Live Services of Engineering.

A degree in technology opens doors to companies and provides opportunities in today's job market. However, to this day, few women make technology a preferred field of study or career choice. In fact, women comprise less than 20 percent of the total number of professionals in IT-related fields in the United States and Western countries. *Yerevan* magazine's Joanna Buickians met with Zorina Ohanian, Marietta Pashayan, and Pamela Markarian, three successful professionals, to seek advice on how to succeed in a male-dominated, but rapidly developing field.

Joanna: Some people choose technology, others fall into it. How did you end up where you are in your careers?
Pamela: When I was at school, like everybody else I was dreaming at first to become a lawyer, doctor or FBI agent because I wanted to do something cool. But I like computer graphics, so I started taking classes and stuck to it ever since. It fits my personality because I like talking to people, and I like doodling when I'm talking or in a meeting. That's why I don't know what to do with my hands right now – usually I'm drawing or sketching, analyzing colors, pictures.
Zorina: We should give you something to draw on!
Marietta: I love engineering – numbers were my friend because I guess both my left and right sides of the brain are equally developed. I was born and grew up in Armenia. I went to school there and started my college years, graduating in manufacturing engineering. I came here with zero English and wasn't sure what to do, so I went to community college and ended up taking computer science as a major. When I graduated, it was out of nowhere an agency told me, "There is a position available. It's a temporary job, but it's something to start with. Would you like to take it?" I said 'yes' just to keep busy. So I applied for the position without knowing what I was applying for. It ended up being testing video games, and I thought: 'Really? You're getting paid for playing games? I just started with the testing process and ended up finding more jobs and decided software engineering is what I like to do. I graduated, got an additional degree from the university, and went back and started working in software development, not the quality assurance side.
Zorina: I very much fell into this. I was not looking to be in IT. If I knew I was going to be in IT, I would definitely have majored in engineering or computer science. I actually got a psychology degree.
Marietta: (Laughing) How close is that?
Zorina: Not very useful to do anything with. I was in human resources for a brief time, and then I ended up going back to get my MBA. When I graduated with an MBA, I took a job for a software company doing project management. Funny enough, I was the lowest paid person, in spite that I went to Emory. It was a great school, but almost all my colleagues ended up getting really high paying jobs, and I think I ended up getting the lowest paid job out of that school. But I think it was probably the best thing because I moved to Nashville all by myself. It was a good thing for me – I kind of grew up and fell into project management, and that pretty much kept me in IT.

> Technology is more than robots, gadgets, and Google eye glasses, it is a promising career, opening doors to leadership positions, working for Fortune 500 companies, and being a tour de force for innovation.

Joanna: Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, coined the term "leaning in," meaning women need to be more courageous and assertive in their careers and you're all in a career where it's predominately men, so how you did make yourself stand out?
Marietta: Ninety percent of where I work or anytime I go to a meeting, I will stand out because I'm the only woman in the room. Any kind of off-site meeting or outsourcing teams that I visit, I can barely count any female presence. I think Armenian women especially are strong. I take after my grandmother and mother who are the core, the intricate part of our family. They managed to go through many different experiences. My grandmother escaped from the Genocide and moved to Lebanon and from there to Yerevan, and my mom took us to the United States. Every time, they made the choices, leading the family. My father is a strong man, a typical Armenian man who has his own beliefs and needs to be the strong personality in the family; but my mom led us into things. That pushed me to become a leader in a field that is dominated by men. It was taking what I've learned, not doing it with my family, but with my job.
Zorina: It's the exact same thing for me. The men in our family were definitely the men, whatever they said pretty much was the deal, but there were always strong women. I was surrounded by my aunts, my mom and both grandmothers. We learned to be assertive, to take charge and also to be persistent. As Armenian women, we don't take no for an answer.
Pamela: Or not very lightly. We definitely fight it when it's a no.
Marietta: We do like to show our own personalities, and we will do it exactly how we feel. If I have 300 people reporting to me, it's not like I need to know what all 300 of them are doing. But I do need to understand the project so I can be ready when I'm being questioned about any of them. So that's really something that creates a strong leader – the fact that you understand the operation and are taking charge.
Pamela: When I worked for Technicolor, the women were pretty strong in their positions, even though the men were still dominant. The men would be hovering over the women because they had to fix a problem, but it was pretty cool to see women being assertive. For me, it's a creative field, so I have to blend in with the guys. I can't fight with them, but I can't let them undermine me either. Guys naturally have some sort of creative vision – they know what doesn't look good, but they don't know how to get there, so I end up knowing all the paths to get there.
Joanna: What advice do you have for women to move into technology as a career option?
Pamela: Definitely in 2013 you should have some technical knowledge. ▸



Marietta: Wherever you go, women in technology are generally overwhelmed by being surrounded by men. If they see one or two successful women around, they definitely want to take after them. I can't tell you the number of places, including Sony, where two girls were reporting to me, and when I left they sent me e-mails telling me, "I would have given up a long time ago, if I didn't have a chance to meet you and take some of the key points from you." The other place I worked, at Electronic Arts, this nice African-American lady told me, "I would have failed terribly, and I wasn't actually confident that I had skills, but you brought all my skills to life, and now I am continually going to pursue and be successful like you are." People need some sort of role model; we're not talking about celebrity role models either. I never considered myself a role model for anyone. I teach my kids to take the good stuff, you don't need everything. Give them the right direction, and if they can take that direction, you know you had an impact on that person and guided them based on your experience.

Joanna: When women want to pursue technology, for some reason or another, they often change their minds and get out of it. What do you think about studying technology?

Zorina: IT has helped me to understand business from end to end – all of the processes and all the data related to it. They say information is power. I have more information about how the business operates, and I have valued having this job in IT because it has exposed me to every part of the TV business. Because of that I have the flexibility of moving into a business role. I think you can get some of those technical skills, for example, if you join Accenture, Cap Gemini or Deloitte where they usually take you through programming so you have the basics of SQL queries. To me that would have been a sufficient path, as opposed to having majored in computer science. I would probably steer away from that, unless you want to be an architect, a field that requires a lot of experience in coding. That's probably one of the most important resources for me as a project manager – to have an architect who has the vision to build things that are technically correct. To do that, you have to have experience. Project management tends to be more flexible and even creative since you can apply it to a lot of different jobs. I did want to have the technical background. I see a



trend of not having a lot of value in that, but I don't agree with the thinking. Having some kind of technical background and business experience are transferrable skills to have. Kids today who have some basic understanding of Excel or PowerPoint, just being able to do pivot tables, are hard to find, but those people are really critical to the business because they can take data and create all kinds of views for that information. Today you can't make anything without a presentation. My point is, if you understand the business and apply some technology skills, you can move up. I see these young kids in the business who have moved up quickly because of that.

Pamela: Right now in my field, because I've been through the ringer as far as jobs go, you can't be just a designer anymore. You have to have some sort of technical side also. Before, being a graphic web designer was just a creative thing, but now, you have to know some of the back-end, so it's blending two different jobs into one person.

Marietta: Even though I do have a computer technology background, I don't use those skills any more. It's more about becoming a leader of the group, instead of becoming a developer. Whatever you have, software development skills and a degree, and you know exactly what to do, just be sure you understand the basics. And if you do want to take it to the next step, which is management and how to implement software in the right places, those are the skills that you have to learn from school. But, you don't have to stick to that; you can take the next step toward something that is closer to your heart and you are passionate about.

Zorina: I think someone who would read that, might think, "Okay, I'll get a computer science degree and I'll learn programming, and then I want to become a manager." But it's not just that. You really do have to have experience. You never want to be promoted sooner than you are ready.

Pamela: Some people are good at their jobs, but they can't manage people.

Marietta: There are leaders, managers and sole contributors. I've seen people who think they are ready for a promotion just because they've been in a field for a while. I never consider 10 years qualifying you for the next step. I've seen people in my field who've been around the same company for 15 years, and they feel they should have been ahead of you when it comes to positions. They have just been sitting there and milking the position, not improving their skills, not adjusting to change, and still expecting that they deserve this. It's not that you deserve it, you have to earn it, you have to show that you are able to go to the next step. I am dealing with mostly the younger generations in my group. Most of the test groups and leads that I deal with are young, some of them are right out of high school. You have to teach them that they have to do more than the job requirement to show that they are ready for the next level. If you do just what is given to you and never separate yourself from the pack, then you are always going to stay where you are. I always promote healthy competition. Even when I talk to big teams and hold quarterly meetings, I tell them the only way you can get to the next level is to separate yourself. You must do something that makes you stand out and see yourself as not doing just what is given to you but going the extra mile and showing you are capable of doing a bit more. That makes you ready for next position.

Zorina: There are a lot of people who come into large companies like Sony expecting sophisticated career planning and they're like, what's next for me? They're expecting someone to give them the direction, but you just basically need to step in, cross the line, take some risks and do more than what you want to do. If you just do what you're doing, then you're just the average person. You have to go the extra mile.

Pamela: Sometimes you get in trouble for it, but it's worth it.

Marietta: I think if you end up getting in trouble, then there is something wrong with the management. Most of the time, every good leader understands that going the extra mile takes them apart from the others. No company will grow if they're never striving for the extra mile.

Pamela: You definitely have to push the limits especially creatively, because some companies are pretty set in their ways. I have to wiggle my way through changing their style, updating, and I have to blend in, but at the same time I have to be assertive.

Zorina: I don't have time to stop and talk to anyone. I think it's a cultural thing. There are people who have time to take a chair and start a conversation, but I am always going. People tell me I have fire off the back of my heels because I am constantly in motion, doing something, going somewhere. I'm on a mission, and I'm trying to get something done.

Joanna: Do you think more women should go into technology?

Marietta: One thing that I know, I would still encourage them, because opportunities are ample in the software industry.

Pamela: I don't know if I would or would not agree with that. Women become catty, and technology is not catty. One, I want them to excel in a male-dominated field, but at the same time, I enjoy working with men because it's easier.

Zorina: I would definitely encourage it. Information technology gives you a lot of different skill sets that become transferrable, and there are a lot of jobs and opportunities with the economy being the way it is, you can always find technology jobs. ■

"Wherever you go, women in technology are generally overwhelmed by being surrounded by men. If they see one or two successful women around, they definitely want to take after them," says Markarian.



Abiding by the Dudes

Not since Joe Montana and Jerry Rice has there been a better duo in the Bay Area to spiral the culture of sports onto uncovered grounds than Blake and Jason Krikorian. They're not competitive athletes – anymore, but ten years ago they changed the way people watch sports – and everything else – through a device called the Slingbox. The brothers' pioneering vision became a catalyst in the media industry for delivering content over multiple screens and revolutionized the paradigm of geographic exclusivity. Where others saw frustration, they saw a blank canvas.

Text **Ara Tahmassian, Mery Khatchatrian** | Photo **Armen Poghosyan**



A shiny metal found in the American River once shifted a generation's focus out West toward San Francisco, forever changing the city and its surrounding areas. Years later, the golden nugget became a silicon chip that not only changed the area, but also the intangible world around it. Today there is a new frontier and a new generation panning for change in the river of opportunity. The new frontier can't be seen, it's everywhere you are and everywhere you aren't. Blake and Jason Krikorian have made it their business to make sure they lay stake to where you want to be.

Blake: People are experts in their current life, but it's our job as product creators to be experts in their future life. **Jason:** We are truly fortunate to live and work in the Bay Area, where we grew up. The talent and energy coming in from all directions is continuously inspiring.

Sling Media was founded in 2004 and their Emmy award-winning baby, the Slingbox, gave consumers the unique capability of watching what they wanted, where they wanted. To put the technology into perspective, the VCR gave us the ability to time-shift our media content, and the Slingbox introduced us to the concept of place-shifting it. The small brick-sized unit plugs into your home signal, allowing you to watch real time local content as if you were sitting on your comfy couch in front of the television – of course, couches were not included in the packaging. ▸



Jason: We were on the road a lot and wanted to watch the San Francisco Giants play. Usually, when we get involved in something, it springs out of experience.
Blake: Like when we can't take it anymore! Frustration is the mother of all inventions.

In 2007, Sling Media and its product line, along with their distribution operations in over 5,000 retail stores spanning eleven countries, was acquired by EchoStar (DISH) for $380 million. The Sling Projector technology became the predecessor to Apple's AirPlay and other second-generation screen applications, delivering content over multiple-screens. This was long before consumers were catching on to the idea and convenience of remotely accessing content on devices other than their home media systems.

Blake: Early on, we thought of the notion of a "cloud" – to serve as a connection point between the device, the consumer and the content. The cloud would have a conversation with all three. Our belief was that in the cloud there would be more content available from other servers, and that content would be in the Slingbox player.

Coincidently our interview takes place on a cloudy day, a little over three miles from the Bay, where dozens of unidentified flying objects are grounded, and a giant creature lurks about.

Blake: Joey! Come here.

Okay, there is no real giant and the flying objects are small-scale helicopters neatly scattered around Blake's lounge, along with other cool gadgets and toys. Joey is a four-legged fuzz-ball, and although he probably weighs less than six pounds soaking wet, he sets the tone of the interview, jumping on and off Blake and Jason's lap, and greeting our team with his nuzzling embraces.

Blake: This is Joey Lebowski.
Jason: Actually, the word Lebowski is printed on the package of every product we've ever sold, either on the inside or out.

Joey is named after the 1998 Coen brothers' cult comedy, *The Big Lebowski*. The main character is an unemployed slacker and avid bowler nicknamed "The Dude." Introduced by the narrator as the laziest man in L.A. County, he gets caught up in a case of mistaken identity and deals with certain adversities, which he refers to as "the strikes and gutters" of his life. But through it all, he remains anchored by his personal enduring philosophy that the Dude abides.

Jason: The film has had a deep cultural impact on our company. It's important not to overreact in business. Take chances, be creative, execute, but don't overreact – The Dude has that quality to him.

Lebowski is also the code name for their Sling Stream technology, which adapts to the variables affecting the wireless connection by adjusting and changing the format of the stream in real time. Basically abiding by the conditions of the stream so that it maintains at quality levels without stopping.

Blake: The Dude adds a little humor to it all; that's important – in business and in life

Blake's estate, where he lives with his wife and two daughters, is a modernly furnished 1920s home, equipped with cutting edge technology and dressed with lively art pieces like a jazzy portrait of the Caped Crusader. And sometimes, when Blake controls the functions of his home through his mobile phone, I can't help but think that this is probably how Bruce Wayne would live, leaving me wandering if there was a vehicle tucked away somewhere on the property with the functions of a Batmobile.
But there were no visible signs of such a vehicle in the backyard. Instead, two black Labradors – Sierra and Louie – ran circles around a marshmallow-colored fiberglass head; a piece by Japanese contemporary artist Yoshitomo Nara called Puff Marshie. Opposite it was a sculpture of a horse by American sculptor Deborah Butterfield. I recognized her work from the Murphy Sculpture Garden at UCLA, where Blake went to school and played water polo.

Blake: Mixing division one athletics and school is hard work; you didn't get much sympathy from the professors. It was about surviving the four years – which became five. School was so theoretical for me. I just wanted to build things. But even though I was chomping at the bit to get out, I've now realized that all the foundation came from there.

Blake studied mechanical engineering and with a classmate created the SmellBeGone -SBG 5000. It was a toilet seat with a sensor, vacuum and filter that would magically whisk away unpleasant odors. Solving such problems, and working with others to do it, is something he credits sports for instilling in him. Blake had once contemplated becoming either a veterinarian or marine biologist, and was leaning toward UC Davis, but their water polo team was sub-par, so he became a Bruin instead.

Blake: The stereotypical engineer student can be an introvert, but when your teammates are from other countries, other walks of life, your communication skills become stronger, and they complement the analytical. It's what I value in the people I work with as well. The ability to communicate effectively is important in my line of work. If you are smart but can't articulate your ideas, that's a problem. It never ceases to amaze me how incredibly intelligent some people are, yet they are blind to certain parts of business and their lives.

> Microsoft beat Google and Apple in purchasing a brainchild of id8 Group called R2 Studios, a home-automation startup. The idea came when Blake was remodeling his home.

Jason: And that's what's missing in entrepreneurship – the ability to bring people into your world. You have to be able to sell the vision in a genuine way.
Blake: I'm always looking at where the future is going, trying to piece it together. I keep pushing until I figure it out, and when I do, I have to convince others that it's going to happen. Converting an idea into a story and then raising capital, you have to be able to communicate well to do that.

If you want to raise capital, you go to Jason. Other than his wife and three kids, early team and product building is what he's most passionate about. He is the man you go to if you want to install training wheels on your startup and then guide you through the process of taking them off. He spent several years at The Boston Consulting Group, advising Fortune 500 clients in the retail, automotive and utilities sectors. Jason can guide a portfolio company across the many bridges of business in his sleep. That kind of finesse comes with years of experience as an entrepreneur, from retail inventory management to the creation of e-commerce strategies. Jason was a member of the nationally-ranked NCAA swim team at UC Berkeley and later earned an M.B.A. and J.D. from the University of Virginia. Currently, he's a general partner with the Silicon Valley venture capital firm DCM, where he backs startups that develop applications for the Android mobile operating system, also known as the A-Fund. The fund is the first of its kind and is in direct competition with the Apple's i-Fund.
With limited screen real estate, tech companies, startups and advertising agencies alike are duking it out in the mobile monetization race. Companies try to make the most use of social networks and engage the mobile platform to sell advertising, something the brothers thought of many moons ago.

Jason: In business school I needed to create a business plan, so some buddies and I thought we could get into the casino space with a mobile-connected device. Some of those ideas came from my discussions with Blake, from his time at General Magic and then Phillips.

Blake broke ground pre-Internet at General Magic, where they created the Magic Cap operating system for mobile intelligent communicators and Telescript. He assisted telecom and electronic companies such as Sony, Mitsubishi, Sanyo and others in creating new products and partnerships. In 1994, he co-founded the Philips Mobile Computing Group, funded by Philips Electronics. There he built and piloted the award-winning Velo 1 Handheld PC -Windows CE and its product line. ▸



Jason: So I went to Blake with it. I thought of a mobile device that you could walk around the casino with. You could play games, and it would monitor where you were, give you incentives and direct you to a certain part of the casino using those incentives – flow management, if you will.

This was before widespread wireless capabilities, so the brothers drew up a model that involved installing wireless transmitters in the ceilings of the casino to communicate with the mobile handheld devices.

Jason: It was fairly primitive and a great exercise, but a lot of what we imagined in that product and in that business model is taking shape now. Some of the social gambling, retail-focused platforms like Shopkick are taking advantage of the fact that consumers are mobile, and how you can influence their demand and movement.

The brothers enjoyed working together, so while Jason was at Boston Consulting, Blake founded the id8 Group, which stands for ideation – the process of creating ideas. The group became a holding company that would later be the playground for these brothers to invest and invent at their will.

Jason: I became frustrated at not having close control over product development. Blake said, 'Why don't you come back here and let's try it out?' I always envisioned working closer with products and with him.
Blake: We were not clear what it was going to be at the time, whether it was an investment vehicle, product creation and development, or a consulting company. We started Sling from there and since then id8 Group has been a good landing space where we could work on other things.

In January, Microsoft beat Google and Apple in purchasing a brainchild of id8 Group called R2 Studios, a home-automation startup. The idea came when Blake was remodeling his home. Along with renovating the kitchen cabinets, he remodeled the way people interact with their homes by teaching his house how to communicate with his phone. Microsoft thought it was a pretty cool idea, so Blake left Amazon's board late December to join their Xbox team as the corporate vice president of their Interactive Entertainment Business – with plans of evolving the gaming console to a home-hub with broader capabilities.
From their first shot at entrepreneurship – teaching swim lessons – to inventing the Slingbox so they can watch their favorite team play, it's undeniable that sports have impacted their lives. Their younger brother Adam coached the U.S. Olympic women's water polo team to a gold medal in London last year. So it was interesting to see what their take would be on a controversial decision the San Francisco 49ers head coach made last year to bench quarterback Alex Smith, who was having the best season of his career, for the younger Colin Kaepernick.

Jason: Business and sports are a lot alike. People criticize business moves and strategy in the media, but it's just guessing from the outside. Sometimes the right move is emotionally unsettling, whether promoting someone over someone else or replacing someone due to performance. But it's never a fun thing because people have families.
Blake: Many of these decisions fall in a grey area. If you are just looking at the data, then you are going to start Alex Smith again, who just came off two of his best games from a statistical point

of view. If you are deep in it, then you are able to see something that perhaps allows you to unlock potential. No one knows what the next wave is, but you can't just look at forecasts and data. Either way, it was a gutsy call.

Jason: I see many entrepreneurs think about stuff a lot – the positives and negatives around strategic moves and decisions, where they are tangled in a cycle. You should have a bias toward making a decision – then push forward and go. Like with Sling, we timed our exit very well. It was at a time when the Dow was up to levels we recently touched. We did not know that was going to be the case. Had it been a few months later the opportunity would not have been as such, since the meltdown followed soon after.

According to the entrepreneurs, taking chances in other aspects of life translates into business. Jason confessed that he wished he had more musical abilities. As his seven-year-old son George ventures into the world of the ukulele, he practices with him.

Jason: I can see why people get so addicted to music. As poorly as I play, I find it meditative and consuming in a positive way. I wish I could play something meditative for you, but at my musical level, it might have an opposite effect.

Blake: We are at a point when music fidelity has gone down, and high quality sounding music is not appreciated, with MP3s and the like. It could easily evolve.

Jason: As a kid, I remember shooting baskets in the backyard listening to Sir Duke – real funk and soul music. When I had kids, Van Halen turned into Van Morrison. Adam, who is younger than me, said he gets his music taste from me, which is funny because I got mine from Blake, who is the oldest.

Blake: I was into rap before it was big, back in The Sugarhill Gang days. Then I got into Led Zeppelin, Loue Reed and the Velvet Underground – some alternative and new wave punk. But Bob Marley, The Clash and the Chili Peppers are my favorite.

Jason: We have gone through a transition period of prioritizing convenience with digital formats and streaming. More access is a huge step forward for people to enjoy music. But there will be a bounce back to the quality you get from records. The problem is that the economics of music are not great right now. Music services are not high margin.

Blake: Neil Young is working on a project to push higher quality of music. We've gotten together a few times, and it sounds great.

Jason: The intersection of health and the consumer is another interesting field. People want to take personal and social responsibility for their own health. The same way people began recycling cans to say, "I'm doing what I can." Social responsibility paired with economic incentives combined with technology that enables you to track your own health. That would be cool, especially if it's wrapped up in an interesting experience.

> If you want to raise capital, you go to Jason. He's the man you go to if you want to install training wheels on your startup and then guide you through the process of taking them off.

Many tech greats work odd jobs before they build their empires. Mark Cuban sold garbage bags to pay for basketball shoes. The Krikorian brothers taught private swimming lessons and mowed lawns.

Jason: I'm not sure if we were mowing the same lawns.

Blake: I think I sold my business to him.

Jason: Ha! I think you might have even left some gas in the mower. Later, in graduate school, I became a reseller for a suit maker out of New York, called Hickey Freeman. I saw the demand among my peers and gave it a shot. I didn't really make a lot of money, but I was able to subsidize my own suit purchases.

As inventors, entrepreneurs, executives and family men, the brothers continue to better themselves by finding new problems to fix, improving on the mundane, taking chances and having fun through the process. You get the feeling that success hasn't inflated their egos, it has only put them in a closer position to have a deeper impact on technology and humanity, as both fields seem to approach each other at rapid pace. From our vantage point it looks like all three brothers turned out all right, so who's to blame for that? It's probably their parents, Gary and Joyce Krikorian.

Jason: Because we have enjoyed a fair amount of success, people always ask us about our parents, if there is a secret. But the truth is that there isn't. I never felt pressure to perform. Certainly we had to get our jobs done, but no pressure to excel in school, sports or business. Success wasn't the expectation. There was an expectation on the process and the effort. I value the fact that I didn't get those pressures. It made us more comfortable to take risks, because we weren't so concerned about the result. You should be happy in the process and effort, and we're happy.

Blake and Jason had flights to catch, and all that running around meant Joey Lebowski was ready to take a nap. So our team said our goodbyes, and just before the gate closed, I looked back beyond the garden and thought I saw the silhouette of a Krikorian Batmobile, but perhaps it was just the San Francisco fog and my wayward imagination running amuck. ■

optimized reality

Tony Adam, the former Director of Online Marketing for Myspace and now the CEO of the hottest event-planning firm in Los Angeles, has no plan to stop creating. His expertise with establishing startups makes him a trailblazer that a whole generation of entrepreneurs can follow.

Text **Patrick Bairamian**



In a tech savvy generation, we find ourselves akin to a certain computer lingo that might otherwise be interpreted by older generations as the jargon of the young generation. Some words like: "emoticon," "hashtag," and "subreddit," are common terms used in the modern Internet sphere as well as in daily conversations. But when terms like: "boilerplate," "search engine optimization (or SEO)," and "web crawler" are used, most of us react like a question mark has been stamped onto our foreheads. It's times like these that we need hybrid friends from both the realm of technology and laymen-terminology to explain to us what the relevance of SEO is in our daily lives. That's where Tony Adam comes into the picture.

Adam is the type of expert you want to explain things about technology to you. He's the kind of guy you would sit down to enjoy a beer with, while he tells you what digital marketing is all about. He doesn't use industry terms or complicate a dialogue by impressing you with words that seem to be derived from a *Star Trek* episode. He takes complicated ideas that are "Greek" to us and makes them understandable.

What drives Tony's expertise is the idea that things in life should be free of complication, and that problems that could be solved, should be solved, without any shades of grey. His independent thinking was forged while he studied computer science at Mt. Sierra College while working as a telemarketer, earning little more than $7 an hour. "The first time we had a computer at home," Adam started, "I managed to find a way to break it by taking it apart to find what made it tick. After that, I always had an interest in computers."

That interest turned into a college degree, and from there Adam found himself working for Fame 1 Computers, an IT firm that leases office computers to companies. While at Fame 1, he became transfixed, searching the evolving social media and marketing arena for better solutions to drive higher traffic to Fame 1's website. It was there that Adam went from computer science graduate to digital marketing expert, increasing traffic to the site by earning a top rank in Google's search results. "SEO at its basic level is showing up in Google's results organically," says Adam. "The more relevant you are, the more you show up on search results. SEO means mastering two things – relevance and authority. If CNN is linking to you, that means they are vouching for you. You want to be a prom king and prom queen to Google, so that the more people link to you or are talking about you, the more traffic you're getting and your SEO rises."

EventUp has grown from an idea that was written on paper just over a year ago to a nationwide digital showroom of venues. Currently, EventUp operates in nine major-metropolitan cities nationwide.

The New Face of Online Marketing

Soon, Adam's skills in social media marketing caught the eye of PayPal where he was hired as a project manager, leading over 400 successful marketing campaigns for the company. Adam would go on to work at multiple tech companies and Internet giant Yahoo! before becoming the Director of Online Marketing for Myspace.com. While at Myspace, his leadership led to increased traffic to the then social media goliath by one million users per month. "At Myspace, the authority had already been built. People knew about Myspace, but we still had to be more relevant as other platforms started to pop up," said Adam, referring to the advent of Twitter and Facebook creeping up on Myspace's popularity as a social media platform. "So the challenge was to work with the engineering teams to allow for broad marketing that would save time and capture users. We started changing how pictures were tagged, how links were titled, how music was marketed," said Adam. "After all of these changes, we immediately saw the traffic increase to one-million users a month." Curious about the simplicity of how changing the title of a picture could increase traffic or "clicks," I pressed Adam to elaborate. He referenced his time working at Yahoo! headquarters as their SEO manager. "For instance, at Yahoo! games, we would change links that read "click-here," to "Free online games," then two months later, we saw an increase of traffic so significant that we ranked third when anyone would type 'online games,' into their search engine." When asked what it is about search-engine optimization and digital marketing that drove his passion to succeed, he stopped with a chuckle, as if asked why he breathes. "It's really quite simple. When I see a problem, I want – no, I need to fix it. I can't deal with inefficiency," Adam says. "If I see something that needs to be fixed, all hands are on deck to fix it. If someone stands in the way of progress because they're lazy, progress that will make something simpler for people to use, I'm going to remove them from my path. I want to see growth. At a company I worked for, BillShrink, I increased their online traffic by 400 percent because it was my duty to do so. No bureaucracy, just growth and progress."

Not to be Held Down

It would come as a surprise to readers that Adam left Myspace's marketing department after little over a year with the company. Where was the marketing master to go? Perhaps to Facebook, YouTube, or any other social media sites that would be eager for his expertise. Not exactly. Would you believe event planning? In a sense, that's what happened.

In 2012, after nearly fifty investment pitches, rejections and a persistence that would make Sisyphus blush, he founded

his startup: *EventUp.com*, a company that specializes in reinventing event planning by creating a digital showroom for venues. The website offers current rental rates, dates of availability, floor plans, contact information, ample detailed photographs, and if requested, a complimentary venue specialist to help you plan your event, in case it wasn't easy enough with the website's interface. The website hosts venues for anything from weddings and art shows to company getaways or just a venue to rent out with friends to party. But, why? Why after becoming fluent in SEO, mastering digital and Internet content marketing, would the tech-marketing leader himself turn to a project like EventUp?

"I saw a problem," begins Adam. "One day my friend was talking about how her mother used to rent her ranch in Santa Barbara for weddings during the summer. Then the light bulb went off." That light bulb became a business plan. As he spoke to more florists, cake designers, brides to be and wedding coordinators, he was invigorated with everyone's desire for a solution to the nightmare that finding a venue had become. But weddings were only the tip of the iceberg.

"While I worked at Myspace, I would set up IT dinners with professionals and friends. Something like thirty people would attend every time I hosted one. So I asked myself, 'Why does EventUp have to only be limited to weddings. Why not all types of events?'" And so, after spending the first six-months of the concept's creation in his office refining his idea, planning the marketing and eventually pitching the business plan to countless conference rooms filled with potential investors, Adam created his ground-breaking company.

When asked why event planning was his problem to solve, the young entrepreneur answered without hesitation. "It is a real-world problem. People are going to host events...there's no question about it." I pressed him again, stating that his background in digital and media marketing didn't seem to connect to event planning. "It's not necessarily about doing something you know," stated Adam, "That's the fun of it, you learn something new. I'm not an event planner, but I saw the difficulty people were having with finding venues, and I thought 'this is a real problem.' We get 50 real leads a day, and we're not even marketing this to its fullest. When people demand a service to make life easier, as an entrepreneur, who am I to refuse?"

EventUp has grown from an idea that was written on paper just over a year ago to a nationwide digital showroom of venues. Currently, EventUp operates in nine major-metropolitan cities nationwide, with the headquarters based in Santa Monica. Some of Los Angeles' most notable locations are featured on the front page with venues such as Club Nokia, Marylyn Monroe's 'Devoe house,' Frank Lloyd Wright Jr.'s Hollywood mansion, and the Disney Concert Hall topping off the list.

> "You have to realize that good investors are expert businessmen. They've got more than money to put into your idea. They put their time, experience and network into your toolbox," says Tony Adam.

