

THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF "ARMENIA" INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

«ԱՐՄԵՆԻԱ» ՄԻՋԱԶԳԱՅԻՆ ԵՐԱԺՇՏԱԿԱՆ ՓԱՌԱՏՈՆԻ ԴԵՐՆ ՈՒ ՆՇԱՆԱԿՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ՄԻՋՄՇԱԿՈՒԹԱՅԻՆ ԵՐԿԽՈՍՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԶԱՐԳԱՑՄԱՆ ՄԵՋ

РОЛЬ И ЗНАЧЕНИЕ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО МУЗЫКАЛЬНОГО ФЕСТИВАЛЯ «АРМЕНИЯ» В РАЗВИТИИ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОГО ДИАЛОГА

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Abstract – The article presents the importance of the "Armenia" International Music Festival in the field of intercultural dialogue. The idea of creating the Festival belongs to Sergey Smbatyan, Honored Artist of the Republic of Armenia, PhD in Arts. It is no secret that the study of cultural ties has significant scientific importance. An international festival is a special type of cultural dialogue, which appears in the form of creative communication. In the 21st century, it has become one of the universal means of forming and developing intercultural ties, which contributes to the formation and continuous development of the dialogue between different cultures, reveals the creative abilities of individuals, serves to preserve and spread national identity and universal values, and stimulates interest in culture among society. The article examines and presents, for the first time, the contribution of the "Armenia" International Festival to the development and preservation of intercultural dialogue. The Festival's concert programs include works that embody a unique expression of intercultural dialogue. An international competition and a music academy were organized within the framework of the festival, which are important elements of intercultural dialogue. The next important component is the involvement of internationally recognized artists and the opportunity to perform on Armenian stages with Armenian musicians. The "Armenia" festival has brought together both the

leading state collectives of Armenia and outstanding Armenian performers from around the world. The Festival has become a significant event in the Armenian musical mosaic, making an important contribution to expanding international cooperation, transforming Armenia into a cultural capital, and developing and strengthening intercultural ties.

Ամփոփում – Հոդվածը ներկայացնում է «Արմենիա» երաժշտական միջազգային փառատոնի կարևորությունը միջմշակութային երկխոսության ասպարեզում: Փառատոնի կազմակերպման մտահղացումը ՀՀ վաստակավոր արտիստ, արվեստագիտության թեկնածու Սերգեյ Սմբատյանինն է: Գաղտնիք չէ, որ մշակութային կապերի ուսումնասիրությունը գիտական կարևոր նշանակություն ունի: Միջազգային փառատոնը մշակութային երկխոսության առանձնահատուկ տեսակ է, որն իրականացվում է ստեղծագործական հաղորդակցության ձևով: XXI դարում այն դարձել է միջմշակութային կապերի ձևավորման և զարգացման համընդհանուր միջոցներից մեկը, որը նպաստում է տարբեր մշակույթների միջև երկխոսության ձևավորմանն ու շարունակական զարգացմանը, բացահայտում անհատների ստեղծագործական կարողությունները, ծառայում ազգային ինքնության և համամարդկային արժեքների պահպանմանն ու տարածմանը, խթանում հասարակության շրջանում մշակույթի նկատմամբ հետաքրքրության բարձրացմանը: Հոդվածում առաջին անգամ ուսումնասիրվել է միջմշակութային երկխոսության զարգացման և պահմանման գործում «Արմենիա» միջազգային փառատոնի ներդրումը: Համերգների ծրագրերում ընդգրկվել են ստեղծագործություններ, որոնցում առկա է միջմշակութային երկխոսության յուրահատուկ դրսևորում: Փառատոնի շրջանակում կազմակերպվել են միջազգային մրցույթ, երաժշտական ակադեմիա, որոնք միջմշակութային երկխոսության էական տարրերից են: Հաջորդ կարևոր բաղադրիչը միջազգային ճանաչում ունեցող արտիստների ներգրավվածությունն է և հայ երաժիշտների հետ Հայաստանի բեմերում հանդես գալու հնարավորությունը: «Արմենիա» փառատոնն իր շուրջն է համախմբել ինչպես Հայաստանի պետական առաջատար կոլեկտիվներին, այնպես էլ աշխարհասփյուռ հայ հայտնի կատարողներին: Այն նշանակալի իրադարձություն է հայ երաժշտական խճանկարում և կարևոր ներդրում ունի միջազգային համագործակցության ընդլայնման, Հայաստանը մշակութային մայրաքաղաք դարձնելու և միջմշակութային կապերի զարգացման ու ամրապնդման գործում:

Аннотация – В статье рассматривается значение Международного музыкального фестиваля «Армения» в сфере межкультурного диалога. Идея создания фестиваля принадлежит заслуженному артисту Республики Армения, кандидату искусствоведения Сергею Смбатяну. Ни для кого не секрет, что изучение культурных связей имеет важное научное значение. Международный фестиваль является особым видом культурного диалога, реализуемого посредством творческой коммуникации. В XXI веке межкультурные связи стали одним из универсальных средств формирования и развития межкультурных отношений, способствующих укреплению диалога между различными культурами, раскрытию творческого потенциала личности, сохранению и распространению национальной идентичности и общечеловеческих ценностей, а также повышению интереса общества к культуре. В статье впервые анализируется вклад Международного фестиваля «Армения» в развитие и поддержание межкультурного диалога. Концертные программы фестиваля включают произведения, являющие собой уникальное проявление межкультурного диалога. В рамках фестиваля были организованы международный конкурс и музыкальная академия, представляющие собой важные элементы межкультурного диалога. Следую-

щим существенным компонентом является участие всемирно признанных артистов и возможность выступать на армянских сценах вместе с армянскими музыкантами. Фестиваль «Армения» объединил как ведущие государственные коллективы Армении, так и выдающихся армянских исполнителей со всего мира. Фестиваль стал значимым событием в мозаике армянской музыкальной жизни как неоспоримый вклад в расширение международного сотрудничества, превращение Армении в культурную столицу, а также развитие и укрепление межкультурных связей.

Keywords – "Armenia", Sergey Smbatyan, festival, orchestra, foundation.

Հիմնադրամբեր – «Արմենիա», Սերգեյ Սմբատյան, փառատոն, նվագախումբ, հիմնադրամ:
Ключевые слова – «Армения», Сергей Смбатян, фестиваль, оркестр, фонд.

Introduction

As is known, the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra (hereinafter referred to as the Orchestra) has been carrying out active and productive organizational activities for 19 years, and the creation of festivals is one of its important and key directions. Since 2010, it has organized the annual Armenian Composing Art Festival; since 2013, the annual Khachaturian International Festival; since 2017, the International Festivals dedicated to the art of living legendary composers: Gia Kancheli, Krzysztof Penderecki, the International Festival of Modern Classics (since 2019, named after Krzysztof Penderecki since 2022) and the Symphonic Yerevan International Music Festival (2022).

It is no secret that the study of cultural ties has significant scientific importance. An international festival is a special type of cultural dialogue, which appears in the form of creative communication. In the 21st century, it has become one of the universal means of forming and developing intercultural ties, which contributes to the formation and continuous development of the dialogue between different cultures, reveals the creative abilities of individuals, serves to preserve and spread national identity and universal values, and stimulates interest in culture among society.

The establishment and expansion of international ties and cooperation is one of the priorities of the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra. Thus, in 2017, through the joint effort of Sergey Smbatyan, Honored Artist of the Republic of Armenia, Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Orchestra, the "Armenia" International Music Festival (we have extracted information about the festival from the archive materials of the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra) was founded, the idea of which belongs to Sergey Smbatyan, PhD in Arts.

