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## DAVIT EVEREKLYAN: HIS ACTIVITIES IN MONTREAL

### ***Abstract***

Davit Evereklyan, one of the key figures in the Armenian diaspora theatre, began his journey in the theatre in 1943 in Lebanon. He founded several theatre companies, including "Lebanese-Armenian," "Petros Adamyan," "Germanic," and "Beirut-Armenian Backstage Artists." As a director and actor, he brought to life characters from both Armenian and foreign playwrights in numerous productions.

Evereklyan's prolific theatrical career in Lebanon was interrupted by political instability, prompting his move to Montreal with his family. There, he revitalised his theatrical environment by collaborating with the "Armenian" and "Constantinople-Armenian Union" theatre companies.

His literary contributions began with *Theatrical Essays and Materials on the History of Lebanese-Armenian Theatre* (Beirut, Sevan, 1971, 212 pages), which documents the theatrical life of Armenian genocide survivors and enriches the scholarly and factual literature on Diaspora Armenian theatre.

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This was followed by *On the Road of My Theatrical Life* (Los Angeles, 1989, 185 pages) and *Always... On the Road of My Theatrical Life* (Los Angeles, New Armenia, 1999, 192 pages). In these works, he reflects on his memories of Montreal, Los Angeles, and New York, including interviews with actors and reviews of their work.

These books serve as important primary sources for those studying the history of Armenian Diaspora theatre. Evereklyan's multifaceted work, as an actor, playwright, theatre scholar, and historian, has made a significant contribution to the development of Armenian theatre in the Diaspora, the preservation of Armenian cultural identity, and the transmission of national traditions.

**Keywords:** *Davit Evereklyan, Montreal, Diaspora, Theatrical company, actor, historian of theatre, performance.*

#### **Introduction**

A talented Lebanese-Armenian and Canadian-Armenian actor, prolific director, theatre professional, theatre scholar, founder of theatre companies, and historian of theatre, Davit Evereklyan first appeared on stage in 1943. In 1945, he wrote, directed, and acted in the tragedy *"I Was the Cause."* Alongside participating in all productions of the Lebanese Armenian theatrical events, he founded several theatre companies: "Lebanese-Armenian," "Petros Adamyan," "Germanic," and "Beirut-Armenian Backstage Players." Since 1953, he served as a Lebanon correspondent for the semi-monthly theatre journal *Kulis* until its discontinuation.

Evereklyan's rich and impactful work in Lebanon was interrupted due to the country's political instability. In 1975, he emigrated to Montreal with his family, where he continued his theatrical activity with local theatre groups. There, he once again recreated his theatrical environment. Thanks to his warm and modest personality, he formed close ties with the "Constantinople-Armenian Union" theatre company, became secretary of the cultural division of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), and was a key figure in the "Armenian" theatre company. In 1989, Hay Gyank Publishing House published Evereklyan's book *"On the Road of My Theatrical Life,"* a continuation of his 1971 work *"Theatrical Memoirs and Materials from the History of Lebanese-Armenian Theatre"* (Sevan Publishing House, Beirut). His third book includes

memories, interviews, and theatre reviews from Montreal, Los Angeles, and New York. Members of the Evereklyan family, both in Lebanon and Canada, actively participated in Davit Evereklyan's productions and contributed to the Armenian Diaspora's cultural life.

***Activities with the "Armenian" Theatre Company***

Since 1976, the "Armenian" theatre company in Montreal, founded and led by Selma Keklikian,<sup>1</sup> an opera singer with the Montreal Opera Theatre, has been actively staging plays. She was supported by Arto Nshanian<sup>2</sup>, Sargis Sandikyan, Berge Melikyan, and her husband Serop Keklikian. Between 1976 and 1985, the company prepared over 20 theatrical productions and gave more than 50 performances. More than 160 actors took part in these performances, and the total audience exceeded 10,000 people.

Selma Keklikian managed to build a tight-knit, cohesive group of performers who, with boundless energy and enthusiasm, came together without any political or communal backing, without a dedicated center or meeting space, often rehearsing under inconvenient conditions – in their homes, apartments, or various rented clubs. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that nearly all actors showed immense dedication to sustaining Armenian theatre in that distant city, participating in rehearsals and performances after finishing their regular jobs. After long and exhausting workdays, they would rush to rehearsals, transporting props and various items to temporary stages from different locations. After rehearsals, often without even having time to remove their stage makeup, they would return the props and equipment to their owners to vacate rented venues on time.

The core actors were Selma Keklikian, Khoren Teteyan,<sup>3</sup> Arto Nshanian, and also Davit Evereklyan and members of his family.