The Man Behind the Title

I wondered what it was like in the typical day of a CEO of a startup company. Adam starts with a laugh. "Everyday is anything but typical here," he states. "There are a countless number of tasks that need to be done daily, and you find yourself burning through hours without even noticing." Looking around the office, one could tell that the company is new. The painted walls have a crisp tone to them, as the reflection from the purple accent wall makes the wooden floors and desks that fill the main workspace of the office warm with a lavender tint. One turn past the kitchen indicates the abundant caffeine being consumed as spent coffee filters fill the trash bin, and the smell of delivery Styrofoam plates suggests the dedicated workers focus more on their work than their diets. Yet, such is the startup culture. "Even before I walk in the door, I look through my phone and see a long list of emails," says Adam. "After I finish with the emails, I usually have back-to-back meetings with staff, our marketing manager, sales manager..." he takes a breath with a smile. "It's just – different, everyday. This last week I've been setting up our new sales team while compiling the monthly portfolio update for our investors."

Investors are necessary for any type of large-capital business, but they are the crème de la crème for startups. "They don't just invest their money," says Adam. "You have to realize that good investors are expert businessmen. They've got more than money to put into your idea. They put their time, experience and network into your toolbox." Compiling monthly data reports with percentages riddled across accounting reports are one of the many tasks he does as CEO. "People think that being a CEO is glamorous," Adam laughs. "They don't understand it's not a title given loosely."

Sitting down to interview Tony Adam was exacting at times, with the buzzing of his phone indicating an urgent email or phone call that he would politely ignore, looking up with a smile to continue our chat. The EventUp CEO explains how for the past week he has been building the Los Angeles office's new sales team. "I started out with making sales calls myself, calling venues, and taking down leads from customers." After the incubation period is done, he will gradually transfer all sales management to his newly hired VP of Sales. It's safe to say that he doesn't sit around his office and plan golf matches between fellow business owners and CEOs , as most people interpret the life of executives to be. "Anyone can print business cards with their name,



title and become a CEO. But until you're willing to put your hand in every jar, and work beyond what you think you're capable of, you're not doing much other than pretending."

Never Forgetting One's Roots

As the son of Armenian immigrants, Adam is no stranger to the Armenian lifestyle and culture. "I've always held the culture close to my heart; in some ways, it's what drives me to succeed in life." Asked to elaborate, Adam continues. "The fact that our ancestors survived the Genocide and moved here, created a life for us, allowed us to live in peace and gave us a chance at prosperity, should be a resounding force that should encourage us to succeed and make something of ourselves," Adam says with conviction. "If there is one thing I've learned through all my years as a project manager and entrepreneur, it's that if you want something in life, you have to take it – no one is going to give it to you."

Could something be done in the Armenian community to help refine the entrepreneurial spirit and unite the creative minds was the question. "We absolutely need a network. Look at the Harvard Alumni Association. They connect and are informed of each other's work and needs," he says. Adam points to a desk beyond the conference room we are sitting in. "I just hired Natalie, my new VP of Sales. She's Armenian, but I only heard about her through a friend." I asked if he hired her because she was Armenian. "The fact that she's Armenian made me smile, but no. She's a worker and very dedicated to succeeding. As much as I love to support Armenians, we need to support each other because of our skills and talents, not just rely on being Armenian. We are smart, we're more than survivors, we're innovators. Why settle for anything less?"

While talking about the young Armenian community and the new generation's opportunities, he shares a piece of advice that one would expect from an older brother to his siblings. "You have to follow your passion, otherwise any job makes money. It's about what you want. If something doesn't work, change it. Don't settle."

When asked what his parents think about his path from computer engineer to entrepreneur, he mentions an all-too-familiar response that most Armenians can relate to. "Armenian parents want their kids to be doctors, lawyers or any of those conventional professions. So when I went into computer science, my mom saw it as the same thing. When anyone would ask her what I did, she'd tell them, 'Tony is a computer doctor.'"

Tony Adam may not have a medical degree from Johns Hopkins, but his ability to diagnose a problem and treat it with surgical precision is a skill that describes the very essence of the American entrepreneur. Although his career has seen success as a project leader, digital marketing pioneer and an all-star entrepreneur, he has no intention of reaching for a nine-to-five office job anytime in the near or distant future. "At the end of the day, I didn't become an entrepreneur for the money. You don't become an entrepreneur for the money; you do it because you're a problem solver. And I love solving problems." ■





SILICON ARMENIA

Armenia is hard at work establishing itself as a country with a strong technical talent to invest in. The Soviet Union left a university environment strong in mathematics and engineering, talent that is scarce in today's economy. Synopsys, Microsoft and VMW are already in the country, and others like Disney and IBM are opening offices or offshore locations. Though these larger companies have subsidiaries in Armenia, the Diaspora is coming back to open offshore development centers to service companies in United States, Europe and even India, a known leader in offshore development. At the same time, Armenia is also growing as a place where repatriates from the Diaspora as well as the locals are capitalizing on the exciting startup industry in the country. Investors from Silicon Valley, Europe and other places are pouring money into the ideas of young entrepreneurs to make a global impact on the world economy.

Text **Joanna Buickians** | Illustration **Gegham Vardanyan**

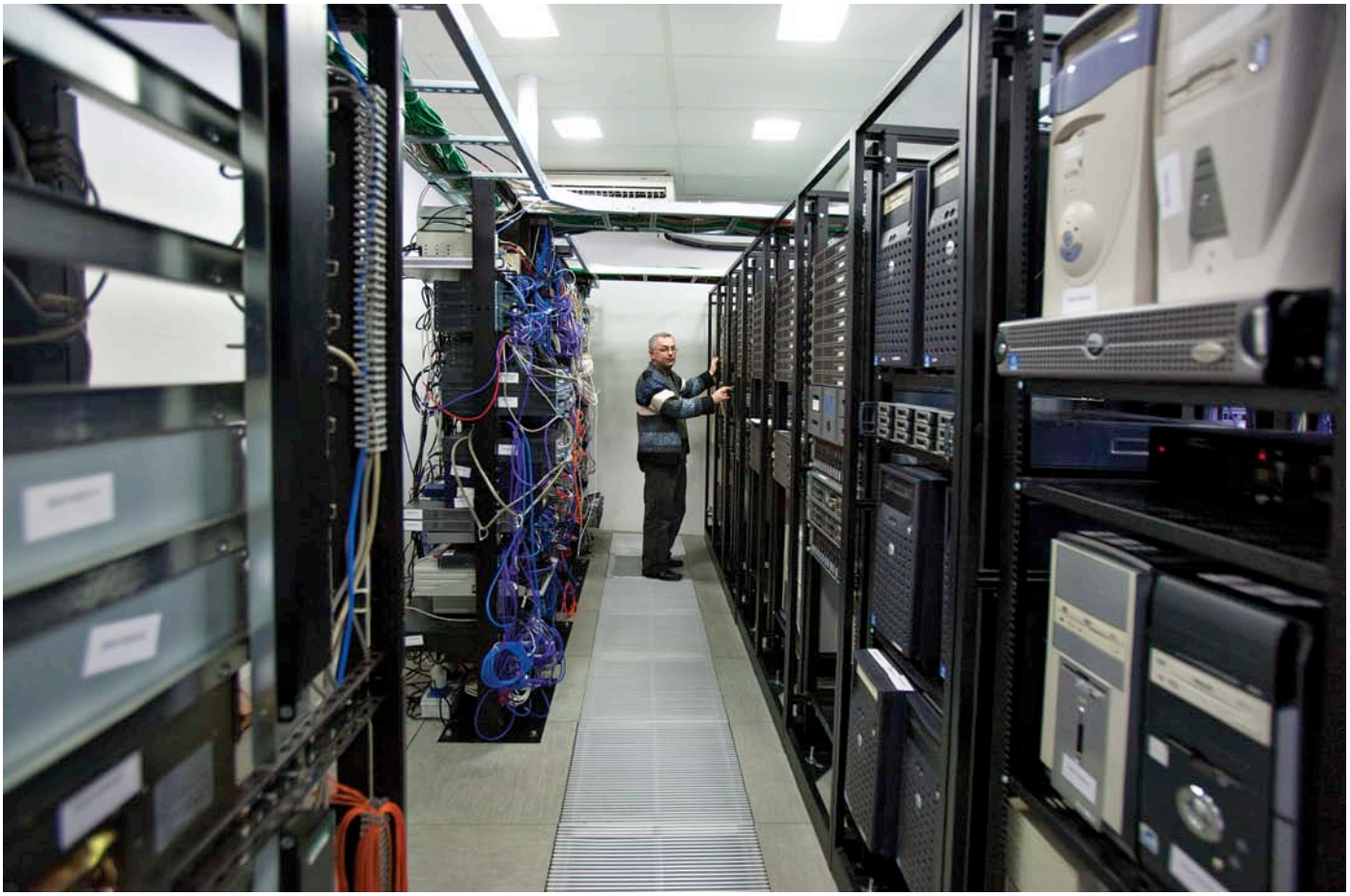
Startups: Key to Growth

According to the World Bank, Armenia has seen a growth of 27 percent in its compound annual growth rate from 1998-2010, with the demand for technology services being a major contributor for that growth.
The past ten years have shown the country is hard at work in bringing some serious changes. In December of 2012, Armenia's Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan made a visit to CalTech, Silicon Valley and Harvard University to start conversations and actions to bridge the gap between the technology industry in the United States and Armenia. Currently, Armenia has active trade relations with the European Union, Russia and the United States, a motivating reason for the Prime Minister to attract companies. Historically, Armenia was the high tech research center of the Soviet Union. Since that time, the country has continued to maintain the same standards of education, which is one of the driving forces of the country in attracting investors.
In fact, recently the country's startup industry has been receiving attention and investments from foreign and native entrepreneurs who are looking to make an impact on the global high-tech field.
Plug and Play Tech Center, a business accelerator headquartered in Sunnyvale, California, started a program with Armenia at the end of 2012 to connect Armenian founders with Silicon Valley. Jupe Tan, the head of International Programs and Initiatives for Plug and Play, is focused on providing an opportunity for companies outside the United States to gain access to venture funding. "Since 2009 we have accelerated around 100 startups per year, mostly companies from Canada, Austria, Chile, Brazil and other parts of Europe," he stated in an interview. He compares Armenia to Estonia and Singapore – countries smaller in size and more open to adopting policies that attract talent and propel business growth. "Plug and Play is in a good position to help build the bridge and move the IT industry from a more traditional outsourcing model to high tech startups," he stated.
"Silicon Valley definitely does not have a monopoly on the best ideas, so in the last two to three years we have expanded our international operations and initiatives, investing more in international startups," said Tan.
Although Armenia has a physical presence in the Valley, they have just started putting the relationship into action, hoping to see more companies coming over in the latter part of 2013.
Opportunity is abundant in Armenia, and it is the reason many Armenians who have left the Motherland for other ventures are moving back to the country, along with next generation Armenians from the Diaspora. Raffi Elliot, 24, who is half Armenian, half Canadian-Irish, is from Montreal, Canada. He moved to Armenia in 2011 with a Belgium-based



Opportunity is abundant in Armenia, and it is the reason many Armenians who have left the Motherland for other ventures are moving back to the country, along with next generation Armenians from the Diaspora.

think tank called European Friends of Armenia, where he was a research fellow. He stayed in the country for the fellowship and decided not to leave when his contract was over. Thinking of what to do next, he went through several ideas deciding that natural resources were scarce so that was out, as was import/export because it can get overly complicated with customs. In September 2012, he discovered Armenia Startup Cup, the first-ever national competition where startups showcase their companies. "I submitted a proposal for an Armenian technology startup and ended up being a finalist, but didn't win." His proposal was the reason he stayed in Armenia. Though he was only a runner up, he decided to start his company, Nest Innovations, full time with his partner Hagop Kazanjian, a twenty-five-year-old Armenian repatriate from Syria.
According to Eliot, Nest provides web servicing, search engine optimization (SEO) management, inbound marketing, website maintenance, and aims



to support "every small and medium enterprise around the world, with the same quality and friendly service, providing services in up to six different languages with lightning fast response times." Raffi Elliot's mother was the inspiration for his idea. "My mom's total incompetence in the IT field was the inspiration. Being a very savvy businesswoman, she runs two dental clinics, but she can barely use a cell phone, let alone a computer," he said. Taking note of how busy she was running her businesses, how she had minimal time to manage a website and did not want to pay someone $2,000 per month to manage it, he thought of starting a company that would support small companies, paying him $50-100 per month to run, operate, and market their company websites. He also adds, "This is a great way to interact with Armenia, instead of blindly giving away money to charities." So, another motivator was to provide job opportunities to Armenians who want to stay instead of leaving for other countries.

Raffi Elliot is not alone in his repatriation and business startup in Armenia. There are many Armenians repatriating to the country to start businesses and bring some serious change to the country. Nigel Sharp, 28, half British and half Armenian, moved to Armenia three years ago through Birth Right Armenia. "I was placed at Tumo Center in Yerevan, a nonprofit center for kids to learn digital animation, web design, game design and digital media." Through a host of events like TEDx that are held at Tumo Center, HyeTech is an organization that brings Silicon Valley entrepreneurs to visit Armenia and hosts Arm-Tech, an international conference for Armenians in the high-tech industry. Noticing the buzz of innovation, Nigel Sharp said, "Everybody was saying one thing – now is the time to start in the technology business and get stuff done."

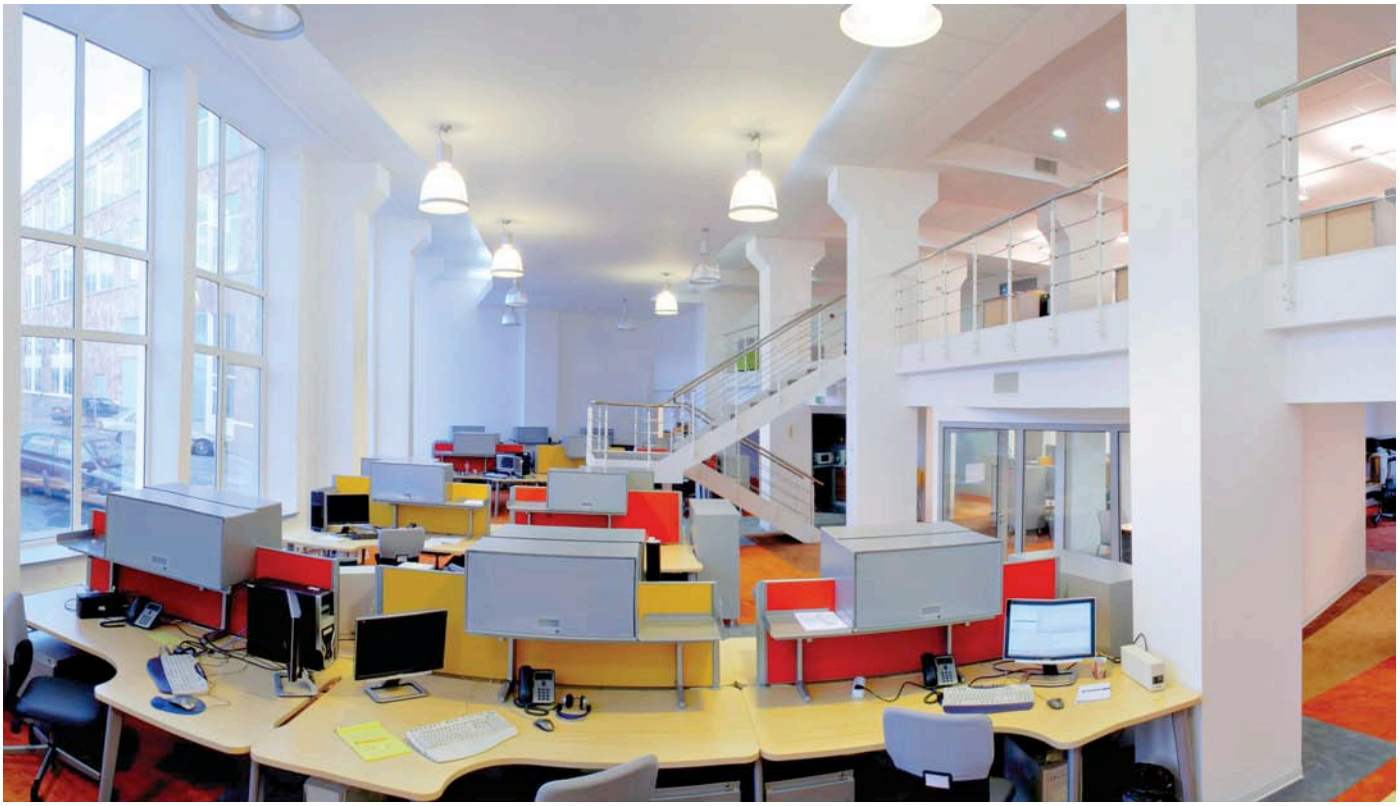
Sharp, along with a few of his colleagues from Tumo Center, decided to launch their company, Lion Sharp Solutions, in November 2012. The team consists of four people, including Sharp; Lilit Revazian, a designer with a background in educational coaching; Gevorg Hovesepyan, a systems engineer; and Alessandro Mambelli, a robotics engineer, an Italian transplant who moved to Armenia after meeting Nigel Sharp at Kings College in London during their graduate studies program. Mambelli helped set up the biggest robotics lab in Armenia at the Tumo Center, according to Sharp. After deciding to start their company, the four colleagues met in Sharp's living room. "While we were sitting there brainstorming ideas, we got so frustrated because somebody had to keep getting up and writing ideas on the white board. I joked with the team, 'Wouldn't it be cool if we just spoke to the white board and it wrote the words down

as we said them and then we could pick this stuff up, move it around and save it after we spoke it?'" Though Nigel Sharp was joking with the team about the idea, it became a real option when they were looking at what ideas to present at a startup pitch event in Armenia. "We pitched our idea, called 'VoiceBoard,' and developed it as the world's first interactive brainstorming platform." They won first place and were given the opportunity to pitch their idea to Eleven, a Bulgarian accelerator venture fund, who decided the idea was worth investing in. They selected VoiceBoard over 300 teams from around the world for first-stage acceleration investment equating to $32,000.

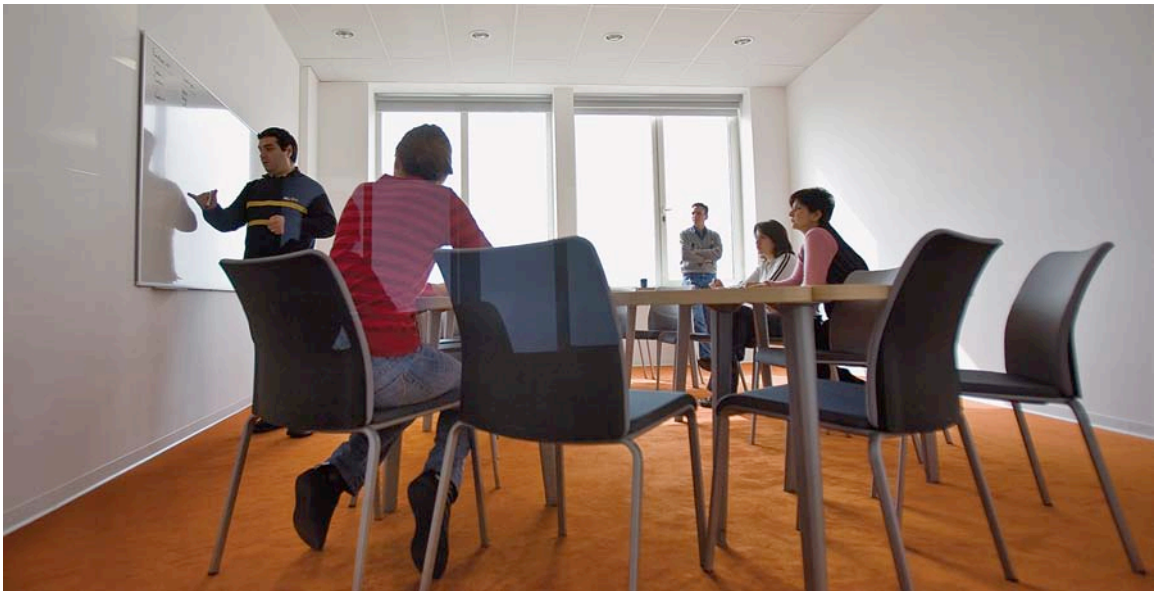
Armenian citizens who left to go other places are returning home to work on their own ideas. Armen Kchachikyan, 24, launched a startup while studying for his masters degree in information technology at Hong Kong University. He started TweetHood, an iPhone application that allows you to get information from people who are tweeting near your area. He started the company with three other friends, each in different locations, unexpectedly receiving requests for 3,000 downloads in eight months with no advertising. "I'm not impressed by those numbers. I'm not focused on it full time as we are working on another version, localizing it for some countries," stated Kchachikyan in an interview. He was not expecting so many of the people using his app to be from the Middle East, with the current numbers of 60-70 percent of download users coming from Saudi Arabia.

When asked what the benefit of using TweetHood is over using Twitter, which allows you to use hashtags (#) to connect with others, he stated, "Some people don't use hashtags and don't know what they are at some events." By using his app, users will be able to

Armenian citizens who left to go other places are returning home to work on their own ideas. Armen Kchachikyan, 24, launched a startup while studying for his masters degree in information technology at Hong Kong University.



Synopsys Inc.



Synopsys Inc.

see who is in their area, and what they are tweeting about. His company won the Best Media Project at a Microsoft-sponsored event in Armenia called Hackathon [YAN]. The company is working on a version that will localize their content for the new regions that are following them, which should be released sometime this year.

Being away from Armenia for a couple years showed Kchachikyan the changes that happened while he was away. "I was surprised when I came back. There are a number of people interested in startups." He is especially proud of an Armenian company called PicsArt that started out in Yerevan but is currently located in Mountain View, which has given Instagram good competition for photo-editing on phones. The company has over 500,000 "likes" on Facebook and according to their website has processed over 35 million downloads in its first year, with a growing 3 million downloads per month. Kchachikyan has not yet decided to leave his day job as a programmer for AtTask, a Software as a Service (SaaS) company, to work on his company full time, but hopes that he may gain as much success as PicsArt has in the coming years.

Startups, a growing buzzword in the world today, can be compared to the Internet boom in 2000, and are being taken very seriously in Armenia as well as all over the world.

Outsourcing as an Economy Boost

In the past, Armenia has not been the most popular business destination. Yet the past few years almost seem like a jolt to the economic system with new startups growing, foreign companies moving in and the demand for Armenia's technological outsourcing services burgeoning. With 45 percent of the population between the ages of 25-54, the country is aggressively attempting to bring foreign companies in. "IT has become the "it" profession in the last decade for students in Armenia," says Hasmik Gharibyan, Ph.D., Professor of Computer Science at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

Dr. Gharibyan has taught for 15 years in both the United States and Armenia. Her studies have focused on why there are more women studying computer science in Armenia than in the United States and the differences between the two countries' educational systems. "Though it has been 20 years since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Armenian education has been guided by Soviet standards, so the same system is used today, which is profoundly theoretical and analytical. Armenian students and young people are very capable. Sometimes they are even stronger than the professionals in the US because they have greater knowledge of theory and mathematics. I think they are very bright, innovative and creative," she says, not hiding her bias toward Armenian students. "It can be extremely profitable for a company to outsource work here to people who are eager to be paid for work that they can easily do. It would be beneficial for both sides."

Culture and cost are other strong factors that attract outsourcing companies. Armenia is not alone in pursuing outsourced technical work. India has been at the helm of the software industry since the early 1980s, which has advanced their educational system, brought foreign investors into the country and created more jobs. In a similar way, Armenia is working toward the same goals with cheaper labor, an advanced educational system and a Diaspora that brings increasing amounts of business back to the country.

"Armenian developers will work for five to ten times less the cost of local US developers," says Vahram Gasparyan, founder of Brain Hunters, a software consulting firm providing technical talent to companies inside the United States since 2009. Although Gasparyan is originally from Armenia,

he studied for one year in the United States. He explains, "Armenia is a little country and currently cannot compete against India with its greater outsourcing potential and already-established outsourcing industry." Yet, he doesn't give up the pursuit of making Armenia stand out as a competitor to India, believing that first, second and third generation Armenians may be coming back to the country. Using his consultants as foot soldiers in companies, he makes sure they do their best job and "leave a lasting impression that will make the company owner or manager say, 'we want more people like those Armenian guys.'"

Although companies of all sizes, from giants like Microsoft to small startups are moving their engineering departments to Armenia or opening subsidiaries in the country, one hurdle that faces them is publicity. Many people have not heard of the country's business potential. LeisureLink, a Pasadena startup company servicing the online vacation rental market, moved its user interface design team to Armenia through a company introduced to the firm by one of their venture capitalists.

"I didn't know much about Armenia prior to our initial starting," says David Vitko, chief technology officer of LeisureLink. Vitko states that most people's reaction is curiosity and then enlightenment when he shares his experience. "When I tell someone I am outsourcing work to Armenia, they're like 'Really?' It's not the first place you think of when you think of outsourcing. Number one, it's not a very big country; two, it's in a sometimes tough part of the world; and three, there's just not a lot of exposure to Armenians in general unless you live in Los Angeles."

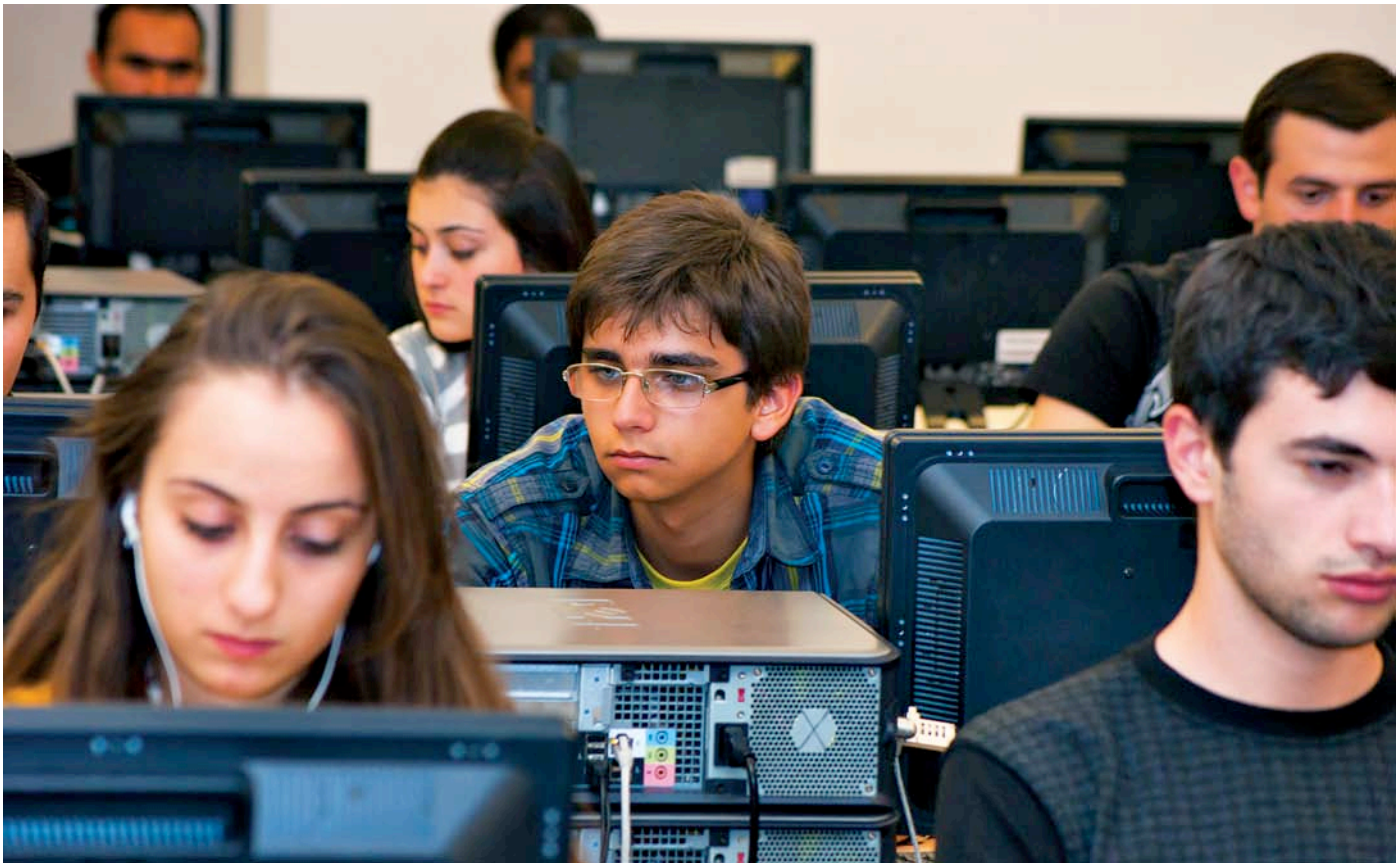
Armenians in the Diaspora, recognizing the window of opportunity to use the existing talent in the country, are working hard to bring businesses back. Dr. Zarik Boghossian, whose experience includes over 27 years of developing technical solutions with billion-dollar companies, started development offices in Armenia in 2005, while working as the head of technology for Integrien, a company later acquired by VMWare. Dr. Boghossian attributes cost as a factor in his decision to move off shore, but says the strong available pool of talent was the main reason to move operations to Armenia.

Though he has been working in Armenia for the past eight years, Dr. Boghossian echoes some of the same comments on the culture as David Vitko, "Armenian developers ask questions about the requirements for developing technologies; they dive deep into the logic and give you options. They are not shy about challenging and questioning." Companies have learned that having a cultural understanding is a huge part of successful outsourcing. Dialogue about projects is an important part of the innovation process. Armenians have the reputation of asking questions and delivering solutions. The Indian government has also realized the advancement of Armenian developers and worked with the Armenian government in launching the Armenian-Indian Center for Excellence in Information and Communication Technologies (AICEICT), a training center at Yerevan State University. Still, the manpower is a huge advantage for India. "They have millions of developers versus thousands in Armenia," Dr. Boghossian states.

On one hand, Armenia's culture of intellectual curiosity and strength is a strong reason why companies are setting up research centers there. On the other, Armenian brain power is also a reason why companies are enticing some of the talent away from Armenia.

On one hand, Armenia's culture of intellectual curiosity and strength is a strong reason why companies are setting up research centers there. On the other, Armenian brain power is also a reason why companies are enticing some of the talent away from Armenia. "Software developers often leave to work for Microsoft or Google in Europe or the United States, and because every Armenian has at least someone they know in the US, it is not a problem on the emotional side," Dr. Boghossian explains. Yet, although this might sound negative, it actually could be a positive thing for the developers as it demands they get paid well enough to stay in the companies they're working for. "You have to pay them reasonably high salaries, and when you keep them working for an international company, if they can travel enough, and if they love their environment, they will want to stay," he continues.

"Armenia is not so much an outsourcing destination, although we have outsourcing as well, but we have excellent engineering schools that teach software development, IT research and the development of different international companies," says Karen Vardanyan, Executive Director of the Union of Information Technology Enterprises (UITE), who adopted the name Silicon Armenia in conversation.



Synopsys Inc.

