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ART

OHANNES TCHEKIDJIAN'S CONTRIBUTION TO ARMENIAN MUSIC ART

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Ohannes Tchekidjian is a newly discovered star sparkling in the Armenian music firmament. He has come to have the world hear the genuine song of our Komitas, and glorify both himself and our nation¹.

Victor HAMBARDZUMYAN

In 2018, the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia completed its 75 years.

On October 18, 2018, in the Al. Spendiaryan National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet, the festive ceremony of marking the 75th anniversary of the founding of NAS RA was held. In the celebration concert, Ohannes Tchekidjian and the National Academic Choir of Armenia performed *a capella* Komitas's choral songs "El-el", "Gutanerg", "Kali yerg" (soloist – Honored Artist of the RA Sargis Aghamalyan) and the song series "Lusnak sari takin", "Andzrevn ekav", "Eghnik", "Vard a yars", "Yerevan bagh em arel", "Tun ari" and "Arnem ertam im yar". Then the Capella under the Maestro's direction and to a piano accompaniment by Aram Turabyan presented Scene One of Act One and the concluding chorus from Dikran Tchouhadjian's comic opera *Karineh*. The public also enjoyed the art of Ohannes Tchekidjian the symphonic conductor: the Maestro directed the orchestra of the Al. Spendiaryan National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet featuring the popular Waltz from the music to M. Lermontov's *Masquerade*, written by the only musician Academician in the history

¹ O. Tchekidjian's personal archive.

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of Armenia's National Academy of Sciences, the world famous composer, conductor, teacher, public figure, Hero of Socialist Labor, People's Artist of the USSR, Recipient of the Lenin and State Prizes of the USSR, Academician of the Armenia's Academy of Sciences, Doctor of Arts Aram Khachaturian (1903–1978). Over time, the Waltz became the best known piece of music written by the outstanding composer for drama theater. *Masquerade* was premiered in the Moscow Vakhtangov Theater on June 21, 1941. The next day the Great Patriotic War broke out. The Waltz, nonetheless, survived and gained popularity across the world.

At the commemoration of A. Khachaturian in the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, the State Symphony Orchestra of the USSR under Yevgeny Svetlanov performed the famous Waltz – “to have everyone present realize what a Great Composer we have lost”². The sounds of the Waltz accompanied A. Khachaturian to immortality.

The composer's wish was that his House-Museum be affiliated with NAS RA Institute of Arts. It, regrettably, was not. Nor was it turned into a research center, but... the well-liked Waltz from *Masquerade* welcomes the visitors to NAS RA Institute of Arts website www.art.sci.am.

At the end of the celebration concert the National Academic Choir of Armenia and the Orchestra of the Al. Spendiaryan National Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet performed the anthem of the Academy under the baton of its unique and unequalled interpreter Ohannes Tchekidjian.

Incidentally, just a couple of days prior to NAS RA anniversary celebration, by the decision of Academy Presidium, O. Tchekidjian was awarded the title of NAS RA Honorary Doctor. The certificate was presented to the Maestro on October 18, 2018 by NAS RA President, Academician Radik Martirosyan.

At the very end of 2017, on December 30, by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan PD-1014-A, Ohannes Tchekidjian was awarded the high title of “National Hero of Armenia”. The Presidential decree read as follows, “For the total commitment to the cause of presenting Armenia to the world, the great personal contribution to the field of culture, as well as for the exceptional service to the Armenian people, to award People's Artist Ohannes

² **Yuzefovich V.** Aram Khachaturian, Moskva, 1990, p. 73 [Rus].

Tchekidjian the highest title of ‘National Hero of Armenia’ and present the ‘Order of Homeland’”.

A truly deserved assessment, title and award, since “the creative deed of the Maestro has long become the pinnacle and criterion of art. He is an entire epoch in contemporary performing art. The topmost achievements of the Academic Capella of Armenia are associated with his name. The amazing talent of the choirmaster and his selfless service to the beloved cause have determined the creative destiny of the choir for many years ahead. The best traditions of the Armenian choir culture of the past and the accomplishments of today’s choir art have met in Ohannes Tchekidjian. He has enhanced the horizons of choir creativity, having connected the living truth of life with poetic sublimity, which brings about emotions of ineffable power”³.

Prior to that, by the decision of the joint session of the Council for Humanitarian Collaboration of the CIS Member States, and the Board of Interstate Foundation for Humanitarian Collaboration of the CIS Member States as of 17 April 2014, Ohannes Tchekidjian was awarded the Interstate Prize “Commonwealth Stars” 2013 in the field of culture and art, presented to him in the Beethoven Hall of the Bolshoi Theater of Russia⁴. It is worth noting that among the prize recipients were the long-term President of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine Boris Paton⁵, and one of the most revered figures of Russia’s theater and film art Oleg Tabakov⁶.

³ **Gomtsyan Natalia**, A Living Legend, Golos Armenii, 25 January 2018, p. 6 [Rus].