In 1978, the "Armenian" theatre company celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the literary and cultural career of the veteran intellectual, satirist, and

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<sup>1</sup> Keklikian Selma (1927–2004) was a talented Armenian opera singer, actress, founder of the "Armenian" theater company, and promoter of the Armenian culture in Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Nshanian Arto (1935–1999) was a Diaspora Armenian actor. He was born in Cairo. He played in different theatrical companies in Cairo. In 1963 he settled down in Montreal, taking part in the Armenian theatrical life.

<sup>3</sup> Teteyan Khoren (1901–1980) was a prominent representative of the Armenian culture, actor, satirist, theater critic.

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playwright Khoren Teteyan. On this occasion, and also marking the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Derenik Demirchyan, the company prepared a production of "Vardanank," which Teteyan had adapted into a play back in 1953 and staged in Cairo in 1957, and played the role of Ghevond Yerets.

In an interview with Montreal's Armenian-language television program, Teteyan said: "I would like to have the work of a talented writer like Derenik Demirchyan as a guide. I wrote this play adapting it to the capabilities of our Diaspora enthusiasts, keeping it concise and avoiding long speeches as much as possible."<sup>4</sup>

It is particularly notable that the Battle of Vardanank, which symbolizes the Armenian people's unyielding faith and has long represented their struggle for liberation, once again found expression on the Armenian stage abroad.

On March 4 and 5, 1978, the play "Vardanank" was performed at the luxurious and modern Lucien-Pagé Theatre in Montreal – during the afternoon for students and in the evening for the general theatre-loving public. Clearly, a tremendous amount of work went into preparing the production, which involved about 25 characters. The actors created an atmosphere charged with patriotism and national pride. Especially notable for his powerful stage presence was the well-known Lebanese-Armenian actor Davit Evereklyan, who portrayed the character of Vasak.

Here's what Davit Evereklyan himself wrote about the play and his assigned role in "Vardanank":

"A car moves forward through the icy and snow-covered streets of Montreal. From Egypt, Syria, Greece, Armenian theatre lovers, huddled side by side, forgetting everything, captivated by their love of Armenian theatre, head toward the Istanbul-Armenian Union club, where rehearsals for the "Vardanank" play organized by the "Armenian Theatre Company" are taking place.

Snow piles up as tall as a man over walls, gardens, and fields. Storms have repeatedly lashed this cold country. The wind has howled at terrifying speed. But what does it matter? The theatrical flame burns so brightly in their hearts that they feel neither cold nor frost.

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<sup>4</sup> Correspondent "The Performance of Vardanank", Kulis 1978, № 751, 10.

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That night, I sat beside them too... The Lebanese Civil War had thrown me, too, across the oceans. Barely settled in this promised land, I was already surrounded by golden-hearted theatre lovers who helped me forget the scenes of horror, disaster, and sorrow we had endured. They enveloped me with the fragrance of their spirit, they warmed me...

They had recently founded their theatre company and had already staged several plays. Now they were preparing to present Derenik Demirchyan's "Vardanank," adapted into a play by the renowned satirist-actor and now Montreal resident Khoren Teteyan. Rehearsals had been underway for several months. I could sense how exhausting and worrisome this large-scale production was for the organizers. They mentioned they lacked a suitable actor for the role of Vasak and offered it to me. How could I refuse... I was overwhelmed with the joy of being next to Khoren Teteyan, his stage partner."<sup>5</sup>

Thus, despite the newly forming Armenian community in Montreal and the unfavorable conditions for Armenian theatre abroad, as well as the challenges of having many beginners in the cast, and other difficulties, the production of "Vardanank" came together harmoniously and was successful.

Continuing to serve his people and support the mission of preserving Armenian identity, the "Armenian" theatre company on March 3 and 4, 1979, staged Simon Ekmekdjian's<sup>6</sup> (Grem Simon) comedy "Bride and Mother-in-Law" at Montreal's "Marie-Anne" theatre under the direction of Davit Evereklyan. Members of the Evereklyan family – Berkruhi Evereklyan, Rozalia Vassilian, and Hakob Evereklyan also performed in the play. Written in the Istanbul Armenian dialect, the play depicted everyday family life and was extremely popular. In Istanbul, it had been staged more than 50 times under the direction of H. Ayvaz.

The same play was later revived by the "Beirut-Armenian Backstage Players" and staged many times in Beirut, Anjar, Damascus, and Latakia. Regarding the Montreal "Armenian" company production, it is worth noting that the press responded with praise for the performers' acting.

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<sup>5</sup> **Evereklyan D.** With the Theater Company of "Armenian" and Mrs, Selma Keklikian, Kulis, 1978, № 757, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ekmekdjian Simon (Grem Simon 1981–1962) was a Diaspora Armenian playwright, and satirist. He is noted for his "American Armenian Fiancé", "Bride and Mother-in-Law" and other comedies.

