



Shoghaken Ensemble

Music of Armenia

Thursday, April 8, 2004, 8 pm
Wheeler Auditorium

Gevorg Dabaghyan, *duduk, zurna*

Tigran Ambaryan, *kamancha*

Aleksan Harutyunyan, *vocals*

Hasmik Harutyunyan, *vocals*

Karine Hovhannisyan, *kanon*

Kamo Khatchaturian, *dhol*

Grigor Takushian, *duduk*

Levon Tevanyan, *blul, shvi, tav shvi, pku*

*This performance has been made possible, in part,
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*Cal Performances thanks the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation,
The Wallace Foundation, and the Zellerbach Family Foundation for their generous support.*

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 Karabakhi Horovel
 Zangezuri Par
 Gorani
 Hovern Enkan
 Kani Voor Jan Im
 Shalakho
 Ororotsayin
 Saren Gookayi
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 Yes oo Yars

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Armenian folk music is one of the world's richest musical traditions, burgeoning with an extraordinary array of melodies and genres. Since the 1880s, ethnographers and musicologists, most famously the Armenian priest Komitas, have traveled to remote villages and towns in Anatolia and the Caucasus collecting Armenian songs and dances. Currently, there are over 30,000 catalogued in various archives, each with rhythms and modes characteristic of both broad Near Eastern influence and particular rituals and dialects not seen or heard beyond the next mountain pass. Tonight's program, performed by Armenia's preeminent traditional music ensemble, offers a rare chance to witness the energy and variety of this music, which for centuries was so integral to Armenians' rites of passage and daily lives. Popular dances and troubadour (*ashugh*) melodies are interspersed with more unusual emigrant- and work-songs, medieval epic verse, mournful wedding dances (a peculiarly Armenian oxymoron), and exquisite lullabies (numbering in the hundreds and renowned for their haunting lyricism).

This wealth of folk material was honed and passed down over many generations, its depth a result of the Armenians' long historical presence at a remote, biblical crossroads of the world. It was as early as 7000 BC that the Armenians settled in the eastern Anatolian highlands, the land coursed by the Euphrates and dominated by Mt. Ararat, on which Noah's ark is believed to have set down. Speaking their own Indo-European language and following their own kinship and religious traditions, they formed a unique culture that thrived through centuries of conflict and usurpation. Sandwiched between the Greco-Roman and Persian empires in the classical period and the Ottoman and Russian empires in the modern period, and for years part of the valued trade route of the Silk Road, Armenia was continually reconquered, divided, governed, and taxed by invaders, spawning a large diaspora as early as the Byzantine era. Occupiers and merchants invariably introduced new customs, and Armenians were adept at assimilating and transforming neighboring traditions, from Persian Zoroastrianism (with its worship of fire) to Roman bureaucra-

cy to Central Asian and Middle Eastern musical instruments. Armenians' cultural autonomy in the region was buttressed by theology and literacy—they adopted Christianity in 301 AD and an alphabet in 404, leading to an extraordinary monastic culture that churned out countless manuscripts, many gloriously illuminated, that preserved both the classical heritage (some original versions of Plato are only available in Armenian copies) and a received Armenian tradition. The elaborate modal music of the liturgy was theorized in writing and notated as it developed, becoming part of an intellectual clerical tradition that remained cohesive for centuries. Meanwhile Armenia's remarkably stable feudal courts and large towns and cities supported professional bardic *ashughs*, who prospered especially between the 17th and 19th centuries, traveling from town to village singing of Armenians' historical feats and forsaken love.

Armenian folk music, forged over centuries in the language and rituals of everyday life, traditionally accompanied everything from family celebrations to sowing fields to funerals, and remains a rich brew of historical elements. Pagan ritual can still be traced in songs foretelling a maiden's future retained as part of the Christian festival of the Ascension, not to mention the beloved circle-dance, with its prehistoric and Zoroastrian antecedents in the Near East. The folk repertoire is in many cases highly differentiated—specific songs, each with distinct modal characteristics, are tied to dozens of moments in the wedding ceremony, from blessing the wedding tree to the entry of the bride to male-only dances.