It is noteworthy that in the period of the Republic of Armenia's independence, the Orchestra was the first to set out to create the "Armenia" International Classical Music Festival named after our country, the important goal of which is to present to the international community our Republic, which carries and preserves the academic traditions of classical music, and to make it a global cultural center that

will give prominent contemporary representatives of the performing arts an opportunity to gather around to listen to their exclusive interpretations in Armenia.

The annual (except for 2020, which was interrupted on September 27 due to the war (two concerts were held)) "Armenia" International Festival (hereinafter referred to as the Festival) has been held since its inception until 2021 with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia (since 2019, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the RA). Since 2022, it has been organized in partnership with the Tourism Committee of the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia. Additionally, since the festival's founding, Sergey Smbatyan has been the artistic director, and Sargis Balbabyan, PhD in Arts, has been the director. The Orchestra, being faithful to its adopted principle and the important goals of its activity, namely the preservation, development and popularization of Armenian music in Armenia and abroad, consistently includes the rich pages of music of both Armenian classical and contemporary composers, both symphonic and chamber genres, in the programs of the international Festival's concert series.

Thus, the goal of our article is to examine and present, for the first time, the contribution of the "Armenia" International Festival to the development and preservation of intercultural dialogue.

Works of Armenian Classical and Contemporary Composers in the Festival's Concert Programs as a Unique Manifestation of Intercultural Communication

In the Festival's concert series, renowned works by Armenian classical composers Alexander Spendaryan, Aram Khachaturian, and Alexander Harutyunian – distinguished by rich performance histories and international recognition – have been regularly performed, alongside symphonic works by prominent contemporary composers, both established and emerging. These include Tigran Mansurian, Yervand Yerkanian, Mikhail Kokzhayev, Eduard Hayrapetyan, Armen Smbatyan, Vartan Adjemian, Gagik Hovunts, Melik Mavisakalyan, and others. It is noteworthy that the Festival's concert programs have featured works of key significance to the development of intercultural dialogue. In the pages of the history of Armenian classical and contemporary compositional art, the works that have received musical embodiment from the achievements of world literature occupy a unique place. These valuable compositions represent distinctive manifestations of intercultural dialogue that have stood the test of time.

In 2024, during the 8th "Armenia" International Music Festival, the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Portuguese conductor Luis Andrade, performed the Symphonic Picture of *Three Palms* (1905) by Alexander Spendaryan (1871–1928), an Armenian classical composer, People's Artist of the Armenian SSR. This work is based on the poem with the same title (An Eastern Tradition, 1839) by Y. Lermontov (1814–1841), a renowned Russian poet and prose writer. Similarly, on July 4, 2018, the Orchestra, under the direction of Sergey Smbatyan, performed

three movements from the Symphonic Suite (1989) from the ballet *The Snow Queen* by Tigran Mansurian (1939), one of the prominent composers of the modern era. Tigran Mansurian composed the ballet based on the famous fairy tale with the same name by Danish writer and poet Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875).

Works that represent Armenia, national traditions, and the peculiarities of compositional art were performed during the festival.

Thus, in 2018, at the opening concert of the festival, *Armenia Symphonic Poem* by Grigor Yeghazaryan (1908–1988), a talented composer, teacher, musical and public figure, People's Artist of the Armenian SSR and the USSR, was performed for the first time since the independence of the Republic of Armenia. Written in 1942, in the period of the Second World War, it presents the pages of the history of Armenia and Armenians. As noted by Matevos Muradyan, musicologist, Honored Artist of the Armenian SSR, and Doctor of Arts, "The poem's music, based on an Armenian folk song, is colorful, simple and understandable. Having won first prize at the Republican Awards, it has secured a prominent place in the repertoire of symphony concerts (translated from Armenian)" (Մուրադյան 1959, 37).

Among the symphonic works of Professor Ghazaros Sarian (1920–1998), a talented composer, teacher, musical and public figure, People's Artist of the Armenian SSR and the USSR, the *Symphonic Panel Armenia* (1968), written with motifs from the paintings of Martiros Sarian, one of the greatest Armenian painters of the 20th century, occupies a unique place. It consists of four parts: *Garni*, *Old Yerevan*, *Ara-rat Valley* and *Sunny Landscape*. In 2021, in the 5th Festival, the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of conductor Marius Stravinsky, performed this unique musical canvas.