Armenia has a strong backbone in engineering and mathematics which is used to fuel the country's R&D. Originally a hydro-engineer, Vardanyan moved to IT in 1999 and used his background in technology to work for the government's Ministry of Technology. From there he moved to his role at UITE. An example of a company using Armenia's intellect for research is National Instruments (NI), the billion dollar software company headquartered in Austin, Texas, which opened an engineering research center in Yerevan. Vardanyan estimates there are 400 high tech companies in Armenia today with a growth rate of over 25 percent per year. He expects the country to not only use outsourcing to grow but also to foster their own startups. He predicts 100 new startups in Armenia beginning in 2013. His organization advocates the creation of more opportunities for technology companies by creating an open environment for growth. They do this by sending their educators to schools to teach programs like robotics and running an annual event in October called Digi-Tech, which brings together the country's technology companies from all industries such as education, finance, mobile and gaming to showcase their projects and accomplishments. Though it is predominantly for Armenians, people come from all over the world to attend.

Gayane Petrosyan, a graduate student at McGill University in Canada shared her background and her experience of being a developer in Armenia. When asked how she compares the salary she made in Armenia to other countries, she commented, "If I compared average income, it would be a sad picture. Before coming to Canada, I was working in Armenia, and I was earning the most money [in my family] – and I was the youngest one. They all have good jobs." As a programmer, she earned $1,000 per month, compared to Canada or the United States where a developer earns anywhere from $5-10,000 per month. She also sees Armenia as being in a good place to support outside companies. "Armenia is a very smart nation. If you compare it with other countries, the Armenian women are much more involved in computer science, math and engineering." Armenia boasts a more than 50 percent graduation rate of women from the computer science industry. However, she does state, "Outsourcing is not giving you products; you will have much more recognition and money if you come up with your own product and your own trademark. There will always be someone else who can do something cheaper, which is why it can't be the future." Petrosyan is not far off in her assessment as companies are always thinking how they can cut costs and save money. "My immediate plan is to work a bit here to understand the working culture and how companies are run here, then go back to Armenia and do my startup." Armenia's greatest resource is her human potential and the country's future includes bringing innovation back to the country. ■

MISSION **DEPLOY**



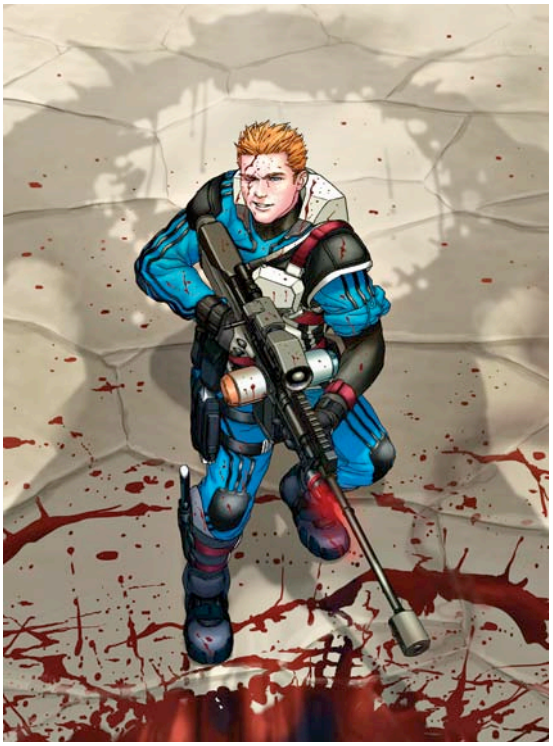
ALEX SEROPIAN'S LATEST VENTURE IN GAMING IS SET TO SHAKE THE INDUSTRY. THE CREATOR OF THE *HALO* FRANCHISE HAS ASSEMBLED A DREAM TEAM THAT'S PROMISING TO BRING THE FIRST PERSON SCI-FI SHOOTER EXPERIENCE TO TABLETS AND SMART PHONES WITH THEIR FLAGSHIP TITLE *MORNING STAR*. CORE GAMERS, REJOICE!

Text **Manouk Akopyan**

It's the year 2130 and you are Charlie Campbell on the research vessel MSRV-Joplin sent to investigate a mysterious signal coming from the Earth's solar system. Then – catastrophe strikes – sending you and your crew into a galaxy stricken with alien conflict.

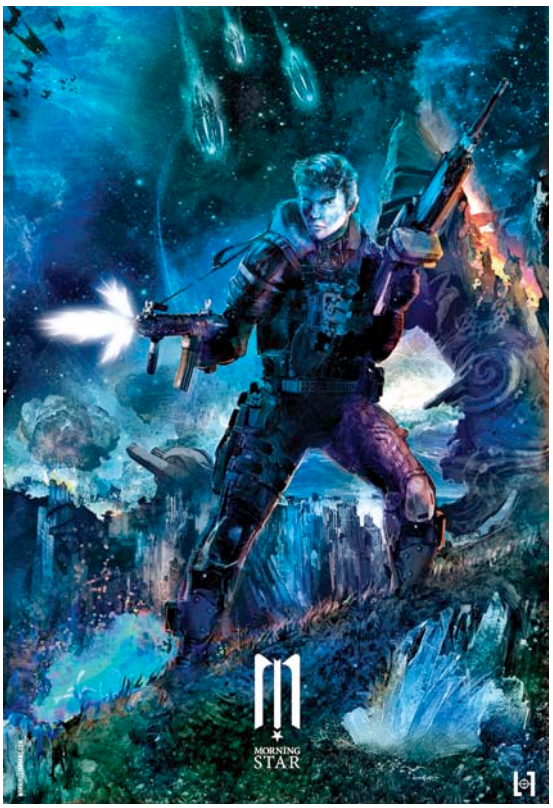
...And then the door bell rings. Your company has arrived, and you're caught between fending off an unwelcome sniper radiating your forehead and getting up to greet your guests. So you toss your iPad on the coffee table and return to the reality of the evening's festivities.

Such is the trend of a 2013 gamer, as subtle and promiscuous as ever in an industry full-fledged in flux. Alex Seropian founded Industrial Toys in 2012 to specifically fill a gap in the market. The pragmatic goal was to make quality mobile games for core gamers. A year later, with that being the sole mission of his startup, they're launching *Morning Star* on Apple iOS devices this summer.



→ Charlie Campbell by lead concept artist Mike Choi.

LOFTY GOALS SHOULDN'T BE FAR-FETCHED FOR SEROPIAN. HE'S ALREADY LEFT A MONUMENTAL MARK IN GAMING BY OVERSEEING THE DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION AND DELIVERY OF THE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED AND HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL *HALO*.



← *Morning Star* poster by Roger Kupelian

Morning Star is designed for players whose three-minute play session can eventually pull them into a rabbit hole. Seropian says you can get through the storyline in a few hours, but specifically notes that the game is designed for competitive multi-players, one of *Morning Star's* main pillars. Using Epic Games' Unreal Engine 3 technology, the visually striking game is built around community, mechanics designed for touch-powered mobile devices, enemy artificial intelligence, and dynamic encounter design. Industrial Toys focused on an engaging story and rewarding gameplay. In return, it allows for a fast-paced, easy-to-play tempo that could trap you in the deeper world they've created.

"The reality is that if you don't have a great experience in a one or two minute span on mobile,

you're not going to come back. That's not what we want," says Seropian.

The "we" he refers to reads like a who's who in gaming. Seropian gathered what he calls a dream team of like-minded enthusiasts with a depth of talent across every division. Spearheading the project are established industry veterans like President Tim Harris, Executive Creative Director Hardy LeBel, Chief Technology Officer Brent Pease, Lead Game Designer Paul Bertone, and Lead Concept Artist Mike Choi.

Harris, formerly the founder and CEO at Seven Lights, calls the intimate team of 20 a group of "cynical, crusty, and opinionated bastards" who want to make sure they deliver on their promise of making a great game.

"The culture and chemistry of the company trumps everything," adds Lebel. "Most of our senior leadership has worked together in the past, so when Alex called with the opportunity, I couldn't pass it up."

Johnny Skwirut, a 25-year-old in marketing and production, considers the tight knit bunch one he can grab a beer with after work. Luckily, there's a brewery conveniently situated in front of their Pasadena, Calif. studio.

Morning Star is also peppered with mainstream star power. System of a Down frontman Serj Tankian wrote the full musical score to the game, and bestselling science fiction novelist John Scalzi is penning *Morning Star Alpha*. The graphic novel will further explore the universe he's creating for the game.

"When you put all of these things together, you create a place where people can go – whether for a



↑ Dust Ascended

→ Dust Ascended concept art



↓ Roger Kupelian's concept painting of the end of the world.





↑
Chief Technology Officer Brent Pease, Executive Creative Director Hardy LeBel, Art Manager Aaron Marroquin, and Alex Seropian

few minutes or a few hours a day – to get something out of it. It has to be the whole package for it to be super successful," says Seropian.

Lofty goals shouldn't be far-fetched for Seropian, who's anticipating millions of players to download the game. He's already left a monumental mark in gaming by overseeing the development, production and delivery of the critically acclaimed and highly successful *Halo*.

Last we met with Seropian (Issue 14, July/August 2011), he was leading Disney's global creative studios as its Senior Vice President and General Manager of Core Games.

USING EPIC GAMES' UNREAL ENGINE 3 TECHNOLOGY, THE VISUALLY STRIKING GAME IS BUILT AROUND COMMUNITY, MECHANICS DESIGNED FOR TOUCH-POWERED MOBILE DEVICES, ENEMY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, AND DYNAMIC ENCOUNTER DESIGN.

After two and a half years, he became restless with Mickey Mouse and Goofy and resigned in Feb. 2012 to get in touch with his independent roots. Seropian founded two gaming companies then negotiated the acquisitions of both – Bungie Studios to Microsoft before the 2001 launch of Xbox and Wideload Games to Disney in 2009.

The 43-year-old has made a killing – figuratively by way of capital and literally with a hit list of shooter games. So why did he spurn the console market that was so good to him for over 20 years?

"Making games at Disney became very expensive and difficult," says Seropian. "We had 200 people on each project, and tens of millions of dollars were spent just to get the game done. And then, double that for marketing and distribution."

Seropian says he became frustrated with the overall industry trend and bounced for the luxury of accessing a market for a fraction of the cost. Mobile games are electronically packaged, which means no distribution costs, manufacturing discs, shipment, retail space and the other costs of doing business.

His enthusiasm and dedication for making games, however, hasn't dimmed.

"I moved to a more simple idea with a small group of folks and wanted to do something that was unprecedented." ▸

↓
Roger Kupelian puts his own spin on the launch of the Joplin in this concept painting.



He says simple cost-cutting ingredients, focusing on a new marketplace, and hitting the reset button on ideology were the impetus of Industrial Toys.

"Any startup company has its risks," says Industrial Toys President Tim Harris, "but this is a good one because the industry is booming."

Seropian heralds the future as a fusion of talent that's hitting the work force at an opportune time. His tone is enthusiastic, especially when he talks about the coming generation who combine a blend of energy, passion and knowledge and choose four years in video games as collegiate career paths. Seropian taught himself how to write and program games on his father's Mac in high school. They are all the reasons why he's documented the making of *Morning Star* into instructional webisodes for the students at Tumo Center for Creative Technologies, Armenia's state of the art open media studio.

He's also not afraid to experiment – like tasking a 3D artist intern who was still in high school with creating the graybox model for the MSRV-Joplin, the game's spaceship that transports heroes out to meet doom and adventure. Ruben Avoian was responsible for the shape and outline of the ship, adding details, functional bits and the beginnings of how the animated ship would work. The finished product was a twelve-million polygram model so dense, some of the computers couldn't handle it.

"I was given the opportunity to make something amazing and share my work within the world of *Morning Star*. This is my first job, and I couldn't ask for a cooler boss than Alex. He and the team have been great," Avoian says, now 19 and working as a contractor for Industrial Toys. "My parents have been getting more satisfaction out of it than I have. They show the game's trailer and point out the model to every person who comes to our house."

With *Morning Star*, Seropian remained true to his first-person-shooter (FPS) roots, even though he says it's not much of a popular genre on mobile. However, he's confident in building a brand that'll stand the test of time in today's competitive landscape. Although the game can be downloaded free of charge, he considers Industrial Toys' business opportunities as being very real; he is content without a profit margin in the immediate future. His group of investors agrees. Industrial Toys is backed to survive a cold and dark winter – or two.

"We have the challenge of fulfilling a niche for FPS core gamers because what we saw in the market sucked," he says. "Is it impossible to make a great game? Or are there just untapped opportunities? We decided it was the latter. We have a great opportunity to own the genre and establish a franchise and go on for a long period of time."

ALEX SEROPIAN FOUNDED INDUSTRIAL TOYS TO SPECIFICALLY FILL A GAP IN THE MARKET. THE PRAGMATIC GOAL WAS TO MAKE QUALITY MOBILE GAMES FOR CORE GAMERS. A YEAR LATER, WITH THAT BEING THE SOLE MISSION OF HIS STARTUP, THEY'RE LAUNCHING *MORNING STAR*.

→
Ruben Avoian worked on the MSRV-Joplin, the game's spaceship.









↑ Mike Dekoekkoek (front) and Johnny Skwirut are part of the intimate team of 20 at Industrial Toys.

← Iteration of the Joplin with the bridge at the top of the end of vessel to add drama out of the space.

"We are betting on the trend that gamers want to have a deeper, more immersive experience in mobile," adds Harris.

"We're the only company on the market that's recognizable and has the credibility to do it," says Pease. "We're ready to take advantage of that and be that breakout game. That's our mission. There's no barrier of entry. It's only the perception."

Traditional American game publishers have largely deprived the mobile market of quality game experiences, Seropian says. On the flip side, countries overseas have had considerable success in the App Store with their products: cases in point are Finland's Supercell and Rovio and the Czech Republic's MADFINGER Games.

Seropian offers a plausible explanation. "For the first time we're in a market where the biggest marketplace is not the United States. Countries throughout Scandinavia and Asia...they are going straight to mobile. This market will be growing tremendously, especially outside of the U.S. The biggest challenge is that there is no shortage of products, but the average quality is very low. We'll start seeing better games and experimentation of different genres. The trial and error will get better. With mobile games in particular, people have a lot of options to choose from. They often don't stick with the experience, and it's very competitive that way."

The iOS market Industrial Toys plans on catering to with *Morning Star* currently hovers around half a billion – the number of iPads, iPhones and iPod Touches sold since 2007. Factor in the possibility of moving the game to the Android market, which they are considering, the potential audience doubles.

"I want to make something that's new, different, and a lot of fun. It's personally rewarding," Seropian says. "That's what I wanted to do and I am having a frickin' blast with it!"

When asked what kind of expectations he's set out for Industrial Toys and *Morning Star*, he answers, "I want to make the best mobile game – ever."

Seropian's innate leadership will give Industrial Toys the blueprint to lead the next generation of mobile game developers while at the same demanding serious respect. Angry Birds, Bejeweled, Whale Trail, et al – consider this a warning from your FPS adversary. ■



rules of engagement

I discovered Bryan Srabian on Twitter while doing what most productive males do every night – perusing through sports sites. To my disappointment, I quickly learned he worked for the San Francisco Giants. I did what no Dodgers fan would ever do – I followed him. He followed me back. And then, things got serious. Quick.

Text **Manouk Akopyan** | Photo **Armen Poghosyan**

Bryan Srabian

Bryan Srabian is the Director of Social Media for the San Francisco Giants. The savvy executive has worked several jobs for the team since graduating from Santa Clara University with a bachelor's degree in science marketing. Srabian started out as a media relations intern in 1995. He was then Manager of Game Entertainment from 1998-2005, instilling such traditions as "I Left My Heart in San Francisco" after home victories and "Orange Fridays" throughout the ballpark and city. He became Director of Marketing in 2005 before leaving in 2008 to work as the Vice President of Marketing for the Sacramento River Cats (Oakland A's Triple-A affiliate). He is currently an adjunct professor at the University of San Francisco, teaching master's courses on social media in the sports management program.

Long gone are the days when people meet the old-fashioned way. You know, face-to-face, in person… without online intervention.

Bryan and I had a prototypical 21st century meeting. It began on our computers and smart phones with emails and text messages and culminated with a meeting in a distal land 380 miles away.

All this was completely normal – and fitting – because Bryan Srabian is the Director of Social Media for the San Francisco Giants, owners of two of the last three World Series trophies. Srabian is responsible for managing the team's online community, which ranks among the most popular in baseball.

After our initial "follows," I sent him a DM. For the non-Twitterati, that stands for "direct message." I asked for his email address so that we could take the exchange to levels exceeding 140 characters. Srabian obliged.

Ten days after our online correspondence, he greets me on the Embarcadero in San Francisco in front of Juan Marichal's statue. To my delight, instead of a Marichal bat, he greets me with a big smile, firm handshake and a bro-hug double-back-tap-combo.

The online barriers are broken. We walk inside the ballpark I promised myself I'd wholeheartedly dislike throughout my seven-hour drive up the 101.

Srabian walks me through the club level and points at a picture of Henry, his youngest son. Henry's face is covered with orange and black championship confetti and jubilation. I can't help but admire the sight, hoping one day, I too can be Henry, only doused in Dodgers blue confetti.

Just after breaking the friendship barrier, I end up breaking my earlier promise to hate this place once I catch the smell of brats and garlic fries wafting throughout the concourse.

We take a seat in the upper deck with the World Baseball Classic playing out in front of us. It is March 18, twenty years to the day when the 20-point underdog Santa Clara, led by freshman Steve Nash, became only the second No. 15 seeded team to oust a No. 2 two team when they beat Arizona in the 1993 NCAA Tournament.

Then Srabian, a University of Santa Clara alum, begins to explain the story of another underdog and relative unknown who came and captured the hearts – and fingers – of the world like no one ever could.

He begins to talk about social media.

Sports franchises and the players they employ are often the fabric and representation of their community. The advent of social media in the last 10 years has given organizations the luxury of building the profiles of their players as well as the team brand to demographics in their fan base they once couldn't reach.

> "Once you establish your voice and humanize your brand, you give fans exclusive behind-the-scenes content, and they feel like they are part of the inside," says Srabian.

Like a Barry Bonds home run deep into the waters of McCovey Cove, the days of social media escaping everyday vernacular is outta here!

As the Director of Social Media for the Giants, Srabian uses online platforms to highlight the eccentric personalities of a team that's seemingly winning in every facet of baseball.

Facebook is nine-years old, Twitter is seven, Pinterest is three, Google+ is two and Instagram is at a raw and flourishing 19 months old. Add them all up, and it doesn't even total the age of most of the executives who try to make sense of it.

The 40-year-old gate-keeping guru is in the fourth year of a position essentially created for him. He's helped to build the Giants' Facebook and Twitter accounts to a current ranking of third best in Major League Baseball with a combined audience of over

two million, trailing only the Yankees and Red Sox. Srabian understands the city's eclectic culture, fan base and the 130-year-old Giants brand – and he successfully merges them all together. San Francisco lends itself to individuality and diverse characters. The Giants themselves are a band of misfits – like the reigning $167 million MVP Buster Posey, the perfect-game-throwing $127 million ace Matt Cain, two-time Cy Young Award winner Tim Lincecum, Pablo "Kung Fu Panda" Sandoval, the guitar-playing yogi Barry Zito, and prankster Sergio Romo.

Some of the digital strategies they've implemented to highlight the cast are special giveaways, Twitter chats, live stream question and answers, viral videos and even having fans tweet their phone numbers to get a call from a player.

But there is no cut and paste formula for managing quirkiness and alternate personas. What works for the Giants might not work for another team, says Srabian. But one thing is certain – the Giants always seem to set themselves up for scoring positions. Companies sign countless checks buying software and consultants in search of an online strategy and vision, but if people like Srabian don't live and breathe the brand they're promoting, consider it null and void.

"Once you establish your voice and humanize your brand, you give fans exclusive behind-the-scenes content and they feel like they are part of the inside," says Srabian. "The tools may change, but the fundamentals remain the same. I have ideas and a voice when it comes to certain matters. That's the value of social media."

"The tools may change, but the fundamentals remain the same. I have ideas and a voice when it comes to certain matters. That's the value of social media," says Srabian.

As a professional with a background in marketing, Srabian treats social media participation like customer service and asks himself simple questions in order to reach his audience, which collectively hovers around three million users across all platforms.

"'Would I like this? Will this be of value to me? Will it be entertaining? Or is it just spam?' Essentially, fans are our market research. I am a Giants fan myself, so I can relate to them easier and empathize."

Aside from being the first to be informed and feeling a certain level of exclusivity, followers are also looking for freebies, slick deals, autographs, and a follow back, retweet or reply from their favorite players, which is just as flattering as an autograph nowadays.

"The important thing is to listen to the fans in real time because getting people to buy in makes it that much stronger."

Srabian would have his work cut out for him if the Giants were the Houston Astros. But they're not. His 2010 and 2012 World Series rings are a memento of working in Pleasantville despite the fact that he rarely sports them.

"It's a reminder of why we do what we do," he says of the bling, noting that his sons George, 6, and Henry, 4, will get to have them once they're older.

Srabian's online efforts bring fans to the "front of the row" even though most of the time he's nowhere close to it. He works from his Sacramento home and makes the hour and a half drive to San Francisco twice a week. The set-up works perfectly because he gets to spend time with his children and wife Selena, who's due with their third child in October.

"A majority of what I do, I need to be online. In essence, being at the stadium is almost a distraction because you get caught up in the game. It's a dichotomy," he says. "Whether fans are in town or away on vacation, if I can bring them as close as I can to the atmosphere, then I've done my job."

Another job title Srabian holds is professor. He teaches a master's course on social media at the University of San Francisco's sports management program. In the classroom, he's avoided textbooks altogether and instead teaches from the syllabus of "today." What might work today might not tomorrow, so Srabian keeps the material fresh by analyzing social media's global power. That means studying new platforms, trends, overnight media darlings, and the channels of other successful franchises.

"It's not necessarily a lecture, but a conversation where everyone is involved by sharing ideologies," he says. "People ask me questions, but I'll be the first one to say 'I don't have all the answers.' I try to learn as much as I can from who's doing what. We are looking at the new generation as to where social media is heading."

In addition to the newly raised championship flag, the Giants added another attraction to their home



at AT&T Park for the 2013 season. They unveiled a social-media café under the majestic over-sized glove that sits beyond the centerfield wall. The area is designed for fans to battle the Bay's breeze with Peet's Coffee and use an interactive video board to Instagram photos, feel the social pulse of fellow fans by seeing what's trending, and send out live tweets. They can also use the area to charge their phones while catching the game on TV.

After nearly two years, Srabian's innovation has finally came to fruition. It's just part of the evolving culture at the ballpark, where mobile devices and emerging technology are replacing the mundane classics of a transistor radio and the daily paper previewing probable pitchers.

"It's really exciting to see an idea you thought was cool in the beginning, and have people buy into it internally," admits Srabian. "I'm proud the Giants believed in me. It turns into an environment that breathes innovation. There's a genuine satisfaction with that."

The Giants are also one of about ten teams who use Apple Passbook technology to deliver single-game tickets, and are currently working on offering fans in-game seat upgrades. They also doubled AT&T Park's Wi-Fi network coverage from last year. Contrast that to Srabian's first Opening Day with the team as an intern in 1995 when he did not have access to the Internet.

It is for such groundbreaking developments that the Giants are considered one of the most tech-forward franchises in all of sports. Just as the Oakland Athletics pioneered baseball with Moneyball's analytics and sabermetrics from across the Bay Bridge, the Giants are seemingly doing the same with technology.

Call it the Silicon Valley effect, or a #GlimpseIntoTheFuture. ■



FEMME APPROACH

IT IS NO SECRET THAT LOS ANGELES IS ONE OF THE MOST STYLISH CITIES IN THE COUNTRY OTHER THAN NEW YORK. THE TOWN IS FILLED WITH A RANGE OF FASHIONISTAS SPORTING THEIR CASUAL JEANS AND T-SHIRTS FOR A CUP OF COFFEE TO THOSE IN TAILORED SUITS RUSHING TO THEIR NEXT BUSINESS MEETING. IN THE SAME CROSS-CULTURAL SPIRIT, HIPSTERS AND MINIMALISTS CALL LOS ANGELES THEIR FASHION MECCA. "ANYTHING GOES IN LA, THAT IS WHAT IS SO FRESH ABOUT STARTING A FASHION COMPANY HERE. IN NEW YORK, EVERYONE WEARS BLACK. IN LA, THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL SORTS OF DESIGNERS," SAYS YOUNG LOS ANGELES-BASED DESIGNER SARINE BERBERIAN WITH THE HOUSE OF SARINE MARIE. A THIRD-GENERATION DESIGNER, SARINE IS BRINGING CLASSIC BACK WITH HER ONE-OF-A-KIND FEMININE PIECES IN A WORLD OF UBER TRENDS AND SO-CALLED DESIGNERS.

Text **Sauline Kojababian** | Photo **Tigran Tovmasyan**

A Current Fashion Business Model

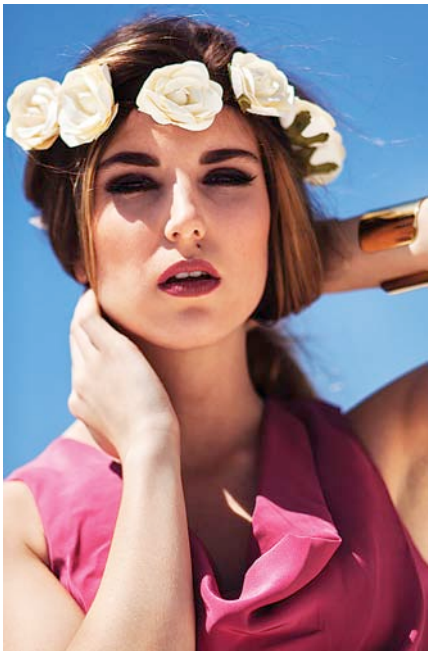
Sarine Berberian's family fled the civil war in Lebanon and moved to Paris to study couture tailoring. They catered to Lebanese socialites and Arabian princesses as did many Armenian immigrants seeking a new life in the mid 70s. "My grandma was a seamstress for oil tycoons while my father was tailoring high-end menswear." The family worked together, they traveled together, they ultimately learned from each other. Migrating to the United States was rather comfortable due to in-house manufacturing and production being at an all-time high circa 25 years ago. When it came time for Sarine to build her business, she realized the industry had changed. Manufacturers were outsourcing, designers were moving their companies elsewhere, and T-shirt labels were oversaturating the city. "I couldn't use the old-school business mentality my parents were using. I needed to focus on running a business right now to stay afloat amid the competition and a tough economic crisis," she says. The House of Sarine Marie came about in 2010 with two years of thorough research and study." I did a lot of trend analysis, which is forecasted two years in advance. I used exclusive forecasting tools to strategize my first collection. I studied consumer behavior in department stores and specialty boutiques to see what customers were buying and ultimately what they weren't." While most designers' approach to starting their first line is belief in their creative power, business today has shown that creativity is simply not enough. Social media, viral marketing and public relations are key components in building a fruitful brand. Sarine Marie has used her marketing degree to her advantage by involving bloggers, trade show outreach and a positive attitude on the present-day business trends. She also has learned the power of keeping her pieces American-made. " I do not buy fabrics from China or outsource. Everything is made in Los Angeles, and I plan on keeping it that way. In 2012, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa kick-started an initiative for designers that produce and manufacture in LA called, 'Designed & Made in Los Angeles,' intended to help the industry grow and thrive. The House of Sarine Marie is one of the 10,000 fashion-related companies proud to be a part of the movement. "If you're not keeping up, you're missing out," she laughs.

Collections

With a confident mindset, Sarine debuted her first collection in the fall of 2012. She was chosen by the authority of fashion news, Women's Wear Daily (WWD), as an exclusive emerging designer for one of the biggest trade shows in the country, Magic Market Week. Her designs have been featured in Apparel News, Flaunt and *Lucky* magazine. The first collection embodied her ideal

USING THE '40s and '50s AS HER INSPIRATION ERA, THE SARINE MARIE COLLECTION STAYS TRUE TO STAPLE SILK BLOUSES, PENCIL SKIRTS, ORNATE JACKETS, AND TROUSER PANTS, ADDING REFINEMENT TO ANY WOMAN'S CLOSET.







Sarine Berberian
Sarine's father and uncle Koko and Jack Berberian worked with costume designer Bill Whitten to create the famous "white glove" Michael Jackson premiered in 1983. Bill Whitten called upon the two brothers to create the magical glove and bring it to life. The white glove served to be one of the most influential fashion statements in history.

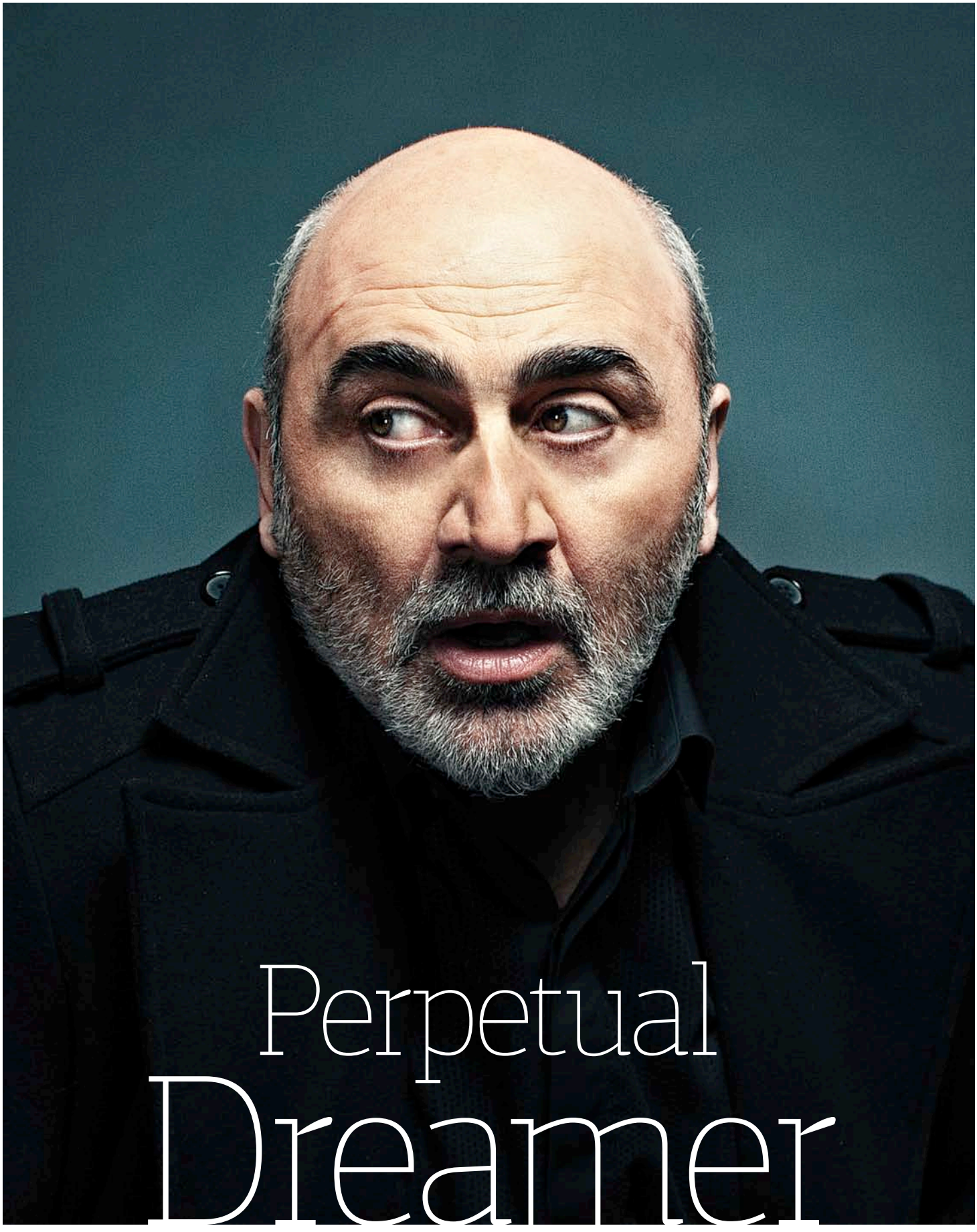
vision of elegance and sophistication. She incorporated virgin wools from Italy and silk lace from France.
"The feedback from buyers and clientele was encouraging and discouraging at the same time. They loved my ideas but insisted I combine some more affordable fabrics. I went back to work and instead of using virgin wool that costs $300 I used a wool blend. Rather than using all natural fabrics, I used synthetic materials to lower the cost while keeping the look that is high-end Sarine Marie. It is hard for people to accept, let alone love your idea. I was fortunate the price variant was easy to alter," she shares.
With three collections underway, the Sarine Marie style is distinct. "Feminine tailored pieces" as she likes to call it. There is an ongoing theme in all her designs. The clothes are lady like, classic and easy to wear from day to night. "My target market ranges from 25 to 55. For example, I have a skirt suit that a younger girl would pair separately with jeans and an older woman would prefer together."
Inspired by Chanel and Christian Dior, Sarine Marie designs connect the gap for women who seek quality and timeless pieces without having to break the bank. Using the '40s and '50s as her inspiration era, her collection stays true to staple silk blouses, pencil skirts, ornate jackets, and trouser pants. Her use of silk tweeds, damask cotton and mixed textured fabrics adds refinement to any woman's closet.