As in much of the Middle East, Armenian music is modal, based not on an octave with major or minor notes, but on an untempered scale. Still, repertoire from the Anatolian plain differs from that found in the Caucasus mountains, and within these areas distinct folk music styles, rhythms, genres, and instruments evolved corresponding both to the main geographical and political division of Western and Eastern Armenia and to the more than 60 regional dialects spoken across this vast expanse. In the city of Erzerum, west of Mt. Ararat, one would most likely dance to a 10/8 rhythm, as do Turks and Kurds in the

area, while across the Transcaucasian region, shared by Georgians and Azeris, a fast 6/8 is typical, as you'll hear tonight. Folk instrumental ensembles heard to the west might include the *ud*, while the *duduk* is the main folk instrument to the east, where melody is always accompanied by a drone that holds the tonic note. Such musical differences solidified in the wake of the genocide of 1915, in which over a million Armenians perished and the remainder fled either to the West or eastward to what would become a few years later the Soviet republic of Armenia (today an independent nation). The Shoghaken Ensemble, the consummate representative of the eastern tradition, combines the musical virtuosity inherited from the Soviet years with a new attention to the unscripted forms and styles of lost songs and dances, from both west and east—a curiosity that has become a hallmark of post-Soviet Armenian culture.

Tsamerov Par (“Braid Dance”)

A dance in the “urban folk” genre written by 20th-century female composer Dzovak Hambartsumyan in which young female dancers twirl their long braids.

Janoy (“Oh, My Dear”)

A wedding song traditionally sung by family elders as they moved in a half-circle in a quiet, solemn dance called a *govend*.

Oh, my dear
Wild, long-necked crane
Father, mother, have me married
Give me to a shepherd
Not to the master who will weave his threads
But forget me
Or to the merchant who will count his profit
But forget me
Give me to a shepherd
Give me to the winds of the mountain
Feed me the milk of the black sheep
Put me to sleep in the bed of the shepherd

Shatakhi Dzernapar (“Hand Dance of Shatak”)

A mournful female solo wedding dance in 6/8 rhythm emphasizing graceful hand movements. Traditionally danced as part of the cer-

emony of taking a bride-to-be from her family home. From Shatak, a region south of Lake Van in eastern Anatolia.

Karabakhi Horovel (“Horovel of Karabakh”)

A *horovel* is a work song traditionally sung in a recitative call-and-response form while ploughing, its drawn-out free-meter lines sometimes corresponding to the time it takes to plough a length of field. Karabakh is an Armenian enclave surrounded by modern Azerbaijan and is historically one of the richest Armenian cultural regions.

Zangezuri Par

A women’s dance in 6/8 from the mountainous southern Armenian region of Zangezur (bordering Azerbaijan) in which dancers mime the gestures of various female tasks, such as rocking a cradle, sewing, or knitting.

Gorani

Pagan in origin and widespread in Anatolian Armenian villages, *gorani* songs tell the stories of emigrants forced to leave their homes.

Hovren Enkan (“Coolness Has Descended”)

A traditional *duduk* folk melody.

Kani Voor Jan Im (“As Long As I Am Alive”)

A song by the great 18th-century Armenian *ashugh* Sayat Nova. Featuring Tigran Ambaryan on the *kamancha*, an instrument long associated with the lone traveling troubadour.

Shalakho

A male solo dance in 6/8 from the Caucasus region, featuring characteristically Caucasian fast footwork, abrupt turns, high kicks, and deep knee bends. Aram Khachaturian included the melody in his ballet *Gayane*. Often played as a strictly instrumental piece, here the tune is a vehicle for the extraordinary pyrotechnics of Karine Hovhannisyan on *kanon*.

Ororotsayin (“Lullaby”)

A medley of verses from four lullabies: 1. *Pootanya Ororotsayin* (“Lullaby of Pontus”), from the ancient province of Pontus on the

Black Sea; 2. *Taroni Heyroor* (“Lullaby of Taron”), from the town of Mush, historical Taron region; 3. *Roori Roori* (“Rock, Rock”); 4. *Nani Bala* (“Sleep, My Child”), from the town of Van.

Saren Gookayi (“I Was Coming From the Mountain”)

A lyric song by the blind *ashugh* Sheram (1857–1938), the most famous modern musician in the Armenian troubadour tradition.

Armenak Ghazariani Yerk (“Armenak Ghazarian’s Song”)

A patriotic song from the turn of the 20th century, written by Ghazarian, a leader in the Armenians’ struggle for freedom from Ottoman rule.

Yes oo Yars (“My love and I”)

A spry line-dance in 6/8 called the *ververi* (literally “up”), characterized by repeated jumps, in which dancers traditionally break into song.

INTERMISSION

Karabakhi Harsanekan Par

A “wedding dance of Karabakh,” featuring Gevorg Dabaghyan on the *zurna*. With its urgent wail, heard hundreds of yards away, this is a traditional opener and closer of ceremonies.

Mokats Mirza (“The Lord of Moks”)

An epic song about the death of the Lord of Moks, a province of historical Armenia southwest of Lake Van whose people often struggled against various nomadic tribes. The Lord of Jizre invites the Lord of Moks to visit, only to poison him.

Naz Par

A women’s solo improvisational dance in 6/8, featuring delicate arm and hand movements and playful glances (the word *naz* suggests both grace and coyness).

