January/February 2013 (#23)

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A MAGAZINE WITH AN ACCENT



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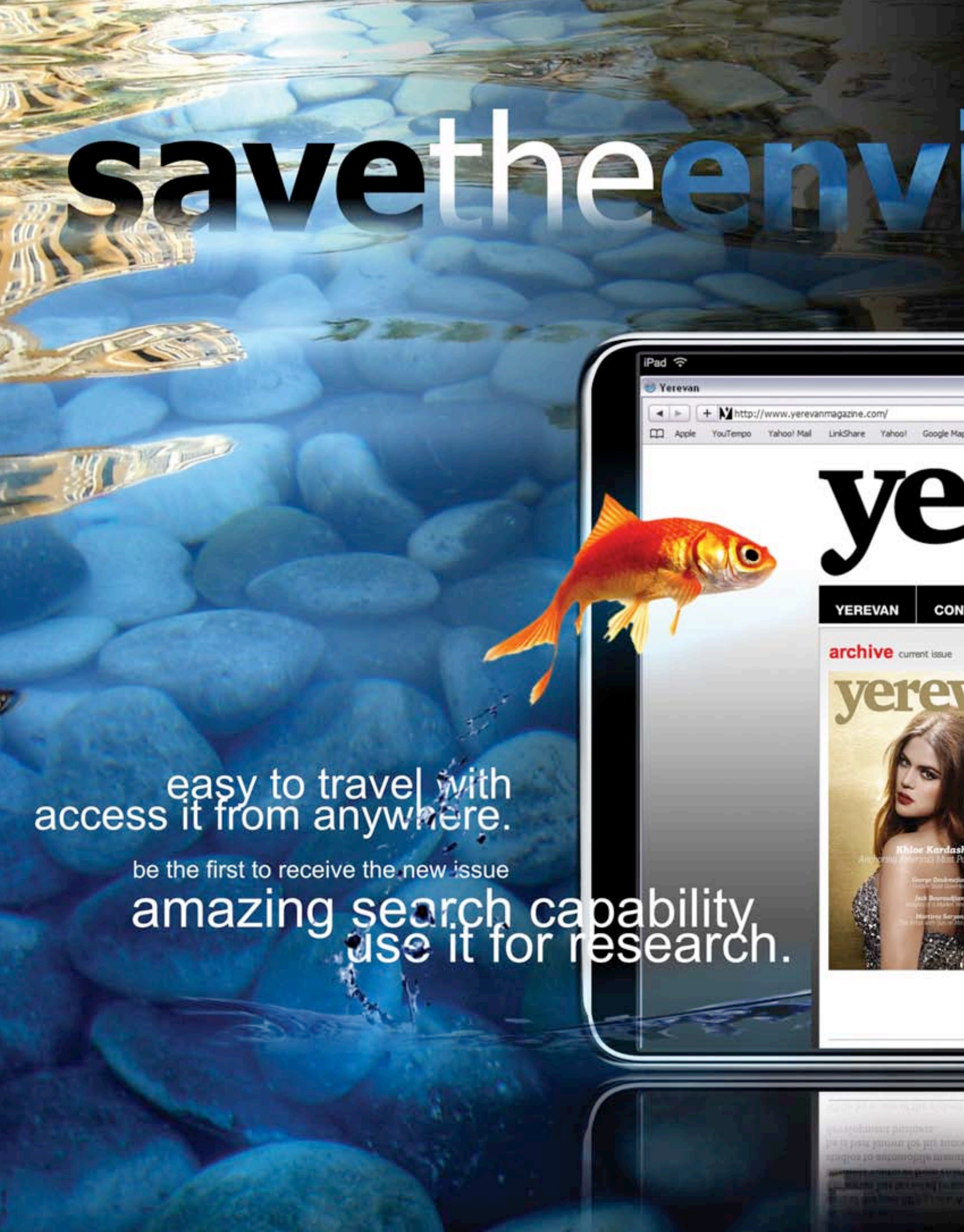
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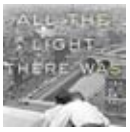

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The Nordic Archipelago
Born and raised in Sweden, Gayane Khechoomian intimately relates to its Nordic capital comprised of luscious nature and mystical folklore.

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Yerevan Magazine presents an exclusive interview with NASA astronaut Dr. James Phillip Bagian, a man whose limitless energy is directed towards saving the lives of patients.

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Prominent astrophysicists and long-time friends hold a part-joking, but mostly serious conversation about science and humanity.

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A Grant for a Genius

Have you ever thought from a microbe's point of view? Sarkis Mazmanian received the Genius Grant for his innovative research.



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A plastic retainer can make someone a better athlete? If only you could imagine Managing Editor Manouk Akopyan's level of cynicism when he met with Roobik Ebrahimi, a neuromuscular dentist who specializes in making customized mouth guards. The findings, however, will make anyone a believer in this sports science.

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A season of premieres, festivals and celebrations was in full force and we could not stay apart. Visit Arpa Film Festival, the premiere of *Crossroad*, and the Hye Aid Benefit Concert.



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Celebrity jewelry designer Marianna Harutunian uses Swarovski crystals to create avant-garde and edgy pieces for the likes of Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, Diana Ross and Cher.

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Court of Dreams

Sooren Derboghosian had a lifelong dream. He wanted to graduate from UCLA. Little did he know that not only would that become a reality, but he'd also find himself playing basketball for a program basked in basketball royalty.



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Skye Stevens is going to sing, dance, and charm his way through the music industry, even if it takes all night. Within less than a year of breaking onto the scene, the 19 year-old has scored a record deal with Rock Society Records and a Top 20 hit on the charts.



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Armenian Cradle of UChicago
The University of Chicago hosts a variety of Armenian language and culture courses.

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At 28, Karen Oganesyan shot his first full-length directorial debut. It took him five years to become one of Russia's main producers.

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Last Comic Standing comedian Jackie Kashian has a few jokes up her sleeve.

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One Laptop per Child
One Laptop Per Child volunteers send hundreds of laptops for children in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

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Lee Ohanian commands as much attention when he walks through the halls of UCLA, as does his work on economic crises.



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Lebanon, Elections 2013
Civil unrest in the neighboring countries of the Middle East and outdated electoral laws make the situation in Lebanon increasingly unpredictable, explains Dr. Arda Ekmekji.

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Solar Stories from Italy
Century-old discoveries were made by photochemist Giacomo Luigi Ciamician, a nine-time Nobel prize nominee and senator.



OSCAR *for* CROSSROAD?

This image of two men facing each other is taking Los Angeles by Storm! If you have seen this poster, you are one of hundreds of thousands of LA residents. This image is only a part of the massive promotional campaign for a film titled **CROSSROAD**, written and directed by Shervin Youssefian and produced by Danny Simonzad, David Dginguerian and Amy Weber. *Crossroad* is a film that many are now referring to as the SLEEPER HIT of 2012 and quite possibly an Oscar Nominee.

CROSSROAD is an exploration of the amazing interweaving of our lives and the realization that everything happens for a reason. The storyline follows 12 strangers who discover that their lives are strangely connected and that they are all part of a bigger plan to save a man's life. After a sold out World Premiere at the Historic Alex Theatre in Glendale, California, *Crossroad* exploded onto the scene with bus ads, bench ads, magazine ads. TV & radio spots and cast & crew interviews. Not to mention nearly 100,000 that flooded all the homes in the Valley.

How this film came to be seems almost as exciting as the film itself. When Youssefian, a Sunday School Teacher, approached his producing partner about the idea of making a faith-based film, neither one thought it would hit theatres just two years later. Youssefian and Simonzad made local commercials for a living. When the script for *Crossroad* was finalized, they solicited their old clientele to invest in a different kind of venture: a Movie. In this economy, a ton of rejections were expected, but one client stepped up to the plate and funded the entire project. For the following 2 years, Youssefian and Simonzad pulled in all of their resources from the commercial production arena and managed to finish an incredibly polished piece of filmmaking.



"When you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can tell the mountain to move and it will move. This project started with just an idea and look how far we've come!" says Youssefian. "We wanted to get this film made and get the message heard, one of forgiveness and redemption. We need more movies like this." Says Producer David Dginguerian. "We felt a strong urgency to press forward with this film because of its strong positive message," says Producer Danny Simonzad.

So how can an independent film catch the attention of the Academy Awards? The answer: a song titled *By the Light of a Moon* written specifically for the *Crossroad* by a 10-year old prodigy named Trevor Jennings Gore. The song has already created big buzz in tinsle town and picked up a lot of interest from major players at the Academy. In case of a win or even a nomination, the song will catapult the film and filmmakers to new heights. And if it doesn't, no sweat. The filmmakers of *Crossroad* have picked up so much momentum that they are already working on the next project and inspiring other artists to pursue their dreams no matter how far-fetched they may seem. Youssefian and his team have attained the American dream and this is just the beginning ■

More Info about Crossroad: www.crossroadmovie.com
Contact the Producers: info@Spotonmediatv.com



English Edition

Executive Editor
LIANNA ZAKHARIAN

Managing Editor
MANOUK AKOPYAN

Art Director
GEGHAM VARDANYAN

Senior Editor
AZZIE MEKHITARIAN

Copy Editor
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Contributing Writers
NANE AVAGYAN
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ARA TAHMASSIAN
RUZANNA TANTUSHYAN
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Translations
ALEXEY MIRONOV
VERZHINE NIKOGHOSYAN

Photo Editors
ARMEN POGHOSYAN
TIGRAN TOVMASYAN

Editorial Interns
ANNA PETROSYAN

Russian Edition

Editor-in-Chief
EDUARD AYANYAN

Art Director
ARSEN KIRAKOSYAN

Deputy Editor
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Contributing Editors
RUBEN GYULMISARYAN
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Fact Checking
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Photo Coordinators
ARMEN HAYRAPETYAN
ARMINE GESIYAN

Design
NONNA ISAJANYAN
ANI KARAMANUKYAN

Page Layout
ARMEN YOLYAN
ARTAK SARGSYAN

Contributing photographers: ARMEN POGHOSYAN, TIGRAN TOVMASYAN, ARNOS MARTIROSYAN, HAYK MELKONYAN, SUREN MANVELYAN, MARIAM LORETSYAN, RUZANNA TANTUSHYAN, MARCO ANSALONI, BABAN MALIAN, HELENA GRIGORIAN, ARMEN GRIGORE, EUGENE BALAYAN, GREGOR EMMIAN, BEN SOLOMON, SCOTT CLARKE, TOM CASINO, DON LIEBIG, LOUIS TRINH, ZAREH GORJIAN, BABAN MAILIAN, BENGT NYMAN, JODI MULLEN, JORGE ANDRADE, JOSE MESA, SVETLANA GRECHKINA

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Chief Operating Officer
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Director of Advertising
SUZY HOGTANYAN

Public Relations
KRISTINA GUKASYAN

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135 S. Jackson Street, Suite 202,
Glendale, CA 91205 USA
Tel: +1 (818) 507-7057
Fax: +1 (818) 507-9015
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

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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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A MAGAZINE WITH AN ACCENT

Salute to the Curious

Two months ago our team started working on this issue. Naturally, we expected to learn about new frontiers of science. What we certainly did not expect was to have some of our most basic school science fundamentals shattered without being given any other explanation.
What is the most well-known force? One might say gravity, the force that landed Newton's famous apple on his sleepy head, right? Everyone knows gravity: the larger the mass of an object, the stronger its gravitational force, right? Turns out, in spite of the millions of dollars spent in the past 20 years, scientists cannot define the waves that create gravity. Or, take microbes. Though we know that some of them are good for us, the conventional wisdom tells us to stay away from them, right? And again, we were wrong all along. It took the Genius grant recipient, Sarkis Mazmanian, to ask himself, "What would I think and do if I were a microbe?" to come up with a direction for his groundbreaking research.
So, if nothing can be certain, and every previously established idea is proven wrong with every step humanity takes in an attempt to come closer to the truth, what is science? Evidently, what we previously called science, implying the knowledge contained in our voluminous high-school textbooks, is not quite that knowledge at all.

Finally in the 20th century, scientists admitted that the true meaning of science is not in definite answers, but in the scientific process itself. Apparently, while most of us thought that scientists were joking when they defined science as "the process of satisfying one's curiosity at the government's expense," they were dead serious. Which makes sense because any undergrad knows that most results can be falsified, absolute truth doesn't exist and any definite answer is a mistake by definition, according to... say, the Theory of Relativity.
So what does it take to be a scientist? It is the insatiable curiosity, the restless mind that poses question after question, and the constant striving "to prove ourselves wrong as quickly as possible, because only in that way can we find progress," as Richard Feynman wrote. True scientific minds are never stopped by obstacles – like Giacomo Ciamician they spend countless hours experimenting; like James P. Bagian they fly to space; like Ara Mirzoyan they help build the largest telescope; and like hundreds of scientists at JPL, they send space modules to Mars. In this issue, Yerevan pays tribute to the inquisitive minds of those who are trying to fulfill the ultimate purpose of science – making sense of human beings and the vast Universe around our small planet.





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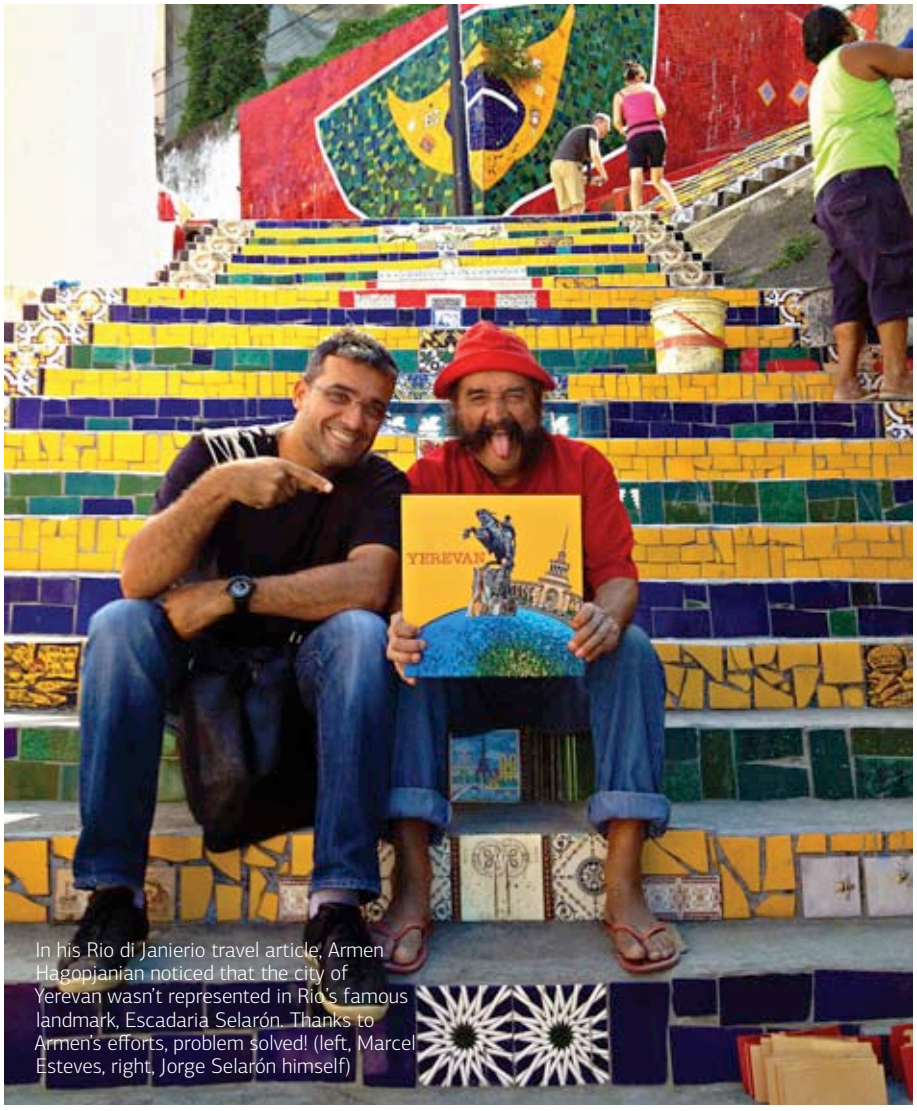
Dear Editor,
Now this is what I am talking about! Chef Zakarian. If you guys weren't cool then, you are definitely cool now. This has got to be my favorite issue yet. I watch the Food Network like it's my full time job. I got my first glimpse of Zakarian when he came out with his first cookbook. I just knew he was something special. Since then obviously he has been on TV as a judge on Chopped, *winning Iron Chef, etc. But I didn't know nearly as much about his career as I do now after reading the wonderfully written article in the magazine. First, the pictures are phenomenal. Secondly, I really enjoyed reading the quick quotes in the question and answer portion. I think that was a very nice touch to the article. This issue really sets the magazine at a higher level. I have also pulled some really cool quotes from Zakarian's article. "I'm a hopeless romantic. I romanticize everything." I just love it! Thank you for your refreshing articles* Yerevan Magazine.

Anna Ohanian
Queens, New York

Not being from the U.S., I have a very different view on Armenians. I love them. I love them all. Five years ago, I moved to Los Angeles for school and since then, I am married and consider the states my new home. When I first moved, I felt a lot of animosity towards Armenians from other Armenians. I was shocked and turned off by this. Even with your last issue, I saw a lot of backlash because of Khloe Kardashian being featured on the cover. I think it is such non-sense. I decided to write to your publication because I wanted to encourage the magazine to keep writing and presenting wonderful articles and ideas. From my knowledge, your publication is the only outlet for Armenians across the globe to come together on a positive note. Yes, we are flawed, but so is every other ethnicity. I feel Armenians are so critical of others and I sure hope a respectful magazine like yours will help draw attention to the individuals who certainly deserve praise. We are a wonderful culture and Yerevan Magazine *does such a nice job at presenting us to not only foreigners, but also our own people. The magazine eliminates our own ignorance.*

Juanes Abdoulian
Buenos Aires, Argentina



In his Rio di Janierio travel article, Armen Hagopjanian noticed that the city of Yerevan wasn't represented in Rio's famous landmark, Escadaria Selarón. Thanks to Armen's efforts, problem solved! (left, Marcel Esteves, right, Jorge Selarón himself)

I am assuming the last issue of the magazine was a food-oriented issue? I love that concept! I am originally from Venezuela, but now live in Boston. My first encounter with Yerevan Magazine *was at a Halloween party. The magazine was left in the guest bathroom and, guess what? I took it! I guess I stole it actually. I am not going to pretend to be some food connoisseur, but I love to eat. I don't watch cooking shows, but have seen episodes of George Duran's shows. This is what I love about you guys; I learn things about people and subjects that I may not directly be interested in. Because of the article on Chef Duran, I will watch his show more often and think about how I built a connection with his food through Yerevan. It does help that he is from Venezuela, as well. Many Armenians wouldn't think that there is a population of Armenians in South America, but you guys got it covered. Gracias,* Yerevan!

Vic Hovsess
Caracas, Venezuela

Thanks to the November/December 2012 issue, I discovered a connection between Scotland and Armenia. I am much impressed by Yerevan, and the convincing power of its cultural presence on behalf of Armenia and all her people in diaspora and at home. Yerevan so appealingly sets forth the 1% Armenian cuisine, fashion, arts, and their impact on the world, as to make clear that there could not be room there for the lower 99%, unless they had vision enough to see themselves as partaking in that excellent humanity that bears the name "Armenia." (I am not kidding with that purple prose...) But the Kardashians never fail, as the recent issue on Khloe makes clear. There is a certain appeal in Keeping up with the Kardashians, *I have to admit, that is lacking in* The Swiss Family Robinson.

John Gibbs
St. Paul, Minnesota

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Telethon 2012

The Hayastan All-Armenian Fund concluded its 15th International Telethon by raising $21,422,477 in donations and pledges. The traditional telethon broadcast from Los Angeles culminated the Hayastan Fund's global fundraising campaigns that included phonathons, gala dinners and charity concerts. Under the slogan "Our Village," the funds collected through the 2012 fundraising drive will help construct community centers in rural regions of Artsakh and provide assistance to Syrian-Armenians. The geography of the telethon covered Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Russia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, Greece, Italy, U.S., Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Great Britain, India, Iran and Kuwait. The Artsakh Republic President attended the Moscow-hosted gala dinner party of the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, where Russian Armenian businessmen made a $12 million contribution. Ten percent of the newly collected funds will be used for providing humanitarian assistance to Syria's Armenian community that is increasingly suffering from the conflict in the Middle Eastern state.

Daredevils of Sassoun Recognized by UNESCO

The Armenian national epic *Daredevils of Sassoun* has been included in UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. The epic is a chronicle of exploits by four generations of Armenian heroes - Sanasar and Bagdasar, Mher the Senior, David of Sassoun and Mher the Junior - reflecting the struggle of the Armenian highland province of Sassoun against Arab conquerors.



World Chess Champion

Representing the USA, Samuel Sevian became the World U12 champion in the World Youth Championship in Maribor, Slovenia. Sam, a Santa Clara resident, became the youngest U.S. player ever to achieve the title of chess master when he was just nine years old. Now at twelve, he has proved himself to be the best chess player his age in the world. Meanwhile, GM Hovhannes Gabuzyan (Armenia) became World U18 vice champion, while CM Shant Sargsyan (Armenia) won the title of World U10 vice champion. Armenian-American GM Melikset Khachiyan from USA scored 6.5 points out of eight and took the first prize solo at the 48th American Open held in Anaheim, California. Armenian grandmaster Hrant Melkumyan won the gold at the London Chess Classic FIDE Open.



PanArmenian PHOTO

International Jewelry Expo

The International Jewelry Expo Yerevan Show 2012, dedicated to the 15th Anniversary of the Armenian Jewelers Association, was held October 29-31st in Yerevan. The exhibit features works of U.S., Russian, Thai, Lebanese, Indian, Turkish, Chinese and Australian jewelry masters. AJA President Gagik Gevorgyan took an aggressive idea to transform the annual Yerevan shows into one of the major regional jewelry exhibitions and translated it into life. The opening ceremony was attended by the President of Armenia, the Minister of Diaspora and the Minister of Economy. President Sargsyan spoke of a possibility to continue these activities in free economic zones being created in the country. In the course of the exhibition, jewelers and guests marked Jeweler's Day together for the first time. To boost the role of Armenian jewelers and jewelry, the Armenian government adopted a decision to announce the last Sunday of October as "National Day of Jewelers."

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Genocide Film Project

"This is a challenging project that reveals a shameful chapter in world history. I am not one to back down from a challenge, and I believe the world is ready to join me in finally examining this tragedy and its far-reaching consequences," said award-winning film director Shekhar Kapur about his new project on the Armenian Genocide. Kapoor will shoot his film based on Micheline Aharonian Marcom's award-winning novel, *Three Apples Fell from Heaven*. Oscar-nominated screenwriter José Rivera (*The Motorcycle Diaries*) has adapted Marcom's novel for the screen. The film's executive producer, Vahe Yacoubian, introduced author Marcom to Kapur along with producer/actress Sona Tatoyan and her husband José Rivera at the Tumo Center for Creative Technologies in Yerevan. They were joined by the film's French producer Edgard Tenembaum and Turkish co-producer Cigdem Mater. *Three Apples* will be the catalyst for creating a world-class film industry in Armenia, so it really is a feat of activism. Because it works on several levels, the film is not only a narrative about the Genocide, but like the book it is surrounded by passion and love, said Sona Tatoyan. Director Kapoor spent a week in Armenia trying to find a location for the shoot. Preparations for the production of the historical drama will begin soon. Kapoor is best known for films such as *Elizabeth*, *Golden Age*, *Bandit Queen*, *Mr India*, *Masoom* and *Four Feathers* that have won or been nominated for numerous awards including the Oscars, BAFTAs and the Filmfare Awards.



Architectural Award

To honor individuals for their outstanding accomplishments and recognize present and future leaders of the architecture profession, the American Institute of Architects California Council hosted a luncheon at the California Club in LA. In recognition of his distinguished service to the architectural profession and the people of California, Hraztan Zeitlian received an AIA Presidential Citation Award. Hraztan Zeitlian, is an award-winning architect and innovative author as well as the founder of Hraztan Sarkis Zeitlian Publications. He has worked with Gensler, RTKL and Altoon+Porter, all firms with worldwide corporate architecture expertise. Hraztan's architecture and design work has been featured in prominent design magazines worldwide. Hraztan Zeitlian has won a number of architectural awards including the Architectural Record award. Hraztan's approach to design is highly contemporary and technology driven. His designs are inspired by the emerging technologies of communications and media.

Pay by Card, Give Life

Ameriabank has come forward with a card initiative under the slogan "Pay by card, give life," directed at the treatment of terminally ill children. All card-holders may participate in the initiative by making non-cash payments anywhere in the world at any trade point. Card-holders from other banks can also participate in this initiative by paying for purchases at trade points where POS terminals of Ameriabank are located. Ameriabank transfers one Armenian dram from its revenues for treatment of children from every 1000 drams of non-cash payments. This means that this sum is not taken from a card-holder or a trade point. The initiative will be valid till January 31, 2013. The accumulated sum will be transferred to the Give Life foundation for treatment of children. Ameriabank is a part of the Ameria Group, Armenia's Leading Business Advisory Services Provider with offices in Los Angeles and Armenia. Ameria donated $50,000 to the All-Armenian Fund and sponsored the All-Armenian Fund's 20th Anniversary Gala held at the renowned Dorothy Chandler Pavilion of the Los Angeles Music Center.



Influential Art Dealer

The Armenian-American art dealer Larry Gagosian, owner of the Gagosian Gallery chain of art galleries, won second place in the ranking of the most influential people in the art world carried out by *ArtReview* magazine. The son of Armenian immigrants, Larry Gagosian started his business by selling posters in California. Today he is the owner of eleven galleries, one in New York, two in London and one in Beverly Hills, as well as in Rome, Athens, Paris, Geneva and Hong Kong. ArtReview recently published their 2012 Power 100 list of the 100 most influential figures in contemporary art.



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BBC Playwriting Competition

The radio play *And the Sun Went on Shining Cynically* written by the Armenian contestant Seda Stepanyan was judged as one of the Best Seven from over 1,000 scripts submitted in the 23rd International Radio Playwriting Competition of BBC. Seda's script is based on a true story about a girl named Stephanie who is devastated when the love of her life disappears. Her desperate hunt to find him takes her straight into the heart of the raging Karabakh war. The drama is notable for the representation of Armenian traditions and life in a small village near the state border. Seda Stepanyan graduated from the Yerevan State Linguistic University after V. Bryusov and currently is undergoing practical training at the Azatutyun radio station. The winners' plays will be transmitted by the BBC World Service. The prize is granted to two authors in two categories: a radio play in English as a native language and a play in English as a foreign language.



New Seat in the Assembly

Adrin Nazarian, the former chief of staff for Los Angeles City Councilman Paul Krekorian, won the newly-drawn 46th Assembly District with over 70 percent of the vote during the Nov. 6 general elections.
The district includes North Hollywood, Toluca Lake, Studio City, Sherman Oaks, Valley Village, Valley Glen, Van Nuys, Panorama City, North Hills, Lake Balboa and the Hollywood Hills. Holding on to his seat in the California State Assembly's 35th district, incumbent Republican Katcho Achadjian handily won reelection with 61.4 percent of the votes.



Artsakh Independence on Capitol Hill

U.S. legislators joined the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic's Foreign Minister Karen Mirzoyan in a celebration of Artsakh's independence and democratic development. The program, held in the historic Russell Senate Office Building, was hosted by the Armenian Caucus, which is co-chaired by Congressman Ed Royce, the incoming Chairman of the influential Foreign Affairs Committee and Congressman Frank Pallone. Among the legislators offering powerful statements at the event in support for Nagorno-Karabakh were Senator Jack Reed and Representatives Adam Schiff, David Cicilline and Eliot Engel, the incoming Ranking Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Senator Robert Menendez and Representative Jackie Speier shared powerful statements of support for Nagorno-Karabakh. Members of Congress cited Karabakh's democratic and economic progress, even in the face of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's continuing hostility, noting the overwhelmingly positive assessment of the July 2012 presidential elections. Legislators also discussed the need for continued U.S. support for Karabakh's self-determination, through, among other things, expanded humanitarian and developmental assistance to Artsakh.

Armenia's Youth World Boxing Champion

Armenian boxer Nikol Arutyunov (81kg) won the gold at the International Boxing Association (AIBA) Youth World Boxing Championships held in Yerevan and attended by 68 countries. Another Armenian representative Narek Melkonyan (91 kg) grabbed a bronze. The World Youth Boxing Championship was launched in the Karen Demirchyan Sports Complex on November 28, 2012. During the ten days of the tournament over 400 athletes from various countries around the world competed with each other. The event was followed by the AIBA annual awards ceremony with AIBA President and other officials present.



PanArmenian PHOTO

SECOND ANNUAL WORLD CUP

AUGUST 15-18, 2013

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The Second Annual MAF World Cup is being held from August 15 to August 18, 2013 at the incredible WYNN Las Vegas!

The minimal guaranteed cash prize is $30,000, which is anticipated to grow with a considerably increased number of registered participants.

The registration fee is $350 prior to May 1, 2013 and $390 thereafter.

A block of rooms has been reserved and will be held until it is full or July 15, 2013, whichever comes first.

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Reference MAF WORLD CUP or group code 8MCT0813 to receive the promotional rates, starting at $139 per night.

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Hydro Power Plant

Armenia and Iran began construction on a joint hydroelectric power plant along their shared border. Armenia's President Serzh Sarkisian and Iran's Energy Minister Majid Namjoo symbolically laid the first stone for the plant located on the Arax river near the southern Armenian town of Meghri on November 8. The construction of the plant will take five years and will be financed by the Iranian Tavan Ab Araz Company. TheMeghri power plant will have an installed capacity of 130 megawatts and produce about 800 million kW/h electricity per year. The $323 billion plant will supply electricity to Iran for the first 15 years before being handed over to Armenia. The project is undertaken in line with a bilateral agreement on the construction and utilization of the hydroelectric power plant signed on March 19, 2007 in Meghri.



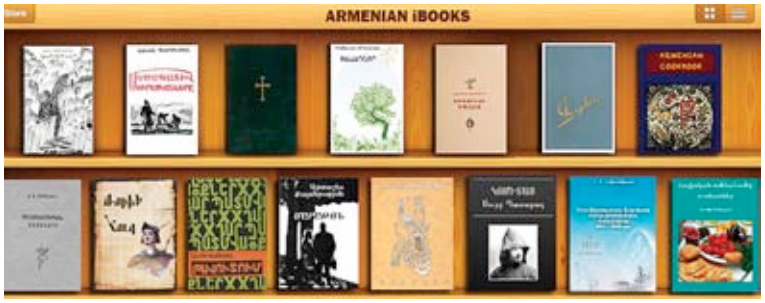
PanArmenian PHOTO

Council of Europe Committee of Ministers

Armenia will follow Andorra and will chair the Committee of Ministers for the Council of Europe for the next six-month term after May, 2013. The Committee of Ministers is the Council of Europe's decision-making body. It is comprised of the foreign affairs ministers of all the member states or their permanent diplomatic representatives in Strasbourg. It is both a governmental body where national approaches to problems facing European society can be discussed on an equal footing, and a collective forum where Europe-wide responses to such challenges are formulated. In collaboration with the Parliamentary Assembly, it is the guardian of the Council's fundamental values and monitors member states' compliance with their undertakings.

iBooks

To preserve digitize and popularize the Armenian written heritage in the era of high technologies - through dissemination of the both Armenian classical literature and works of modern Armenian writers, the Armenian iBooks initiative (https://www.facebook.com/Armenianibooks) was established by Ruben Mirakyan and Marat Yavrumyan – Associate professors of the YSU. Since November 2012, Armenian iBook initiative managed to present over 20 examples of classical and modern literature on the Apple iBookstore and Google Play platforms. That includes both fiction and scientific publications. Among them are the well-known works by Hovhannes Tumanyan, Eghishe Charents, Vahan Teryan, Hakob Paronyan, Artashes Kalanatryan and many others.





ArmTech Congress at Stanford University

The main objective of the fifth global Armenian high-tech industry conference and strategic business forum was to bring together executives from the high tech industry, researchers and officials from academia, representatives from the venture capital community and other investors as well as top government officials from Silicon Valley, Armenia, Europe and other geographic locations to explore the next generation of emerging markets and related technologies in the Silicon Valley and Armenia and to help set the next stage of high tech industry development in Armenia. The Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Stanford University hosted the conference under the theme of "Learning from the Past and Inventing the Future." The Prime Minister of Armenia Tigran Sargsyan and the US Ambassador to Armenia John Heffern were among the 120 dignitaries and top industry executives attending the ArmTech Congress 2012 in Silicon Valley. Four interactive panel sessions were held this year, allowing the participants and presenters to discuss possible directions for Armenia's high-tech economy in the coming few years. ArmTech 2012 is organized through the joint efforts of the government of Armenia, the USAID-funded Enterprise Development and Market Competitiveness Project, the Enterprise Incubator Foundation, ViaSphere Technopark, the Armenian Development Agency, Synopsys Armenia, the Armenian-American Chamber of Commerce and *Groupement Interprofessionnel International Armenien.*

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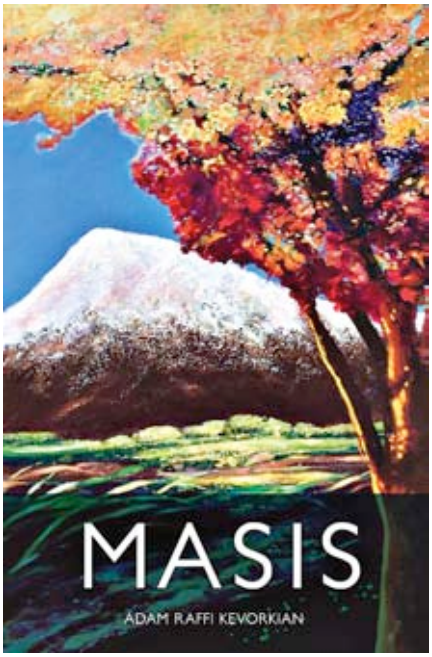
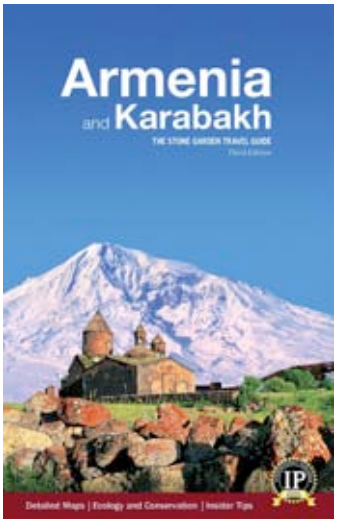


Adam Raffi Kevorkian

Masis

Dreamcatcher Publishing, 2012

Lives of everyday Armenians who are trying to deal with problems of daily existence and find their identity in a post-Soviet world is the center of this dynamic and artistically rich novel. In Armenia's capital Yerevan, an ancient culture is coping with the remnants of communism and a desire for a western lifestyle. In this setting, the protagonist Arin Karyan, unfulfilled by his cozy family life with his intelligent and strong wife Nara, is tempted by the irresistible Ruzanna and dangerous Yerevan underworld. A chance shooting offers him the opportunity he's been seeking. However, his true nature becomes at odds with the local crime boss, and not even his uncanny ability to enter the surreal can save him. When all seems lost, Arin's salvation comes from the most unlikely of places and so begins a mesmerizing and soul-searching journey into an alter-Armenia which is as mischievous as it is mysterious. Following his vision, Arin must ultimately stand against his greatest fear. *Masis* is a heart-warming tale of love, tragedy, humor and greed – and the decisions one makes when few choices exist.

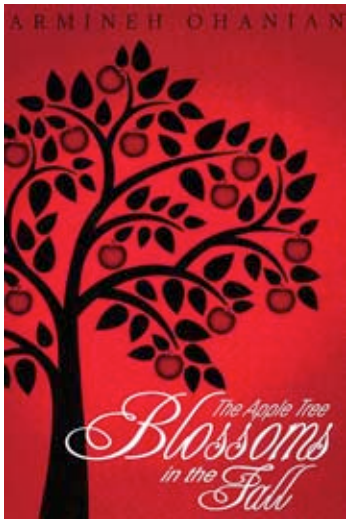


Matthew Karanian, Robert Kurkjian

Armenia and Karabakh
The Stone Garden Travel Guide

Stone Garden Productions, 2013

The new edition of *The Stone Garden Travel Guide: Armenia and Karabakh* contains updated and expanded information for the 2013-14 tourist seasons. It features 135 color photographs and 28 color maps, including a map of historic Armenia created shortly after the Genocide. In addition to information about cultural sites and travel, the guide book highlights issues of the conservation and ecology of Armenia complemented with maps from the American University of Armenia's "Birds of Armenia" project. Initially, the author, attorney Matthew Karanian, and photographer, scientist Robert Kurkjian, traveled to Armenia to teach at the American University of Armenia. *CNN Travel* magazine calls the book "an excellent guide, written with real passion for the subject."

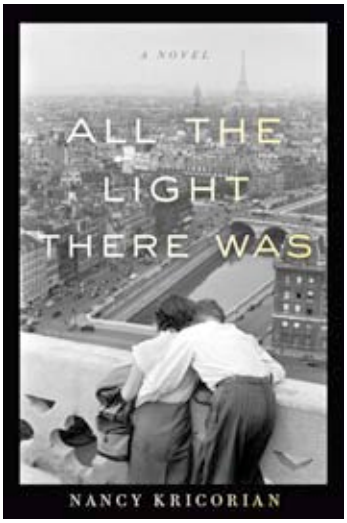


Armine Ohanyan

The Apple Tree Blossoms in the Fall

LazyDay Publishing, 2012

This book portrays an Armenian woman's life journey through interconnected short episodes. The Islamic revolution is imminent. Carineh, an Armenian beauty, knows it is time to leave Iran. The country where she grew up is reverting to its Islamic roots. Carineh would vehemently hate to wear a veil, to the point that she is willing to say goodbye to her homeland, her father's resting place, her family and friends. In *The Apple Tree Blossoms in the Fall*, Carineh narrates stories of her life in Iran before the Ayatollah's time. She also recounts tales about her new life in Europe and America. This book offers a unique insight into the Iranian, Islamic and Armenian cultures, and the fascinating life of a jet-setting woman. It is filled with laughter, tears and challenges that the heroine faces.



Nancy Kricorian

All The Light There Was

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013

All the Light There Was depicts human lives caught in the crosswinds of history. It is a novel about family loyalty, secret love and the many faces of resistance. On the day the Nazis march down the Rue de Belleville, Maral Pegorian is fourteen years old, living with her family who, along with many other Armenian Genocide survivors, have come to Paris to start over. The adults set about gathering food and provisions, bracing for deprivation. But Maral, her brother Missak and her beloved Zaven are spurred to action of another sort, finding secret and not-so-secret ways to resist oppressors. Only when Zaven flees with his brother Barkev to avoid conscription does Maral realize that the occupation is not simply a temporary outrage to be endured. After many fraught months, just one brother returns, changing the contours of Maral's world.



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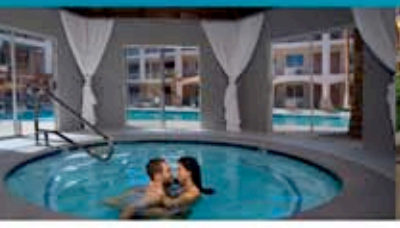


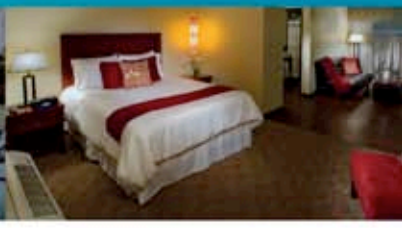

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January/February

Teatro Alla Scala



The world renowned opera house in Milan, La Scala dedicates its 2013 musical season almost exclusively to the Italian and German composers Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner - the bicentennial of whose birth is being celebrated this year. La Scala's seasonal schedule traditionally opens on December 7, St. Ambrose's Day – a big annual holiday in the city when most businesses and schools are closed.

The current season's program includes Verdi's new productions of La Traviata conducted by Daniele Gatti; Falstaff starring Ambrogio Maestri; Nabucco conducted by Luisotti and featuring the rising star Liudmyla Monastyrska; Oberto by director Mario Martone; Macbeth conducted by Valery Gergiev; Un Ballo in Maschera to be conducted by Daniele Rustioni and starring Marcelo Alvarez and Sondra Radvanovksy.