⁴ The main humanitarian CIS award “Stars of Commonwealth” is established by the Council for Humanitarian collaboration of the CIS Member States and the Interstate Foundation for Humanitarian Collaboration of the CIS Member States at the joint session in Astana (Kazakhstan) on May 21, 2009. Since then, this prize is annually awarded in three nominations: science and education, culture and art, humanitarian activity – for major contributions and achievements of global significance, facilitating humanitarian collaboration.

⁵ Boris Paton - Academician of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (from 1962), Hero of Ukraine (1998), Honored Innovator of the USSR (1983), Recipient of Lenin Prize (1957), Stalin Prize of III Degree (1950) and two State Prizes of Ukraine (1970, 2004), Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (1962-1989), Member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of USSR (1963–1980).

⁶ Oleg Tabakov – People’s Artist of the USSR (1988), Recipient of State Prizes of the USSR (1967) and RF (1977), holder of a complete set of Order of Service to the Fatherland, Artistic Leader and Director of the Moscow Chekhov Art Theater (2000–2018), founder and Artistic Director of the Moscow Tabakerka Theater (1987–2018).

Ohannes Tchekidjian's Contribution to Armenian Music Art

Thus, who is the hero of our times, the living legend and walking classic, Maestro Ohannes Tchekidjian?

The performing career of the outstanding conductor embraces two major areas.

Firstly, he presents Armenian choral music and the high level of choral art to the world. In this respect, the Maestro successfully continues the cause of great Komitas, who was an advocate of Armenian song, a propagator of Armenian music among foreigners and us, Armenians; in a sense, he “compelled” us to love it. His ultimate goal was to convince the world that Armenians have their own distinctive music. Before him, beyond Armenia, even in the centers of Armenian intellectual life, such as Constantinople, Tiflis, Venice, Moscow, Baku and elsewhere, the Armenian folk song was very little known. The tune of the so-called “national” songs, even if they carried patriotic texts in Armenian, was predominantly borrowed from European operas or popular European songs (“Ari im sokhak”, “Mer hayreniq”, etc.).

All along his performing career Maestro Tchekidjian remained faithful to Komitas's behest. And it is not a mere coincidence that, since January 29, 2015, the Maestro has been a member of the Scientific Board of the Komitas Museum-Institute. Quite importantly, he was among those who came up with the idea of founding the abovementioned Museum in Yerevan.

Earlier, in 2011, he was the Honorary Guest of the First Komitas International Festival in Germany and was elected Honorary President of the competent jury “for the assistance in the process of forming the artistic part of the festival and the commitment to the latter”. On August 7, 2011 the Maestro was awarded the Honorary Diploma of the Festival.

O. Tchekidjian's repertoire included not only works by Armenian classics Dikran Tchouhadjian, Komitas, Makar Yekmalyan, Armen Tigranyan, Alexander Spendiaryan, Aram Khachaturian, but also by the contemporary Armenian composers Arno Babajanyan, Alexander Harutyunyan, Edward Mirzoyan, Edgar Hovhannisyanyan, Grigor Hakhinyan, Aram Satyan, Konstantin Petrosyan, Ashot Babayan, and the Diasporan composers Barsegh Kanachyan, Alan Hovhannes, Hambardzum Perperyan, Gurgen Alemsahah, and others.

The Maestro gave concerts in 184 cities – in the former Soviet Republics, in the Lebanon, France, Spain, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Great Britain, the USA, Greece, Syria, Switzerland, Turkey, Argentina, Australia, etc. At 868 concerts (of

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which 43 in France and 97 in Leningrad) he conducted 69 world-class orchestras, among them: the State Academic Symphony Orchestra of the USSR, the Bolshoi Theater Symphony Orchestra, the Moscow Philharmonia State Academic Symphony, the Leningrad Philharmonia Academic Symphony, the Budapest Philharmonic, the Wroclaw Philharmonic, and the Symphony Orchestra of the Marseille Opera.

In Yerevan and in the administrative centers and districts of Armenia he presented pieces by both Armenian and foreign classical composers, including Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Bellini, Rossini, Verdi, Wagner, Mendelson, Brahms, Berlioz, Gounod, Faure, Smetana, Gershwin, Glinka, Borodin, Musorgsky, Tchaikovsky, Taneev, Aram Khachaturian, Dmitri Shostakovich, Tikhon Khrennikov, Georgy Sviridov, Dmitri Kabalevsky, Rodion Schedrin and others.

The Maestro is very often the first and unexcelled interpreter of the music performed. Under his direction, the Armenian Capella sings a wide repertoire, including various pieces from the world music literature, by Armenian and foreign composers, as well as Armenian folk songs, scenes from operas. The Capella performs in the original in 27 languages over 700 works, including 40 large-scale pieces, 15 of which were premiered in the Soviet Union.

We can say with certainty that Ohannes Tchekidjian's personal participation accounts for the higher level and better quality of music life in Armenia, that his creative career contributed greatly to the progress of choral and conducting art in the Soviet Union. A vivid proof of this is the Honorary title of ACADEMIC conferred on the State Choir of Armenia "For the Distinguished Achievements in the Development of the Soviet Art" in 1969.