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A year later, on March 8 and 9, 1980, again at the Marie-Anne Theatre, the "Armenian" theatre company organized a tribute-festival for the veteran Diaspora intellectual, public figure, editor, journalist, lifelong educator, and playwright Gevorg Baghjian<sup>7</sup> (Vazgen Ayghuni). During the event, three of his plays were staged, each reflecting the author's convictions and thoughts: "The Invention of Letters," "The Community Head," and the patriotic drama "Toward the Homeland," directed by Davit Evereklyan. The play conveyed the emotions, outbursts, and dreams of Armenians who had immigrated and settled in Canada from various countries. Among others, Davit and Hakob Evereklyan played roles in the performance.

On May 3 and 4 of the same year, again at the Marie-Anne Theatre, the company staged Avetis Aharonyan's play "The Valley of Tears," directed by Davit Evereklyan, in which father and son Evereklyans performed.

On September 6 and 7, 1980, under the auspices of the Holy Cross Armenian Apostolic Church of Toronto and invited by the "Masis" Cultural Association, the Montreal "Armenian" company, directed by Davit Evereklyan, performed Paruyr Massikyan's<sup>8</sup> "The Matchmaker" and Grem Simon's "Bride and Mother-in-Law." These comedies were met with great enthusiasm and warmth by hundreds of Armenian audience members in Toronto." Rozalia Vasilian, Berkruhi, Hakob, and Davit Evereklyan performed masterfully in the first production."<sup>9</sup>

The second production, which had been staged dozens of times in Istanbul by the veteran artist Hakob Ayvaz, was this time directed by his theatrical colleague, the experienced stage director Davit Evereklyan. "This comedic performance delighted the theatre-loving audience, who enjoyed unforgettable moments filled with laughter and applause," wrote *Kulis*. Members of the Evereklyan family again performed in the cast.

Following the performance in Toronto, on September 13 and 14, the "Armenian" theatre company staged the same cast's production of Paruyr Massikyan's "The Matchmaker" at the Marie-Anne Theatre. Cast members

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<sup>7</sup> Baghjian Gevorg (Vazgen Aiguni 1913–1999), a Diaspora Armenian cultural and public figure, established the first Armenian television broadcast in Montreal in 1979.

<sup>8</sup> Massikyan Paruyr (1914–1989) was a Diaspora Armenian cultural figure, lawyer.

<sup>9</sup> **Mazmanian G.** "Matchmaker" and "Bride and Mother-in-Law" in Toronto, "Kulis" 1980, № 812, 23.

included Davit, Hakob, and Berkruhi Evereklyans, Rozalia Vassilian, and others. As noted by the theatre critic, "having shed the shell of their daily hard labor, they worked their utmost to delight, entertain, and deeply amuse the public... they kept the vibrancy of the comedy consistently high and became the target of continuous laughter and mirth."<sup>10</sup>

"The Matchmaker" had previously been staged many times in Egypt and later rose to prominence on Lebanese and Syrian stages. After generating great enthusiasm in Beirut, Anjar, Damascus, Latakia, and Tripoli, it finally reached Canada, receiving applause in Toronto and Montreal. Regarding the first performance in Beirut, critic Nishan Khoshafyan wrote in the *Diaspora* weekly on February 21, 1971: "This is a brilliant work that highlights Massikyan's satirical talent. Being both a lawyer by profession and a satirical writer, the author presents a vibrant depiction of the early stages of married life, where ideals, love, money, fidelity – everything in human character – is portrayed, even the most sacred devotions becoming matters of negotiation."<sup>11</sup>

In December 1981, twelve actors from Montreal's "Armenian" theatre company, responding to an invitation by the Armenian Cultural Association of Ottawa and braving the harsh winter, traveled by car 180 kilometers from Montreal to the Canadian capital to present a dramatic recital for the city's small Armenian community. The event featured selected scenes from three tragedies and five comedies, divided into two parts. The first part included excerpts from "The Valley of Tears" by Avetis Aharonian, "One of the Many," by Hakob Ayvaz,<sup>12</sup> "The Judgment of the World," by Aleksandrovich, "Charshalu Artin Agha" by Mikael Kyurjian and Yervand Otian.

The second part featured scenes from Gevorg Baghjyan's "The Community Head," Hovhannes Amirentz's "Number 5 Madman," Paruyr Massikyan's "The Matchmaker," and Grem Simon's "Bride and Mother-in-Law."

The Evereklyan theatrical family played an active role in this event. Director and actor Davit Evereklyan presented a moving excerpt from Aharonyan's "The

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<sup>10</sup> **Mazmanian G.** "Matchmaker" and "Bride and Mother-in-Law" in Toronto, *Kulis*, 1980, № 812, 23.