WITH THREE COLLECTIONS UNDERWAY, THE SARINE MARIE STYLE IS DISTINCT. "FEMININE TAILORED PIECES" AS SHE LIKES TO CALL IT. THERE IS AN ONGOING THEME IN ALL HER DESIGNS. THE CLOTHES ARE LADY LIKE AND CLASSIC.

Trending For Summer

Trends influence Sarine Marie, but they don't define her. She ordinarily shies away from designs that are produced for the mass market. One must keep trends in perspective yet original enough so a buyer will want to wear a particular piece for years at a time. Mass markets usually don't have long shelf lives in closets. Designing to the beat of her own drum, Sarine Marie designs are conscious with a presence of distinction. Fashion magazines, editors, and designers are showing leather, neon, stripes, and menswear inspiration for the approaching season on a global scale. Sarine has incorporated her favorites in her summer '13 line while retiring from others. "I show current trends and the other half, my way. Customers like having what is recent with a touch of what is different. My favorite summer trend has to be the pastel color palette. Her spring/summer 13 collection consists of delicate, feminine fabrics and silhouettes with tailored jackets and figure-flattering dresses. Leave behind your inner wallflower because psychedelic prints have been seen all over the runway for the upcoming season which Sarine Marie has adopted into skirt separates to be worn with solid blouses. Shocking color is trending with neon details and pastels. "I personally do not like neon. I think it is harsh and non-classic. Neon isn't year-round nor does it have a long life span in your closet. I do color but I stick to more subtle tones such as champagne, mulberry and rose. The 18th century has really shaped my color story for summer '13. Everything was romantic and pretty then," she says. Peplum is surely a trend that everyone is tired of seeing. "Even though some designers are still showing peplum for fall, I have grown weary of it. I think we need a new silhouette to make a come-back." ■



Perpetual Dreamer

The characters created by Michael Poghosyan have accompanied film and theatre lovers for over three decades. He is one of those artists who have made a distinctive contribution to the development of contemporary Armenian art and whose creative works appeal throughout the world – even though he's composed most of his work in Armenia. Poghosyan appeals to several generations because since the '80s, he has kept pace with the times, sometimes even getting ahead of them. He draws inspiration from his Motherland, where he was given the title of "Honorary Artist of Armenia." Last winter, the award-winning Poghosyan visited the United States to present his latest project, *If Only Everyone* was submitted for Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards. The movie brought Artsakh into sharp relief before the world in a language of universal human values.

Text **Nane Avagyan** | Photo **Armen Poghosyan**

His ever-calm exterior disguises his inner world pulsating with storms of creativity that erupt inimitably, each time couched in surprisingly innovative forms of expression. In the course of his creative life, the much-loved artist has expressed himself in almost all art genres and has been an innovator-experimenter. "In any society, those who do not fit in the regular typecast and do not conform to the familiar and accessible templates are branded as 'difficult' people. Michael Poghosyan is one of these difficult people," notes Dr. Henrik Hovhannisyan in his piece, *The Artist of the Transition Period*. Our interview with Poghosyan, an artist of multiple talents – author/screenwriter, film and theatre actor, singer, film director and producer – who portrays the Motherland, culture and the national identity, was reminiscent of a creative screenshot in itself.

"Yerevan is everything to me – my fate, love, health and illness," Poghosyan confesses. These words about the Armenian capital emanate a distinctive force as they are honest and are the fulcrum and springboard for his creativity. Poghosyan's love for his country and people compel him to heroism by courageously speaking up and pointing out flaws and deficiencies, but at the same time leading to beauty and kindness to building the Motherland we have always dreamt of having. This is only characteristic of an intellectual artist whose work radiates so much love and affection for Armenia that they are transmitted to us, they penetrate our cells and will not let us rest until they reach our minds in the form of a question: what is our mission in the world and our duty toward our Motherland? Poghosyan responds to this question through his works of art; he has discovered the truth through his personal struggles and search for his own self.

"In the early 1990s, I went to the United States for several months, and I believe that I became a fully-fledged Armenian individual and artist in this period when I realized that through my heart and soul I was attached to Armenia and could feel my roots deep down. I felt stifled by nostalgia and decided to share my thoughts and soothe my nostalgia by communicating with fellow residents and started writing unsigned letters to made-up addresses in Yerevan. Thus, through examining and discovering myself away from Armenia, I came to an understanding of who I was, what I wanted and what I had to do and returned to Armenia, embarking on a new phase in my life."

Poghosyan makes a clean breast of his feelings on the pages of *Yerevan* magazine. You may have been a recipient of one of his unsigned letters. ▸

The Beginning

"I trace my own beginnings to the time when my father said 'I love you' to my mother, and this is because every child is the result of love," he explains. Poghosyan's father was the founder of the Gyumri Medical College. Despite being a chemist by profession, he wrote poems dedicated to his mother. And it was in this atmosphere permeated with art that the future artist was born. "My abilities for art became apparent from the age of six when I didn't have to make an effort, it came to me instinctively. I started singing from the age of six and became a solo singer in the choir. Then I started drawing and sculpting as well as playing the guitar."

Upon seeing her brother's sculptures, Poghosyan's sister presented him to the great sculptor Yervand Kochar, who had much praise for the adolescent Michael's works and took him on as his apprentice. "At that time, I was helping Kochar with his famous sculpture *The Muse of Cybernetics*, which later became the symbol of the Institute named after Mergelyan," reminisces Poghosyan.

He did not stay with the master sculptor for long, however, and took a sharp U-turn to the world of music, singing in a vocal-instrumental ensemble. Then again, it was time to pursue specialized education, and Poghosyan entered the Yerevan State Academy of Fine Arts, graduating from the department of Ceramics with honors. It seemed as though his professional path was chosen, but it turned out that this was not Poghosyan's fate. Soon he found himself among actors, and his well-pronounced gift for acting was noticed. "I was asked to test my abilities on the stage and decided to enter the Acting Department of the Yerevan Fine Arts and Theatre Institute. But before I could do that, I received the blessing of the renowned director Vardan Achemyan. I studied at the Operetta (Musical Theatre) Department headed by Tatevik Sazandaryan. Although my voice was more suitable for the variety genre, she noticed me and admitted me to her department, which made me take singing seriously. It was in this period that I was offered a job at the Men's Club, a popular 1970s troupe that later formed the basis for the establishment



Michael Poghosyan

Filmography, Acting

Lost and Found in Armenia
The Last Troubadour
If Only Everyone (screenwriter)
Welcome Papa (screenwriter)
Maestro
Taxi Eli Lav A
Troe i Snezhinka
The Rope (short)
Symphony of Silence
Khent Hreshtak
The Merry Bus
Yerevan Blues (screenwriter)
Yerevan Jan (writer, director)
Khatabalada
Dzayn Barbaro
Zhamkete Yot Or
Wind of Oblivion
Gaghtni Khorhrdakane
Three of Us
The Last Sunday
Snowdrops and Edelweiss

Awards

• "Artist of the Year" at the Arpa International Film Festival, 2012
• Best Leading Actor, Hayak, first National Film Awards winner, 2012
• Vazgen Sargsyan Medal, RA Ministry of Defense, 2010
• Recipient of the prestigious Dutch cultural award from the Prince Claus Fund, 2005
• Recognized with the Golden Medal of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia, 2009
• Best Modern Contemporary Album winner, 2004 Collection of Songs Dedicated to Yerevan

of the Yerevan Chamber Theatre," recalls Poghosyan. He thus became one of the co-founders of the Yerevan State Chamber Theatre, simultaneously taking part in the construction work and playing in the performances. "In its essence, this was a new type of theatre as there was no concept of the fourth wall; instead we directly interacted with the audience through songs, dances and plasticity of movements. This was my passion. In our performances, we reflected on various problems, protested against injustice, and all of this was done within the comedy genre. It was here that I received my conditioning in many aspects and theatre took root in me."

"I had always been searching for this genre that would shake the body with laughter but at the same time would lodge this deep angst in one's soul. To have these two feelings together in this way, one gets both the laughter and the meaning of the laughter," explains Poghosyan.

Self Searching

Several years later, the desire for change set Poghosyan on a path of searching for a new beginning, and he left the Chamber Theatre. At Sos Sargsyan's invitation, he performed for two years at the Hamazgayin Yerevan Drama Theatre. "One day I felt that I was suffocating from the conventional theatrical formulae and left the theatre searching for my calling," recollects Poghosyan. As a result, in 1997, with his friend Armen Hambardzumyan and other collaborators, he produced the overwhelmingly popular and much-loved theatrical comedy *Khatabalada*. "Through this project, I finally found the form of expression that best resonated with me, bringing together the experience and knowledge gleaned from the *Club of the Funny and Inventive* (Russian comedy TV show), Chamber Theatre, singing and other genres spanning my artistic career. *Khatabalada* was the release of my pent-up desire to talk about the most serious realities and phenomena in a genre that could be called pessimistic comedy. I had always been searching for this genre that would shake the body with laughter but at the same time would lodge this deep angst in one's soul. To have these two feelings together in this way, one gets both the laughter and the meaning of the laughter," explains Poghosyan.

From this point forward Poghosyan worked as a freelance artist producing a number of films and projects as a screenwriter, director, and actor, embodying dozens of roles. He considers comedy a vital and serious art genre with its own rules. "If we take Chaplin's example, there are both a conceptual framework and plasticity, hence a philosophy. The Armenian film industry has a number of short films in this genre, like *Tzhvzhik* or *01-99*, that are popular to this day. Today there is a need to revive the traditions of this genre," proposes the artist. Poghosyan is concerned that this genre is adulterated as the performers are not professionally trained. "One may compose art incessantly, but one may also exhaust his or her reserves of creativity and resort to repeating oneself as one runs out of forms of expression. And if one has specialized training, this enables the artist to express himself in all genres."

Creativity as Self Discovery

"The Armenian man is the focal point of all my works. Our type and phenomenon with its positive qualities and flaws in the context of the global reality is of great interest to me. The Armenian is drawn to the extreme, and it is in these extreme circumstances that I want to discover the real reason why God created the Armenian genus, as I believe each nation has its mission. Armenians are gifted but we fail to present ourselves properly, and we use only a small percentage of our talents. It is a sin not to use what has been gifted to us from above as it is given to complete a mission. The Armenian identity is inevitably linked to the spiritual. Narekatsi, Mashtots, Charents are my reference points. However, the spiritual element is present in every Armenian, and it is imperative to set it in motion. This will unite us and we will reach great heights as a nation," Poghosyan is convinced. In his opinion, an artist's mission is to relive and present to the public what nurtures their inspiration and feelings. "I have accepted the conditions that were given to me from above, the land where I came into being and where I live, my Motherland,

and I am accountable for both the good and the bad. I always ask whether it is ever possible to exchange one's ill parents with healthy ones? Armenia is our parent, and I love our crouched-down Motherland that suffers from so many viruses, which in fact we ourselves introduce. I feel complete on this land and create art here."

The Intellectual

Michael Poghosyan considers himself a free artist. "Above all, I present what interests and excites me as a human being. There are themes and topics that are a matter of principle for me. For example, the films *Yerevan Jan* or *Yerevan Blues*, where I was the screenplay writer, film director and leading actor, are important works for me as these imparted my response to the situation in place. The political and social situation when these films were made was so hideous that I couldn't help speaking up and expressing myself. I couldn't tolerate what was happening around me. I reflected on politics and specific people, criticizing presidents and high-ranking officials," recounts Poghosyan. "The opening scene of my film *Yerevan Jan* is my dream where, for daring to say hello to the president, I am punched by the bodyguard and I wake up. At this moment, I realize that our city suffers from a disease and the cause of this illness is the lack of love. In the course of the film, through several characters we fight against the vices with kindness and love, and in the end I ask a sorceress to remove the evil spell from the city through me. At the end of the film when I in fact meet the president, he greets me and starts walking with me in the town together with the people joining us. He suddenly notices that the people are barefoot and that he is the only one wearing shoes, so he also takes off his shoes. This is to say if you can put shoes on people's feet, go ahead; if you can't, then take off your own shoes." Poghosyan shares his ideas and proposals on the relationship between citizens and their leader through his films.

The Actor

Poghosyan was one of the lead actors in Armenfilm Studio beginning in 1978. He considers his first piece of serious acting in the film industry the role of Tomazo in Vigen Chaldranyan's feature film *The Voice of Silence*, a film that elicited much praise from film critics. His collaboration with Chaldranyan continued and led to the films *Symphony of Silence*, *The Priestess*, and *Maestro*. Poghosyan has played dozens of roles in films based on his own screenplays. "Simply being an actor does not appeal to me. For me, the crucial things are my type of human beings and their qualities, which I try to express through my profession. In all the roles I act upon my feelings as an individual." He also reflects on the Armenian film industry and notes that today there is an atmosphere of alarm in Armenian cinematography. "The cinema is a synthetic art and brings together creative and technical teams. They are brought together by the film director who needs to have a clear strategy, whereas the Armenian film directors today are only led by their personal interests. A new approach is needed to create films that will have a conceptual framework and an objective, will have the necessary technical sophistication opening the way to international success and recognition. It is worth bearing in mind that cinematography is one of the most important ways of presenting a nation and its history." Poghosyan shares his concerns and proposals for the contemporary Armenian film industry.

If Only Everyone

Michael Poghosyan strives to be the first to translate his own words into reality. His latest film *If Only Everyone* is about Artsakh. It became an important instrument of advocacy as the film was submitted for Best Foreign Language Film at the 2013 Academy Awards. "The subject of Artsakh is important to me, and I could not stay indifferent; sooner or later I had to come back to it. This happened 20 years later, and the film was dedicated to all the men who participated in this war and today live by these memories and for many of whom the war is not yet over. The film is an episode depicting the consequences of the Artsakh war. It is a story of peace and universal human love," notes Poghosyan, the author of the concept, co-writer of the screenplay, leading actor and film producer. Although *If Only Everyone* did not get an Oscar, the film was ranked at 71 out of 250 films, which is great progress for Armenian cinema. In a short period of time, this film, presented to the audience in 2012, was awarded top prizes by a number of international film festivals, including the Golden Apricot International Film Festival in Yerevan and the Shining Angel International Film Festival in Moscow. *If Only Everyone* was also "rewarded" by a response from

The artist momentarily transforms when talking about Yerevan. Michael Poghosyan is a native of the capital – a real "Yerevatnsi," one of those residents who are familiar with every particle of the city and have taken a part in the development of the city's urban culture.



Azerbaijan, a vitriol unleashed on a global scale. This should be noted as an experience so that, when participating in international competitions, the Armenian side should be prepared for propaganda warfare. "I virtually had to ward off Azeri attacks on my own as I didn't get sufficient support either from Armenians or the Diaspora. We need to stand by such initiatives as a single nation, do our best to be presented to the public as widely as possible and raise our voices at various platforms," points out Poghosyan. For this reason, Poghosyan also assumed the producer's responsibilities for *If Only Everyone*.

Yerevantsi

The multitasking artist momentarily transforms when talking about Yerevan. Poghosyan is a native of the capital – a real "Yerevatnsi," one of those residents who are familiar with every particle of the city and have taken a part in the development of the city's urban culture. "There were a number of unwritten rules in Yerevan, making it the city that it was. For example, the concept of the yard, patio in the communal sense, where the local elders and girls were treated with emphatic respect. Unfortunately these rules are changing, and the new type of Armenians have ushered in new rules that have nothing in common with what I just described. There is no one to pass our accepted mores and values onto the new generations as all the Yerevan residents are leaving the country," ruefully notes the artist. He is one of the few exceptional artists who live with the joy and grief of the capital and through his numerous self-authored projects and characters reflects on Yerevan.

I was transcribing my interview with the much-loved artist while enjoying his performance of songs. Ruben Hakhverdyan's "This is Yerevan, where you are at home and where you are expected even at midnight..." was followed by compositions from Arno Babajanian, Hovhannes Badalyan, Artur Meschyan, Marina Ales and other well-known composers. Poghosyan's interpretation was suffused with his distinctive affection and refinement. And it is on this charming note that I conclude the interview.

Epilogue

"In my youth I was fortunate enough to interact with our classical intellectuals. Aghasi Aivazyan was my spiritual father and each time I met him, it felt as though I was "cleansed." For each nation, its greats are extremely important, their words are valuable and communication with them is vital for nurturing one's soul. We also had a generation of greats, who alas are leaving and there is no one to replace them. Contemporary art is becoming amorphous," Michael Poghosyan remarks with concern. However, after my meeting with him, I do not share this particular opinion of the intellectual artist. ■

METAL OVER MATTER





A man in black lights a cigarette. As he draws in that clean-as-it's-ever-gonna-get Los Angeles air, he stares straight into the deceiving December sun and says, "I don't ever remember an instance when I wanted to do something and couldn't, based on restrictions posed by whoever thinks I should or shouldn't be doing it." The man in black is Souren Mike Sarkisyan, guitarist and founding member of the Grammy-nominated metal band Spineshank, and that's how he takes on his day – with controlled angst and an unruly smile.

Text **Ara Tahmassian**

Reports were out that a vehicle had collided with an electrical pole, and about seven square blocks of Ogden, Utah were without power. A crowd of devoted fans who had waited the better part of a decade for their new album, *Anger Denial Acceptance* to drop, had gathered outside a local venue to see Spineshank perform. With no power in sight, not even a flickering street light, the crowd began getting restless – and so did Sarkisyan. "I called our singer, who was still in the hotel, and said, 'dude, get your ass over here. Me and you are doing an acoustic set.'" Pausing to take a puff of his first cigarette, he continues. "The place was packed, and these kids wanted to see us play." Armed with only electric guitars on tour, lead vocalist Jonny Santos and Mike borrowed two acoustics from a couple of guys in town, re-tuned them, and kicked off an intimate set for their grateful followers. "There were no lights, no amps – just us, the fans, and some candles – lots of candles. It was beautiful."

In 2004, Souren Mike Sarkisyan and Spineshank were nominated for a Grammy in the category of Best Metal Performance, alongside Korn and Marilyn Manson. They lost to some unknown band named Metallica.

Don't hold your breath for a Spineshank acoustic Christmas album anytime soon because it doesn't take long to see that Mike is more of a cigarettes over candles type of guy. So to their loyal base, whose support for the band has translated into selling hundreds of thousands of records worldwide and allowed them to share the stage with Slipknot, Metallica, Disturbed and the like, don't you worry about a thing – Mike's not going soft on you.

"You have to stay true to who you are," he believes. But when you're a kid, forming that identity can be difficult, especially when you're different, like an Armenian metal-head different. Today Mike looks back at those days, when he was bullied and forced to mix it up in schoolyard brawls, as mere growing pains. "I think everyone goes through some degree of difficulty, whether it's because of the way you look, your music preference or whatever," he says, as he lights up another one. "It developed my sense of individuality pretty early on." ▸

For the musician with a fan base that spans the globe from New Jersey to Spain, the little things don't seem to bother him much. So when the waiter mixes up Mike's order, he responds with a gentle "no worries, this is cool too."

He might be unapologetic in his articulation, but I can't say he's not polite, because he is.

His bad-ass vibe is noninvasive, perhaps even conservative, like the ink on his upper arms, which is barely visible beneath the short sleeved basic black tee. He's in his mid-thirties, but shows no major visible signs of being a Keith Richard-esque aging rock star. His wrinkles, however, are inside.

"I would rather have not made this record," he confesses, referring to the period of personal pain he endured while making the new album. "But shit happens. What are you gonna do?"

Anger Denial Acceptance is Spineshank's fourth studio album, released under Century Media Records, and produced by Sarkisyan and drummer Tommy Decker. The title refers to the various stages of grief and reflects the band's sentiments during the creative process. Although he refuses to share personal stories of pain, he does however say that "there was insanity around us, people in our lives were just dying left and right, divorce...things ending in general. You can either move on or choose to give up." He leans back, moving closer to the sun's rays, and says, "Life is too



beautiful to do the latter. You have to find a way to be resilient and carry on."

When I met Mike, the country was going through its own stage of grief. It was two weeks before the New Year, clear and crisp as the day can be, yet there was a sobering wind that kept reminding us of what had happened less than twenty-four hours ago on the other side of the country in a place called Newtown. Trying to make sense of a senseless act, the media posed all kinds of questions that day, including the gunman's musical preference. As a musician it saddens Mike, but he's heard it before. Isolated incidents, like that of the depressed teenager who took his own life while listening to an Ozzy Osbourne's song, or when false reporting claimed the Columbine murderers were influenced by Marilyn Manson's music, have caused a stigma to shadow metal music like perhaps no other genre. Sarkisyan believes that "if you connect with music, then it helps you get through the pain; it doesn't help you cause pain to others. If it does, then that's not a true connection."

Anger Denial Acceptance is Spineshank's fourth studio album and produced by Sarkisyan and Tommy Decker. The title refers to the various stages of grief and reflects the band's sentiments during the creative process.

"Music saved my life," he says. "I wasn't a good kid, but ultimately I chose the guitar over anything else." At about six, Sarkisyan started taking classical piano lessons and admits not having a passion for the schooling aspect, noting that "it's been a reoccurring pattern in my life." Instead he was attracted to the creative process. By seven, little Mikey was writing his own compositions and using them for exams. One day he heard Randy Rhoads' guitar lead in "Mr. Crowley," an Ozzy song. "Randy was doing these things with the guitar. It ruined my life," he laughs. "I picked up the guitar, and it's been a constant chase ever since."

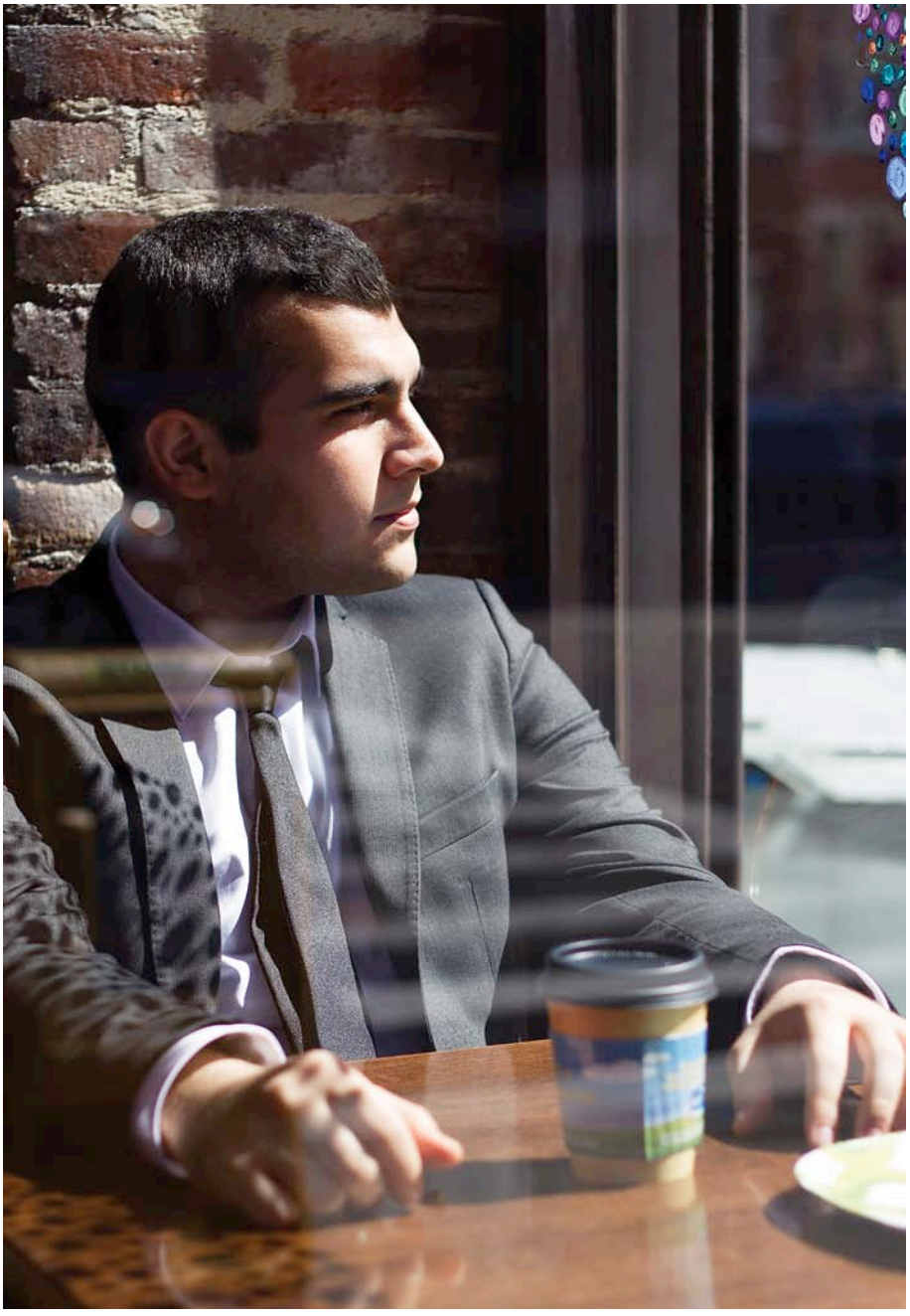
Mike was signed to Roadrunner Records when he was 20. Bands like Rob Zombie, Mötley Crüe, and Young the Giant, have called the label their home. Their debut album *Strictly Diesel* was released on September 22, 1998, about a couple of months after System of A Down released theirs.

"It was a good time to be in music; we enjoyed actual record sales," he points out. This was before Napster – and way before record stores ended up on milk cartons. For those of you with a Justin Bieber poster hanging in your room, a record store was where you went to purchase music. It was a physical place, and they could be found in local malls and shopping centers all over the world. That is, until they started disappearing at an alarming rate. "The balance between digital and physical record sales has shifted, but metal still sells physically. It's a matter of a kid looking at the art work and the liner notes. We spend a lot of time and energy on that."

In 2004, Spineshank was nominated for a Grammy in the category of Best Metal Performance, alongside Korn and Marilyn Manson. They lost to some unknown band named Metallica. Mike recalls that night. "It was kind of surreal – it still is. I remember sitting near R. Kelly, and it was around the time he got busted for that sex-tape or whatever. He had a Zorro mask on. I thought it was hilarious."

Although their current album is not nominated, Mike thinks it's the pinnacle of his career. One of the tracks is titled "Everything Everyone Everywhere Ends" – it's probably not going to be on your wedding DJ's playlist, but it could make the divorce party. The track opens like the raging temper of a derailed train and continues until it hits a brief sonic seclusion, and just as all hope is lost, slowly rising from the wreckage you can hear the *duduk* take form. "I've always wanted to use it in the context of a metal song," he shares. This haunting woodwind instrument is a glimmering light in an otherwise dark piece. And for Mike, who grew up in Armenia and lost his father when he was just nine, it's his way of coming full circle.

The sun, which had almost exclusively kept the man in black warmly lit throughout our interview, was fading. He took the last puff of his cigarette and finished, "Whether in a poem, a song or any other medium, an artist chooses to express his or her experience. The point is to let someone else know that they are not alone. People don't want to feel lonely; they want to feel like they belong somewhere." ■



The Soloist

At 20 years old, clarinetist Narek Arutyunian has it all – impressive technique, emotionally subtle interpretation and an exuberant presence on stage. For this interview, we meet at the famous Juilliard School of Music, where he is a second year student. Smiling easily, Narek impresses with his self-confidence, drive, sophistication, and positive attitude – laudable qualities way beyond his young age.

Text **Florence Avakian** | Photo **Brian Vu**

Winner of the 2010 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, which resulted in his debut at the Kennedy Center, Narek Arutyunian earned this praise from the prestigious Washington Post, "his playing reaches passionate depths with seemingly effortless technical prowess and beguiling sensitivity." His New York debut was at Merkin Hall in 2011 in the YCA's Rhoda Walker Teagle Concert. Narek has also appeared as a soloist with the Boston Pops Orchestra, the Meridian Symphony in Mississippi, the Buffalo Chamber Music Society in New York, the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, and in Russia with the Kaliningrad Philharmonic, the Moscow Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra and the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra, among others.

Born in Armenia in 1992, he left with his family to Moscow at age three and studied with Evgeny Petrov at the Moscow State Conservatory where he graduated with honors. Starting his concert career at age 12, he performed all over Russia and also entered children's competitions. He won the International Russian Rotary Children's Music Competition at 13, then the TV competition in Russia called *The Nutcracker*, which opened up opportunities for him to perform with major Russian orchestras. Shortly thereafter, he started touring all over Europe, gaining invaluable experience and perfecting his English, which he now speaks fluently with no accent. His many awards include First Prize at the International Young Musicians Competition in Prague at age 14, and the Musical Youth of the World Competition in Moscow.

The well-known and acclaimed conductor Constantine Orbelian, who brought Narek to the states as part of his Guzik Foundation scholarship program, has said that he is "thrilled to see Narek's meteoric rise in the ranks of the great young clarinetists of today."