O. Tchekidjian has significantly enhanced the horizons of choral potentials and blended the Armenian music legacy with the best of the world classical and contemporary choral art⁷.

Thanks to Ohannes Tchekidjian, in Armenia and in the Soviet Union such vocal-symphonic pieces were premiered as H. Berlioz's *Requiem*, *Te Deum* and *Romeo and Juliet*, G. Faure's *Requiem*, G. Verdi's *Hymn of the Nations*, C. Lambert's *Rio Grande*, etc.

⁷ **Ohannes Tchekidjian.** The Captain of Armenian Capella. Forum, 2/2014, p. 32 [Rus].

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Incidentally, O. Tchekidjian is the only conductor in the world who has conducted Berlioz's *Requiem* 37 times, setting a kind of world record of unprecedented performance. The Yerevan premiere of Berlioz's *Requiem* took place on February 1 and 2, 1967. On February 26, *Requiem* sounded in Moscow under O. Tchekidjian's direction, featuring the State Symphony Orchestra of the USSR and the State Choir of Armenia.

Thereupon, on March 2 and 3, the piece was performed in Leningrad with the State Choir of Armenia and the Leningrad Philharmonic Academic Symphony Orchestra.

Ohannes Tchekidjian is the only Armenian conductor and performer awarded with the State Prize of the USSR in 1975 – “For the Concert Programs of 1971–1973”: during these years the Armenian Capella under the Maestro's direction gave concerts in Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Lithuania, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Today Ohannes Tchekidjian is a most desired and expected participant of all musical events in Armenia: the Capella under his direction was entrusted with the opening concert of the Komitas International Conference-Festival (September, 26 2018), the 17th Francophonie Summit in Armenia (October 7, 2018), and the like.

Ohannes Tchekidjian is a sought-after interpreter of vocal-symphonic and choral works by many Armenian composers...

Ohannes Tchekidjian – the distinguished musician and individual – is the 16th Armenian⁸ and the 2nd musician⁹ decorated with the title of “National Hero of Armenia”. He is the only “National Hero of Armenia” presently living in Yerevan, Armenia. The “Order of Motherland” decorated the Maestro's chest as an appreciation of his exhaustive dedication to Homeland and Armenian music art.

In 2019 we will celebrate anniversary – 75 years of his creative career: his first experience as a choirmaster dates back to the year of 1944. And today,

⁸ 16 of 17 National Heroes of Armenia are Armenians, one is Russian. “For the considerable contribution to the organization of work toward restoration after the disastrous earthquake in Armenia, for the exceptional moral support of the Armenian people in those difficult times”, on December 6, 2008 the said title was conferred on Chairman of the Federal Assembly of Russia, Member of Federation Council Nikolay Ryzhkov (sequential number 15).

⁹ “For the outstanding merits in presenting Armenia to the world, for the outstanding services provided to our country, as well as on the occasion of the 80th birth anniversary”, the title was conferred on the Great French Armenian Chansonie Charles Aznavour (sequential number 13).

borrowing the definition given by the Marshal of the Soviet Union Hovhannes Baghramyan, we aptly name him the Marshal of choral art.

This, however, does not exhaust the series of jubilees.

55 years ago, in 1964, it was not scholarly presentations that sounded in the Conference Hall of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia. The audience was enjoying Komitas's and other national secular songs along with Handel's, Mozart's, Bellini's music. The concert was given by the State Choir of Armenia. "An unforgettable concert. The talented conductor and choirmaster Ohannes Tchekidjian once again proved that Komitas is where the Choir is. Once again he demonstrated his mastery, his inspiring art, his skill to brilliantly present the pearls of choral art"¹⁰.

Fifty - five years ago, in 1964, on November 24–28, O. Tchekidjian's debut in Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union, took place. The Capella performed Mozart's *Requiem* and Schubert's Cantata Miriam's Song of Triumph. At that time the Choir consisted of just 54 artists. The concert was of crucial importance as in case of success, the doors of the country's major concert halls would open. And Moscow appreciated Tchekidjian's talent. D. Shostakovich remarked that "...he can freely embellish the best concert halls of Europe".

"There are quite a few, so to speak, musical cities, even countries", the Maestro said years later. "We perceive Italy as a huge conservatory; we see a born musician in every Italian. In our perception, Milan, Vienna, Paris and Leningrad are identified with music. At the same time, although Moscow does not belong in this group, the values of classical and contemporary music art are set here. Even the most acclaimed musician cannot but seek for Moscow plaudits. The Leningrad "academic" audience is substituted for the Moscow "international" audience, literally, and one never knows where the echo of today's concert will sound tomorrow. These listeners are always with their suitcases packed, always on rails. The Moscow stage is a pedestal, where you are visible for the representatives of many nations, for whom Armenia and the Armenian, the Choir from Armenia are a revelation, and that concert can possibly be the one and only chance for them to meet with the Armenian culture, because they are only visitors in that city. Tomorrow they will leave for all four corners of the globe, taking with themselves

¹⁰ **Hayrapetyan Gh.**, Komitas is where the Choir is, Lraber, 5 March 1964.