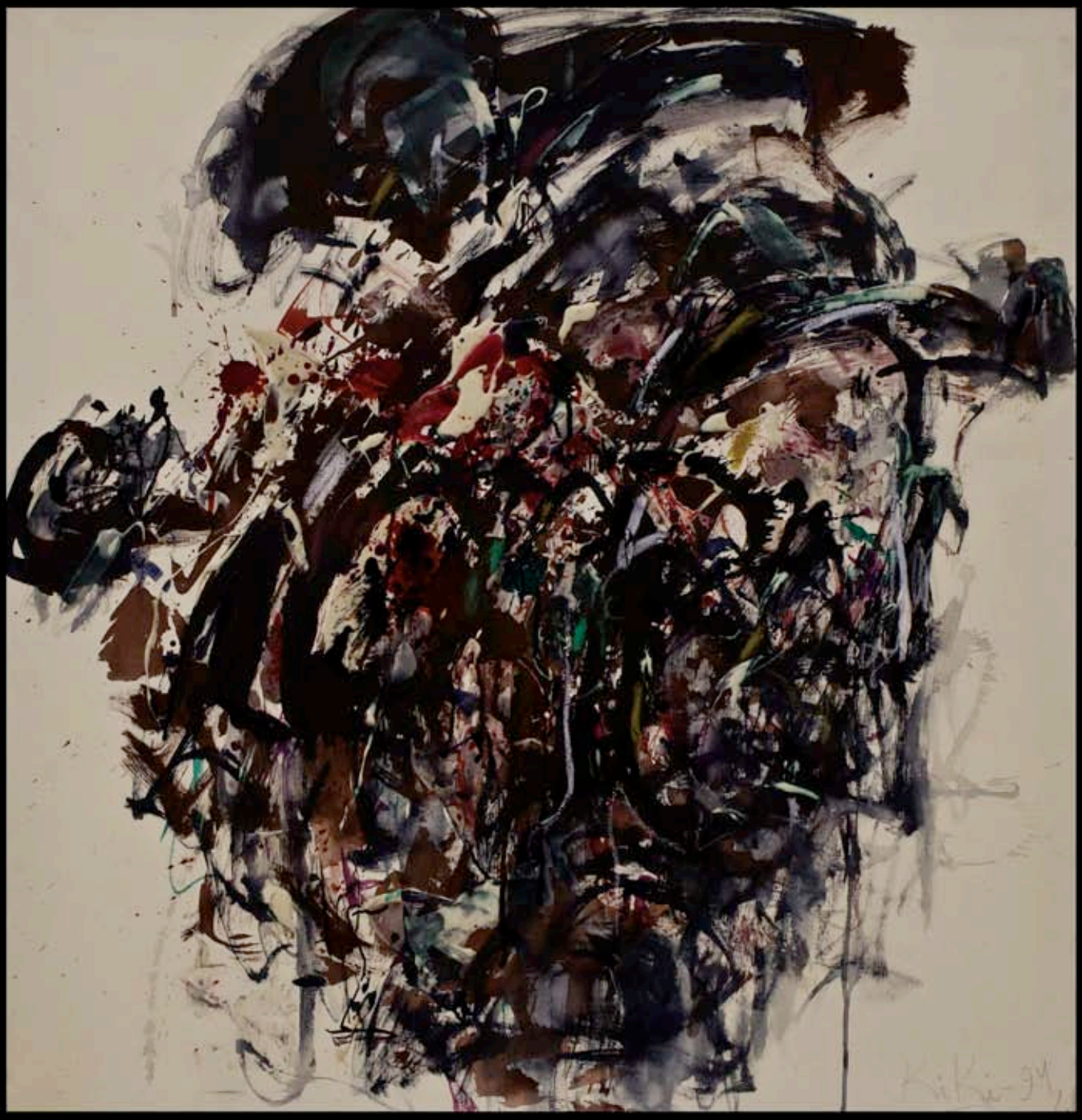
Performances of Alexander Raskatov's opera A Dog's Heart and Rossini's La Scala di Seta, the ballets Romeo and Juliette, Notre-Dame de Paris, Giselle, "Il lago dei cigni", L'altra meta del cielo, L'histoire de Manon and numerous symphonic concerts are also included in the 2013 season. Opera aficionados know that it takes dedication to get tickets at the La Scala box office as they sell out in a matter of minutes.

For more than 200 years, Teatro Alla Scala has been the temple of the world's best musicians, and we are proud to mention that the famous Armenian opera singers Vahan Mirakian, Gegham Grigorian, Hasmik Papian, Maria Guleghina, Kallen Esperian, Aline Kutan, Isabel Bayrakdarian have performed at La Scala.



Chicago Museum of Science and Industry

The Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago plays a pivotal role in presenting the latest technological advancements in science to the public. Established in 1933, this museum covers diverse areas like energy, the environment, the human body, space exploration and transportation. The largest science museum in the Western Hemisphere, the Chicago Museum hosts over 2 million visitors a year and has over 2,000 exhibits displayed in 75 major halls. Among its technologically advanced and expansive exhibits, the Museum features a full-size replica of a coal mine, a German submarine captured during World War II, a 3,500-square-foot model railroad and the Apollo 8 spacecraft that carried the first humans to the Moon. The Museum is known also for its unique exhibits, such as a 13-foot-tall interactive 3D giant heart that brings the heart's complex and precise action to visible life. In addition to its three floors of standing exhibits that cover a wide array of topics including petroleum, genetics, the Internet, model ships, the navy, space and architecture, the Museum of Science and Industry hosts temporary exhibitions, including the Smart Home that shows new ways to live eco-friendly. You'll be inspired to recycle in a whole new way when you see how older furniture and household items have been transformed.



KIKI

"Bobo #13"

1994, oil on canvas, 36" x 36"

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Մ [Մ]

Text **Aram Khachatourian**

Մ [Մ] is the twentieth letter of the Armenian alphabet. Its name is – **մեն** (men) and the numerical value is 200.

Մ մ



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



862 981 1118 1170 1359 1548

Most language historians trace the Armenian **Մ** to the Greek letter mu. Of course not to the classical V-shaped (M), which does not have anything in common with **Մ**, but to the U-shaped (Ʌ) which was one of the widely-spread variations of mu in the 4th and 5th centuries. The letter was preserved in approximately the same shape in the Coptic alphabet (Ⲙ). That is the variation which is considered the prototype of the Armenian letter. The lower case (**մ**) differs from the upper case (**Մ**) not only by its size, but also by the shortened left "pillar."

In spite of the Greek origin of the graphic representation, its name – men – according to Armenian linguist Hrachya Acharyan, "cannot be originated from the Greek mu; it is closer to the Semitic "mem," differing only by its last letter." Mem, in turn, is translated from the Semitic languages as "water," and apparently can be connected to the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph – to the symbol of water (𓈖), from which – through the Phoenician (𐤌) – the Greek M was originated.

In medieval Armenian manuscripts, the letter **Մ** with various signs for the abbreviation of the following words were denoted: mother (**մայր** – mayr), thought (**միտք** – mitk,) body (**մարմին** – marmin), and the proper name Marc (**Մարկոս** – Marcos), among others. In contemporary language, the letter M is often associated with Metro – the underground train system. In fact, in contrast to many countries where the entrance to the Metro station is marked by the letter M, Yerevan's Metro entrances are marked by the Armenian **Մ**. So for those who are planning to visit Armenia, it could be useful to remember how the letter looks.



Note

In contrast to Western European languages, where the letter M symbolizes Mary, Mother of God, in Armenian, Mother of God (**Աստվածածին** – Astvatsatsin) is usually signified by two **ծծ**s. And in one of the Armenian hymns, sharakans, there is a quite interesting interpretation of the name Maria. In the "Canon on the Occasion of the Birth of the Mother of God" by the historian and philosopher Vardan Areveltsi, there are the following lines: "Your name designates the number of days and centuries passed."

The author hints that the sum of the numerical values of the letters in the Armenian variation of the name Maria , Mariam, is equal to 5422, which is approximately the number of years that passed from the creation of the world to the birth of Jesus Christ.



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The Nordic Archipelago

"*Du gamla, du fria, du fjällhöga nord*," translated as "Thou ancient, thou free, thou mountainous North," begins the national anthem of Sweden, a country whose flag is adorned by the colors blue and yellow. Fusing those two pigments characterizes what the hymn boasts about. Green, as in the "mountainous North" describes the aerial view over Sweden's landscape. The beauty is so abundant that it would not be surprising if its inhabitants took it for granted.

Text **Gayane Khechoomian**

Stockholm Syndrome

My grandfather lived in Sweden for many years, traveling back and forth between Tehran and Stockholm. Even when my family moved from Sweden where I was born and raised, my grandfather stayed. I think he enjoyed the peace of the Scandinavian solitude. It is a place where people are isolated like the islands that make up the capital's archipelago. There is always time for self-reflection and thought.

As a young girl, I remember taking long walks through the woods, picking all the berries and mushrooms that the forest had to offer. Nature is such a prevalent part of Swedish society, that from a young age children are taught how to read a compass during physical education classes. I spent many hours wandering around the woods equipped with nothing but a compass and a map and the well wishes of a P.E. teacher. Somehow I made it out in time for the end of the school day.

Every time I visit Stockholm, I take the subway to Gamla Stan, which translates to "Old Town," and get off right in the center. Upon exiting the station, I step on to cobblestones along a path next to water and continue through the medieval-style streets of the preserved city. This part of town contains winding walkways and narrow alleys that often change elevation in different directions. When the town is bereft of people walking around in their modern clothes, it is easy to imagine that there once were horse-drawn carriages passing through the streets.

Walking past the Stockholm Palace, there is a bridge connecting the Old Town to the New City. It also leads toward the Riksdag (the Parliament) and scores of tourists crowded around entertainers on the sides of the street. Each year I discover something new about the Old City: a restaurant, shop, or an interesting alley. But it never changes more than that. Stockholm is a timeless city as calm as its residents.

↓ Most of Stockholm's subway stations are decorated with art in the form of murals, sculptures, paintings and reliefs. This one in Kungsträdgården is made to look like one of Stockholm's old palaces.





Walking past the Stockholm Palace, there is a bridge connecting the Old Town to the New City. It also leads toward the Riksdag (the Parliament) and scores of tourists crowded around entertainers on the sides of the street.



Babak Mallian



Bengt Nyman

← Midsummer in Sweden is centered around the summer solstice. People raise maypoles decorated with wreaths to sing and dance around them in celebration of summer's arrival.

Swedish House Monarchs

Sweden's capital is home to its royal family: the Swedish Royal House of Bernadotte. Though they have no political power, these regal residents perform official engagements and ceremonial duties of state. The family consists of King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden and his wife Queen Silvia, their three children and grandchild.

The official residence of the Swedish monarchy is Stockholm Palace where the king performs duties as the head of state and where all the royals' offices are located. However, the family actually lives in the Drottningholm Palace, which is traditionally the Queen's residence. Built in the 16th century, the grounds feature two gardens and is quite the tourist attraction.

The Drottningholm Palace's estate is so extensive that it contains a Swedish Royal Castle: the Chinese Pavilion. This Chinese-inspired castle dates back to the 18th century when it was built as a birthday gift to Queen Lovisa Ulrika from King Adolf Fredrik.

The Swedish royals allow the public onto their Drottningholm property, though the palace itself is guarded by the Swedish Military. This begs the question: could one tell if they are home? It was always something I wondered as a child running around in the front garden. The answer is that when the family is home, the Swedish flag stands at full mast. And although I have seen the flag flying high on many occasions, I have never caught a glimpse of any royals in the massive castle.



Jose Mesa

↑ Drottningholm Palace is the Royal Family's private residence as well as a tourist attraction.

← The Chinese Pavilion was built as a birthday gift to Queen Lovisa Ulrika by King Adolf Fredrik.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Sweden is perhaps best known for its never-ending winters and almost exaggerated darkness. I used to walk home in pitch-black conditions by the time school ended at 3:00 p.m. But come summertime, the sun sets as late as 11 p.m., and in the north, it doesn't set at all. The Swedes hold Midsummer celebrations every year in May to welcome the long awaited warm weather. People dress up and dance around a large pole decorated with flower wreaths to celebrate the season of fertility.

Midsummer bonfires, the remnants of a pagan culture, are lit at night. The fires run about a story high, and are located in a public place for people from each community to gather around with their families. Another one of these remaining traditions includes girls eating salty porridge without washing it down with water afterwards so that their future husbands might bring them water in their dreams.

One of the most interesting facets of Scandinavian culture is their folklore, which is riddled with mythological creatures. Films such as Lord of the Rings epitomize Nordic cultures' beliefs through their depictions of dwarves, cursed rings and the Old Norse fire god Loki. Also in Nordic folklore lurk seductive elves, trolls and invisible characters of the forest.

Today, a majority of Swedes do not subscribe to such beliefs, but the myths have left their mark on the public. On a field trip one day in the forest, our teacher pointed to a cave we were passing. She told us to peek through the wooden door that had been erected at its mouth. "Inside lives a troll," she said, giving no hint of jest. When I looked through the cracks in the wood, I saw two dim lights that my naïve brain processed as being supernatural eyes. And that is how I came to believe in trolls until the age of ten.

But perhaps the most visible character in the Swedish literature is Pippi Longstocking: the kindhearted, red-haired daughter of a pirate who



Jodi Mullen

possesses incredible strength. Her character was concocted by world-renowned author Astrid Lindgren whose story was translated into over 60 languages around the world.

Pippi's fiery red braids sticking out horizontally from each side of her head and her defiant attitude toward authority made her a staple of Swedish culture. Known for bending the truth through unbelievable hyperbole, Pippi goes against the grain of Swedish society, which advocates honesty and order.

Ethnic Vikings

In recent years, the faces of Swedes have taken on new shapes and dimensions. An influx of immigration has added color to a center square where once descendants of a Viking race existed almost exclusively. Peoples from war-torn African and Arab countries have sought refuge in the neutral North; the nationless Assyrians and Kurds have come to call Sweden home, and even hot-blooded Armenians endure the cold climate of the Nordic state.

A fascinating byproduct of the amalgamation is the Swedish mainstream incorporating a slew of slang terms from their immigrant populations' languages. These include Arabic words such as ya' allah (hurry), and Turkish words chok (very), just to name a few.

In the more immigrant-heavy neighborhoods, police have come to display the word "aina" on their police cars, which in Turkish and Farsi mean mirror, but in urban slang has come to mean "cops." This is presumably done in an effort to relate to the youth, to put them at ease with Swedish authority.

There is a story I like to share to describe what Stockholm's suburban schools were like in the 1990s when Swedish society was more homogenous in its ethnic make-up.

There I was, on a stage wearing sheer harem pants and a coin belt around my waist. Each hand clutched finger cymbals as I twirled them across my thinly



↑ These buildings of Gamla Stan (Old Town) provide a colorful face to the city.

→ Gamla Stan (Old City) is one of the best preserved medieval cities in Europe.



Jorge Andrade

← The Royal Castle, built in the 19th century. It serves as the official residence of the King.

↑ A Viking ship

Peoples from war-torn African and Arab countries have sought refuge in the neutral North; the nationless Assyrians and Kurds have come to call Sweden home, and even hot-blooded Armenians endure the cold climate of the Nordic state.



Svetlana Grochkina

veil-covered face. That was me at the age of nine, a belly dancer in an elementary school Christmas Pageant where most of the other girls were made to play angels surrounding the Nativity scene.

To the tall, blonde Swedes with crystal blue eyes, I was different. "You look exotic," the pageant director explained to me, "I'm going to have you play one of the King's belly dancers. It'll be fun."

Armenian Diplomacy

Although the influx of "new Swedes" happened in recent decades, one of the most notable Armenians to make a debut in Sweden is Ohan Demirgian. In the 1800s, while the Swedish Prince August was on a trip to Egypt, he met a diplomat by the name of Ohan Demirgian who was also known as Habib Bey. Demirgian moved to Sweden and became King Karl XV's equerry, in charge of the stables.

Demirgian brought with him two thoroughbred stallions as a gift to the King on behalf of Egypt's monarch. Later, he acquired Swedish citizenship and became a knighted officer in the inner circle of King Karl XV. While in Sweden, Demirgian established his abode in Överjärva Manor, which dates back to the Iron Ages.

The adventurous Demirgian was known to live in a luxury house in the courtyard. His villa had an oriental design and he often threw lavish parties with belly dancers that the King frequented. When the King passed away, Demirgian left Sweden.

It was Demirgian who ordered a chapel to be constructed on the property, according to sources. Since then, the chapel has been used as a conservatory, artist's studio and Armenian chantry. Its interior is said to have been inspired by Armenian churches and currently awaits restoration. As of this year, it is Stockholm City's 192nd historical site.

When I visited the estate with my uncle a few years back, the last of the winter snow lay on the

ground. Three buttercups were sticking out of a snow pile as if to assure the Swedes that warmer weather was on its way. In the courtyard, the snow weirdly juxtaposed with its architecture. The building, oriental in nature, warranted a warmer, Mediterranean climate. The out-of-place design probably worked to make Demirgian feel more at home in his new land. Especially with the added touch of a chapel in the front yard.

Home, Swede Home

It was especially cold during my visit one particular winter. The date was March 11, 2010. I arrived home from the airport and turned on the television to update myself on the news. Sitting in my family's cozy apartment in the outskirts of Stockholm, I was greeted by a welcome announcement: Sweden's parliament passed a bill recognizing the Armenian Genocide.

That bill is one of the reasons I met Pierre Karatzian, whose grassroots efforts contributed to its passage. I wanted to learn about the process of passing such a bill. Since Pierre was a big force behind the endeavor, he was the best man for my inquiries. We met in one of the malls in the city to sit down and discuss his work over a cup of coffee.

My only reference was a picture I had seen, so I was relieved that he recognized me and we set off to find a place to talk. The first thing that struck me about this man was his beard. "I'm growing my beard because I'll be going to Nepal in a few weeks to climb mountains," he says to me in his perfect Swedish.

Perhaps the most visible character in the Swedish literature is Pippi Longstocking: the kindhearted, red-haired daughter of a pirate who possesses incredible strength. Her character was concocted by world-renowned author Astrid Lindgren.

→ Demirgian's chapel is now officially one of Stockholm's historical sites.



Baban Matlan

↑ The Yellow Villa of Overjarva was leased to Diplomat Ohan Demirgian who at the time was in the inner-circle of Swedish King Karl XV, a frequent guest at the lavish oriental parties thrown by the Armenian.



→ The Stockholm Archipelago sits on the central part of Sweden's east coast and is made up of 14 islands.



Baban Maillan



Pierre is half Armenian: his mother is a Swede and his father a descendant of Genocide survivors from Greece. He understands a bit of Western Armenian, but not more. He chivalrously bought me a cup of coffee and for a second I was taken aback by the gesture. Had an Armenian man in Los Angeles picked up the tab, I wouldn't even question why. Sweden is an egalitarian country based on societal equality, and I was not sure whether Pierre had completely immersed himself in the culture or not. Thanks to Pierre's efforts over the past couple of years uniting the different peoples affected by the Genocide and taking care of press matters, the bill was introduced and the votes went in favor. It is worth noting that one of the votes in favor came from Esabelle Dingizian, an Armenian member of the Swedish Parliament's Environmental Party since 2006. A large congregation of Armenians, Chaldeans, Assyrians and Greeks gathered in the town square to celebrate the occasion. That day I saw something I had never seen before: an Armenian priest giving a sermon in the very center of Stockholm City. This was followed by political speeches to an enthusiastic audience. All around, flags of the nations commemorating the tragedy befallen their people waived. I watched my grandfather standing in the crowd, listening intently to each speaker. It was clear that this was one of the most redeeming moments of his life in Sweden. I know this because it was mine too. ■

Visceral Truths



Vahram Muradyan

You seek facts to get to the truth in life. And then there are times when you, as if enlightened, feel the truth deep inside. We may not get to revelations overnight, yet there are eye-opening moments, events and people in life that lead us toward that ultimate state of awareness. Each of us has a different journey toward realization of these deeply intimate beliefs. What is yours? What is for certain that does not need science to prove it?

Galina Khitrova
Professor of Optical Sciences
I believe in coincidences - because I see them. I believe in surrealistic powers which control us. You have to be mentally and physically ready for coincidence, then you can take advantage of it. Coincidence has controlled my life.

Andy
Singer
I have come to realize that life goes on without me. Even with all my fame, fortune and success, in the bigger picture, I know life will go on without me and nothing really matters. Life is much bigger than me or who I think I am.

Tom Khecumyan
Doctor
As cliché, as this is – LOVE. You can feel it deep down inside and you absolutely need no science to recognize it when you feel it. When you have it, you know it.

Patyl Hajarian
Flight Attendant
I have come to realize that if it weren't for Armenian women, Armenian men would never get married.

Khanh Kieu
Assistant Professor
University of Arizona, Tucson
A lot of things in physics we know are there, but can not prove. We are all attached to the earth because of gravity, but nobody can detect its wave - yet. Scientists have received millions of dollars from governments to study it, but they still can not measure the wave behind gravity's force.

Alfred Contreres
Photographer
I know there is an afterlife. There is no way to prove it, but in yourself you know it's true.

Harvella Mansouryan
Insurance Agent
When you have a strong relationship, you don't need science to understand and feel the significance and existence of it.

Michael E. Gehm
Ph. D. Candidate
I have trouble believing in something without evidence. But, even looking at the universe through telescopes, we can't really see the very beginning, or even see why it came into existence.

Anahit Melikyan
Nurse
I know that when you really want something, you will eventually have it. It might not happen at the time when you want it badly, but a bit later. It doesn't take science to prove this, but rather a life experience.

Anna Anderson
Psychology Student
I know for sure that life is beautiful and love is real.

Michellle Arellano
Lawyer
It doesn't take science to prove that everything happens for a reason.

Sylvia Sultanyan
Lawyer
I know I am – I exist – and I don't need science to prove that. And my deepest belief is that we are all one.

Vache Levonian
Diamond Setter
Friendship and love keep you going and give you happiness. That's all.

Joe Ter-Poghossian
Chocolate Maker
I am 100 percent sure that chocolate is good for you. Life is sweet and delicious as chocolate if you surround yourself with good people, honest friends and family.

Franky Cash Waddy
Musician
I know that funk is a reality. It's a way of life, not just a style of music.

Ara Kachadourian
Editor, *Asbarez*
I am certain that life is what it is and you just have to live it. Life is happening now and, I don't need a scientific proof for that.

Garbis Titizian
Entrepreneur
I know for sure that I am a happy man. I also know that the key to my happiness is in sharing whatever I have with my loved ones and friends. My friends are not just people that I spend time with; they are my happiness. I have always shared everything I have had with my friends and it doesn't take science to prove that happiness is in sharing.

Zarek Issakhanian
Pharmacist
The only thing I can say is God. That's it. I know God exists and I don't need science to prove it.

Shani Rigsbee
Singer
You rip what you see. Karma needs no science to be proven.

Sander Zandbergen
Graduate Research Associate
College of Optical Sciences
There is nothing I believe in that can't be proven. I have always felt that as I've grown up I have given certain opportunities that other people haven't been given. Although, luck is a strange phenomenon. Just to get a glimpse of how it works, we have to combine all disciplines of study, like humanities and science. So, I guess, luck.

Paul Stepanian
Accountant
I am certain that we create our own fate and our future is in our hands. My life works to the degree I keep my promises.

Arina Irkitova
St. Petersburg Polar Academy
I believe that there is an afterlife, a place where the spirits of our ancestors go after they die. They still remain amongst us, but in a different dimension. Some of us have the gift of seeing them. They come to us in their spirit form. As a modern woman, I understand that it contradicts science, yet I believe it to be true.

Ed Constantian
Mortgage Banker
To quote Nobel-prize winning economist, Milton Friedman, "there is no free lunch." Some sort of "price" has to be paid. When we draw millions of gallons of coal or oil from the earth, we leave a void where the resource once was, thereby producing an imbalance underground. When we combust the refined resource, we discharge toxins into the atmosphere, thereby creating an imbalance in the atmosphere. There was a time when our "carbon footprint" on the environment was so insignificant that the earth could "absorb" the abuse.

Aida Ayvazian
Teacher
When you love someone you know it. When you are true to yourself, you know it. When things just flow and there is synergy, you know it. I have come to realize that I have to trust my instincts.

Gerry Sharp
Teacher
I believe in the existence of God. I know a lot of scientists who are atheists, probably because science can't prove that God exists.

Ani Manooginan
Librarian
You should do your absolute best and detach yourself from the result. That is when things just start to flow. Do I need science to know this? Absolutely not.

Lisa Henry
Educator
I believe in destiny. There is an Armenian saying, "Whatever is written on man's forehead will happen." A long time ago, my friend told me that he was planning to climb Mt. Elbrus in a group of alpinists, but his boss did not allow him to take his vacation days and saved his life. The five guys in his group perished in the expedition. A month later, we learned he still attempted to climb Mt. Elbrus and fell into a crevasse. Sadly, he could not avoid his fate.





THE ONE AND ONLY

This is one of those rare cases when the exclusivity of an article is not conf ned by the interview and the story. The word “exclusive” in this case may be used in several occasions: to def ne a personality, a man and his actions. *Yerevan Magazine* is honored to introduce to its readers the exceptional nature of one man to whom even the sky is not the limit – literally.

Text **Ani Nazaretyan** | Photo **Tigran Tovmasyan**

March 13, 1989
Kennedy Space Center, Florida

NASA was getting ready for the launch of STS-29 Space Shuttle Discovery. The launch was initially scheduled for February 18, but was delayed until the month of March to eliminate the chance of potential malfunction of three main engines on the shuttle. The crew of the STS-29 Discovery was all set for the flight after having a preflight breakfast in coats and ties. This was the third mission since the tragic accident of the Space Shuttle Challenger that took the lives of its seven crew members in January of 1986. One of the astronauts of STS-29 Discovery, Dr. James Philip Bagian, was initially scheduled to be on board the ill-fated Challenger, but several months before the scheduled launch there was a change of plans and Bagian and his crew switched places in the schedule and didn't fly. Later, Bagian would become one of the key investigators of the Challenger accident, helping during the salvage operations of the Space Shuttle crew module. Following that, he was responsible for the development and implementation of crew survival and escape equipment used on future shuttle missions. The list of Bagian's contributions to NASA cannot be summed up in one article, yet in his interview with *Yerevan Magazine*, Dr. Bagian confessed that his biggest accomplishments probably came after his time as a NASA astronaut. Indeed, Dr. Bagian's career after his retirement from NASA proves to be just as valuable and prominent.

All That It Takes

Dr. Bagian, who started his career with NASA in 1980, said as we began our conversation, "While, as a young boy, I always had wanted to be an astronaut but had put that idea aside by the time I was 12 years old as unrealistic. I didn't think again of becoming an astronaut until I was in medical school. That was when I became aware that NASA was looking for Space Shuttle astronauts. I completed the application, sent it in, and was invited for the interview. I was ultimately selected as a mission specialist astronaut." How simple is that! A medical student submits an application and becomes a NASA astronaut. But, in reality, Dr. James Philip Bagian was no ordinary applicant. Besides being a medical school graduate, Bagian, still in his twenties, had a pretty impressive background and work experience. After receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering from Drexel University, he worked in the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School and Development Center designing ejection seats. In addition, he had experience piloting high performance jet aircrafts. "I think it was the combination of all these things that made me stand out during the interview," was Bagian's modest conclusion. An engineering background, experience in the aerospace industry, being a physician, and having mechanical aptitude. The list obviously clarifies what it takes to be admitted by NASA as an astronaut.

> Dr. James Bagian was the first one to successfully treat space motion sickness back in 1989. To this day it has been the only treatment used and no better one has been developed.

NASA

Having undergone a series of the toughest trainings in the past, the hard-to-endure challenges of the astronaut training program were nothing new to young Bagian. "To me, it was like any other training. There were no special challenges," continued Bagian in the same casual tone, telling an absolutely non-casual story. "I happened to be a physician, but most of the things I did were engineering-related. In some missions, I was in charge of satellite launches. In other missions, I was conducting scientific and medical experiments." In fact, mission specialists are often physicians or engineers, but Bagian carried out the duties of both. James Bagian has had two space flights. During the first flight in 1989 that lasted four days, 23 hours, and 39 minutes, the crew deployed a tracking and data relay satellite, and performed various experiments. They conducted studies on the changes of cerebral blood flow and its relationship to the Space Adaptation Syndrome (SAS) and Space Motion Sickness (SMS). SMS produces symptoms that resemble sea-sickness and affect approximately 75% of all astronauts on their first flights. In 1989, Dr. James Bagian was the first to treat SMS with the drug Phenergan by intramuscular injection. Bagian's treatment was adopted by NASA at



James Philip Bagian

James Philip Bagian received his Professional Engineers Certification in 1986, and was board-certified in aerospace medicine by the American College of Preventive Medicine. Bagian has been active in the mountain rescue community and has served as a member of the Denali Medical Research Project on Mt. McKinley. He has been a snow-and-ice rescue techniques instructor on Mount Hood. J. P. Bagian was a colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserve and a pararescue flight surgeon for the 939th Air Rescue Wing. He is a USAF-qualified freefall parachutist, holds a private pilot's license and has logged over 1,500 hours flying time in propeller and jet aircraft, helicopters, and gliders.



← James P. Bagian, MD, PE

→ Launch of Space Shuttle Discovery, STS-29





← Bagian conducting medical investigation during STS-29 flight aboard Space Shuttle Discovery



← STS-29 Crew, John Blaha, Jim Bagian, Jim Buchli, Bob Springer, and Mike Coats

→ Bagian floating in the Spacelab during STS-40 aboard Columbia





← Bagian running to his daughter Kimberly after his flight on the Space Shuttle Discovery

that time and continues to be the only treatment used as there has not been a better one developed in the last 23 years. Bagian's second space flight took place two years later on board STS-40 Columbia in June of 1991. It was the first Space Shuttle mission dedicated to life science studies. During this mission that lasted nine days, two hours and 14 minutes, the crew performed experiments to determine how the heart, blood vessels, lungs, kidneys, and hormone-secreting glands respond to microgravity, the causes of space sickness, and changes that occur in muscles, bones, and cells in humans during space flight. That time Dr. Bagian's exceptional skills and ability to improvise in the most challenging situations helped the crew to complete the important experiment. "We had a failure of one of the pieces of equipment that made it impossible to do one of our experiments," Bagian recalled. "I woke up in the morning with the thought that I could fix it with the equipment that was in the medical kit: needles, syringes, etc. That was something we were never trained to

do – I just improvised and it worked, so we were able to finish the experiment."

"What view impressed you most as you looked out the window of the spaceship during your first flight?" I asked Dr. Bagian. He responded, "I was amazed that even at an altitude of 185 miles, one still could make out a tremendous amount of detail. You can see runways for airports, power line towers, many streets, cargo ships. You can see more than you would think. To me, that was the thing that no photo could serve justice to."

Like Father, Like Son

Ever since he was a child, Bagian was interested in flying. His father's influence in that sense was immense. "My father, Philip Bagian, was a fighter pilot during WWII and had a very distinguished career," says Bagian. "He was in the Army Air Corps in the United States, and flew P-47 Thunderbolts in combat. He had 120 missions and was awarded the Silver Star, which is the third highest medal in the country for valor; the Distinguished Flying Cross; the Soldier's Medal; as well as multiple air medals. He is still very active."

There is an interesting story from James Bagian's childhood that speaks for itself: "When I was eight years old, I was in the Cub Scouts and we had to put a scrapbook together about something that interested us. I had always been very interested in flying and aviation so I did one of the NASA space programs. This was before the first U.S. astronaut had flown, and I remember thinking this would be something that would be great to do."







← Father, Philip Bagian sitting on his P-47 fighter aircraft between missions in World War II

↑ Bagian with his heavily damaged aircraft after mission in World War II



Dr. Bagian is currently the Director of the Center for Health Engineering and Patient Safety in the Department of Anesthesia at the University of Michigan

Lethal Game

Despite all the research and testing, launching a shuttle has always been a game of chance. Unlike airplanes, ships or automobiles, Space Shuttles cannot undergo the same number of test flights prior to going into actual operation. It has always been a potentially lethal game – a Russian roulette of sorts – since the level of risk is so much higher than virtually any other endeavor that the question is when, not if a mishap will eventually occur. The tragic Space Shuttle Challenger disaster of 1986 aroused many speculations, due to the fact that for years the U.S. government and NASA were less than forthcoming regarding certain aspects surrounding the mishap.

Dr. Bagian was part of the investigation group of the fatal Challenger accident, in charge of determining what exactly happened to the crew, supervising and conducting the investigation of the cause of their death. Another dramatic aspect of the story is the fact that initially Bagian was scheduled to be on board the Challenger Shuttle on that day. Fortunately there was a change in schedule, and he and his crew did not fly that day. It is hard to imagine the feelings of a man who witnessed the tragic death of fellow crew members, realizing that he could have been one of them. Understandably, he did not provide me with much detail on this subject. But the fact that Dr. Bagian was actually the first one to make the dive and confirm the location of the remains of the Challenger crew members in the Atlantic Ocean speaks for itself.

The scanty report of the Presidential Commission on the Space Shuttle Challenger Accident stated that the crew of the shuttle died instantly as the shuttle broke apart 73 seconds after launch. But was that really the case? The investigation conducted by Bagian's team revealed an even more sorrowful fact: the crew was not killed instantly. Astronauts on board the Space Shuttle Challenger were still strapped to their seats and were alive until the moment the shuttle hit the water. This dramatic fact was to serve as a bitter lesson for NASA because NASA had made the decision to remove the escape system that had been available on earlier Shuttle flights for crew use.

"If there had been an escape system on board similar to the one that was placed into service after the Challenger mishap, there would have been a reasonable



Dr. Bagian was the one who actually made the first dive and confirmed the location of the crew remains of the Space Shuttle Challenger in the Atlantic Ocean.

likelihood that the crew could have survived," Bagian continues. "NASA utilized escape systems on board the shuttles starting from the first flight after the Challenger accident until the end of the shuttle program in August of 2011. I was one of the individuals responsible for that project as well. Even though we came up with the escape system, up until I flew my second flight on the STS-40 Space Shuttle Columbia in 1991, there was no official training on how to use the system for events similar to the Challenger disaster. So we trained the crews unofficially."
In 2003, Dr. Bagian was also appointed as Medical Consultant and Chief Flight Surgeon for the Columbia Accident Investigation Board. Unlike with the Challenger disaster, there was a full report done on the space shuttle Columbia accident, and Dr. Bagian's team was allowed to publish that report.
I was always curious to know why there weren't other manned moon landings after the last landing of Apollo 17 in December of 1972. "There hasn't been support to provide funds for manned landings on the moon," Bagian answered. "The United States planned 25 Apollo missions. There were supposed to be eight additional landings above what actually occurred, but due to the lack of interest in funding they were canceled. That picture hasn't changed dramatically since the 1970s. And currently there is no concrete timeline to go to the moon or Mars. Back in the 1970s it was a combination of many things that supported the program; mainly it was a competition with the Soviet Union, and that competition played a large role for the both sides. I think, once we got to the moon, the interest and then the financial support dwindled," concluded Bagian.
This is attested by the secret presidential recording from the Kennedy Library archives that only a few months ago saw public release. I found that historic conversation between President Kennedy and James Webb, the head of NASA, on the official JFK library website. The recording system was installed by Kennedy himself in order to preserve an accurate record of Presidential decision-making in his White House meetings. "I'm not that interested in space," Kennedy tells Webb during their heated conversation. President Kennedy made it clear that the lunar program was supposed to be the only priority both for NASA as well as for the entire government, so the United States would beat the Soviet Union in the space race and prove the superiority of the American system.

Career after NASA

"After I retired in 1995, I continued to pursue other interests," Bagian said, "In 1999 I was offered the opportunity by the Veterans Administration to start the first patient safety dedicated organization in the world. I thought this was the ideal opportunity to see whether I could be successful in introducing my knowledge and experience from other industries like engineering and aviation, into healthcare. From 1999 to 2010, I served as Chief Patient Safety Officer and Director of the Veteran Administration's National Center for Patient Safety. That was probably my most significant career, perhaps even more valuable than what I did at NASA." Bagian confessed. "I was always amazed at the fact that many things in medicine are based on old systems. People would learn from one another rather than doing things in a systematic way, and if there were problems they would be corrected individually instead of thinking what could be done for everyone to learn from someone's experience. A tremendous number of people are killed because of unsafe medical care. So now I was given the opportunity to form the first organization that would actually attempt to ensure safety, not just talk about it.
We set up standards, tools and methodologies in countries all around the world and changed the way healthcare is delivered today. We realized that we were actually saving lives. Simply telling people to be careful was not a good strategy. There is no reason that a patient has to be hurt before one can learn something. With that in mind, within the healthcare industry we popularized the notion of reporting what are called 'close calls.' We have also authored many publications and had training programs for over 14 countries around the world to set up safety programs and develop tools that are used throughout the world to this day. A lot of



our initial ideas were implemented in a large way across the VA system. We also changed the design of medical equipment that has been less than perfect and could harm patients. All this was done not only for our patients here in the U.S., but for all the patients around the world. I think we were very successful in our work, and this has been absolutely satisfying."

Dr. Bagian is currently the Director of the Center for Health Engineering and Patient Safety in the Department of Anesthesia at the University of Michigan and is actively involved at the national level with standard-setting organizations to make sure that what was developed in the VA can benefit others as well. In one of his keynote addresses to the physicians at Montefiore Medical Center about patient safety procedures, Bagian ended with these words, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world." There is definitely no doubt that Bagian with his team has proven this statement right.

Dr. Bagian and his wife live in Northville, Michigan. They have two daughters and two sons. Both daughters are engineers, their oldest son is currently working as an engineer and the younger son is in engineering school.

Airplanes and space shuttles are not the only adrenalin-pumping activities in Bagian's list of interests: he is also an ardent motorcycle lover. On many occasions he prefers motorcycles to cars and often rides them to work. Dr. Bagian owns not one or two, but seven of them.

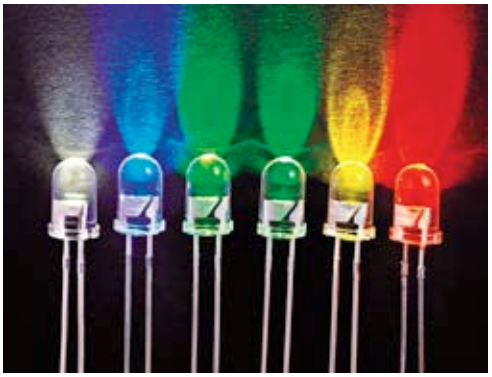
Post Scriptum

An engineer, a physician, a NASA astronaut, an Air Force-qualified freefall parachutist, a mountain rescue instructor, a private pilot, director of the Veteran Administration's National Center for Patient Safety and a professor at the University of Michigan. No, this is not an A-Z list of careers of different people. Unbelievable as it may seem these all constitute one man, who throughout his life managed to distinguish himself in various occupations and made invaluable contributions in all his endeavors. They say, the more you lose yourself in something bigger than yourself, the more energy you will have. Well, if that is the case, Dr. James Philip Bagian's energy supply must be unlimited. ■

science — գիտություն [ghi-tou-tsyun]

Space Explorations Benefits

The benefits of space exploration are vital to our rapidly evolving world. Technological and scientific advancements resulting from space exploration have greatly improved our quality of life. Technologies that were derived from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration research and are being commercialized through NASA funding or assistance are called "spinoffs." Since 1976, over 1,300 NASA technology spinoffs can be found in medical, environmental, automotive, sports, computer industries. Have you ever wondered how space exploration impacts your daily life? We present a list of the top ten spinoff technologies produced over the past years.



Light-Emitting Diode (LED)

The light-emitting diode technology that was originally used to grow plants in space is recently finding a new use for cancer treatment, wound healing, human tissue growth and chronic pain lessening here on Earth. Biologists have found that cells exposed to near-infrared light - that is, energy just outside the visible range - from LEDs grow 150 to 200 percent faster than those cells not stimulated by such light. The light arrays increase energy inside cells that then speed up the healing process. Several hospitals are using these "light therapy" devices that are in their second phase of clinical trials to promote wound healing. The Light-Emitting Diode special lighting technology has also successfully reduced the painful side effects resulting from chemotherapy and radiation treatment in bone marrow and stem cell transplant patients.

Adjustable Smoke Detector

Smoke detector technology was originally developed for NASA's Skylab spacecraft, but is now required by law to be placed in all homes and is universally credited for saving countless lives. Skylab was the first U.S. space station, and it was decided that astronauts would need to know if a fire started or if noxious gases were loose in the vehicle. Teaming up with Honeywell Corporation, NASA invented the first adjustable smoke detector with different sensitivity levels to prevent false alarms. The first smoke detectors to hit the consumer market were called the ionization smoke detectors and used a radioactive element called americium-241 to spot smoke or harmful gasses. When clean air particles of oxygen and nitrogen move through these smoke detectors, the americium-241 ionizes them, which creates an electrical current. If foreign smoke particles enter the smoke detector, it disrupts that interaction, triggering the alarm.





Treatment of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

Video games are not only a popular electronic form of entertainment, but they can also help patients with Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder control their behavior. NASA uses simulators similar to video games to train and help pilots stay focused while flying. Derived from that research, NASA's software technology transforms ordinary video game play into a highly effective treatment for a spectrum of disorders including attention deficit, hyperactivity and autism. The treatment involves monitoring the brainwaves of children and trying to get them to modify their brain activity which in turn helps them to concentrate. Enhanced ability to learn occurs naturally while playing favorite video games likeXBox, PlayStation, and S.M.A.R.T. BrainGames™. The video game technology provides advantages over standard neurofeedback treatment in terms of enjoyment for the children and positive parent perception.



Breast Biopsy System

Silicon chips, originally developed for NASA's Hubble Space Telescope to see and to convert faint objects such as distant galaxies directly into digital images, have been adopted by doctors. The breast biopsy technique allows easy detection of tiny spots in breast tissue more clearly and efficiently. This non-surgical procedure, which is replacing surgical biopsy in many cases, is saving women time, pain, radiation exposure and money, and is less traumatic. It is performed with a needle instead of a scalpel and leaves only a small puncture wound rather than a large scar. A biopsy needle is mechanically guided into position for firing into the sampling region. The needle is parallel to the transducer, allowing real-time guidance during needle insertion. Lesion sampling is verified by another ultrasound image after firing. Two procedures have quantified the targeting accuracy of this apparatus.



Memory Foam Mattresses

NASA's space mattresses from revolutionary material called memory foam provide all the support that a body needs for healthy sleep. Memory foam technology reacts to the weight of a body, yielding at hips, shoulders and head while supporting legs and arms. This provides a sleep surface that conforms to your shape and position. Back in the 1970's, NASA's Ames Research Center scientists came up with a new foam substance that improved the safety of seat cushions aboard air and spacecraft. The foam was created by treating polyurethane with chemicals that increased its viscosity and density, thereby giving it a spring-like torsion. NASA released memory foam to the public domain in the early 1980s, and nowadays its most common domestic uses are mattresses, pillows, and blankets. It also has medical uses such as wheelchair seat cushions, hospital bed pillows and padding for persons suffering long-term pain or postural problems.