<sup>11</sup> **Khoshafian N.**, "Matchmaker" produced by D. Evereklyan, *Spyurq*, 1971, 21 of February, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Ayvaz Hakob (1911–2006), a *Diaspora* Armenian editor and theatrical figure, accepted different roles in theatrical companies of Istanbul.

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Valley of Tears," a production he had staged in Montreal in May 1980. He then performed a scene from Ayvaz's "One of the Many" with his talented daughter, actress Rozalya Vassilian. The first part of the recital concluded with a humorous scene from Kyurjian and Otian's "Charshalu Artin Agha," staged by A. Nshanian, which mocked the foreign-worshipping attitudes of the Istanbul Armenian elite.

The second half of the event featured more comedic scenes from Diaspora Armenian satirists, provoking joy and laughter among the audience. In the final scene of the recital, Davit and Berkruhi Evereklyans performed an excerpt from Grem Simon's comedy "Bride and Mother-in-Law," once again earning warm applause from the crowd.

In 1983, the Montreal Armenian theatre-loving community celebrated with great fanfare the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Davit Evereklyan's prolific and devoted theatrical career. On March 15, 1983, the board of the "Armenian" theatre company officially informed Evereklyan that his 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary would be commemorated with their upcoming production. For this purpose, the play "Sting of Conscience" by seasoned Diaspora intellectual Harutyun Essekulyan<sup>13</sup> was selected. The author was entrusted with its staging, and the lead role of Gabriel Arevyan was offered to Davit Evereklyan. Other roles were also cast, "and rehearsals enriched with various cultural references and knowledge shared by the esteemed author turned into months-long sessions of unforgettable enjoyment."<sup>14</sup>

Finally, after a long and strenuous period of preparation, on November 19 and 20, 1983, the "Armenian" theatre company premiered Harutyun Essekulyan's "Sting of Conscience" at the fully packed Marie-Anne Theatre in Montreal. The performance was dedicated to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Davit Evereklyan's stage career.

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<sup>13</sup> Essekulyan Harutyun (1914–?) was a Diaspora Armenian pedagogue and writer. He wrote stories, poems, pedagogical and historical articles and plays which were staged in Brussels, Cyprus and Montreal. In 1978, he founded Nor Aig (New Dawn) monthly.

<sup>14</sup> **Evereklyan D.H.** On the Road of my Theatrical Life, Los Angeles, 1989, 148.



Unfortunately, “despite the significance of the event, not a single line was dedicated to this occasion in the massive commemorative program, which saddened those who had attended solely to honor the jubilarian’s legacy.”<sup>15</sup>

In the play, Essekulyan delicately and deeply addressed one of the most pressing concerns of Armenian Diaspora communities – the moral deterioration of Armenian families in foreign environments. As stated in the program, “The Sting of Conscience” deals with one of the most urgent and relevant issues troubling the Armenian Diaspora: assimilation.”<sup>16</sup>

The production convincingly portrayed the struggle of Armenian spirit and patriotism against assimilation and loss of identity. The main character, Gabriel Arevyan, is an orphaned survivor of the Armenian Genocide who finds refuge in distant France. Through years of diligent work, perseverance, and initiative, Arevyan becomes a prominent factory owner. However, wealth and a comfortable life distance him from his Armenian roots – until circumstances force him to awaken and reconnect with his heritage. His character embodies a sharp inner conflict between positive and negative traits, culminating in the triumph of love for the homeland and a sense of duty as a parent.

Davit Evereklyan played the lead role of Gabriel Arevyan. He successfully brought to life the character’s complex and contradictory nature, convincingly conveying his inner turmoil, pangs of conscience, and eventual return to his roots. According to eyewitnesses, the production was a great success, and all actors delivered nearly flawless performances.

After the performance on November 20, many artists paid tribute to Davit Evereklyan, expressing deep appreciation for the positive contributions he had made to the world of theatrical art over forty long years. In his address, Gabriel Pasmachian, the president of the “Armenian” theatre company, rightly emphasized, “It is truly a heroic deed to keep theatre alive in the Diaspora. Davit Evereklyan has endured all forms of sacrifice and remained a loyal servant to the eternal flame of Armenian theatre.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> **Nalbandian M.** The Performance “The Sting of Conscience” by “Armenian” theatrical company. *Nor Aig*, 1983, № 50, 8.

<sup>16</sup> **Momjian P.T.** “The Sting of Conscience” (on the occasion of Essekulian’s eponymous play), *Horizon*, 1983, 19.12.

<sup>17</sup> **Evereklyan D.H.** *On the Road of my Theatrical Life*. Los Angeles, 1989, 148.

