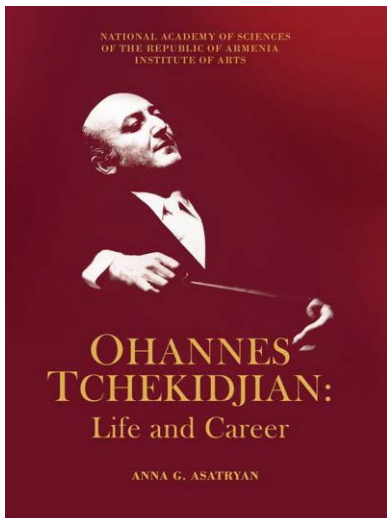


**ANNA G. ASATRYAN**, Ohannes Tchekidjian: Life and Career, Executive Editor  
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## A POWERFUL AND INFLUENTIAL PANEGYRIC BOOK DEDICATED TO THE NATIONAL HERO

“My whole life will not suffice to apprehend Komitas.  
Some think Komitas can be interpreted.  
Sounds ridiculous.  
Komitas is my biggest affection”.  
Ohannes Tchekidjian



On some occasion the great educator Khachatur Abovyan acknowledged that Armenians are to blame for their inability to present to the world their notables of global significance. Doctor of Arts, professor, director of NAS RA Institute of Arts Anna Asatryan has made Abovyan’s dream come true. She wrote and published an extensive and insightful monograph in the English language, entitled “Ohannes Tchekidjian: Life and Career”. The book is a result of many years of hard work. The reader is introduced to the charismatic and attractive portrait of the legend of Armenian choral art, who embodies the best features of his own people.

I cannot imagine an Armenian who would not worship genius Komitas. And here is the genuine follower of his cause – Tchekidjian, who had heard about Komitas back in his early childhood. His father sang in Komitas’ choir and, what is more, Komitas stayed in his parental house for a fortnight, during which time he amazed everyone with his humbleness and lack of pretension.

A tremendous amount of primary sources, reflecting the Maestro’s life and career, all the available materials both from the Armenian and foreign media, opinions of eminent, world famous people and an observation of an Armenian journalist have been collected and systematized.

Tchekidjian’s biography abounds with facts, and at times – quite astonishing ones. Thus, we learn that he could not speak until he was five, but he sang so well that the passers-by stood in amazement and fascination on hearing a child’s voice coming out of the open window. Curiously enough, another Armenian genius, the American painter Arshile Gorky could not speak until he was six.

Tchekidjian gave concerts in 184 cities of the former Soviet Union, toured in Lebanon, France, Spain, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Great Britain, USA, Greece, Syria, Switzerland, Turkey, Australia, Argentina and elsewhere.

As a conductor, he directed 69 renowned symphony orchestras, such as the USSR Academic Symphony Orchestra, the State Academic Bolshoi Theater Orchestra, the Moscow Philharmonic, the leading orchestras of Budapest, Wroclaw and other cities.

He took Armenian music to the big wide world. Along with the pieces by classical Armenian composers Dikran Tchouhadjian, Komitas, Makar Yekmalyan, Armen Tigranyan, Alexander Spendaryan, Aram Khachaturyan, his repertoire included music by his contemporaries Arno Babajanyan, Alexander Harutyunyan, Edward Mirzoyan, Edgar Hovhannisyan, Grigor Hakhinyan, Aram Satyan, Konstantin Petrosyan, Ashot Babayan. Tchekidjian's concert programs embraced pieces by Armenian composers of Diaspora Barsegh Kanachyan, Alan Hovhannes, Hambarzum Berberyan, Gurgen Alemshah and others.

Tchekidjian gave 868 concerts abroad, of which 43 in France, and 97 in Leningrad.

France is famous for its genius composers, while Leningrad is known as the most musical city of Russia, which fame did not fade even during the years of blockade in the Great Patriotic War. Thanks to Tchekidjian, intellectual music lovers of Leningrad became Komitas admirers. Generally speaking, throughout the USSR, widespread was the view about Tchekidjian's Capella, expressed by Aram Khachaturyan, which read: "Tchekidjian's amazing improvisations are an absolute delight. In Moscow and elsewhere, the Tchekidjian Capella is reputed as one of the best Soviet choral groups. I feel happy at the victorious march of that powerful singing body across the world's most famous concert halls" (p. 48). The book underscores the part Tchekidjian had in the development of music art in and outside of the Soviet Union.

From Anna Asatryan's book we learn that Tchekidjian was born in Istanbul, or Constantinople, the glorious capital of the Byzantine Empire, which in the VI century, in the days of Emperor Justinian, experienced cultural upsurge. A masterpiece of Christian architecture, the Temple of Hagia Sophia was erected, whose cupola in the X century was renovated by Tiridates, the chief architect of Ani, the capital city of the Armenian Bagratuni dynasty. In those days, another architectural miracle was constructed – the Basilica Cistern. Let's not forget that the capital of Byzantine, Constantinople, rose to its fame in the X-XI centuries, when the Macedonian emperors of Armenian decent ruled there. Therefrom the best of the Armenian was instilled in Ohannes Tchekidjian.

He attended the Polis branch of the Mkhitarian school of Vienna, thereafter – the Saint Michel French College, and then – the conducting department of the Istanbul Conservatory. On his father's wish, he studied chemistry and obtained a degree in chemical engineering. However, it was God's will for him to become a musician. And he boldly stepped onto the path of his life. He entered the Paris Conservatory. Only 5 of the 84 applicants were admitted, three of which were Frenchmen, one – Greek and... Tchekidjian, the Armenian.