Invisible Braces

What does a pretty smile have to do with rockets? A material developed by NASA's Advanced Ceramics Research originally designed to protect heat-seeking missiles is now used to make invisible braces. Because of their instant popularity, invisible braces are one of the most successful products in the orthodontic industry.

Water Filters

The technology for purifying water that was used on the Apollo spacecraft is now used to kill bacteria, viruses and algae in community water supply systems. For the lunar missions, NASA developed a lightweight water purifier the size of a cigarette pack that was designed for minimal power consumption and monitoring. Water purification technology has been successfully commercialized, and a system based on the Space Shuttle's water purifier is widely in use in developing nations today to cleanse drinking water. The commercial system passes a small electrical current through copper and silver electrodes, releasing ions into the water being purified. Along with killing bacteria in the water, the filters also prevent further bacterial growth. This water purification system is also used in swimming pools, fountains and cooling towers.



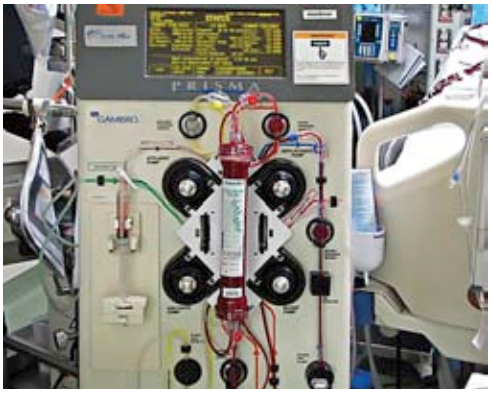


Artificial Heart Implant

The technology used in Space Shuttle fuel pumps led to the development of a miniaturized ventricular assist pump by NASA and renowned heart surgeon Dr. Michael DeBakey. The artificial heart pump, which is two inches long by one inch in diameter and weighs less than four ounces, supplements the heart's pumping capacity in the left ventricle. Later, a team at Ames Research Center modeled the blood flow and improved the design to avoid harm to blood cells. It has been successfully implanted into many people.

Kidney Dialysis Machines

Modern machines that do the work of the kidneys were developed as a result of a NASA-developed chemical process that could remove toxic waste from used dialysis fluid. The discovery marked the birth of what is known as "sorbent" dialysis, a method of removing urea from human blood by treating it with a dialysate solution. Sorbent dialysis differs from conventional single-pass dialysis in one major respect: in the sorbent system, used dialysate is chemically reprocessed into fresh dialysate and sent back to the dialyzer instead of being flushed down a drain. This process saves electricity and eliminates the need for a continuous water supply and drain.





Freeze-Dried Food

To reduce the weight of food to be carried on missions, NASA carried out extensive research. One of the techniques developed was the freeze-drying process in which water is extracted from freshly cooked foods by dehydration at very low temperatures. Flavor is locked in by freeze-drying the food and then sealing it in special pouches that block out moisture and oxygen, the principal causes of food deterioration. This makes it possible to store the food for long periods without refrigeration. As a result, freeze-dried foods preserve nutritional value and taste while also reducing weight and increasing shelf life.

Human space exploration helps to address fundamental questions about our place in the Universe as well as foster a peaceful connection with other nations. We must be proud that many Armenian scientists have made significant contributions and played a vital role in the world-class achievements in this sphere.



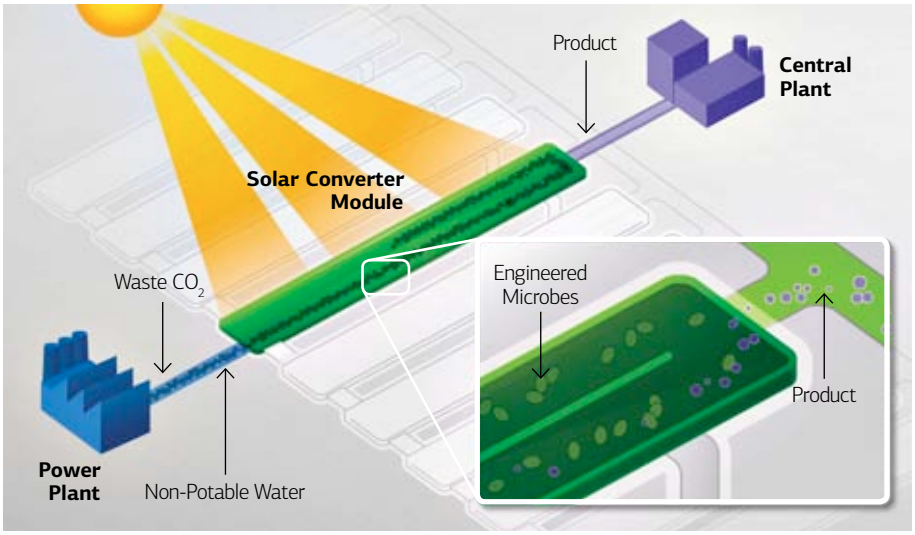
Unlimited Fuel

Fossil fuels are one of the important energy sources on earth. Without these fuels, many day-to-day operations would not be possible, like driving a car. Today's world relies on such fuels in order to economically function. What would happen if one day all these fuels disappeared or if oil-rich countries decided to no longer trade oil? Joule Unlimited, may be the answer to this question.

Text **Ani Garibyan**

The idea behind Joule Unlimited was followed by "years of work developing related technologies in fields of biological engineering, genomics and renewable fuels," said founder and chairman of Joule Unlimited, Dr. Noubar Afeyan. The ingredients of this renewable fuel are simple: sunlight, waste carbon dioxide (CO_2) and non-potable water. The outcome is millions of gallons of clean, renewable fuel.

"Renewable fuels are needed to partially replace fossil fuels. Over the last decade, there have been billions of dollars invested globally to develop new technologies that can produce replacement fuels to the current crude oil derived gasoline, diesel or jet fuel," explained Dr. Afeyan. Here is how it works: A typical solar converter array (consisting of modules) will encompass 1,000 acres. Each module contains microbes created by Joules, along with non-potable water (or untreated water) and micro-nutrients. Waste CO_2 is pumped into the module through a pipeline, keeping the microbes in motion, maximizing their exposure to sunlight. The sunlight charges the microbes, which consume the CO_2 and produce fuel. The produce fuel is then separated and sent to storage while the microbes that did not consume the CO_2 take another circle inside the module. Every eight weeks, the modules are flushed and the process is repeated. The arrays are best utilized in areas where there is direct sunlight and where temperatures do not reach freezing conditions. Currently, the product is in the demonstration phase but once the end product is reached, it will be sold through the same channels that sell ethanol and diesel fuel. "Eventually, the solar ethanol product will be blended with regular transportation fuel (gasoline) and sold at gas stations or else placed into the diesel supply chain," said Dr. Afeyan. Biofuels are the most promising approach so far as they convert agricultural products or waste into ethanol or what is called biodiesel. Dr. Afeyan explains, "Joule Unlimited, our company, invented a process called Helioculture, which can directly convert the sun's energy and



← An illustration showing how the end product is extracted.

In the News

The Guardian named Joule in the Global Cleantech 100. The Global Cleantech 100 represents innovation and highlights the companies most likely to make a significant market impact in the next five to ten years.



← A system containing microorganisms, non-potable water and micro nutrients.



→ Display of the eight-week process

"Joule Unlimited, our company, invented a process, Helioculture, that can directly convert the sun's energy and waste CO_2 emitted from power plants and other sources into ethanol or diesel," says Dr. Noubar Afeyan.

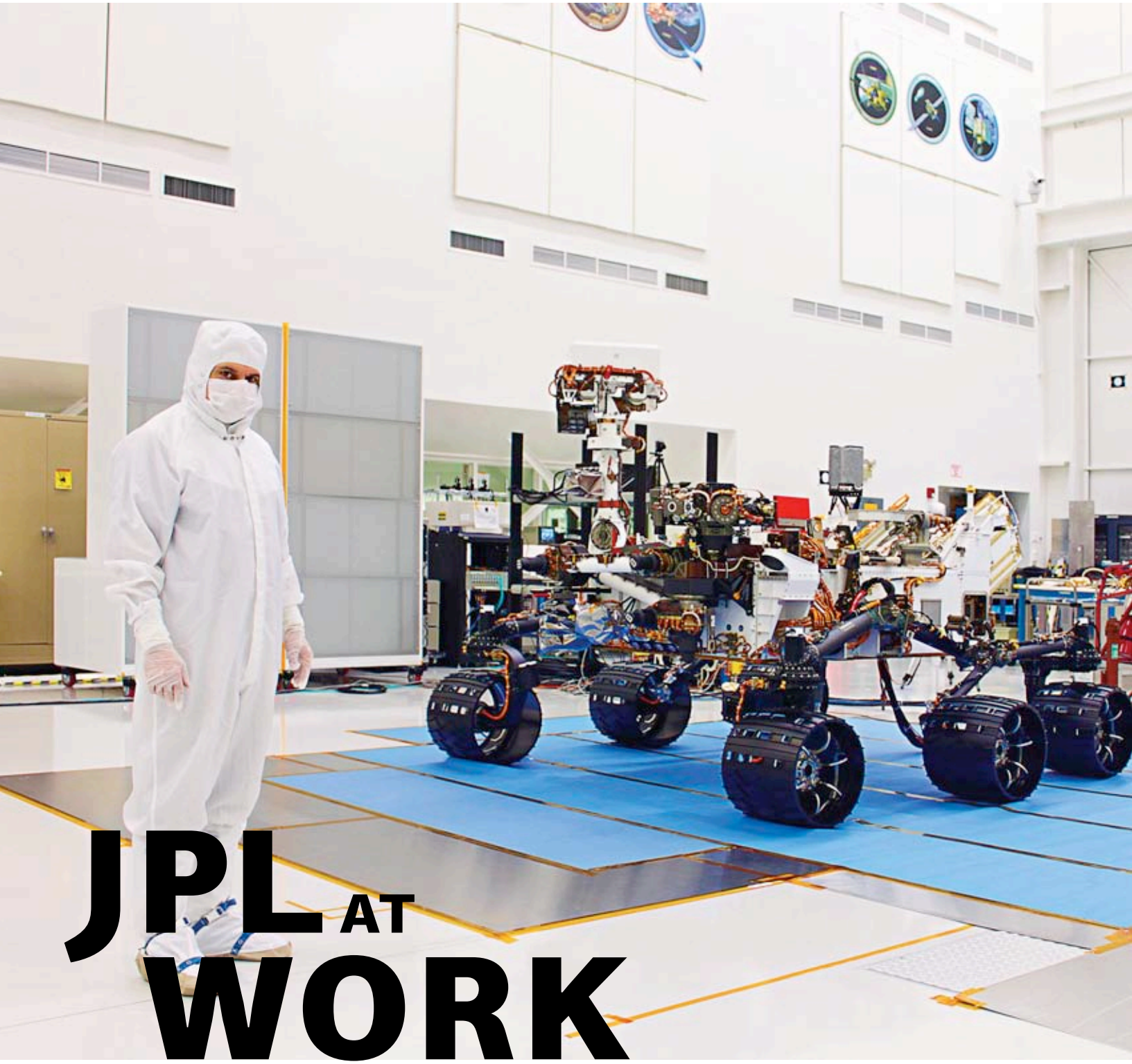
In the News

In September 2012, Joule announced a strategic partnership with AUDI AG. "Audi selected Joule as its exclusive partner in the development of biologically-derived diesel and ethanol – the result of extensive evaluations of Joule's proprietary technology and commercial plans."

waste CO_2 emitted from power plants and other sources into ethanol or diesel. We expect that as renewable fuel reach price parity with current crude-derived alternatives, there will be increased adoption of these renewable fuels that are generally far more environmentally friendly (producing less net greenhouse gases) and will lessen our dependence on imported oil." The company expects that their product will be cost competitive, possible to produce at many locations, carbon neutral, and compatible with the current transportation fuel infrastructure and vehicles.

Joule Unlimited is a hot topic in the technological and renewable energy outlets.

Just recently, the company was awarded the prestigious "Wall Street Journal Technology Innovation Award" in the Energy category. The company was also named the "2012 Technology Pioneer" by the World Economic Forum. In November 2011, Joule Unlimited came in 23rd, ahead of BP Biofuels and Chevron in the 50 Hottest Companies in Bioenergy, in the *Biofuels Digest*. "This type of disruptive technology development takes a lot of different disciplines and relies on many different breakthroughs in order to succeed. We are working to realize the promise and expect to demonstrate production at significantly larger scales than today's pilot scale over the next year," explained Dr. Afeyan. ■



JPL AT WORK

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) is located in La Canada Flintridge, Calif. In these laboratories scientists have created engineering masterpieces such as the Voyagers 1 and 2, Mars Rovers, including the latest Curiosity, the Cassini-Huygens Missions to Saturn, the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter and the Spitzer Space Telescope. Take a look at what it's like to be on NASA's JPL campus.

Text **Ani Garibyan**



Zareh Gorjian

Driving onto the JPL campus, you must go through security, then some more security, and then be escorted around by a staff member. Researchers at JPL/NASA must maintain strict confidentiality and a commitment to keep flexible work hours. Time in space is not the same as it is on Earth; therefore, JPL scientists adjust their clocks to that of their research, at times spending sleepless nights watching over their handiwork.



The campus laboratories are quite large, spacious enough to accommodate all the components of their inventions with extensive outdoor test areas. Currently, JPL has 24 spacecraft and 10 instruments conducting active missions. In June 2012, JPL launched the X-ray telescope NuSTAR. The Dawn spacecraft, which since last summer has orbited the asteroid belt's second largest object, Vesta, will soon embark on a flight to orbit the dwarf planet Ceres in 2015.



The inventions that are brought to completion in this tranquil campus are life changing and substantive additions to the technological advancement of humanity. These influential creations are in part the work of a diligent group of Armenians – close to 20 engineers worked on the Curiosity Rover project.



Louis Trinh

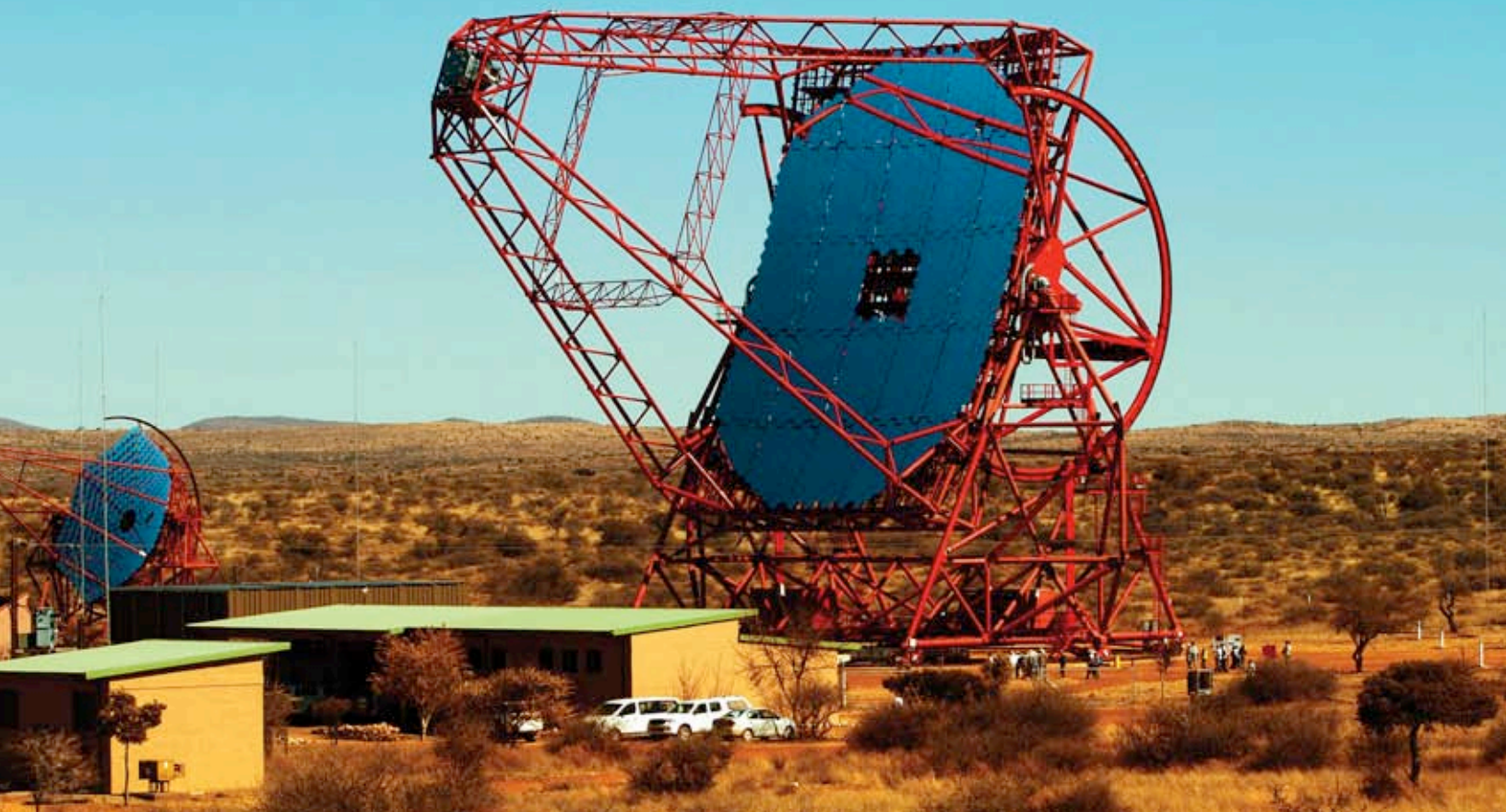


At JPL, researchers have opportunities to attend various seminars and conferences to keep abreast of new technology within their respective fields. With the knowledge that's brought to the table, they are periodically rotated to various projects. Each project has its own regulations, including the use of protective gear. At times, scientists look like they are about to enter an operating room or handle hazardous material. The protective clothing is to avoid undesirable interaction between various elements, including static. One of the outdoor fields looks and feels like the rugged terrain of Mars. Though the Curiosity Rover safely landed on Mars on August 15, 2012 and is currently making newsworthy discoveries, additional tests are essential to ensure that the Rover continues to function properly.



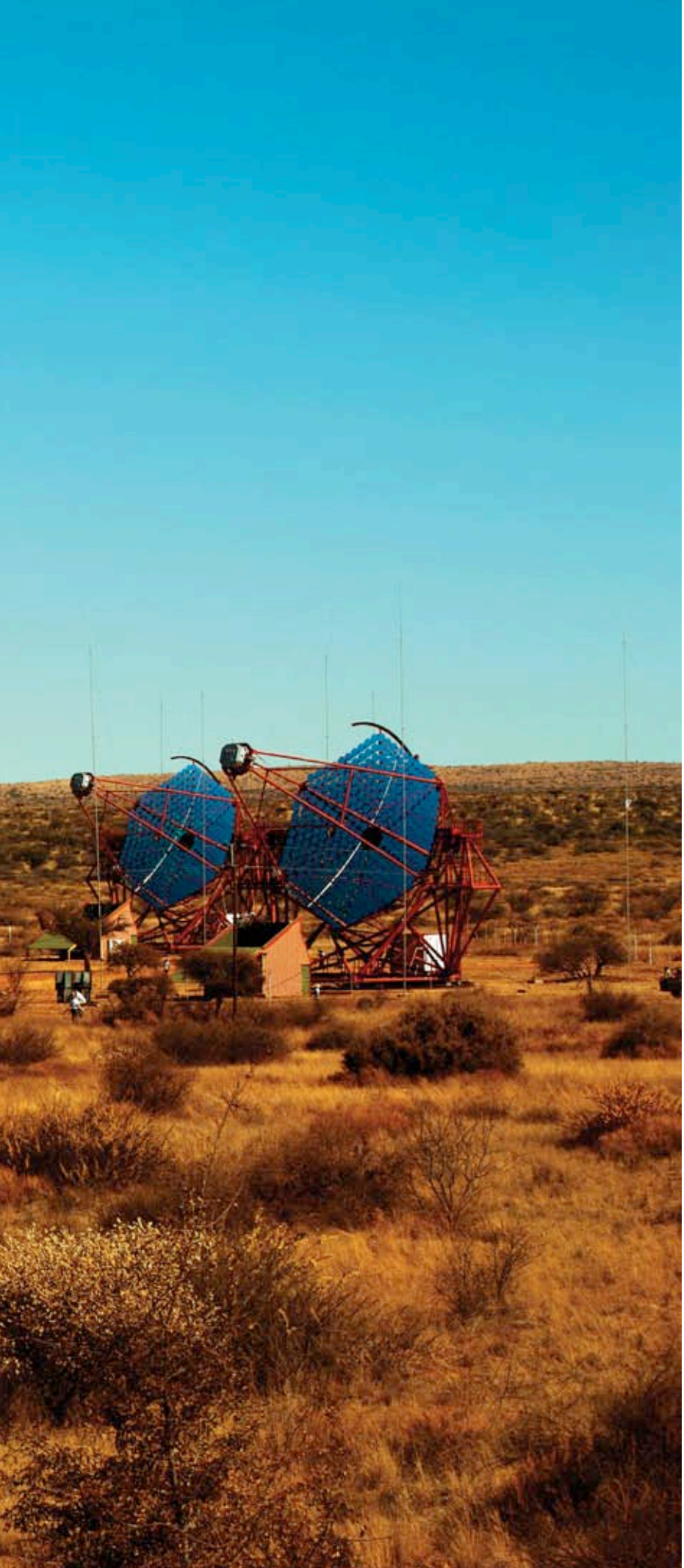
I was fortunate to have the opportunity to meet and observe the Armenian scientists, and proud to learn what they have accomplished and plan to achieve at JPL/NASA, one of the world's most important research institutions. I believe the renowned astrophysicist Viktor Hambartsumian would have been very gratified, too.

875 REFLECTIONS OF ARMENIA



The largest Cherenkov telescope in the world has the word ARMENIA written 875 times on each of its large mirrors. All mirrors of this tall 560-ton telescope were made by the Galaxy Company located in Garni, Armenia and led by Dr. Ara Mirzoyan. The of cial inauguration of the HESS II telescope took place on September 28, 2012, and among the 170 scientists from 32 research institutions in 12 dif erent countries was a group of physicists from the Department of Physics and Astrophysics of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia and Yerevan Physics Institute.

Text **Lianna Zakharian**





Dr. Ara Mirzoyan,
Director of the
Galaxy Company

As long as I have known Dr. Ara Mirzoyan, his dream was to restore the grandeur of the past achievements of astronomy and astrophysics in Armenia. This was not a coincidence – his father, the prominent astrophysicist Professor Lyudvik Mirzoyan, worked most of his career at the Byurakan Observatory side by side with the President of the International Astronomical Union, Viktor Hambartsumian. Back in the Soviet period, the observatory discovered special star clusters – stellar associations, more than 1,000 flare stars, dozens of Supernovae, hundreds of space objects, cometary nebulae and galaxies. Unfortunately, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the observatory was largely neglected and underfunded. Many of the scientists scattered around the globe and the technical staffs either retired or moved to other fields of occupation.

Ara Mirzoyan, after receiving his Ph.D. in astrophysics, also served his country as the Vice Consul of Armenia in Los Angeles and later became the General Manager of the Coca-Cola plant in Armenia. Quite successful in these new high positions, he nevertheless could not entirely abandon the idea of pursuing his career in science.

His mentor and close friend Professor Felix Aharonian left Armenia to become the world's leading specialist in the field of High Energy Cosmic Gamma Ray Astronomy. Felix Aharonian shared Mirzoyan's dream – to reinstate his country on the map of the global scientific community. To do it, Aharonian's

vision was to shift priorities from the old Soviet mentality – from pursuing a self-contained, locally centered advancement of fundamental fields of science to integration with the broader framework of the global scientific community. He proposed a smaller scale approach – choosing a field where Armenia traditionally excelled and advancing it in a financially viable way. Astrophysics was an ideal field in that sense because Armenia traditionally had the intellectual resources, and it was a field that was comparatively less expensive to pursue.

Among other international projects, Professor Aharonian and his team at Max Planck Institute in Heidelberg, Germany, were actively involved in the international collaboration called HESS, the High-Energy Stereoscopic System. An observatory in Namibia was the base of the project, and the location was chosen because the atmospheric conditions are favorable for observations.

In the process of manufacturing the mirrors for HESS II, we have increased our production capacities and created a lot of new technology. Due to this and the speed of our work, we hope to win the next tender.

Dr. Mirzoyan has collaborated in the area of instrumentation with the Max Planck Institute since 2002. The collaboration was a long experimental path. The four smaller 12-meter telescopes of the first phase of HESS had been in use since 2004 and already had Armenian mirrors. So when the second phase of the project named HESS II announced tender for a contract to make mirrors for the world's largest Cherenkov telescope, it was only natural that Dr. Mirzoyan decided to try his chances and bid against the large optical companies from Germany and the U.S.

Soon Dr. Mirzoyan assembled a team that was ready to undertake such a large-scale project. In his quest he found highly-qualified professionals, specialists who in the past were involved in the technological support of the Byurakan Observatory, Institute of Physics and Academy of Sciences. The new members of his company Galaxy – Razmik Khosrovyan, Levik Sarkisian, Robert Galoyan, Avetik Hovannisian, Ashot Vardanyan and Vachik Elbakyan – set to work. It was not an easy task because creating mirrors with such precision required technology that was not available in Armenia. Therefore, Ashot Vardanyan created new machines for processing and polishing mirrors, and Vachik Elbakyan designed and assembled a device for measuring the reflectance of the mirrors. Throughout the project, Ara Mirzoyan and his team were supported by the president of the National Academy of Sciences Radik Martirosyan and the academician and Head of the Department of Physics and Astrophysics, Yuri Chilingaryan.

The results of the tender were announced at the end of 2006. Dr Mirzoyan and his team at Galaxy won the tender contract for making the mirrors for the telescopes of HESS II, surpassing the optics manufacturers from Germany and the United States. Since Cherenkov telescopes are installed outdoors without a dome, the technical requirements for the installed mirrors were very strict: the weight of the glass could not exceed 23-24 kilograms, and the reflection coefficient could not be not less than 80%. The skilled Armenian specialists settled on a thickness of 15 mm, using their newly-developed device to measure the reflection coefficient and ensuring 85% efficiency by the established coefficient. They worked in two shifts to complete the 900 mirrors, safely pack them and deliver them on time. Their dedication and enthusiasm paid off. The produced mirrors satisfied all quality requirements and the work was completed and delivered within the scheduled deadlines. In fact, the team went further and developed a secure packing system so that all mirrors reached the distant location undamaged. Thanks to their efforts, the world's largest Cherenkov telescope HESS II, with an area of 600 square meters, was launched into operation in Namibia in July of 2012. Since then, the observatory continues the study of cosmic processes with greater precision and efficiency.

"On several occasions since the official opening of the new telescope on September 28, 2012, the German side, particularly the Director of the Max Planck Institute Werner Hofmann, expressed their satisfaction with the quality of the mirrors and the manner in which the team from Armenia participated in the project. For us it is a great honor, and we are very proud," said Dr. Mirzoyan.

The Armenian astrophysicists participated in HESS almost since its initiation. The coordinator of the collaboration effort from Armenian was Vardan Sahakyan from the Yerevan Physics Institute, and now the Galaxy team has become the executor of the instrumental part.



The High Energy Stereoscopic System
HESS is a system of Imaging Atmospheric Cherenkov Telescopes that investigates cosmic gamma rays in the energy range from 10s of GeV to 10s of TeV. The name HESS stands for High Energy Stereoscopic System, and is also intended to pay homage to Victor Hess, who received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1936 for his discovery of cosmic radiation. The instrument allows scientists to explore gamma-ray sources with intensities at a level of a few thousandths of the flux of the Crab nebula (the brightest steady source of gamma rays in the sky). HESS is located in Namibia, near the Gamsberg mountain, an area well known for its excellent optical quality.

← The HESS II telescope is as high as a 20-story building.

Ara Mirzoyan and his team are not going to stop here, however. They are already planning to participate in the next tender, which will involve more extensive cooperation. The next project, called CTA – the Cherenkov Telescope Array – will cost approximately €200 million, with 10% of this amount expected to be allocated for the optics. The project will involve building two Cherenkov observatories with 100 small telescopes. "We hope to get 40-50% of the entire order. During the manufacturing of mirrors for the project HESS II, we increased our production capacities and created a lot of new technology. Because of this and due to the speed of our work, we hope to win the next tender as well. We made the 900 mirrors in approximately two years, although the preparation of the production took a much longer time. To this date, no one in the world has such a productivity rate," he said proudly.

"We made the 900 mirrors in approximately two years, although the preparation of the production took a much longer time. To this date, no one in the world has such a productivity rate."

Mirzoyan's team started the restoration of the mirrors for the largest telescope of the Byurakan Astrophysical Observatory first, followed by the restoration of other telescopes at the Observatory. They will complete the new cover of the large telescope by the end of the year, and next year the team will begin upgrading the dome and its electronics. Perhaps, we can say that Ara is making his dream of restoration of Byurakan Observatory come true. ■

A Night in

How do astrophysicists celebrate a colleague's anniversary? Why, they organize a conference, of course. While working on our Science issue, we learned that, in order to celebrate the 60th birthday of the renowned astrophysicist Felix Aharonian, 70 of his closest colleagues, collaborators and friends from around the world came together at the Faculty of Physics of the University of Barcelona for several days of discussions, entitled, "Exploring the Non-thermal Universe with Gamma Rays," the area of astrophysics in which Prof. Aharonian has been working throughout his career. *Yerevan* could not stay away from the occasion. We asked Prof. Aharonian and his colleagues, Dr. Alexandre Lazarian, Dr. Vardan Sahakian and Dr. Razmik Mirzoyan, to answer some half-serious and half-joking questions about science, physics and nature. It turned out to be a great night out for friends, who first took an evening stroll on the streets of Barcelona and then sat in a cozy tapa bar following a long-lasting tradition of holding some of the most fruitful scholarly conversations over a glass of beer.

Facilitator **Lianna Zakharan** | Photo **Marco Ansaloni**



ht Out Barcelona

Alexandre Lazarian
Associate Professor,
University of Wisconsin-
Madison Education

Razmik Mirzoyan
Leader of the MAGIC group
in Max-Planck-Institute (MPI)
for Physics in Munich.

Vardan Sahakian
Senior Researcher,
National Science Laboratory,
Yerevan Physics Institute

Felix Aharonian
Professor of Astrophysics,
Dublin Institute for Advanced
Studies in Ireland

Lianna Zakharian: What is physics, really? Does physics concern what we say about nature or how nature really functions?

Alexandre Lazarian: I think, physics is about finding out how nature functions at its elementary level. Thus, physics is a very fundamental science. In some sense, one can describe the entire world on the basis of physics, but as you go to a level of more complexity, it is expedient to use the empirical laws studied by the disciplines of higher levels of hierarchy, e.g. chemistry or biology.

Vardan Sahakian: Of course, physics is concerned with the study of how nature (the physical or material world ranging in scale from subatomic to cosmic) functions, but if under the notion of nature, we refer also to life in general, then of course other disciplines devoted to the study of life and living organisms should also be considered.

Felix Aharonian: Yes, indeed, that is the main objective of physics, and vice versa – physics, coupled with astronomy and mathematics, is our main tool to explore the universe and understand how nature functions.

Razmik Mirzoyan: But every time when we make one little step trying to compose an imaginary picture of what surrounds us and understand how it functions, the One who invented this all probably laughs at our efforts.

Zakharian: So, would you agree that everything we call real is made of things that cannot be regarded as real?

Sahakian: I agree. The development of science in the last century, particularly a deeper understanding of the structure of matter and the universe, show that many problems predicted by quantum physics could not be solved on the basis of classical physics and simple experience.



Lazarian: True, the deeper we delve into the structure of matter, the weirder is the world we discover. Even at the level of atoms, we face laws of quantum mechanics that are completely mind boggling. They present us with paradoxes that cannot be resolved on the basis of our experience and logic.

Aharonian: I have a somewhat more optimistic and positive opinion on this subject. Collective efforts by physicists, astronomers and mathematicians often result in reconstruction of quite realistic descriptions of complex phenomena in the universe. When independent studies of the same facts using different tools, approaches and models remarkably agree with each other, that means a lot and for sure cannot be treated as a coincidence. The electromagnetic radiation we detect from celestial objects is a real substance; the stars and even black holes are real objects; and there is little doubt that invisible Dark Matter is something real. And by the way, I can't definitely say the same about Dark Energy. Of course, all our models are to a large extent approximations, but it does not mean they are not real. I believe that the human intellect, using different approaches of theoretical physics and mathematical models, is able to interpret correctly the experiments and observations obtained with facilities. This is a general statement with perhaps one exception concerning the issues related to the creation and nature of the early Universe. Unlike many modern cosmologists, I do not think that God is so naive as to give us the key to the code of the universe, unless the achievable, for us, space-time which we call "universe" is a component of a larger and more complex structure.

Mirzoyan: It depends. When I am typing an e-mail using the keyboard of my computer it seems real to me, but when I'm trying to answer your question, I don't have the feeling that I'm giving you a real answer.

Zakharian: Ah... you started joking. Are we delving here into some things that are so serious that all you can do is laugh at them?

Lazarian: Well, by now we know that baryonic matter, i.e., the matter of the world as we know it, constitutes only a small fraction of the energy and mass of the Universe, while most of the energy is dark energy and most of the matter is dark matter about which we know nothing, so yes, we have to laugh at our ignorance. On the positive site, this is also progress. In the Dark Ages of science during medieval times, people seriously thought that they understood how the world was born and how it operated.

Sahakian: Exactly, the problems of dark matter (the hidden mass) and its detection, the gravitational waves and their detection, as well as the origin of extremely high-energy cosmic rays are very serious issues. I can add also the problem of creating an "artificial intellect."

Aharonian: Well, I do not think we should give up even when we face tremendous difficulties. The most challenging phenomena, in fact, serve as the major driving force of science. On the other hand, one should not overestimate the significance and universality of the current concepts and theories. The most successful researchers, in my view, are those who are not scared of difficulties, but those who clearly understand that what they do is just another small step, an insight toward understanding the mysterious celestial object and phenomenon.

Zakharian: As Niels Bohr once said, "Every great and deep difficulty bears in itself its own solution." How easy it is to change our thinking in order to find solutions?

Aharonian: "The change of our thinking" is a key condition for progress in all areas of human activity. In basic science it is especially important. But one should be careful in this regard. It should be robustly justified by new facts and data, experimental results and observations which cannot be explained otherwise



Felix Aharonian
Professor of Astrophysics, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. Head of High Energy Astrophysics Theory Group, Max Planck Institute, Heidelberg, Germany. Fields of Research: High Energy Astrophysics, Astroparticle Physics, Cosmology. Received his M.S. and Ph.D. at Moscow Engineering-Physics Institute and Doctor of Science (Yerevan Physics Institute). Editor of the *International Journal of Modern Physics*. Involvement in major projects: Member (representative of ESA) of the Science Working Group of the JAXA-NASA X-Ray Mission ASTRO-H (x-ray astronomy); Member of the H.E.S.S. Collaboration Board (gamma-ray astronomy).



Alexandre Lazarian
Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Education:
Ph.D. in Applied Mathematics from University of Cambridge (UK)
Received his M.S. in Theoretical Physics and B.S. in Astrophysics from Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology
Postdoctoral Research: CITA, Toronto, Princeton University Observatory, CfA, Harvard
Current Research Interests: Interstellar Turbulence and its Implications
MHD Processes: Magnetic Reconnection; Physics of Interstellar and Circumstellar Dust; Interstellar, Circumstellar and Interplanetary Magnetic Fields, Cosmic Ray Physics



Vardan Sahakian
Senior Researcher, National Science Laboratory (Yerevan Physics Institute), Head of the Department for Science Policy at the State Committee of Science of the Republic of Armenia.
Field of Research: Very High Energy Gamma-Ray Astrophysics, Cosmic Ray Physics, High Energy Physics, Numerical Simulation and Modeling, Data Processing and Analysis.
Awards: Co-winner with Felix Aharonian and A. Akhperjanian of Prize in Physics from the President of the Republic of Armenia, Co-Winner with H.E.S.S. Collaboration of the 2010 Rossi Prize of the High Energy Astrophysics Division of the American Astronomical Society (awarded to F. Aharonian, W. Hofman, H. Voelk and the H.E.S.S. team).



Razmik Mirzoyan
Leader of the MAGIC group in Max-Planck-Institute (MPI) for Physics in Munich, Germany. Received his M.S. from Moscow Engineering-Physics Institute Defended his Ph.D. at Lebedev Physics Institute of Academy of Sciences of USSR (FIAN), Moscow. Author/coauthor of over 450 publications.
Fields of research: Laser fusion, picosecond hot plasma and extremely powerful ultra-short pulse laser experiments.
Member of the Comite Cientific Internacional (CCI); responsible for observatories on Canary Islands
Member of the International SUCOSIP committee for the Sky Quality of observatories on Canary Islands.

within the framework of the well-established standard theories and models. Only after comprehensive study of all possible ways to explain the new data, and after the demonstration of a failure of the existing theories to address these new facts, one should move to a formulation of a new concept. By the way, this was exactly the case when Niels Bohr introduced the concept of quantum physics.

Lazarian: It is well known that a properly posed question already has half of the answer or even more. Thus the ability to formulate difficulty presents a substantial way toward its resolution. It is not easy to change our thinking which is very much influenced by common sense, which in turn, may be detrimental and misguiding in terms of scientific discovery. It is very important to be able to give the world a fresh outlook, not dominated by our previous experiences and prejudices. I believe that it is important to search and formulate the contradiction intrinsic to a scientific problem and to resolve it. This requires a type of thinking different from the usual commonplace logic. During my student years I made many inventions, and I feel that the ways of solving scientific and engineering problems are similar.

Sahakian: I agree that every difficulty, more precisely every problem, contains some elements of its solution. However, this principle seems simple only at first glance. First of all, sometimes it is difficult to find and properly formulate the problem. In the scientific process, this step is decisively the most important one, and in my opinion it is more than half the answer. The second important component is the ability to analyze the problem, then to generate possible solutions, and finally to choose the best one to resolve the problem. Both aspects of thinking are important; however creativity, the ability to imagine or invent something new (generating possibilities, exploring ideas) and accepting change (which can be based on but not dominated by previous experiences) are much more important. Of course, it is not easy to change our thinking; it is necessary to start with the educational system, including schools and universities, and the aim should be building a creative society.

Mirzoyan: Probably we cannot change our thinking. But for finding solutions there are good recipes from ancient times, like the one from Archimedes: taking a bath do not forget to observe what happens to the piece of soap.

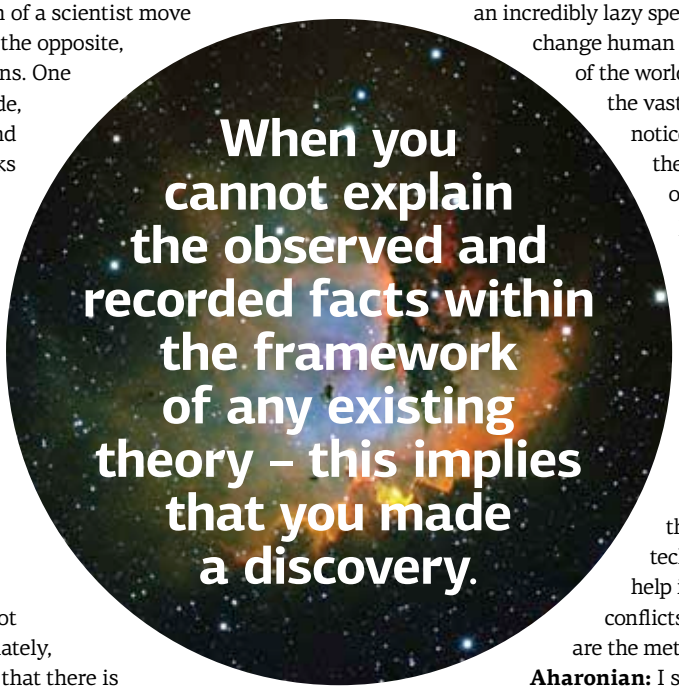
Zakharian: I feel that we are talking here about things more complex than a simple language can convey. Would you agree that scientists should express themselves more clearly than they think? ▸


Tapes del dia

Lazarian: I think that they should. When we think we are searching for a solution, we are in some sense in a fog. But when the solution is found, it must be possible to explain it in simple, easy to understand language. In my talks, for instance, I try to write as few equations as possible. Instead, I think that providing a clear physical outlook on the process is more important.

Sahakian: And still, the scientist should express himself more clearly than he is able to think, and I have to agree, in most cases it is not so easy. Thinking is not a linear process; it is an approach to solve a problem, and when the solution is found, it is possible to present the whole process in a relatively simple scheme and language. But as a result of such simplification, some details of the process could be omitted or distorted.

Mirzoyan: Is it even possible to present it in a clear form? Sometimes, the thoughts in the brain of a scientist move from the right to the left and then in the opposite, and then up and down, in all directions. One thought is pushing the other one aside, chasing and fighting the third one and so on; to say it clearly, what one thinks under such conditions is a major effort, one needs to wait until one thought will establish hierarchy and rise among the others. Then one knows, but his explanation cannot be better than the one described above.