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the song of the until then unknown nation. This is why the Moscow concerts are not only about aesthetic value, but about self-assertion.

For me, it is hard to overestimate the significance of the Moscow concerts. They carry an enormous amount of moral and political significance. No matter on what occasion you come onto the stage – your responsibility grows tenfold because you represent your own people. And if, in addition, you know that the seats in the box are occupied by Aram Khachaturian, Hovhannes Baghramyan, Irina Arkhipova, Ivan Kozlovsky, the outstanding Armenians, residing in Moscow, whose desire to witness the spiritual revival of their own people, your wish to become the corroborator and witness of that rise overwhelms you.

The diverse Moscow audience are your strictest jury, who give you green light as a performer. You are listened to and judged according to international criteria. Moscow is a window to the world. In order to look out of it, you must first earn Moscow's favor. My long experience convinced me: you must sing in full voice, when Moscow is listening to you"¹¹.

The Capella made their Moscow debut with the premiere performance of Rossini's *Stabat mater*, featuring world-famous Yevgeny Nesterenko. The success was unprecedented: the audience gave a standing ovation. When O. Tchekidjian was invited onto the stage for the eighth time, the administration turned down the lights signaling the concert was over. The rounds of applause went on through the darkness. The symphony orchestra left the stage – the audience would not leave. The lights came back on, and... Komitas, "Gutanerg", then one more Komitas...

After his debut in the Homeland, amply presenting Komitas's choral songs, O. Tchekidjian directed own matchless renditions of Komitas's songs performed by the Choir all around the world – to make the world believe that "Armenians have their own distinctive music, admire the entrancing songs of the age-old nation." The Maestro remains faithful to the traditions and follows the precepts of his paternal home in Constantinople, where his family once hosted great Komitas.

"We are the medium of Armenian art", the Maestro says with conviction, "so we are obliged to first propagate our own music, and only then show our style and technique by performing European music. And do you know what is happening when after Verdi's *Requiem* or Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, through the unending clapping, we begin singing Komitas? He shines like a genuine diamond.

¹¹ **Hovhannisyan Anzhela**, Ohannes Tchekidjian, Yerevan, 1984, pp. 82–84.

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And we usually conclude our concerts with that diamond. My goal is to serve Armenian art, to present the music of my nation at the highest possible level and through that give warmth to people's hearts, enjoy the fondness of the public"¹².

...Upon the triumphal performance in Moscow, the doors of the most recognized concert halls of the Soviet Union opened. Aram Khachaturian remarked on the Choir's commendable appearance on the Moscow stage, "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 the Soviet culture"¹³. The monthly *Muzykalnaya Zhizn* [Music Life] and weekly *Sovetskaya Kultura* [Soviet Culture] reacted, as well.

From that time on, the posters of the state Choir of Armenia occupy their rightful place in the musical life of Moscow. H. Baghramyan, A. Mikoyan, A. Khachaturian, P. Lisitsian, T. Petrosyan, the multinational Moscow intelligentsia, foreign visitors attend their concerts in the Assembly Hall of the Kremlin, in the Column Hall of the House of Unions, in the Bolshoi Theater.

Throughout the 55 years after the debut in Moscow, the Maestro gave there 90 concerts, among them – the All-Union premiere performances of several vocal-symphonic pieces, such as: Berlioz's *Requiem* and dramatic symphony *Romeo and Juliet*, Gabriel Faure's *Requiem*, Gounod's Oratorio "Death and Life".

Fifty-five years have passed since the days when the Capella under O. Tchekidjian's direction conquered Leningrad. On October 29-31 and November 1, 1964, the Capella performed Mozart's *Requiem*, Schubert's Cantata in C major, and gave two *a capella* concerts. The choirmaster of the Leningrad M. Glinka Academic Capella V. Baranov said, "The Artistic Director of the Choir, a talented musician Ohannes Tchekidjian deserves all the praise. His will, his flawless knowledge of the score, his gestures, his flair of a true choirmaster allowed him to create a committed ensemble and call forth an emotional tension. The Choir captivated the Leningrad listener even more when they sang Komitas's two choral songs for the encore: the mastery and clear sound, the national tone of the wonderful ensemble were demonstrated in all their splendor"¹⁴.

¹² Honored Ensemble the State Choral Capella of Armenia, Yerevan, 1989, p. 10 [Rus].

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ **Baranov V.**, Komitas's Compatriots Sing in Leningrad, Grakan Tert, 4 December 1964.

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The Chief Conductor of the Leningrad Academic Symphony Orchestra, People's Artist of the USSR, Hero of Socialist Labor, Recipient of the Lenin Prize and the USSR State Prize Yevgeny Mravinsky, on the occasion of Berlioz's *Requiem* performed by the State Choir of Armenia on March 5, 1969 at the Grand Hall of the Leningrad Shostakovich Philharmonia, remarked, "As professional musicians, during a concert we cannot but think about the score, beat distribution, shades and much more. And what a delight it is when the performer makes you forget you are a professional, makes you feel like one of the audience. While listening to Berlioz's *Requiem*, featured by the State Choir of Armenia and our Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Ohannes Tchekidjian at the Grand Hall of the Leningrad Philharmonia, I came across an interpreter, who made me forget about the score and my professional attitude to music. I unwittingly became an ordinary delighted listener, who was fortunate to enjoy such happiness".