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Indeed, maintaining a theatre in the Diaspora is exceedingly difficult, yet at the same time a mission of national preservation – one that demands unpaid and selfless dedication. In one of his articles, the renowned Diaspora actor Khoren Teteyan wrote that Evereklyan “regrets those fellow actors who have abandoned the theatrical art, justifying themselves by saying that being an actor in the Diaspora relegates one to an undesirable position. While acknowledging this viewpoint, Evereklyan prefers to serve in the temple of Melpomene without expecting material compensation, seeking instead his reward through daily work.”<sup>18</sup>

Numerous Diaspora periodicals<sup>19</sup> covered Davit Evereklyan’s 40th stage anniversary and the performance of *Sting of Conscience* dedicated to this milestone.

In the sharp satirical plays of French playwright Eugène Marin Labiche (1815–1888), such as *The Straw Hat* (1851), *The Voyage of Mr. Perrichon* (1860), *Blindfold* (1861), and *Me*, the narrow-mindedness, hypocrisy, and calculating behavior of usurers are vividly depicted. The unexpected twists, comedic and absurd situations, and witty dialogue of his vaudeville plays earned Labiche the title “King of Vaudeville.”

On December 8 and 9, 1984, the “Armenian” theatre company presented Labiche’s play *The In-Laws* (originally titled *Blindfold*) at the theatre hall of Marie-Anne School in Montreal, directed by Davit Evereklyan. The adaptation and “Armenian localization” of the play were also done by Evereklyan himself. The play humorously satirized petty bourgeois manners, customs, vanity, senselessness, and pretentiousness.

The theatre-going public left satisfied, as there were “no obviously unsuccessful performances; all actors, to varying degrees, embodied their roles.”<sup>20</sup> Lead actors Davit Evereklyan (as the doctor) and Arto Nshanian (as the grocer) effectively portrayed the transformations of their characters. Alongside the experienced actors, new young talents were introduced in this production, with promising performances on stage.

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<sup>18</sup> **Teteyan Kh.** Our Dear Davit’s book (Davit Evereklyan On the Road of my Theatrical Life’” Los Angeles, 1989, 134.

<sup>19</sup> See **Apagah Montreal** 1983, 12.12., New life Los Angeles 1983. 29.12, **Jahakir Cairo**, 1984, 21.1 etc.

<sup>20</sup> **Momjian P.T.** “The In-laws on Stage” Horizon, 1985, 14.1. 4.

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On April 13, 1985, in Montreal's "Vahram Soukias" Hall of the local AGBU branch, the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cairo-based weekly *Jahakir* (*torch-bearer*) was celebrated. As part of the evening's cultural program, Hakob Ayvaz's play *One of the Many* (also known as *The Final Curtain*) was staged under the direction of Davit Evereklyan. This play was first performed on May 27, 1949, in Istanbul under the direction of Ashot Madatyan, with the author in the lead role. It was later staged in Beirut in 1961 and then in Zahle, Lebanon. The play reflects negative phenomena in capitalist legal systems that lead to chaos and undermine the sanctity of the family unit. Portraying the complexities of modern life, this drama kept the audience in suspense throughout the performance.

The lead role was performed by Evereklyan's son, Hakob Evereklyan, who "fulfilled the role with conscientiousness and success."<sup>21</sup> Davit Evereklyan's daughter, Rozalya Vassilian, skillfully portrayed the frivolous and pleasure-seeking character Herminé, who, realizing the immorality of her lifestyle, seeks to escape it through marriage, only to betray her husband and fall victim to her own disloyalty. Ani Evereklyan and Davit Evereklyan also convincingly portrayed their characters.

The "Armenian" theatre company concluded its 1984–1985 season on June 15 and 16, 1985, with a performance at the Marie-Anne School Theatre featuring scenes from works by Alexander Shirvanzade (*For Honor*), Hakob Baronian (*The Flatterer*), Yervand Otian and Mikael Kyurjian (*The Hero Game* and *Charshalu Artin Agha*), Harutyun Essekulyan (*Sting of Conscience*), Aleksandrovich (*The Judgment of the World*), and others. More than twenty actors took part in the performances, under the leadership of Arto Nshanian and Davit Evereklyan.

As the theatre critic rightly noted, "this theatrical bouquet—comprised of selected excerpts from ten dramatic, emotional, and comedic productions regularly presented to theatre-loving audiences by the "Armenian" company—served as a retrospective of the passing theatrical season."<sup>22</sup>

Between 1976 and 1985, Montreal's "Armenian" theatre company carried out a tremendous mission for the benefit and preservation of the nation. As *Kulis* journal founder Hakob Ayvaz noted, "Theatre demands a great deal of

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<sup>21</sup> Ghazarian M.H. An Interesting and Profound Performance. *Kulis* 1985, № 926, 8.

<sup>22</sup> H.O. Theatrical Geghard, 1985, № 77, 16.

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work, but in return, it gives almost nothing over the years.”<sup>23</sup> Actors from various backgrounds and denominations participated in the company, contributing to its mission of Armenian cultural preservation. Among them, Davit Evereklyan held a particularly distinguished place.