Aharonian: I say, definitely he or she should try to express him/herself clearly! Here is why: When a researcher does not understand what is going on, he or she should admit it and clearly state in relevant papers using a simple language: "I (we) do not understand" or "We cannot offer a simple explanation." Unfortunately, many researchers do not understand that there is nothing wrong with admitting their failure to explain the facts. This not only can confuse their colleagues or readers of their papers, but also they could miss a potential discovery. I do not remember the exact famous phrase of Enrico Fermi, but it can be approximately formulated in the following way: if you have new results which are explained by a certain existing theory, then you simply confirm that theory. But when you cannot explain these facts in the framework of any existing theory – this implies that you made a discovery.

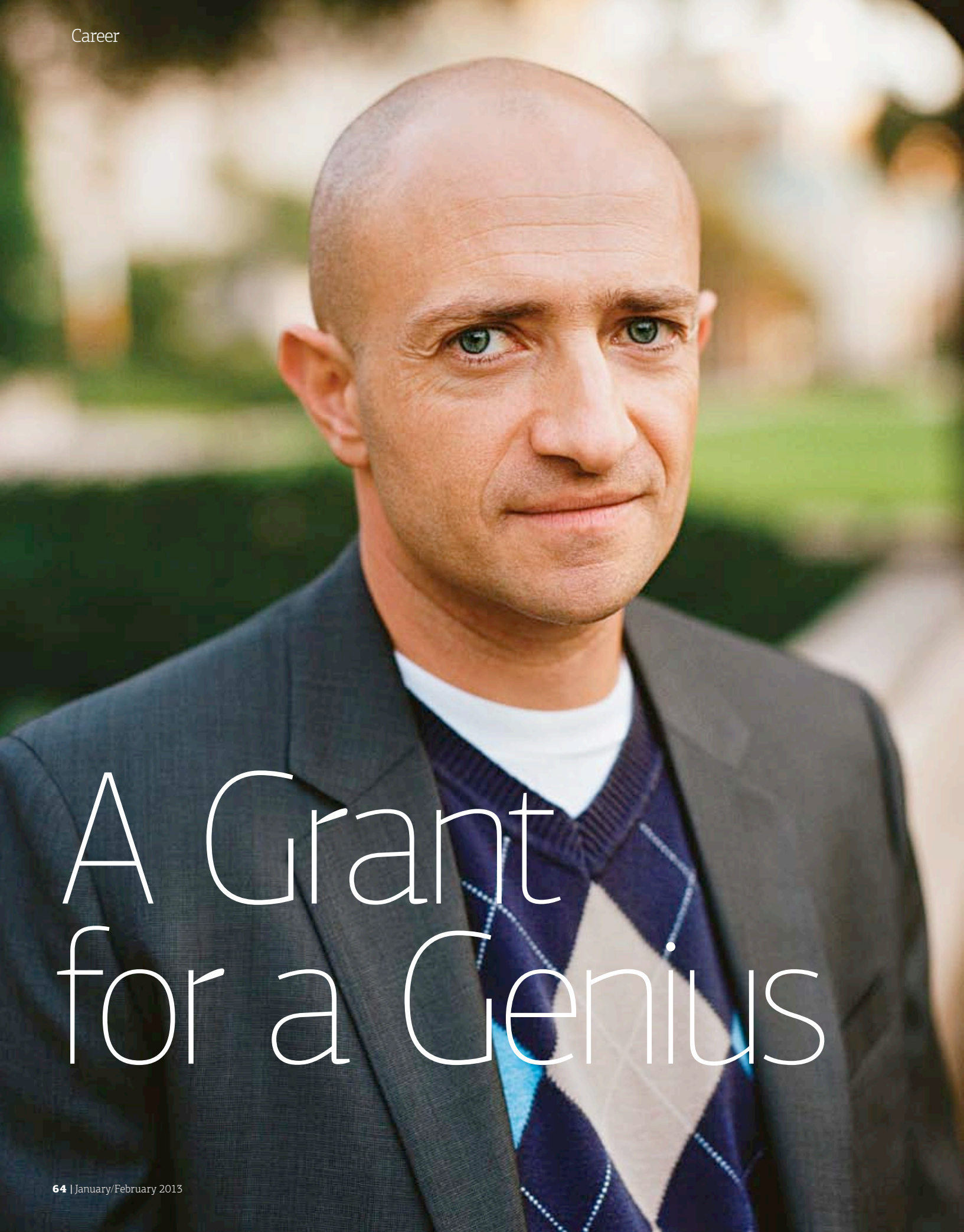
Zakharian: Technology has advanced more in the last thirty years than in the previous two thousand. The exponential increase in advancement will only continue. How easy it is for you to make a prediction about the future?

Lazarian: Predicting is always difficult and may be dangerous. For instance, Nostradamus predicted the day of his own death. Well, to fulfill his own prophecy, he had to take a poison! Exponential increase does not mean that all the branches of science will develop exponentially. Instead, new branches of science which we cannot even imagine now will appear in future. But it is fun that we really cannot predict the future. In one of the science fiction stories, the invention of a machine for future prediction resulted in the decay of civilization, with people losing interest in life. Life should be full of surprises and even better if they are pleasant.

Sahakian: The future is difficult to see and predictions are always wrong. The only accurate prediction about the future could be the continuation of advancement in different branches of science and technology. Although, perhaps this is not even a prediction as it is based on observation of how things moved in the last 20-30 years.

Mirzoyan: Technology makes our lives more comfortable and easy, but at the same time, it makes us lazier. We are trying to organize our lives and do everything in our power to spend them with less and less efforts and movements! So we are on our way to becoming an incredibly lazy species! Technology, it seems, did not change human nature. While less than one percent of the world population is making big progress, the vast majority, the 99 percent, do not notice until it is advertised as appealing to their own comfort. So the development of the society of this less than one percent of the people does not mean much in real time. Perhaps it is not really helpful to predict the future (although it may provide a momentary advantage to certain locations or countries who can possess a certain technology earlier than the others, and as a sad rule, for getting military advantage). I find it disappointing, that while we enjoy incredible technological progress, it does not help in any way to reduce the number of conflicts. The only things that are changing are the methods of fighting against each other.

Aharonian: I should admit that I am confused. Things are going too fast, and it is clear that all aspects of human activity will be dramatically changed. I do not know – is it for the good or bad? As long as it concerns basic science, I cannot exclude the possibly that in 20-30 years computers will be able to analyze and interpret experimental data, write papers, suggest new experiments and develop new theories. We see such situations already in chess. These days computers easily beat the best chess players. Also, computers most likely will produce better movies than the best Hollywood directors. But chess and movies belong to sport and art, so people will continue their activities in these areas. The situation in science will be different – who will need our theories if computers can do it better? This is like Bulgakov's statement from *Master and Margarita* concerning the fresh fish. Bulgakov's character said, "There is no second degree of freshness." This is sad, but I think, unavoidable. Anyway, I hope all this will happen after my move to another world, the "next station" where the computers will be underdeveloped. On the other hand, I do not know how I could survive without my MacBook in that world. ■



A Grant for a Genius

Commit his name to memory – Sarkis Mazmanian is well on his way to changing the world. The medical microbiologist is one of 23 people to receive the prestigious 2012 MacArthur Fellowship – by popular name the Genius Grant – for his pioneering research of microbes. The title and $500,000 unrestricted monetary award is given to game changers in disciplines ranging from fiction writing to geochemistry.

Text **Silva Sevlian** | Photo **Tigran Tovmasyan**

Focusing on the potential use of bacteria to improve health, Mazmanian and his team at the California Institute of Technology study how beneficial microbes can be harnessed as therapies. With no exaggeration, the work that he and his team of researchers have done in identifying microbes as a positive contributor to the body's immune system has created a paradigm shift in the field of preventive medicine. Mazmanian's research has made a measurable impact on finding treatments for multiple sclerosis(MS), staph infection and inflammatory bowel disease.

"I had this simple thought, but I think it was revolutionary in its simplicity," Mazmanian said. "If I was a bacteria and I was going to intelligently design an activity – and I only lived inside of humans – then I could either passively live there and use the nutrients in that host or I could learn ways to improve the health of that host because the healthier the host is, the more I will thrive, and the better environment I will have."

With that idea, he shifted the thinking within the field of medical microbiology from "all bacteria are bad to some of these bacteria may be good." One small step for this man, but in hindsight, one big step for mankind.

In a summary of the direction and rationale of his work Mazmanian stated:

"The Western world is experiencing a growing medical crisis. Epidemiologic and clinical reports reveal a dramatic increase in immune disorders: inflammatory bowel disease, asthma, type 1 diabetes and multiple sclerosis.

Emboldened by the 'hygiene hypothesis' proposed two decades ago, scientists have speculated that lifestyle changes (vaccination, sanitation, antibiotics) have predisposed developed societies to these disorders by reducing bacterial infections. However, the hypothesis remains without explanation as our exposure to most bacteria does not result in disease. Mammals are colonized for life with 100 trillion indigenous bacteria, creating a diverse ecosystem whose contributions to human health remain poorly understood. In recent years, there has been a revolution in biology toward understanding how (and more importantly, why) mammals harbor multitudes of symbiotic bacteria.

We have recently demonstrated for the first time that intestinal bacteria direct universal development of the immune system; thus fundamental aspects of mammalian health are inextricably dependent on microbial symbiosis. Furthermore, it is now clear that all of the diseases in question astonishingly involve a common immunologic defect found in the absence of symbiotic bacteria. As we have co-evolved with our microbial partners for eons, have strategies used against infectious agents reduced our exposure to health-promoting bacteria, ultimately leading to increased disease? ▸

"I went to Harvard not because of the school or anything, but because I found a laboratory that would let me test these crazy ideas – at the time no one was studying this."
— Sarkis Mazmanian

We propose that the human genome does not encode all functions required for health, and we depend on crucial interactions with products of our microbiome (collective genomes of our gut bacterial species). Through genomics, microbiology, immunology and animal models, we wish to define the molecular processes employed by symbiotic bacteria that mediate protection from disease.
Advances in the past year have now made it possible to mine this untapped reservoir for beneficial microbial molecules. Ultimately, understanding the immune mechanisms of these symbiosis factors may lead to natural therapeutics for human diseases based on entirely novel biological principles."

***

His parents never pushed Mazmanian to do well in school or even to pursue a college degree. Still, he was an exceptional student and scored high enough on his SATs – sans studying – to be offered admission to UCLA. He chose English as his major because he loved to write and had won a national poetry award in high school. In no time, he switched his major to economics, then one more time to microbiological and molecular genetics. So began his love for science – serendipitous and solid. "I didn't like science growing up, but I found that whatever qualities I have – that I learned from family or whatever it is, fit perfectly in the mold of being successful in science"
After graduating from college, Mazmanian continued his academic career and received his Ph.D. in microbiology from UCLA in 2002, with a dissertation on bacterial pathogenesis. Back then, while most microbiologists were studying microbial pathogenesis, Mazmanian's curiosity of bacteria inspired him to use Staphylococcus aureus as his subject. "The goal there was to understand how the bacterium causes infection and disease. Because if you could understand how microbes cause disease, then you can think of ways of inhibiting that process and preventing them from doing what they're doing – and these are antibiotics/anti-infectives."
Finally, he was studying how bacteria stick to our cells – because if a bacterium never attaches to the body's tissues and just washes through the body, then it's harmless and can't cause a disease.

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He further delved into his research of microbes with post-doctoral work at Harvard Medical School. He explains, "So I went to Harvard. It wasn't because of the school or anything, it was because I found a laboratory that would let me test these crazy ideas. At the time no one was studying this." After his postdoctoral work, he returned home to California and took a position as an assistant professor at Caltech, where last year he received a lifetime appointment of a tenure professorship.

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Mazmanian underscores the importance of sharing scientific findings, contributing to the field through public literature and allowing others to build on the work. Though he speaks softly about his reputation, he and his team place an emphasis on publishing high quality research. "In science you cannot work in a vacuum. You could come up with the most brilliant discoveries but if no one knows about it, you're not helping anyone," he said. "Ultimately if our goal is to cure diseases, if you don't do things to advance that mission, then drugs will never end up in a clinic."



↓ Mazmanian shows that humans may have an evolutionary requirement for the specific bacteria.

"If I was a bacteria and I was going to intelligently design an activity – and I only lived inside of humans – I would learn ways to improve the health of that host because the healthier the host is, the more I will thrive."



↑ Four post-doctoral scholars and six graduate students work in Mazmanian's lab.



↑ Symbiotic bacteria elaborate immunomodulatory molecules which are recognized by host immune cells (dendritic cells), and presented to T cells to mediate development of the mammalian immune system

His studies have received high recognition in the scientific community worldwide. His articles appeared in many scientific publications, among them were *Science*, *Nature*, *PNAS*, and *Cell*.

***

Mazmanian's passion for science can only be matched by the sincere love he has for his Armenian heritage. Since 2008, Mazmanian ok traveled to Armenia to teach courses on microbiology. In the past two years, he has collaborated with the Institute of Molecular Biology in Yerevan to teach a weeklong intensive microbiology class, where he and a group of graduate students study the interaction between host microbes and humans. This sentiment is underscored by his plans to spend a portion of the MacArthur grant to assist with educational and research programs in Armenia.

***

He and his family moved to the U.S. from Beirut when Mazmanian was just a little more than a year old. Like many Armenians of their generation, the families of both his mother and father were displaced to Aleppo, Syria after the Genocide and in the mid-1950s moved to Lebanon.

All four of his grandparents were survivors of the Armenian Genocide. Interestingly, his maternal grandfather was taken in by a Kurdish family who used his long red hair to disguise him as a girl and protect him from the Ottoman regime who hunted men and boys.

When the Mazmanians moved to the States, they made a home in the San Fernando Valley and he and his two sisters attended Rose and Alex Pilibos Armenian School until their early teens. Central to their upbringing was a sense of pride and a need for cultural preservation. "My parents always said, 'It's America outside, but when you walk in our home, it's Armenia.'" Responsible for helping their families, both his father and mother never received a formal education. Neither attended a day of school. Rather than assisting their children with homework, their three children helped them learn English. As is often exemplary of immigrant families in the U.S., Mazmanian's parents taught him more than he could have ever learned in the classroom.

"My father was sweeping hair in a barber shop when he was six, but he taught himself to read and write in five languages," Mazmanian said. "I don't come from a family of doctors or educators, but I learned that anything is possible if you apply yourself." His father would later go on to co-author an Armenian-French dictionary and is working until this day – well into his eighties.

Mazmanian has no business being as humble as he is. He will be the first to tell you that the success he found was by following an unstructured plan – or really, no plan at all. "I'm not a genius, I simply am not," said Sarkis Mazmanian. "I just make the obvious decision and find direction – then just go!" Two short decades ago he was fixing fenders in a Van Nuys body shop and now he is the recipient of the Genius Grant. "If my boss at that time would have come in and said 'I'll offer you a raise,' I would probably never have gone to college. It was that easy." ■

Plastic Magic

If you think you are about to unwind into the best story you've ever read, your inclinations are correct because I am writing this story with a custom-fitted performance enhancing mouth guard in place. It is the human growth hormone to my fingers, the steroids to my keyboard. Who knew gaining a competitive advantage would be so easy?

Text **Manouk Akopyan**



Art Hovhannisyan/Photo by Tom Casino

→
Mouth guards are most common in football, hockey, combat sports and basketball.



Adrian Peterson/Photo by Scott Clarke

For the last four years, three times a week, I play pick-up basketball at my athletic club. My tenacious style of play at the center position has earned me the nickname "Manucleus." (Get it? Manouk...center...nucleus...Manucleus?) Then came the fatal fall of 2012, when after a six-week vacation from basketball, I was dealt an insurmountable level of ineffectiveness. I couldn't hit water if I fell off a boat. A practice that once seemed as simple as a free throw had reached Dwight Howard levels of foul line futility. I watched *White Men Can't Jump* – even *Kazaam* and *Space Jam* – in hopes of channeling my inner Woody Harrelson. Luckily, Roobik Ebrahimi answered my cry for help before the Voluntary Anti-Doping Association did.

Mouth guards are most common in combat sports, football, hockey and basketball, just to name a handful. In recent years, however, a growing number of pros, weekend warriors and even everyday Joe's and Jane's alike have been wooed by the wonders of jaw-positioning retainers.

A plastic retainer can make someone a better athlete? If only you can imagine my level of cynicism when I met with Roobik Ebrahimi, a neuromuscular dentist by vocation who specializes in making custom mouth guards. The first thing that came to my mind was the failings of Power Balance or any derivation of the silicone wristband with the hologram that markets itself as a "performance bracelet."

That was my chide-side speaking before I actually tried the mouth guard Ebrahimi custom made for me. During the evaluation, Ebrahimi said that by using the mouth guard, his is commercially known as the Miracle Mouthguard, it would improve my oxygen intake, posture, strength, power, balance and accuracy, as well as help me think more clearly under pressure.

"By biting down at your optimal position, you are flexing your muscles and at a physiological rest position," says Ebrahimi. "In return, it decreases the likelihood of fatigue and injury and it gives you up to 30% more strength. For world-class athletes, the smallest percentage of improvement takes their talents to new heights. For the average person, they can see improvements on entirely new levels."

The science of neuromuscular dentistry entails the contact between teeth and the function of the jaw muscles and points before, during and after treatment in order to obtain results. By clenching your teeth, a mouth guard edges your jaw forward by a few millimeters. Your clench pinches the nerves that run through the temporomandibular (jaw) joint, causing a lower production of the stress hormone cortisol. (Excessive levels of cortisol impede performance.) By holding the jaw in a position that also allows the neck muscles to relax, the mouth guard gives an edge in strength, balance, speed, flexibility and vertical jumping.

During the testing process for strength and range-of-motion, as I stood on one leg with both arms stretched at my

A mouth guard can make someone a better athlete? If only you can begin to imagine my level of cynicism when I met with Roobik Ebrahimi, a neuromuscular dentist by vocation who specializes in making custom mouth guards.



Tigran Tovmasyan

← Ebrahimi has made UFC women's champion Ronda Rousey and trainer Edmond Tarverdyan their custom mouth guards.

↓ Strength, balance, and jumping are just some of the physical attributes which see improvement with the mouth guard.



LeBron James/Photo by Ben Solomon

shoulders, Ebrahami almost tossed me aside like a rag doll when he slightly pushed down on my arms. I then bit into a bite registration stick. This time, with the same amount of force, Ebrahami clearly struggled before I stabilized myself with the other leg. A series of other tests followed before I was molded.

A 2008 study by Rutgers University concluded that high jumpers leaped one inch higher while wearing a similar mouthpiece. Other studies have shown that professional weightlifters add several pounds to their snatch; golfers drive the ball farther, and soccer players can kick the ball up to 15 yards more.

I put myself to the test with weights. I complemented my Miracle Mouthguard with a pre-workout energy shake and felt like I could karate chop a fortress down to the ground as I consistently lifted additional repetitions at an average of ten pounds more than my previous marks.

Dr. Anil Makkar, the initiator behind the current science, first began marketing his brand Pure Power Mouthguard (PPM) in 2008 with the millions of dollars he obtained from investors. After having hundreds of high-profiled athletes from all over the world use the product, Makkar's efforts and his stream of revenue folded soon thereafter. Although his acumen as a businessman may have been meager, Dr. Makkar left a lasting effect for the industry as it moved forward into neuromuscular dentistry.

On November 2, 2009, Jon Gruden, the fierce, no-frills Super Bowl winning coach, gave the mouth guard a lifetime-lasting endorsement on the telecast of ESPN's *Monday Night Football* by linking the New Orleans Saints winning the Super Bowl the previous year to every player using the product. PPM instantly became the poster child for performance, an enhancement that Drew Brees and company might have had a *wee bit* to do with as well.

Ebrahimi also has a list of clients that's not too shabby either. He goes on about his work without conglomerate hullabaloo in his dental studio and lab in Montrose, Calif. He's fitted world-class athletes Andre Agassi and Ronda Rousey and businessmen Dennis Washington (No. 63 on the Forbes 400) and Bill Gates for their custom mouth guards. If you are wondering why the billionaire behind Microsoft is using a customized mouth guard, it is not because he uses it to program better, but for golfing.

Celebrities like Charlize Theron, Sean Penn and Jim Carrey have entrusted the contents behind their money-making smiles to the hands of the Armenian-Iranian Ebrahimi as well. But as Ebrahimi puts it, he always holds a special place for Armenians. He seeks them out – boxers Vic Darchinyan, Vanes Martirosyan and Art Hovhannisyan already among them – to educate them with the current science and studies available in order to make them better athletes. Which is why for the 2016 Olympic Games, he will reach out to the Armenian Olympics Committee to provide every athlete their own customized mouth guard.

Ebrahimi says he practices what he preaches by biting into a balanced lifestyle. At 50, he has as much energy as he did as a 15 year-old playing soccer for FC Ararat Tehran. Ebrahimi's active lifestyle today includes racquetball, golf and soccer for at times upwards of four hours or more.

"There are a lot of products available in the market, but you need to have one that is actually going to help you. If neuromuscular dentistry were not behind the mouth guard, it might as well be an accessory," Ebrahimi says. "Neuromuscular dentistry is a fascinating discipline that's still fairly new to people. That's why I want to



Tigran Tovmasyan

Roobik Ebrahimi

Roobik Ebrahimi is a neuromuscular dentist who specializes in making custom-made mouth guards known as the Miracle Mouthguard. He also has a background in advanced cosmetic dentistry and restoration, with a celebrity list of clients that includes Charlize Theron, Sean Penn, Jim Carrey, Tobey Maguire, Rebecca De Mornay, Tyler Perry, Nelly, Lisa Kudrow and Haley Joel Osment. Ebrahimi has made the Miracle Mouthguard for Andre Agassi, Ronda Rousey, Bill Gates, Dennis Washington, Vic Darchinyan, Vanes Martirosyan, Art Hovhannisyan and Edmond Tarverdyan, among countless others.

▸ Certified Dental Technician, Tehran, Iran, 1984
▸ National Dental Board of Certification United States, 1994
▸ Certified LVI Master Technician and Neuromuscular Technician, 2004
▸ Founder of Dream Smile Studios, 2004
▸ Chief of Dental Technology, Cornerstone Dentistry, Glendale, Calif.

A 2008 study by Rutgers University concluded that high jumpers leaped one inch higher while wearing a similar mouthpiece. Other studies have shown that professional weightlifters add several pounds to their snatch; golfers drive the ball farther, and soccer players can kick the ball up to 15 yards more.

educate people and have athletes unlock their true potential."

Hall of Fame boxing trainer Jesse Reid, who's been involved with and trained 23 world champions over the course of the last 46 years as a boxer and trainer, praises the sweet science's protection aside from the obvious reasons of not getting their teeth punched in.

"Your jaw is one of the strongest parts of the body. When you bite down on the mouth guard, it gives you more strength and pop. It also allows you to breath better and prevents you from swallowing your tongue. Although a fighter may not be feeling this all at once, it is there helping him."

"A lot of times, when a fighter's mouthpiece flies out, it's either because they were playing around with it or it was a generic one. I always tell my fighters – and I would advise all fighters – to get a mouth guard especially made for them by a dentist who specializes in them."

Reid, 70, now training out of Powerhouse Gym in Burbank, Calif., trained the late Hector "Macho" Camacho Sr.'s wins over Sugar Ray Leonard and Roberto Duran, the late Johnny Tapia to four world titles, as well as Roger Mayweather's two championships.

"At the end of the day, it's all about what a fighter's God given talent is."

Growing up, I could never shake the picture of an impregnable Mike Tyson hopelessly trying to pick up his mouthpiece during his knockout loss to Buster Douglas. Today, I can't shake the haunting images of LeBron James doing 360s with his piece of plastic during every play stoppage. And now, if you catch me at your local playgrounds, you won't be able to shake my "Dream Shake." And I didn't even have to go to Hakeem Olajuwon's summer school.

Ever since I started sporting my black and gold piece of plastic magic, I've tapped into physical talents I didn't have before. It could be mind over matter or a timeless case of classical conditioning or just a newly-found unconventional way of conditioning myself. Call it whatever you want, but I no longer have to dunk on my three-year-old nephew Vartan and his Fisher Price to regain lost confidence. Bite into your Miracle Mouthguard... and voila! Just throw on a headband, the newest pair of Jordans, and the farce hologram bracelet of your choice and you're good to call out any athlete on Twitter. ■



Film Lovers Celebrate **Arpa's 15th Anniversary**

The Arpa Foundation for Film, Music and Art celebrates the 15th anniversary of its signature event, the Arpa International Film Festival with Yerevan magazine as one of its main media sponsors.



Arpa International Film Festival 2012 opened with a sold out screening of Lost and Found in Armenia and closed with the North American Premiere of Armenia's first official submission to the Academy Awards for best foreign language film, *If Only Everyone* starring Michael Poghosian. The four-day festival showcased over 60 films from 17 nations. The diversity of films shown, feature films, documentaries, short films and animation, was matched by the diversity of nations represented including Armenia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Canada, USA, Greece, France and the Palestinian Territories.

The annual event at the world famous Egyptian Theater in Hollywood, California has become an important film festival for a burgeoning community of international art house filmmakers. Each year Arpa honors the spirit of independent filmmaking with its broad selections of screenings followed by panel discussions with filmmakers and cast members and open forum Q&A's.

The festival culminated in an evening of cocktails, dinner and awards at the Gala and Awards ceremony at the Universal Sheraton Hotel. After a tribute video honoring the wonderful work done by Arpa throughout the last 15 years, festival director Alex Kalognomos welcomed the distinguished guests and honorees and introduced the Mistress of Ceremonies, Marla Maples.

Award-winning actress and Grammy nominee, Anoush Nvart presented the Arpa Foundation Award to the USC Shoah Foundation. Breakthrough Actor of the Year Award was given to Hrach Titizian who included a little advice for parents in his acceptance speech, urging them to support their children's interest in the arts. The Award for Achievement in International Cinema was given to the film *Lost and Found in Armenia* and Artist of the Year was awarded to Michael Poghosian. British filmmaker Sebastian Siegel presented the Career Achievement Award to Francis Fisher. The prestigious Armin T. Wegner Humanitarian Award was given to Lusine Sahakyan from Armenia for her documentary *Crossroads of the Past and Present*. The glamorous event closed with a few words of gratitude from Arpa founder Sylvia Minassian thanking all the individuals who work so hard to make the festival a successful event every year and all the people who support Arpa and value the art of movie making. ■


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Hye Aid Concert Benefits Syrian Armenians



Photos by Helena Grigorian & Armen Grigore

With the collaboration of Artists for Kids and the Syrian-Armenian Relief Fund, Armenians from all over the world gathered for the Hye Aid Benefit Concert to support Syrian-Armenians. The concert took place on November 11 at the Pasadena Civic Center in Los Angeles.

As sad as the objective of this concert may have been, it brought together Armenians of all backgrounds and ages for one cause: to help Syrian-Armenians.

The Syrian Armenian Relief Fund (SARF) was established in August 2012 to supply immediate assistance to the Syrian-Armenians living under unimaginable circumstances. The committee stated that the Syrian-Armenian community is experiencing the worse crisis since the Armenian Genocide.

The Artists for Kids non-profit organization invited an array of musicians and guest speakers who volunteered their time to uplift the spirits of those stricken by the tumultuous times in Syria.

Zaven Khanjian, member of the SARF executive committee, opened the event with a powerful speech and set the stage for a line-up that featured musicians Serj Tankain along with his father Khatchadour, Arto Tuncboyaciyan, Ruben Hakhverdyan, Element Band, Lilit Pipoyan, Vicken Tarpinian, VIZA, The Dirty Diamond, Armen Movsisyan, Sebu Simonian from Capital Cities, as well as London's Charming Liars.

"I was honored to be asked to be a part of such a worthy cause," said Simonian. "The musical line-up was both artistic and impressive. Our community needs to help the Syrian-Armenians either to get out of the country or to secure their situations. It's better late than never, and we all have to make every possible effort in spite of our personal struggles. As long as we have unity, it's a good thing."

Artist Vahe Berberian said, "When your leg bleeds, the blood doesn't only come from your leg, it comes from your entire body; Syria is a part of our Armenian being. We are all bleeding. Our community is the first Diaspora community; our people are beautiful. Syria was a stable Diaspora for us in the Middle East, but now the future of Syria is bleak, unfortunately. Politically no one was expecting this."

Yerevan Magazine has donated all of its proceeds from magazine subscriptions to this cause. ■

THE LOVE GUIDE

Promotional Page



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Crossroad

The world premiere of *Crossroad* was held at the Alex Theatre in Glendale on October 14. The film, which is written and directed by Shervin Youssefian, drew hundreds of supporters from the Armenian community as well as celebrities and artists of all kinds.

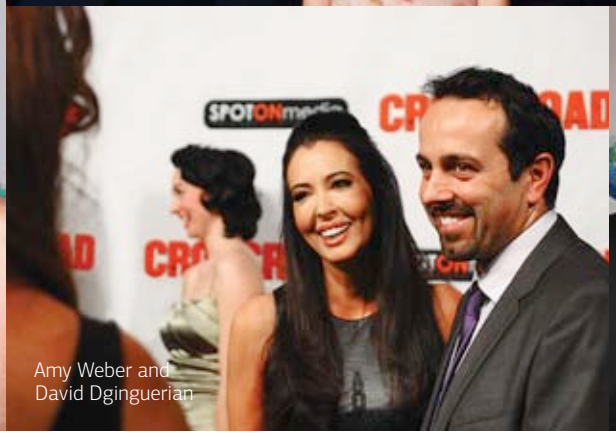




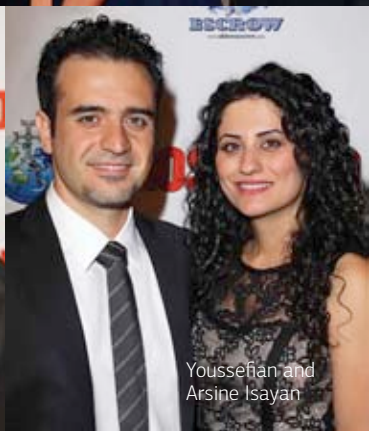
Danny Simonzad, Kim Estes, Brittany Ganiere, Shervin Youssefian, Geoff Reisner, Sarah Gilbert Dale, and Matt Jones



Simonzad and JoAnne McGrath



Amy Weber and David Dginguerian



Youssefian and Arsine Isayan

The red carpet was rolled out for the cast and crew while close to 1,400 guests waited outside the doors to have a first look at Shervin Youssefian's highly anticipated film *Crossroad*.

The evening kicked off with one of the film's stars and producers, Amy Weber, introducing the film and speaking about her experiences on the production. David Dginguerian, one of the film's executive producers was then introduced and talked about the first time he was handed the screenplay for the film. "It's a film that had to be made," he says.

Danny Simonzad, a close friend of director Shervin Youssefian and an executive producer on the film, then came onstage and fired up the crowd about their film. In an emotional speech about his dear friend, he talked about the obstacles that they faced and ultimately overcame during their journey together.

In a sold-out theatre, Youssefian was welcomed onto the stage with roaring applause as he thanked a list of supporters. The director wasn't in an immediate rush to step down from the stage and considering his directorial debut was a dream in the making for 34 years.

Crossroad is a Christian thriller and ensemble piece that weaves together multiple storylines, all of which are set in a small diner. The film touches on themes of family and commitment as characters ultimately realize that God plays a significant role in their individual lives. ■

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Armenian Organizations Honor Dr. Vaughn Gregor

The Armenian Professional Society (APS) and Armenian Engineers and Scientists of America (AESA) united to honor Dr. Vaughn Gregor.









A former president for both organizations, Dr. Vaughn Gregor was honored with the prestigious APS Lifetime Achievement Award and the AESA Victor Hambartsumian Award.

"It's a wonderful feeling to know that there are so many people who consider themselves part of these organizations. Some people have done so for over 50 years," said Dr. Gregor. "It's been very satisfying to see professionals working hard to ensure the continuity. I'm very proud of the fact that both of these organizations exist today, and it's very good to give back to the Armenian society."

Supporters, guests and APS and AESA members gathered at the Armenian Society of Los Angeles in Glendale, California to enjoy a cocktail hour followed by a several course dinner during which there were music performances and speeches given by various members of the organizations.

Honoring Dr. Gregor as the recipient of the organization's highest honor was an obvious decision, Ghailian said. "Dr. Gregor was one of the founding members of the Armenian Professional Society and one of its last surviving members since it was started in 1958. He has been a real strong pillar in the organization itself. Even when we have meetings he has joined us, so I thought it was inspirational to have him as part of this year's honorary."

Dr. Gregor proudly accepted the Lifetime Achievement award and left with a profound final thought. "I did what I enjoyed. Everything I've done, whether it's for community work or for my business, has been something that I love to do, and I take pleasure in it. That's something I tell my children – 'make sure that you love what you're doing, otherwise it becomes a problem or a chore rather than an enjoyable career.'" ■



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Model **Katelyn Pascavis** for lamodels.com
Photography Assistant **Arthur Balyan**

The BEADED SLIPPER

Daniel Swarovski invented a machine in 1892 specially made to cut crystals. Now, Marianna Harutunian of Marianna's Designer Jewelry uses crystals to create avant-garde and edgy pieces. These are not figurines in grandma's house. We are talking jewelry for Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, Nicki Minaj, Pink and legendary divas Diana Ross and Cher. Her work has been highlighted on *True Blood*, *Pretty Little Liars*, *Germany's Next Top Model* and, hold your breath ladies, *Gossip Girl*.

Text **Sauline Kojababian** | Photo **Armen Poghosyan**

Like a moth to a flame, little girls are enticed by objects that twinkle and shine. Pretty things that are pink, crowns with jewels and glass-like Cinderella slippers that click and transform them into princesses. Marianna was your typical little girl; the only difference was she coveted a very different kind of slipper. Her mother's house slippers to be exact. "My parents managed to spoil me with what little they had. Of all the gifts I received, the one I cherished the most ironically, was an old pair of hand me down slippers that belonged to my mother. They were embellished with beads and sparkles that had already lost their luster," she recalls. Marianna recycled the slippers embellishments and brought life to new jewelry pieces for her friends and neighbors. Her ingenuity soared as a young kid as she again and again, envisioned regular house items transforming into lustrous necklaces and bracelets. ▸

Operating one storefront location and expanding, Marianna's crystal clientele is filled with individual patrons and, of course, showbiz clients. She works with stylists, celebrities and designers on a daily basis. Her first breakout gig came with pop singer Pink for her music video U + Ur Hand. "I was given four days to create a body piece. Although it was very challenging, it was nothing but amazing at the same time. I was invited to the filming of her video, and she virtually led me to the success that I have now." Her proudest moment came when she got news that her jewelry was featured on the cover of Vogue magazine. It's not everyday your work makes it to Vogue – twice. She recently finished up her collaboration with kooky pop artist Nicki Minaj for her video Va Va Voom. In the video, Nicki Minaj is seen wearing numerous body pieces designed by Marianna.
"I love making body jewelry. The bigger the piece, the more fun I have



in creating it," she says. The crown used in Lady Gaga's Judas video was so popular among stylists and celebrities that she is now in the middle of establishing her own distinctive crown collection.
American fashion designer Bob Mackie, better known for his costume designs for Liza Minnelli, Tina Turner and Diana Ross, has also turned to Marianna for inspiration. "I was at work one day and a limo pulled up to the front of my store and out came the legendary Bob Mackie. He fell in love with my work, and we recently worked together," she explains. Her pieces alongside his designs were incorporated into a collection that is now at a museum in Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas. Fortunately, she does not let the celebrity hoopla go to her head and the pressure from stylists break her. "Honestly, I just love creating and wowing people. Whether it is a celebrity or not, I love making people happy." ▸

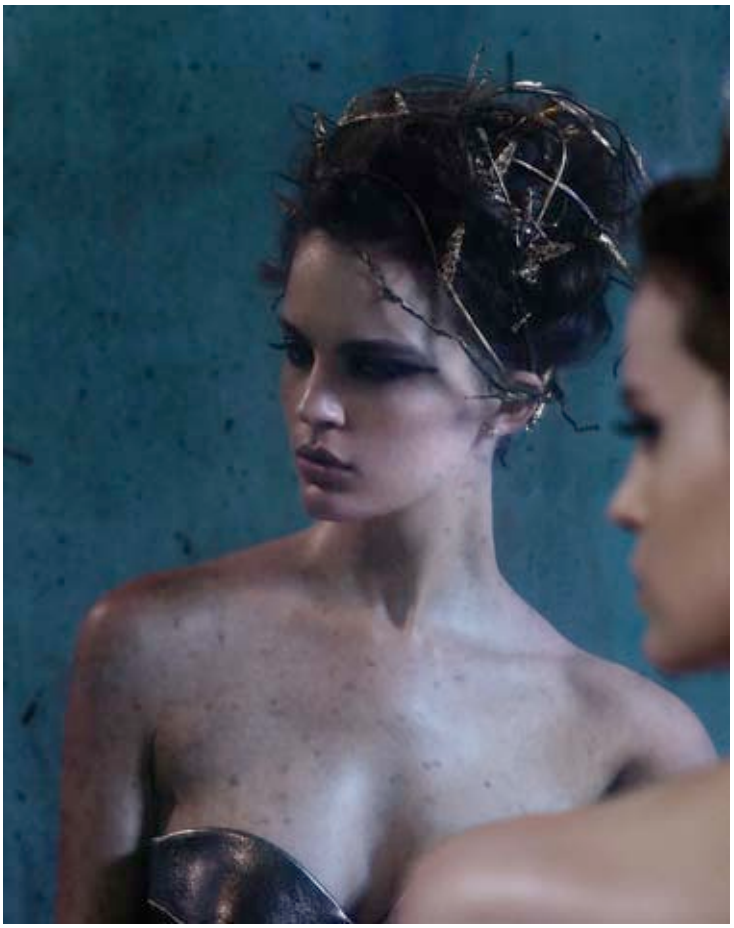


Dress Alexander McQueen www.alexandermcqueen.com



Dress Irfe www.irfe.com

Although her jewelry is loud, Marianna is not. She considers herself to be very shy and introverted. Her fashion style is simple and modest. “I’m not that much into color,” she laughs. Her alter ego unquestionably shines through her work. “With bold accessories, a woman must keep everything else minimal. An outfit is not complete unless you have accessories,” she adds. Her inspirations are drawn from the encouraging and beautiful people that surround her. “Ideas first come to me out of nowhere, and I am filled with a sudden burst of emotion and creativity. There are also times where I envision a piece in my dreams.” Her hands have a mind of their own; they convert her thoughts into life. She also turns to Alexander Mcqueen, Furne Amato, Christian Dior and Marc Jacobs for design stimulation.
Her workforce? Pliers, tweezers, cutters, glue and a lot of Swarovski. Marianna bursts out laughing and recalls an incident when she asked



Dress Johanna Johnson www.johannajohnson.com

her assistant “tweezers, please” like a surgeon with all seriousness while working on a project. “Sometimes I get so engulfed in my work,” she laugh. She works with many different types of metals that include brass, antique gold, silver, copper and 24k gold and silver plate. Marianna’s creations are hypoallergenic and certainly not what you would find in a typical jewelry store. She plans on expanding her brand to the east coast with a store in New York in the near future. Other than jewelry, she creates belt buckles, hair accessories, bridal accessories and special order pieces. “I would rather wear crystals than diamonds. There I said it,” she says.
Marianna manufactures for the happiest place on earth – Disneyland. Looks like even Minnie Mouse enjoys strutting around in Marianna Jewelry. She proves that a little sparkle goes a long way. Not too shabby for a girl who began her journey with a pair of throwaway slippers. ■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Court of Dreams

The cornerstones of John Wooden's "Pyramid of Success" are industriousness and enthusiasm. They are the two traits of the fifteen building block initiative that have allowed Sooren Derboghosian to relentlessly persevere on and off the court. The UCLA basketball player maximized on those characteristics and defied all odds by making the team as a walk-on this season.

Text **Manouk Akopyan**

Sooren Derboghosian had a dream. It was not a dream in the cognitive state, but a childhood one that he hoped would one day become reality.

Sooren dreamed of graduating from UCLA. With dedication, determination and support from his family, he believed it was possible, even if there were limitations.

He would talk to his father Hovakom and his mother Diana about it and the steps he needed to take in order to get there. The formula of maturity, patience, and hard work – as simple as it may sound – was a tall task for the kid who ironically was the tallest ever since the first day he stepped into a classroom.

Sooren was intrigued by UCLA's mystique after he saw the men's basketball team play on television. He was a five-year-old in 1995 and more interested in his duties as the goaltender of his soccer team than the sport he would eventually play. The game he was watching was 20 years removed from an unprecedented stretch of ten national championships – including seven in a row – during a twelve-year period under legendary coach John Wooden.

There was one obstacle the 6-foot-10-inch Armenian-Iranian had to hurdle, however, before even arriving at his destination in Westwood – the cozy campus nestled around the rich-and-famous neighborhoods of Brentwood, Bel-Air and Beverly Hills. Actually getting there.

Sooren lived 7,500 miles away in Tehran. But there were a couple of out cards.

First, he was bright. He speaks five languages – Armenian, Farsi, Arabic, Russian and English – and majored in math and physics at Sahakian High School. Out of the Iranian grade point average scale of 20, he scored 19.

Second, he kicked soccer aside and grew into a standout basketball player for the Iranian under-14 to under-20 age group teams he played on.

And the final kicker – Sooren Derboghosian combined his two talents and obtained a student visa, arriving in sunny Southern California on April 10, 2010, where he enrolled at Glendale Community College (GCC).

It was the first step in making his dream become a reality.

Welcome to Glendale

When Sooren was watching that 1995 national championship team led by the O'Bannon brothers – Ed and Charles, Tyus Edney, George Zidek and Cameron Dollar, he quickly understood that UCLA was a world-class institution that could also provide a future athletically.