This bond proved to be lasting: 97 concerts – a series of All-Union premieres including – were given in Leningrad under the direction of Maestro Tchekidjian, mostly in the Grand Hall of the Shostakovich Leningrad Philharmonia, more than 70 of them – with Yevgeny Mravinsky's Symphony Orchestra.

It was 55 years ago, when the Capella under O. Tchekidjian successfully toured around such Baltic cities as Tallinn, Tartu, Narva, Vilnius, Kaunas, Riga, the Russian cities Kaliningrad, Chernyakhovsk, Svetlogorsk, Kislovodsk, Pyatigorsk, Yessentuki, as well as Baku.

For the high professionalism manifested during the concert tour of the Soviet Republics, in February 1964, the State Choir of Armenia was awarded the Honorary Diploma of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

From October 21 to December 22, 1964 The Capella gave 49 concerts outside Armenia, part of them – in five biggest Baltic cities Tallinn, Vilnius, Riga, Tartu and Narva. In those years O. Tchekidjian's name was not yet widely known in the USSR, which caused difficulties in organizing the tour. The Administrator Alik Aslamazyan, as well as his spouse, the splendid singer Gohar Galajyan were of huge help to the Maestro in overcoming challenges.

The choir conductor, composer, pedagogue, People's Artist of the USSR, Hero of Socialist Labor, Recipient of the Lenin Prize, two-time Recipient of the USSR State Prize Gustav Ernesaks in the October 29 issue of the *Rahva Haal* newspaper shared his impressions of the concerts of 24 and 25 October: "A nice

surprise or, I should say, a ‘concert blast’ awaited the audience of the Estonia Concert Hall. I mean the performance of the State Choir of Armenia, whose intonational wealth and distinct phrasing convey to the listener something beyond the fixed notes. Not only the text, but the subtext is heard, not just the lines, but what lies in between, above and below the lines.

The Principal Conductor and Artistic Director of the Capella is Ohannes Tchekidjian – a unique musician of incredible talent. O. Tchekidjian momentarily reacts to the slightest inaccuracy in timbre of either of the choir sections. Under Tchekidjian, the choral group resembles a bottle of mercury that reacts to the least deflection. The conductor is ready to add more and more nuances to the Choir’s remote control panel, and it works with electronic virtuosity.

... Into orbit has entered a new musical spacecraft, whose enthusiastic captain and the crew look forward to the most challenging flights”¹⁵.

The concert program included pieces by Bach, Handel, Dvorak, Berlioz and Komitas. The press reacted in superlatives, “The Audience Gave a Standing Ovation”, “A Celebration of Choral Art”; the TASS Russian News Agency praised the Baltic tours of the Capella as “A Major Phenomenon of the Concert Season”.

Here is the impression shared by the music critic T. Elmanovich, “Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the State Capella of Armenia Ohannes Tchekidjian is a “magician” of music. During the few last years, many new singers joined in the State Choir, and hundreds of new pieces were prepared, such as Schubert’s Cantata (the first performance in the Soviet Union), Mozart’s and Berlioz’s *Requiems*, oratorios, etc.”¹⁶

O. Tchekidjian had prepared a surprise for the audience in Tallinn. Some of them were moved to tears when the Choir performed Gustav Ernesaks’s “My Homeland”. Komitas’s “Kali yerg” sounded no less impressive.

The next stop was in Tartu, thereupon the Choir went to Narva.

About the concerts in Riga, music critic, composer, Doctor of Arts Olgerts Gravitis wrote, “One can safely state that to date, we have hardly witnessed choral art of this professional level. Ohannes Tchekidjian’s hands seem to have felt in the human voice an instrument that hasn’t been invented yet. These hands have us hear sounds very close to those produced by the king of all instruments – the pipe

¹⁵ **Ernesaks G.**, A Nice Surprise, *Rahva Haal*, October, 29 1964; **Ernesaks G.**, Fly high, *Sovetskaya Estonia*, October 28 ,1964 [Rus], Fly High, *Sovetakan Hayastan*, November 3, 1964.

¹⁶ Honored Ensemble State Choir Capella of Armenia, Yerevan, 1989, p. 59.

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organ, which is endowed with human breath, emotions and senses. The Capella and its heart and soul, the energetic conductor Ohannes Tchekidjian gave three consecutive concerts of vocal and instrumental music by the Armenian composers of the past and present to sold-out audiences at the concert venues in Riga. Hearty atmosphere of brotherhood reigned in the hall, when the Capella from Armenia performed together with the Symphony Orchestra of the Latvian Radio and Television. Ohannes Tchekidjian, unlike many choral conductors, is perfectly good at directing a symphony orchestra. He does his job with remarkable power. Every beat and chord serve the one and only goal of musicality. The conductor leads us to the core of the composition and highlights the emotional in it. Amazing is the Choir's professionalism, which encompasses vocal sounding, instrumental punctuality and dynamic contrasts"¹⁷.