What was the catalyst that drew you to music at a young age, and in particular to the clarinet, which is not a typical solo concert instrument?

First of all, my father Garen is a clarinetist. He was one of the best performers at weddings in Armenia. My mother Azganoush is a pianist. They both live in Los Angeles. My inspiration was my father. He was my idol. I would always hear him practice during my childhood and have always wanted to play like him. It was always Armenian pop, folk, instrumental music, and I was especially inspired by gypsy music. On the other hand, my mother was against me becoming a musician. They both knew how hard it is to survive as a classical musician, especially as a clarinetist. At the age of eight, my mother took me to a local music school in Moscow where they checked for my rhythm and musical abilities. The teachers were amazed and told my mother that if I didn't go into music, it would be a huge mistake. I started playing the clarinet at age ten or eleven. I especially wanted to be a performer of Armenian folk and gypsy music, playing at weddings like my father. My mother told me I had to first learn the basics which are the classical pieces. She brought me recordings of different composers. The first one I heard was the Mozart clarinet concerto. I was so amazed that I thought I was in heaven. I listen to it all the time. I can never get tired of it, especially the second movement.

"I want to become an influential and respected person like the great conductors Valery Gergiev and Vladimir Spivakov and help and support musicians to reach their goals."

During your recent concert at the Morgan Library and Museum, you played the Sonatina for Klezmer Clarinet and Piano by Paul Schoenfield. Was the clarinet for this piece a special instrument?

There was no change of clarinet for the Morgan concert. I played on my own clarinet, which was a personal gift from the conductor and violinist Vladimir Spivakov, with whom I have performed. The older the clarinet is, the worse it is. If the clarinet is a new one, and you play it for a year and it doesn't crack, then it's great. Mine is a clarinet made at a special factory in Paris, France which specializes in wind instruments – oboes, bassoons, amazing clarinets. I got a nice clarinet then which made my dreams come true.

What are the special attributes of the clarinet as opposed to other wind instruments?

The clarinet is one of the only instruments which is flexible in many musical styles. It possesses a substantial classical repertoire and is in great demand for jazz, klezmer, gypsy, folk, contemporary, pop and electronic. It can be used in everything. As an instrument, the clarinet needs a lot of attention from a performer as it is quite complex and delicate. For a clarinetist to succeed, one has to be good at managing the reeds, mouthpieces, ligatures, and be able to fix it on their own.

When did you realize that you wanted to have a career in music? And what was the route to the Juilliard School of Music?

When I heard the Mozart clarinet concerto recordings, I decided that I

wanted to be a famous classical clarinet player. I had the dream for many years to perform the Mozart clarinet concerto. I haven't done it yet with an orchestra. My dream is to be a clarinet soloist. If I work as hard as I am doing now, I think it will come true. At Juilliard, I am studying with Charles Neidich who made a solo career in the United States as a clarinetist. In 2009, when I had my recital at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, which was organized by the Guzik Foundation in California and the conductor Constantine Orbelian, I was invited to audition for Juilliard. I studied for one year at Queens College, then got into Juilliard on full scholarship. If you desire something sincerely and work hard, it will happen. I think audiences in the United States are interested in music. Whenever I play here, the halls are mostly full, sold out. I think if a performance is compelling or emotional enough, then every kind of audience will respond the same way.

What are the major differences between the training you received in Russia and the one here in America? Are there different points of emphasis? And which method is more beneficial for a young artist like yourself?

In Moscow, there was more emphasis on performing. Here at Juilliard, there is more emphasis on the arts, broadening your understanding of music, which you really should know as a performer, such as writing, knowing music history, literature and philosophy, as well as improving as a human being. And my life here in New York with all of the city's energy and activities has also greatly helped and changed me. My day is filled with classes, studying, practicing. It's a lot of work. I thought to myself: Why am I doing this? This is so much work – I'm just ruining myself. But no, I think I am developing in all aspects. Another dream of mine is to become a conductor, a huge passion for me which I am now also studying. As a conductor, you can perform pieces that you can't perform with the clarinet and piano or clarinet and orchestra, so my education at Juilliard intensifies that goal. Sometimes when I listen to a recording of orchestral music, I think that I would conduct it in a different way. I have my own idea of performing Beethoven's 7th Symphony or Brahms's 3rd or Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2. I think it will happen in the future. I don't want to play clarinet my entire life. I want to do many things. Maybe I'll even become a composer in ten years. I sleep only five or six hours a day because I have to study, to improve myself. That's what I live for. I love what I do. I am a positive guy, and I know everything will be great if I keep my faith and focus in the right direction.

Besides the powerful motivation of your parents, what other influences have affected or inspired your life and music? Have you been inspired by Armenian composers, and do you include their works in your concerts? And which composers are your favorites?

That's a good question. (He reflects quietly.) If you put aside the folk music that inspired me as I was growing up, I think Benny Goodman was the greatest influence. I was amazed at the number of tunes he composed. He was one of the most accomplished people in the world. Unfortunately, there is nothing in Armenian music for clarinet. My favorite composers? (He laughs). It will take two hours to tell you. I love everything classical, romantic. Twentieth century American music really fascinates me.

Maybe you can compose some Armenian music for clarinet. And as a conductor you can always bring Armenian music into the program.

"I want to inspire as many people as I can all over the world, to play everywhere, to engage my life with the world of music. It doesn't matter what the music is," says Narek Arutyunian.

That's a great idea, but I'm not good at composing. Sometimes in my dreams some music comes into my head, but when I wake up, it has been forgotten. I will be pursuing both the clarinet and conducting paths. It's music. It's what I live for. One of the only times that I played an Armenian piece for an audience was at the Boston "Pops" last June. It was Groong by Komitas, and the audience loved it. I also played Arty Shaw's Clarinet Jazz Concerto. I also love playing jazz. It's a huge passion of mine. I have a huge fascination with American music – Bernstein, Copland, Barber – the harmonies captivate me. I think they were all inspired and embodied the flavor of being in New York City. But this is something that I was recently fascinated by. I love all music that sounds good.

During your recent concert at the Morgan Library and Museum, your performance was also sparked by your emotional physical expression of the music which for me resembled some inventive choreography. What is going on when you perform? Is it an expression of confidence or anxiety or fear?

(He laughs spontaneously). I cannot express in words what I feel when I play. Music is the most expressive of the arts. Many scientists have said the songs of Schumann are the most understandable of the arts in terms of communication. And when I play music, it's a matter of me feeling comfortable, and that's how I feel the music. I just cannot blow into the clarinet and just make sounds. I do that when I don't like a piece, or when I have to practice certain passages. But when I'm performing at a concert, I give my listeners my own idea of what the music should sound like. And if I want to be comfortable I have to express myself. I do not concentrate on choreography. I play with confidence.

What are the emotions that you experience, before and after a performance? What is it you want to convey to an audience? And if you hadn't chosen a musical career, what other work would appeal to you?

Before a concert, when I was having my first experiences at the ages of 12, 13,

Performances
As a soloist, Narek has performed with the Boston Pops, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra of Moscow Radio, Moscow State Symphony Orchestra, Kaliningrad Philharmonic, Meridian Symphony in Mississippi, Chamber Orchestra Kremlin, among others.



14, I would be fearful. After a concert, I would feel relieved. Now, since I have a lot of experience playing for audiences, right before going on stage, I feel happy and responsible that I will have the adrenaline. I feel joyful that they came to listen to me and my message through my music. I cannot describe it in words. The stage gives you amazing energy. I always prepare well for all my concerts, and at the end it's a relief that it went well, which it usually does. Usually I rely on my own opinion. I'm the best judge of my performances. I will listen to a recording of my concert and keep on improving myself. I'm still studying, still improving. Everything you REALLY desire will happen. I try to give to the audience the way I feel about the music, show them how amazing it is and how much attention and respect it needs. When I'm on stage, I never think about anything that's going on outside of my music. It's an amazing escape which demands a lot of work. Until I hit the age of ten, I wanted to be a surgeon or a lawyer. I think a talented doctor is something people really need, saving people's lives or helping people live longer.

What influence has your Armenian heritage had on your music? If someone asked you what you are, what would be your answer? And what does being Armenian mean for you?

I am Armenian. Armenia is a nation which has a history of 5,000 years. Being an Armenian makes me really proud. It's not easy to be a real Armenian, which I'm trying to be. I'm happy with my origin. My family going back for many generations are all Armenian. Being Armenian is a responsibility, an honor. And it's a nation which has survived many tragedies. It has some of the most talented and exceptional people. Bringing my origin to the fore is a special responsibility for me.

How do you find the balance between your professional and personal life? What are your activities in your life besides music? And if you had a choice of where to live in this world, where would it be?

That's a good question. I guess I would live wherever I get a job offer. I always wanted to live in Armenia because it's my homeland, but living here in New York City, after performing in many places around the world, I think New York City is one of the most amazing cities in the world. Personal life is the respect you have to pay to your parents, your relatives, your friends. I go to the gym often. I run for about an hour every day. I love being with my friends and enjoying New York City. I go to museums, concerts, opera. I think I'm one of the luckiest people in the world.

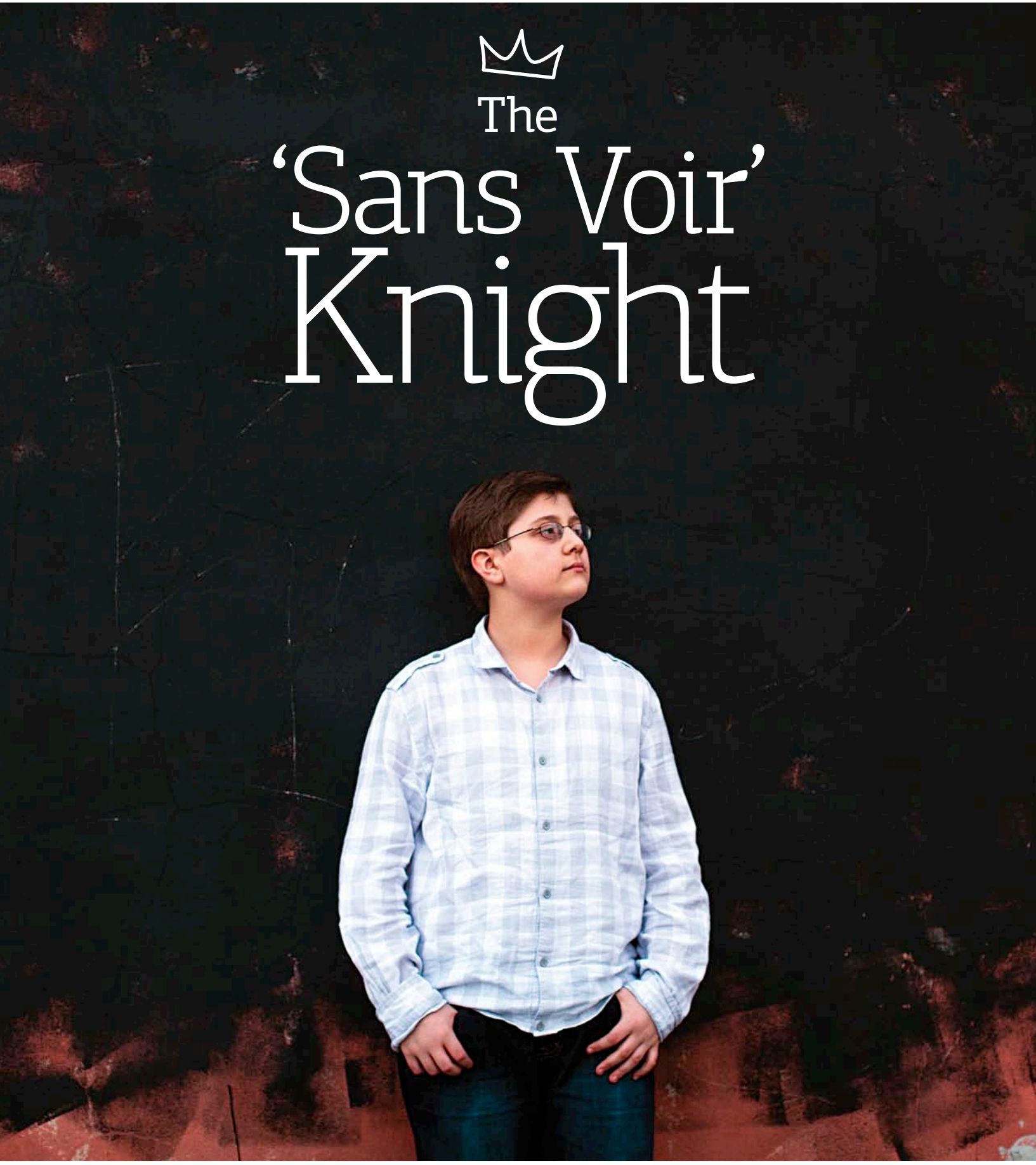
Following the fall of the Soviet Union, the budget for the arts in Armenia has suffered terribly. What would you do to help young people in their pursuit of a career in music? What is needed to get the youth there into the field of music?

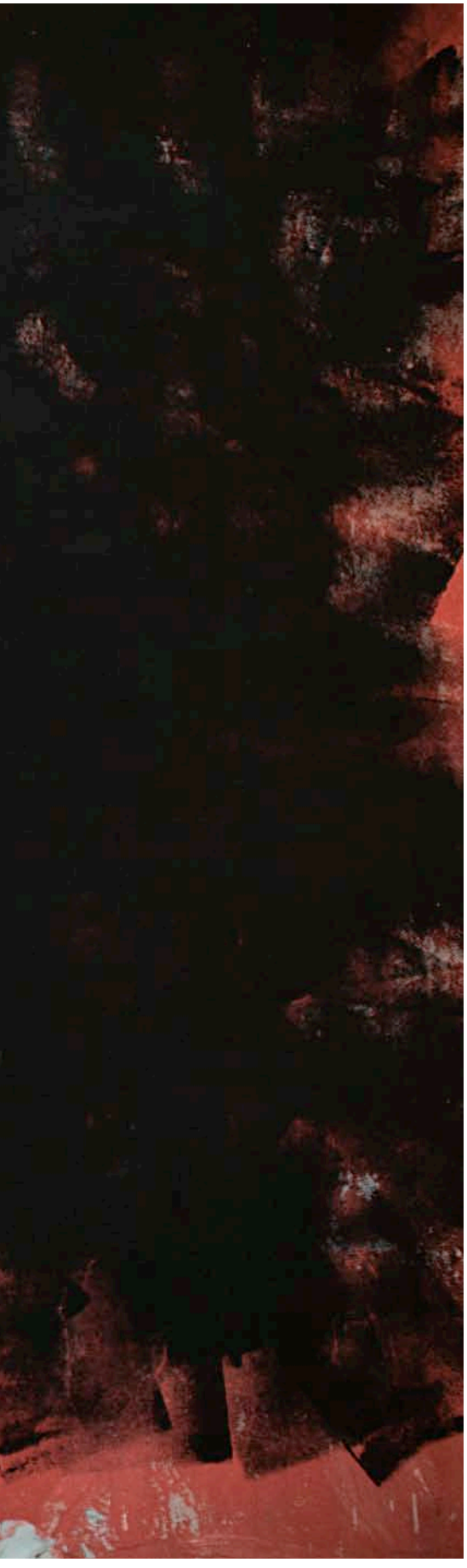
My advice for young people would be to find the personal voice of what you want to pursue, to achieve in life. It is something they will find over time. Always go after something you love and can't live without. Never hesitate to share dreams and passions with the people who care about you. Have a broad interest in everything. Do not let the music take over your life entirely. For the young people in Armenia, I would love to give master classes and play all over Armenia, which I have not yet done. For young musicians growing up, I would advise them to be heard and recognized by audiences. However, there doesn't seem to be an interest in classical music in Armenia. The most interest is in pop music.

Who is Narek Arutyunian?

I am a 20-year old musician who is ambitious and excited about his future. I am someone who thinks positively about everything and wants to inspire people with what he does. I want to become an influential and respected person like the great conductors Valery Gergiev and Vladimir Spivakov, and help and support musicians to reach their goals. ■

The ‘Sans Voir’ Knight





Garry Kasparov, known to be the greatest chess player in the world, once said: "Chess continues to advance over time. Players of the future will inevitably surpass me in the quality of their play, assuming the rules and regulations allow them to play serious chess. But it will likely be a long time before anyone spends twenty consecutive years as number one, as I did." This must have been said before Kasparov had formally met the young Samvel Sevian, who appears to be taking Kasparov's statement as a challenge and closing the gap between "long time" and "twenty years" with his sensational rise to the top of the world's chess rankings.

Text **Patrick Bairamian** | Photo **Tigran Tovmasyan**

Samvel Sevian was born twelve years ago after his parents Armen and Armine Sevian moved from Armenia to New York. The first time Samvel sat down in front of a chessboard, his dad Armen presented the centuries-old board game like a children's puzzle. "I showed him how each piece was allowed to move. He just – well, he just learned really quickly," laughed Armen.

After his first introduction to chess, Samvel's progress in the sport lit up like a mountain inferno. By the time he was four years old, Samvel was competing in tournaments and advancing in regional competitions. At age seven, he had locked in a United States Chess Federation (USCF) rating of 1700. To put that number into perspective, Bobby Fischer, known as the "greatest chess player of all time," achieved a USCF rating of 1726 when he was thirteen – nearly double the age of Samvel.

In 2008, Armen Sevian moved his family to Northern California, where they settled in the San Francisco Bay Area. During his tournaments on the west coast, Samvel met Andranik Matikozian, an International Master (IM) who subsequently became his coach. Upon learning how to calculate and analyze moves more efficiently under the tutelage of coach Matikozian, he achieved his greatest honor in his chess career. At the age of eight, he advanced his USCF score to 2000, achieving the ranking of Expert, the youngest person in the United States to do so. Not allowing the momentum of his achievements to slow down, when Samvel was a month away from turning ten years old, he shattered the USCF record by achieving the rank of National Master, surpassing Bobby Fischer twice in chess rankings.

Sevian's fame reached the point of national recognition in his chess career when he attended the U.S. Chess School in Los Angeles in December 2010. He sat down for an impromptu blitz game with International Master Greg Shahade. During a blitz game, each player is given fifteen minutes or less to best their opponent. Samvel clocked in his win at 4:25. The game was recorded by a phone camera, and the video itself went viral after it was posted on YouTube. *Yerevan* magazine had the opportunity to talk with Greg Shahade, the International Master who was defeated by the then 10-year-old. When asked about the game, Shahade responded that during the chess camp, he and Samvel had played numerous games in which he coached



Samvel Sevian was a month away from turning ten years old when he shattered the USCF record by achieving the rank of National Master, surpassing Bobby Fischer twice in chess rankings.

the participants with different strategies. "Samvel offered to play a casual blitz game for fun," said Shahade. "After a long day of training, I couldn't resist. So we sat down, and someone recorded the game, then posted it." When asked about Sam's potential in the chess world, Shahade only had praise for the young champion. "What sets him apart is his ability to learn rapidly. His family supports him, and he has a community that holds him up like a hero. He has a fierce desire to win, giving him that edge that will one day make him one of the best players in the world."

Not to be limited to tournaments hosted only in the U.S., Samvel sought to expand his realm of competitions by participating in international tournaments. Upon winning major competitions against international players, Samvel became a top contender in November at the 2012 World Youth Chess Championship, hosted in Maribor, Slovenia. Simply participating in the championship wasn't enough for the young chess master. He aimed to win in his age group (12 and under), and that he did. Winning the World Youth Chess Championship in his age rank led to his participation in the Master Norm Tournament in Los Angeles, roughly two weeks after Slovenia. With his undefeated streak in Los Angeles, he was chosen as the recipient of the Friedman-Schein Annual Recognition Award, presented in part by the American Chess Academy.

Before I was set to interview Samvel, the youngest National Chess Master in United States history, I had lingering questions hanging over my research: Why chess? What is so special about chess? Is chess a sport, a board game, or as some would say, an art?

It was also important to find out who the person was behind the contemplative stare of every tournament victory. At first I thought how intimidating it would be for me to sit in front of a 12 year-old boy who could play eight chess boards blindfolded and win them all. But upon sitting down with Samvel and his father, I discovered his personality was similar, if not identical, to my own cousins who were the same age. Sevian is just a regular, friendly kid with a shy smile. The only difference was that I sat across from the youngest United States chess champion and the forthcoming chess champion of the world.

Patrick Bairamian: "So, Samuel..."

Armen: Wait. Can you officially correct that? It's actually Samvel. Everyone calls him "Sam," so it stuck. But his real name is Samvel.

No problem, Samvel. Let's start with a question everyone is curious about. Why chess and not something else?

Samvel: When I was five, my dad sat me down and taught me chess. He presented the game as a puzzle. He would tell me that the pawn can only move one space forward while the knight is limited to "L" shaped directions. It was a puzzle I had to solve, and I liked solving them.

Well how about traditional sports like baseball or hockey?

Samvel: Oh! I love hockey. I watch it all the time. Chess is just more... it's beautiful. To play, to think– it's beautiful, that's all.

Which do you prefer, chess on a board or a computer?

Samvel: Doesn't matter for me. But, I can use games from the computer to show my coach and use them for studying later.

What influence has your coach Andranik Matikozyan had with your development?

Samvel: He taught me about position analysis – how to defend my pieces and to better calculate every move.

Armen: They call it tactical calculation. It's how each player calculates the move of every piece's position.

Samvel: It's about being careful... cautious.

Armen, did you know any of these techniques when you started to teach Samvel, or were you just familiar with the game?

Armen: Well – most of what I learned was from my mentor in Armenia, Genrikh Kasparyan. He was a chess composer, one of the greatest in the world. I taught some of that to Samvel when I saw that he was getting better, but Andranik has definitely taken the statistical analysis much further.

Have you had any other practice with coaches other than your dad or Andranik?

Samvel: Yes, with Alexander Chernin. He is a Chess Grandmaster and former Soviet chess champion. We met at the Kasparov Chess Foundation.

Is that where you go to learn from Garry Kasparov and other Grandmasters?

Samvel: Yes. I go with some other players – it's only three or four of us. And so we train with International Masters and Grandmasters. Alex is my coach. Every day for two months, he will come and coach me, five hours a day. We analyze strategies and tactics.

Are these strategies of former games played on the computer or new ones played against the Grandmasters themselves?

Samvel: Usually former games are recorded by the computer. But mostly we play among each other – the other three participants – then we analyze the moves with our coaches.

Let's talk about Garry Kasparov. He's said in previous interviews that you have what it takes to lead the new generation of chess players. Does that put a lot of pressure on you, almost as if it is now your responsibility to dedicate your life solely to chess?

Samvel: Well. (Pauses for a long moment) I love chess. It is my life. And I work better under pressure.

Armen: That's his way of saying he is ready for the challenge.

Samvel: It was an honor to meet him. He is the world chess champion, and he presented me with my medal. It was a happy moment in my life.



For two years, you've traveled the world on a marathon of chess competitions. How do you manage the expenses?
Armen: I'm glad you asked that actually. It's a big assumption by everyone that since Samvel is a champion, he's winning large checks of prize money at every tournament. But like you said, chess has a niche community of fans. Of course Samvel plays because he loves it, and we support him because it makes him happy, but I would say the biggest challenge is finding sponsors that can continue to promote the players and the sport.
What about companies like Excalibur Electronics, or – well, that's really the only chess company that I know.
Armen: That's the thing. Most people assume that chess is big and companies like Coca-Cola or some other company is backing us financially. To tell you the truth, our last tournament was funded by the Kasparov Chess Foundation, mostly by Kasparov himself. He knows how hard it can be to keep up with traveling for tournaments. Until players reach a certain level, like top ten in the world, you really need to find sponsors. Half the time, you're on the road to fund your next plane ticket to make it to another tournament.
What about the Armenian community? Have they been supportive at all throughout your journey?
Samvel: (Shrugs with a smile)
Armen: He's being a bit shy. We're both overwhelmed with the support, actually. Being from the Bay Area, there isn't a large Armenian community. So when we come down to LA, or anywhere that there are larger pockets of Armenians, we are always greeted with embraces. The Armenian community has really held us up, and I speak for our whole family when I say we're humbled. We want to be connected to the community more, especially since living in the Bay Area has somewhat severed that tie. That's why the event in Burbank, Calif. honoring Samvel is a big step for us to connect with the community.
How has being Armenian helped you be where you are today? Or has it?
Samvel: I'm definitely proud to be Armenian. I speak Armenian at home. I've been to Armenia... three times too!
Armen: Samvel won't tell you this, but he was jumping up and down when Armenia won the World Chess Olympiad. Having chess as such a highly-regarded and respected sport in Armenia helps support his ambitions to be the best.
What's the next move for you?
Samvel: I'll take being the number one world chess champion, (he laughs).
Armen: I would say maybe a physical move. Samvel has already won most tournaments in the Bay Area; he's outmatched them all.
OK, last question. Do average chess players like me have to worry about finding you on a Yahoo! Games chess forum, pretending you're a novice?
(Samvel and Armen both laugh.)

Our interview ended with Samvel returning to an afternoon training session with his coach, Andranik Matikozyan. The following day of the interview, Samvel was being honored by Armenian-American community leaders and organizations which had invited the Sevian family to Arbat Restaurant in Burbank. At the event, Samvel played multiple chess games in front of an audience of 100.
At this point, Samvel, his father, Levon Aronian, or Garry Kasparov cannot define chess as any one thing. But, who says that's a bad thing? Chess can be defined like love. "Love is..." and for the next two thousand years, scores of men will define it. But for this writer, chess in our reality is like poetry in the sense that poets are considered to be interpreters of a language streaming across the cosmos. Chess players offer a different interpretation. They are mathematical warriors, statistical wizards and puzzle-solving sages. Their tactics on the chessboard can be used to achieve victory on a battlefield or allow the mind to exercise its analytical lobes to advance to levels of interpretive masterminds of logic, psychology and geometry. Either way, chess cannot be defined by one word or for one group of minds. Chess is not just a board game, it's a window into a dimension of wisdom that we will come to understand over time with chess masters like Samvel Sevian leading the way. ■



Denice Brown

Muse of the *Whimsical*

Light blue and white, the walls of the room sustain buoyancy, simultaneously revealing the actions and emotions of wayward creatures at a party amongst the colorful paint strokes, resembling confetti. In the center a bright yellow table, amorphous yet defined, supporting an elaborate plume of ribbons in blue and pink, paired with a vibrant expression of flowers in the corner of the room.

Text **Nare Garibyan**

Russell Aharonian, who is a mainstay in the Portsmouth, New Hampshire art scene, calls this piece "The Pie Party", which was featured in the 2012 film *Being Flynn*, starring Robert De Niro, in portrayal of the dynamic and complicated Jonathan Flynn, a self-proclaimed writer. The film documents how Jonathan reunites with his son Nick Flynn, a writer and poet, by chance after years of estrangement, when he utilizes the services at a homeless shelter where Nick is employed. Russell Aharonian and Jonathan Flynn became friends unloading boats on the Portsmouth pier. When Nick began to collect materials for the film, he approached Aharonian to feature his art on screen. "The Pie Party" and "The Goddess and the Joker" were chosen to adorn the walls of Jonathan Flynn's various residences in the film, which is based on Nick's memoir, *Another ...Night in Suck City*. Russell recalls how Nick took Robert De Niro to meet Jonathan Flynn because he was going to portray him in the film. Jonathan asked De Niro, "Do you think you can handle it?"
In "The Goddess and the Joker," Aharonian creates an imaginative union between two unlikely figures: a magnificent golden goddess and an energetic and quirky creature in a ritualistic setting, guided by the light of a torch with a red handle. Both these pieces seem to reflect, to a certain degree, the essence of Jonathan Flynn, his life, and his efforts to reconstruct his relationship with his son.

"I think working on paintings all the time, there is a certain process to it which is kind of parallel to life; you make mistakes, you correct them and then you keep going," he says.





← "Who's In the Basket", 2012, acrylic on wood 38x31 inches

↑ "Who Knows Where or When", 2012, acrylic and epoxy on canvas, 9x12 inches

In the late 1950s, Russell Aharonian graduated from North Andover High School in Massachusetts where a counselor asked him, "Are you interested in art?" Russell was not interested in pursuing art because he was unaware of the opportunities in the art world. Instead, he joined the United States Naval Air Command stationed on an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean. When in port, Russell immersed himself in art, visiting the great art galleries in Spain and Italy, falling in love with Barcelona and Rome. He explored Gaudi and Joan Miro in Spain. Russell

↓
"The Goddess and the Joker", 2010, acrylic on canvas 12x16 inches



→
1963 Chrysler 300, embellished by Aharonian from 1976-1983





↑
Aharonian and his "To Life" car, 1976, Portsmouth, New Hampshire

→
"The Pie Party", 2011, acrylic on canvas 12x16 inches



What is Erotic Art?

Erotic art is difficult to define, but in general it refers to various art forms, such as paintings, engravings and sculptures that portray sexually-oriented depictions and scenes, along with the corresponding emotions. From the beginning of time, different cultures from prehistoric tribes to Egyptian society, the Roman and Greek empires, and Asian and European groups have expressed numerous interpretations of erotic art. For example, in the Eastern world such as Japan, China, and India, the ability of humans to love and express that love was celebrated through erotic art.

Russell Aharonian shares his thoughts about erotic art: "I think it's mostly the explicit imagery that upsets people, but it has been around since the beginning of time. I usually pay attention to the beauty of how much love was put into a work more than the content or the imagery or the color. I imagine what makes something erotic to some people is something in themselves that they see in the art, and that could be good or bad. I think it is the culture that makes the distinction, not the individual. Most people, if they identify something as they look at it, they usually see what they want to see."



→ "Mellow Yellow", 2012, acrylic and epoxy on canvas 16x20 inches

"My painting style is organic, humorous; I am random with the choice of color. It is a process; lately I start with just a drawing and let it develop. I am intuitive," says Aharonian.

states, "I like Miro because he is happy. I like his images. I like his color." In some way, art and creativity have always been a part of Aharonian's life beginning in childhood when he used to dig clay in the backyard to make shapes and spray paint in the garage. He reminisces, "I was just really creative; I used to go to the library when I was like five, six, and seven and look at all the art books."

After two years of service in the Navy, Russell Aharonian returned to America and attended the Art Institute of Boston on the G.I. Bill, where he received a BFA. "In art school, I had some excellent teachers and most of my best teachers didn't teach technique; they taught me how to find myself." He studied the work of the abstract expressionists such as Arshile Gorky, who was Russell's connection to his roots, finding his Armenian-ness within Gorky's work and his own. In this spirit, he never stopped looking at the world around him and dared to experiment with humor, sexuality, color, whimsy and erotic art within his paintings. Aharonian is inspired by female energy. "I love their energy, the excitement, the shape and form, the whole thing, the exchange, the dialogue." He describes his painting style as "organic, humorous; I am random with the choice of color. It is a process. Lately, I start with just a drawing and let it develop; I am intuitive."