"In the frame of the Festival, symphonic works based on Armenian folk songs and dances were performed, including excerpts from the Symphonic Suite of Grigor Yeghiazaryan's ballet *Sevan*, as well as compositions by Armenian composers that have become masterpieces of world classical music. Among these, Aram Khachaturian's Concerto for Violin and Symphony Orchestra (1940) stands out and continues to be performed by prominent artists.

Moreover, historical events and places have also been reflected in Armenian compositional art. From those unique musical pages, excerpts from the symphonic suite from Aram Khachaturian's ballet *Spartacus* (1954), Yervand Yerkanian's symphonic poem *The Ruins of Baalbek* (2008), and the overture of *Bells of Sardarapat* (2021) by Mikhail Kokzhayev were presented. As M. Kokzhayev noted, "Maestro Sergey Smbatyan and the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra presented the work to the audience with a high level of performance excellence" (translated from Russian) (from a personal conversation with Mikhail Kokzhayev, Yerevan, 20.09.2025).

New Interpretations of Russian and Western European Classical and Contemporary Composers' Works

The Armenian State Symphony Orchestra diligently and with unique interpretations presented the masterpieces and achievements of Russian and Western European composers. Alongside the masterpieces by Johannes Brahms, Edvard Grieg, Giacomo Puccini, Gioacchino Rossini, Felix Mendelssohn, Antonio Vivaldi, Richard Wagner, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Sergei Prokofiev, Claude Debussy and others, the Orchestra also performed new works by contemporary foreign composers – Alexey Shor and Sir Karl Jenkins – that were previously unfamiliar to the Armenian audience.

As is known, the epic *David of Sassoun* was expressed in Armenian compositional art, particularly in the works by Haro Stepanyan, Alexander Adjemian, Edgar Hovhannisyanyan and others (Մովսես 2021, 20–25). In 2018, the revelation of the Festival was the treatment of a foreign composer on the Armenian epic. For the first time in Armenia, the Symphonic Poem *David of Sassoun*, composed by Ayrat Ishmuratov based on the epic's motifs, was performed. It had been recorded in 2006 by the State Symphony Orchestra of the Republic of Tatarstan under the composer's direction in Kazan. Additionally, the composer also incorporated one of the Armenian folk work songs, *Horovel*, into the composition.

Resident Composer of the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra: Alexey Shor

The revelation of the "Armenia" International Music Festival was Jewish composer Alexey Shor, Doctor of Mathematical Sciences, Honorary Professor of the Yerevan Komitas State Conservatory, who is the resident composer of both the Festival and the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra.

Alexey Shor successfully composes in various genres, including musical theatre, symphonic, and chamber music, with symphonic works predominating. His works have been regularly performed by prominent contemporary artists, namely Maxim Vengerov, Lyubov Kazarnovskaya, David Aaron Carpenter and others and published by the prestigious publishing house *Breitkopf & Härtel*.

During the "Armenia" International Music Festival, Alexey Shor's works were performed by Armenia's leading ensembles, including the Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra, the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra, the National Chamber Orchestra of Armenia, the Khachaturian Trio, with the following musicians: Armine Grigoryan (piano), Karen Shahgaldyan (violin), Karen Khachatryan (cello); pianists such as Denis Kozhukhin, Ingolf Wunder, Nare Arghamanyan, violinists such as Nikolaj Znaider, Roman Kim, Fyodor Rudin, Marc Bouchkov, Sergei Dogadin, Andrey Baranov, Daniel Lozakovich, cellists such as Narek Hakhnazaryan, Jonathan Roozeman, vocal soloist Anna Aglatova, conductors such as Sergey Smbatyan, Eduard Topchyan, Conrad Van Alphen, Felix Korobov, among others. On July 3, 2018, during the Festival, the new CD of the Khachaturian Trio, released by Sony,

was presented at the Aram Khachaturian Museum, which includes works by Aram Khachaturian, Alexey Shor and Arno Babajanyan.