Forty-five years ago, in 1974, the first tours of the Capella outside the Soviet Union took place. They gave concerts in the Lebanon and France.

There was no symphony orchestra in Beirut at that time¹⁸, so the program only included *a capella* pieces.

Five concerts had been scheduled, twelve concerts were given instead. The Diasporan press hastened to announce, "We have seen Komitas", "The true outline of our talents", "The doors of magic and miracle have been opened" – such were the titles of the articles. The *Azduk* wrote, "The Lebanese Armenians have refound themselves, seeing this wondrous phenomenon. The Armenian song was sung alongside the masterpieces of Bach, Handel, Verdi, Rossini, was printed in the same program and, what is more important, was performed with the same power of perfection, flawless harmony and to the same highest performing criteria". The *Monday Morning* weekly remarked, "The conductor of the State Academic Choir of Armenia, Ohannes Tchekidjian, had outstanding teachers. If we add to that, his inborn talent and agreeable human qualities, it will be clear that we deal with a great music master. ...Ohannes Tchekidjian demonstrates his art in an amazing unity with his choir. ...Ohannes Tchekidjian can be safely

¹⁷ **Gravitis O.**, Temperament and musicality, *Literatura un Maksla*, 21 November 1964.

¹⁸ Incidentally, today Beirut has its symphony orchestra, which was founded and is led to date by Armenian Lebanese Pertj Fazlyan. On the invitation of the President of the Lebanon National Conservatory Valid Gholmie, P. Fazlyan returned to Lebanon in 1997 to found the first in Lebanon symphony orchestra. In 1999 he was assigned conductor of the Lebanon Philharmonic, then promoted Principal Conductor.

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ranked among the most talented conductors of our time”. “...Immeasurable is Ohannes Tchekidjian’s role as a composer, conductor and inspirer of the music life of Armenia. The Choir, led by this outstanding Maestro, has enriched its repertoire with over 700 pieces, which include requiems, cantatas, oratorios, symphonies”, such was the remark of *La revue du Liban* of Beirut. The Arab *Safa* stated, “Everybody is familiar with the magic power of human voice. The leader of the Choir captivated us with magnificent performance. ...Ohannes Tchekidjian’s conducting gestures are very varied. He requires the utmost from his singers, and he succeeds without noticeable efforts”.

Years and decades later, on November 22, 2016, the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia Aram I decorated Ohannes Tchekidjian with the “Order of Knight” of the Great House of Cilicia.

On September 6–16, 1974, the first tours of the Capella to France, namely, Paris and Marseille, took place.

The beginning of the story dates back to the year 1961, when the student of the Ecole Normale de Musique of Paris, who had also completed postgraduate courses at the Istanbul Conservatory, the Artistic Director and the Principal Conductor of the only professional choir in Turkey – the Istanbul State Capella, the Musical Director, Principal Choirmaster and the conductor of the Symphony Orchestra of the Istanbul Opera Theater, Ohannes Tchekidjian came to Armenia, and on September 5 assumed the position of the leader of the State Choir of Armenia.

Two days prior to the Yerevan debut, in an interview to *Sovetakan Hayastan* daily, O. Tchekidjian said, “It may seem that I lived an eventful life of an artist there, but those were duties per se, while my heart and my soul wished to be engrossed in art, but – my soul was here, in my sunlit, dream country, whose songs I could only hear secretly on the radio. I listened to the songs, put down the notes, made the scores, then copied them and gave out to all my choir members. And the Armenian song sounded...”¹⁹

The young, talented and energetic conductor’s lifetime dream came true. His creed of an artist was as follows, “Art ought to live like a landlord, be the owner of its hearth and home, deepen its roots in own soil and stretch its branches up to the skies. There is and can be no art without homeland.”

¹⁹ “He is in his sunlit Homeland”, *Sovetakan Hayastan*, 25 November 1961.

Ohannes Tchekidjian's Contribution to Armenian Music Art

O. Tchekidjian came to his home country to serve his own people. The life of the Maestro is truly educative and exemplary. In recent years we very often hear about emigration due to the social and economic hardships. But for each of us there is only one Homeland, and O. Tchekidjian, having come to Yerevan in 1961, hardly ever knew what would come onto him here, yet he did come – despite everything, because he wanted his art to serve his own people, his own land, in Yerevan and elsewhere in Armenia he wanted to feel enjoyment from the applause of his compatriots; when touring the world, he wished to proudly represent his Motherland – the Soviet Union, Armenia, his city of Yerevan. It is quite appropriate that “for the undeniable contribution to the cause of developing Armenian art, for introducing the world music treasures to his own people”, on September 20, 2001 O. Tchekidjian was awarded the title of Honorary Citizen of Yerevan.