#### ***Activities with the Constantinople-Armenian Union***

Thanks to the efforts of Istanbul Armenians settled in Montreal, the Istanbul-Armenian Union was founded in 1967. It is the only compatriotic union operating in Canada, free from all forms of political, religious, and partisan affiliations, yet the most liberal, and a staunch defender and loyal guardian of Armenian traditions. In that distant land, the Istanbul-Armenian Union serves as a warm Armenian-spirited shelter, providing fatherly refuge to the fragments of the Armenian nation. It is a gathering place where compatriots come together to shake off daily worries and awaken memories of the past stored within them.

The Union serves as a venue for communal, cultural, athletic, youth-oriented, and other events. In 1969, the Union inaugurated its newly built center with a theatre hall, and on April 12 of that year, held its first artistic evening. The program included solo songs, solo dances, recitations, a concert by a 30-member choir, and two comedic performances. Later, its repertoire expanded to include plays by Ferdinand Roger (1898–1967), Dario Niccodemi (1874–1934), Paul Gavault (1866–1951), Molière (1622–1673), Hakob Baronian (1842–1891), Garegin Yeritsyan (1879–1966), and others.

The theatre company of the Union’s cultural department quickly gained a strong reputation among the Armenian community in Montreal. The well-organized Armenian-language performances contributed significantly to the mission of national preservation in the city.

In April 1982, the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Union’s magazine *Geghard (Spear)* concluded with a theatrical production titled *Theatrical Bouquet*, staged by the seasoned artist-actor Davit Evereklyan. The production consisted of excerpts from eight different plays, each of which had been performed multiple times across various Armenian communities around the world and had received high acclaim from theatre-loving audiences.

Evereklyan was concerned about whether he could overcome all the challenges and adequately present these individual excerpts to the audience. As

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<sup>23</sup> Interesting Interview with Hakob Ayvaz, Kulis, 1990, № 1031, 22.

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noted by G. Shirvanyan, Evereklyan's direction was notably successful: "Avetis Aharonyan's *The Valley of Tears*, Hagop Ayvaz's *One of the Many*, Aleksandrovich's *The Judgment of the World*, M. Kyurjian's *The In-Laws*, Mihrdat Haykaz's *Number 5 Madman*, and Grem Simon's *Bride and Mother-in-Law* – all were gems of our stage that, once again, thanks to Davit Evereklyan's efforts, crossed the modest and small stage of the Istanbul-Armenian Union, winning everyone's hearts."<sup>24</sup>

The selected pieces of music also contributed to the success of the production, enriching the scenes and making them more vivid, meaningful, and convincing. The audience, influenced by the music, was easily transported into the dramatic environment and drawn into the monologues of the characters. "It was also quite appropriate," wrote G. Shirvanyan, "that each performance was introduced by carefully selected musical preludes that corresponded to the themes. This gave the event a special brilliance and dignity."<sup>25</sup>

Performers included Rozalya Vassilian-Evereklyan, Hakob and Berkruhi Evereklyans, Nerses Tolmachyan, and others.

#### ***Activities with Other Theatre Companies***

On November 1, 1987, the theatre company of the "New Generation" Cultural Association gave its inaugural performance at the AGBU Theatre Hall, presenting the comedy *The Lustful Husband*.<sup>26</sup> The Montreal Armenian community enjoyed this play by Buzand Tulkeryan, directed by Davit Evereklyan. Among other actors, members of Evereklyan's family participated in the performance. His daughter, Rozalya Vassilian, played Knarik in it. A theatre critic wrote: "Could anyone have been more fitting than Rozalya – filled with dreams and reality, embodying both the maid and mistress archetypes, emotions, yearnings, feelings of love and compassion? I don't think so..."<sup>27</sup>

His wife, Berkruhi Evereklyan, portrayed the role of Agapi with meticulous and graceful acting. Davit Evereklyan himself played the role of Karapet. "We had seen him in various roles many times before... but this latest one was a revelation for us: we laughed, we were moved... we were scandalized, yet we

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<sup>24</sup> Shirvanian G. Bouquet, Geghard, 1982, № 58, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Shirvanian G. Bouquet, Geghard, 1982, № 58, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Gogorian P. The Lustful Husband, Kaits, 1987, № 2, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Gogorian P. The Lustful Husband, Kaits, 1987, № 2, 4.