It is remarkable that the influence of composers from the Romantic era, particularly Giuseppe Verdi, has played a significant role in shaping the composer's creative taste. Although A. Shor's works are composed in a quasi-Romantic style, there is, however, a discernible inclination towards avant-garde, not in terms of external manifestation, which would imply the use of any compositional technique, but rather in character innovation, capable of conveying the composer's contemporary perceptions of events and impressions: "In general, what I write under the influence of what I have seen reflects not the musical traditions and culture of the place, but my personal emotions (translated from Russian)" (Алексей Шоп 2018).

In 2017, in one of the festival's symphonic concerts, the programmatic concert to *Travel Notebook* (2016) for piano and symphony orchestra was performed by the Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra and pianist Nare Arghamanyan, under the direction of conductor Gevorg Muradyan.

The title of *Travel Notebook* already suggests the programmatic nature of the work. Thus, the concert, consisting of seven movements – *The Wayfarer's Prayer*, *La Rambla* (inspired by visiting Barcelona), *Addio* (inspired by visiting Rome), *The Luxembourg Garden* (inspired by visiting Paris), *Rubicon* (inspired by visiting Ravenna), *Sorrow* (inspired by visiting Venice), *The Horseman* (inspired by visiting Ascot) – is a unique musical journey with the composer. The prayer is followed by six parts, each of which is a distinct musical image, featuring its own unique structure, virtuoso performance, and artistic uniqueness. The composition lacks the use of sharp contrasts. There are interesting intonational combinations and vividly expressed characterization in the melodies with pastoral and narrative characteristics. If the listener is familiar with the geographical locations mentioned by the author, the perception of the musical material becomes more profound and meaningful. The orchestral texture is complementary, with the use of percussion instruments. However, at the same time, certain sections exhibit artistic and character-driven independence and in some cases, they prepare the entrance of the piano section, which is one of the structural elements characteristic of the concerto genre. The piano part is filled with dense, textured compositions and lively passages. In some cases, the play of harmonic verticals gives a certain form of mobility to the musical flow.

At first glance, the piece may seem simple to perform, but it demands a substantial arsenal of interpretative techniques from the performer to overcome the technical challenges and present the work flawlessly to the audience.

Performances by Renowned Artists at the Festival

One of the main features of the Festival is the involvement of internationally renowned artists and the opportunity for them to perform on Armenian stages with Armenian musicians. For 9 years, the "Armenia" International Music Festival has

been hosting Mikhail Pletnev, Vladimir Ovchinnikov, Pavel Gililov, Polina Osetinskaya (piano), Mischa Maisky (cello), Zakhar Bron, Maxim Vengerov, Zakhar Bron (violin); conductors Dmitry Yablonsky, Alan Chirkop and others from Russia, the USA, China, France, Great Britain, Austria, Monaco, Germany, Ukraine, Malta and elsewhere; and has been introducing Armenian music lovers to the best representatives of contemporary performing arts. The talented musicians highly appreciated the contributions of the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra and Sergey Smbatyan to the organization of the Festival. As Mikhail Pletnev noted, "Sergey Smbatyan is very actively involved in the musical life of Armenia and beyond. The orchestra he conducts, the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra, is deeply engaged in its activities. It has been a great pleasure to work with Sergey Smbatyan once again. And, of course, we ought to pay tribute to those who, despite these challenging conditions, find the will and resources to organize such a wonderful event as the "Armenia" International Music Festival (translated from Armenian) («Ամեն անգամ մեծագույն հուզմունք եմ ապրում՝ լինելով Հայաստանի սրբազան հողում». ամփոփվեց «Արմենիա» փառատոնը 2021).