But he needed to transform his game as a set-player with international schooling to being athletic and rough and tumble in order to even get a taste of the domination that Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Bill Walton, and most recently Kevin Love, displayed. ▸

"I'll never forget the feeling of Head Coach Ben Howland pulling me aside after a few practices and telling me 'Congratulations, you're on the team!' It was the best feeling in the world. I got teared up. It was a very emotional moment."



Don Liebig/ASUCLA Photography

The first thing in order was a reclamation project at GCC in order to perfect the game's nuances like improving his post game, rebounding, screening defenders and banging guys with his 240 pound frame. Derboghosian grew up watching Tim Duncan and later tried to model his game after Love and Dirk Nowitzki. He says feels just as comfortable in a three-point shooting contest as he does banging it out in the post.

"He had a skill set when he got here, but it wasn't a skill set conducive to playing at a higher level. He worked hard in perfecting them," Brian Beauchemin, the Head Coach at GCC currently in his 34th season, tells *Yerevan*. "He did a great job making adjustments. From a coaching standpoint, his advancement was very encouraging."

Beauchemin attributes Derboghosian's hardwood development to his incessant drive for improvement. As a freshman at GCC (2010-11), Derboghosian averaged 4.5 points and 3.7 rebounds per game. He doubled those numbers in his sophomore season, averaging nine points and leading the team with eight rebounds. He secured first-team All-Western State Conference honors and paired his athletic achievements by being a varsity letter winner with a 3.8 GPA.

"Armenians and Iranians on campus regularly came up to me and showed me their support and encouragement, and I was fortunate enough to be around them. It felt great," says Derboghosian. "I needed to be taught the American game, and I thank Coach Beauchemin for that. I felt like I was at home. I have some family here but that's been the toughest part in the United States. Being away from my family in Iran."

"He is grateful for what has happened to him. The whole time, he has not forgotten his roots and the road that brought him to where he is today. He is very appreciative for everything that has been done for him," continues Beauchemin. "He was a highlight at GCC, and I enjoyed every moment with him. He's a remarkable young man who listened, and it was never a question of whether or not it was going to be done. It was how fast it was going to be done. If I had five players out of 15 like Sooren every year, it would be hard to lose games. He made my year when he came to GCC."

Beauchemin says that by talking to Sooren for five minutes, you quickly realize he's a goal-oriented gentleman whose head's on right. Which makes the initial thought of Derboghosian forgoing Division I college basketball scholarship offers after his breakout sophomore season somewhat of a head-scratcher.

Sooren received offers from the aforementioned Cameron Dollar, who is now head coach at Seattle University, as well as University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA). But he declined them both, all in the name of fulfilling his dream of making it to UCLA. In the summer of 2012, he was admitted into school. And now he is paying for it. Literally.

Inception

I meet with Sooren, a quiet and mild-mannered 22 year-old on a grey November afternoon, one day after he scores his first points as a UCLA Bruin. He greets me after practice with a smile that stretches from one ear to another and complements it with a crushing handshake as firm as a baler. We talk about the road that brought him here.

Derboghosian humbly reflects his time in the United States, thankful for the support he has received from the Armenian and Iranian communities, his six cousins, and the chance to live out his dream by making the team as a walk-on.

Derboghosian was one of four walk-ons this season – a sizable feat for a program basked in basketball royalty. Sooren had sought out the team by sending tapes well

The highlight of Sooren Derboghosian's basketball career came Nov. 9, 2012 in a game he didn't play in. It was his first as a Bruin at Pauley Pavilion, pulling the No. 44 jersey over his head for a season opening victory against Indiana State. It was the day he fulfilled his dream.

before he officially declared his candidacy this summer.

"I'll never forget the feeling of Head Coach Ben Howland pulling me aside after a few practices and telling me, 'Congratulations, you've made the team!' It was the best feeling in the world. I got teared up. It was a very emotional moment."

The emotional whirlwind continued a couple months later. The night he scored his first points, Sooren had a special guest watching him play the final minutes of a 26-point blowout victory. His father. It had been 34 months since the two had last seen each other.

Hovakom came to the United States for the sole purposes of watching his son make his debut, which he briefly did against James Madison. Howland made Hovakom's trip half-way around the world worthwhile on Nov. 29 – the day Sooren scored his first field goal on a baseline jump shot.

"As soon as Sooren made the basket, I looked into the parent's section across from our bench to see (Hovakom) and Sooren's family and friends excited, and so prideful," UCLA Assistant Scott Garson tells *Yerevan*. "It was gratifying for me to see that his father saw him score his first points under the bright lights and a big crowd."

Hovakom also traveled to New York to see Sooren and UCLA play a back-to-back against Georgetown and Georgia. But that was it. There was no time for father and son to get some Big Apple tourism under their belts. During the trip, the business economics major was confined to his books, studying.

"Road games are fun because we get to see new places and bond with our teammates," Sooren says. "I didn't even get to see Times Square. It's fine, I will on my own time. One day."

After attending the team's first eight games and several practices, Hovakom left for home on Dec. 2. He left his son with a message: stay strong.

Hovakom's virtue of sustaining emotional and mental strength has been vital for both Derboghosian and UCLA.

Primed for another run of Final Fours, much like the three consecutive appearances from 2006-08, UCLA opened the season ranked No. 13 in the country. The Bruins had what many believed was the core to a championship winning team. But Derboghosian and the program have been in somewhat of a rollercoaster ever since. Shabazz Muhammad, the nation's top recruit, was declared ineligible for the first three games of the season because of NCAA violations. The Bruins plummeted out of the rankings after a loss to Cal Poly, and shortly after Thanksgiving, Tyler Lamb and Joshua Smith were both granted their immediate releases. By December, old questions about Howland connecting with his players arose.

"The chemistry has been the same among our team," says Derboghosian. "It is better to lose early than to lose in the tournament. That's what coach (Howland) has us playing for. Being a disciplined and championship caliber team. He tells us 'fear none, respect everyone.'"

As for Derboghosian, playing time so far this season has been few and far between. Howland recruited the No. 1-ranked class in the country, and recruited players get the lion's share of the playing time and opportunities because a coach's livelihood manifests on it. They are all the reasons why the forecast on Derboghosian's playing time is gloomy. But it never bothered him.

Garson indicates that Derboghosian's characteristics of industriousness and enthusiasm, cornerstones of Wooden's "Pyramid of Success," never allow for him to be discouraged. With the departure of Smith, once a top recruit in the nation himself, the pecking order quickly changed.

"Basketball, or not, my goal was to come to UCLA. Education was a foremost priority for me and my family," says Derboghosian, who is covering all costs of his tuition, as is the case for any walk-on player. "I'm getting used to the program. It's a transitional period right now. I am practicing very hard, getting better by the day and supporting my teammates. Hopefully, I can earn more playing time in the future."

"He has become a crucial asset to the team during practice and five-on-five drills," says Garson. "He's never had to deal with guys with great size and athleticism in his life. So he's busting his butt and improving on a daily basis. He just has to wait for his opportunity to pop in. He has to be mentally ready, and I know he will. His maturity is going to allow him to do that."

Garson continues, "Who knows how a guy can develop? You can't teach good size. He's really working very hard with our coaching staff. That's the thing we love about him. This kid is absolutely a workaholic and has a great attitude. He is a terrific young man to have in this program and is just going to get better and better."

Howland, Garson and assistant Phil Mathews have told Derboghosian what's expected of him. "My role is very simple: play defense, set screens...and maybe shoot the ball," he laughs.

For now, Derboghosian is on Cloud Nine, living in the moment.

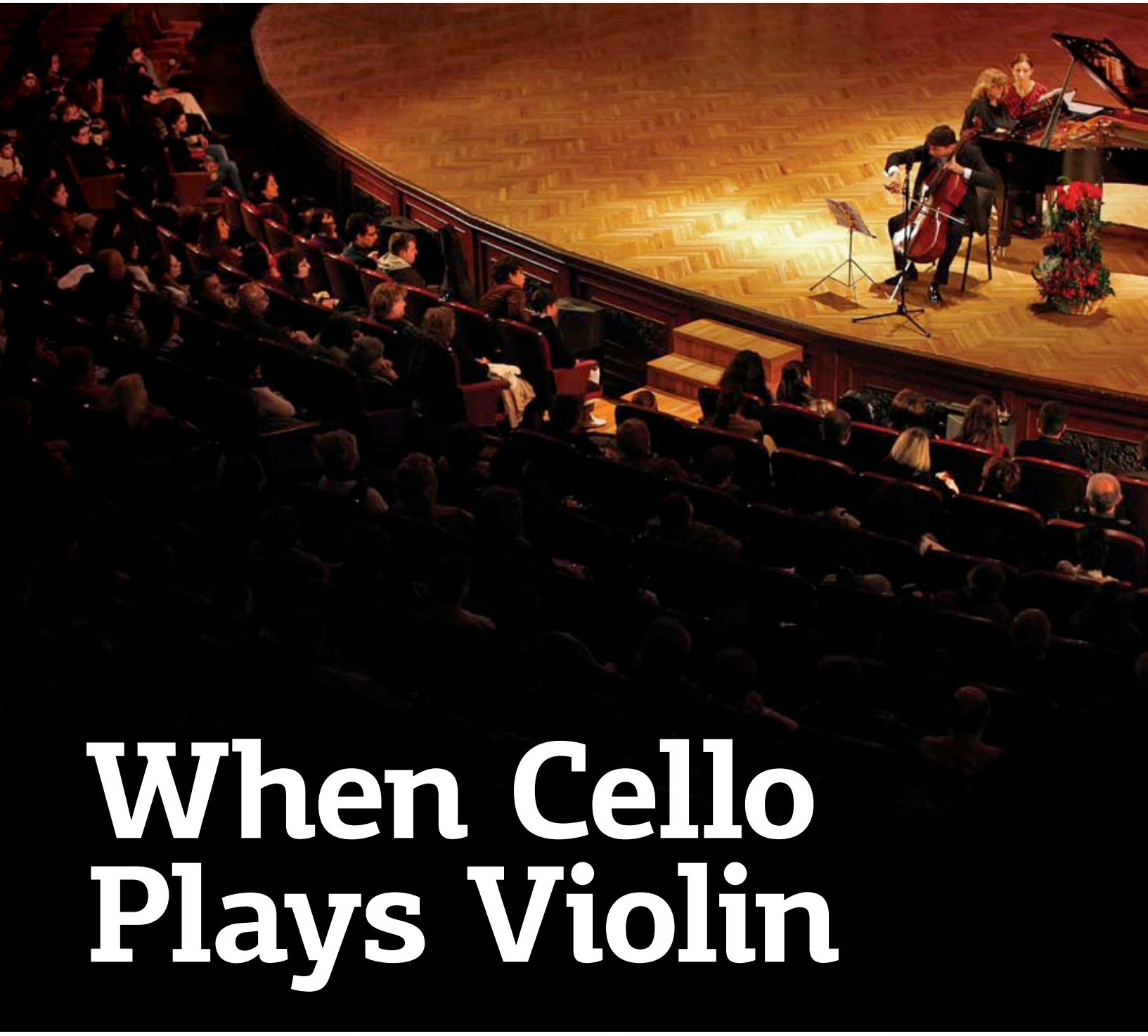
He's fresh off completing his first quarter and already has his goals set on the university's Anderson School of Management after graduation. Although he's been enjoying the college experience with his teammates, he prefers to be on his own during his free time, reading biographies of American success stories instead.

"I came to America at 20 years-old with goals, and I am committed to reaching them," he says. "I know I have the talent and skills to play professional basketball. Education, dedication and maturity are principles that I have been blessed with through my family. It's all about working hard to be an achiever."

The highlight of Sooren Derboghosian's basketball career came Nov. 9, 2012 in a game he didn't play in. It was his first as a UCLA Bruin at Pauley Pavilion, pulling the No. 44 jersey over his head for a season opening victory against Indiana State.

It was the day he fulfilled his dream.

And now, from an MBA to the possibilities of the NBA, the future serves as his motivation. ■



When Cello Plays Violin

Acclaimed by three of America's most reputable newspapers, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Los Angeles Times*, 24-year old cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan who, since winning the first prize at the prestigious 2008 Young Concert Artists International Auditions and the coveted gold medal at the 2011 XIV International Tchaikovsky Competition – the most esteemed award given to a cellist, has literally brought concert-goers from across the globe to their feet in lengthy standing ovations.

Text **Florence Avakian** | Photo **Arnos Martirosyan**



It was in New York, at a black-tie concerto debut at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall in 2011 with the Orchestra of St. Luke's where Hakhnazaryan not only performed with his usual dazzling virtuosity and mastery, but after another lengthy rapturous ovation by the sold-out crowd, introduced his encore by announcing, "I would now like to play a piece by a noted composer from my country, Armenia." For those of us in the audience who were of Armenian heritage, it was a moment of great pride which brought tears to the eyes.

Narek's 2011-12 season included debuts with symphony orchestras throughout the United States and Europe and in particular with the famed Mariinsky Orchestra conducted by the eminent conductor Valery Gergiev, who has championed him. In 2011, he played with the Mariinsky Orchestra under the baton of Gergiev for the celebration of Armenia's 20th anniversary of independence. Mentored by the world-acclaimed cellist Mstislav Rostropovich in many master classes, Narek was the only cellist invited to travel on behalf of the Mstislav Rostropovich Foundation.

Narek Hakhnazaryan was born in 1988 in Yerevan, Armenia, into a family of musicians – his father, a violinist for 24 years with the Komitas Quartet, and his mother a pianist. Following early studies from age six to eleven at the Sayat Nova School of Music in Yerevan with Zareh Sarkisyan, he began studying intensively at age 12 at the Moscow Conservatory with Alexey Seleznyov. Coming to America, he continued his studies at the New England Conservatory of Music, graduating with an Artist Diploma. Then came the singular honors of winning both the Young Concert Artist International Auditions in 2008 and the International Tchaikovsky Competition in 2011. Besides concertizing throughout the world on a heavy schedule, he is currently based at the Moscow Conservatory, completing his studies for a doctorate.

Uncanny, Wise, Charming

During the one and a half-hour exclusive interview with this writer, Narek, a tall, lean young man with sparkling dark Armenian eyes, a charming smile and wisdom beyond his years, laughed easily and sometimes gesticulated when he wanted to make a special point, never avoiding a question, sometimes becoming thoughtful before answering.

His early start in music was due to his parents, both of whom are professors at the Yerevan and Moscow Conservatories, but now are mostly based in Moscow. "My father, Suren, wanted me to be a musician – a violinist. But my mother, Gayane, really loved the cello, and one day she secretly took me at age six to the cello class at the Sayat Nova School. When she told my father, he was very angry and disappointed," Narek recalls. But at age six, Narek was much more interested in soccer, sports and "being a very bad boy, never listening to people, and doing what I wanted." He still does what he thinks is "right in a smart way. I'm still a bad boy. Maybe I'll change when I'm 25," he says with a chuckle.

Touches Every Part of Your Soul

Cello is his favorite instrument because "compared to other string instruments it is limitless. I actually can play a violin repertoire on the cello. If you speak about music that doesn't have a very fast technique, the cello can play everything a violin can. It is much more expansive, with many more characters. And the cello has the most human sounding tone. It reminds me a lot of the duduk, which is my favorite instrument," he relates. "The duduk touches every part of your soul, your emotions, your heart. There is nothing like it. And the cello tone is closest to the duduk."

In playing the cello, Narek never tries to express his own feelings. "I always try to transfer to the audience the message that the composer wrote, whether it's sadness, happiness, joy, etc. That's the best way to make music and be an honest musician. Stanislavsky has said the artist must love the art in himself, not himself inside the art. That's what I try to do and show it to others." Though Narek has made performing on the cello his destiny, in the future he would also like to become a conductor. "It's not so rare now. Many musicians become conductors."

> "He projected intensity from the moment he took the stage. To the very end, his intense focus and expressive artistry never flagged."
> — *The New York Times*

Narek decided to make music his lifetime career "when I saw that I didn't have any other choice. My parents sacrificed everything for me to study cello at an advanced level in Moscow." His mother accompanied him, which divided the family for seven years. His father and his two older brothers, who also are musicians, stayed in Yerevan. His 33-year-old conductor brother is in Russia, and his

38-year-old pianist brother is in Berlin.
Narek has so many feelings from his childhood, especially for his first music teacher Zareh Sarkisyan, "who gave me everything, and loved music so much." He relates how after a performing tour to Germany at age 14, he postponed seeing Sarkisyan after returning and discovered that his teacher had passed away. He has never forgotten his powerful feelings of regret. Since then, "I try to do things on time and not postpone things."

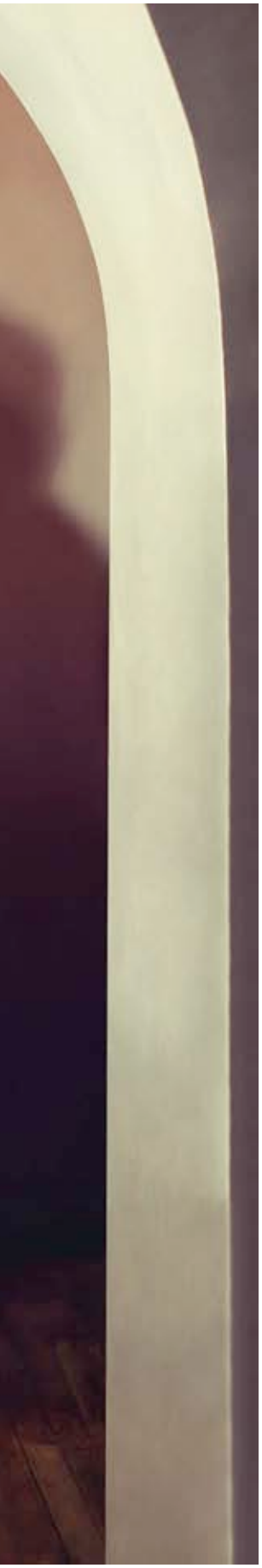
Vast Difference in Training

There is a "vast difference" between musical training in Moscow and the U.S., according to Narek. "It's two opposites of the spectrum. Russian training is more strict and based mostly on traditions. The Russian music schools are not readily open to new styles or evolution. The American system is based mostly on freedom and the rights of musicians to express themselves as they wish. But sometimes, we need to keep some traditions. Perfect for me is a mixture between the Russian traditions and the freedom in America," he explains.
What individuals have been the greatest influences in his life? Besides his parents, he lists Rachmaninoff through his works and recordings and the violinist Fritz Kreisler, both because of their sincerity and also because they were so much ahead of their times, especially Rachmaninoff," he says. "You listen to his recordings and you think some contemporary genius is playing." Another of the greatest influences for him "concerning the colors and the feelings of the music is Van Gogh. I was blown away when I first saw his paintings. I actually felt I could go inside his art and walk in those fields – the air, the oxygen, the colors." And another great influence has been the 20th century Russian poet Alexander Blok.
For him, playing during a practice session and performing in a concert are basically the same. "It may sound surprising but there is not much difference. I'm not that kind of musician who practices six hours of scales. It's completely useless for me. Every time I play, I imagine that I'm on stage. Rostropovich once told me a very valuable idea. He said 'when you practice, imagine that the very best jury of musicians is listening to you.' I can practice fast or slow, but the feeling of the concert must always be there." Because of his "crazy" travel schedule, he tries to practice one or two hours daily "to keep myself in good shape." He's been traveling alone since he was 16 or 17 years old.

Before And After A Performance

Just before going on stage for a performance, the primary emotion that runs through him is "adrenaline." But it depends on the type of performance and what the





"He impresses you with a degree of freedom that comes hard won from discipline of the highest order. He is a seasoned phenom." — *The Washington Post*

composition is. "If it's a piece I know very well, I just enjoy myself and hope the audience finds it interesting. I always make dialogues with the orchestra members, even visual dialogues which make the performance much more fun. At the end of the performance, I'm usually sorry that it is finished."

The most useful advice he has ever received about his work came from a fellow musician, noted violist Kim Kashkashian who told him, "The performance is only finally finished when you close the door of your hotel room." In the 21st century, "it's not just about playing, you need to be social. People must feel close to you. People want to know me as a person also. That's why there are so many receptions after a concert, and some with very well-to-do concert-goers. But none of them has bought me a cello," he comments, laughing.

Sponsors Needed

The cello he plays is "a very nice, cute" 1698 David Tecchler cello on loan from Valentine Saarmaa, granddaughter of one of the most renowned violin dealers in 20th century New York, Jacques Francais. "This instrument is wonderful for chamber music. It has very small tones. So with orchestras, it gives me a lot of problems. I really need something like a Stradivarius, or a Guarneri, which is powerful and beautiful," he notes, hoping there will be a "kind, rich Armenian sponsor." Narek definitely deserves what he hopes for. After all, he is the first Armenian musician to win the coveted Tchaikovsky competition. It would be a noble cause to help him perform on an instrument which would allow him to demonstrate the full spectrum of his extraordinary talent. Particularly, considering that he popularizes Armenian classical music on the stages of the most prestigious concert halls of the world.

The influence of his Armenian heritage has had a passionate effect on his work. He has often played Khudoyan's genius composition Sonata for Cello Solo, and Haroutunian's brilliant Impromptu in his performances, garnering standing ovations. Laughing heartily, he relates that when he played the Khudoyan piece in Russia, he used to wear a black shirt and a red bow tie, so he was nicknamed the 'Red Devil.' "It's correct because I have something like a devilish Armenian hot blood," he says.

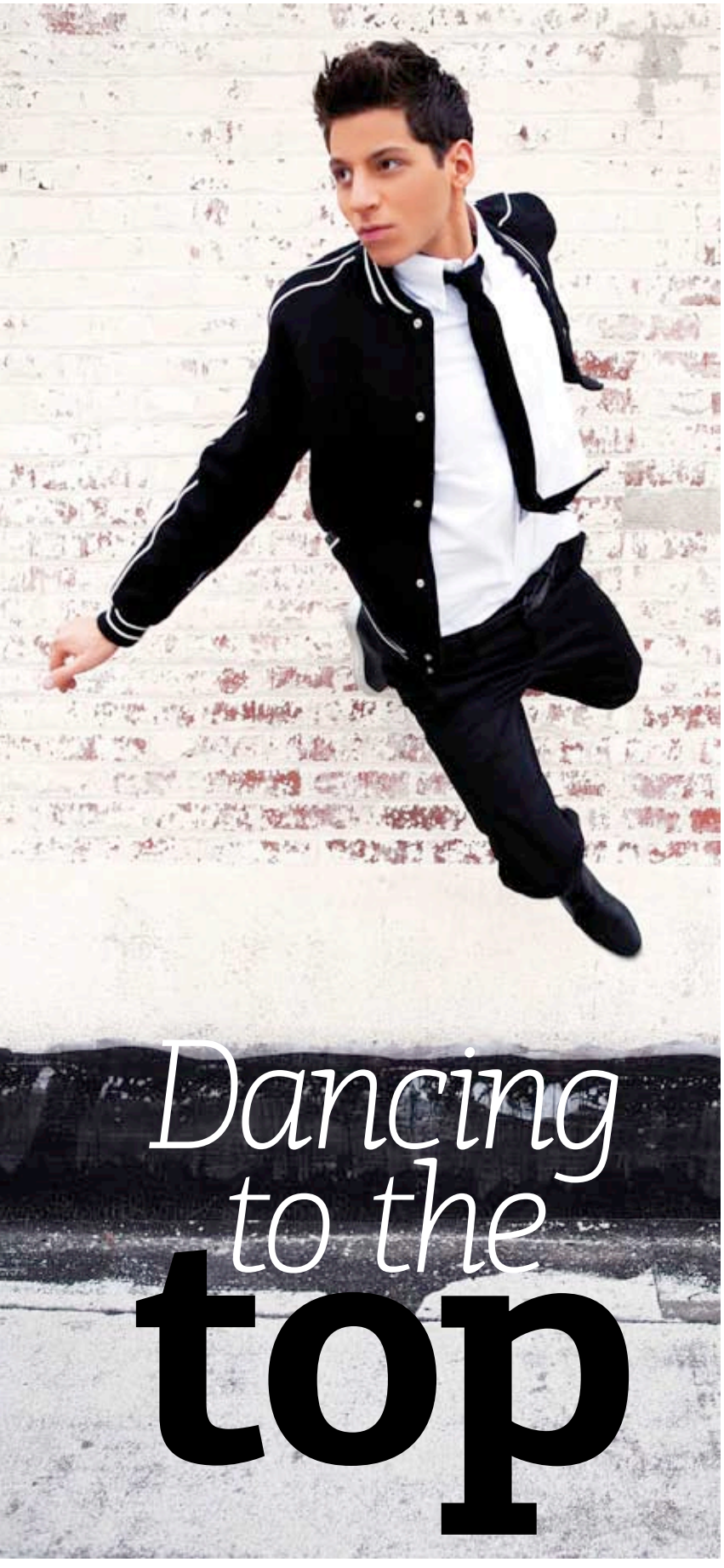
Wherever I Live, I Will Always Be Armenian

No matter where he lives, "I will always consider myself to be Armenian," he states proudly. It signifies for him a heritage with "an amazing history, amazing talent, and amazing tragedy – a very unfortunate destiny which includes wars and Genocide," he says. "Armenia now is in a tough situation, especially culturally. Last year there was only one cellist who applied to the Conservatory," he reveals. "In the early 1990s there were many good professors, but they have all left the country. This is the tragedy of Armenia – a 'brain drain.' However, as depressing as the situation is, Narek doesn't think it's hopeless. He himself is doing his share in popularizing classical music in Armenia. In the future, he hopes to travel to areas of Armenia, play and inspire young people. He cites the example of the dynamic and electrifying conductor from Venezuela, Gustavo Dudamel, who "took the orphans of the country and taught them classical music, and now there is a wonderful orchestra made up of these young people."

Who is Narek Hakhnazaryan? "A person trying to find his own path in this pretty complicated and exciting life. A person who doesn't know what tomorrow brings which is equally exciting." For relaxation, he watches movies, reads books, and plays games. Last August, he vacationed with his family in Yerevan. "I enjoy the loudness, the heat, the dirt. It reminds me of the many good times of my childhood, when I was a naughty child. I also love to go to ancient Armenian churches, especially Noravank, and Tatev. My interest is strictly historical. I am not a religious person in terms of formal religion, but going to these ancient Armenian churches makes me feel close to God. I also love the beauty of Armenia's landscape."

Still on his to-do list is going to Artsakh, playing in schools there, encouraging the students, and raising money for them. In the next five years, he also hopes to travel throughout Armenia, playing for and inspiring young people, as well as sending a strong message to the powerful people in the Armenian government to support the culture. "Young people don't want to learn the cello because they know it will not earn them money which, on the other hand, playing the duduk or the dhol will. Folk instrument playing is a money earner," he notes.

Through his agents, Opus Three Artists Management in New York and Intermusic in London, his calendar is already heavily booked all the way to 2014 for professional engagements. They include performances in Russia, Europe, Brazil, the United States, Canada, China and Japan. A successful future for this extraordinarily gifted young musician is already guaranteed. ■



Dancing to the top

As the California sun glistens through the curtains and shines on his face every morning, Skye Stevens wakes up determined and one step closer to living out his dream. His dream is becoming the first and youngest mainstream Armenian pop entertainer of our generation. His days are filled with voice lessons, singing rehearsals, dance routines, and quality time in the studio practicing his sets. The music industry isn't cut out for every aspiring little boy or girl to become a successful recording artist one day. In Skye's case, however, all it takes is one listen to see that he stands alone from his pop-music peers. Watch out Justin Bieber, Skye Stevens might just steal your thunder.

Text **Sauline Kojababian**

The industry of big dreams. As many have been swallowed whole and spat back out, Skye Stevens knew the business wouldn't always be kind. The 19 year-old isn't too concerned about a backup plan. Within less than a year of breaking onto the scene, Skye has scored over one million YouTube video views, a record deal with Rock Society Records and a Top 20 hit on the Billboard Dance Charts. His first single "Takes All Night" has been circulating throughout the international dance music scene, placing him on the musical map. He is not even old enough to drink, yet clubs and DJs all over the world have been blasting his music, including Grammy-nominated producer and re-mixer Dave Audé who has worked with U2, Jennifer Lopez, Selena Gomez and Coldplay. New to the game, Skye is already setting himself up to be more than just a trendy one-hit wonder. Although it is spot on that music has changed a lot over the years, and upcoming artists are put under so much scrutiny for integrating auto-tune and disguising their actual vocals with club beats. "Using auto-tune doesn't mean I am working any less. It can't miraculously make you sound good. It can create a note, but not a singer," laughs Skye.

As a kid, Skye owned a toy cash register. He soon transformed that cash register into a bank for his future album release party. "For album, saving money for the future," it read in kindergarten scribbles. From the age of five, and before he knew how to tie his own shoe laces, Skye knew he wanted to be a star. While all the other kids wanted to become astronauts and superheroes, he wanted to be just like his icon Michael Jackson. "I would sit in front of the television and watch Michael Jackson music videos over and over again. When I watch him dance, I feel a magical energy transcend from his body into mine," he says and pops his chest with a suave dance move. Like many other kids, he participated, not always successfully, in numerous baseball and soccer teams, but his ever-present love for music led him to a dance class that completely changed his life. Teachers recognized that Skye, aside from all the other kids, was blessed not only with talent, but with an artistic vision. As the stage became his playground, voice lessons soon followed. From one rehearsal to the next, city to city, Skye lived a very different life from other kids his age. "I definitely had to give up a lot. I missed a lot of sleepovers because I had performances. I did have to give up normal kid things but I didn't feel sad about it. I wanted to be on TV, radio and in movies. I remember I was out of school for three weeks in the fifth grade; I would fax my math homework at eight in the morning and then attend an audition for ten hours. I loved it; I loved every minute of it," he says. At age ten, Skye performed at the 76th Annual Macy's Day Parade on the official Macy's float. On weekends, he would road trip with his family to New York and perform in theatres. "Summer after high school, I went on a cross-country Broadway tour. I sang in clubs that I wasn't even old enough to be in. Theatre was fun but it was almost more of a gateway to performing music. Each city that we would visit I would find a recording studio and record music that I created on my laptop five hours earlier. I would take my paychecks and pay for studio time instead of spending it on games or going to the movies," he explains.

Trying to break into an industry that is impossible to break, Skye's music somehow landed in the hands of music managers Jules Dougall and Dawna Zeeman who have worked with musicians like Rihanna. Plain and simple, they saw a spark in Skye and quickly flew him out to Los Angeles to create a star. Moving to the City of Angels has been an adjustment for Skye, but he thanks God every day for the opportunity. "Los Angeles is different. It's hard to find real connections with people, but my music family has made the city feel like home," he says.

Stevens has scored a record deal with Rock Society Records and a Top 20 hit on the Billboard Dance Charts with his first single "Takes All Night"

"Skye is one of the most driven artists we've had the opportunity to work with. He is very artistic and always has great creative ideas. He wanted to perform more than most artists, and as managers we know the power of that. We've seen a lot of talented artists come and go because they lack that dedication," says his manager Jules Dougall. Through his management team, Skye got in touch with the famous artistic director/choreographer Jamaica Craft, who has been involved with successful artists like TLC, Usher and Ciara. Many sleepless nights were spent in a dance studio in order to perfect his talent. "She was really captivated by my drive and my desire. We spent hours in a local studio not always dancing but talking about culture and the world. When it came down to my dance style, we drew inspiration from Usher and Ne-Yo who move so effortlessly. We even flew to Atlanta for a few weeks and participated in underground dance battles. I experienced the art of dance in its rawest form," he says.

His mother, a former performer herself, gave up her passion for the arts at a young age under unfortunate circumstances. "My mother and I have a really strong connection. She was a dancer and singer until the age of 18. As her father was dying, he asked her to stop performing. He was worried about her being in the industry as a young girl. It was tough for her to quit, but she did it to fulfill his last dying wish. I think when she saw me falling in love with music; she began living her dream through me. She knew it wasn't a hobby from day one." Growing up in a household very encouraging of the arts, Skye's journey has had its struggles, but unlike most true Hollywood stories, his experience has been nothing less than thrilling. "I feel so blessed and privileged. I thank God every day for my fans. ▸



Skye Stevens
Although it sounds like a stage name, Skye Stevens is his real name. His grandfather, the pioneering disc-jockey Chuck Stevens, worked as a radio personality in Rhode Island and legally changed his last name from Abejian to Stevens for commercial reasons. During the "rock 'n roll" era of the 50' and 60's, Chuck Stevens was known for his famous "Hello, you" at the beginning of every show.

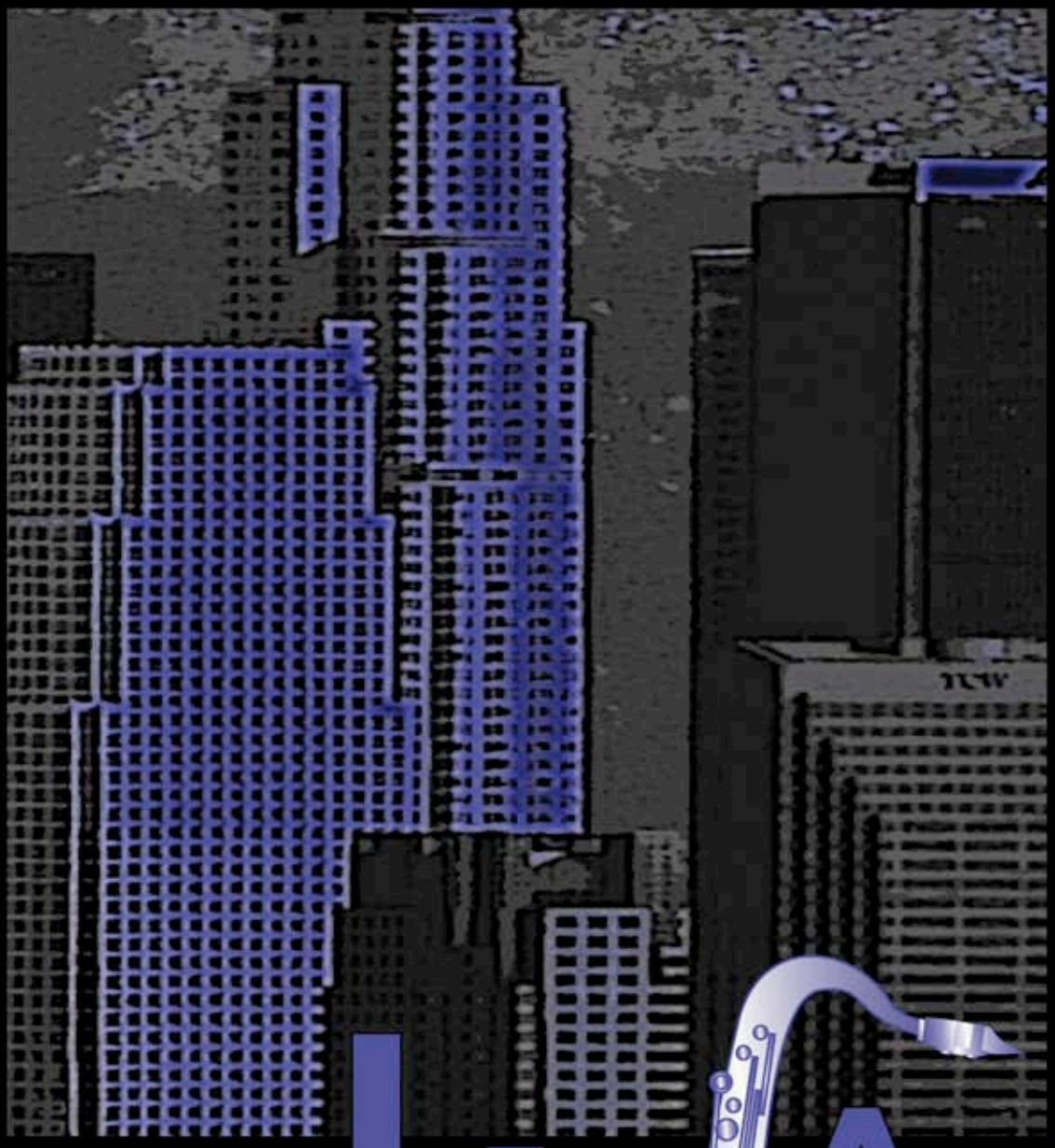
I call my parents every morning and say thank you. I have had my struggles, but my experience has been so positive," he says with a sincere smile. Being so young, Skye has a large number of fans who look up to him as a role model. The one thing that he tells other aspiring artists is to really dig deep and make sure they are going to keep fighting even when the fighting gets tough. "You have to ask yourself is this really what I want to do? Not every day is going to be interviews and photo shoots; most of the time it's you by yourself. It's you figuring out how to enhance your voice and improve your dancing. No one else is going to do it for you," he says. If you ask him, drive and the perseverance to be taken seriously in the music industry is something that you are born with, almost like an addiction or something as natural as brown hair or blue eyes. There are soaring highs but also very low lows. "One day you feel like a champion and the next you ask yourself where your life is right now." Skye sees making music as a form of responsibility to his fans. He wants to stand for more than just singing songs and performing on a stage. "I want to make people truly happy. Music has always been my outlet and my connection has been so personal. I know others turn to music too when they are going through emotional times in their life. It's not always about you. I think that is what separates you as a serious artist from the dreamers" he says.

The dance style of Skye Stevens is a cross between Usher and Chris Brown with a sharp edge that hits hard.

Coming up in the era of social media, Skye sees the new Internet future as a plus for emerging musicians like himself. Witness the fact that one in five divorces are now blamed on Facebook, and that Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber and Britney Spears have more Twitter followers than the population of Sweden, Israel, Greece and Chile combined. Musical figures who once were so unattainable are now your friends. As out of control as social networking can get sometimes, Skye wouldn't be where he is today without it. It helps him connect with his fans on an individual level. "Artists can be links and mentors to their fans, and you are constantly able to share with the world. I read every tweet, every e-mail, and every shout out. I recently received an e-mail from a girl who told me her parents were going through a divorce and every morning she would put on my song to make her feel better and help her get through the day. I love to lift spirits; it is the greatest feeling in the world." Skye's favorite part about being an artist is creating music videos. Within the last decade, music videos have become less important when it comes to creativity and importance for an artist's success. Not until recently have videos made a come back. "They aren't as powerful as they once were, but at the same time I disagree with myself on that. I feel now we are in a place where people are online and instead of television we have YouTube, Vevo, Twitter etc. If you look at the views on some videos online, they have 500 million views. The Internet almost recreated the music video. I am noticing that artists are putting more money into that business. It's not a dying art, now it's just in the artists hands," he explains.

Just wrapping up his tour, this year has been an unforgettable year for Skye, filled with growing pains and life-changing experiences. Being on tour has taught him everything a closed studio rehearsal space can't. It's real life without the breaks; it's a real crowd with real reactions. A good show in Boston does not guarantee a good show in New York. As an emerging artist, as soon as he hits the stage, it is his job to win the crowd over. "I remember after the introduction to one of my shows was done, and the first verse of the opening song started, my eyes filled up. At that moment, a part of me said to myself – man, after all the blood, sweat and tears, I am on my way. Girls were holding signs with my name on them and singing along to all my songs. I even had girls chasing me through the stadium for an autograph. It was a day I will never forget." As the doors are opening up for Skye, he is fully engaged in working on his album and celebrating the positive feedback from his newly released second single "Rewind."

Skye Stevens works hard. He creates music within a new genre called Urban-Pop. His dance style is a cross between Usher and Chris Brown with a sharp edge that hits hard. He is a loving guy who enjoys going to the movies by himself. He also finds the Justin Bieber comparisons quite flattering. Above all, he is an American-Armenian crossing the boundaries of music as a mainstream teen pop star and melting young hearts along the way. ■



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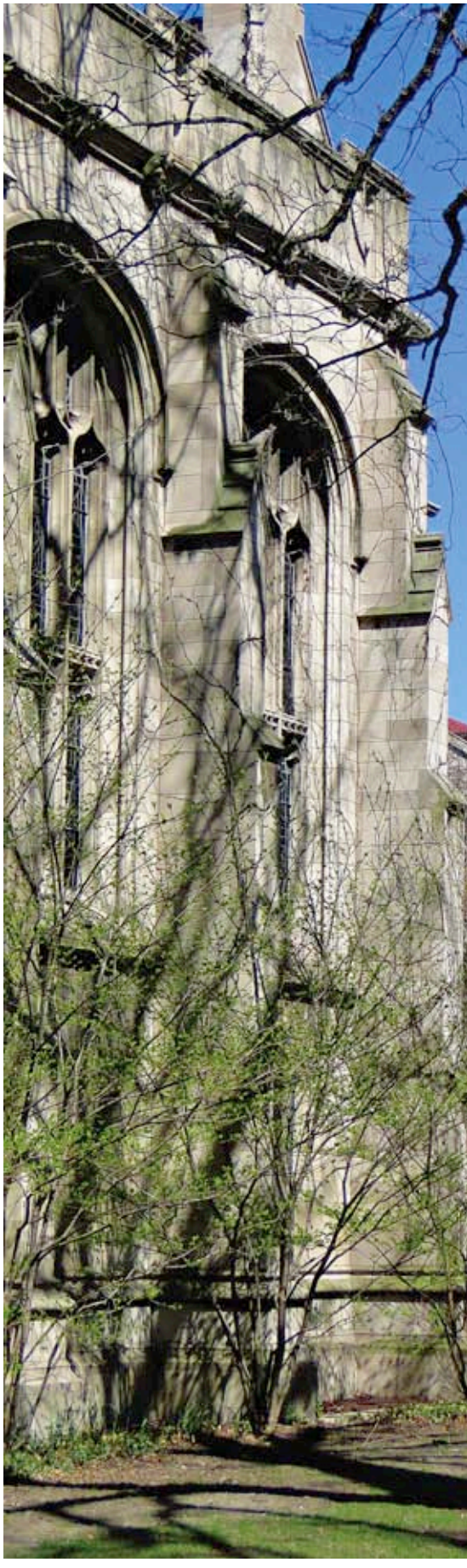

Framed replicas of ancient scriptures, meticulously crafted mosaic ornaments and passages of ancient poetry capture my eye as I enter the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago located in the Hyde Park district. Founded in 1892, the University of Chicago, like many other higher education institutions, made the best of the post-Cold War era and launched its Center for Middle Eastern Studies. Part of it was the Armenian language program.