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empathized; we applauded him, his successful direction, the company, and the initiative."<sup>28</sup>

On November 13, 1988, the "New Generation" theatre company presented *Bride and Mother-in-Law*, again featuring Davit, Berkruhi, Hakob Evereklyan, and Rozalya Vassilian-Evereklyan. The playwright Simon Ekmekdjian (Grem Simon) depicted a scene from a typical bourgeois Armenian family in Constantinople. "Under the direction of Mr. Davit Evereklyan, *Bride and Mother-in-Law* succeeded in providing audiences with that much-desired chance to forget their daily monotony and enjoy a pleasant moment of laughter."<sup>29</sup>

In June 2008, Montreal's Armenian theatre enthusiasts staged Georges Feydeau's comedy *The Fiancés*, translated by Egyptian-Armenian actress Araksi Ohanyan. The play was directed by Rozalya Vassilian, with Davit Evereklyan as acting coach. "His name alone was enough. The audience responded with passionate and respectful applause,"<sup>30</sup> wrote *Apagah*.

#### **Theatre Historian**

A Lebanese-Armenian and later Canadian-Armenian theatre professional, talented actor, founder of theatre companies, theatre scholar, and historian, Davit Evereklyan directed works by both Armenian and foreign playwrights. His life was devoted to Armenian culture, particularly theatre. Alongside his prolific theatrical career, he was deeply committed to the study of Armenian theatre history, resulting in several books.

Following the Armenian Genocide, Lebanese-Armenian theatre became the worthy successor to Istanbul-Armenian theatre. It gave rise to passionate theatre practitioners who, despite material hardship, kept the two-thousand-year flame of Armenian theatre alive, serving their fellow Armenians.

His first major historical work, *Theatrical Memoirs and Materials from the History of Lebanese-Armenian Theatre* (1971, Sevan Publishing House, Beirut), offers a full account of the Lebanese-Armenian theatre scene from the 1940s onward. The book is a valuable resource for theatre lovers and future

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<sup>28</sup> **Gogorian P.** *The Lustful Husband*, Kaits, 1987, № 2, 4.

<sup>29</sup> **Tigranian T.** *The Play "Bride and Mother-in-Law"*, comic performance, Kaits, 1989, № 3–4, 8.

<sup>30</sup> **Trdatian Guyumjian Q.** *The Company "Montreal's Armenian theatre enthusiasts"* presented George Feydeau's *The Fiancés*, *Apagah*, 2008, June 30.

generations, filled with accurate dates, trustworthy information, and tributes to dedicated Armenian actors. As *Kulis* noted: "This masterful work is the sincere and selfless result of collaboration with his fellow actors and a genuine contribution to the history of Armenian theatre."<sup>31</sup>

The book features the stories of companies such as "Petros Adamyan," "Ruben Mamoulian," "Germanic," and "the Beirut-Armenian "Backstage Players," as well as performers like Khachik Araratyan, Hakob Kuloyan, and Toros Spitanyan. The foreword was written by the veteran publicist Simon Simonian, publisher of the *Diaspora* weekly, who remarked: "This work is a unique outline of the history of Lebanese-Armenian theatre from 1943–1966. Its value lies in its role as a primary source, based on the testimony of an eyewitness and participant. After decades of multifaceted theatrical activity, this modest artist now contributes the fruit of his pen to the eternal flame of Armenian theatre. We believe future historians of Armenian theatre will gratefully recognize this work."<sup>32</sup>

Evereklyan's second book, *On the Road of My Theatrical Life* (1989), continued where the first left off. It covered his participation in 13 productions with the Armenian Theatre Company founded in 1976, led by Selma Keklikian, as well as the activities of the AGBU William Saroyan Theatre Company, interviews with actors, reviews of their performances, and more.

As Davit Evereklyan himself noted: "My purpose in life has been to rescue from oblivion, as much as possible, the work and merit of those humble and devoted souls who spent their lives breathing backstage air, burning with the fire of the stage."<sup>33</sup>

Gevorg Baghjyan, praising Evereklyan's contributions, wrote: "The two books authored by Davit Evereklyan are monumental – not because of their size, but due to the importance of the material they present. They will serve future

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<sup>31</sup> **Mazmanian G.** Davit Evereklyan and his "Theatrical Memoirs", *Kulis* 1980, № 815, 4.

<sup>32</sup> **Davit Evereklyan**, *Theatrical Memoirs and Materials on the History of Lebanese Armenian Theatre*, Beirut, 1971.

<sup>33</sup> **Davit Evereklyan** *Always... on the Road of My Theatrical Life*, Los Angeles, 1999, published by *Nor Hayastan*, 21.

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historians of Armenian theatre as a rich source of essential insights to illuminate their research.”<sup>34</sup>

#### ***Conclusions***

Actor-director and theater historian Davit Evereklyan is one of the main figures in the development of the Armenian Diaspora theatre. Evereklyan's theatrical path began in 1943 in Lebanon and later expanded in Canada. He founded and led the Petros Adamyan, Lebanon-Armenian, and Beirut Armenian Backstage Players theater groups, which played a significant role in preserving Armenian theatrical art in the Diaspora.