In 1974, Aharonian's experimentation lead to his arrest for displaying "obscene" art during an art show, within a mural in a Portsmouth, New Hampshire mall. Russell recounts the events, "I was living in Kittery Point, which is right outside of Portsmouth in Maine. I had a barn over there, where I had a studio. One day, Vesta Brue, the coordinator of the art show, came over. She saw what I was doing and invited me to be the feature in the art show. She gave me a 17-foot wall to do whatever I wanted to do. So I did. I covered it with paintings. I had things spinning and moving with paintings mixed in, and I had cut outs from collage. There were Margaret Mead and Henry Miller, you know, kind of inspiring things. A lot of it was collage. I used Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Tibetan elements, some of which were erotica, and some were X-rated photographs, all mixed together. It was big." Soon thereafter, the coordinator asked Russell to streamline his mural, and he refused. As a consequence, Russell's mural was covered with a white sheet, and from behind the white sheet police removed the pieces that were considered obscene. Eventually, the mural was taken down and Aharonian was called to the police station to pick up his materials. Once at the station, he was arrested for his expression. On October 30, 1974, Aharonian, accompanied



← "Miraculous Blossoming of the Winter Cherry Tree with Friends", 2012, acrylic on wood 21x41 inches



↑ "Midnight", 1991, oil on canvas 37x73 inches

↓ "Dancing Fools", 2011, acrylic and epoxy and canvas 12x9 inches



↑ "Boomerang", 2012, acrylic on wood 38x31 inches





← "The Carousel", 2009, mixed media on canvas 25x37 inches

↓ "A Mayan Princess Trip to Chichen Itza", 2010, acrylic on canvas 20x27 inches

Russell studied the work of the abstract expressionists such as Arshile Gorky, who was Russell's connection to his roots, finding his Armenian-ness within Gorky's work and his own.

by a local lawyer and a civil liberties lawyer wearing a Superman T-shirt, went to court. The case was dismissed and in the *Boston Globe*, it was written that the police got an art lesson, remembers Russell.

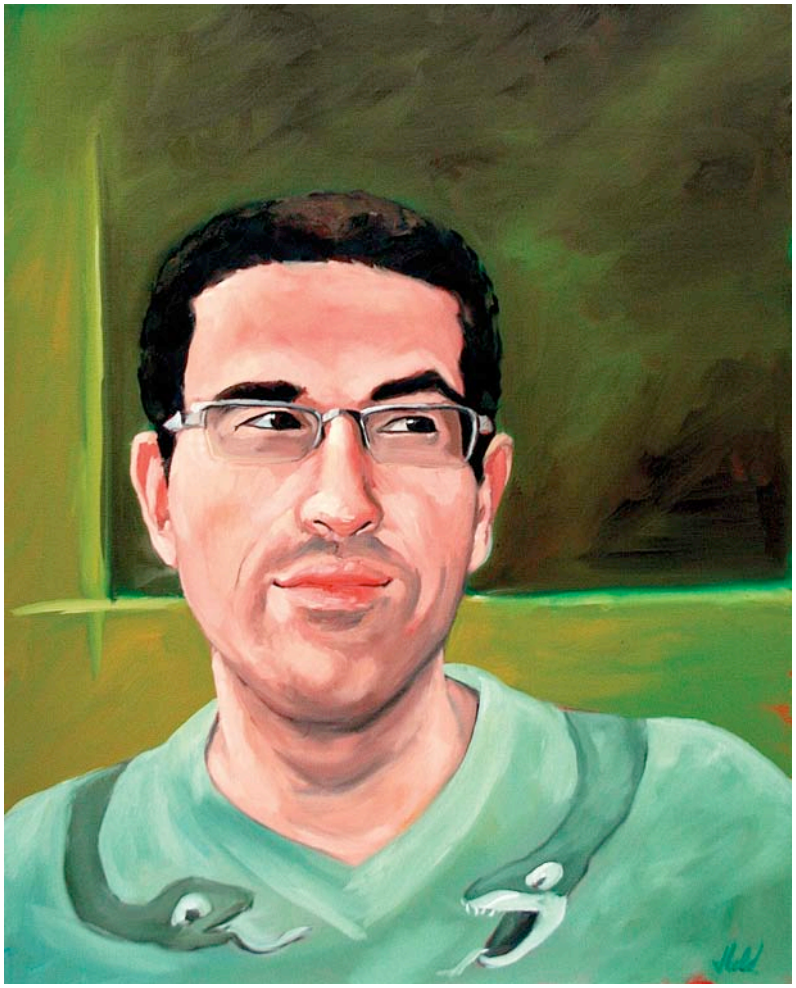
In response to this restriction of expression, Aharonian purchased a 1963 Chrysler 300 and decorated the car with art, including collage, erotic elements, and multi-dimensional aspects, with a license plate entitled, "To Life." Coincidently, all the elements that Russell used on the car were censored within the mural. His car was presented in a book, *Wild Wheels*, featuring outrageous cars across America. This is a testament to Aharonian's philosophy, "I always lived out loud and as bad as I was sometimes, I was honest about it." The element of honesty comes across in Aharonian's paintings and the way he conducts his life, always painting, and with enough zeal to pursue multiple interests. "I was a massage therapist for 20 years. I did construction for 20 years. I had a business, a spa with three massage rooms." His fiancé, Merrill Black, whom he first met in the '70s, shared that "massage was a natural extension of his art." His massage therapy business, Tactora, grew out of the work-based wellness program Russell developed with Penny



Morrow while working in construction for Maine Post and Beam. Tactora also had a gallery where he showed the work of local artists.

Russell's work is on exhibit at the New Hampshire Art Association's Levy Art Gallery, The Barn Gallery and the Ogunquit Art Gallery, both in Ogunquit, Maine. Aharonian explains that he works on paintings all the time. "There is a certain process to it which is parallel to life; you make mistakes, you correct them and then you keep going." At age 74, Russell Aharonian continues to work. In April, his paintings were exhibited at Plymouth State University at the Karl Drerup Art Gallery. He says he does not have any regrets. "I just need to live until I am 100." ■

Beauty of the Unconventional Art



Like beauty, some say art is in the eye of the beholder. Others rely on professionals who have embraced art as a part of life. The ones who have turned critiquing a work of art into their career. People who have the power to set an okay piece apart from a spectacular piece. One of these people is Hrag Vartanian.

Text **Violet Kanian** | Portrait **Matt Held**

Hrag Vartanian has always had a passion for two things – art and writing. Growing up, he was an avid reader which sparked his love to tell stories. Once he discovered the work of painter Arshile Gorky, Vartanian felt a certain connection. Whether it was Gorky's Armenian descent and his cultural history or just an understanding of different visual aspects, Vartanian's passion for art grew rapidly. He considers Gorky his "gateway drug into the bigger world of art and art history." Using that gateway, Vartanian found himself with a graduate degree in art history from the University of Toronto. He and Veken Gueyikian created the art forum website Hyperallergic three years ago. He says that his interests lie within talking about visual phenomenon and images. In other words, blending his two passions perfectly together. Although Vartanian has and still creates his own art in the form of graphic design, he prides himself as a writer before anything else. Vartanian has developed a reputation – people know who he is and have certain expectations of him and his topics. He says that that's what makes a good critic. That may be why Vartanian's readers connect with his words. His authenticity shines through his critiques, along with creative professionalism. He doesn't mind that some people just may not agree with everything he writes. He says that what he publishes either resonates with you or it doesn't. "I'd like to think that I appeal to a lot of people who understand what I'm trying to say," says Vartanian. "I try to tap into issues that are bigger and connect them to the world, and I think people really appreciate that." He also believes that consistency plays a key role in being a successful art critic. In the field of art, it's really all about taste, and that's what critics use to understand and connect with a piece of work. "You develop different ideas and voices through time," explains Vartanian. "A lot of people, particularly young critics, come onto the scene and think 'Oh, I'm going to write one piece and everyone's going to notice.' " With naysayers believing that art critics shouldn't have the right to judge a piece of work, Vartanian says that his job is just like any other expert's – except that art critics are trying to start a conversation about what they are evaluating. "Art critics at the end of the day are contributing to a conversation – we're trying to lead the conversation and influence it because we simply have more expertise on the topic," says Vartanian. "Just like any other expert in a field." Although Vartanian may have a distinct voice in the world of art, he doesn't judge every piece in the same way. When approaching a piece aesthetically, he looks at how something may appear – whether

it's beautiful or engaging. He factors this criterion in before writing. When looking at contemporary art, he has a completely different approach due to the differences in people's ideas of beauty. Vartanian takes into consideration whether the art piece has an impact on the world. "Contemporary art is beyond purely the visual anymore," says Vartanian. "It has a lot of other motivations, so it's about the impact it has on culture, the impact it has on society, on an idea."

Although one may think that something on the other side of the art spectrum, like oil painting, couldn't possibly be judged in the same way, the truth is, it can. Vartanian says that if a social project is supposed to create awareness in society, then he will use the same criteria for that project as well. One concept that he looks for in all pieces of art across the board is whether the work makes people talk. He believes that the success of a work of art shouldn't be based on the financial aspect, but on the conversations it creates. On television, in a magazine that's not related to the world of art, or among a group of friends at a local coffee shop – discussion about the work is what stands out to Vartanian. He can walk out of an exhibition and have divergent narratives and understandings of various aspects of a show – understanding different aspects of visuals. With this creativity in mind, Vartanian is in the process of creating the Art Installation in Times Square. A more recent household name in art would have to be Andy Warhol. His thoughts were provocative for his time, yet his influence can still be seen in today's art. Vartanian says that although he was important to his generation and is a genius of his time who should be recognized as one of the greatest artists of the 20th century, too many artists today are using him as an excuse for their art – saying they are doing the "Warhol" thing. "Certain things do come in and out of fashion, and while I do think Andy Warhol was a genius for his time, I think a lot of artists and people have taken to him thinking it's sort of a solution for art now," says Vartanian. "Some of us would argue, well, Andy Warhol had his time and now we need new solutions."

Integration became a indelible part of the contemporary art world; the borders have blended, and it's often hard to tell where an artist is from. "People can take narrative from their own local culture," describes Vartanian. "For example, if you're a painter from the States and are interested in Western landscapes you may do work connected to that, but that's not to say you can't be a Swedish painter and do the exact same thing – which happens." Along with the borders, various art forms are also being blended. Musicians may be creating visual art in the form of film and vice versa. Vartanian believes that the world of contemporary art is going to change and the blending of the different forms is going to increase. "Fifty or 60 years ago, to think that visual art could include audio was unheard of, or very radical," explains Vartanian. "I think this integration is going to increase, and there's going to be a really big effort to try to bring contemporary art into everyone's life as much as possible."

> "Art critics at the end of the day are contributing to a conversation – we're trying to lead the conversation and influence it because we simply have more expertise on the topic," says Hrag.

A style that increasingly receives recognition today is street art. Graffiti is now considered art, while years ago it was just purely a delinquent act. Vartanian says that the emergence of street art and graffiti in a museum context shows just how much the perception of art has changed. This art genre had been done before; nevertheless, he says, it's never been done with such level of sophistication and creativity.

Alongside graffiti, a newer medium of art is, surprisingly, video games. They have entered the world of art and are present now even in the museums. Ten years ago, Vartanian says that no art critic would have ever viewed video games as a form of art. Picasso, Van Gogh and Rembrandt are household names, but household names in today's society carry a different weight. Vartanian presents as an example the internationally-renowned British street artist, Banksy, as being one of today's common household names whose work can be seen all over the streets of Los Angeles as well as in Museum of Contemporary Art. With an actual technique and statement behind his pieces, graffiti artist, painter and film director Banksy would be the perfect example of an artist crossing over various platforms of art.

Now, Vartanian's Hyperallergic website and Tumblr are joining forces to create a big art show. In 2011, during the Egyptian Revolution, Hyperallergic found a writer in Cairo who ended up contributing his story about the rise of street art during the revolution. Being the first to publish such a piece, the article was even picked up by the *New York Times* blog. Vartanian says that without social media, that wouldn't have been possible with what little resources the company had at the time. "Social media has made art more accessible," says Vartanian. "Everything was really reliant on hierarchies, but now social media allows people to talk to one another in a way that wasn't possible before."

Vartanian doesn't use social media merely for his website and the world of art, however. Right after college, he left the states and went to Haigazian University in Beirut where he worked with Armenian and non-Armenian students. From there, he went on to work with the Armenian General Benevolent Union – AGBU – and has been with them for 14 years. He started by helping with the NY summer intern program, later helping to build their first website and all their websites since, along with handling AGBU's social media. Although he takes time to do other projects, art is always a part of Vartanian's life. From walking through the city, New York or London, Hrag can't help but notice all the art that surrounds him – another reason why he loves street art. "Art is not always presented in conventional ways," says Vartanian. "You just have to notice it to really appreciate it." ■

ARTivism: Art for a Cause

The All Armenian Students Association celebrated "ARTivism," a one-night art showcase held at the Les Noces Du Figaro in Los Angeles. Over 30 artists with a diversity of skill sets – among them painters, photographers, and illustrators – joined forces displaying a medley of art, all for a good cause.



The All-ASA chose ONEArmenia, a non-profit organization that is currently working on raising awareness on domestic violence issues in Armenia, to donate over $3,500 of its proceeds," said Edlin Yousefi, one of the organizers of the event.

Although college students organized ARTivism at a grassroots level, the audience attracted a wide-ranging crowd of art lovers from all ages and backgrounds.

Ani Tatintsyan, All-ASA's Chair of Homeland Welfare, said, "We really wanted to use ARTivism as an opportunity to turn art into an action that creates positive change in a community, as well as showcasing the artists who were kind enough to contribute their talents to the event."

"It's such an honor to support our younger generation trying to make a difference for Armenia," shared Vahe Berberian, an honorable artist for the evening. "I feel art is a positive gateway for our youth to come together. What is actually more worthy is that there are a lot of non-Armenians involved. It is refreshing to see everyone working together."

Participating artists were also pleased with both the exposure and feedback from the over 400 guests that attended.

"When I heard ARTivism was for an Armenian cause, I knew my art would be a good fit. I am half Armenian and we have a lot of amazing artists," said fashion artist Darian Vardanian, whose style is a mix of self-proclaimed fashion illustrations that embody a fantasy world he's living in.

Spectator and fellow photographer Avo Kambourian shared, "I used to be an ASA member, this event is close to my heart because I know the people who started ONEArmenia. They work night and day to start projects for Armenia. It is really good to spread art and activism." With the event billed as a successful one, Tatintsyan said events such as these will surely take place.

Art.Life Brings Talents Together

Exhibition nooks, juxtaposed amongst canvases and sculptures, custom-made, uniquely upholstered armchairs and sofas, including a grouping of old wooden theatre chairs, painted in the likeness of renowned singers and actors, such as Marilyn Monroe and Frank Sinatra were available for guests to use and served as excellent conversation pieces.







The 11th floor of the landmark LA Mart building was transformed into an elegant and lively art space. Throughout the evening, 2,000 people visited the exhibition. The basis of Art.Life, as envisioned by Amy Demirchian, the event's producer, was to combine everyday furniture with artwork that creates a cohesive living environment.

The seating was provided by Demirchian's company, EWI Collections, which is located above the temporary gallery space, in anticipation of a new art gallery Amy plans to open, adjacent to her offices on the 12th floor of LA Mart, in an effort to elaborate further on the concept presented in Art.Life.

Demirchian's creative team was comprised of Event Director and Public Relations contact Emma Moralyan, Media and Design Coordinator Henri Martel, Social Media Manager Karo Moralyan, Event Planner and Coordinator Oskar Rivera of O Rivera Event Productions, and Co-Curator Dale Youngman of FABRIK Magazine.

The exhibition space contained 300 pieces, diverse in composition, aesthetic mentality, and thematic focus. Amongst the 50 artists and sculptors, 15 were of Armenian background, including Jenik Cook, Vahan Demirtchian, Darzoo, Laura Durgaryan, Faro, Yan George, Vahram Hovakimyan,Varuzhan Hovakimyan, Lilya Kalashyan, Samvel Marutyan, Martin Petrosyan, Liousin Semerdjian, Yelena York Tonoyan, Liz Trdatyan, and Henrik Vardeniktsy. Artwork was also displayed from Sebastiano Ciarcia, Michael Hayden, Monika Jensen, Stuart Kusher, Caryl Levy, Duncan Linthicum, Daniele Matalon, Andre Miripolsky, and Sara Palacios, amongst others.

Over the course of the March 30 evening, Emma Moralyan officially welcomed the guests, presented Amy Demirchian, and acknowledged Art.Life's support of the LA Art Alliance and Free Arts for Abused Children charitable organizations. Frank Joens, the Sr. Vice President and General Manager of the LA Mart building, also welcomed the audience and recognized the 55th anniversary of LA Mart.

Oskar Rivera greeted attendees and entreated people to enjoy the art and the ambience at Art.Life. Peter Drivas, the founder of the Los Angeles Art Alliance (LAAA) praised the event's charitable focus.

Photographs taken by young artists from Belmont High School, through the LA Art Alliance program, were also shown in another display nook.

A portion of sales revenue from the exhibition was donated to LA Art Alliance and The Free Arts for Abused Children organizations to ensure that the children of Los Angeles will be exposed to the arts and benefits that accompany artistic expression.

Icis Apartment Homes Unveil to the Public

Yerevan magazine hosted the unveiling of Icis Apartment Homes in Glendale, Calif. as guests enjoyed tours of the new complex and its exquisite amenities and sophisticated residence.

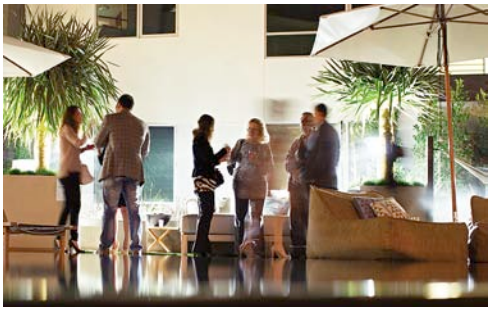














The event took place in the Icis Lounge under the stars. Fittingly, this is the space where residents would have the opportunity to entertain their own guests.

Over a hundred people enjoyed signature cocktails and Chef S. T's flavorful fare. The innovative cook behind the Kitchen X Catering Company brought a fresh approach to the hors d'oeuvres with careful preparation and presentation. An espresso bar by Bon Cafetit offered the attendees coffee as the guests mingled poolside.

Shervin Youssefian, director of *Crossroad*, stated that the setting was a wonderful combination of glamour and comfort. "It was a pleasure to attend another successful event hosted by *Yerevan* magazine," said Armine Ohanessian, designer of R-Mine Bridal. "We can't wait for the next one."

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UCLA ASA Cultural Festival

When eighth grader Aldo made his way from Nimitz Middle School in Huntington Park to visit UCLA, he had never met an Armenian before; to be frank, he didn't even know what one was. But by the end of the day, he learned how to write his name in Armenian, snacked on some tasty hummus and most importantly – gave that wrist a good old fashioned twist and danced to some traditional Armenian songs.



Flyers read, "How to Be an Armenian for a Day" and a sign posted said, "Teach Me How to Dance *Shalaxo*." The UCLA Armenian Cultural Festival, brought to you by the Armenian Students Association, combined food, dance, trivia, sixty signed portrait prints of Charles Aznavour by artist Zareh Meguerditchian, and a traditional rug display by Armen and Karo Ovsepian for a fun-filled day at the Bruin Plaza.

"I was nervous, but it looked like everyone was having a good time," shared Zara Hovasapyan, Cultural Committee Chair. "March 4 doesn't mark any holiday or historical victory in Armenian history but our love for our culture is felt every day, and we are always happy to introduce it."

The newly-formed UCLA ASA's Armenian Dance Group, established in the last weeks of fall 2012 and directed by Lyolya Hovhannisyan, educated the crowd with the rich history of Armenian dance, but most importantly it engaged all the students who entered the space. The Bruin Plaza turned into an Armenian party that even woke up the two-ton Bruin statue.

"Archaeologists have discovered rock paintings of ancient Armenian dancers in Armenia and the land of Ararat dating back to the third millennia BCE," said Vice President Paytsar Topchyan. President Kristina Nalbandyan added, "Every quarter we try to incorporate something that's cultural." She humbly credits the tireless work of the sub-committees and volunteers who make their events possible.

As the ASA pointed out, last year marked the five hundredth anniversary of Armenian printing from its origin in Venice, Italy in 1512. It was there that the famous English poet Lord Byron fell in love with the Armenian language, eventually writing several grammar books, translating chapters of Armenian history and pioneering the establishment of Armenian Studies.

Who knows, maybe young Aldo – who was still dancing when I left – could be inspired from the day's festivities to one day follow in Byron's footsteps.

AQUA SOLEIL

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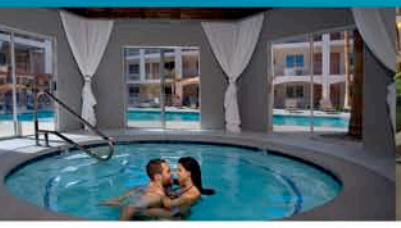


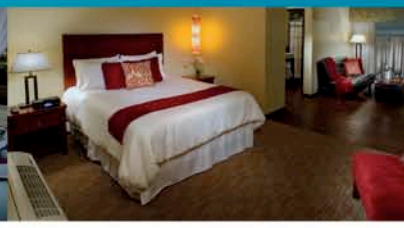

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Destination Janapar

Unpaved roads and footpaths, known for centuries only to the natives who used them to get from one village to another, suddenly acquired a new mission. Woven into a net of paths, they were converted into a long route that now takes visitors toward the unseen and previously undiscovered countryside of the landlocked Nagorno Karabakh Republic, which I prefer to call by its historic name – Artsakh.

Text **Ani Nazaretyan**

Hayk Matevosyan

The hiking route across Artsakh, known as the Janapar Trail (from the Armenian word Janapar meaning road, way, path), has been designed to pass by age-old fortresses, monasteries, castles, canyons, caves and waterfalls, unveiling for the traveler the immaculate corners of mountainous Artsakh. At the end of each day, the path takes the hikers to a new village, the genuine hospitality of which often surpasses the static reception of many urban hotels. John Muir, the famous advocate of the preservation of wilderness in the United States, believed that only by going without baggage could one truly get into the heart of the wilderness. Thus, by stopping in a new village at the end of each day, the hikers travel light without any camping gear and enjoy the wilderness of nature. When I first visited Artsakh, which, by the way, is only accessible through Armenia, the work on the Janapar project was still in progress. However, today, seven years after the project was first initiated, visitors can fully enjoy all the picturesque sites that the southern half of the region has to offer. The Janapar project is the result of the steadfast work of Raffi Kojian, a man who first visited Armenia in 1994 as a university student from the United States and made up his mind to experience the country to the fullest. To do this, he packed only two suitcases and repatriated to Armenia the next year, hoping to contribute to the country in some way. Since then, Kojian has indulged himself in several successful projects.

After his first visit to Armenia, Kojian created cilicia.com, a website where he shared his impressions and experiences about his trip to Armenia. Soon a number of the repatriates who joined the site became some of the first online Armenian resources within the repatriate blog and chat rooms. In the 'Why Are We Here' section of the website, the users share their life experiences in Armenia with the world. The general idea is to give people on the outside some perspective on what it might be like to live in Armenia, so that they can consider whether it would be the right move for them. The simple goal here is not to just paint a rosy picture, but rather to present "the good, the bad and the ugly." Currently the website mainly serves as a chat room.

Another project spearheaded by Kojian is the award-winning site Armeniapedia.org, an online encyclopedia about everything related to Armenia and Armenians. In 2004, when Kojian saw he could create a wiki, which is a website developed collaboratively by a community of users, allowing any user to add and edit content, he decided to move all of the articles from Cilicia.com onto Armeniapedia.org and put it into a wiki format. With the help of a handful of editors, the online encyclopedia is continuously enriched with new data and has over a million page hits a year. As a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) contractor, Kojian worked on facilitating Armenia tourism development and

in 2001 opened the first tourist information office in Yerevan that provided unbiased help and free information to all those who were eager to discover and rediscover the country. The endeavor was funded both by the USAID in Armenia and by the Armenian government. Unfortunately, the office was closed in 2011.

Together with Brady Kiesling, Raffi Kojian published the first edition of *Rediscovering Armenia* in 2001 – one of the first detailed guides to every village, monastery, mountain and rock in Armenia and Karabakh. The second updated edition was published in 2005, and today the book is also available online for free. All these projects gradually paved the route that eventually led Kojian to the Janapar Trail. He traveled extensively around the country and knew the countryside quite well, so when asked whether he would be interested in working on such a project, he didn't think long to answer "yes." With the help of a number of volunteers, Kojian set off to the undiscovered regions of Artsakh. He created new maps, and by 2007 more than 200 km of the trail were marked. Unfortunately, funding dried up at the end of 2008, and by 2012 the trail markers needed maintenance and work. So on his own initiative, Kojian went to Karabakh with a paintbrush and, along with the help of volunteers, started repainting the trails. Afterwards, he worked on expanding the website and updating the maps.

Today the entire southern half of the trail is complete and many visitors from around the world, armed with their maps, have the unique opportunity to discover the unseen jewels of Artsakh while hiking along the chain of routes woven together by Kojian and his team. Kojian recently incorporated a GPS-enabled smartphone application to enhance the visitor's experience on Janapar Trail. "I put almost all of the trails onto the app called EveryTrail. I uploaded photos and created a GPS tracking and description for every section, so now the visitors can download the maps directly to their smartphones and navigate through it," says Kojian.

Is there a better way to get an idea of what one should expect when hiking the Janapar Trail than to hear it from the lips of those who have actually experienced it? Among visitors who have recently hiked Janapar, there were many non-Armenians. It was especially interesting to hear the confessions of those who were drawn to Armenia and to Artsakh for the sheer reason of discovering a new country. Below are confessions of two tourists from Israel who shared their impressions with *Yerevan* magazine.

Raffi Kojian recently incorporated a GPS-enabled smartphone application (EveryTrail) to enhance the visitor's experience on Janapar Trail.



↑ Raffi Kojian



↓ Gtichavank Monastery near Togh Village

Shaili Cahalon

travel guide from Israel

"I was planning to visit Armenia as part of my journey to the Caucasus region and was searching for information about hiking trails around the country. An acquaintance of mine forwarded me the link to the Janapar Trail website. On the website I found specific details about the hiking trails, day-by-day itinerary, trail marks, descriptions of the different parts of the trail, topographical maps and even contact names and phone numbers in the different villages. After reading all these I got even more excited to visit the country. I traveled there accompanied by a friend of mine from Israel. We got in touch with a girl from Karabakh who told us about the area, so when we got there we felt a little bit more connected and less alienated. The locals we met were absolutely generous and wide hearted. I was highly impressed by the trail-makers' work, and the maps that we had were good. Sleeping in the villages was an experience in itself. Since there were no hotels or guesthouses along the way, we found shelter in the villages. People in some villages were not expecting any tourists and were surprised to see us; nevertheless

everyone was happy to host us. They did it without hesitation and wholeheartedly. Grateful for such warm reception we wanted to compensate them for the trouble and offered money, but they refused to take it. We were treated like guests of honor. Locals would gather the entire families for a fancy dinner and would cook special foods for us. They even spared a room for us, and their kids had to sleep at neighbors' houses. Next morning, they equipped us with food, and one day, the hosts woke up early in the morning just to get us to the bus station. The only difficulty on our way was the language barrier. We had a pocket dictionary (Russian-Hebrew) with us and it proved to be a great help. Since we were short of time, we decided to travel only to specific parts of the trail. Detailed descriptions gave us the opportunity to decide ahead which parts of Janapar Trail to hike and which to bypass. We trusted those descriptions and were not disappointed. I was glad to get to know the unique people of Karabakh and experience the beauty of its nature and historical sites. The whole trip was a special and meaningful experience for me."





← Karkar Canyon

↑ Janapar Trail mark



← Wild bee orchid



→ Villager with Karintak Village behind him.

Janapar Trail Guide

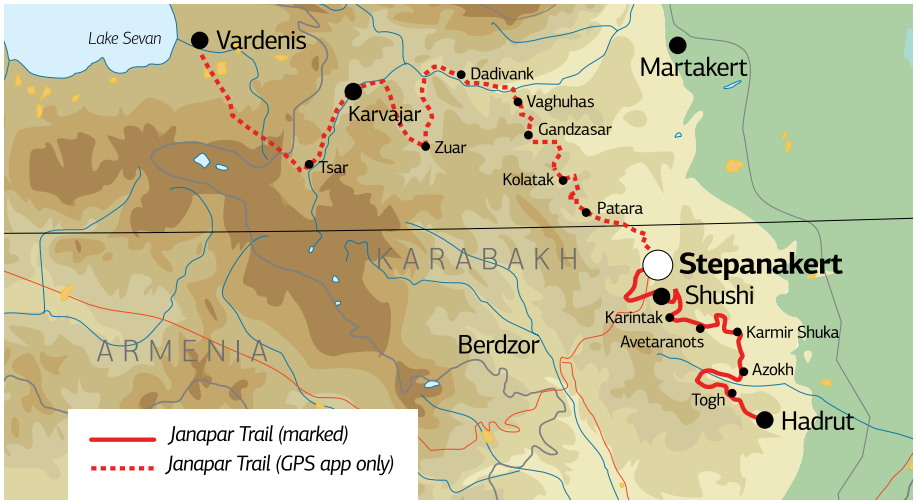
1. Head to Kilikia bus station in Yerevan and take the morning mini bus, marshrutka, or a taxi to Stepanakert, the capital city of Artsakh. Travel time is about eight hours with several stops on the way.

2. Get your visa at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Stepanakert. The visa is issued after entering the country.

3. Head to the Stepanakert bus station to catch a bus, marshrutka or taxi to Hadrut.

4. Make your way to the old church in Hadrut and you'll find the first trail markings... follow them!

For the markings, look for a blue rectangle/streak/arrow. The older ones have the yellow footprint on them, but the newer ones do not.



Kojian made up his mind to experience the country to the fullest; to do this he packed two suitcases and repatriated to Armenia, hoping to contribute the country in some way.

Yaron Weiss

project manager, Israeli Telecom Company

"Before setting off on my trip, I read the history of the countries that I had planned to visit. I felt deep sympathy with the Armenian people and the Movement for the Liberation of Nagorno Karabakh. So I decided to make it my destination. The idea of creating the Janapar Trail was a great one for several reason: it provides positive exposure to the Nagorno Karabakh region, is aimed at preserving the nature and the environment, and helps to directly acquaint with the locals as well as encourages the Armenian Diaspora to visit their homeland. Besides the nature and stunning views, I was impressed by the hospitality of the locals. Despite the language barrier (I traveled alone and I do not speak Armenian or Russian), the locals hosted me wonderfully, let me feel I was part of their family. I was impressed by the wonderful combination of nature, history, culture and people that I encountered while hiking the Janapar Trail. The route planning is excellent. Walking days are not too long, and every day the walk ends at a village or town where you can stay. Inspired by that exciting trip and the things I learned about Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, upon my return to Israel I made up my mind to promote two agendas among my Israeli friends. The first agenda is the Israeli recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and secondly I want to spread knowledge about the movement for liberation of Nagorno Karabakh. I feel deep disappointment about the fact that the State of Israel does not recognize the terrible crime that occurred. Please note that the Israeli people feel deep solidarity with the Armenian people, and I feel sorry that the government does not reflect the opinion of the people in this respect. There is little knowledge in Israel about Nagorno Karabakh and the conflict that exists there. By means of writing articles I intend to spread knowledge about Nagorno Karabakh and describe the country's trip options. This is aimed at attracting backpacking travelers from Israel. My second mission is to influence public opinion, with the hopes in the future to influence the Israeli government to support Nagorno Karabakh and minimize relations between Israel and Azerbaijan."