Text and photo **Ruzanna Tantushyan**

Professor John E. Woods of Iranian and Central Asian History at the University of Chicago met with *Yerevan Magazine* to explain the history of the program. "Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a strong desire to redefine in some ways the boundaries of what constituted the Middle East." Dr. Woods has served as the head of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies for four terms since 1980.

"A lot of the American universities defined the Middle East as an artifact of the Cold War, "explains Dr. Woods. There is a consensus among the pioneers of Middle Eastern Studies programs that the success of the Soviet Union in the space race prompted the U.S. to rethink its educational program and adopted the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) into law in 1958. The act provided funding to United States education institutions at all levels. It was meant to increase the number of students attending colleges and elevate the performance of students, particularly in the scientific sphere.



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University of Chicago, Hyde Park Campus.



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Founder of the Armenian Program, Dr. John E. Woods and Dr. Hripsime Haroutunian.

Dr. John E. Woods ensured federal funding and individual contributions were in place to finance the Armenian language program, which officially kicked off in 2001.

We sit in Dr. Woods' office, a space surrounded by shelves of books in Arabic, Turkish and Persian. The professor begins his story in 1977, the year that marked the inception of the relationship between the Armenian community and the University. Then, Ara and Edma Dumanians teamed up with the United Armenian Cultural Association to provide the initial seed money for the annual Armenian visiting professorship program at the University of Chicago.
"Usually it was quite an event. They used to hold these lectures in one of the nice rooms at the Regenstein Library," recalls Dr. Woods.
The visiting professors included Dr. Seta Dadoyan of St. Nerses Armenian Seminary, who held lectures on The Armenians and Islam: Paradigms of Interactions, Dr. Sebouh Aslanian of the University of California in Los Angeles lectured on the explorations of early modern history of Armenia titled "From Venice and Istanbul to Isfahan and Madras."
"It was great to have very high profile lecturers in Armenian, but in general, it was like a 'kiss-and-run,'" says Dr. Woods. "They would come, teach and go away."
Dr. Woods wanted to lay a solid foundation for the Armenian program. "If we really wanted to have an Armenian Studies program, which we did, the way to do that was to start with the teaching of the language."
Over the next three decades, the Dumanians continued to fund the professorship program, ensuring that Armenian studies courses would be offered at the University of Chicago. Their dedication perseveres today; owing to their generosity, Professor Elyse Semerdjian of Whitman College in the spring of 2013 will lecture on Armenian Communities under Muslim Rule from 1500 to 1920.
While the professorship program emerged thanks to the Dumanians, Dr. Woods ensured federal funding and individual contributions were in place to finance the Armenian language program, which officially kicked off in 2001.
The language program class is usually small, ranging from three to six students at a time. "Even if I have just one student I always give one hundred percent," says Dr. Hripsime Haroutunian, who joined the program as an instructor of Armenian language from its inception.
The majority of students are what the department refers to as "heritage" students: those who have Armenian roots. Among them is 21-year old Michael Tartell, a fourth

↓ Armenian program graduate student Gizem Pilavci



→ Center for the Study of Languages hosts a variety of courses.



year student of biology, who was born to an Armenian mother and Jewish father. He took Armenian in his second and third years as an elective to learn the language of his ancestors and connect to his heritage.

"Armenian was certainly not an easy language to learn," confesses Tartell. "The most difficult for me were the sounds of the letters, which often had no direct correspondence to any letter or combination of letters in English." Think of the aspirated and unaspirated "k" sounds (կ and ք) and "t" sounds (թ and տ). Those are completely different letters in Armenian. "It took a while, and is still a little difficult for me to learn to listen for those differences in sound and use them in speech."

The program addresses a wide spectrum of topics from the modern Armenian alphabet to the study of old Armenian, *Grabar*. The Modern Armenian language program consists of three-levels of instruction: Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced. In addition to the language classes, Dr. Haroutunian, who holds a Ph.D. in Ancient Near Eastern Languages, History and Civilizations, teaches Armenian literature, culture and history.

Small and cozy classrooms equipped with the most advanced computer technology and audio-visual aids enable graduate and undergraduate students to master the nuances of phonetics, the rich vocabulary and basic grammatical structures. Additionally, the program prepares students for research in Armenian and related study areas. "Usually the undergraduates take Armenian to be better exposed to Armenian culture or take a trip to Armenia," says Dr. Haroutunian as we walk through the beautiful park to the Center for the Study of Languages, where she is due to meet her students. "Others take Armenian as their second or third language and focus on translations for their research that can be in Armenian, Byzantine, or Islamic Studies, Indo-European or General Linguistics, Post-Soviet Studies, Human Rights Studies."

In addition, the students are exposed to considerable historical, political, social and cultural issues. That is especially handy for those students who intend to visit or pursue career opportunities in Armenia. That was certainly the case for Katherine Casey, a 30-year-old graduate of Middle Eastern Studies. Casey landed a number of exciting job opportunities thanks to her knowledge of Armenian among other skills. "Prior to studying Armenian formally, my only knowledge of the language was through my grandmother, who would pay me a nickel if I used այո (*ayo*) and ոչ (*voch*) instead of yes and no," writes Casey in her e-mail from Central Asia where she currently works on a research project (non-related to Armenian studies).

After receiving her B.A. in English Literature in 2004, Casey pursued her M.A. degree in Middle Eastern Studies in 2009 – both at the University of Chicago. Her thesis title was Agree to Disagree: the Incompatible Nationalisms of Armenia and its Diaspora.

Armed with the knowledge of Modern and Grabar Armenian, she worked on a USAID anti-corruption project from 2008-2009. A year later she returned to Armenia to conduct research for a USAID economic growth proposal. Casey currently works on strategic communications for the Armenia Virtual Science Library, a resource for Armenian universities and research institutions. The AVSL is the result of a U.S.-Armenian partnership involving the U.S. Department of State, CRDF Global, Armenia's Ministry of Education and Science, the State Science Committee and the National Academy of Sciences Fundamental Scientific Library.

"I have no doubt that I will continue to work in Armenia in the years ahead," Casey concluded.

For those who intend to learn Armenian for research purposes, the program offers Intermediate Modern Armenian I, II, III. This covers a rich vocabulary and complex grammatical structures in modern formal and colloquial Armenian. Reading assignments include a selection of original Armenian literature and excerpts from the mass media. "Students can communicate well beyond their basic needs about daily life and achieve a level of fluency in their professional interests," said Dr. Haroutunian.

This course has helped Gizem Pilavci, 23, a graduate student in Middle Eastern Studies connect her interest in calligraphy with the history of the Ottoman Empire. Pilavci's thesis is exploring the intellectual contribution of the Armenian community to the Ottoman milieu.

"Armenian is indispensable to my thesis focus which is on the Manas family, an Armenian family of court artists who at the same time functioned as diplomats for the Ottoman Empire from the 18th century onwards," shares Pilavci who is graduating in 2013.

The next and final level of the program is the Advanced Modern Armenian I, II, III. This three-quarter sequence is offered to students who have completed the grammatical and lexical content of the intermediate level. At this level students have a lot of reading to do including original Armenian literature as well as excerpts from mass media and scholarly literature.

"At this level my students have enhanced writing assignments: weekly essays on given topics or scholarly research," describes Dr. Haroutunian, who teaches





←
Dr. Haroutunian with her students

both Grabar and Modern Armenian. Dr. Haroutunian remembers one of her brightest students of the advanced course, Kate Franklin. When Franklin, a Ph.D. student of anthropology, decided to study medieval politics and trade relationships, it quickly became clear to her that Armenia is the place.

"Learning Armenian has opened up an entire world for me," shares Franklin, who studies both Modern Armenian and Grabar. "Learning the language has enabled me to get to know Armenians in all of their humor, their idiosyncrasies, and their incredible generosity." Franklin has been involved in the Aragats project since 2008. The ability to read original accounts of archaeological discoveries from 100 years ago and inscriptions from the walls of churches carved 1000 years ago has been invaluable for her research. "My research is still in process, but specifically I discovered a caravanserai (caravanatun) on the slope of Mount Aragats that is similar to other buildings in Armenia, such as the Selim caravanatun." Franklin's research shows that these buildings were constructed by local wealthy merchants who wanted to donate some of their trade wealth for philanthropic purposes.

Aside from the formal curriculum, there is also the Armenian Circle, which meets every other week to watch Armenian or Armenia-related films, listen to lectures on Armenia's culture and history, and practice speaking Armenian while indulging in Armenian cuisine. Among the visiting lecturers were Turkish author and publisher Osman Koker,

The Armenian studies program addresses a wide spectrum of topics from the modern Armenian alphabet to the study of old Armenian, *Grabar*.

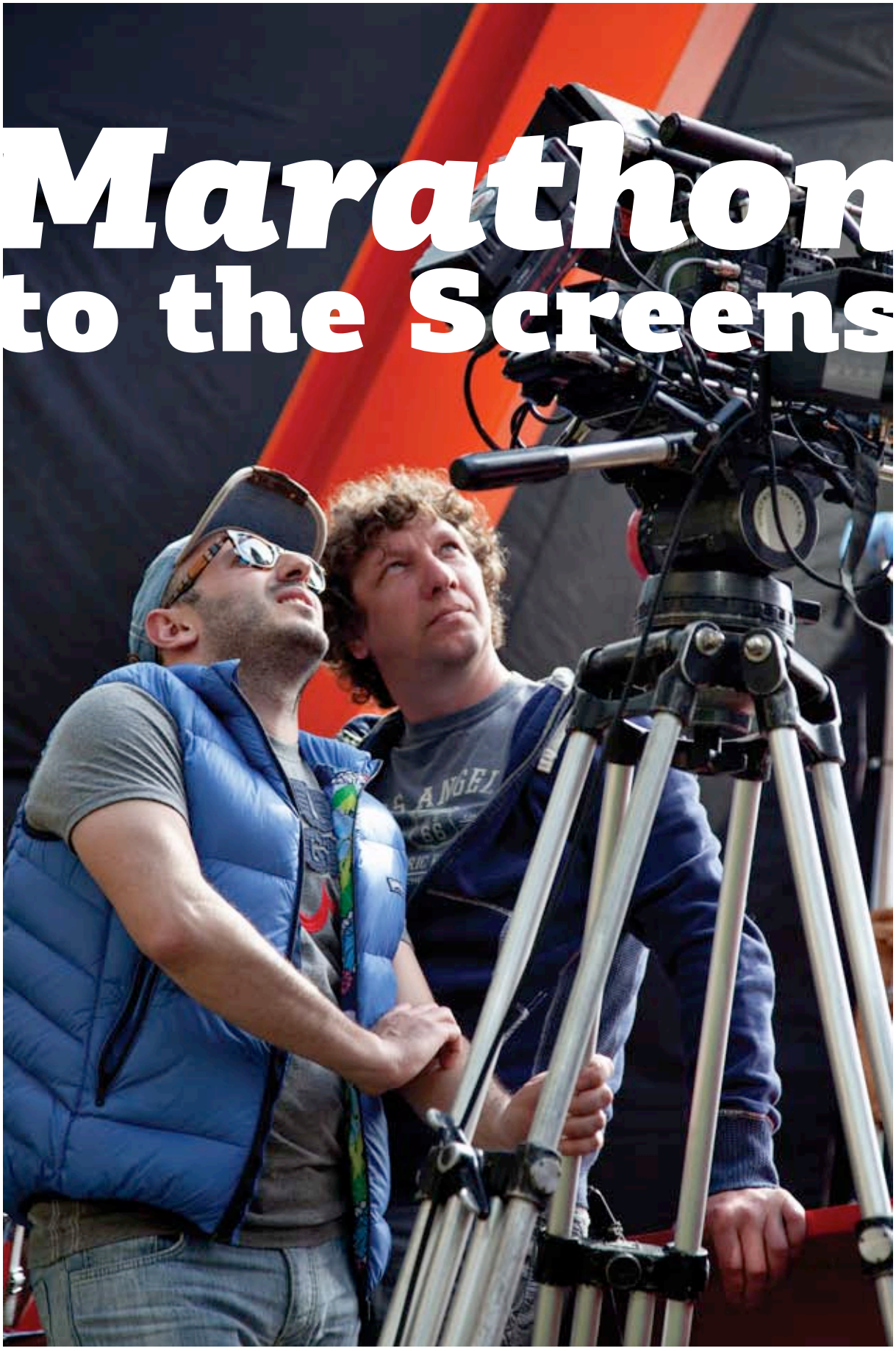
who presented his book, *Armenians in Turkey 100 Years Ago: Presentation on the Historic Postcards Documenting the Lives of Armenians in Ottoman Empire (1900-1910).* Professor Armen Marsoobian of Southern Connecticut State University presentation, "At the Crossroads of Family and Institutional Memory: The Armenians of Marsovan (Merzifon) and Anatolia College, 1890–1922" is still fresh in the minds of many at the university community. Students also have a chance to make their own presentations. "We organize field trips to Armenian community centers or restaurants to practice spoken Armenian," says Dr. Haroutunian.

When it was Tartell's time to make a presentation during one of the Armenian circle events, he researched the history of his family who were forced to migrate as a result of the Armenian Genocide of 1915. "Luckily, I have a cousin, Armen Marsoobian, who is a philosophy professor at South Connecticut State University and who has spent years collecting, translating and recording our family history," explains Tartell. He was also able to add some graphics using his family photo archives – they were in the photography business – that date back to the late 1800s and continue all the way through the Genocide period. "In the course of preparing for the presentation, I learned so much about my family that I had never known before and felt as if I really connected with my heritage and history."

In the 1980s when Dr. Woods was talking with interested parties about the Armenian program, he wished to achieve at least two major objectives: to provide a platform for the students to talk about controversial subjects in an open intellectual way and to cover areas that are scarcely explored such as Christian communities in the Middle East. His aim has been achieved as the program has been attracting students and lecturers from various disciplines and parts of the world to study Armenian language, history and culture.

As I take a final look at the scriptures decorating the hall leading to the Armenian corner at the University of Chicago, my hope is that more students will take this route, for years to come. ■

Marathon to the Screens



The professional odyssey of film director Karen Oganesyan could be aptly described by Andrey Tarkovsky's quote "Film directing is not a profession but a destiny." Oganesyan did not even think of a career in film when he studied philology in Armenia. However, at the age of 28, Oganesyan shot his first full-length directorial debut *I Am Staying in Moscow*, thus heralding his confident entry onto the Russian film-making scene in 2007. The director's next film – *The Ghost* – made it to the Toronto Film Festival. In just five years, Oganesyan has succeeded in creating a portfolio of fiction films covering a range of genres as well as several television series. He is now one of the main producers in Russia's biggest film distribution and production company Central Partnership.

Text **Nane Avagyan** | Photo **Tigran Tovmasyan**

The key to Karen Oganesyan's success is his originality, which perhaps is due to the fact he did not receive a formal professional education and hence did not feel compelled to be limited by the restrictive norms of the field. Through his independent quest and exploration, he has boldly developed his own style, intuitively found his own method of narration and turned filming into an engaging journey of creativity. As a result, Karen Oganesyan's films are lucid, sincere, warm, emotional and humane stories whose protagonists are genuine, close and dear to us.
"Nowadays, special effects will hardly sweep anyone off their feet, but bringing about real emotions and filming these emotions is becoming increasingly difficult," notes Karen Oganesyan.
The director produces mainstream films that are seldom found nowadays and are remarkable for their high professionalism, tastefulness, holistic compositional structure and are at the same time coherent, compassionate and spiritual. Karen Oganesyan's *Marathon* brought him to the United States, where I met this film producer, who is still young yet has already cultivated his own style.

Your diploma work entitled *Doors into Myself* that you produced after completing your six-month course in TV production, in fact became doors to the outside, to the world of cinematography at large. Is one born a film director or does one become a film director?
I think it can be either way – one can be born or become a film director, but at times it is the filmmaking itself that finds its way to people. In my opinion, the latter happened with me. Becoming a film director was never a childhood dream, it just happened this way. I think it is not possible to study and learn to be a film director; that is to say it is possible to learn some professional techniques, but to learn to think like a director is hardly possible. I used to take pictures and once showed my photos to the talented cameraman Alik Yavuryan, who had worked with Parajanov. He told me that I did not need to study and advised me to take up a cameraman's job right away. While in the six-month TV production course, I realized that TV production was not my calling, and my diploma work was a cinematographic project entitled, *Doors into Myself*. I shot my first film relying on my emotions, whereas my lecturers were comparing it to films by Tarkovsky, Parajanov, Fellini; I felt ashamed that I had not watched a single one of these films. Then things evolved in such a way that I ended up going to Moscow and decided to enter the All-Russian State University of Cinematography named after S. A. Gerasimov (aka VGIK). However, it turned out that there was a tuition fee involved, and back then I was unable to pursue my studies. I showed my *Doors into Myself* to the acclaimed Russian film director Vladimir Motyl, who, upon watching the film, advised me against pursuing studies and said: "You do not need to study as whatever natural gifts you have will be completely destroyed at the institute. You should be teaching them rather than be taught by them." Back then I didn't appreciate the significance of what he told me and entered the studio of Yuri Grymov at Russian Humanitarian State University in Moscow where I took PR and advertising courses that also included some elements of film production.
How did you embark on your professional career?
I started by filming videoclips and editing film, and one day I was commissioned

"Life itself is very complex – people watch movies to see alternatives, illusions. In their heart of hearts they cherish a wish for their lives to change like that of the film characters, to love and be loved."





"Based on my experience, I can say that although [technical] knowledge is a prerequisite, for a film director, instinct and imagination are more important," Oganesyan says.

by Central Partnership to produce a film trailer. The result garnered appreciation for its creativity. I then was asked to edit a TV series, and half a year later I was hired as a film editor. Then after reading the script for the film *I Am Staying*, I proposed to the Central Partnership to take over the project, and for the first time I worked as a film director. The film was a great success. Today, based on my experience, I can say that although [technical] knowledge is a prerequisite, for a film director, instinct and imagination are more important. At present, I am trying to fill in the gaps for a basic foundation in cinematography that I never had; however I should confess that this has never been an impediment to making films.

What themes are you attracted to?

Social themes. I will never make films that do not resonate with the pressing issues of the day. I am a proponent of realistic, contemporary films that are based on real people, their emotions and sentiments. I prefer to film what would attract my interest as a viewer, as a contemporary man. Today there is a need for human stories.

Through your films you create heroic figures. Who are they, the heroes of our times?

Unfortunately, life is such that anyone who manages to find a job to feed their family and not be left out in the street is already a hero. Especially the people who have to live away from their motherland – they are already heroes. Life seems to have changed. As for film characters, these are the same people as our friends, neighbors, relatives. I think if the film character is not the real person living next to us, it is not worth making the film. The characters I portray in my films are real people together with their positive and negative sides, each of which has its own truth to it, and it is important for me to believe in these people and to relive their lives. It is only then that the film characters come into a being of their own.

What message are you trying to convey?

It is a delusion to think that one is trying to convey a message through a film; this is a utopia, a sheer impossibility. In my view, it is more like the film director is raising questions to make people think. I do not seek to teach anything to the people through my films. Each person has his or her own answer to a given question. I am interested in stories that change the main character's life and his/her environment, affect their world outlook. And based on this, the viewers should draw their own conclusions. I think that if a film can change a man's plans for at least one day after watching it, then this is already something. Films do have a big impact on people, and I would like my impact to be one of radiance rather than of darkness. Even if the film is entirely about violence, all the same, there must be light at the end of it. Life itself is very complex – people watch movies to see alternatives, illusions. In their heart, they cherish a wish for their lives to change like that of the film characters, to love and be loved. I do not know what films I will make in the future, but I think a movie should emanate light and kindness.

Your films are made in various genres, including drama, thriller, comedy as well as serialized films. What are your principles of filmmaking?

My principle is to do my work honorably. It does not make a difference whether it is an animated cartoon or a fiction movie; I treat it with the same sense of responsibility. My first film was a psychological drama, the second one, *The Ghost*, was a psychological thriller, and then I directed a comedy film. These films belong to different genres as I dislike repetition. I cannot imagine how it is possible for someone to keep making films in the same genre. By shooting a film in the same genre, one divulges everything, as though one empties himself and it takes time to live through and experience new emotions. The different genres are of no importance to me; the storyline is a story where the character is brought to light and presented in his entirety. As for soap operas, these are serialized fiction films that can range



Filmography

Director
Marathon (2012)
Zonnentau (2012, TV series)
Mommies (2012, segment *Ya-ne Kolya,*)
Five Brides (2011)
Open It's Me (*Zhurov 2*) (2010, TV series)
Zemlyak (short)
Countryman (2010)
Zhurov (2009)
The Ghost (Domovoy) (2008)
I Am Staying (*Ya Ostayus*) (2007)

Editor
The Ghost
Don't Cry Mommy 2
Hello, We Are Your Roof

Producer
Marathon
Legends About Krug

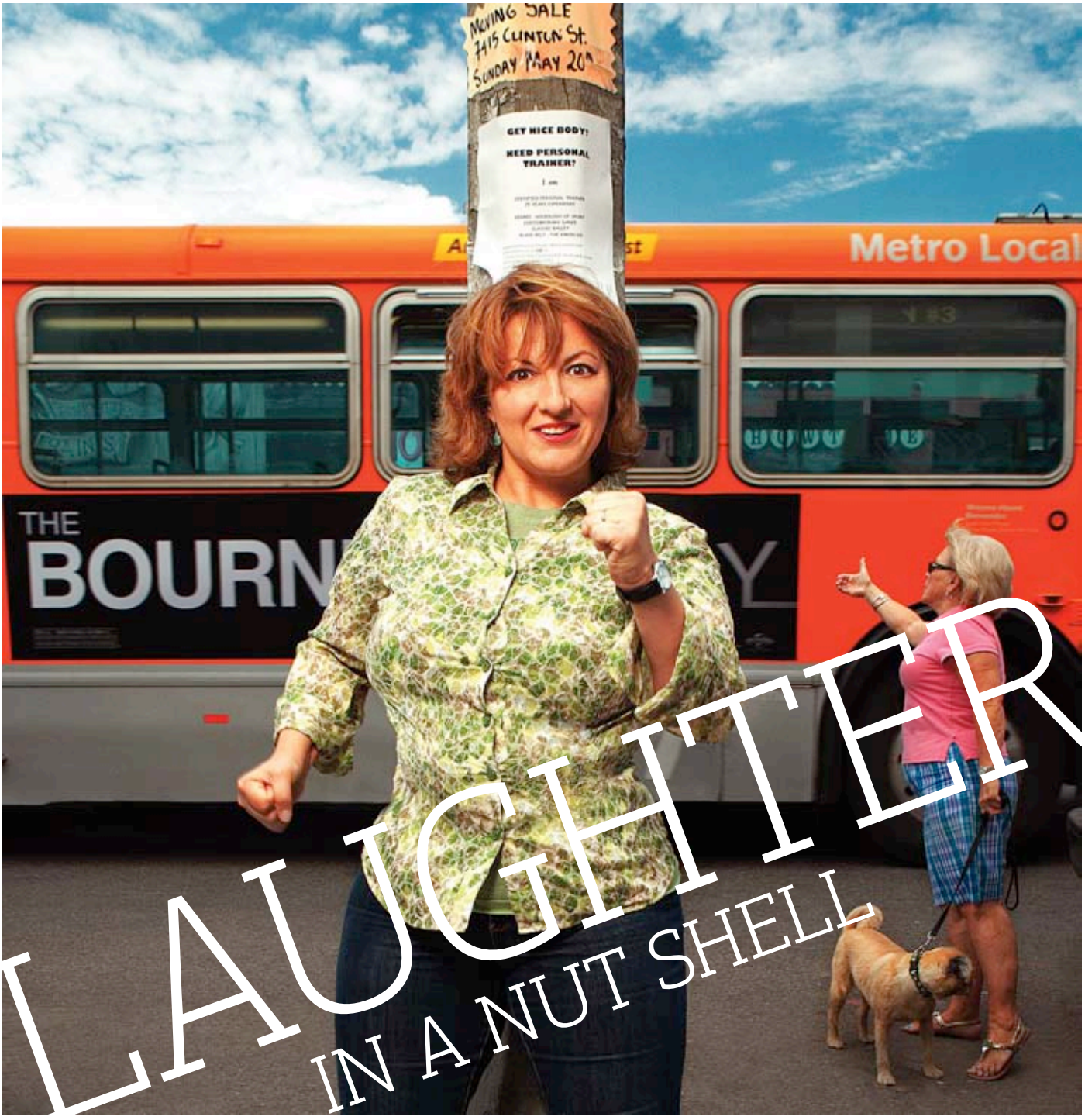
between four to a maximum of sixteen series. Many renowned film directors, among them Scorsese and Spielberg, have made film series bringing intelligent films to the television screen. In movie theatres today, one can mainly watch recreational films. The real cinema is found only in film festivals and for the thinking, intelligent public, the real films are shown on TV. My latest serialized film *Zonnentau* is a mystic psychological drama, where events unfold at a Third Reich concentration camp, and I would really like this film to be watched also by the public outside Russia.

As a film director, to what extent do you participate in the production of a film?
By ninety percent, with the remaining ten percent making up the part that is beyond one's control and is quite often decisive. I am very meticulous about directing projects. With full confidence, I can say that the script is the most important thing and the rest is down to professionalism. In the case of my films, the script has to be perfect, and I make adjustments myself, at times revising it during the film shooting. This is a creative process, and if I am not able to tweak and change things, it will not be as interesting for me. I try to be different in each film, not to resemble myself. Another key to my success is the fact that well-known and talented actors are involved in all of my films.

Have your films been influenced by the Armenian culture?
Definitely. None of my film viewers will say that my films are representative of Russian cinema. Although I think and shoot my films in Russian, there is something from within that slips in, regardless of my wishes. Many people call it a European, often Armenian influence. People who know me and my sense of humor say that only I could come up with something like that. I certainly think that the language of films has no nationality; a good film, regardless of the language it is in or the ethnicity it portrays, will be grasped and accepted. This is the most important thing in a film. And generally speaking, I consider the commitment and the persistence in achieving a goal as part of our national profile.

Have you ever been tempted to make a purely commercial film?
I have constantly received offers of commercial projects that I have turned down, but which have brought in large profits after these films were made by others. Nevertheless, these cannot be considered to be films as they are entirely commercial projects. For instance, I would be ashamed to invite my parents to watch such a film and tell them that this film has made millions of dollars. People also make a lot of money through drug and arms trafficking, but this does not mean that one should follow their example and engage in this trade. I pursue my profession honorably, and if I want to work in cinematography I should not stray from it. I cannot say that my work brings in no money, but simply put the mechanisms at work are quite different.

What brought you to the United States?
If I were to put all my past projects on one side of the scale and only *Marathon* on the other, then in view of the various difficulties that got in the way of that work, all of them together are not even half as valuable as *Marathon*. The course of the film shot in Novorossiysk and Los Angeles was encumbered with many difficulties that turned filming into a veritable marathon for me and my film crew. The film is an art-mainstream social drama about universal human values and will certainly mean something to anyone who cherishes such concepts as love, friendship, kindness, hope and sincerity. I think there are many such people, but bright and kind emotions both in life and on the screen are not many. The main character is somebody who has failed in his personal and professional life, whose life changes after a chance meeting with an eighty-year-old woman. She persuades the protagonist to take part in a million-dollar prize marathon in the U.S. They both discover that the most important thing in life is one's goal, thanks to which life goes on. ■



LAUGHTER IN A NUT SHELL

NOW THAT BEING AN AUTHOR IS UNDER HER BELT, COMEDIAN JACKIE KASHIAN DOESN'T LET ANYTHING GET IN THE WAY OF HER SUCCESS. GROWING UP IN A LARGE FAMILY AND USUALLY BEING THE BUTT OF THE JOKES HELPED THIS WISCONSIN NATIVE BUILD HER BACKBONE FOR WHAT WAS TO COME.

Text **Violet Kanian** | Photo **Armen Poghosyan** | Make up **Summer Chapin**

Stumbling across comedy during her college years, Jackie Kashian doesn't take much seriously – except that she loves doing what she does. She's appeared in her own Comedy Central Special, competed in the *Last Comic Standing* contest, stars in her very own podcast called "The Dork Forest," where people get interviewed about their obsessions, and now has written two chapters in the book, *The Comedy Film Nerds Guide to Movies.* Kashian is a sarcastically blunt force to be reckoned with – and that's putting it lightly.

"I WASN'T THE CLASS CLOWN. I WAS A WEIRD, INTROVERTED, READING KID THAT GOT SARCASTIC WHEN I WAS MOCKED — WHICH WAS REGULARLY."

Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
I'm from a little factory town outside Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I'm the youngest of six children – four older brothers, then my sister was born – pleasing my Armenian grandmother to no end since now "there was someone to wait on the boys." I was born as the spare, I assume. My sister and I, for the record, let our brothers know early on that their lives would be self-serve.

What is your family life like?
My family life was like a litter of puppies. We lived on top of each other, laughed and fought and did a lot of eating and cooking. It's pretty much still like that whenever we can see each other. Now I'm married, and we have an iguana and a garden and a lot of friends. My husband is a game designer so we end up playing a lot of board games and video games. It's really fun. My brothers and sister and I talk in varying degrees of regularity but I'm pretty friendly with all of them.

Was comedy something you always wanted to do or did you just stumble across it?
I completely fell into doing standup. I was going to school at UW– Madison and we went to a comedy club one evening. I heckled the headliner, and management told me to pipe down. I did not. The manager came over and sarcastically told me that 'open mic is on Sunday,' and I came back three weeks later. The rest of college was a bit of a blur, I have to say. I was hooked immediately. I did graduate from Madison though (polital science) because my sister told me I had to. It turns out she was the boss of me.

Were you always the class clown?
I wasn't the class clown. I was a weird, introverted, reading kid that got sarcastic when I was mocked – which was regularly. Besides my parents encouraging me to take up an instrument, both my brother Russ and my sister Darla insisted I joined Student Council since both of them and our brother Scott were Student Council Presidents. Instead, I went into journalism and joined the student newspaper. I'm sure, I had no such plan to be the "power behind the throne," though that was what was said when I became editor... *heh.* I think I just wanted to see free movies. I traded including the theater's name in my reviews as free advertisement in exchange of free movie tickets. I was in band and debate and a spoken word competition called Forensics. That was my only performance as a child, and it was all news and politics related.

When did you decide that comedy would become your full-time career?
I don't think I ever did consciously make a decision to do stand up fulltime. It felt more like the decision was made for me. I took work that paid so I could do comedy, and I did it as much as I could in spite of anything or everything. Some of the greatest hobbies start that way, I think. You might just really, really like stamp collecting, and then one day you are being paid to consult on stamps. That's what standup has felt like for me. I just love doing it so much that now I make a living at it.

Tell us a bit about your Comedy Central Special.
It was pretty great as far as a "TV set" goes. The best TV set I ever did was in about 1999 for this show called *Late Friday 2001*. Lisa Leingang booked the comics, and she said, 'It's a seven-minute set. Do about ten and we'll cut it down. Keep it TV-clean and have fun.' She didn't even ask the comics what they were doing. She figured we were all adults and our brains were attached. It was awesome. The Comedy Central Special was not like that. They needed to know what material I was doing. But the cool thing they did do was to have my set list – the list of jokes I was to do – playing on a teleprompter in front of me as I performed. It took a lot of the pressure off the performance, which was nice.

You also competed in the Last Comic Standing, what was that like?
Last Comic Standing is a reality show. I don't think I realized that it was a reality show. Reality show means that the camera is going to be in your face 24-7. It was a lot. I didn't like it. They wanted so much for us to be cut-throat, and we just couldn't do it. ▸



Did you ever hesitate becoming a comedian because you are a woman, and is it harder for a woman to be successful in the field?
It never occurred to me that it was even a stumbling block. When someone asks me about it, I always say that I'm a "woman comic."
I'm told that the word comedienne feels like you're saying... "Aw, look how cute you are, trying to do comedy... comedienne." My parents are hilarious and made some interesting parenting choices, but they never assumed anything but that we would all be leaders of our own small nations by the end. Whatever we did, as long as we weren't burdens on them and society, was fine by them. I know what you mean about being successful, but success in comedy can be widely defined. I define it as getting to do it for a living. So, if you can live on 25k a year and do comedy, you're a success. But some people really freak out about success. If they aren't Ellen DeGeneres or Jerry Seinfeld, they're a failure – they aren't. Success can be anywhere between those two things, or something else that I haven't thought of.
Does the amount of work you get differ due to your gender?
The real problem in getting comedy work is the sheer subjectivity of the results. No one likes the same kind of comedy. One liners, storytelling, sex jokes, never any sex jokes, shouting things, jumping around a lot, puppets, props, political, women comics, black comics, Mexican or GLTB comics. Sometimes you get work because you're not a white guy, sometimes you can't get work because you're just another white guy. So with women, I've been hired for the freak-show factor and not moved up to headliner because I'm a woman. If you aren't a white guy, you do offer a nice respite in the middle of a show of two white guys. There's nothing to be done about the -isms of the world except to keep doing your work and try not to get mad about it when you recognize discrimination. I do my best and try to ignore the jackasses.
Do you have to be raunchier as a woman to get more laughs?
No. Raunch is funny when it's done right. Raunch done poorly is shocking and can get shock laughs from audiences. If you're a "lady" it's saying raunch or if you're a "frat boy" it's saying shocking things. It's not my favorite kind of comedy – on the other hand, a well-crafted sex joke is often the joke I'll remember more than anything else. I have about four sex jokes. I have about the same number of weird, mean jokes. I mean a joke that, said out of context and by the wrong person, could cause picketing, but said perfectly by the right man or woman, staid old men and prim old women laugh their heads off.

"BARELY ANYONE KNEW WHAT AN ARMENIAN WAS. I USED TO TRY JOKES ABOUT IT EARLY ON AND HAD TO GIVE UP BECAUSE I HAD TO EXPLAIN THAT IT WAS A COUNTRY, NOT A 'BALTIC SWORDFISH.'"

Who were some of your comedic and non-comedic influences growing up?
We never listened to comedy when I was a kid. I heard the Bill Cosby "Noah" bit when I was about eight, and then I heard some Dr. Demento. I really liked sitcoms: *MASH*, *Mary Tyler Moore*, *Happy Days* and *Laverne and Shirley*. In the movies I loved the *Marx Bros*, *Abbot and Costello*, *Francis the Talking Mule* and the *Bowry Boys*. Non-comedic would probably be *Tarzan*. My main influence comedically when I was a kid, were my parents. My father has the best timing of anyone I've ever met, and my stepmother is smart. She's hilariously smart. When I was 15 someone asked me if I wanted to join MENSA. I told Nancy and she said, "It's just an excuse for wife-swapping." I didn't even get that line for years, but I knew it was hilarious.



Jackie Kashian
Jackie Kashian has been doing comedy for over 15 years. Her latest CD, "It is Never Going to Be Bread," was one of the top 10 comedy albums on Amazon in 2010. She has appeared on television shows and films like *Last Comic Standing*, *Tough Crowd*, ABC's *The Glass House*, Gameshow Network's *Funny Money*, VH1's *The List*, NBC's *Friday Night Videos*, A&E's *Comedy on the Road*, CBS's *Murphy Brown* and many others. She appears at comedy festivals and comedy clubs across the nation.

Who are some of them now?
I love watching Maria Bamford, Erin Foley, Dana Gould, Greg Proops, Marc Maron... too many to name. I just saw Al Jackson for the first time and that was really great. I love Albert Brooks and Dick Cavett. I've seen Bill Cosby twice in the last couple years. That's inspiring because he's still doing standup. No more, no less (and, in his case... it's so much more) than what, 50 years later? Still telling stories about his life, still expressing opinions about his family's antics. Just hilarious. People say he's "become political." I don't think so. I think that he's always had opinions and has stated them; he's just saying them in a more "get off my lawn" kind of manner now that he's a million years old and just can.

Was being Armenian helpful for you? Did it give you more material to work with?
Growing up in Wisconsin, barely anyone knew what an Armenian was. I used to try jokes about it early on and had to give up because I had to explain that it was a country and not a Baltic Swordfish. When I moved to Los Angeles I was blown away by how many Armenians there are. I still am. Sometimes I play a game when I do errands. How many Armenians will I meet today. It may give me more material now that there are so many Armenians on TV, but I can't tell yet. Every Armenian man, woman and child I meet at church or various places can offer a chance for comedy.

What is the one thing you do before hitting the stage?
Laps. I tend to walk around the club and check the audience and what the other comics are talking about and how the audience is responding to them.

What was the worst experience for you on stage? People not laughing?

"THAT'S WHAT STANDUP HAS FELT LIKE FOR ME. I JUST LOVE DOING IT SO MUCH THAT NOW I MAKE A LIVING AT IT."

Ah... the throwing of things when I first started out. I opened for a band at the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1986, and I had to do 15 minutes before a cover band. At about eight minutes they were bored and started whipping popcorn bags at me. That's a bad experience. Now, it's if I lose my temper in any way. There are a lot of people who come to comedy shows and can't seem to realize that they aren't watching a movie in their house with their friends. They're texting or chatting about the show. And if I lose my temper I can get mean. I don't want to, so I have stopped doing clubs that don't police the room (explaining the idea of live theater).

Do you practice your jokes on people before you use them on stage? Who do you practice on?
I sometimes warn a friend or loved one that I am going to say something that I might use on stage. But I do that so they don't think I'm always doing that. It'd be horrible to think you're having a conversation with someone and then find out they're just working on premises with you. I usually write out a joke and then I try it on stage.

Were your parents supportive of you wanting to become a comedian?
My parents are supportive of anything any of us wants to do as long as they don't have to let us move back in or give us money. Comedy didn't seem like a career, initially, but I think after I was on television, they've gotten more excited about it.

Do you have any comedians in your family?
No. But all of them are non-professional. It's all public speaking, from my father on down – and they're all funny – really funny. My oldest brother is an evangelist with his own church. The next brother is a salesman. The next brother and my sister are in the finance industry, sales and such, and my other brother is an econ professor at the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater.

If you weren't doing comedy, what would you be doing?
I'd like to either teach college history or be La Femme Nikita. ■



One Laptop per Child

As it turns out, the myth that we only use ten percent of our brain is science fiction. We use all of our brain, just not all the time or all at once. Similar to computer programs and applications, it is the tasks we perform that dictate how we use the program. Sameer Verma, a professor at San Francisco State University Business School, studies concepts of user/program productivity and efficiency. A large part of his research focuses on how people adapt to innovation and to what degree a person understands the technology and its implications.

Text and photo **Gohar Barseghyan**

On a sunny November Sunday at the Academy of Science in Golden Gate Park, I had the pleasure of speaking with Sameer about his interest in the organization One Laptop per Child (OLPC). Immediately struck by his humility, I thanked him for introducing the program to Armenians. His original impetus led to hundreds of laptops for children in Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. The father of two young girls, he has a natural empathy for children and the way their minds work. When conducting his Ph.D. research in the late 1990s, he started using open source software, as commercial software was too expensive. During this research, he realized that even though open source software in many cases was not packaged like the commercial software, it was still very powerful if one knew how to use it. Around 2007, Sameer stumbled upon OLPC and learned that they were planning to give free laptops to children around the world using open source software.



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Verma is a Ph.D. in Information Systems and has been teaching for 12 years at SFSU.



Sameer Verma's One Laptop per Child (OLPC) impetus led to hundreds of laptops for children in Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh.

Is this what attracted you to OLPC?
My involvement with OLPC at the beginning was not from the social side or the educational side, it was simply the technology. I was like a kid. Oh, a new phone, I want to get it. But once you start scratching the surface, you realize that the technology is only a medium, it's not the message itself. Then my focus started to change. I spent hours adjusting the software and translation, those kinds of things, and it's not for the sake of the technology, it's for the end goal which is – someone in some remote area will be able to read about the rest of the world. And when someone realizes this, they end up staying with the project.

Tell me about the Armenia project?
I look for opportunities all the time, and when I meet people I talk about OLPC and its mission.

Barry Levine is a professor in Computer Science at SFSU. He's done a lot of interesting projects, and he started a program at the American University of Armenia. Because of this, he goes there frequently to maintain the project and further it. I ran into Barry at one of the meetings on campus and asked him whether there would be any interest in Armenia. I have friends from that part of the world, and I knew what the situation in the country was. He has access to the university, which is a great pool of students. I said, "If your students would be interested, maybe we could work out something." I ordered two laptops and asked him to take them to Armenia and leave them there, hoping that maybe the students could translate the software from English into Armenian, and we could take it from there. Barry wasn't quite sure which way this would go, but once he got to Armenia, he said it was a huge success because everyone was attracted to these machines.

Thus, we ended up working with the coordinator of his program– Rubina Danilova. We signed her up as an administrator for the language translation program, and she got a few students to help her with it. The translation process is this: you go on the Web – it's an open system, anyone can do it. You see a word in English and there's a box next to it. You type the equivalent in Armenian and click Submit. That's it. One word at a time. Roubina, as an administrator, looked at the submissions by the students and approved them or changed them. The group did that for a while and they had 50% done. Then we found out there was a parallel effort going on to bring the laptops to Armenia by Eduardo Eurnekian. We then joined forces, discussed what we had done, designed the keyboard layout and finally got the whole thing completed. The laptops were introduced through the NUR project. When I look back and think of it, I realize how one thing led to another. Of course, there were lots of contributors. NUR has a staff that works on this, and every contribution counts. It feels good that I was a small part of a big thing that's happening in Armenia. Rubina e-mailed me recently and said that her daughter goes to a school where first-graders were given the laptops this year. It was fascinating to see that this kind of advocacy and contribution actually works. It's a combination of both the top-down approach and the bottom-up. It's interesting that in countries and cultures where the top-down doesn't work, one way to make it happen is the bottom-up approach. I think Armenia was the only country that took the right approach and got things done in a very short time.