He quickly gained popularity in the musical life of Istanbul. His concerts were attended by high-ranking officials. Once after the concert, the USSR Ambassador to Turkey expressed his wish to get acquainted with the Maestro. That was a life-changing meeting. Tchekidjian told the Ambassador about his dream to move and work in Armenia. The process was launched. On his way to his Homeland, while still in Moscow, he was proposed to stay and work in the capital of the superpower. But his Homeland was waiting for him. It was the year 1961 when he arrived in his native land.

Tchekidjian was highly appreciated in Soviet Armenia. Unofficially, he was given the title All-Armenian Maestro. Only very few, such as the historian Movses Khorenatsi, educator Khachatur Abovyan, poet Hovhannes Tumanyan had deserved that epithet. Interestingly, the USSR Marshal, Twice Hero of the USSR Hovhannes Baghramyan named him “the Marshal of Choral Art” (p. 126). Among the numerous properly selected photographs in this book, there is one showing three outstanding individuals sitting together: the world famous scientist Victor Hambardzumyan, the victorious warrior from the Battle of Sardarapat (1918) to the Great Patriotic War Hovhannes Baghramyan, and the All-Armenian Maestro Ohannes Tchekidjian. The Armenian nation can pride itself on being represented to the world with such personalities.

The social order changed in Armenia in 1991. The country declared its independence. The challenging years of formation began. The country found itself in a cruel blockade: no electricity, no bread... Many common people and prominent figures, unable to endure the adversities, abandoned the country. Tchekidjian, the internationally known musician, could have but had not left his Homeland. He proved he was a true patriot, and his art is nontemporal.

The achievements of the Armenian people were his own achievements. Thus, when the Metro was opened in Yerevan, the Maestro watched his compatriots' elation on that occasion with delight, with his eyes about to shed tears.

One of Anna Asatryan's notable observations in the book is that in 1920, on the invitation of the then Prime Minister Alexander Myasnikyan, preeminent men of science and art arrived in Armenia from all the nooks and corners of the world to promote the progress of their Homeland. No one invited Tchekidjian. He came on his own. He came to continue the cause of genius Komitas, to make the world know and love Armenian music. And he succeeded.

Here is what Aram Khachaturyan said about the Maestro: “This is a brilliant choir of supreme culture. The Capella is headed by a great musician\_and composer. Whatever he does, he does with an innovative spirit... The State Capella of Armenia can be sent on tour to any country. They will proudly represent Soviet culture» (p. 18). It is the opinion of a composer, whose records with an inscription “Aram Khachaturyan – the Composer of the Century” are sold in music stores throughout Europe, whose name is included in the “Biography: Pocket Guide to People Past and Present, Over 4000 Famous Lives”, published in the UK (p. 286).

Tchekidjian's Capella sang 700 pieces in 27 languages. Under the Maestro's baton, the Capella performed Mozart's, Berlioz' and Verdi's Requiems in a number

of the world most famous concert halls. On hearing the performance of Tchekidjian's Capella at the celebration of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of NAS RA in the A. Spendiaryan's Opera and Ballet Theater, one of the guests exclaimed: "This is divine music!" Can there be a better appreciation of one's art?!

A great number of highest awards were bestowed on Tchekidjian: National Hero of Armenia, People's Artist of the Arm. SSR and USSR, NAS RA Honorary Doctor, Professor. He was elected as a delegate to the Supreme Soviets of the Arm. SSR and USSR. The pictures of all his awards and certificates are included in the book.

In 2011, the first international festival, dedicated to Komitas, took place in Germany, at whose closing the Maestro was presented with a Certificate of Honor.

The book contains an impressive gallery of portraits of musicians, authors, state figures, celebrities and their opinions about Tchekidjian's art. Words of admiration are written by Victor Hambardzumyan, Marietta Shahinyan, Martiros Saryan, Ohan Duryan, Dmitri Shostakovich, Boris Piotrovsky, Krzysztof Penderecki, Nikolay Tikhonov and many-many others. The complete list of these names would take several pages.

One of Tchekidjian's astounding performances is Gioacchino Rossini's *Stabat Mater*. The concert poster is designed with exquisite taste. It presents The Pieta – the statue by one of the titans of the Italian Renaissance Michelangelo, sculpted at the age of 23. The *Stabat Mater* in Tchekidjian's interpretation makes an indelible impression on the audience.

The Maestro's 80<sup>th</sup>, 85<sup>th</sup>, 90<sup>th</sup> birthdays were celebrated in Yerevan with great vigor.

Anna Asatryan's book – a true masterpiece indeed – is dedicated to the 95<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Maestro. It contains so many impressive details about Tchekidjian's accomplishments that the reader can expect the Maestro to say, quoting Horace: "I have built a monument more lasting than bronze".

NAS RA dedicated to Ohannes Tchekidjian a number of conferences, whose proceedings came out in relevant collections.

From the photograph placed in the Afterword, two nicely smiling faces look at us: Ohannes Tchekidjian and Anna Asatryan – the hero and the author of the book. The Afterword concludes as follows: "And I can state assuredly that Maestro Ohannes Tchekidjian is exceptional not only as an artist – with his creative career, the indelible trace, left by him in the history of Armenian and Soviet performing art, – but also as a Citizen, Intellectual, Individuality..." (p. 485).

Anna Asatryan's monograph "Ohannes Tchekidjian: Life and Career" is a lasting academic and historic value, addressed to the generations to come.

**Aelita DOLUKHANYAN**

Head of the Chair of Old and Medieval Armenian Literature and Its Teaching  
Methods at the Kh. Abovyan ASPU, NAS RA corresponding member,  
Doctor of Sciences in Philology, professor