Moreover, the "Armenia" International Festival has brought together not only the leading state ensembles of Armenia – the Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra, the Armenian National Academic Choir, the National Chamber Orchestra of Armenia, but also outstanding Armenian performers from around the world, including cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan, pianists Nare Arghamanyan and Lilit Grigoryan.

"Armenia" International Piano Competition

The organization of the international competition was aimed at discovering and nurturing young talent. From July 4 to 12, 2017, in parallel with the Festival concerts, the "Armenia" International Piano Competition was held, in which young pianists from Armenia, as well as France, Russia, Georgia, Iran, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, Norway, Syria, Ukraine, China, and Austria participated.

The jury of the competition was chaired by Armen Babakhanyan, Honored Artist of the Republic of Armenia, laureate of international competitions, and outstanding musicians such as Vladimir Ovchinnikov, People's Artist of the Russian Federation, Professor of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, Paolo Baglieri (Italy), Ratko Delorko (Germany), and Valerian Shiukashvili (Georgia) were jury members. As Armen Babakhanyan noted, "We must choose the best. Nowadays, there are very few outstanding personalities. Many of them can play the piano, but not everyone can demonstrate individuality. The competition program is free: any performer can present a favorite work. This is how we get a glimpse of both the musician's taste and the structure of their program. The two stages consist of short performances, mini-concerts, which reveal how well the performer can captivate the audience with the program and presentation (translated from Armenian) («Արմենիա» միջազգային առաջին մրցույթ-փառատոնը բացահայտելու է վառ անհատականությունների 2017):

The Festival as an Educational Platform

One of the important intercultural features of the festival is the presence of its educational component.

Thus, in 2019, Sergey Smbatyan founded the "Music for Future" Foundation, which aims to identify talented Armenian children and support their professional development and artistic success. Additionally, Sergey Smbatyan is the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Foundation, while Anna Ter-Hovakimyan holds the position of the Director. One of the key areas of the Foundation's work is the creation of an educational platform and the development of international partnerships, which help provide high-quality professional training and expand opportunities for performance on international stages.

Since 2021, the "Music for Future" Classical Music Academy has been established within the framework of the "Armenia" International Music Festival. In the frames of the program, renowned musicians who performed at the Festival conduct master classes for the scholarship holders of the Foundation's educational program, passing on their performance achievements to young musicians ("Music for Future" Foundation).

The first master classes were conducted by Steven Isserlis, Zakhar Bron, Dmitry Yablonsky, Gil Shaham, Lavar Skou-Larsen, Felix Korobov, Fumiaki Miura, Pavel Gililov, Rémi Geniet, Jin Yan, Jean-Paul Gasparian, Maxim Rubtsov, Yol um San, Mikhail Kirchoff, Sergei Dogadin, Graf Mourja. The master classes provide a platform for intercultural education, enabling young musicians to learn how to communicate, collaborate and perceive the specifics of the performance achievements of prominent artists.

The Classic Pulse of Cultural Tourism Development

Since 2022, the Festival has been held in partnership with the Tourism Committee of the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia. The Armenia International Music Festival plays a key role in enhancing the appeal of Armenia, presenting it as a major destination for cultural tourism. Thanks to the Festival, Yerevan becomes a meeting point for prestigious musicians, attracting both Armenian music lovers and international guests visiting Armenia for either the festival or other cultural purposes.

Conclusion

Sergey Smbatyan's efforts in organizing the Festival, conducting it at a high level, and providing valuable and meaningful interpretations of Armenian, Russian, and Western European music are undeniable. The "Armenia" International Festival has become a significant event in the Armenian musical mosaic, contributing to the development and enhancement of international cooperation and intercultural ties.

The Festival, established in the period of independence of the Republic of Armenia and aptly named "Armenia", is a necessary event also from the perspective of the cultural diplomacy and strategy of the Republic of Armenia.

During the days of the Festival, Armenia transforms into a cultural capital, bringing together professional musicians, international artists and music enthusiasts from around the world.

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