How does the company operate?
We have a lot of volunteers. The company itself has about 30-35 employees. Their job is to maintain the innovation and technology and keep the company running in partnerships. But all the software is open source. They don't write any of it – it's the thousands of volunteers who are writing bits and pieces. It all adds up. The majority of communication happens through e-mail lists and other means of electronic media. Electronic media is good for scalability, but face-to-face communication brings the social aspect. So what happened is that the group of volunteers in San Francisco, for a variety of reasons, started to meet at SF State. Saturday was a good day for everyone, and I told them that I had access to a classroom on the campus. Before I knew it, it snowballed into this group of over 200 people, which is a proper volunteer community. We meet once a month and we have 14 projects managed not only by people in the SF area but all over the world.

So, how do you get to meet the larger community of volunteers?
The social aspect is interesting. We started hosting an annual summit at SFSU, and it has become de facto the global summit now. Everybody comes. People come from all over the world, and it gives you an opportunity to meet them face-to-face. You realize that the person you've been

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Dr. Verma and a group of volunteers at the annual summit at SFSU

talking to by e-mail who has a larger than life persona is in fact a 22-year-old kid who just got out of college. Or someone who you thought is a 22-year-old kid turns out to be a grandmother from LA. It's very interesting to meet these people and learn why they do what they do. And the University has been very supportive in hosting a conference or meetings. SFSU's mission is to provide social justice and equality, which is what this project is about. You want to go to the poorest communities and give them a chance to do better for themselves.

Are your students involved in OLPC as well?

For me personally, this project is important in another aspect which I bring into my classroom. I get groups of students to work on something for their thesis or class assignment, and that work actually ends up in the field. For a student it's a very powerful connection to say – I worked on something for three months and there's some child in Mongolia that's using my work. When you're in college and young and your work is used somewhere in the world, that's a very powerful metaphor for students.

What is your focus in the project?

My focus now has been how to provide IT infrastructure in remote and rural places. How can we support information access over there? I get my research done, I bring it into the classroom, and it's obviously a good connection with the community over here. It consumes the major part of my life. Sometimes I wonder who do I work for – the State of California or the OLPC. It's difficult to distinguish sometimes.

Has the mission of OLPC changed over the years?

This is about educating children. That has been the goal and it has never changed. It's about giving the children a chance to understand what critical thinking is. For instance, you may go to a community that has some issues. You may tell them what to do, but without understanding their context, you may be telling them something that may not fit. They understand their context the best, what they lack, what are the tools to solve their problem. If you can provide that to them, you can solve their problem. You don't have to ship water to someone who needs water. You can teach them how to purify their own water at the source.

What is an XO?

The XO laptop was designed especially for children. It has a rugged plastic exterior, built-in wireless, a unique dual mode display that is readable under direct sunlight and software designed for children to encourage exploration, creativity and collaboration. The design is exceptional. It's so iconic that people focus on it and forget the end goal, which is – this is really about children.

How do communities welcome XO software?

There is a set of learning principles behind the scenes that comes mainly from MIT and other places which is called constructionism. Lego and play-dough are perfect examples of constructionism. Here we have a software that allows you to build things. The software is designed for the ages from 5-12. Beyond 12, there's software you can switch to that looks more like Windows. You get Firefox and Office, those kinds of things. But for 5-12 year olds, the focus is using the software called SUGAR which was built with the purpose of learning. There is an interesting thing that we don't pay attention to: Windows and Mac come from an office productivity environment, which is why you have the metaphors of files and folders. The conventional wisdom tries to retrofit that onto learning, and the logic is that a kid has to grow up some day and might as well get started with what everyone else is using. But we don't use the same logic with clothes. We don't buy grownup clothes for kids and say well you have to get used to it. So the software for education has to be geared towards learning. And it has to be built in a different fashion. That took some criticism because we were often asked "why don't you give children what everyone else is using?" OLPC said no. Five years later we are seeing the results of it: children are able to understand concepts better. For instance, you can learn geometry from a textbook or see someone describe it on a blackboard, but here, you actually do it yourself. That learning sticks better. I'm in my early 40s now and I still see things and I think, "I learned that in high school and I didn't quite get it then, and I am getting it now." That's the philosophy. Some people who know more or less about computers argue that they'd prefer Microsoft Office rather than SUGAR, because they think their kids could get a job faster if they had MS Office skills.

Could XO eventually eliminate the textbooks from schools?

If you have no choice in a situation where it is paper versus digital, and paper is too expensive, you can put all the books you want on this machine. In the U.S. we have a choice, we can use books and/or laptops, but in areas where it's expensive to ship books or produce them, this one laptop can hold 10,000 books. Printing 10,000 books in those areas is unthinkable.

We are also building solar-powered servers that host digital libraries to provide access to information. The more interesting part is when you go to a community that has never had a library, and they don't understand the concept of a library. Here you are telling them that there's a place



"We have pros and cons. I am giving a village access to 500 books and on the other side, determining which 500 they get."



where you can go and borrow a book, and they don't have a clue what you're talking about. You have to approach it from a different perspective by bringing examples, like "If you want to solve some issues with farming, you could go to this place and search for a book where you can read about it." As technologists, we didn't think about that. For me personally it's been one of those things that for all the formal education I've had, this is more valuable than any of that because it opens my eyes. How much is out there that we don't know? It's just fascinating.

How do you decide what to pack in an XO?

Down the street on the other side of the Golden Gate Park, there's the Internet archive and it has over 3.5 million books in electronic format for free. We have this pipeline, and our challenge now is we have the technology and we have the source of the books, how do you curate from 3.5 million the 500 appropriate books that you need for your high school or your village? We have pros and cons. I am giving a village access to 500 books and on the other side, determining which 500 they get. If I miss my mark, I am creating a disaster. You have to be careful with this. One day they will get on the Internet and be able to search on their own.

Statistically, 68 percent of the world is not on the Internet, and that's a huge number. Until they have access, we are trying to bridge that gap by providing them some set of books.

How many countries have introduced XO to their students?

We have been in 45-50 countries so far. There are countries that have a couple of thousand units and there are some that have only 10 units in a village. The spectrum is huge.

Who is funding the project?

The funding structure is that OLPC is a non-profit, and then they have partners most of whom are not non-profits. These are chip manufacturers, software developers, content producers, and shipping companies. OLPC requires funding to do the innovation stage, produce this particular laptop, test it before manufacturing it, and then the partners, such as Google, Red Hat and others, step in to finance the manufacturing. Once the laptop is ready to go, that's where the funding stops and each country has to find internal or external sources (government, NGO, or a private donor) for funding. They place an order for a certain amount of laptops to be produced and shipped to their country. The OLPC helps with the infrastructure and gets the project going.

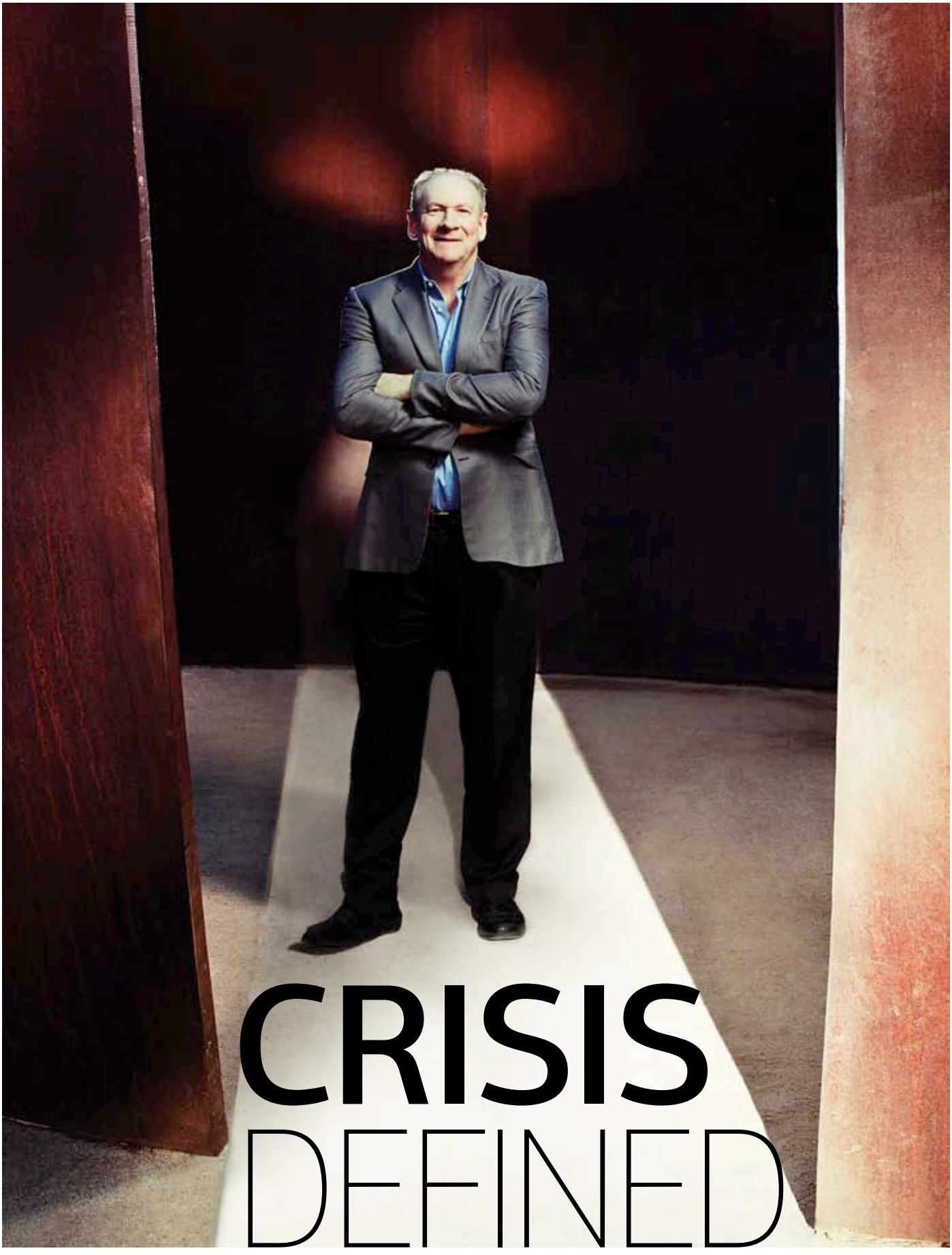
Any plans to produce the laptops in the consumer country itself?

That question has come up a few times already. Peru has 1.1 million laptops and is our largest consumer. Instead of making the laptops in China and shipping them to Peru, they want to start their own production. If it can be produced in a consumer country, it can create jobs, save money on shipping and create a sense of ownership. I would not be surprised if that started happening.

Can I get one for my kids?

They don't do retail, even though there's a lot of demand for this. It's a completely different line of work, but in the future they might partner with some company, like Amazon, who would do retail. There's a good demand in the U.S. for XO as well. But we're not there yet.

OLPC and the thousands of volunteer contributors have certainly designed a great tool for children to boost self-empowered learning. It also helps them stay connected to each other, to the rest of the world and perhaps to a better and brighter future. It obviously takes a concerted effort from around the world to take the XO laptops to all of these students in countries that are participating in the project, in the hopes that eventually, the world will get to hear back from these children and their achievements. ■



CRISIS DEFINED

ON THE EVE OF THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, WE MEET LEE OHANIAN, AN EXPERT IN IDENTIFYING ECONOMIC CRISES. THE UCLA AND STANFORD UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR SHARES WITH US HIS INSIGHTS ON THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ECONOMY, THE FEDERAL RESERVE, GOLD, AND THE FUTURE OF THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY.

Text **Mery Khatchatrian** | Photo **Armen Poghosyan**

Ohanian's research focuses on economic crises, economic growth and the impact of public policy on the economy. As a professor of over 20 years, he focuses on economic policy. He is also the Director of Robert Ettinger Family Program in macroeconomic research at UCLA and Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institute at Stanford University. He advises the Federal Reserve Banks of Minneapolis and St. Louis, and the Foreign Central Banks of Sweden and Portugal. Lee's work is frequently featured in *Forbes*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Investor Business Daily*. Ohanian extensively works with Congress and the California Legislature helping create policies aimed at restoring jobs and economic growth. Due to his efforts and expertise, he frequently testifies in the U.S. Senate in regards to economic policies. Currently, he is working on a book about economic depressions and crises. Its main focus is understanding why the U.S. economy has not recovered from the recent recession, how the situation is impacting the youth and retirees, and the ramifications of the unemployment rates. Ohanian distinguishes the types of policies in place that will help promote growth contrasting them to those that impact growth. He presents why states that were the homes of the auto, rubber and steel manufacturing industries for the past 50 years have been relatively depressed in comparison to Southern states, like Tennessee and Carolina, that became the de facto leaders in manufacturing. Ohanian's work will explain in detail why these industries were not able to respond adequately to the changing preferences of the consumer and rising gas prices. Rather than responding to changes in consumer expectations or trends in the industry, "the politically connected industries were able to get government protection at the expense of the taxpayers."

Ohanian classifies an economic crisis as a rapid and large decline in employment, production and income. "You would distinguish a crisis from a recession in the sense of how much and how quickly the economy declines and how long it stays at low levels of economic activity." Typically recessions are "ones in which employment falls maybe about one percent, production falls, and production incomes fall about two percent, so this is a disaster in the sense that some people do lose their jobs, but the country as a whole is not faced with a substantial decline in economic activity." However, he states, "employment now has fallen nine percent as opposed to the aforementioned one percent. It fell that much during the 2008-09 fiscal period and it has stayed down since. The depth of the employment decline from 2008-09, the speed of the decline, and the fact that employment per capita has not recovered at all makes this a depression."

Using various methods of diagnostics and tracking a variety of economic models, Ohanian's research indicates that the current economic conditions are a result of joblessness. "The issue today

LEE OHANIAN EXTENSIVELY WORKS WITH CONGRESS AND THE CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE HELPING TO CREATE POLICIES AIMED AT RESTORING JOBS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH.

is solely in the labor market." He notes, "If employment was back to where it typically is, the rest of the economy would look normal. This is not always the case – typically there is more than one thing going on." But when the labor market is on the wrong path and is not recovering to the level where it should be, it indicates conditions of economic crisis. "The number of jobs relative to the population is lower today than it was during the financial crisis, even when we were saving GM and the other bail outs that were in motion," Ohanian confirms.

Many can recall turbulent days when the market was "falling five percent a day and people were thinking the world was coming to an end. It's lower than it was in 2009 when incomes bottomed out. From the standpoint of jobs, we are in a lot of trouble."

One distinctive factor that is often overlooked, according to Ohanian, is that "among the unemployed, about 60 percent have only a high school degree completion or lower skill sets." In the next four years, the youth and those with lower levels of education attainment will continue to be impacted the most. "These are the segments of the population that society should be trying to help the most. Having an education and skills is now the key to the competitive work place. It's not out of your hands to be competitive and have a rewarding career that is consistent with the type of spending you anticipate." Thus, wage inequality is really a matter of disparity in educational level.

In the weeks leading up to the elections there were lengthy discussions about which candidate would be better for the economy and the stock market. Many provided projections on earnings and performance for 2013. Ohanian responded, "The market is hard to predict, and many will base their projections on prior years. But it's hard to distinguish luck from what's actually going on. The market will distinguish an economy that is healthy from one that isn't growing and thus, the market won't support it."

We discussed his involvement with the Romney campaign in which he served as counsel on economic policies. Personally, he is supportive of a market-based economy. "We did lose a lot of jobs, and nothing at this time indicates anything that would reverse that."

The problem with policies is that in the recent years they have been mandates. "Like the ones that were intended just to help the auto or housing industry to get over the hump," he says, meaning the stimulus plans, the cash for clunkers' plan, home buyers tax credits, among others. "None of these were really useful." The reason is their relatively short term impact. Instead he suggests, "Long term policies which take some time to get into the process and accomplish in a format are needed in order to allow businesses to have more certainty."

Lee believes that the Federal Reserve should be as "independent and immune from any and all political influences as possible." He states that the Fed is engaged in activities that they never really performed before. He urges caution in this regard. "I think they should be careful of what they do. They are not elected officials but political appointees and should not be manipulated." For example, when "keeping interest rates low, a whole segment of retirees is being affected. Their investments are not getting any interest income." He suggests instead, "You want to make sure that every central bank in every country is independent. They need to pursue goals of low stable inflation and well-functioning financial markets."

The impact of quantitative easing amid Ben Bernanke's announcement of open-ended QE also came up during our discussion. "Interest rates will stay low for some time and this will benefit homebuyers, but those with fixed income investments will be hurt." However, Ohanian suggests, when looking for signs to identify a recovery, one should draw attention to the stock market, to respond to job creation, new business formation, wages and productivity growth.

This brings us to a question raised by Pete Najarian, the co-founder of Option Monster and a regular contributor on CNBC's Fast Money. "Given the backdrop of this economy, why are certain areas and specific stocks thriving and performing so well?" asked Najarian.

In response, Lee Ohanian referred to technology leaders, companies like Apple (AAPL) and Microsoft (MSFT), which are competitive companies today and have the necessary edge to remain dominant. With the "overall weak economy, we still have pockets of profitability. Such companies will continue to increase profitability over time and the tech leaders will continue to take off." Ohanian is sure that "new giants will emerge primarily started by individuals that used to work for these companies." He suggests we keep in mind that "although earnings have been relatively strong, some companies are starting to weaken a little bit depending on the sector." It's possible that 2013 could

LEE OHANIAN BELIEVES THAT THE FEDERAL RESERVE SHOULD BE AS "INDEPENDENT AND IMMUNE FROM ANY AND ALL POLITICAL INFLUENCES AS POSSIBLE."



become a year of economic growth, "depending on how the looming tax increases are dealt with. Proposing broad-based tax reform won't lead to large increases in tax rates, which generally depress economic activity." In this environment he says "high tech, health care and manufacturing will continue to grow." However, in the event that the fiscal cliff cannot be avoided, there could be a significant economic impact on households. "It depends on how Congress deals with the large tax increases that are set and which will severely depress the economy by reducing job creation and increasing unemployment."

In recent years we have seen the value of gold rise substantially. Some investors are choosing to invest in gold as a means of a safe haven currency. Others are driven by fear of the future, uncertainty and the continuous devaluation of major currencies. Thus, we asked Lee what would be the continued impact on gold. "Gold tends to go up with a lot of uncertainty and concerns about the economy. People are worried about upheaval and are looking for something stable to preserve their wealth. In a successful rapidly growing economy, gold doesn't do much."

Many investors question what will happen to the price of gold if countries start backing their massive debt with it. At this, Ohanian suggests, "Gold prices would go higher." Yet he cautions, "It's hard to predict issues, because when some say that such issues were obvious, it is said generally after the fact."

A potentially troubled area is the Federal debt, according to Ohanian, "The publicly held debt is about 70 percent of the GDP. We have not had a situation like this in peace time in the history of the country. It's going to be a challenge to make progress, because Congress will need to come up with some combination of tax reforms and budget cuts to make this add up. It's a potential problem, but not an issue at this time because the government is able to borrow at incredibly low rates." He says that many countries, like China, are willing to buy U.S. treasuries and warns that "this can change overnight." One such example, according to Ohanian, is Greece, "They were borrowing at the same rates as the other European countries, and then in a short period of time, all that changed. So they started paying 15 percent a year."

If such a scenario becomes an issue, some major sectors of the economy would be considerably affected. So we asked Ohanian's advice on what individuals should do in order to sustain their wealth. "If people anticipate interest rates to rise, they don't want to hold a lot of fixed income assets. The higher the interest rates, the more individual wealth in fixed income assets will fall." It is important to identify individual tastes for risk and diversification in such conditions. "The finance, insurance, and real estate sector produce about ten percent of the country's GDP value," he explains. With growing competition, he thinks new ideas of creating wealth and helping individuals manage risks are of the utmost importance. The financial services industry "will maintain its relevance, but in a different manner."

These were the cautionary words from a man who casts aside shadows of economic uncertainty.

Lee Ohanian's grandmother fled Turkey and immigrated to the U.S. in 1918 after his grandfather made last minute efforts and smuggled his wife on board a ship headed to New York. She arrived to Ellis Island, leaving behind the land where her family's history dated back for more than 600 years. Lee's grandfather was able to join her years later, and the family eventually settled in California where his grandfather held a variety of agricultural jobs, including growing grapes in the Central Valley.

Lees interest in economics was sparked during an economics course in high school. Perhaps being the son of a psychologist has something to do with Ohanian's uncanny ability to identify economic crises and solve them makes him highly sought after.

Lee believes that the Unites States is the best place to maximize personal and economic freedom, and eventually, succeed. We have lost some ground and we need to get back on track. ■



Lebanon, Elections 2013

The upcoming 2013 parliamentary elections in Lebanon raise serious questions in the country and internationally. Civil unrest in the neighboring countries of the Middle East and outdated electoral laws make their outcome increasingly unpredictable. Considering the recent events in Syria, Armenians in the Diaspora are concerned about their compatriots in Lebanon. Yerevan met with Professor Arda Ekmekji, the only woman on the 2006 Boutros Commission for the drafting of a new electoral law and on the supervisory commission of the electoral campaign of the 2009 Lebanese elections.

Text **Lianna Zakharian** | Photo **Eugene Balayan and Gregor Emmian**

What was your involvement in the Boutros Commission?
In 2006 we were commissioned by the government to draft a new law. It included different types of people — lawyers, judiciary experts, constitutional professors and people from academia, colleges and universities. There were three representatives from academic circles and I was one of them. We worked for nine months on an electoral law that would be modern, fair and impartial. However, as soon as we finished it in June 2006, the war broke out in Lebanon in July.

Do you think the new electoral law will be implemented in the upcoming elections?
This electoral draft was put in the "lower drawers" and things became increasingly worse because of the internal situation. People who were going to ratify this law were the current parliamentarians. So these people could potentially be put out of power by the law they were supposed to ratify. Understandably, nobody wanted to do that, and they kept dragging it out, saying this law has problems: "It does not represent the Christians well, it does not represent the Muslims well." The problem is that the people who are voting on this law are looking at it not from the point of a political party or denomination, but as individuals: "Would I be elected, if this law was applied?" They would rather have the obsolete old law that they can manipulate. So unfortunately right now and until our next election in June 2013, we don't know what's going to take place.

"We don't know what's going to happen – Lebanon today is a region that is reacting to what is happening in Syria and neighboring countries. We might not even have elections."



Dr. Arda Ekmekji
Was born and raised in Jerusalem. Arda Arsenian Ekmekji is currently the Dean of Arts and Sciences at Haigazian University, Beirut, Lebanon. She holds a B.A. and an M.A. in Ancient History and Archaeology from the American University of Beirut, and a Doctorate in Archeology from the University of Paris I – Sorbonne. Active on the Lebanese national scene, she has served as the only woman on the Boutros Commission for the Drafting of a New Electoral Law (2006) and on the Supervisory Commission of the Electoral Campaign of the 2009 Lebanese Elections. Recently she translated and edited her grandfather Hagop Arsenian's memoirs, *Towards Golgotha* . She is married to Engineer Jacques Ekmekji and has one daughter, Karma.

What about the current electoral law? What changes were proposed by the commission?
The existing law is a patchwork assembled during an emergency meeting as a cease fire compromise. It was supposed to be in effect for a year, in 2009 only. That was the resurrected 1960 law, which was based on a majority-only system. What we are pushing now is a mixed system, which is based on a majority and proportioned representation of the smaller and larger constituencies. The age limit is another proposed amendment. Presently, voters must be at least 21 years old, but we are pushing it down to the age of 18. There are 18 different religious denominations in Lebanon. It is a country where political representations do not follow political affiliations, but are defined by religious affiliations. In Lebanon your birth, marriage, divorce, inheritance and death papers are processed through your religious denomination not through civic institutions. Religion becomes politics. If you are Armenian you have five deputies; if you are Maronite Christian you have a certain number of deputies. So religion manipulates the politics and the politics manipulate religion.

Women in Arab countries are increasingly losing their rights. How is the situation in Lebanon?
An important consideration is the women's quota in parliament — some people are against it. Women in Lebanon are very educated; however, we have only 21 percent women's participation in the parliament. So we are proposing for one or two terms, and not even in the parliament but at least on the electoral list, to have one or two women. Unfortunately the opposition is saying, "This is a democratic country, men and women are equal, and if she is qualified, let her be elected." They use this as a slogan, but the cultural reality is that a woman could never run a campaign independently because it is very expensive. In the past, we have had a number of very qualified women, but they were never elected. And there is a very sad saying, "You have to wear black to go to parliament." Which reflects reality — all the women in parliament wear black because they either replace a husband,

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Haigazian University in Beirut

brother or a son who died. It is really very degrading. We are in 96th place out of 212 countries for women's participation in a parliament. Countries that are behind us are countries that have no elections at all, like Libya, Saudi Arabia, etc. And it is very degrading for a country that has a higher percent of women in all our universities. For example, at Haigazian University where I work, 53 percent of the students are female; in other universities it's even higher, 80 percent. Women are good students — they study and work hard. They are getting into professional positions in business and finance. They are very competent. So it's a shame that they cannot participate in politics. Because of this situation, many women think that politics is a "dirty" business and don't want to get into it.

What is the mission of your current visit to the U.S.?

The goal is to present the law to the international community. A year ago last August, the Aspen Institute, a Washington think tank, in cooperation with the Lebanese Renaissance Foundation, invited me to write a paper on this new electoral law. I told them that I am not a political analyst, but they wanted fresh input from somebody who worked on it and had experience. When the article was finished, I had to come and present it to a panel. As I wrote the article, I was constantly changing it because every day something changed in the specifics of the law. It took me a lot of time because every two weeks I would read it and see that things had changed again, so I had to continue upgrading it. The presentation was on July 17, 2012, in Washington. It was a panel and a forum with other Lebanese and representatives from the National Democratic Institute(NDI), an organization that provides assistance to political leaders around the world and whose chairman is Madeleine Albright. In the past, they came and supervised our elections as observers.

> The existing law is a patchwork assembled during an emergency meeting as a cease fire compromise. It was supposed to be in effect for a year, in 2009 only.

What conclusions did you come to?

About 50 professionals from other universities participated in the very interesting roundtable panel. We discussed the new law, and of course the general concern was that in theory what we were proposing was correct, but in practice – we don't know what's going to happen. You see, Lebanon today is a region that is reacting to what is happening in Syria and neighboring countries. Some things are getting out of control, and some people think that



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Dr. Arda Ekmekji



Dr. Armenag Haigazian

Haigazian University is named in honor of the former headmaster of the Jenanian Apostolic Institute of Konya, Turkey. Dr. Haigazian was an educator who received his Ph.D. from Yale University and returned to Turkey to serve his Armenian compatriots. After the law for forced exile of the Armenians passed in the Ottoman Parliament, Dr. Haigazian had the opportunity to escape to the United States, but he chose to stay and continue his ministry. Later, he, along with all Armenian intellectuals, was rounded up to be driven to the Syrian desert. Dr. Haigazian died on the way in the prison of Kharpert in 1921. Concurrently, eight Armenian colleges were destroyed in Turkey. Although these realities of education and service were brought to an end, the dream continued in the minds of Dr. Haigazian's descendants and others. The Mehagian family (Mary Mehagian and Florence Mehagian-Guertmenian) of Phoenix, Arizona, relatives of Dr. Haigazian, donated capital through the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) and worked hand-in-hand with Stephen Philibosian to get Haigazian College started.

Haigazian University

On October 17, 1955, Haigazian University was established in Beirut, Lebanon by the joint endeavors of the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA) and the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East (UAECNE). The leadership at Haigazian believes that the free exchange of ideas among people from a multiplicity of ethnic and religious backgrounds is one of the best forms education can take. Haigazian University offers B.A., B.B.A., B.S., M.A. and M.B.A. degrees as well as a Teacher's Diploma.

we may not even have elections. Others are concerned, saying, "You are having elections in the Middle East, but look at the results you are getting. If you are going to get fanatics in power everywhere through democracy, that is also a concern."
The truth is – how you can control it? On one hand, you are saying that you want to have fair elections and you want the majority to vote, but on the other hand, when the majority is extremists, Muslim Brotherhood or other fundamentalists, then your democracy changes again to dictatorship. Now there is this artificial agreement in Lebanon that no matter what the statistics say, the parliament should be 50 percent Christian and 50 percent Muslim. Following this agreement, people don't have to count how many Christians or Muslims are in the country, they simply have 50-50 representation. In theory, it is perfect, but in practice sometimes the numbers do not reflect the reality when you can "go and vote" only. For example, I have 52 members of my family that live not in Lebanon, but in the U.S. If we won't allow citizens to participate in voting from abroad, the numbers will eventually change. Look how things changed in Egypt and Syria. There is this indecisiveness about leaving things as they are or moving on to something new.

What are the factors that affect present-day Lebanon?

Half of the people want to be left neutral and live their lives, but Lebanon is a country which has both land and sea borders. On one border is Israel, on the other border is Syria, and because of the events in Syria, we are almost closed off now; the only outlet is the Mediterranean Sea. The way it affects us now is that all the exports to Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia are mainly processed through the airport. For example, this past summer vegetables were very cheap in Lebanon because people couldn't export them, and if they didn't sell them, they would have to throw them out. This affects the economy, and once the economy is affected, people start going on strike, there is general unhappiness, and as a result there are various political manipulations. We have political parties who are against Syria and political parties who are pro-Syria. And Christians are very concerned, because if this situation changes, there might be a dictatorship like the one in Iraq. Armenians are concerned that they will lose their schools and other rights that they have now. Perhaps, they can repatriate to Armenia and change their nationality, but there are many people who want to stay where they are and they are just very concerned.

Your next book is about women in times of crisis. Can you tell us more about it?

In preparation for the book, I was reading a lot of memoirs about the systematic preparation for deportation of the Armenians in Turkey. The first thing that I discovered was that the men were arrested and imprisoned first. Who was left behind? The old people, children and women. In every story and book, there was a woman who saved people, to whom we owe our continuation. At this point I am gathering information about an extremely interesting breed, women pioneers of survival. ■

Figurative Mythology

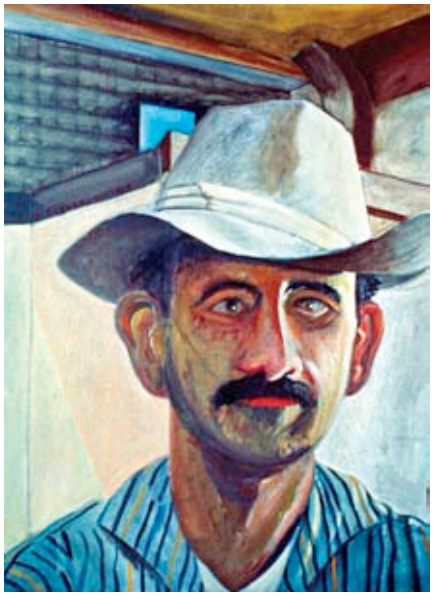


Tigran Tovmasyan

Scholars, historians, poets, artists and playwrights often utilize the universal and varied tradition of mythology to illustrate the components of human existence; this includes larger than life figures with extraordinary powers and enhanced features with heightened personality traits. Charles Garabedian, an artist of the human figure, constantly attempts to reinvent himself and hopes that each time he enters his studio he can enter as a different person, with a diverse perspective. As an artist, he creates his own mythological sensibility within an ordinary and humanistic persona.

Text **Nare Garibyan** | Photo **Tigran Tovmasyan; Courtesy of L.A. Louver Gallery**





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"Christ under the Cross", 1963
oil on canvas
83 3/4 x 70 1/2 inches

←
"Self-Portrait"
circa 1976
acyclic on canvas
24x18 inches

Bubbles rise to the surface as a swimmer exhales in the water enjoying a swim near a canoe-like boat. An ordinary scene, but Charles Garabedian has transformed the piece by adding his own mythological elements, portraying the swimmer as a grand figure within the soft ebb and flow of the water.

Garabedian's repertoire includes depictions of renowned Greek myths such as the story of Apollo and Daphne, a love that was thwarted by Cupid's arrow. Apollo, the god of music, prophecy, archery and light, was shot with the arrow of love; he fell in love with Daphne, a nymph. Apollo tried to profess his love to Daphne, but she rejected him and prayed to her father, the river god Peneus, asking for help. Apollo watched with shock and despair as Daphne transformed into a laurel tree. Apollo vowed to wear a laurel wreath in his hair in memory of his love, and the laurel became a symbol for Apollo. Charles Garabedian's piece titled "Apollo and Daphne" refreshingly captures this story.

The storytelling quality of Armenian manuscripts achieved by the correct placement of image and color connects Garabedian to his heritage; his paintings reflect this sensibility. In the nine-panel series "Prehistoric Figures," the human figure is

at the forefront, a type of iconography with careful placement of a bright blue sky, bodies in motion and a landscape that does not overshadow the composition. The genius behind this series is that Garabedian has taken the elements of Armenian manuscripts and created his own expression.

Chaz, as his friends call him, often traveled to Mexico with fellow artists to explore the vibrant culture away from the routine of academia. One of these extraordinary trips was captured in an extensive black and white film by Louis Lunetta, one of Chaz's friends from UCLA's Art Department. In 2012, the Pasadena Museum of California Art screened an excerpt from the film as the culminating event of the L.A. RAW: Abject Expressionism in Los Angeles, 1945-1980, From Rico Lebrun to Paul McCarthy exhibit. The selected scenes of the film feature Charles Garabedian running through the hustle and bustle of the Mexican marketplace, witnessing religious festivities in honor of





← "Prehistoric Figure"
1978-1980
acrylic on panel
40x30 inches

→ "Prehistoric Figure"
1978-1980
acrylic on panel
40x30 inches





↑ "Prehistoric Figures"
1978-1980, 40x30 inches
acrylic on panel



← "Prehistoric Figure"
1978-1980
acrylic on panel
40x30 inches

→ "Prehistoric Figure"
1978-1980
acrylic on panel
40x30 inches





Pasadena Museum of California Art

From January-May 2012, the Pasadena Museum of California Art (PMCA) hosted the L.A. RAW: Abject Expressionism in Los Angeles, 1945-1980, From Rico Lebrun to Paul McCarthy exhibition in L.A. Raw was part of the Getty Foundation's 2012 initiative Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980, aimed at introducing the postwar Los Angeles art heritage to the public across the city's various museums and art centers. Charles Garabedian was among the artists featured in the L.A. Raw exhibition, including two other Armenian artists, John Altoon and Jirayr Zorthian.

← "Five Figures in Landscape", 1983
acrylic on panel
36x96 inches

↓ "Apollo and Daphne"
2009
acrylic on panel
35 1/2 x 94 1/2 inches



"The painting is never finished. The painting finishes you, you don't finish the painting."

saints and exploring the Mayan and Aztec ruins. He is in search of an inanimate doll that seems to always escape his grasp. Chaz reminisces with nostalgia, "When entering Mexico, I got a sense of release and a feel for the pace of life." Garabedian was inspired by the impressive works of the great Mexican muralists such as Jose Clement Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who dared to portray the fervor of life among historical scenes of struggle and triumph.

Garabedian was born in 1923 in Detroit, Michigan. When he was two years old, his mother passed away. Soon after, his father was badly injured in an accident and could not take care of his young children. Charles and his two sisters lived in an orphanage until Charles was nine years old when the family reunited and headed to Los Angeles to a chicken ranch. As the Depression took hold of California, the Garabedian family venture failed. In this atmosphere of instability, Charles found his love in middle school—music. However, after serving in WWII in the United States Air Force, his focus shifted. He decided to take advantage of the G.I. Bill and began his collegiate path at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he completed his bachelor's degree in history. Years later, Garabedian met artist Ed Moses, who invited him to

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"Ulysses"
1984
acyclic on canvas
90 1/4 x 66 inches





↓
"Untitled (Self Portrait)", 2000
acrylic on paper
17 1/4 x 12 1/4 inches



↑
"Channel Swimmer", 2006
acrylic on paper, 48x121 1/4 inches

→
"September Song", 2001-2004
acrylic on canvas, 156x300 inches

→
"The Spring for Which I Longed", 2001-2003
acrylic on canvas
144x288 inches



a drawing class taught by surrealist painter and muralist Howard Warshaw, who had an extensive teaching career at UC Santa Barbara. After his encounter with Warshaw, Garabedian enrolled at the UCLA Art Department where he received his MFA in 1961. Upon graduation, he taught at UCLA and began to exhibit his work at the Ceeje Gallery in Los Angeles, the hub of figurative painters. The La Jolla Museum of Art, California State University, Northridge and the Whitney Museum of New York have showcased his paintings. Currently, LA Louver Gallery in Venice, California is his artistic home.

In 2011, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art presented Charles Garabedian: A Retrospective from January 22 through-May 1. According to the Santa Barbara Museum of Art press release, "This exhibition represents the first important museum presentation and catalogue in 28 years devoted to the art of Charles Garabedian. Bringing together approximately



Ceeje Gallery

Ceeje Gallery was a Southern California grass-root, avant-garde gallery led by Cecil Hendrick and Jerry Jerome, which was opened in 1959. The name of the gallery was created by combining Cecil's and Jerry's initials. Hendrick and Jerome both attended UCLA, in the Fine Arts and Theatre Arts Departments respectively. The Ceeje Gallery concentrated on showcasing the art of local artists, specifically figurative art that was passionate, thought-provoking and fresh. Many of the students completing their art education at UCLA gravitated towards the gallery and organized their debut solo exhibitions. The artists included Charles Garabedian, Louis Lunetta, Eduardo Carrillo, Les Biller and others.



"My line, my landscapes, and my figures reflect the collective unconscious," Charles Garabedian says.

60 works created by the artist, the exhibition represents his entire career with an emphasis on paintings and drawings produced during the years since his first (and last) major solo museum exhibitions in 1983."

Garabedian creates his art in a Los Angeles studio – a large white space adorned in paint drippings and works in progress taped to the walls. A long table in the middle of the room contains pencils and pieces of paper with bright ideas waiting to be painted. Two skylights pour down light onto a dusty blue sofa and metal scaffolding used to paint large pieces. His current exploration is the poetry of E.E. Cummings, who once wrote, "It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are." Garabedian personifies this statement as he has given himself the freedom to evolve as a person and become the artist he was destined to become, always in search of finding his authentic voice. ■



Don't Sip the Rosewater Until You See the...

Flowers have a taste. In fact, the most irresistibly beautiful and delicious dishes, the ones that come with pansies, daisies, rose petals and orchids, are easy to make and pleasing to the eye. I'm sipping my rosewater lemonade with floating rose petals as I speak to the owner of a boutique restaurant called Favorite Place. It has been named the best romantic restaurant in Glendale for several years in a row. I look up and see tea-cups on the ceiling. Sinatra-ish tunes add to the whole "this could become my favorite place" thought.

Text **Anush Hovsepyan** | Photo **Tigran Tovmasyan**



We continue our discussion on the simple pleasures of life, including eating. "We eat with our eyes first," says the owner of Favorite Place, Alissa Asmarian. "I love the idea of using edible flowers. That's why every food that comes out of this kitchen is dressed with edible flowers."

The rosewater lemonade and the petals in my drink are just the beginning. As an aesthete, I am intrigued to know how this pink refreshment is made. Alissa shares the story of this light beverage, "On a hot summer day I was sitting in the restaurant and felt like having lemonade. So, I made it out of rose petal preserve and fresh lemons, just like my grandmother used to do it, and then garnished it with rose petals, adding a final touch. I was happily sipping it in the far corner of the room, when one of my customers asked, 'And what are you having?' 'It's an old Armenian traditional summer drink my grandma used to make. Would you like to try it?' I brought her a glass. She loved it and insisted we put it on the menu. We've been serving the rosewater lemonade ever since. It has become one of our signature drinks for the last 10 years."

Rose petals in rosewater lemonade seem very natural. But if roses are so great, I wonder whether there are perhaps some other flowers that taste as good or even better. We all know which ones smell great, but which flowers are the most delicious? I like beauty and I like good food. Maybe I should garnish my dinner today? My thoughts stray away and I decide to make dinner with flowers tonight.





I just need to find out more from Alissa. "Some flowers have a peppery taste. Marigolds taste like pepper. No wonder Hindus use marigolds for their weddings and eat them too. We eat basil and mint. It's the same concept with flowers," she says, giving me a list of edible flowers: pansies, daisies, rose petals, snapdragons and orchids. "But they have to be grown a certain way – no pesticides, no chemicals. So, you shouldn't go to the florist and try to buy flowers to eat them with your food," she smiles. She explains that even the tasteless ones go well with mixed greens, and with a touch of sea salt, olive oil, vinegar and garlic.

So my all-flowers dinner plan doesn't seem feasible, at least not tonight. At that moment, my chicken salad with mixed greens and beautiful flowers arrives at my table. She comments, "Pansies mix really well with the greens. My favorites are pansies, even though they are seasonal. They look beautiful. They are fragile and they are the most delicious. You top off your salad with pansies, and you get beauty and taste at the same time."

Pansies are beautiful, but little did I know they were delicious too.

I ask if people find it strange having flowers in their meal. Alissa is laughing.

"Sometimes people even try to eat the decorative flowers from the vases on tables. That's when I usually intervene."