Sev Moot Amber (“Dark Black Clouds”)

A folk melody sung to the verses of poet Avetik Isahakian, who portrays Mt. Aragadz (modern Armenia’s highest peak) as a symbol of the grief and longing of Armenians.

Aparani Par

A traditional harvesting dance in 5/8 from the Aparan region, north of Yerevan.

Im Khorodik Yar (“My Beautiful Love”)

A folk lyric from Sassun in eastern Anatolia.

Tuy-tuy & Ghazakhi Par

Dance melodies from the *duduk* repertoire. The region of Gazakh lies at the juncture of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia.

Antarayin Tsayner (“Sounds of the Forest”)

A modern showpiece for the shepherd’s flute (*shvi*). Levon Tevanyan imitates with remarkable fidelity the forest cries and singing of animals and birds, especially the nightingale.

Ororotsayin

Two more lullabies: *Taroni Oror* (“Lullaby of Taron”) and *Oror Jojk Em Kabel* (“I Bind the Cradle”), from the eastern Anatolian village of Agn (near Kharpert). A *jojk* is a special kind of cradle made of woven branches and tied between trees. Hasmik Harutyunyan sings in part: “I bind the cradle to the plum tree/My bundled little lamb rocks and turns/Eh, my darling, eh....”

Zurni Trngi

A Caucasian men’s solo or pair dance in 6/8 with intricate footwork and jumps (*trnger* means “to jump”). Usually performed on the *zurna*, as the title suggests.

Tnen Ilar (“You Left Home”) & Jakhraki Vod (“Leg of the Spinning Wheel”)

Traditional milling and spinning work-songs.

Msho Geghen (“From a Village of Mush”)

A folk song from the Mush plains, said to hold a thousand Armenian villages: “From a village of Mush two brides emerge from a river/Shivering and shining like pomegranate seeds/Two rivers pass through Mush, Meghraget and Mourat,/And they flow to the river Yeprat.”

Lelum Le Le & Yarkhooshta

Lelum Le Le is a traditional song-dance (*par-yerg*) in which line-dancers sing in a call-and-response form. *Yarkhooshta* (literally “friend of

spear” in Persian), a male military “clapping dance,” originated in the eastern Anatolian region around Mush and Sassun. Hasmik and Aleksan Harutyunyan demonstrate the dance, circling separately and then clasping hands together in an outstretched arc. The sound of their hands clapping signifies weapons clashing and the popping of gun powder.

Instruments

The *duduk*, a double-reed pipe made of apricot wood, is native to Armenia and considered its national instrument, though variants can be found in Turkish, Kurdish, Georgian, and Azerbaijani regions, as well. The best musicians use subtle lip and finger techniques to extend its tonal range. The *duduk* is always accompanied by a second *duduk*, which emits an unbroken drone, achieved through circular breathing, around which the principal player weaves complex melodies and improvisations.

The *zurna*, a double-reed oboe, can be found throughout the Middle East, where its shrill, piercing call provides an insistent invitation to ritual celebrations and a driving accompaniment to dance.

Shepherd’s flutes were an important part of Armenian pastoral culture for millennia, the earliest prototypes having been found in Garni and Dvin in eastern Armenia at archaeological sites dating back to the 5th or 6th century BC. The *blul*, or *dziranapogh* (literally “pipe made of apricot wood” in Armenian), is an end-blown flute akin to the

Middle Eastern *nay* or Balkan *kaval*. The *shvi* (a small fipple flute), made from cane, wood, or bone, has a mouthpiece with an adjacent metal ring for adjusting pitch and a range of an octave and a half. The *tav shvi* (*tav* means “low”) is a more recent variant—bigger and with a deeper pitch.

The *kamancha*, a three-stringed vertical fiddle with a gourd base resting on a metal tip and played with a horizontal bow made of horsehair, is found in various forms in the urban classical musics of the Middle East and is a direct antecedent of the Western violin. In Armenia, it is strongly associated with the urban, refined *ashugh* music of Sayat Nova. In the 20th century, it became a principal instrument along with the *duduk* in the interpretation of Armenia’s folk music.

The *kanon*, a trapezoidal lap zither commonly played in Arabic and Turkish classical music, has been in use in some form since at least the 4th century. The Armenian version has 24 triple courses of gut or plastic strings, plucked with tortoise-shell plectrums, stretched over a set of metal levers that modify the pitch of the strings. The bridge rests on a narrow strip of skin that creates a resonant and percussive sound.

The *dbol* is a large cylindrical drum with skin on both sides, usually played with the hands, though for loud, traditional outdoor celebrations a pair of wooden sticks are used to create a heavy beat.