Today no less actual are the thoughts, expressed by O. Tchekidjian in the far-distant 1962, “My sincere wish, my heartfelt desire is that all our talented artists come together in our home country for the good of own creative growth and for the glory of own people. Because only in his own land the Armenian artist gets the widest opportunities to flourish. Only in your own country, within the embrace of your own people your inspiration can be ingenious and sincere. Every day you see your Homeland and your people, experience their emotions, your abstract feelings thereby become tangible and add meaning to your aspirations and thoughts”²⁰.

It is hard to guess how O. Tchekidjian's life path would have developed had he not come to Armenia. One thing is clear that in his Homeland, he opened a new page in the history of the Armenian performing art, developed a unique and matchless Tchekidjian style: aren't the performances of the Capella recognized infallibly from the very first bars? In his art, which O. Tchekidjian has mastered to perfection, he follows Komitas's principle: to achieve the utmost expressiveness with the least means.

...The activity of O. Tchekidjian in Armenia has marked the Golden Age in the history of the Capella, which reached the level of the best choirs of the Soviet Union, even surpassing them in some aspects. Aram Khachaturian justly

²⁰ See: **Daryan Armen**, In the Homeland: with Ohannes Tchekidjian, Haraj-grakan, July, 1962, pp. 6–7.

described O. Tchekidjian as a conductor of global scale, who transformed the national into international, and made his art universal.

They say the art of conducting is hard to learn, one cannot become but should be born a conductor. Without doubt, O. Tchekidjian was born with the baton in his hand. The youth of godsent talent received brilliant professional education. His professor in Paris was Principal Conductor of the Paris Opera Jean Fournet. And the deserving student of Fournet could not but be very successful, since besides his exceptional talent and profound professional knowledge he was conspicuous for his enviable hard work. 57 fruitful and glorious years have passed from the Maestro's memorable debut in Homeland. The State Choir of Armenia appeared before the world with majestic performances of the priceless gems of Armenian and international choral music.

The Choir led by O. Tchekidjian is the only one in the world who sing without sheet music, even when large-scale vocal-symphonic pieces are performed. They are guided by their choirmaster's motto, "Come onstage with the notes in your heart and mind, not in your hands".

In 1975, for superb performing art and notable creative achievements, the title of Honored Ensemble of Armenia was added to the existing titles of the State Choir of Armenia. Furthermore, on November 15, 2012, by the decision of the Government of RA # 1437-A, the non-profit organization "State Academic Choir of Armenia" received the status of National.

Newspapers and magazines of authority around the world comprised praising articles about the activity of Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Choir, the outstanding master of choir art, "magician of choir baton", "wizard of music" O. Tchekidjian. The number of articles crossed the line of 1250.

To make O. Tchekidjian's creative profile complete, we should add that he also succeeded as Artistic Leader and Director of the Yerevan Al. Spendiaryan State Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet. During his tenure from 1982 through 1987, the Theater experienced its most expansive period of growth.

O. Tchekidjian prioritized the repertoire of the Theater. The efficient leader enriched the repertoire with the world famous classical works, such as P. Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* and *Theme and Variations*, Puccini's *La Boheme* and *Madama Butterfly*, Zakaria Paliashvili's *Daisi*, Rimski-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel*, Berlioz's dramatic symphony *Romeo and Juliet*, performances by

Ohannes Tchekidjian's Contribution to Armenian Music Art

contemporary Soviet composers, such as Vyacheslav Ganelin's ballet *The Satan's Mill*, Alexander Harutyunyan's opera *Sayat-Nova*, etc.

In 1984, the book *The Order of Lenin Al. Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet State Academic Theater* was published to the half-centenary of the Theater. The celebration season opened with a new production of Alexander Spendiaryan's opera *Almast*, realized by the invited Principal Director of the Novosibirsk Theater, People's Artist of the RSFSR, Professor Vahagn Bagratuni. People's Artist of the Arm. SSR Arshavir Karapetyan performed Tatul's part, and Honored Artist of the Arm. SSR Olga Gabayan appeared as *Almast*.

Very few people know that O. Tchekidjian is also a composer. The Maestro's vocal-symphonic poem "Tolls of Freedom", written to Silva Kaputikyan's text, is dedicated to Aram Khachaturian's 60th birth anniversary. His vocal-symphonic poem *Springtime Dreams* is written to Vahan Teryan's lyrical verses.

Yet another field of Ohannes Tchekidjian's career is teaching. In 1973–1977 he taught at the Music College of Yerevan named after R. Melikyan, and in 1975 he took up teaching at the Yerevan Komitas State Conservatory. In 1982, the Higher Attestation Commission of the USSR awarded O. Tchekidjian the academic rank of Professor.

By the decision of the June 18, 2014 session of the Scientific Council of the Conservatory, a Tchekidjian Scholarship was established to award the best choirmaster student.

O. Tchekidjian successfully combined his performing, creative, organizational and teaching activities with his responsibilities as a public figure: he was elected Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of both the USSR (1979-1984) and the Arm. SSR (1975-1990).