If the saying "We are what we eat" is true, then I too should become as beautiful, delicate and exquisite as the flowers I enjoyed eating here. ■



Inhaling

He comes out of the mountain, rather immerses in the mountain, deep inside of it. Into its womb. He is the Mountain. His first name is Ayrivank: monastery in a cave. Further ahead, there is Geghard with the legend of the "spear." The story tells that the Apostle Thaddeus brought the spear of Longinus to the monastery. This was the very spear that pierced Jesus on the cross. The spear is in Echmiadzin now, but the memory of it is here eternally.

Text **Anna Lorents** | Photo **Hayk Melkonyan**



First stop – at the Arch of Charents. To step on the layer of snowflakes sparkling in the dazzling sunlight is a true blasphemy, but we must go. Standing under the arch, one can spend hours watching Ararat, which does not appear to rise up from the ground but is landing down from the sky. Blades of white light on transparent blue. Today the mountain appears happy and generous. And the body completely dissolves in the sea of sun, losing its ability to reserve emotions which fly up to its majestic summit.

***

The waters of the Azat River bank froze, shaping a waterfall monument. She was caught off guard before she could let her diva tranquility appear in front of the cameras. Suddenly, what had been hidden behind the flirty murmur of the waters was revealed. It was obvious how the stones of this canyon were smoothed. Here is the turn to Geghard. My eyes are mesmerized by the domes and how the snow melts over them in a straight and absolute symmetry, on the body of the sloppily falling mountain. This isn't on the top, but in the arms and on the chest.

↓
View of Ararat from Charents Arch



***

Stepping through the gate, I realize how long I have not been here. How I have deprived myself! Once, many centuries ago, there was just a spring here in the cave. The water had healing qualities. Pilgrims came to this place – at first only the pagans, later Christians. The women came more often because it was said that the waters of the spring healed infertility. It was at this very spot that Gregory the Illuminator founded a monastery in the fourth century.

***

The walls of Geghard preserve the name of just one of the creators of this underground masterpiece, architect Galdzag. However, history, which follows its own mysterious ways, has handed down to us the name of Herostratus of Geghard – the Vice Regent of the Arabian caliph in Armenia, Nasr. In 923, he burned the monastery down to ashes. Nothing was left from that first structure except the eyewitness accounts of the historians. The word has outlasted the rocks.

↓ Lioness - the symbol of the Proshyan dynasty of princes. The sculpture is installed at the entrance to Geghard



The waters of the Azat River bank froze, shaping a waterfall monument. She was caught off guard before she could let her diva tranquility appear in front of the cameras. Suddenly, what had been hidden behind the flirty murmur of the waters was revealed.



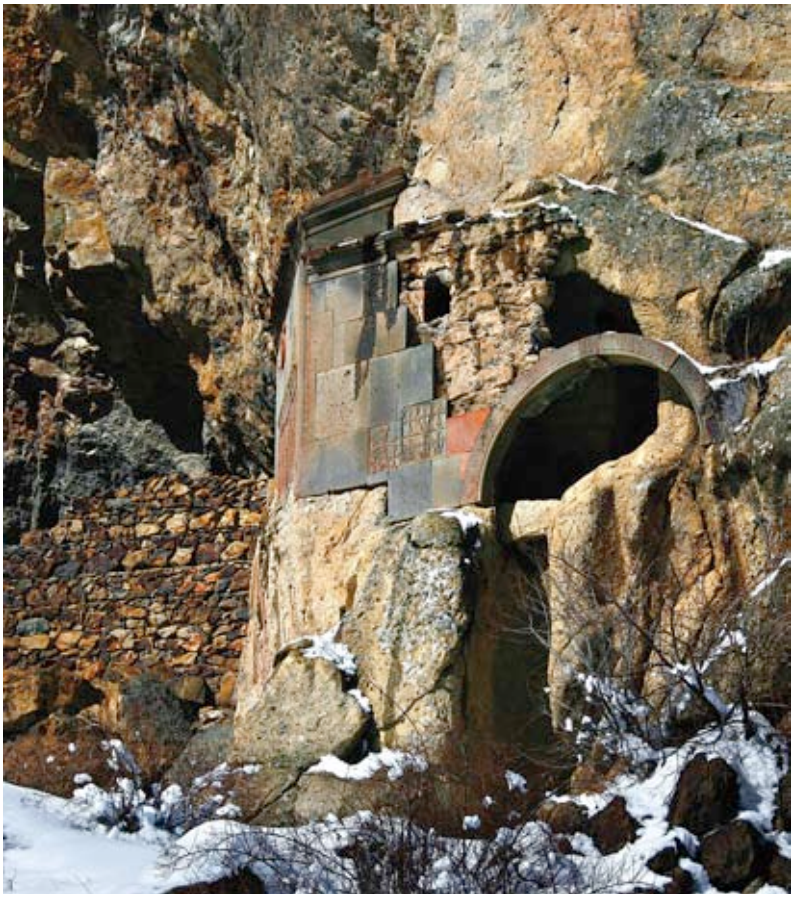
***

The monastery that we see today was built starting in the 12th century. Initially in 1177, St. Gregory the Illuminator Chapel was constructed. But later it remained outside the monastery walls and continued a life of its own. Next, the main church, Katoghike, was built. You step into these walls cautiously, each step echoing off the walls. The fine acoustics makes you sing, not loudly or shouting or anything like that. So I too, could not resist the temptation to sing a couple of notes. Fortunately, my singing did not disturb anyone's sensitive ears – I was alone in the church. Next, you have to turn left, to Avazan Church, (which is translated as pond or pool). The creek is gently gurgling. My knees are pulled down to the ground and my lips kiss the icy water. The live and viviparous water. ▸

↑ Unlike most Armenian churches, Geghard is not on top of the mountain, but in the canyon

↓
Entrance to the rock cells





↑
Rock Church Sourb Grigor Lusavorich (St. Gregory the Illuminator)

***

I am climbing up the stairs at the speed of my shortness of breath. There is a door in the rocks. On the walls of the corridor is a gallery of cross-stones. More precisely, cross-rocks. These are not separate stones, but crosses carved right into the rocks.

I am going further underneath the arch. My conscience tries to maintain my perception of space. The horseshoe-shaped altar is in harmony with the arch of the front wall. The transition creates the visual effect of upward movement. I cling to superficial thoughts, but they inevitably sink further into the depths. These walls are not lined up but inserted into the inner shell of the cave. It's essentially a sculpture. This was all that was left when the unnecessary parts were removed, bit by bit, by the handful.

The creator of these bás-reliefs could not afford to make a single mistake. He could not replace or undo if something went wrong; instead he had to be precise from his very first attempt. Day after day and year after year, the carver moved on firmly without timidity, without doubt.

Almost all of these underground masterpieces were built after the monastery was purchased by the clan of the Proshyan Princes. A huge bás-relief with lions chained to the massive head of a bull was their coat of arms. Like a huge seal, it manifests their pride on the monastery wall.

***

There are many independent chapels where several services can be conducted simultaneously. They are the reason why the place was once called the Monastery of Seven Churches or the Monastery of Forty Altars. Why so? According to one practical theory, wealthy parishioners wanted to have the temple as their permanent place of worship and were willing to pay for it. How many more Geghards yet need to be built, how many more crosses erected on the domes to overcome human pride? At least they should not let them build monuments in the temple, not even as magnificent as this one. ▸

According to one practical theory, the wealthy parishioners wanted to have the temple as their permanent place of worship and were willing to pay for it. How many Geghards yet need to be built, how many crosses erected on the domes to overcome the pride in humans?





←
The gallery of cross-stones at the entrance of Prince Palak's and his wife Ruzunan's tomb



←
The family coat of arms of the Proshyan Princes in the family tomb

↓
The creek of the holy water in the Avazan Church



***

My fingers reach for the wall, as if trying to feel the line of destiny, united with many finger prints left at different times by other fingers. Creators, curators, the sufferers. Perhaps, there is some sort of vital need to be close to them. To feel close to the architect Galdzak, the brothers Zachare and Ivane who built the main Katoghike Church in 1215, the Prince Prosh, who rests at one of the chapels of the cave. I want to relate to the Armenian historian Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi who lived in one of these cave cells in the 12th century. He was the head of not only the graduate school of Ayrivank, but took care of all the religious and cultural centers of his time, including the famous Gladzor in Tanahat. And the thousands and thousands of people who were praying and praising the Lord like me.

My fingers reach for the wall, as if trying to feel the line of destiny, united with the many finger prints left at different times by the fingers of others. Creators, curators, sufferers. Perhaps there is some sort of vital need to be close to them.



↑ The steps leading to the cave cells

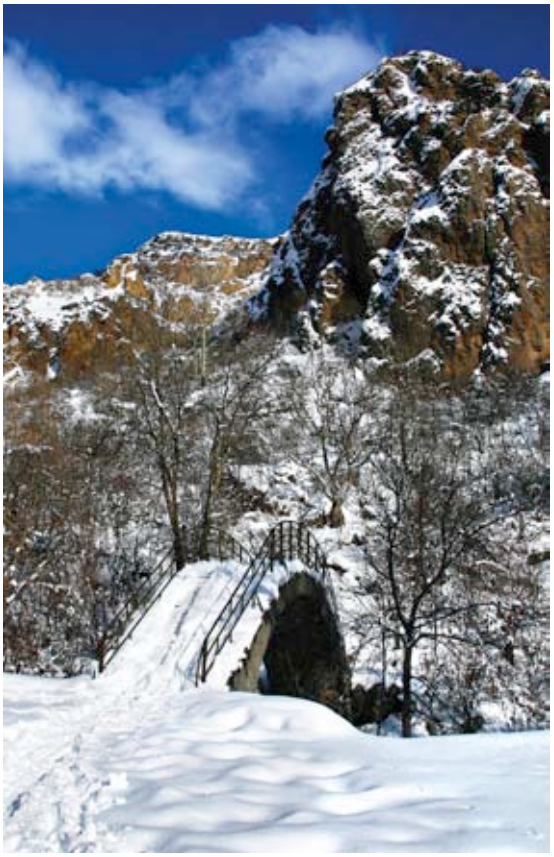
***

In his *Lessons of Armenia*, Russian author Andrei Bitov wrote that the man who created Geghard challenged God. You think? I wonder: what am I doing right now, am I afraid to use someone else's ideas, or to express my own thoughts? I feel shy to name what was erected in honor of, but created in spite of...what should I call it? There is something very disturbing happening inside me, as if I am about to understand something that was not meant to be understood. Perhaps something I have been born for.

***

I throw a look over my shoulder. The look of a thief that took from the monastery everything there was and carried it with him – a bit frightened with the loot, uncertain what to do with it. Yet Geghard stands on its white pedestal. Not on the top, but on the chest. On an inhale. And only those who are seeking it, will be able to find it. ■

↓ The bridge over the Azat River that leads to the cave where, according to legend, St. Gregory lived



Medical Science

Medical science was firmly rooted in Arab culture well before the Middle Ages. The Byzantine Empire, the predecessor of the Ottoman Empire, is noted as the first empire to establish institutions that resemble what we today call hospitals. Medicine was respected as a science in the Ottoman Empire, and medical students, including Armenians, received their education either at the Imperial Civil Medical School or the Imperial Military Medical School in Constantinople. However, Ottoman Armenians also attended medical schools in Beirut, Europe, and the United States. With limited information about the details in both of these medical photographs, we have used styles and details of clothing as clues for identifying professions.

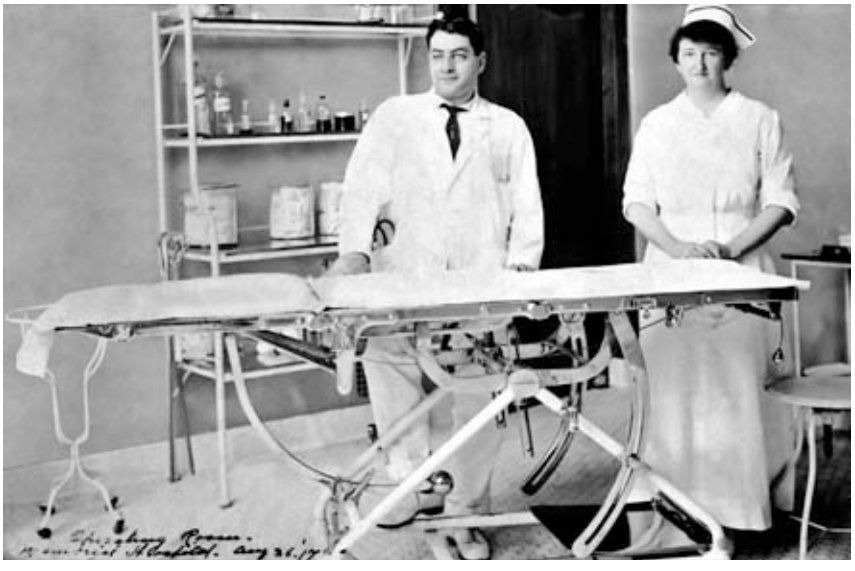
Photos and text provided **Ruth Thomasian from Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives**



Elizabeth Mooradian Grooms 1-06, Xenia, Ohio

Doctors and Pharmacists in Sepastia

As stated in Armenian across the medicine shelves, the National Hospital was established in 1889. It provided free treatment for the poor. For reasons of lighting, the unidentified photographer positioned nine hospital staff members and three patients outside, carefully camouflaging both the ground and building exterior with artfully draped oriental rugs and fabrics. The photographer also arranged hospital props: medicine bottles and jars lined up perfectly on the shelves, along with surgical instruments, and tools of the hospital's pharmacy, like mortar and pestle, and weights and measures on the worktable. With no confirming documentation, it is thought that the three men (one seated left taking a pulse, and two standing in back) wearing dark European-style three-piece tailored suits, are probably doctors, and the men in white are possibly pharmacists.



Marie Alberian 9-90, Weehawken, New Jersey

Following in Father's Footsteps

Dr. Hagop "Jacob" Hekimian, a resident in general surgery, posed in the almost all white environment of the operating room at Memorial Hospital, Pawtucket, Rhode Island, August 26, 1917. Dr. Hekimian's name indicates his profession. In Turkish, hekim means "doctor." Back in Aintab, his father was the beloved Hekim Hagop jan, the honorable doctor who ministered to all in the community regardless of ethnicity or ability to pay. His life-saving medical services were so valued that Turkish officials protected him and his family during the Genocide. His son Hagop, Jr., after graduating from Aintab College, decided to follow his father's profession elsewhere. In 1910 he arrived in the U.S. and began his medical education in Boston. After his residency in Rhode Island, he practiced medicine in New Jersey.

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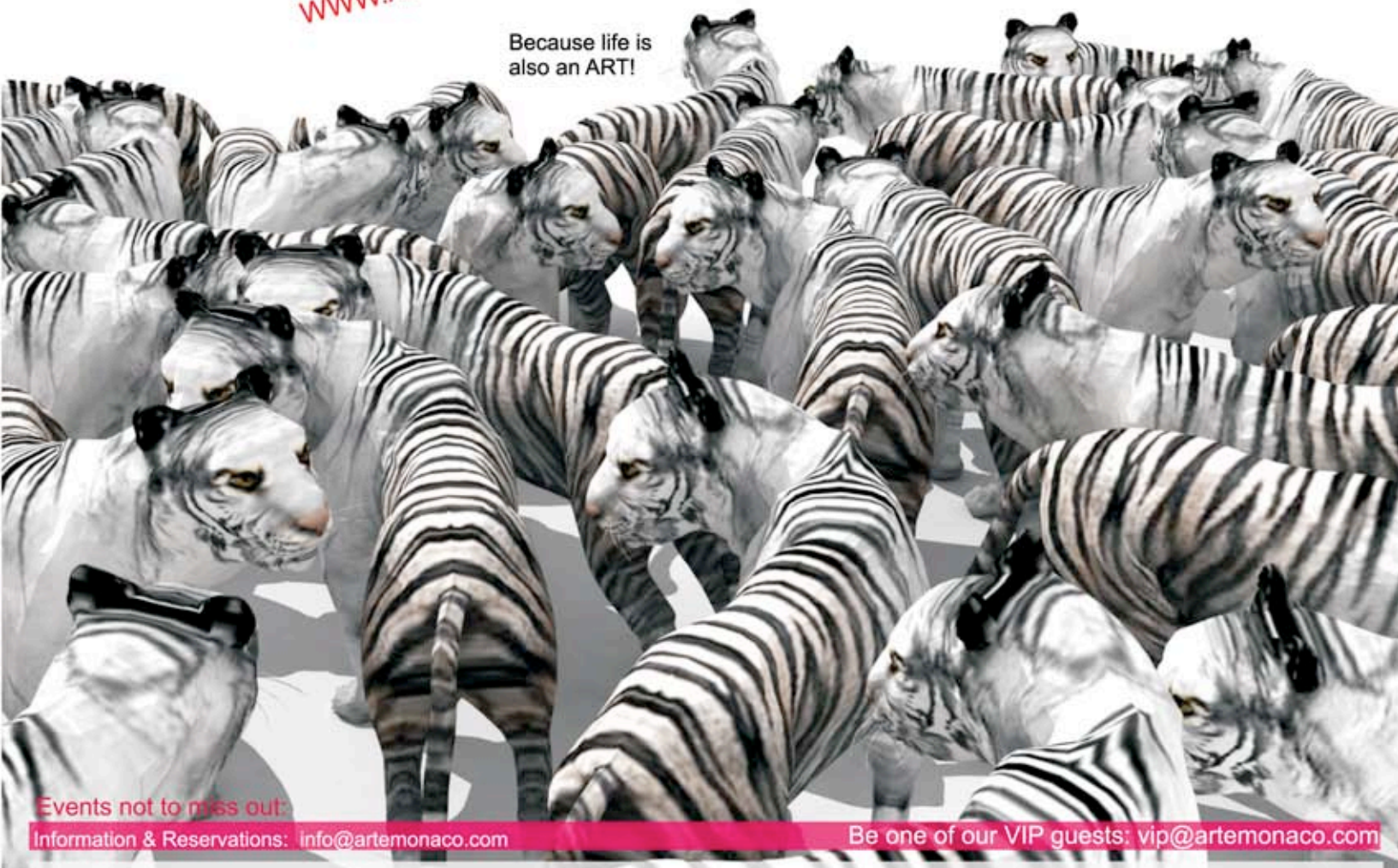
Image courtesy of Blue Baum Gallery - Korea
Artist: Jeong, young-hoon



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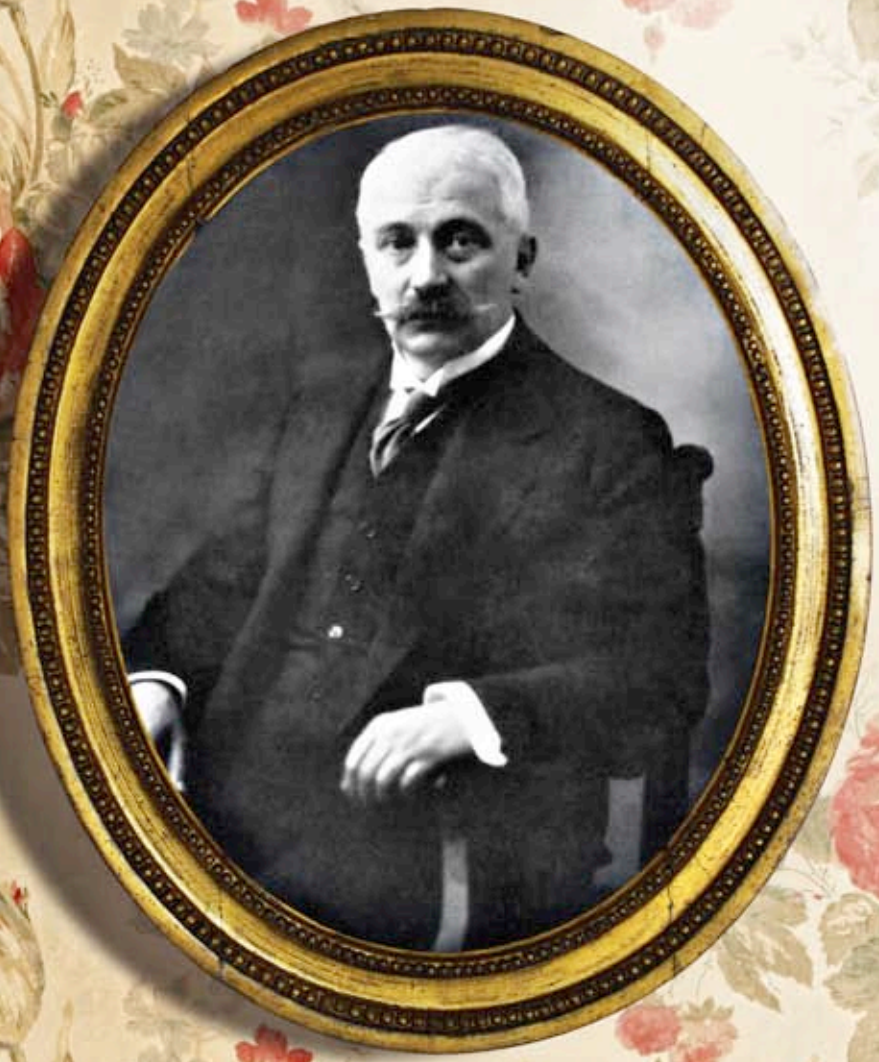
Solar Stories from Italy



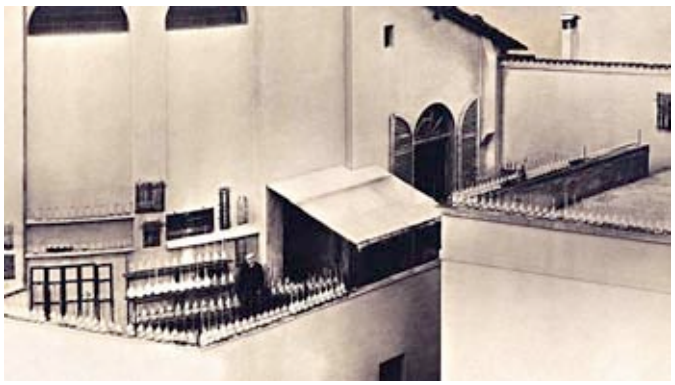
How many people are nine-time nominees for the Nobel Prize and have a department named after them at an Italian University? There is only one such remarkable man – Giacomo Luigi Ciamician, professor at the University of Bologna, a father of solar energy, and a pioneer of modern photochemistry whose discoveries in physical and theoretical chemistry have revolutionized science. A genius ahead of his time, Ciamician, a university professor for 33 years, also served as a member of the Italian senate. His advancements in organic chemistry are still studied today, and if human kind had taken Ciamican's prophecies more seriously, who knows – perhaps our current climate crisis would not be an issue.

Text **Lilit Barsegyan**



Courtesy of Ned D. Heindel

Transitioning from junior high to high school, I began enjoying science classes mostly due to the fact that the teachers were no longer playing VHS tapes of Bill Nye the Science Guy. However, my joy lasted half a semester; Nye's quirky antics were swiftly replaced by stale study materials that were both tortuous and dreary. So, quite understandably, as I began my research on Giacomo Luigi Ciamician, phrases like "the intramolecular photochemical disproportionation of *o*-nitrobenzaldehdye," overwhelmed me, resulting in horrible flashbacks and setting me into panic mode. I felt like a mad scientist on the verge of a breakdown. What article of mine would do him justice? But fortunately, I was saved from destroying his story when I found Dr. Kauffman, a retired professor from Fresno who kindly agreed to assist me, involving in this task his colleague in Italy, Dr. Giorgio Nebbia, also a retired professor. Dr. George Kauffman obviously had an extensive knowledge of subject matters related to Armenia and Armenians, and the fact that he resides in Fresno with its large Armenian community hardly seemed sufficient to explain it. I could not resist and asked the reason for his interest. "My wife was married to an Armenian, and we have three children who are half-Armenian. As a Jew, I can certainly empathize with Armenians, whose own Genocide preceded the Jewish holocaust," he explained. However, referring me to his Italian friend, Dr. Giorgio Nebbia, Dr. Kauffman suggested: "In cases where Giorgio's facts about Ciamician differ from mine, please use his. After all, he's an 87-year old distinguished scholar, while I'm only an 82-year old junior colleague." To my delight, I soon discovered that both



Courtesy of Margherita Venturi

↑ Giacomo Ciamician (left) and Riccardo Ciusa (right) during a lecture demonstration, 1908.

← Ciamician surveying his collection of tubes and flasks exposed to the sun on the roof of his laboratory.

Over a century ago, Giacomo Luigi Ciamician by the means of politics tried to raise awareness toward the possibility of using effective, clean, peaceful and safe solar energy.

professors possess a keen sense of humor. Nebbia jokingly refers to himself as the academic grandson of Ciamician. "When I was young, I was the assistant of mature professors that had been, in turn, assistants or students of Ciamician." And thus, due to the generosity of these two extremely intellectual gentlemen, my faith was restored, and I no longer feared I would cause destruction while sharing the life and career of Ciamician. Ciamician's origins trace back to an Armenian church in Venice, Italy. Ciamician and his family were connected to the Isle of Saint Lazarus not far from the entrance to the Grand Canal in Venice. Originally, the island was a leper colony which was founded in the 12th century. This explains its name, St. Lazarus, who was the patron saint of lepers. Centuries later, the island was abandoned, and in 1717 it was given by the Venetian state to the Armenian Mechitarist Order. Having ties with one of the monks, around 1850 the Ciamician family moved from Istanbul to Trieste, where there was a thriving Armenian community. Giacommo Ciamician was born in 1857 in Trieste, which was then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1874 at the age of 17, Giacomo Luigi began his professional journey, first as a chemistry student studying abroad, later in 1880 receiving a Ph.D., and eventually returning to Italy where he was appointed as an assistant to a prominent chemist. ▸

His initial salary was low, but the experience he gained was tremendous. In 1887, Ciamician became a professor at the University of Padua, and eventually in 1889 he assumed the position of professor at the University of Bologna, where he remained for the rest of his life.

I envision Ciamician as the Leonardo Da Vinci of chemistry – a true renaissance man. Yet, Dr. Kauffman's comparison seems more accurate. "He was a prophet like John the Baptist, who was preaching in the wilderness. The words of his century-old lecture are equally true today. His advice was unheeded a century ago and from all that I observe today, I fear that it will be ignored once again," Kauffman explained, referring to a lecture titled The Photochemistry of the Future, which Ciamician delivered in New York in 1912.

In his famous lecture Ciamician stated, "The photochemistry of the future should not however be postponed to such distant times; I believe that industry will do well in using from this very day all the energies that nature puts at its disposal. So far, human civilization has made use almost exclusively of fossil solar energy. Would it not be advantageous to make better use of radiant energy?"

Sadly, Ciamician's vision is still waiting for wider recognition among the higher echelons of power. Except at this time, his ideas resonate with billions of ordinary people around the world. Coincidentally, on November 14th, as I was researching and writing this article, former Vice President Al Gore was running a live broadcast on the Internet – 24 Hours of Reality: The Dirty Weather Report. With Gore as the chairman, the event featured experts from all over the world who participate in the Climate Reality Project dedicated to raising a global cultural movement and demanding actions from the world governments to reverse the causes of the climate crisis. It continues the efforts and the theme of Gore's 2006 Academy Award-winning documentary, An Inconvenient Truth. Millions of people, including myself, signed a pledge for the Climate Reality Project. Millions more joined the movement as a result of the Concerts for a Climate in Crisis – another campaign launched by Al Gore featuring more than 150 artists who performed in the course of a 24-hour-long concert.

So why aren't the governments taking this matters more seriously? How many more Hurricane Katrinas and Sandys will this and other nations endure before major policy shifts take place? The sad truth is that it may take longer than it should, longer than the time left, until the climate on this planet reaches the point of no return. At the end of the day, it's all about politics and human greed. Why did it take the scientists so long – over a century – to reach at least the current level in the development of solar energy technologies? As Kaufman and Nebbia stated, there was an entire community of scientists who were working in that direction. "The English economist and logician (William) Stanley Jevons (1835–1882) suggested – several years before Ciamician – that the English coal mines would one day be exhausted. At the same time, in 1899 future (1903) Nobel chemistry laureate, Svante August Arrhenius (1859–1927), a Swedish forerunner of today's environmentalists, suggested that the increase in the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide caused by the combustion of fossil fuels could cause an increase in the earth's temperature. The use of solar heat to produce electricity with thermoelectric devices had also been advocated by Antonio Pacinotti (1841–1912), Professor of Physics at the Università di Pisa."

The fact is that in spite of government subsidies, solar panels are still rather expensive. In addition, oil companies and other proponents of fossil fuels openly or



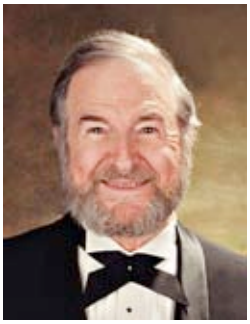
↑ Prophet of Solar Energy, Giacomo Luigi Ciamician (1857–1922)

↓ Commemorative plaque at the entrance of the Institute of Chemistry





↑ The building of the Institute of Chemistry "Giacomo Ciamician," completed at the end of the 1920s was built by architect Edward Collamarini Bologna, taking into account the technical requirements set out by Ciamician.



Dr. George Kauffman
Dr. George Kauffman is a professor emeritus of Chemistry at California State University, Fresno. He has written over 17 books and over 2,400 articles and reviews. Kauffman and his wife Laurie have three children: Robert, 60; Teresa, 58; and Mary Papazian, 55.

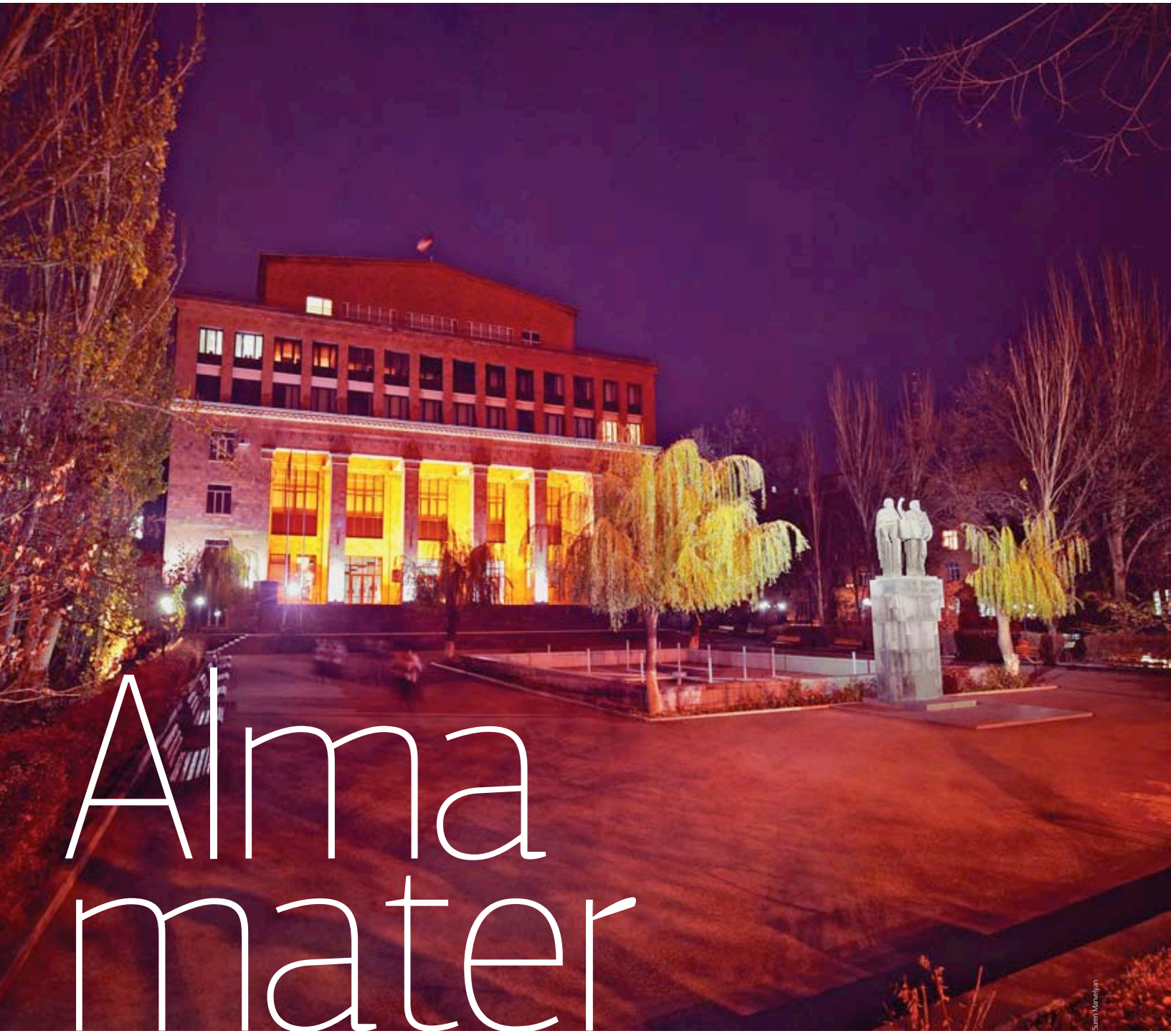


Dr. Giorgio Nebbia
Dr. Giorgio Nebbia is a professor emeritus at the University of Bari in Italy. He taught a subject dealing with chemistry applied to commodities and agricultural and industrial production.

covertly oppose the implementation of solar and other alternative energy source technologies, such as the energy of wind. Like Al Gore currently, by the means of politics, Ciamician tried to raise awareness toward the possibility of using effective, clean, peaceful and safe solar energy. In 1910, he was named as a member of the Italian senate. At the time, members of the senate in Italy were not elected, but were appointed by the King. An active participant in international conferences, Ciamician promoted science and participated in policy-making decisions on various issues regarding public education.
Nine times he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. And yet it was not surprising that he never won. Is a true genius ever appreciated in his lifetime? The actual winners included scientists with discoveries pertaining to chemical elements and organic compounds. Ciamician's theories were far too advanced for the general public to identify with. But that's not the only reason. Government officials and other members of the committee found more interest in inventions related to nuclear energy. Even in 1921, the last year Ciamician was nominated for the Nobel Prize, Frederick Soddy was awarded instead "for his contributions to our knowledge of the chemistry of radioactive substances and his investigations into the origin and nature of isotopes." Because creating weapons of mass destruction is more important than preventing global warming, right? Ciamician did, however, receive several academic honors, such as the Prize of the Royal Academy of Lincei, and was a member of nearly all the Italian academies as well as a foreign member of the scientific academies of France, Prussia, Bavaria, Sweden and an honorary member of the American Chemical

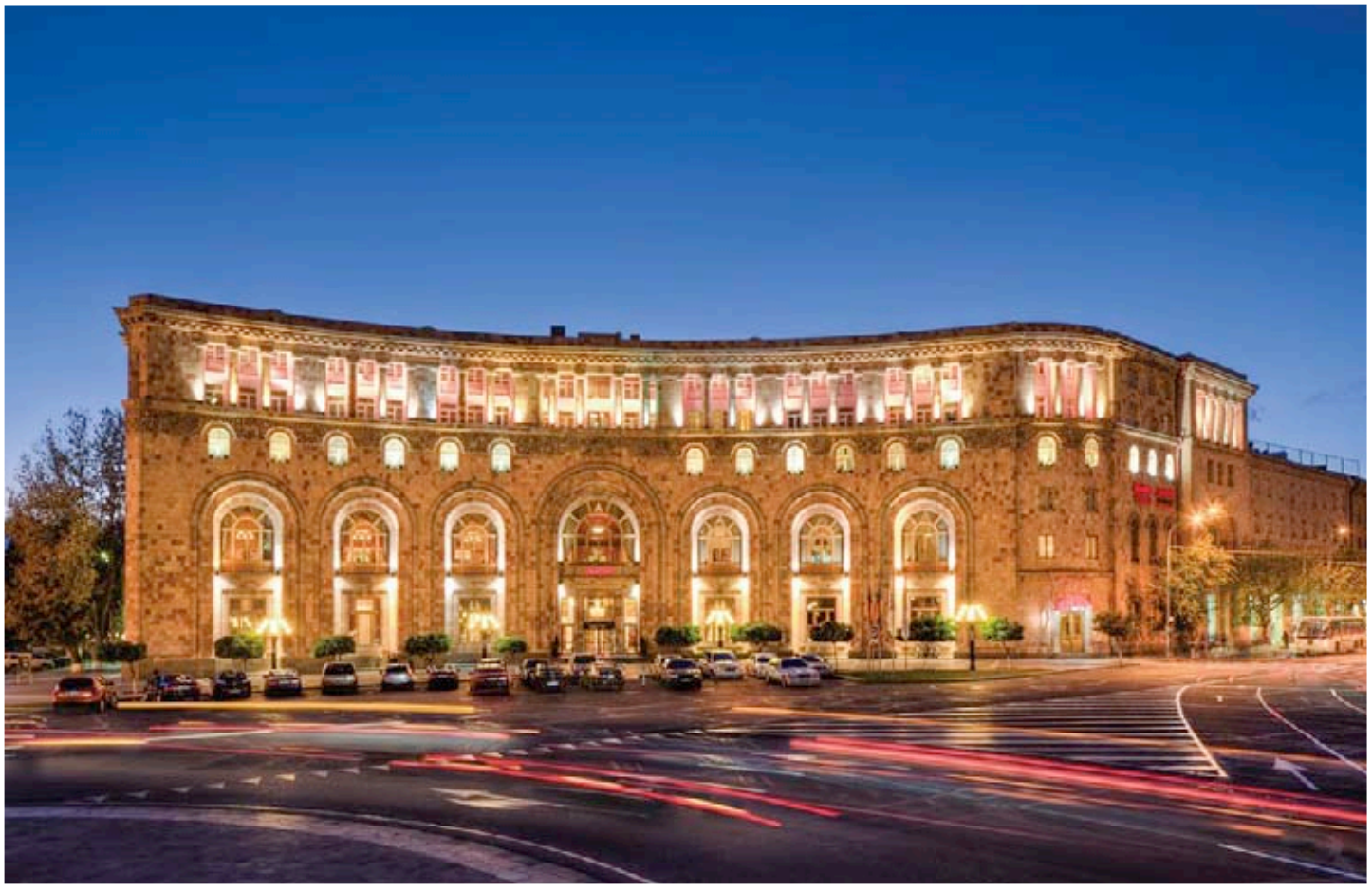
So far, human civilization has made use almost exclusively of fossil solar energy. Would it not be advantageous to make better use of radiant energy?"

Society and the Chemical Societies of France, Germany and London.
I couldn't fathom how Ciamician's political involvement didn't hinder his career as a professor who dedicated his life to teaching. But Professor Nebbia explained that it is not uncommon for a professor to be elected by a constituency. "I myself, when I was in my sixties, served one term in the House and one term in the Senate and afterwards returned to my teaching duties until my retirement. I must say that it is possible, and the terms of service in the House enrich a teacher in many aspects of the civil life, later allowing him to transfer this experience to better teaching."
In an article entitled "Prophet of Solar Energy: A Retrospective View of Giacomo Luigi Ciamician (1857–1922), the Founder of Green Chemistry, on the 150th Anniversary of His Birth," Nebbia and Kauffman state, "Ciamician was a captivating lecturer, as described by American chemist and later President of the American Chemical Society, William McPherson, who attended one of his lectures in 1913: "These lectures were ideal – exceedingly clear and logical. They were illustrated with numerous experiments skillfully performed. For an hour and a half (the length of the lecture period) he poured his whole energy into this subject. At the end of his lecture he was received by an assistant with a heavy wrap – much as our modern football players who retire exhausted from the game."
Ciamician wrote about 400 papers covering various fields in chemistry, and if he wasn't in the laboratory, he was found on the balconies of the Institute, where most of his experiments were conducted. In 1921, Ciamician suffered from a fever due to exhaustion from his labors in Italy during the war and was advised by his students and friends to take a break. Nevertheless, he decided to continue his lectures but died shortly after in 1922. Ciamician was not only a brilliant scientist, but an inspirational teacher and mentor to other scientists, many of whom became significant leading figures in Italian universities. Scientists today continue to study the great works of Ciamician, and it is time that his name received greater recognition for the visionary work for which he did not receive the politicized Nobel Prize. One can only imagine what direction world history would have taken if human greed had been replaced by world peace. Perhaps, if Ciamician's vision had become a reality and had his scientific work received the recognition it should have, we would be fighting fewer wars nor would the environment fall victim to climate disasters. ■



Alma mater

Yerevan State University, the alma mater of Armenia, was founded on May 16, 1919. With a faculty that includes 25 academicians, 130 professors, 700 associate professors and 360 assistant lecturers who educate over 10,000 students, it is the largest university in the country. Initially, it was called the Yerevan Popular University and consisted of two departments – Physical Sciences and Social Sciences. Later in the 1920s, the Departments of Agriculture, Middle East and Technology were added. In the 1930s, the Polytechnic, Medical, Cooperative and Pedagogical Institutes branched out into separate institutes in Yerevan largely comprised of YSU faculty and facilities. Today the language of instruction is Armenian but instruction in Russian and English for foreign students is arranged on a needs basis. This leading independent educational institution of the Republic of Armenia partners with many of the prestigious universities worldwide to maintain its competitive edge in providing contemporary academic curriculum.



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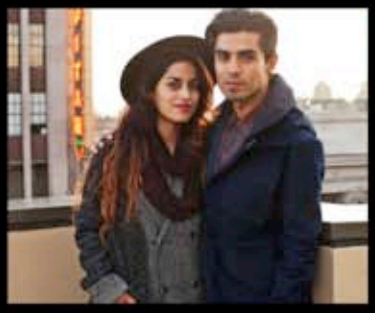




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