Armeniapedia

Kojian encourages new editors to join Armeniapedia. "You are literally a click away from contributing to the information and knowledge," he says. "There are many people who know a lot about Armenia, about its art and culture. It would be wonderful if they could share their knowledge by editing articles on Armeniapedia and by adding new pages. Anyone truly interested in facilitating the easy access of information about Armenia and Armenians and aiming to preserve historical pages of the country, can help us by editing existing texts, digitizing new texts or adding other information. Armeniapedia is really easy to edit, and there is room for everyone," Kojian concludes.

I decided to start with the man in the mirror and took the first step toward contributing to Armeniapedia.org. In order to edit the articles or add pages to Armeniapedia you need to request an account by sending an email with your request to the administrator. The whole process of receiving my login with password and getting into the account took me less than 10 minutes. There are more than 6,000 articles on Armeniapedia, so in the search bar I had to type the name of the subject that interested me in order to check whether I needed to create a new page or edit the existing one. I sat there and wondered what to type, and the first thing that crossed my mind was Yerevan magazine. I was going to be the first person to create this page on Armeniapedia. It was hard to resist the immense feeling of responsibility and satisfaction that rained upon me the minute I clicked "edit" and saved that new page that now is open for everyone to edit. So if you wish to add more to what I have created, feel free to request an account and contribute to Armeniapedia.org by sharing your supply of information and knowledge. ■

A True Inspiration

When I interviewed 78-year-old Julie Ashekian, her passion for Mer Doon, the home she co-founded with Dikranouhi Karapetyan for girls aging out of orphanages in Armenia, was so strong it was almost tangible. I asked, "How old are the girls when they're required to leave the orphanage and come to live at this halfway house?" she politely, but swiftly, corrected me. "Mer Doon is not a halfway house. It is not a dormitory. It is a home for girls. It is their home – something they never had before."

Text **Pattianna Harootian** | Photo **Arnos Martirosyan**



↑ Mer Doon's foyer

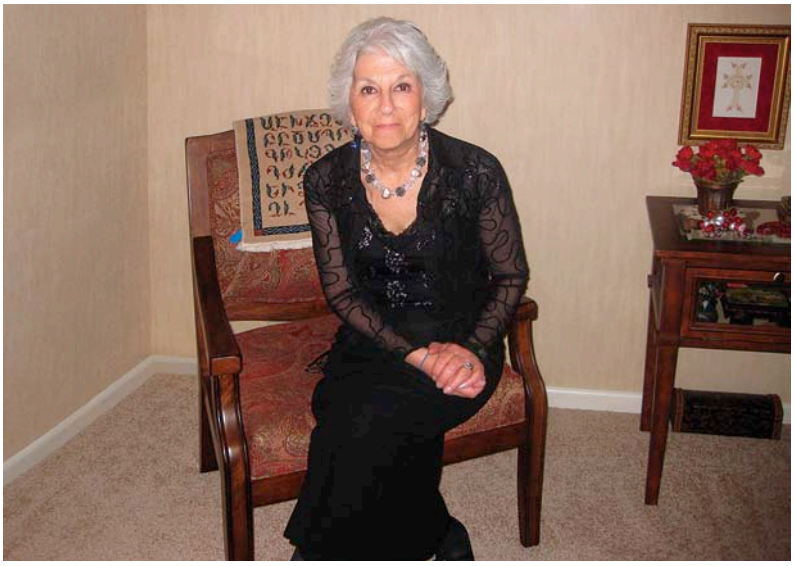
It was early on in the interview that I understood why the girls who reside at Mer Doon refer to Mrs. Ashekian as Grandma Julie. If one were to make a prototype of the perfect grandmother, it would be a resemblance of Julie. Her kindness emanates through her words and tone. She was being interviewed by me, yet asked me questions about my family and career, and was genuinely interested in what I said. She was a great listener and I found myself hoping to become her friend. Her affection and concern for all of the girls she has helped was apparent in everything she said. Her eyes lit up and her face beamed with pride as she boasted about the girls' accomplishments. They included earning college degrees, growing their own vegetables in the garden, planting fruit trees, cooking meals, participating in many of the local festivals, and marrying and starting their own families.

Julie has been to Armenia 42 times since she began her crusade in helping orphans. And despite being on chemotherapy to treat ovarian cancer, she continues to try to go twice a year and works her chemotherapy around her trips, when possible. Her commitment and devotion to helping orphans made me wonder if she'd had a similar plight to the over 9,000 orphans she's helped. "Oh no," Julie said, "I grew up blessed in a traditional, strict Armenian home. My parents were both survivors of the Armenian genocide and my father had an undying allegiance to Armenia. He named his first born, my sister, Hayastan, which means Armenia."

After the Armenian earthquake of 1989, Julie got involved with an orphan sponsorship program, Children of Armenia Sponsorship Program (CASP), through the Diocese of New York. She remembers being both excited and fearful. CASP helped four orphanages, and Julie and her husband, Clement, used their home as an office for 13 years. Julie spent a lot of time at the orphanages and grew bonds with many of the children. At eighteen, the children technically

Mer Doon is a small home that can accommodate up to fourteen girls. The girls that come to live there must be serious about their education, which is generously provided for them and paid for.





↑ Julie Ashekian, founder of Mer Doon Charitable Organization.



↓ Ashekian and the ladies of Mer Doon during one of her frequent visits.

become homeless, often having been made promises of jobs and apartments that never come to fruition.

The girls especially concerned Julie, as she knew how tough it was for them to be on their own, without any family support, and many were lured into undesirable situations. Initially, Julie spearheaded the renovation of the first floor of a building next to The Gamo (Karav) orphanage by Lake Sevan, for emancipated girls to live in temporarily. Next, she created Mer Doon with co-founder Dikranouhi Karapetyan.

With the help of some generous donors and fundraising efforts, they were able to purchase a house in Echmiadzin, which was renovated into today's Mer Doon.

"I chose a home in a normal neighborhood. I didn't want to go to Yerevan because we wanted a quiet, spiritual place. Echmiadzin is the home of our beautiful *Mayr Ator* (mother church), and other ancient churches," Julie explained.

Mer Doon is a small home that can accommodate up to fourteen girls. The girls that come to live there must be serious about their education, which is generously provided for them and paid for by the Armenian Education Foundation in California and the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR). The girls are afforded a four-year college education, earning degrees. About 25 women have lived in Mer Doon since its inception about seven years ago, and all of them have proven Mer Doon a successful entity, by fulfilling its mission and becoming self-sufficient, independent, successful, empowered, and educated women.

Eight women have married since leaving Mer Doon, something they'd never dreamed of. Mer Doon has taken away the unfortunate stigma that being an orphan in Armenia carries, and has given







↓
Dikranouhi Karapetian, President and Co-Founder



→
By the Hripsime Temple in Echmiadzin



↑
The carpet-weaving workshop and the crafts room



→
Tea party in the dining room





these women opportunities they didn't even know existed. Ani, one of Mer Doon's current residents, is referred to by Julie as their professional farmer. "She plants everything in that garden, which those girls did all by themselves – they have fruit trees and grow vegetables and berries and then can them in the winter. These girls are incredible cooks, too. They make dolma and enter the dolma contest in town yearly, at the Sardarabad Festival, as well as take part in many of the local celebrations." Julie speaks so fondly of these ladies, her adoration of them is palpable.

Julie's praise of Mer Doon and the girls is well deserved. Mer Doon has enjoyed first prize in Echmiadzin's annual contest for Best Creative Christmas Decorations for the past four years, and its residents take part in many of the local festivals. The beautiful and talented girls of Mer Doon welcome guests with home cooked meals and entertain them with singing, dancing, and intelligent conversation. For those who've had the pleasure of visiting, it is an experience they never forget and the girls leave an indelible mark in their minds.



If you visit Mer Doon's website (*Mer-Doon.com*), you can read about each of its girls. They all have positive things to say about Mer Doon and its impact on their lives. One girl, when asked "what did Mer Doon give you?" answered, "I'm so happy that I'm afraid to talk openly about my happiness." Another girl said, "The most important thing is that I don't feel abandoned here." They all speak of their gratitude to Julie and the faculty at Mer Doon, and they all give back to Mer Doon. While living there, they contribute to the daily household chores and once moving on, they return to help out when they can. Our family, as the staff refers to the girls, also gives back to the community. The girls are encouraged to visit regional orphanages, where they are able to show the orphans that adoption is not their only option – that there is still hope for success and a bright future.

When I commended Julie on her work, she demurred the compliment. "I couldn't do this without my husband. He and my family are my strength." She continued, "Mer Doon's success is not due to one person. It is because of Dikranouhi and her staff's dedication, love, and commitment that Mer Doon has earned such a respectable reputation and has numerous success stories."

It is this meritorious reputation that brings such visitors as the First Lady of Armenia, Rita Sargsyan (who has visited Mer Doon on several occasions), as well as other famous and accomplished Armenians, including singers Nune Yessayan, Haygo, Andre, Alla Levonyan, and Artour Ispiryan, composer Martin Aharonyan, filmmaker Alexandr Mirzakhanyan, and many others who helped in the production of a Mer Doon documentary that was presented at the Moscow Theater in Yerevan.

Julie is proud of the work being done at Mer Doon, but she wants to do even more, as does Mer Doon's United States Board of Directors, which hopes to enhance the program by introducing job placement opportunities to the girls. It is not surprising that Julie was chosen as "Armenian of the Year" at the 2001 Diocesan Assembly. Julie is truly an inspiration to all those fortunate enough to cross her path. ■

Mer Doon welcomes guests with home cooked meals and entertains them with singing, dancing, and intelligent conversation. For those who've had the pleasure of visiting, it is an experience they never forget.

Changing Lives and Expectations

The word technology has been applied to evolving tools for eons. Looking at vintage photographs, we wonder what people were thinking and doing when old technologies were new. Just imagine the Singer Sewing Machine salesman lugging his sample equipment by donkey over the dusty roads of the Ottoman Empire in search of burgeoning markets. And the telephone! How many folks in the 1910s had a phone in their homes? At best, people shared the phone as well as the phone line with a neighbor. Contrast this with today, when people have both a private line in their home and a cell phone for each family member.

Photos and text provided **Ruth Thomasian from Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives**



Armine Dingilian Arolan 1-04, Schenectady, New York

Cinching the Stitch

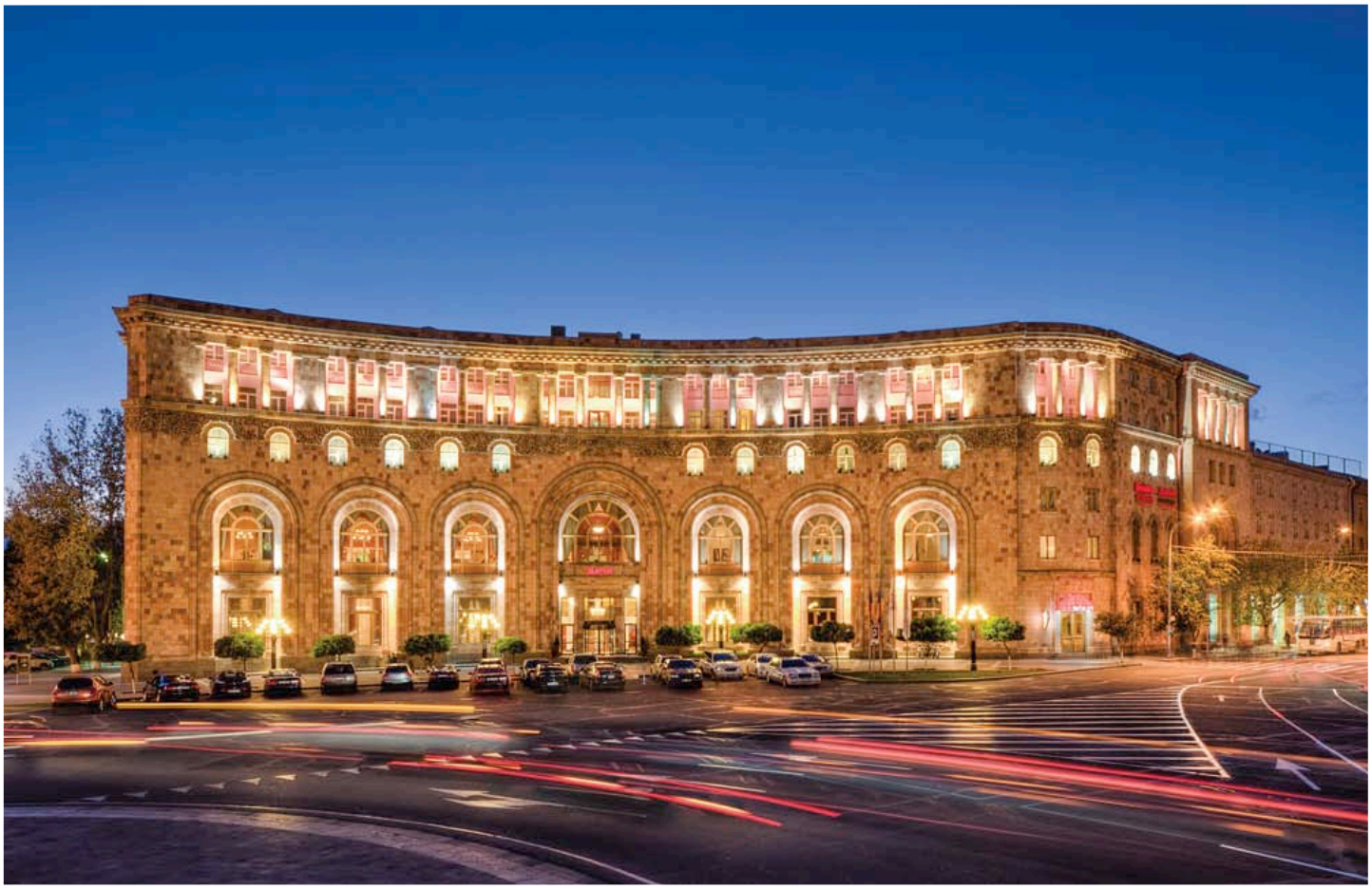
Stepan Dingilian, a Singer Sewing Machine salesman, commissioned this photo of himself and his client in 1899 in the town of Sivri-Hissar near Angora (Ankora), Ottoman Empire. He appears to be demonstrating the quality of the stitching. Note the crank wheel and below it, on the ground at the left, the carrying-case cover, clearly marked with the Singer logo. Our salesman wrote a greeting on the back of the photo to "my loyal friend, Dikran Effendi Tobatian, wishing him "a Happy New Year on the threshold of the 20th century." Even then Singer sewing machines were referred to as domestic, and not industrial, technology, and were marketed to women in North America and Europe for making their family's clothing and also earning money doing piece work. Interestingly, this photo in the Ottoman Empire, a relatively new market for Singer, does not include women.



Virginia Kazanjian Bedrosian 2-90, Methuen, Massachusetts

Rethink Possible

Eugenie Kazanjian poses with the telephone receiver to her ear at a photo studio in Lowell, Massachusetts, circa 1914. This candlestick style telephone, which had its technological beginnings in 1890, is used here as a photo prop to make a cute picture, but its significance as a prop tells us that it is considered an item of prestige. Eighty years later, in the 1990s, Eugenie's sister submitted this photograph to the AT&T Archives in New Jersey for consideration in a mini exhibit titled, "People Talking on the Telephone." It was one of the 15 images chosen to grace the corporate hallways of the AT&T headquarters and inspire their employees with the power of technology and an Armenian girl's eyes.



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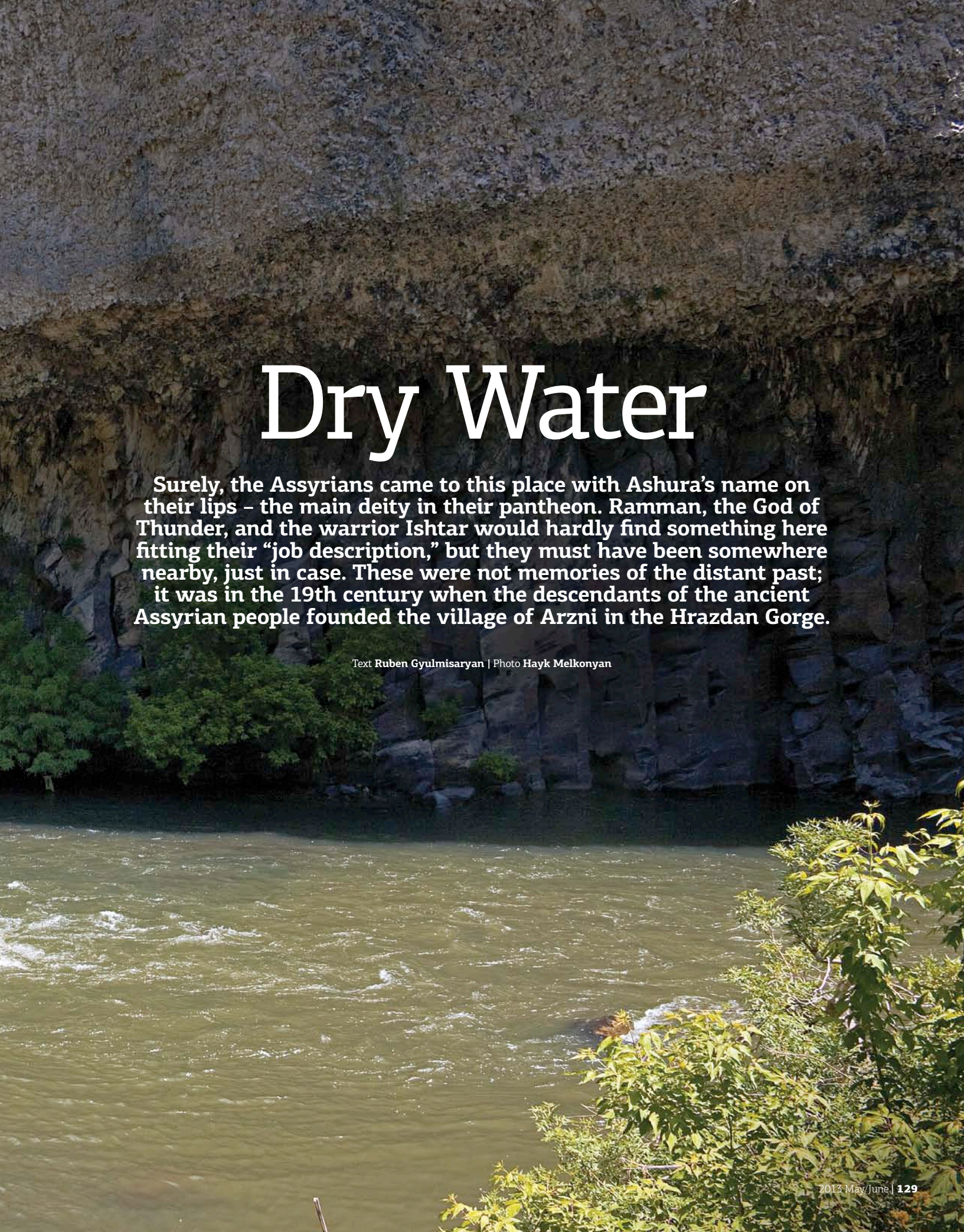
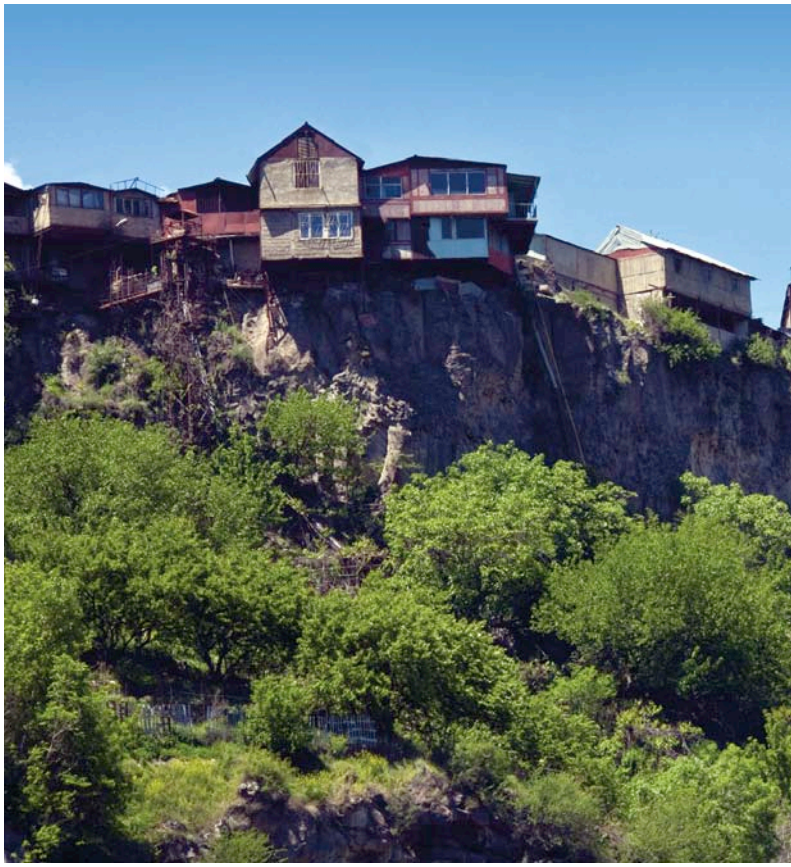
Dry Water

Surely, the Assyrians came to this place with Ashura's name on their lips – the main deity in their pantheon. Ramman, the God of Thunder, and the warrior Ishtar would hardly find something here fitting their "job description," but they must have been somewhere nearby, just in case. These were not memories of the distant past; it was in the 19th century when the descendants of the ancient Assyrian people founded the village of Arzni in the Hrazdan Gorge.

Text **Ruben Gyulmisaryan** | Photo **Hayk Melkonyan**





The Guard Is the Head of Everything

I never cease to marvel at the number of climate zones in Armenia. Only about some 23 kilometers from Yerevan, it seems as though we are in a completely different zone. Complying with the mood of the bright May morning in Yerevan, we set off toward the not-so-distant Arzni wearing just T-shirts and welcoming the belated spring warmth. Soon we reached Arzni, and as we got out of the car, we suddenly realized it was cold, which should have been predictable. What else could one expect in a village located in a gorge on the slopes of the left bank of Hrazdan at 1,250 meters elevation above sea level? We started frantically digging into our bags, looking for jackets possibly taken at the last moment. There was a standard question in the sleepy eyes of the rare passersby: "What on Earth brought you here? It's not the season. Some people just can't sit home."

The same unpretentious thoughts clearly were in the head that looked out of the window near where we began to look through our bags. The head looked, disappeared and soon reappeared with the same expression, but now decorated with a uniform hat. The head tried to make a serious face and demanded, "Come in."

"There we go," we thought. "Got ourselves into trouble and are being taken by the police for no reason at all." Imagination pictured, if not an interrogation, at the least an identity check and deportation back to Yerevan.

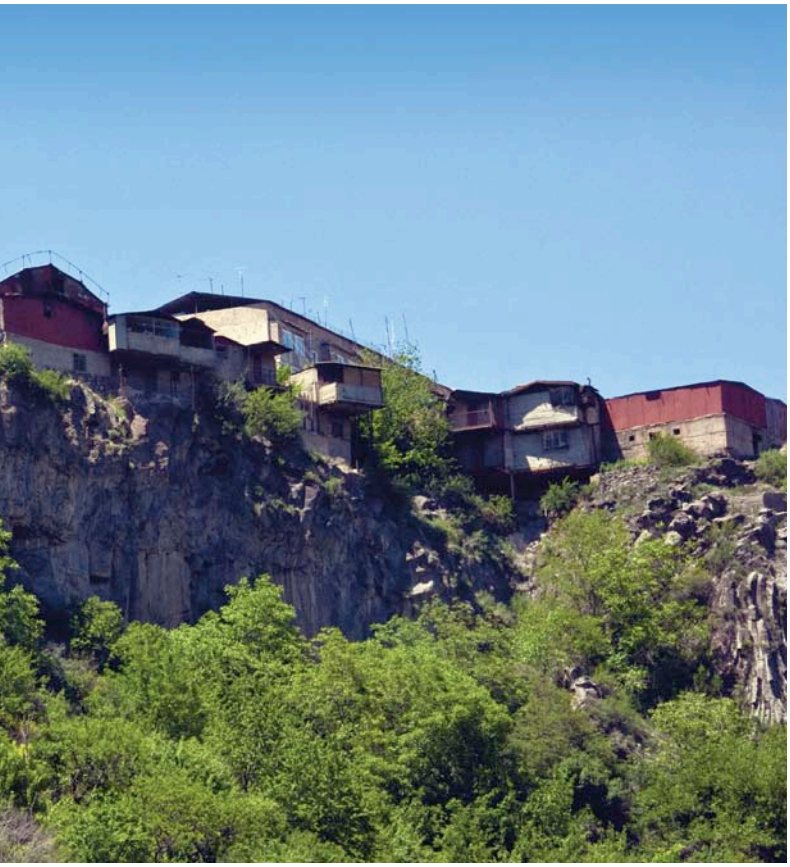
These unreasonable if not absurd fears, however, soon dissipated when it became clear that the head and everything else, although in a uniform, actually represented the guard of some

↓
By the Mart
Mariam Church



Assyrians

The modern Assyrians are the direct descendants of the population of the Assyrian Empire (7th-8th centuries BC.), situated in Mesopotamia and adjacent to the areas to the north of Babylon along the banks of the Tigris River. Representatives of many Assyrian communities in various parts of the world speak the languages of those countries. The Assyrians in Armenia are the third largest ethnic minority after the Yezidis and Russians. According to the head of the Assyrian community, Arsen Mikaelov, their population in Armenia reached about 7,000. Due to economic problems after the collapse of the USSR, many Assyrians have emigrated from there, mainly to Russia. The modern Assyrians first came to Armenia after the Russian-Persian War of 1826-1828, when the Russian government allowed the supporters of the Russian army – Armenians and the Assyrians of the city of Urmia district – to move into the Russian Empire. In Armenia, they founded three villages – Arzni, Dimitrov and Verin Dvin. The traditional trades of the Assyrians here are agriculture, horticulture, viticulture and crafts.



The head looked, disappeared and soon reappeared with the same expression, but now decorated by a uniform hat. The head tried to make a serious face and demanded, "Come in." "There we go," we thought. "Got ourselves in trouble and are being taken by the police for no reason at all."



← The bridge over Hrazdan Gorge in Arzni

local institution. So it was he who voiced his fellow villagers' silent question: "Are you lost? Visiting someone?"

"We are waiting for a doctor who was in a sanatorium. By the way, we should call him to meet us. How can we explain to him where we are exactly?"

The policeman called him with his cell phone. The doctor, as it turned out, was just driving out of Yerevan. Our host began a long search for coffee – he insisted on entertaining us. "We do not drink coffee," he explained. "Hardly ever. We keep it in case guests like you visit us from the capital. You folks in Yerevan drink it instead of water."

While the coffee was brewing and put aside to cool, our doctor arrived. A steaming cup was placed before him as well, along with instructions: "Don't let them out in those thin T-shirts! And all alone – they might get lost!"

Arzni

Like everywhere in Armenia, the entry in Arzni is marked by a sign in Armenian and English. The post is placed by the roadside, blocking the old one, written in three languages – Armenian, Russian and Assyrian. For me, it seems like something from ancient history – like Sumerian. But actually, there is nothing strange in the choice of the language, because where else should there be a sign in Assyrian if not at the entrance to Arzni? Thousands of years after Assyria ceased to exist as a country, her descendants live in different countries preserving their language and culture. The Assyrians came to Armenia along with Persian Armenians after the Russian-Persian War of 1826-1828, when Eastern Armenia was annexed by Russia. Thus the history of Assyrian villages in Armenia, including Arzni, started after that war.

I met many Assyrians in St. Petersburg, where I lived for part of the '90s. The majority of them were from Armenia, including those from Arzni. Many of the Assyrians of St. Petersburg were artisans, shoemakers, tailors and repairmen. They gained excellent reputations among their customers. Many families left Armenia in the '90s, both Armenians and Assyrians. But some stayed in their villages, along with several Kurdish and Yezidi families. Consequently, Assyrian is taught in the Arzni School.

Looking at Arzni from the distance of the opposite bank of the river, the view is quite picturesque: the village curves along the gorge, at times climbing up the hill as though the residents found something interesting and decided to settle next to it.

I think I found an explanation for these seemingly illogical ramifications, however – most likely the families of relatives lived close by in this area, and the houses were built in close proximity in order to provide access not only from the street but also from one yard to another.

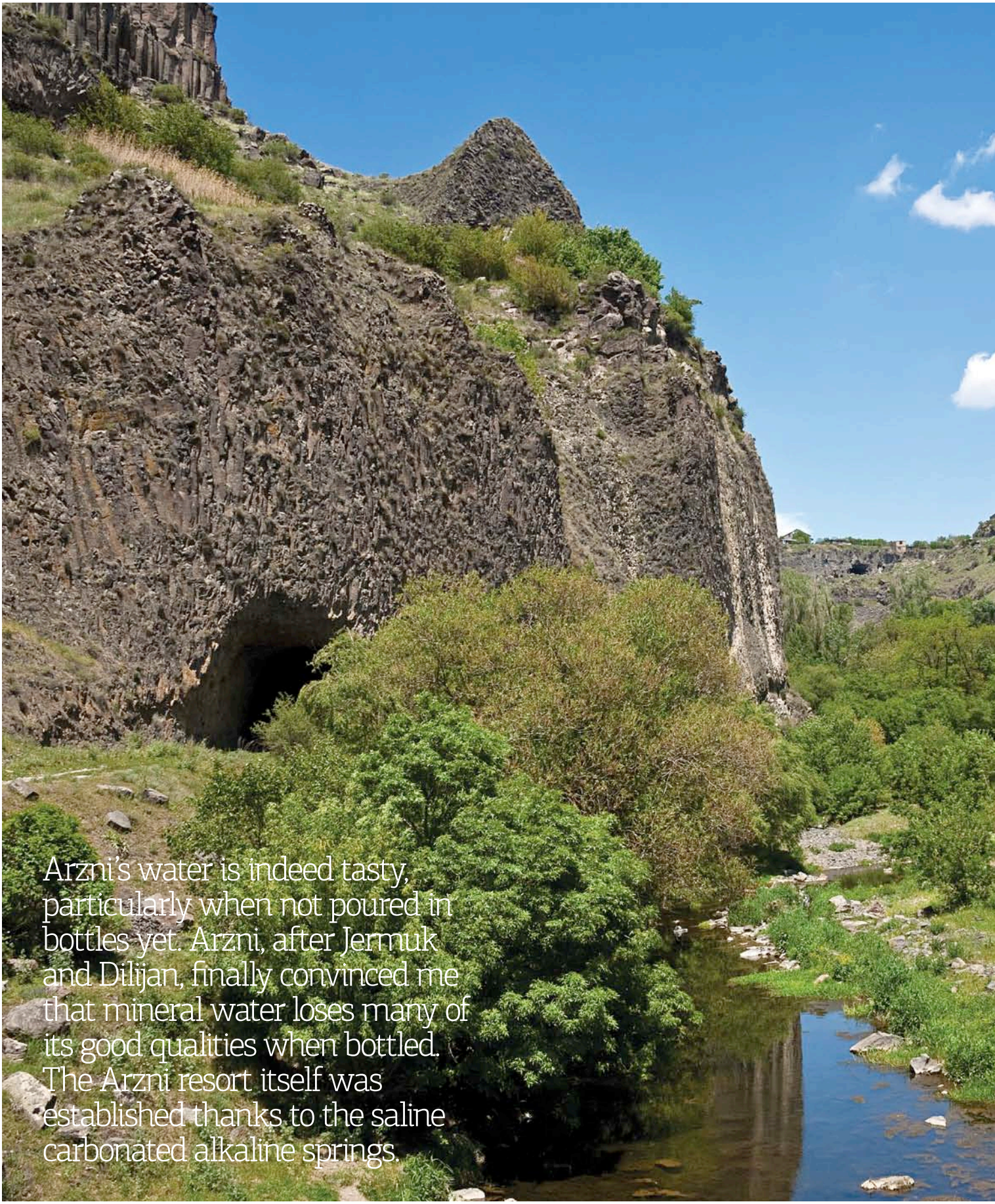
A little further away, a graceful bridge floats over the Hrazdan Gorge. The buildings of the former Soviet-era health resort Arzni tower there, currently trying to regain the resort's former glory, not entirely unsuccessfully. The village itself is rather lacking any architectural masterpieces, though it's cozy and scenic. The monument to the villagers who perished in the Great Patriotic War carries the names of those who never returned. An impressive list for a small village.