—Cynthia Rogers

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The Shoghaken Ensemble was founded by Gevorg Dabaghyan in 1991, and has become one of the most respected traditional music ensembles in Armenia. Dedicated to rediscovering and continuing Armenia’s extraordinary folk music history, the group presents music from a broad geographical and historical span using traditional instruments and song styles. The Ensemble has performed extensively in Europe, Armenia, and throughout the former Soviet Union, and can be heard on the soundtrack of Atom Egoyan’s movie *Ararat*. In the summer of 2002, the Shoghaken Ensemble

performed at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC, as part of the Silk Road festival.

Gevorg Dabaghyan (*duduk*, *zurna*), born in 1965, is one of Armenia’s best living *duduk* players. He has won many awards, including the grand prize at the international Eastern Traditional Instruments Competition in 1990, and the grand prize in the Sayat Nova *duduk* competition in both 1991 and 1992. He is featured on more than 50 recordings in the Armenian National Radio archives and as a soloist on several movie soundtracks, includ-

ing Atom Egoyan’s *Ararat* (2002). Dabaghyan released his first major independent solo recording *Miniatures: Masterworks for Armenian Duduk* on the Traditional Crossroads label in 2002. For the past two years, he has performed alongside Yo-Yo Ma and his Silk Road Project Chamber Ensemble in concerts and recordings of a new composition by Vache Sharafyan. A much sought-after collaborator, Dabaghyan has also performed recently in concerts with violinist Gidon Kremer and saxophonist Jan Garbarek.

Tigran Ambaryan (*kamancha*) graduated from the Romanos Melikian Music Institute and attended the Komitas State Conservatory. He has been a member of the Armenian State Dance Ensemble since 1992, and is currently the group’s director. Ambaryan is also a member of the Mihr Armenian-Iranian Traditional Music Ensemble.

Aleksan Harutyunyan (*vocals*) was born in Yerevan in 1962. His ancestors are from the province of Mush in historical Armenia (present-day Turkey). After graduating from Yerevan State University and the Komitas State Conservatory, he worked for many years as a soloist in, and eventually the director of, Armenian National Radio’s Agoonk Ensemble, and then as a soloist in the National Opera and as a member of the State Academic Choir. He performed with these various groups around the globe, and is now a soloist in the National Chamber Choir of Armenia and the vocal group Hye Folk.

Hasmik Harutyunyan (*vocals*), Aleksan’s sister, is one of Armenia’s best-known folk singers, specializing in the songs of Western Armenia. Born in Yerevan in 1960, she graduated from the Arno Babajanyan School of Music and the Yerevan State Pedagogical Institute and was a soloist for several years in Armenian National Radio’s Agoonk Ensemble. Well known in Armenia for her broadcast performances of traditional lullabies, she has just issued a new recording, *Armenian Lullabies*, on Traditional Crossroads (CD 4321). As a member of the Shoghaken Ensemble, she was featured as a soloist on *The*

Music of Armenia (Celestial Harmonies). Hasmik has traveled throughout Armenia and Europe presenting Armenian folk music and is now the artistic director of the Hayrig Mouradian Children’s Song and Dance Folklore Group.

Karine Hovhannisyan (*kanon*), born in Yerevan in 1966, is a graduate of the Tigran Choukhajyan Music School and the Arno Babajanyan School of Music, and a prize winner at the renowned Sayat Nova Competition. She is currently a post-graduate student and teacher at the Yerevan State Conservatory and a member of the Armenian State Dance Ensemble. Hovhannisyan recorded a solo CD as part of *The Music of Armenia* box set (Celestial Harmonies, Volume 3).

Kamo Khatchaturian (*dbol*) studied at the Romanos Melikian Music Institute and was a member of Armenian National Radio’s Agoonk Ensemble for several years. He currently performs and tours with the Shoghaken Ensemble.

Grigor Takushian (*duduk*), born in Yerevan in 1965, graduated from the Romanos Melikian Music Institute and has performed with both the Agoonk Ensemble and the Shoghaken Ensemble.

Levon Tevanyan (*shvi*), born in Yerevan in 1975, graduated from the Komitas Conservatory. He played on the soundtrack for the Iranian film *Miss Maria*, along with Gevorg Dabaghyan, and has performed in concerts throughout Europe and the Middle East. He is also an accomplished pianist and has given solo concerts in Yerevan. Tevanyan currently plays with the Tkzar National Instrument Ensemble.

Sponsor Support

The 2004 Shoghaken Tour was produced by Direct Cultural Access Inc. with the following sponsor support: Mr. & Mrs. Nubar & Anna Afeyan Foundation, Armenian American Cultural Assoc., Mr. & Mrs. Varujan & Linda Arslanyan, Mr. & Mrs. Edward & Eleonore Aslanian Foundation, Mr. & Mrs. Nishan

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