The Homeland has commended the Maestro's merits: Professor O. Tchekidjian was awarded the Titles of "National Hero of Armenia", People's Artist of the Arm. SSR (1967) and People's Artist of the USSR (1978); he is Recipient of State Prizes of the USSR (1975) and Arm. SSR (1979); the "Order of the Red Banner of Labor", the "Order of Friendship of Peoples", the "Mesrop Mashtots", "Sts. Sahak and Mesrop", "Diamond Gold Cross", "Diamond Ararat" Orders, the "Order of St. Mesrop Mashtots"; I Degree "Order of Services to the Fatherland", the "Order of Honor". Besides, he was awarded the Grand Prix of the "Karot" International Armenian Festival, the "Grand Prix" of the Charles Gros Academy,

the “Prix du Public” at the Montreux International Choral Festival and many other orders and medals.

In conclusion, I would like to quote O. Tchekidjian, an individual, who is deeply concerned with the future of mankind and a true humanist, “Our people, which has suffered most from the lack of harmony among the nations, cannot but aspire for agreement among all races. I myself dream of the day, when human voices will blend in one joint choir, they will sound in harmony, and the song of the mankind will sweep all the hindrances away. However, an ardent dreamer who I am, I realize that a long time separates us from that concert, so I bequeath the “lucky ticket” of attending it to the succeeding generations”²¹.

ՀՈՎՀԱՆՆԵՍ ՉԵՔԻՋՅԱՆԻ ՆԵՐԴՐՈՒՄԸ ՀԱՅ ԵՐԱԺՇՏԱԿԱՆ ԱՐՎԵՍՏՈՒՄ

ԱՍԱՏՐՅԱՆ Ա.

Ամփոփում

ՀՀ ազգային հերոս, ԽՍՀՄ ժողովրդական արտիստ, դիրիժոր Հովհաննես Չեքիջյանի գործունեությունն ընթացել է մի քանի ուղղություններով՝ կատարողական, կազմակերպական, ստեղծագործական, մանկավարժական և հասարակական:

Մասնատրոն աշխարհին է ներկայացրել հայ երգչախմբային երաժշտությունը և այդ արվեստի բարձր մակարդակը: Նա համերգներով շրջագայել է Հայաստանի սահմաններից դուրս 184 քաղաքներում, 868 համերգների ընթացքում հանդես է եկել աշխարհի 69 առաջնակարգ սիմֆոնիկ նվագախմբերի հետ: Հ. Չեքիջյանը դարձել է բազմաթիվ ստեղծագործությունների առաջին ու անգերազանցելի մեկնաբանը: Նրա ղեկավարությամբ երգչախումբը 27 բնագրային լեզուներով կատարել է ավելի քան 700, այդ թվում՝ խոշոր կտավի վոկալ-սիմֆոնիկ շուրջ 40 ստեղծագործություններ, որոնցից 15-ը ներկայացվել են Խորհրդային Միությունում առաջին անգամ: Մեծ վարպետը համաշխարհային դիրիժորական պրակտիկայում միակն է, ով Հ. Բեռլիոզի «Requiem»-ը կատարել է 37 անգամ՝ սահմանելով համաշխարհային ռեկորդ:

²¹ Arakelyan Sergey, Ohannes Tchekidjian, Yerevan, 2014, p. 597.

Հ. Չեքիջյանը հայ դիրիժորներից, նաև՝ կատարողներից միակն է, ով արժանացել է ԽՍՀՄ Պետական մրցանակի:

Մեծ արվեստագետի շնորհիվ երաժշտական կյանքի որակը Հայաստանում նոր մակարդակի է բարձրացել, իր գործունեությամբ նա էական նպաստ է բերել Խորհրդային Միությունում խմբերգային և դիրիժորական կատարողական արվեստի զարգացմանը:

ВКЛАД ОГАНЕСА ЧЕКИДЖЯНА В АРМЯНСКОЕ МУЗЫКАЛЬНОЕ ИСКУССТВО

АСАТРЯН А.

Резюме

Национальный герой Армении, Народный артист СССР, дирижер Оганес Чекиджян наряду с исполнительской, занимается также организационной, творческой, педагогической и общественной деятельностью.

Одно из основных направлений исполнительской деятельности дирижера – продемонстрировать миру высокий уровень хорового искусства Армении. Маэстро выступал в 184 городах мира, в 868 концертах дирижировал 69-ю высококлассными симфоническими оркестрами. Маэстро нередко становится первым и непревзойденным интерпретатором многих произведений. Под его руководством репертуар капеллы был пополнен разножанровыми сочинениями, звучащими, как правило, на языке оригинала. На 27 языках мира были исполнены более 700 произведений, в том числе 40 вокально-симфонических произведений крупной формы, 15 из которых были исполнены в Советском Союзе впервые. О. Чекиджян – единственный в мировом масштабе дирижер, исполнивший «Реквием» Берлиоза рекордные 37 раз.

Из армянских дирижеров и исполнителей только О. Чекиджян был удостоен Государственной премии СССР.

Своей деятельностью Маэстро внес неоспоримый вклад в развитие советского хорового и дирижерского искусства в целом.