There are two churches, one built in the 7th century and another in the 19th century. This second, the Holy Virgin Mary (Mart Mariam in Assyrian), belongs to the Holy Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East. ▸





Arzni ranks first among all Caucasian resorts by the number of sunny days. And another advantage – it is never crowded by vacationers, and the slightly lazy and languid, leisurely lifestyle of Arzni tunes one in to tranquility.



Arzni's water is indeed tasty, particularly when not poured in bottles yet. Arzni, after Jermuk and Dilijan, finally convinced me that mineral water loses many of its good qualities when bottled. The Arzni resort itself was established thanks to the saline carbonated alkaline springs.



Legend

The origin of the name Arzni is explained by a legend. Long ago, the battle between the Armenian King Ara the Beautiful and the Assyrian Queen Shamiram (Semiramis in Greek) thundered around these hills. Shamiram fell in love with the handsome king and sent her envoys with rich gifts. The intention of these gifts was for Ara to succumb to the temptations of her material and feminine charms, to make him marry her and become the ruler of Assyria. However Ara, who was faithful to his wife, homeland and his people, denied Shamiram's offers. She repeatedly reiterated her invitation, but was rejected each time. What woman, moreover, a queen, could endure such treatment? The infuriated queen invaded Armenia with a vast army to capture the unwavering king. And although Shamiram strictly ordered her generals not to kill the Armenian king, he nevertheless died by a fatal accident. Shamiram had hoped to revive Ara the Beautiful with the help of the *aralez*– dog-headed spirits who licked the wounds of soldiers killed in battles and returned them to life. The queen ordered the soldiers to find and deliver the body of her beloved. But since no one but Shamiram knew the Armenian king in person, the soldiers showed her the corpses one by one, saying, "Ar, znni!," which meant "Here, look!" That's how the field of the ancient battle was called Arzni.

Live Water

The Russian poet Osip Mandelstam did not miss anything from the parts of Armenia that he visited. In Arzni, the poet tried "the good, stinging, dry" mineral water. It is indeed tasty, particularly when not yet poured in bottles. After Jermuk and Dilijan, Arzni finally convinced me that mineral water loses many of its good qualities when bottled. We poured a liter of water from the spring into a plastic bottle, and in an hour, it became unrecognizable, acquiring an entirely different taste. The Arzni resort itself was established thanks to the saline carbonated alkaline springs. Leading experts have confirmed that the healing water cures coronary diseases and ailments related to digestion.

Arzni's mineral water has many uses – it is a high-quality mineral water with a pleasant sour taste and can also be used for baths and inhalation. The climate even promotes health – the winters are mild, moderately cold, and summers are cool. People here insist that Arzni ranks first among all Caucasian resorts for the number of sunny days. And another advantage: it is never crowded by vacationers because it cannot accommodate large crowds, and the slightly lazy and languid, leisurely lifestyle of Arzni tunes one into tranquility. ▸



Spring

The mineral water of the Arzni springs is valued for its significant content of carbon in it as well as a wide range of chemical elements. It has a good taste and highly curative therapeutic properties. Experts list a number of positive characteristics – its microbiological purity, transparency, absence of odor and impurities, as well as its specific pleasant taste. No sediments were observed in the bottles after long-term storage. The water is extracted from a depth of 67 meters, pumped with special "food" pipes and bottled near the hole, which allows the preservation of its healing properties. These beneficial properties of the mineral springs in Arzni have been known since ancient times. During the cleaning of one of the original natural pools, coins of different eras and countries were discovered at the bottom. These findings suggest that the healing power of the springs were enjoyed in ancient times, and not only by locals, but also by people from other countries. Patients flocked here from many regions to experience the wonderful effects of the waters, and in gratitude they apparently threw coins into the spring. Currently, the mineral water is bottled by the Arzni Company, which restored and upgraded the factory founded in 1925.



↑ Gallery of mineral waters in Arzni



→ A fragment of a *khachkar* (cross stone) by the Armenian Church

Plus One

As is customary in Armenian villages, strangers are greeted by each passerby. But in contrast to the customs in the remote villages, where villagers immediately try to learn all about strangers, in Arzni, the locals do not initiate the conversation – an influence of the nearby capital city.

The only café in the village is longing for visitors – it's empty, despite the fact that it is Sunday.

"The locals seldom visit the café," says the waitress. "Except maybe families and sometimes couples, but only if the girl is officially engaged." She looked sad then and added, "But many of the guys have moved away." She waved her hand and went to make us coffee.

A woman is gardening in her flower patch in the yard of a house on the hillside. There is so much care in her movements as she gently touches the tiny seedlings, that we admire her movements. We recognize the future flowers – tulips, irises, and purple-green bushes that are roses, of course.

"I have roses of incredible colors, there are even yellow-black ones. Come in the fall, and I will give you several bushes," invites Sophia. We discover that she is a teacher of languages at the local school.

"Which languages?" we ask, slightly surprised by the plural form.

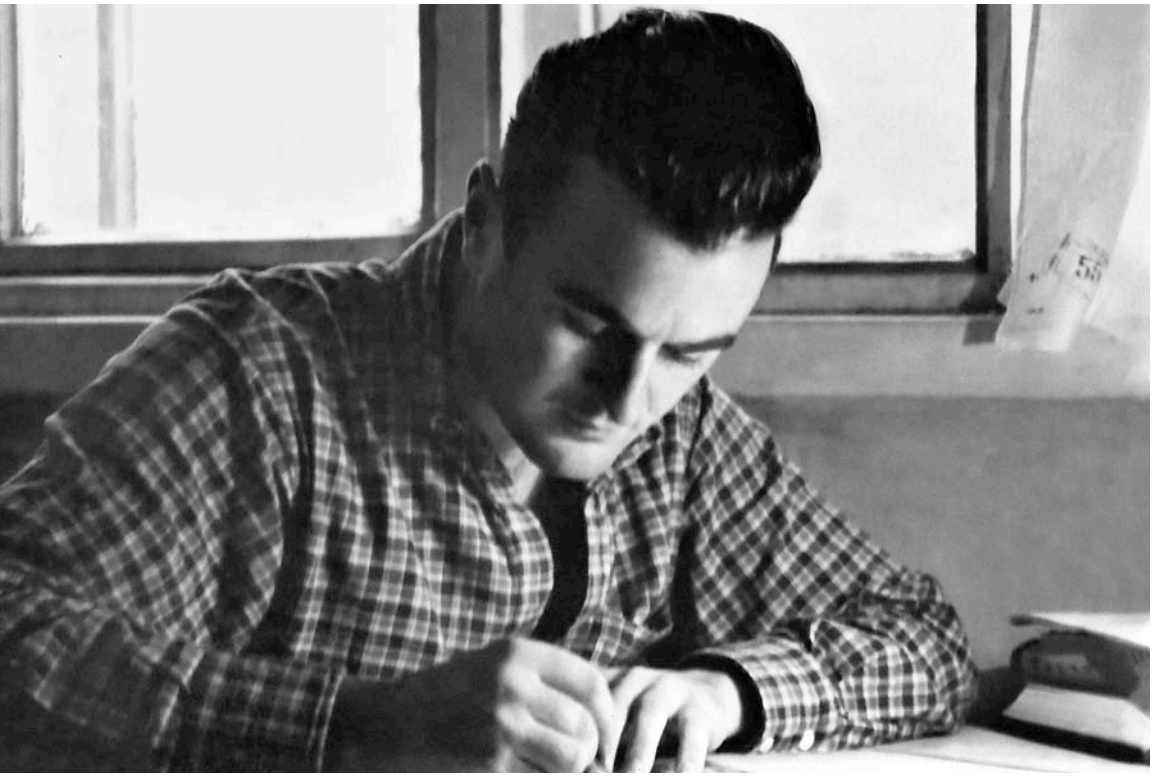
"Russian, Armenian, and Assyrian," she lists.

"English?" I ask.

"No," Sophia sounds slightly surprised. "I teach only our languages."

We, as mere bilinguals, look at each other, envying a woman for whom "hers" are multiple languages. Surely, she is also fluent in Yezidi, and Kurdish – a fabulous wealth!

But now we're leaving the hospitable village of Arzni, having become richer by one more language. ■



pioneering computer technologies

The biography of Vardan Amirbekian is parallel to the rise and fall of computer technology in Soviet Armenia. He was a typical representative of the generation of the ’60s, the post-WWII generation of Soviet intellectuals who immersed themselves in science and technology. He was a celebrity among those who knew him, with his movie-star looks, sharp brain and unique sense of humor. Like many of his era, he displayed criticism toward the official establishment and optimism toward life in general.

Text **Lianna Zakharian**

We met in New York in the summer of 2008, after the passing of Sergey Mergelyan. I was interested in the history of the Yerevan Institute of Mathematical Machines. Then in his late 70s, the First Deputy Director and Chief Constructor of YerSRIMM, Vardan Amirbekian, was the perfect man to ask because he himself was one of the prominent figures at the Institute from the beginning. Our conversation started with the rise of cybernetics in the USSR. Amirbekian began:

"Before I went to the Institute of Energy Physics, there were articles in the official USSR press that cybernetics, computer science and everything related to these fields were pseudo-sciences. Our Institute had 12,000 students in nine departments, of which two departments were closed, classified. One of them was called the Institute of Physics and Energetics. They dealt with nuclear physics. Usually, high-achieving students were invited to transfer there after their first year. Many did, but others refused to transfer, scared by the idea of working in nuclear physics.

"After my first year, I was invited to the other classified department. My best friend, also an Armenian, told me that this was the computer technologies department. He said, 'This is where the future will be when the government comes to its senses.' Lectures were delivered, but the courses were listed under other names as they were classified. We were not allowed to take notes, and if we needed clarifications, small group consultations were offered later. I graduated in April of 1955, and from there I went to a classified institute called the Scientific Engineering Bureau #245 located near the Yelokhovskaya Church in Moscow. From the outside, the building did not appear to be very large, but inside it was huge. There in the basement, they were making the first semiconductor machines in the USSR. It wasn't a serial production, and the transistors they were making were far from being usable because they rapidly changed their characteristics, disregarding external factors such as the temperature.

The head of the laboratory was Olympiada Olhovskaya. She assigned me to design a scheme on two transistors. They brought a stand on which I had to work. But the stand was not functioning, with all the thick cables tangled up. At first I wanted to tell them that I couldn't work on it, but then I sat down and dug into it. I found some minor errors, fixed them, and soon the stand started working. Olhovskaya was very surprised, because someone else in this situation would have called for help. Soon I completed this device, and on the third month of my employment, my portrait was on the best employees' board."

Mikoyan's Visionary Idea

At the end of 1955 during the Communist Party Convention, it was announced that because of ideological restrictions, the USSR was falling behind in computer technologies and cybernetics. It was decided to take very urgent specific steps toward developing computer technologies. At the closing of the session, it was stated that the government should utilize the large pool of human resources that existed in the Soviet Republics of Armenia and Georgia, particularly in Armenia.

Years later, after the opening of the new building of the Yerevan Scientific Research Institute of Mathematical Machines



↑ Amirbekian at the Scientific Engineering Bureau #245, Moscow, 1955



↓ Friends on the roof: in the center – Yuri Oganessian, nuclear physicist, Academician of the RAS

The Institute of Microelectronics became the first Soviet organization to mass-produce floppy disk-drives.

(YerSRIMM), a commemorative plate was installed by the current administration on the red tufa facade. The plate stated something along these lines, "YerSRIMM was created by the initiative of Academician Mergelyan." When the Head of the Ministers' Council, Anton Kochinyan, saw the plate, he told the Fadei Sarkisian, "Fadei, but this was not exactly where it all started." Amirbekian confirmed, "Kochinyan told me the following story on one of his frequent visits to YerSRIMM. It all began when Anastas Mikoyan called Kochinyan and said, 'Anton, there

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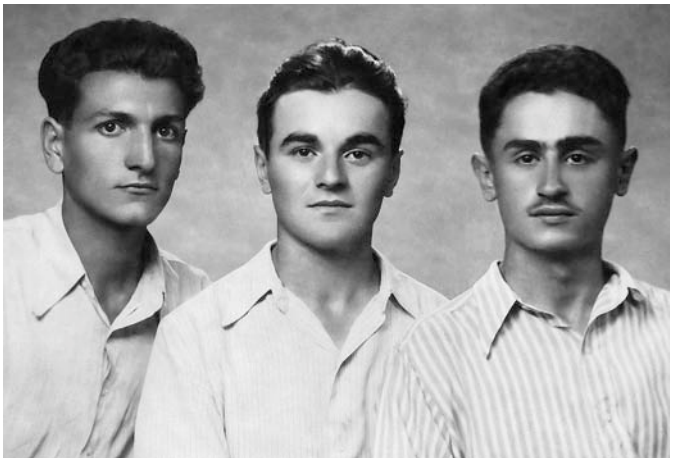
Romik Pahlevanian, Vardan Amirbekian, and the future Deputy General Director of Rosenergoatom, Armen Abagyan





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Young engineers of Mergelyan Institute at a countryside retreat

→
Vardan with sister Lilya

was a Party resolution regarding automatics and computer technologies. Prepare your proposals. This field could be very profitable; there will be big money in it.'

So Kochinyan, the Head of the Ministers' Council of Armenia, started looking for a facility. At that time, the Minister of Agriculture of Armenia had a two-story building in Yerevan built for professional development conferences. The facility had good adjacent territory and a small hotel for staff development. There was enough area for expansion and additional buildings. Kochinyan decided to set aside the place and name it the Institute of Mathematical Machines. Eventually, the new campus of the Institute was built at the beginning of Komitas Street. Next, Kochinyan went to Kirovakan, where he was originally from, to inspect the site for the Institute of Automatization of Chemical Production.

With these ideas and facilities in mind, he arrived in Moscow, visiting first Mikoyan, who was very glad to see such a quick response. Mikoyan directed Kochinyan to Prime Minister Kosygin saying, 'Go to him and present your proposals — he likes you, and I think he won't refuse.' When Anton Kochinyan put on the table his plan, Kosygin was pleasantly surprised. 'We haven't even finalized our decision. I can't imagine when you managed to have the facilities ready. Go ahead and organize the institute.'"

Youngest Academician

In his undergraduate years, Mergelyan studied at the Mechanical Mathematics Department of Yerevan State University. His adviser, Academician Artashes Shahinyan, noticed Mergelyan's talent and created favorable conditions for him to focus solely on mathematics, easing the burden on the young man of the many other subjects mandatory in the USSR. In three and a half years, Mergelyan graduated from the university and at 19 was accepted as a Ph.D. aspirant of Mstislav Keldysh, academician and later, the president of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

The world's great mathematicians traditionally leave behind some unsolved mathematical problems. One of the anecdotes Amirbekian told was that Keldysh presented his aspirant Mergelyan with four unsolved problems of the French 19th century mathematician Augustin-Louis Cauchy, one of which Mergelyan solved. Of course, that was not the only problem Mergelyan worked on. During the defense of his Ph.D. candidate thesis, it was proposed that Mergelyan's thesis should be presented as his doctoral dissertation. Consequently, after a two-week review session conducted by the members of a newly-formed doctoral panel of reviewers, Mergelyan received his doctoral title at the age of 21, becoming by far the youngest Doctor of Sciences in Russia and Armenia.

After working several years at the Armenian Academy of Sciences,

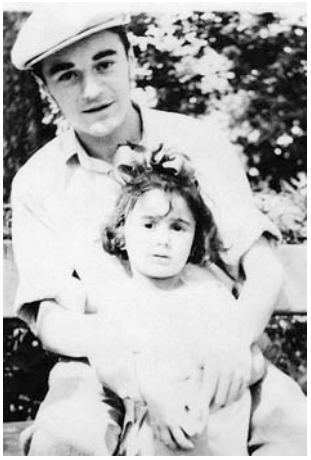
Projects Developed at the YerSRIMM

▸ In 1960, for the first time ever in the USSR, a semiconductor-based computer named HRASDAN was developed. Its new version, dubbed HRASDAN-2, was widely used in the scientific research community and in manufacturing.

▸ In 1965, the next generation of these computers, named HRASDAN 3, was released. Later, on this platform a new computer system was developed named Marshrut-1, which was designed for automated railroad ticket sales. For a long period of time it was in use in railroad station ticket sales terminals in Moscow. A group of scientists who worked on the Marshrut-1 system was presented with the prestigious USSR Government Award.

▸ From the 1960s to 1970s various models of a new family of mini-computers named Nairi were developed at YerSRIMM. The main feature of the Nairi computers was the user-friendly interface, which allowed system interaction based on a language close to the mathematical notations.

▸ In the 1970s, further development of this family of first Soviet mini-computers resulted in the creation of the Nairi-4B, the Nairi-4B C and the KOBER multi-computer and multiprocessor systems, which were compatible on the software level with the well-known DEC PDP computer series. The Institute was presented with a government award for the creation of the Nairi computers.





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Staff at the Institute of Microelectronics

Mergelyan was appointed as the first director of the Scientific Research Institute of Mathematical Machines. It should be said that not many people at the time understood what mathematical machines were. Mergelyan was the face of the new Armenian mathematics, so he was the natural candidate for the position. Rumors said that when he was informed about his appointment as the director, he was enraged because to him it was quite clear that this was a completely different field than the field of his expertise. Evidently, they convinced him to take the position.

Yerevan Scientific Research Institute of Mathematical Machines

At the time, the largest portion of government support in the USSR was given in two fields of science: nuclear and rocket sciences. "Many people considered electronic computational machines as secondary. There were petty attempts in the organization of operations and distribution of resources, which produced petty results," stated one of the pioneers of computer technologies in the USSR, Alexander Zalkind, Ph.D. "By that time, cybernetics had lost its prefix pseudo-. We were assembling our first M3s on the stand of the State Scientific Research Institute of Electronic Industry, headed by the academic Andranik Iosifyan. He also was the vice president of the Armenian Chapter of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, which determined where the first M3s were sent. Melik-Shakhnazarov, who defended his dissertation with Abel Aganbegyan in Novosibirsk, was appointed as head engineer, with academician Mergelyan as director. The Catholicos of all Armenians addressed Armenians around the world in a plea to help Mergelyan with the project. A year later, they received a wagon full of radio parts, even from Japan. But it wasn't easy to incorporate them into our technology. We always had a close friendship with YerSRIIM, having attended tens of conferences there and skiing in Tsakhkadzor – during the training of young specialists," remembered Zalkind in his "Little Stories About the Large and Medium-Sized ECMs" [Electronic Computational Machines].

Amirbekian remembered how he transferred from Moscow. "I was called by Aram Melik-Shakhnazarov who asked me to move to Yerevan in 1956. It was around the time that the Festival of Youth was about to take place in Moscow. My wife was pregnant with our first son, Armen, and it was very difficult to find any apartment in Moscow. I was glad for this opportunity. Several months later, I arrived in Yerevan. Many young specialists from Russia were also offered jobs at YerSRIMM. This was the time when Boris Khaikin, Henrikh Belkin and many other young engineers moved to Armenia as well."

"At YerSRIMM," he continued, "I had a laboratory which was making a semiconductor machine. This was the first semiconductor machine, which we called Hrazdan. When we started making Hrazdan, there was an Institute of Applied Mathematics directed by Shura Burov, and he had a team of very good young guys. He sent them to us, they designed the frame of the device and formulated the main characteristics and ideas, and we started working on the memory of these machines. I had seven or eight guys on my team, and we were working round the clock in shifts. When we made the machine and took it to the Expo of Industrial Achievements in Moscow, we received first prize. Brusilovsky received the grand prize and Gold Medal; I and two others received small gold medals. We came back triumphant."

That victory was followed by one of the largest contracts at YerSRIMM, commissioned by the headquarters of the air force. The lead developer of the project was Fadei Sarkisian, Amirbekian was the first deputy, and there were two more deputies. It was a classified project called "Nuclear Control

As Deputy Prime Minister, Amirbekian initiated the creation of Armenia's first Seismic Protection Agency to ensure earthquake safety.



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Negotiations with International Rectifier Company in Bay Area, 1991

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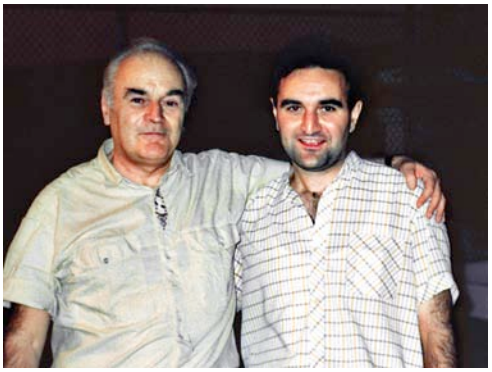
With son, Rouben Amirbekian



System of the USSR Strategic Rocket Forces," and in particular they were working on the program support of nuclear bomb aircraft carriers. The rockets were made by an institute in Leningrad, but the head organization was the so-called P.O Box 3007 in Moscow, directed by Academician Vladimir Semenikhin.

Institute of Microelectronics

Vardan Amirbekian was always seduced by the difficulty of the challenges he was facing. He eventually abandoned YerSRIMM to lead the new Institute of Microelectronics in Armenia. During the six years that he was the General Director, the Institute doubled in size, eventually numbering more than 3,000 employees with a new, white facility that became the landmark of its neighborhood in Yerevan. One of the talented engineers who also gave up a comfortable career at YerSRIMM and joined Amirbekian at the Institute of Microelectronics was Anatoly Gutov.

Thanks to Amirbekian's talent and persistence, the Institute of Microelectronics became the first Soviet organization that was able to mass produce floppy disk-drives. For those who probably don't know what a floppy disk is, it may not seem like such a big deal, but it should be stated that many larger institutes in Moscow and the Ukraine had been assigned that task and had failed for various reasons, hence making the Institute of Microelectronics essentially a monopoly within the Soviet Union.

MARS

After the Institute of Microelectronics, Amirbekian's next challenge was the MARS conglomerate. MARS was a product of the new Soviet policies intended to reform the Soviet Union in the early '80s. It was designed as a joint venture with an English company, Symon Carves Engineering Ltd., which was unusual for the time, but was possibly thanks to a major investment of about $500 million from the Gorbachev government. Vardan Amirbekian joined the conglomerate during the beginning stages of negotiations with the English partners, which were apparently deadlocked because of numerous technical issues. He was credited with successfully concluding these negotiations and eventually overseeing the successful implementation of this project that had the potential of making Armenia a world leader in the field of programmable controllers, those little computer brains that

He stayed in Armenia through both disastrous winters, living through the nightmares while knowing it was largely preventable.

run various devices including industrial robots. People in the Bangladesh neighborhood in Yerevan, where the plant was built, still call MARS "the robots' plant."

"Every three months we held meetings with the British and Russian executives in Moscow or London. The English side wanted to have American parts in each element, but we wanted to use Soviet analogs. The situation was tense because of these frictions and disagreements. I told them, 'Design everything on the Soviet base. If you want to make sure it works, do the testing.' Our guys made all of the 25 schematics. Finally we came to an agreement that when the Soviet analogs did not exist, we had to buy the American parts. It turned out that it was possible to substitute almost everything with Soviet-made components. The order was completed, but the Soviet Union collapsed and the works were wrapped up entirely," Vardan recalled regretfully.

Post Soviet Times

"While I was already in the United States, Armenia started moving toward independence, and it formed its first non-Communist government with Levon Ter-Petrosyan as President. I remember that I was studying for my final exams in December of 1990, when I heard that my father became a deputy prime minister in the first non-Communist government of Armenia. To be frank, that made me very hopeful. I knew that our father was devoted to Armenia and its industry, and I hoped that his selection was indicative of the kind of people that were coming to power. Unfortunately, subsequent developments shattered my illusions," said Vardan's son, Rouben Amirbekian.

As a member of Armenia's cabinet of ministers, Amirbekian

Influential Decision Makers

Anastas Mikoyan (1895-1978) was the only politician who managed to remain at the highest levels of power within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from the days of Lenin's rule throughout the eras of Stalin and Khrushchev, until his peaceful (albeit forced) retirement after the first months of Brezhnev's rule.

Sergey Mergelyan (1928-2008) was an outstanding Soviet Armenian mathematician and author of major contributions in Approximation Theory. The modern Complex Approximation Theory is based on Mergelyan's classical work. He graduated from Yerevan State University in 1947. When he was just 21, studying at the Moscow Steklov Mathematical Institute, he was awarded the USSR Doctor of Science degree in mathematics in addition to his Ph.D. To this day, he holds the record of being the youngest person to receive the Doctor of Science title in the former USSR and present Russia. In 1952, he was awarded the USSR State Prize.

Mstislav Keldysh (1911-1978) was a Soviet scientist in the field of mathematics and mechanics, academician of the USSR Academy of Sciences (1946), President of the USSR Academy of Sciences (1961-1975), three times Hero of Socialist Labor and fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (1968). He was one of the key figures behind the Soviet space program. Among scientific circles in the USSR, Keldysh was known as "the Chief Theoretician," and Sergey Korolyov was called "the Chief Designer."

Andranik Iosifyan (1905-1993) is known as one of the founders of missilery, the chief constructor of the first meteorological satellites in the world, and the father of elecromechanics in the USSR. Iosifyan is the founder and director of the Scientific Research Institute of Electromechanics. One of the major figures in military and rocket production. He was the USSR's classified Chief Constructor of electrical equipment of ballistic rockets, nuclear submarines and space crafts for thirty years.



↑ At a meeting in his search for a partner for MARS conglomerate



→ Going to St. Vartan Church in New York with his great-grand-daughter Suzy.

initiated three large projects. His first one was the creation of Armenia's first Seismic Protection Agency to avoid the repeat of the catastrophic outcome of the Spitak earthquake of 1988.

Next, during his visit to the United States, he found a partner company that was interested in investing in the Mars Corporation. At the time Mars was losing the Soviet Ministry of Defense as their main contractor and needed a reliable partner to market and sell its products outside the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, this plan eventually was shuttered by the energy blockade, which led to the complete collapse of the Armenian economy.

Finally, his third project was the reopening of the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant. To initiate such a project at that time, one had to be prepared to be called a heretic. It meant standing up to the most influential members of the new government, as it was these members who forced the closing of the nuclear power plant. During his visits to Moscow in early 1991, Amirbekian looked for partners in what was still the Soviet government lead by Mikail Gorbachev and Prime Minster Ryzhkov. The fact that there was a member of the Armenian government agreeing with Moscow's position generated a lot of excitement in most upper echelons of the Soviet government. He met with Mikail Gorbachev and Prime Minister Ryzhkov, and to his surprise, they generously promised to help Armenia and cover all the costs involved in reopening the power plant and providing all the necessary resources. Amirbekian was very excited about all he was able to achieve, but to his disappointment, the then-president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, personally vetoed all plans of reopening the power plant, calling it a "political question" in which Amirbekian should not have interfered.

"It still pains me to talk about this issue, when I think what kind of catastrophe could have been avoided. Our father stayed in Armenia throughout both disastrous winters, and I can only imagine how painful it was for him, living day-by-day through that nightmare and knowing that it was preventable," said Rouben Amirbekian in conclusion.

I was writing this article hoping to get Vardan Amirbekian's further input about events and people we talked about. But sadly, he passed away on March 20, 2013, before this article was even finished. ■

INTERSECTING ART AND TECHNOLOGY





The Tumo Center for Creative Technology turns two years old this summer, and it will celebrate its anniversary by launching a summer camp for aspiring artists between the ages of 12 and 18.

Already having received support with Diasporans such as founder and initiator of the project Sam Simonyan, as well as Serj Tankian, Katherine Sarafian, and Alex Seropian, Tumo continues to deliver on its mission of expanding the youth's horizons with the intensive exposure of digital media tools.

The state of the art open media studio will offer campers enlightening courses in video game design, computer animation, web development, among other creative career opportunities. During the second half of the day, guided tours of Yerevan will be offered to gather material for their projects, and sporting events will take place. Saturdays will include optional sightseeing and field trips. Camp Tumo's morning program will be made up of four one-week courses in July. (Complete list of dates and information available at *Camp.Tumo.org*.)

"We aspire to motivate Armenian youth to learn and encourage them to create new possibilities for themselves, and the summer camp will do just that," says Aram Gyumishyan, Head of Communication at Tumo. "Our goal is to become the creative center of technology where teenagers can discover their vocation and embark on a career in digital media."

In only two years, thousands of the next generation's brightest have taken advantage of Tumo's unique experience. Will you or your child be one of them this summer?

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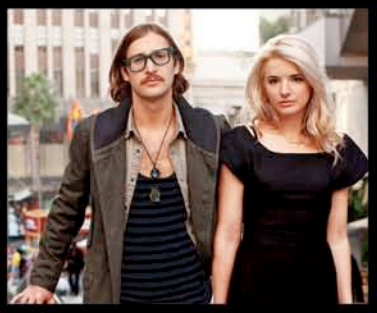


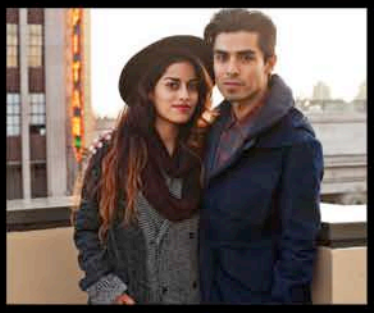




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