“Under the Canadian sky, despite the frozen and snow-covered streets of Montreal, many performances were given to Armenian theatre enthusiasts who had emigrated from Egypt, Syria, Greece, and Constantinople, receiving warm appreciation.”<sup>35</sup>

His published books – *Theatrical Memoirs and Materials on the History of Lebanese Armenian Theater*, *On the Road of My Theatrical Life*, and *Always... On the Road of My Theatrical Life* – are important primary sources for the history of Armenian Diaspora theater, as well as a valuable contribution to the study of Diaspora Armenian theatre.

His multifaceted theatrical activity as an actor, playwright, theatre company leader, and theatre historian has made a significant contribution to the development of Armenian theatre in the Diaspora, the preservation of Armenian cultural identity, and the transmission of national traditions. As rightly noted by Berge Momjian.

“Generations come and go, and people may forget many things. However, the pen neither forgets nor erases... In order for history to kindly remember the distinguished figures of the stage, he wanted to record for future historians all the events, performances, phenomena, as well as the biographies of stage figures familiar to him in Armenian theatre. The result is the book titled *Theatrical Memoirs and Materials on the History of Lebanese Armenian*

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<sup>34</sup> **Davit Evereklyan** *Always... on the Road of my Theatrical Life*, Los Angeles, 1999, published by Nor Hayastan., The Event dedicated to Davit Evereklyan, 15.

<sup>35</sup> **Davit Evereklyan** *Always... on the Road of my Theatrical Life.*, 40



*Theatre*, and now also the second volume titled *On the Road of My Theatrical Life*.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> **Momjian B.** Berge Momjian's Message to Davit Evereklyan, *Kulis*, 1990, № 1032, 29.

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*Բանասիրական գիտությունների թեկնածու*

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Ամփոփում

Սփյուռքահայ թատրոնի հիմնական դերակատարներից մեկի՝ Դավիթ Էվերեկյանի թատերական ուղին սկսվել է 1943-ին Լիբանանում: Իր մասնակցությունը բերելով լիբանանահայ կյանքին՝ նա հիմնում է «Լիբանանահայ», «Պետրոս Ադամյան», «Գերմանիկ», «Պեյրոֆահայ քուլիսականներու» թատերախմբերը: Իր բեմադրությամբ և դերակատարությամբ հանդես է գալիս բազմաթիվ ներկայացումներում՝ կերպավորելով ինչպես հայ, այնպես էլ օտար հեղինակների հերոսներին: Դավիթ Էվերեկյանի բեղուն, թատերական գործունեությունը ընդհատվում է Լիբանանում ստեղծված քաղաքական անկայուն և անբարենպաստ պայմանների հետևանքով, և նա ընտանիքով հեռանում է այդ երկրից՝ հաստատվելով Մոնրեալում: Այստեղ նա վերստեղծում է իր թատերական միջավայրը տեղի՝ «Արմենյան» և «Պոլսահայ միության» թատերախմբերի հետ: Դեռևս Լիբանանում լույս տեսած «Թատերական յուշեր եւ նիւթեր լիբանանահայ թատրոնի պատմութեան (Պեյրոֆ, «Սևան», 1971, 212 էջ) գրքին, որը մեզ ականատես է դարձնում Եղեռնից մազապուրծ եղած հայ բեկորների թատերական կյանքին և հարստացնում է սփյուռքահայ թատրոնի վերաբերյալ գիտական և փաստացի գրականությունը, հետևում է «Թատերական կեանքիս ճամբուն վրայ (Լոս Անճելես, 1989, 185 էջ) աշխատությունը, իսկ «Միշտ... թատերական կեանքիս ճամբուն վրայ (Լոս Անճելես, Նոր Հայաստան, 1999 էջ) աշխատության մեջ հեղինակը ներկայացնում է Մոնրեալի, Լոս Անջելեսի, Նյու-Յորքի վերաբերյալ իր հուշերը, հարցազրույցները դերասանների հետ և գրախոսականներ նրանց գործունեության մասին: Վերոհիշյալ գրքերը նույնպես կարևոր սկզբաղբյուրներ են սփյուռքի հայ թատրոնի պատմությունը ուսումնասիրող-

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ների համար: Դավիթ Էվերեկլյանի բազմակողմանի թատերական գործունեությունը որպես դերասան, դրամատուրգ, թատերագետ, թատրոնի պատմաբան, էական ներդրում են ունեցել սփյուռքում հայկական թատրոնի զարգացման, հայկական մշակութային ինքնության պահպանման և ազգային ավանդույթների փոխանցման գործում:

**Բանալի բառեր՝** Դավիթ Էվերեկլյան, Մոնրեալ, սփյուռք, թատերախումբ, դերասան, թատրոնի պատմաբան, բեմադրություն: