

January 26, 2008

Sonya Varoujian's eclectic music



The fanciful world of Vaco Simon Abkarian gives voice to *Persepolis*

The Armenian Age of Pearl

“Express yourself”

by Paul Chaderjian

Many of us are always trying to find a meaning or reasons for how life unfolds. It's human nature to ask why, especially when it comes to our *raison d'être*. While many may believe in the Chaos Theory, the Butterfly Effect, or Existentialism, I take my cues from others who come into my world to introduce new ideas, new ways of thinking, or to challenge what I know or how I see things.

In each impossible situation, difficult personality, or life hurdle, I look for the windows that open when a door is slammed in my life. In each work of art, entertainment, or news story I encounter, I note the messages and ideas that speak to my heart. I find inspiration in and ideas from events that may seem circumstantial but indeed may be the illumination of the path we are individually supposed to take to make the collective journey that I believe was predestined.

I decided to write this prologue because of an “Aha!” moment at the Eastern Religion section of the Barnes & Noble in Bakersfield, where I made a pit stop on my way home to Fresno this week. (And, by the way, a chain bookstore with clean bathrooms and a coffee shop

Paul Chaderjian was last seen near the pets section of the Barnes & Noble in Fresno, searching for a book that can persuade his mother to cut down on the number and variety of treats she feeds his overweight Chihuahua-Terrier.



Self portrait by Adrineh Gregorian.

is the easiest one-stop location to find inspiration and caffeine on road trips.)

A book called *Teachings of the Buddha* talked about creating our own path and speaking into reality the future that we want. I realized that week after week, this gem of a section called “Arts and Culture” doesn't just report about members of our extended community creating art, but it is a personal challenge to me and to all of you to follow the divine message from the great 20th-century poetess **Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone Ritchie**. (Somehow I doubt **Lory Bedikian** will write about her in Poetry Matters.)

For months on end, on the radio in 1989 were Madonna's lyrics, her anti-ode, her plea for humanity to “Express Yourself.” Though the song was about love, any creative work, be it pop art, infotainment, or high art, is for the receiver of the art to interpret.

For me, Madonna's plea was to not hold back the song, the dance, the words, and the colors that are in all of us. Her words that resonate in me to this day are not to hold back the personal, not to guard the life source and the soul that wants to shine in each of us.

As humans, we are storytellers and creators. We not only look like the image of God, but we are asked to live Godlike, to create like the Creator. We were created to create and should create to be at peace, and there has been no better time in the history of humankind than the now, when all the tools and freedoms of creation are ripe for the picking like the fruits in Eden.

If Armenian culture had its Golden Age of literature in the 5th century, let's call the present the Armenian Age of Pearl. So much has been deposited into our sea of history, that we're ripe to create gemstones. We just have to stop

prologue

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On page C1: Sonya Varoujian, whose album *Janapar* was released in October 2006, is preparing for the Mosaic II concert, which will be held on January 26 at the Alex Theater in Glendale. See page C4.

clamming up and be open to expressing what's inside each of us.

In this day and age, in the Pearl Age of our diasporan culture, we have the freedom and the tools, the resources and the inspiration to write the words we think and share them with others, to make the movies we envision with our home camera and post them on the Internet, to record our songs and mix them on our home computers, to use the free computer labs at public libraries and join community dance groups or take art classes at adult schools to express what's in us.

No matter what you have to say, no matter what insight you have, no matter the innate and inane fear that what we want to create is not good enough or that it has been done before, we must do what Madonna and the Buddha preached: express ourselves and speak our own future into existence. Hey, there are only some 31 original ideas, anyway, and everything else is a variation (or is that there are only 31 original flavors? I forget).

So take heed artists of either gender, of all ages, whatever your background, education, socio-economic status, or lot in life. Thumb through the next 21 pages and be inspired by **Vaco** and **Sonya Varoujian**. One earns a living as a mechanic but has touched the lives of thousands of kids. The other is not holding back the songs in her, and she is taking the stage this weekend at Mosaic II – our community's unique talent show.

Read on and you'll witness **Alina**, a young filmmaker winning accolades in Munich, and her sister **Alexandra** winning accolades in California. Both not holding back. Witness **Mrs. Bezdigian**, who is not related to Alina and Alexandra, becoming a children's book guru in her own right. Note **David Barsamian** and his unstoppable sense of justice, democracy, and the freedom of speech. And these

types of stories echo and resonate every week in the pages of the *Reporter*.

But the art and words we share aren't just by the experienced writers among us. Young **Serli**, at 14, shares her thoughts on being the recipient of media content. She cues us about the age in which we live and the technologies that are abundant to us, to create our own poetry in text messages, our own videos on Current TV and YouTube.

Indeed, the media platforms from blogs to cable TV, from self-publishing companies to Internet malls, are all hungry for content, ready to help sell your art and bring you fans. And rest assured, the gemstones we create in this Age of Pearl will rise to the top. Witness the number of hits the ArdeshirKhan (AKA **Vahe Berberian, Ara Madzounian**, and crew) Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation video has received on YouTube. People want art, crave it, and will help you spread it to new audiences.

Just as I am writing you of my Aha! moment, my colleague and friend **Lory Tatoulian** will soon take to the airwaves with her one-woman sketch comedy show. Our copy editor **Ishkhan Jinbashian** will continue setting the Armenian literary scene on fire with his second novel. **Sevag Koundakjian** will take his experiences on the road with System Of A Down to rock the film world. **Roger Kupelian, Ara Madzounian**, and our own **Adrineh Gregorian** will, too. **Kristen Kidd** in Denver will write her screenplays. **Tamar Sarkissian** will conquer network media, and **Shahen Hagopian, Shahan Sanossian, James Martin, Lola Koundakjian**, and **Armina Lamanna** will reach greater heights with their art.

But that's just the start. **Sara Anjargolian** and **Aram Kouyoumdjian**, who earn a living as attorneys, will create a permanent home for the arts in



Paul Chaderjian as an Armenia Fund Telethon host.

Southern California with the former's magical photographs and the latter's golden playwrighting pen and their collective dream to create an Armenian Center for the Arts. **Sirusho** and **Sofi** will make you dance with their pop hits. **Hrant Tokhatyan** will inspire new actors. **Arsen Serobian** will make the world fall in love with dance. And the *Reporter* will spread the word about their individual voices by reaching a million readers with these pages.

Our art is world art; our media is mainstream media.

So, why are you holding your stories back? Why are you holding back your rhythm, your taste, your beat, and your moves? Write, sing, dance, paint, experiment with cuisine in your own kitchen, sing in the shower, take photographs. Then share.

The world, me, your family, your friends and total strangers, we are all waiting for you to be the artist, the storyteller, the creator that we were created to be. ☸



James Martin.

Eclectic life, eclectic music

Sonya Varoujian's story

by James Martin

When Sonya Varoujian was 15, her uncle brought a guitar to her house. A week later, when he came back to retrieve it, she had already taught herself how to play *House of the Rising Sun* by listening to the 1960 Joan Baez version of the song. Sonya got to keep the guitar.

That moment may have been the catalyst for setting Sonya on a long and winding journey in pursuit of her life's passion. Born in England to Karnitsa and Hagop Varoujian, who absolutely loved singing, Sonya remembers that their house was often filled with music. "They were always doing duets and singing at parties," she recalls. But it wasn't until she was 12 that Sonya understood the true power of music, during a visit to Armenia, in 1986.

Sonya grew up in New York, where she attended a Saturday Armenian school. She did so well in class that she was selected to spend a month in Armenia with other Armenian students from around the world. "I was in a camp with kids from Cyprus, Greece, Brazil, England – any place you can imagine," she says. "I realized the power of music because of that trip." During a party toward the end of her sojourn in Armenia, a DJ played Madonna's "Papa Don't Preach." "So this song comes on," she says, "and I'm looking around me and here are all these kids from all over the world singing this song with passion and emotion, even though they don't know the lyrics. That's when it hit me: *music is universal.*"

As a young girl, Sonya always gravitated toward music. She of-

ten performed the lead roles in her school's musical productions or sang solos in choir performances. She even made it as an All-State Finalist for her singing achievements. She also sang with the Hamazkayin choir for three years.

Still, Sonya approached music as not much more than a hobby. That would change in the years she attended college, when she met guitarist Greg Jones. While she studied graphic design, Jones' mentorship helped her hone her musical skills and led her to write her first song, "Shut Out."

A musician comes of age

Later, when Sonya moved to London to continue her studies, she met a couple of guitarists who were looking for a singer. The musicians were highly impressed by her vocals, which had a deep, soulful, folk quality. The musicians quickly recruited Sonya, formed a full band, and began a series of jam sessions that resulted in the recording of her first album, on cassette, titled *All in All*. Sonya remembers those days as a time of phenomenal musical growth.

Graduating from the university, Sonya moved back to New York, where she worked as a graphic designer. As the daily grind kicked in, the world of music seemed to be be-



Sonya Varoujian. Photos: Daniel Varoujean Kevorkian (www.dvkevo.com); makeup artist Talar Saboudjian.

songstress

hind her. "I was severely depressed sitting in front of a computer for hours, doing absolutely nothing musically creative," she recalls. She eventually traveled back to England to rejoin her old band mates, but was saddened to discover that the chemistry was no longer there.

Sonya returned to New York and this time began to work in the garment district. Serendipity was around the corner – literally. An Armenian man who managed a company on the same floor introduced her to his brother, Oshin Baroyan, a keyboardist and music producer. After a brief audition, Baroyan exclaimed, "We are recording you. There is no way we're not going to record you."

Baroyan subsequently put a band together for Sonya. Called Seven, it featured Sonya as acoustic guitarist and lead singer, and went on to record a self-titled album. Seven quickly became a staple on New York's club scene, garnering critical acclaim. *New York Newsday* wrote:

"Sometimes the letter grades above these reviews are not enough. For Seven, there should be a fourth category: atmosphere. It would get an A+. Blending Sarah McLachlan-style reverberated piano with Natalie Merchant-like balladry, Seven creates a lush sound over which Sonya Varoujian's voice soars. It's like aural aromatherapy!"

Seven's popularity continued to grow with the release of a second album, *Confessions*, in 2001. The band's striking sound drew the attention of Arista Records, which seriously considered signing Seven on but at the eleventh hour opted for another band. Losing the deal was devastating for the band members. Sonya recalls: "The guys were getting very antsy – some of them were playing in cover bands and they were telling me, 'Look... if you want us to keep playing these gigs, you've got to pay us.'" The money generated from concerts was barely enough

to cover rehearsal costs, studio rentals, marketing, and other overhead. "If I paid one, I had to pay them all and I just couldn't afford it. The disappointment [of not getting signed] basically crushed us," Sonya adds. Six months later, Seven broke up.

Sonya was, once again, back to square one. A year and half prior to her rise in New York, Sonya's parents had moved back to London, but had encouraged her to stay behind because of her continuing success. In late 2001, as Sonya was trying hard to pick up the pieces, her parents urged her to join them in England.

Mixing altruism with art

In England, Sonya studied interior design and held a succession of dead-end jobs. Without music in her life, she felt the years ticked by like seconds on a clock and before long she found herself living a life of meaningless repetition. It wasn't just music that Sonya found herself isolated from. When she lived in New York, she was very close to the Armenian community there. In England she felt increasingly disconnected from her roots. "I started to lose touch with who I was," Sonya says. Luckily for her, change was on the horizon.

Enter the Diaspora Armenian Connection (DAC), a France-based organization that provides assistance to children in Armenia through school-building and other programs. "I was at church one Sunday and a friend of mine told me that he was going to Armenia with the DAC," Sonya recalls. After she confessed to her friend that she was very jealous of his opportunity to go to Armenia, he insisted that she join the group. Comprised mainly of French-Armenians, the group, which was leaving in two weeks, was in desperate need of Armenian-speaking personnel. It was to visit the remote village of Marts near the northern tip

of Armenia, where Sonya would interact with the children of the town by organizing various arts and crafts projects. Sonya decided to take her guitar with her to entertain the children. It was the summer of 2005. While working in Marts, she was exposed to the music of a number of Armenian folk musicians. The experience re-awoke her passion for writing music. "I came back completely changed – actually, not changed – I came back as myself," she says.

The event would spark the idea of recording music in Armenia. Sonya lost no time to devote herself to her new mission. "I decided to do it," she recalls. "I started working six days a week." Recording an album wasn't the



Sonya Varoujian.

only reason why Sonya wanted to go back to her homeland. While in Marts, she had been horrified by the dilapidated condition of the local school. It compelled her to undertake yet another project, that of raising money to help rebuild the school. She quit her interior-design job and found a position as a teaching assistant at an elementary school in Leeds, England, in order to acquire experience in working with children. Sonya also inspired the school's principal, June Turner, to help her fund the Marts project. Toy sales and other school-based fundraising events followed.

By April 2006, Sonya had collected enough money, including generous donations from friends and family, to help renovate the Marts school. She was off to Armenia again. In the four months that she was there, she divided her time between organizing the school renovations, recording her album, *Janapar*, making a music video for one of her new songs, "Hampyur," playing the occasional concert, and just taking in as much of Armenia as possible.

Since *Janapar's* release in October 2006, Sonya has played concerts throughout the world. Now living in Los Angeles, she is preparing for the Mosaic II concert, which will be held on January 26 at the Alex Theater in Glendale. Other acts appearing in the event include Zulal, Visa, Cantus Capella, and Ochion and Areni.

Life has thrown many curve balls at Sonya – it's been a series of ups and down, trials and triumphs. But no matter how hard the going has gotten, she was always able to find her true path in the end. Sonya takes it all in stride, offering a simple philosophy: "When you're in tune with yourself and you start to do positive things, then positive things come your way." ☰

connect:

www.naregatsi.org/Sonya,

www.myspace.com/sonyavaroujianmusic



Sonya Varoujian.



Lory Tatoulian.

Exploring the fanciful world of Vaco

by Lory Tatoulian

HOLLYWOOD, Calif. - On the corner of Normandie and Western, in the heart of Little Armenia, is a mechanic shop where Mercedes Benz vehicles in various states of disrepair are waiting to be resuscitated by the masterful hands of Vaco.

The skillful Mercedes technician is not only an expert when it comes to refining the melody of a well-tuned transmission, but he is an impresario of Armenian children's music and song.

The man with many talents is **Vartkes Dellalian**, a curly haired musician with a coiffed moustache, and he has been serenading Armenian children with uplifting music for more than 15 years.

With his original compositions about shapes, colors, and animals, Vaco has been able to introduce an energetic and colorful repertoire into the oeuvre of Armenian children's music.

His soft and puerile voice resonates into the hearts of children and helps them conjure up a quixotic world, where animals sing and dance and puppets speak Armenian.

Vaco believes that it is vital to establish a symbiotic relationship between entertainment and education when producing a children's album.

He also thinks writing children's music is not an easy task, because winning the approval of children and parents can be challenging.

But not only have parents fallen



Vaco with his dog, Malcom Evans, named after the Beatles roadie. Photos: Helena Gregorian.

in love with his thought-provoking lyrics about the environment, recycling and animals rights, but Vaco provides children with the

opportunity to hone their Armenian language skills and relish in a fanciful world, where everything is imbued with Armenian stylings.

new music



Top: Vaco sharing a song in his office on his guitar.

Right: The front and back of Vaco's CD for adults, *In Love Again*.



His office, which sits behind the mechanic's shop, serves as a makeshift salon. It is a place where his

clients, who are 98 percent artists, stop by to talk shop about music, art, and literature.

An inverted exchange of music and mechanics occurs; and in this hyphenated space where art and machinery converge, Vaco says is where inspiration and magic reveal themselves.

"I have writers, filmmakers, executives from Paramount – they all come here not only to bring their cars but to talk about their work with me as artist," Vaco said. "This place for me is a sanctuary."

From this sacred space, decorated with wall-to-wall paintings, art books, old photos, marionettes and instruments – Vaco has managed to record three children albums.

His children's albums include: *Mangagan Ashkharh* (Children's World), *Char Armene* (The Mischievous Armen), *Yerp Yes Medznam* (When I Grow Up), and *Mer Nor Darin* (An Armenian Christmas).

Vaco has also just released a self-produced album of love songs for adults called *In Love Again*.

In his children's albums, Vaco's vocals are complimented by his son Armen and a children's choir.

Subsequently, Vaco added two video series to his collection and introduced a furry counterpart – Dodi, a puppet character played by Stepan Partamian.

Through song and the spoken word, Vaco and his friends teach children the Armenian alphabet and lessons that help children cultivate their language and critical thinking skills.

Vaco's love affair with music and his affinity towards all things idyllic can be traced back to his childhood in Bourj Hamoud, Lebanon.

As a young boy he was a deacon at the neighborhood Soorp Sarkis Church, and it was there that the percussive sway of the censer (pourvar) became music for him.

It was this beat and rhythm that

Vaco needed to emulate, so the first instruments he gravitated towards were the drums, and then he picked up the guitar.

“My mother was always singing folks songs when she was cooking or doing house chores,” Vaco says. “She had a beautiful voice, and music was very much apart of my daily reality.”

The ebullient musician also refers to Bourj Hammoud as being a place that was filled with hyperbole and history.

“Bourj Hamoud was like an opera house,” Vaco explains. “One family would be fighting next door, and then from another window there would be a man singing Sayat Nova, and then in the street somebody would be yelling at passerby’s on the street, selling something – it was beautiful mixture of sound.”

When Vaco reached his teens, he joined a series of bands that would entertain audiences at local music and dance clubs in Beirut. His music reflected the sensibilities of the 70’s rock culture.

In 1970, he recorded the first-ever pop song dedicated to the Armenian Genocide. The song was then translated and performed in three languages and won the artist the coveted Philips Silver Disc award.

Other accolades include winning first prize for songwriting at a prestigious Lebanese Song Festival in 1974 and subsequently receiving honorary mention at the Armenian Song Festival in 1976, a year after moving to the United States.

Drawing inspiration from his own three sons, Vaco began writing and performing children’s music in 1989.

Ever since his initial venture into children’ music, the artist continues to create playful and imaginative music that helps kids explore their world in a fantastical way. 🎹

connect:

Vacomusic.com



The hands of the performer moving across the ivories.

Accolades for a young filmmaker

There's nothing ordinary about Alina Bezdikian. The glittering pages of her life's story reveal a talent destined for greatness: piano lessons beginning at age 3, ballet at 5, playwriting in elementary school, and an abiding obsession with film. If you were to watch her life unfold in one panoramic montage sequence, you would see the fast-moving city lights of San Francisco, Los Angeles, Paris, and Cairo in flamboyant color schemes of teal, forest green, mauve, and taupe. Alina's is a world of creativity, ostentation, imagination, and passion.

The young filmmaker is already on her way to stardom. Her debut short film, *Michel et Odette*, has received wide acclaim at U.S. and international festivals. Then again, as a 21-year-old director struggling to break into an industry that is unbreakable, Alina knows she has a long way to go.

"I love film because it starts as something that germinates in your head and you create something out of nothing ... a part of yourself that other people can take part in," she says.

Born and raised in San Jose, California, Alina grew up in a somewhat liberal yet characteristically strict Armenian household without a television set. The irony was that the absence of television bred in her a healthy obsession with film.

"I found that to keep myself entertained, I did a lot of reading," Alina recalls. "I would read anything I could get my hands on, and with reading came a profound love and need for storytelling and being visually inventive. So I guess somehow it segued into film."

From a very young age, Alina was forced to live in a world where imagination met narrative possi-



Alina Bezdikian making her film.

bility, a place where visual storytelling was the norm. And her family was right there to foster her creativity.

"Growing up in such a rich culture, I was constantly being told amazing stories that hugely influenced my imagination," she says.

So when exactly did the bookworm turn director? "I decided in high school that I wanted to be a

part of making movies by translating stories into reality," Alina explains. "I've always thought that there's a place for me in directing because it's a collaborative effort and the director is involved in helping other people's creativity come out."

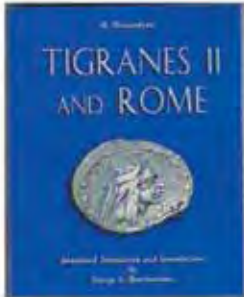
Today, as a senior filmmaker at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, Alina is al-

film

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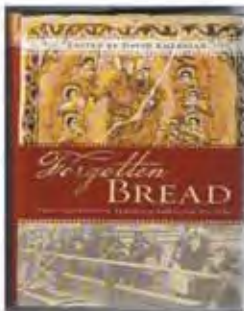
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Right and opposite: Stills from *Michel et Odette*. Far right: Alina Bezdikian.

ready both academically and artistically acclaimed. Maintaining honors throughout her three and half years in college, she has led an active and productive life, balancing school with the constant demands of set and production work.

“The first two years of college were very different than other people experience them because it wasn’t expected of freshmen and sophomores to be so devot-

ed,” Alina says. “And because I was so passionate about it, I was called on to work on more things that instilled a work ethic in me, allowing me to stay on set and work and give it my all because it was such an opportunity to learn.” For Alina, it was a work ethic that often kept her from experiencing all-too common clichés like outrageous parties and ridiculous keggers. Instead, she embraced a life of all-nighters

in the editing room and intense film marathons – precious time spent studying the works of the greatest directors of our time; work that helped create dedication to her craft.

Recognition in Munich

Such dedication recently paid off in the most rewarding of ways. This past November, much to her delight, Alina traveled to Munich, Germany, to present the culmination of her third year’s work, her debut film, *Michel et Odette*, to international audiences by participating in the Munich International Festival of Film Schools. As the youngest filmmaker at the festival, Alina’s experience was “surreal but absolutely fantastic.”

“It was my first international film festival and the first of this scale,” Alina says. “I felt very fortunate to be considered amongst the class of filmmakers that were there.”

Michel et Odette tells the story of two idealist lovers caught between reality and fantasy; two people who unleash a unique brand of generosity on an unsuspecting city. In this wily homage to French new wave cinema, and to the directors who have given us *Un Homme et Une Femme* and *The 400 Blows*, this compelling



black-and-white short takes its audience on a riveting journey through the minds and hearts of a carefree couple unable to live in a world that is not played out in black and white. It is through this exuberant couple that a sort of innocence and youthful vitality comes through, propelling the audience into a multicolored abyss. *Michel et Odette*, which was shot on location in San Francisco, features French voice-over and English subtitles, and has a total running time of just over ten minutes. Well written, beautifully shot, and boldly edited, the film was hailed as one of the most imaginative pieces screened at the festival in Munich.

For Alina, this experience was one-of-a-kind. Munich was a magical time, full of learning and growth. While at the festival, she juggled interviews and attended several screenings and press par-

ties, all with unexpected ease. “Although it was very intimidating to be there, I think every filmmaker craves to have an audience see and critique their work, because they are making their film to be seen,” Alina says. “So it was a good experience to have international audiences view and respond to my film.”

So what’s next for this young Armenian director? “Someday I hope to write and direct a feature-length script about my family and their journey from Turkey to Egypt and eventually to America,” she says. Until then, Alina will be working on postproduction of her fourth-year thesis and second film. “Every person has a story to tell and those stories are important to help people understand and to connect with each other,” the filmmaker says. “And regardless of different situations, film helps bring people together.”





Adrineh Gregorian.

New stories for inquiring young minds

Aline Bezdikian publishes a fresh installment in the Lori and Narek series

by Adrineh Gregorian

The world seen through the eyes of young Lori and Narek is a magical one. Explorations into the galaxy and adventures throughout Armenia are just examples of how author Aline Bezdikian brings their world of imagination to a new generation through her Armenian-language children's books.

After the birth of her daughter, Lori (who is now 12), Bezdikian realized that children's books sold at Armenian bookstores were the same ones she read 30 years ago in Lebanon.

"I always liked to write and read," Bezdikian says. "I'm writing so that kids can have Armenian-language books. I want the kids to want to read, not just look at the pictures."

In each of her six books, her characters (who are based on her children, Lori and nine-year old Narek) embark on a quest to satisfy their curiosity and wild imagination. In the process, they learn lessons about life, family, and the world they live in.

The theme of her first book, *Lori and the Rosebud*, was inspired by her daughter's curiosity about rose buds. Her second installment, *Narek's Castle*, is the story of a little boy who wants to find the world's most beautiful castle. *Lori and the Animals* tells the story

of a little girl who wants to find out what the most intelligent animal in the world is. In *Narek's Dream*, we learn the importance of taking care of the world we live in. We find Narek on a field trip in outer space, visiting the planets. In Bezdikian's fifth book, *Lori and Narek in Armenia*, Lori travels throughout her homeland to find cities or rivers whose names begin with each letter of the Armenian alphabet.

In December 2007, Bezdikian released her sixth installment, *Letters to Dikran the Great*. "I always wanted to write a book on Dikran the Great but I didn't know how," Bezdikian says. In it Narek writes letters to the great king, asking him pressing questions about Armenian history and identity. It consists of eight letters, each with a specific theme.

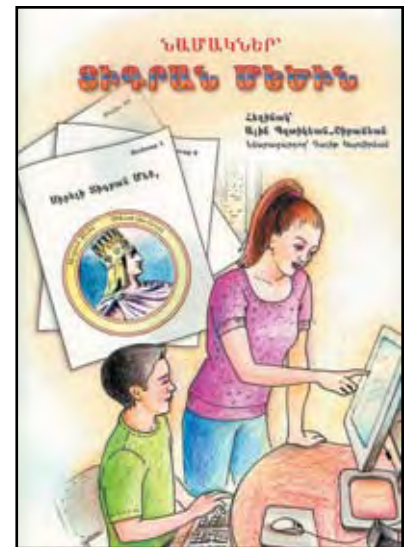
Though Bezdikian's books are written in Armenian, their stories are universal. "Suddenly the ideas come and it clicks," Bezdikian explains as she describes how she comes up with her book concepts. "I always listen to my children talk to each other," she adds. "I hear of the issues in their lives, which are not the same as my generation's, and learn from them."

Bezdikian also incorporates young Armenian talent in her project. Her former student, David Karmiryan, 18, illustrated *Letters to Dikran the Great*. "I was fascinated by his drawing and he's a good person," the author says.

Bezdikian's creativity extends to several endeavors. "I'm always interested in mass media as well as educating and entertaining oth-



Aline Bezdikian



Letters to Dikran the Great.

ers," she says. In addition to writing books, she currently teaches journalism, Armenian, and French, and hosts a storytelling show for kids on Horizon TV.

connect:
narek.com

books

Alexandra Bezdikian stands out at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

Q&A with Alexandra Bezdikian, recipient of the Ed Zuchelli award for outstanding senior broadcaster and overall accomplishment in journalism at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo in Central California.

Armenian Reporter: When did your interest in journalism begin?

Alexandra Bezdikian: I always had an interest in journalism. I graduated high school in 2002 and was recruited to Cal Poly to play collegiate soccer. As a freshman, it was a choice between majoring in journalism or liberal studies. It was in my third year that I committed myself to becoming a journalist. My minor here at Cal Poly is in religious studies, and I would like to get my masters or Ph.D. in religion and the media.

AR: What about internships?

AB: I have had a few internships during my collegiate experience. The first, with an advertising agency in the Bay area. My second internship was with KVEC news radio here in San Luis Obispo, and the third was with KNGY radio in San Francisco.

AR: Do you work on the air on the campus radio station?

AB: I did in fact have to work on air for our campus station. I did on-the-hour news clips as a requirement for a broadcasting class that I was in.

AR: Are you involved in the university newspaper?

AB: I am the pop-culture critic for my university's newspaper, so yes, I do publish in the newspaper. My column has run for about a year.

AR: Are you involved in the Armenian students organization?

AB: I was a board member of our Armenian Students Association and helped get it back up-and-running; but since I left my



Above: Alexandra Bezdikian. Below: Christiane Amanpour.

position last year, I haven't really been involved that much.

AR: Are you involved with other groups on campus?

AB: I'm also involved with the religious studies club on campus, the Theisms.

AR: Who are your role models in journalism, TV and in life?

AB: My role models in journalism... Christiane Amanpour. She stands alone and isn't afraid to fight for what she believes in. In life... my father, Leon, and my sister, Alina. Both are just so strong-willed and determined to make the world a better place. ☞

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journalism

Abkarian gives voice to *Persepolis*

by Vahan Zeitlian

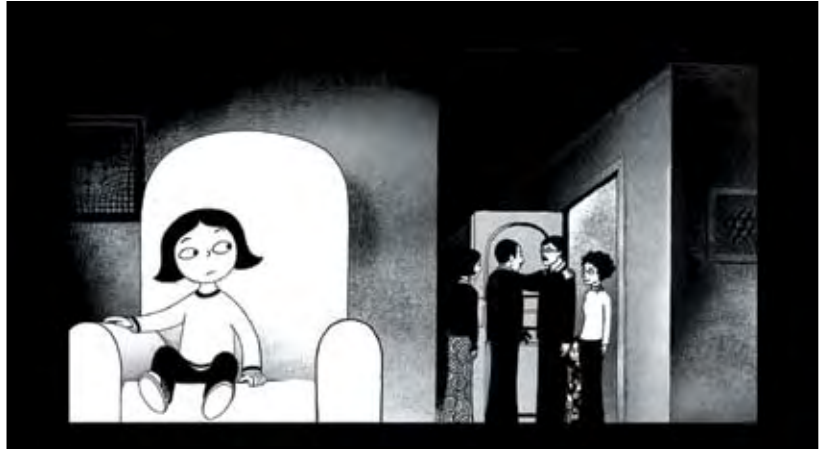
If you watch the French version of the animated picture *Persepolis* (now in theaters), you will hear an Armenian voice. The autobiographical film features Simon Abkarian speaking the part of writer Marjane Satrapi's father, Ebi.

While animated, *Persepolis* is not your typical cartoon. It is, rather, Satrapi's coming-of-age story, set in Tehran during the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Satrapi's progressive parents are aggrieved to watch their country fall under repressive religious rule. To distance their daughter from the fundamentalist regime – and Iran's war with Iraq – they send her to Austria. There, Satrapi encounters little more than disillusionment, moving from residence to residence until she actually finds herself on the streets of Vienna after a brief romantic relationship ends in betrayal. She points out, with irony, how she survived a war and a revolution back home, only to be nearly felled by a “banal” love affair.

The film then traces Satrapi's return to Iran, where she enters into a loveless marriage, obtains a divorce, and is finally dispatched by her parents to France, where she has lived since.

It was in France that Satrapi first wrote her story in graphic novel form before adapting it for the screen. The resulting film (which she co-directed with Vincent Paronnaud) has the look of a *New Yorker* cartoon with angular features accentuating the animation.

In the film, Satrapi's father is depicted as a forward-thinking intellectual with a gentle heart. Abkarian speaks his lines with a caring voice, as Ebi tries to absorb the frightening changes whirling around him. Abkarian strikes the



One of the 80,000 drawings that give *Persepolis* its striking look.

perfect tone in the film's emotional moments, when Ebi must bid adieu to his beloved daughter, but still manages to deliver moments of unexpected humor. In one instance, the Satrapi car is stopped by police while the family is driving home from a party, and Ebi is suspected of having consumed alcohol – a no-no under Islam. He sends his daughter and his elderly mother ahead to empty all the bottles in the house, then yearns for a drink after he gets rid of the officers.

The Paris-based Abkarian, who speaks numerous languages, easily navigates between French, English, and Armenian films. He is perhaps best known to Armenian audiences for portraying the titular character in *Aram* and the painter Arshile Gorky in Atom Egoyan's *Ararat*, although his ethnic features landed him the plum role of a Lebanese immigrant – a doctor-turned-cook – opposite Joan Allen in the Sally Potter film, *Yes*. Of late, Abkarian has been cast in such high-wattage fare as the newest James Bond installment, *Casino Royale*, and the political thriller *Rendition*, starring Jake Gyllenhaal, Reese Witherspoon, and Meryl Streep.

In *Persepolis*, Abkarian is joined by screen legend Catherine De-

neuve, who voices Satrapi's mother. (Deneuve's real-life daughter provides the voice of Satrapi). Deneuve repeats her performance in an English version of *Persepolis*, but Sean Penn steps in to voice the role of the father.

Abkarian and Deneuve were among the luminaries at last year's Cannes Film Festival, where *Persepolis* was in contention for the prestigious Palm d'Or and won a jury prize. Stateside, it has been a critical darling and has already captured Best Animated Feature honors from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association and the New York Film Critics Circle. This week, it garnered an Academy Award nomination in that category as well (despite having fallen off Oscar's short list for Best Foreign Film). Voters – and viewers generally – have obviously been engrossed by Satrapi's story, even as they have been impressed by the 80,000 drawings used to comprise the 130,000 images of the luminous black-and-white film.

In the meantime, Abkarian has already moved on to a number of projects and will next be seen in *La Bombe Humaine* (The Human Bomb), scheduled for release this year. ■

animation

Targeting Iran: A Small but Loaded Book

David Barsamian, Noam Chomsky, Ervand Abrahamian, and Nahid Mozaffari. *Targeting Iran*. City Lights, 2007. 206 pp.

by Shushan Avagyan

In his *Targeting Iran*, David Barsamian, author of several books and founder of Alternative Radio, interviews Noam Chomsky, Ervand Abrahamian, and Nahid Mozaffari about Iran's complex history, both past and present, important moments in US-Iranian relations, and the cultural achievements of contemporary Iranians. "The purpose of this book," writes Barsamian in his excellent introduction, "is to offer a primer on the escalating crisis between the United States and Iran, to provide the reader with critical background information often omitted when U.S. media discuss Iran, and to introduce readers to some of the deeper political and cultural issues at play in contemporary Iran."

The first part of *Targeting Iran* features linguist Noam Chomsky, one of the leading dissident voices for peace and social justice, who discusses the Bush administration rhetoric on Iran and its typical imperial aspirations through its media propaganda campaign to instill fear in both Americans and Iranians. Suggesting cronyism and corruption, he explains the basic policies and interests of the current U.S. administration trying to fill the pockets of their rich friends, get into a position where they can police the world so that everyone abides by their rules, and intimidate the world by force. Chomsky also discusses the 1953 overthrow of Prime Minister

Shushan Avagyan is a doctoral student in English and Comparative Literature at Illinois State University.

Mohammad Mussadegh by the CIA, which destroyed democracy in Iran and ultimately led to the events of 1979. Finally, Chomsky comments on Iran's so-called nuclear threat to the world and how Bush propaganda against the "axis of evil" has diverted our gaze from the real security issues like the U.S.-Israeli threats to bomb Iran.

The second part features Ervand Abrahamian who is a professor of history at the City University of New York and is regarded by many as the foremost historian of contemporary Iran. He talks about the devastating consequences of the Iran-Iraq war and the use of chemical weapons that the U.S. was secretly supplying to the Iraqis, while the UN and the international community were standing by and watching. Abrahamian also discusses the Iranian constitution and its political structure as a pluralistic, oligarchical system with various centers of power. He talks about the current president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and draws parallels between him and George Bush, emphasizing the similarities of their style, rhetoric, and mentality. Finally, he touches upon Iranian relations with the senior clerical figure in Iraq, Ayatollah Sistani, who is Iranian, and Iran's stance on Palestinian issues.

The last part features Nahid Mozaffari, a brilliant author currently residing in New York who talks about Iran's great cultural achievements and the women's movement as part of that cultural heritage. She discusses her involvement with the PEN anthology of contemporary Iranian literature, *Strange Times, My Dear* (Arcade 2005), a rich collection of short stories, excerpts from novels, and poetry by the most innovative and new voices from Iran. She lists some of the influential



authors, including writers and poets in exile who have been tremendously productive in representing Iranian culture and demystifying the romantic and oriental depictions that have pervaded since the Age of Romanticism in the West. Mozaffari also talks about an important Iranian feminist poet, Forough Farrokhzad, who was killed in a car accident in 1967 but still has a very big influence in Iran. In her elucidating overview, Mozaffari shows the complex intersection of resistance and culture, art, poetry, literature, film in Iran and the production of a vibrant, rich and diverse work, despite the heavy impositions and censorship by the Islamic regime since 1979.

Written in a very informative and accessible language, this compact book is an excellent introduction to the political complexities of the Iran-U.S. conflict, Iran's internal dynamics and competing forces, and the cultural resistances to repressive systems, such as the Council of Guardians, Revolutionary Guard, and Bush administration. This lucid text will be most useful for interdisciplinary courses, and anyone who is interested in current events, politics and the Middle East. ■■

book review



Aram Kouyoumdjian

Experiencing *Baron Garbis*: Part I

reviewed by Aram Kouyoumdjian

After a hiatus of almost two decades, Vahe Berberian has returned to the task of writing and directing multi-character Armenian-language dramas. His latest effort, *Baron Garbis*, is an expertly crafted character study that newly premiered at the Whitefire Theatre in Sherman Oaks, where it will play through March 9.

In the interest of full disclosure, let me admit that I do not have the same distance from *Baron Garbis* that I do from most of the plays I review. Aside from my personal friendship with Berberian, I have a direct connection to this play, having contributed an essay to its playbill regarding the context in which it was written.

That context alone makes *Baron Garbis* an important work. In the virtual void that is Armenian-language diasporan drama, Berberian provides a rare voice – one that has been silent for some time. Although he has been busy composing and performing monologues, *Baron Garbis* marks his first play with a full cast in nearly 20 years.

Central to the three-character piece is the grouchy octogenarian of the title who has grown increasingly sardonic and contrarian ever since the death of his wife. He lives a life both frustrated and frustrating, isolated from friends and contending with physical ailments and loneliness. His only regular visitors are his son, Jirair, and his grandson, Khajag.

Berberian devotes a substantial part of the first act to developing

Aram Kouyoumdjian is the winner of Elly Awards for both playwriting (*The Farewells*) and directing (*Three Hotels*). His latest work is *Velvet Revolution*.



Vahe Berberian introducing his latest work. Photo: Helena Gregorian.

this compelling character – a firebrand in his youth who still retains a fighter’s spirit, almost recklessly so, in his twilight years. An unusually lengthy visit by Jirair gives the old man an opportunity to riff on the past and grumble about the present. The writing here bursts with flavor, as Berberian captures the nuances of the Armenian dialect unique to certain parts of Beirut, and there is a remarkable authenticity to the way Maurice Kouyoumdjian (no relation to me) speaks his lines as Baron Garbis.

On this particular day, Jirair happens to have a bit of distressing news for Baron Garbis (although one would not know it, given the nonchalant way in which he engages in conversation until the opportune moment arrives for his announcement). It seems that Dzovig, the daughter that Baron Garbis disowned 40 years ago for marrying a non-Armenian man – is planning a trip to see Jirair and his family ... and, hopefully, her father.

Baron Garbis’ adamant refusal to see his daughter fuels the conflict of the play, which climaxes in the stunning revelation of a family secret. Berberian builds up tension through taut exchanges as he explores questions of honor, revenge, and forgiveness, all within the framework of intergenerational clashes. His ability to keep the drama from devolving into melodrama is a testament to his talent – and his keen ability to inject piercing humor into his writing. His staging keeps the action fluid and the pace appropriately brisk.

Kouyoumdjian is exceptional in the title role, lovable in his stubborn ways and hilarious in his impatience; he is equally at ease while deadpanning a comic phrase or emoting heartbreak while acknowledging his failures (as when he helplessly utters, “I did what I knew”). His performance is well matched by Sako Berberian’s effective turn as Jirair; he ably acquits himself even though at times the script treats his character merely as a foil to Baron Garbis. Roupen Karakouzian completes the generational chain as Khajag, surely the least developed character of the three and almost tangential to the storyline. Unfortunately, a tentative performance by Karakouzian prevents him from overcoming this disadvantage.

It is noteworthy that all three roles are double-cast. At alternating performances, Ara Baghdoyan, Ara Madzounian, and Christopher Bedian step into the roles of Baron Garbis, Jirair, and Khajag, respectively.

I am looking forward to a repeat viewing of the play with this different cast, whose members – and audiences – undoubtedly experience *Baron Garbis* in their own distinctive way. 卍

theatre



Serli Polatoglu

A student's dislike of technology

by Serli Polatoglu

I believe that because mass media attention has begun to trivialize subjects like substance abuse, our society has become increasingly more susceptible to addictions. What's our latest fix? Obnoxious, unnecessary, modern technology.

It may sound a bit dramatic to call our infatuation with technology an addiction, but I ask you, how many hours a day do you spend checking your e-mail? Texting? IMing? Watching TV? Are any of these numbers indicative of addictive behavior? I know mine are.

I give you Exhibit A: One anonymous teenager confesses to texting at least 30 times per day, and spending 4 hours IMing. She was unable to keep from texting for a mere 45 minutes – if you do not find these numbers appalling then my diagnosis would be that you, my friend, are an addict as well.

Technology has become our medium of communication with the outside world. In response to the question "Why spend so much time online?" most of us would answer, "To talk to my friends." This leaves me to wonder, whatever happened to good old-fashioned human contact?

Though I am an advocate of communicating with our fellow human beings in person, I must say, at least the telephone allows us to hear one another's voices. I believe modern technology completely dehumanizes things.

It gives people a chance to live

Serli Polatoglu is the 14 year old Op-Ed Editor for the AGBU Manoogian-Demirdjian School DHS Digest newspaper..



Barbara Billingsley as June Cleaver.

totally separate lives. On several accounts, I have heard my friends complain of how different people can act online. They can seem so warm and caring, and in person they pretend you don't even exist.

Now, I try not to divulge in these unorthodox means of communication too much, but I do admit that I am addicted to TV. It pains me to attack an invention that I love so much, but that's exactly the problem! I'm not supposed to love an object – it's unnatural!

I think it's safe to say I've watched everything there is to watch. I've seen every episode of every TV show in the world. I've seen the same episodes so many times I can finish the actor's lines for them. That's what scares me – watching the same thing over and over again doesn't bore me. I find things just as riveting and compelling the second, third, and fourth time around.

You know why? Because it's *mind-numbing* television. I don't think when I watch TV – I don't have to! I just sit there and watch, blissfully unaware of the happenings in real life.

There is a war going on people, and by watching TV nowadays you wouldn't even know it. I'm sad to say I probably know more

about the Britney Spears shaving incident than I do about Iraq. (Did you know that the hairdresser was Armenian? I saw it on E! News.)

One other thing that scares me – I learn so much from TV. Not educational things mind you, but how to avoid social inadequacies, about relationships, death, loved ones moving away, and to avoid asking out two people to the same dance (that *never* works, so don't try).

Aren't our parents supposed to teach us this stuff? It's as if mom has been replaced with June Cleaver or Carol Brady. Big sis now goes by DJ Tanner. Little bro is the equivalent of Henry on *Grounded for Life*, or Matt on *Lizzie McGuire*. I don't even have a little brother, and yet I know how annoying one would be.

Though I've managed to keep in touch with a simpler, more traditional time, I attribute that to the mere fact that I am a technological idiot – and I thank God for that every day.

Now, I only have one piece of advice to us kids that have grown up in the generation of iPods and Intel. Hide the remote, light the fireplace, and curl up with a real-live book while you can. Soon they'll all be on iBooks or something. Unless we decide to go the *Fahrenheit 451* route. ¶

teen talk

28 January

MONDAY

PST	EST	
4:30	7:30	Super Duet – Concert
6:00	9:00	News in Armenian
6:20	9:20	The Colour of Sin – Serial
7:05	10:05	PS Club
7:40	10:40	The Making of a Film
8:10	11:10	The Armenian Film
9:00	12:00	News in Armenian
9:20	12:20	Cool Sketches
9:35	12:35	Hit Music
10:00	13:00	Exclusive
10:20	13:20	Yo –Yo
10:45	13:45	The Century
11:05	14:05	Cartoon
11:45	14:45	Cool Sketches
12:00	15:00	News in Armenian
12:20	15:20	Teleduel
13:05	16:05	The Colour of Sin – Serial
13:50	16:50	Against Clock –Arrow
14:20	17:20	Armenia TV Film
14:50	17:50	Music Videos
15:00	18:00	News in Armenian
15:20	18:20	Italian Serial
16:05	19:05	New serial – Amazonian
16:50	19:50	Super Duet
17:15	20:15	Soul Mate – Serial
18:00	21:00	News in Armenian
18:20	21:20	Unhappy Happiness – Serial
19:00	22:00	The Making of a Film
19:30	22:30	The Armenian Film
21:00	0:00	News in Armenian
21:30	0:30	Deal or no deal
22:10	1:10	Teleduel
22:55	1:55	PS Club
23:30	2:30	The Century
23:50	2:50	Exclusive
0:10	3:10	Cartoon
0:50	3:50	Yo –Yo
1:15	4:15	Hit Music
1:40	4:40	Blitz
2:00	5:00	Against Clock –Arrow
2:30	5:30	Cool Sketches
3:00	6:00	Super Duet – Concert

29 January

TUESDAY

PST	EST	
4:30	7:30	The Armenian Film
6:00	9:00	News in Armenian
6:20	9:20	The Colour of Sin – Serial
7:05	10:05	Italian Serial
8:00	11:00	Unhappy Happiness – Serial
8:30	11:30	Super Duet
9:00	12:00	News in Armenian
9:20	12:20	New serial – Amazonia
10:05	13:05	Exclusive
10:25	13:25	Soul Mate – Serial
11:10	14:10	Cartoon
11:50	14:50	Music Videos
12:00	15:00	News in Armenian
12:20	15:20	Armenian Diaspora
12:45	15:45	Cool Sketches
13:05	16:05	The Colour of Sin – Serial
13:50	16:50	Against Clock –Arrow
14:20	17:20	Armenia TV Film
14:40	17:40	Hit Music
15:00	18:00	News in Armenian
15:20	18:20	Italian Serial
16:05	19:05	New serial – Amazonia
16:50	19:50	Super Duet
17:15	20:15	Soul Mate – Serial
18:00	21:00	News in Armenian
18:20	21:20	Unhappy Happiness – Serial
19:00	22:00	Mosfilm
20:20	23:20	Blitz
21:00	0:00	News in Armenian
21:10	0:10	Cube Reality Show
22:10	1:10	Box
22:35	1:35	Hit Music
23:00	2:00	Discovery
23:25	2:25	A Drop of Honey
23:50	2:50	Exclusive
0:10	3:10	Cartoon
0:50	3:50	Armenian Diaspora
1:15	4:15	Blef
1:40	4:40	Blitz
2:00	5:00	Against Clock –Arrow
2:30	5:30	Cool Sketches
3:00	6:00	Furor
3:30	6:30	Armenia TV Film
4:00	7:00	Music Videos

30 January

WEDNESDAY

PST	EST	
4:30	7:30	Mosfilm
6:00	9:00	News in Armenian
6:20	9:20	The Colour of Sin – Serial
7:05	10:05	Italian Serial
8:00	11:00	Unhappy Happiness – Serial
8:30	11:30	Super Duet
9:00	12:00	News in Armenian
9:20	12:20	New serial – Amazonia
10:05	13:05	Exclusive
10:25	13:25	Soul Mate – Serial
11:10	14:10	Cartoon
11:50	14:50	Music Videos
12:00	15:00	News in Armenian
12:20	15:20	Our Language,Our Speech
12:45	15:45	Cool Sketches
13:05	16:05	The Colour of Sin – Serial
13:50	16:50	Against Clock –Arrow
14:20	17:20	Armenia TV Film
14:40	17:40	Hit Music
15:00	18:00	News in Armenian
15:20	18:20	Italian Serial
16:05	19:05	New serial – Amazonia
16:50	19:50	Super Duet
17:15	20:15	Soul Mate – Serial
18:00	21:00	News in Armenian
18:20	21:20	Unhappy Happiness – Serial
19:00	22:00	PS Club
19:30	22:30	Box
20:00	23:00	Cube Reality Show
21:00	0:00	News in Armenian
21:10	0:10	Super Duet – Concert
22:45	1:45	Fathers and Sons
23:50	2:50	Exclusive
0:10	3:10	Cartoon
0:50	3:50	Our Language,Our Speech
1:15	4:15	Teleduel
2:00	5:00	Against Clock –Arrow
2:30	5:30	Cool Sketches
3:00	6:00	Furor
3:30	6:30	Box
4:00	7:00	Music Videos

Satellite Broadcast Program Grid

28 January – 3 February



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31 January		
THURSDAY		
PST	EST	
4:30	7:30	Blitz
5:00	8:00	Cube Reality Show
6:00	9:00	News in Armenian
6:20	9:20	The Colour of Sin – Serial
7:05	10:05	Italian Serial
8:00	11:00	Unhappy Happiness – Serial
8:30	11:30	Super Duet
9:00	12:00	News in Armenian
9:20	12:20	New serial – Amazonia
10:05	13:05	Exclusive
10:25	13:25	Soul Mate – Serial
11:10	14:10	Cartoon
11:50	14:50	Music Videos
12:00	15:00	News in Armenian
12:20	15:20	The Century
12:40	15:40	Cool Sketches
13:05	16:05	The Colour of Sin – Serial
13:50	16:50	Against Clock – Arrow
14:20	17:20	Armenia TV Film
14:40	17:40	Hit Music
15:00	18:00	News in Armenian
15:20	18:20	Italian Serial
16:05	19:05	New serial – Amazonia
16:50	19:50	Super Duet
17:15	20:15	Soul Mate – Serial
18:00	21:00	News in Armenian
18:20	21:20	Neighbours – serial
18:50	21:50	Blitz
19:10	22:10	Deal or no deal
19:50	22:50	Cube Reality Show
21:00	0:00	News in Armenian
21:10	0:10	Box
21:40	0:40	Hit Music
22:00	1:00	In the World of Books
22:20	1:20	Blef
22:45	1:45	The Century
23:05	2:05	Cool program
23:25	2:25	Yo –Yo
23:50	2:50	Exclusive
0:10	3:10	Cartoon
0:45	3:45	Our Language, Our Speech
1:15	4:15	Hit Music
1:40	4:40	Blitz
2:00	5:00	Against Clock – Arrow
2:30	5:30	Cool Sketches
3:00	6:00	Discovery
3:30	6:30	Box
4:00	7:00	Music Videos

1 February		
FRIDAY		
PST	EST	
4:30	7:30	Armenia Diaspora
5:00	8:00	Cube Reality Show
6:00	9:00	News in Armenian
6:20	9:20	The Colour of Sin – Serial
7:05	10:05	Italian Serial
8:00	11:00	Neighbours – serial
8:30	11:30	Super Duet
9:00	12:00	News in Armenian
9:20	12:20	New serial – Amazonia
10:05	13:05	Exclusive
10:25	13:25	Soul Mate – Serial
11:10	14:10	Cartoon
11:50	14:50	Music Videos
12:00	15:00	News in Armenian
12:20	15:20	PS Club
12:55	15:55	Cool Sketches
13:05	16:05	The Colour of Sin – Serial
13:50	16:50	Against Clock – Arrow
14:20	17:20	Armenia TV Film
14:40	17:40	Hit Music
15:00	18:00	News in Armenian
15:20	18:20	Italian Serial
16:05	19:05	New serial – Amazonia
16:50	19:50	Super Duet
17:15	20:15	Soul Mate – Serial
18:00	21:00	News in Armenian
18:20	21:20	Neighbours – serial
18:50	21:50	A Drop of Honey
19:10	22:10	Mosfilm
20:30	23:30	Box
21:00	0:00	News in Armenian
21:10	0:10	Cube Reality Show
22:10	1:10	Hit Music
22:35	1:35	Armenian Diaspora
23:00	2:00	PS Club
23:30	2:30	Discovery
23:55	2:55	Exclusive
0:15	3:15	Cartoon
0:55	3:55	Our Language, Our Speech
1:20	4:20	A Drop of Honey
1:40	4:40	Blitz
2:00	5:00	Against Clock – Arrow
2:30	5:30	Cool Sketches
3:00	6:00	Blef
3:30	6:30	Box
4:00	7:00	Music Videos

2 February		
SATURDAY		
PST	EST	
4:30	7:30	Mosfilm
6:00	9:00	News in Armenian
6:20	9:20	The Colour of Sin – Serial
7:05	10:05	Italian Serial
8:00	11:00	Neighbours – serial
8:30	11:30	Super Duet
9:00	12:00	News in Armenian
9:20	12:20	New serial – Amazonia
10:05	13:05	Exclusive
10:25	13:25	Soul Mate – Serial
11:10	14:10	Cartoon
11:50	14:50	Music Videos
12:00	15:00	VOA(The Voice of America)
12:20	15:20	A Drop of Honey
12:45	15:45	Cool Sketches
13:05	16:05	The Colour of Sin – Serial
13:50	16:50	Armenia –Diaspora
14:15	17:15	PS Club
14:50	17:50	Music Videos
15:00	18:00	VOA(The Voice of America)
15:20	18:20	Italian Serial
16:05	19:05	Blitz
16:25	19:25	Pan –Armenian Star – Concert
16:20	19:20	Armenia TV Film
17:40	20:40	Cool Program
18:00	21:00	VOA(The Voice of America)
18:20	21:20	Neighbours – serial
18:50	21:50	Teleduel
19:30	22:30	The Making of a Film
20:00	23:00	The Armenian Film
21:00	0:00	News in Armenian
21:20	0:20	Box
21:50	0:50	Deal or no deal
22:30	1:30	Hit Music
22:55	1:55	A Drop of Honey
23:15	2:15	Cool Sketches
23:45	2:45	Exclusive
0:05	3:05	Cartoon
0:45	3:45	Cool Program
1:05	4:05	In the World of Books
1:30	4:30	Furor
2:00	5:00	Blitz
2:20	5:20	Cool Sketches
3:00	6:00	Teleduel
3:40	6:40	Box
4:00	7:00	Music Videos

3 February		
SUNDAY		
PST	EST	
4:30	7:30	The Armenian Film
6:00	9:00	News in Armenian
6:20	9:20	The Colour of Sin – Serial
7:05	10:05	Italian Serial
8:00	11:00	Neighbours – serial
8:30	11:30	Cool Program
8:50	11:50	Music Videos
9:00	12:00	Fathers and sons
10:00	13:00	Exclusive
10:40	13:40	Box
11:05	14:05	Cartoon
11:45	14:45	Cool sketches
12:00	15:00	VOA(The Voice of America)
12:20	15:20	Armenia –Diaspora
12:45	15:45	Music Videos
13:05	16:05	The Colour of Sin – Serial
13:50	16:50	Teleduel
14:30	17:30	Yo –Yo
15:00	18:00	Unhappy Happiness – serial
17:00	20:00	Blitz
17:20	20:20	Cool Program
17:40	20:40	Armenia TV Film
18:00	21:00	VOA(The Voice of America)
18:20	21:20	PS Club
18:55	21:55	Deal or no Deal
19:40	22:40	News
20:00	23:00	Pan –Armenian Star – Concert
21:00	0:00	News in Armenian
21:10	0:10	Box
21:40	0:40	Cool Sketches
22:20	1:20	Furor
22:50	1:50	Hit Music
23:15	2:15	Discovery
23:45	2:45	Exclusive
0:05	3:05	Cartoon
0:45	3:45	Yo –Yo
1:10	4:10	Cool Program
1:30	4:30	PS Club
2:00	5:00	Blitz
2:20	5:20	Teleduel
3:15	6:15	Blef
3:45	6:45	Box
4:05	7:05	Music Videos



Lory Bedikian.

The 'Happy Accidents' of William Michaelian's Verse

by Lory Bedikian

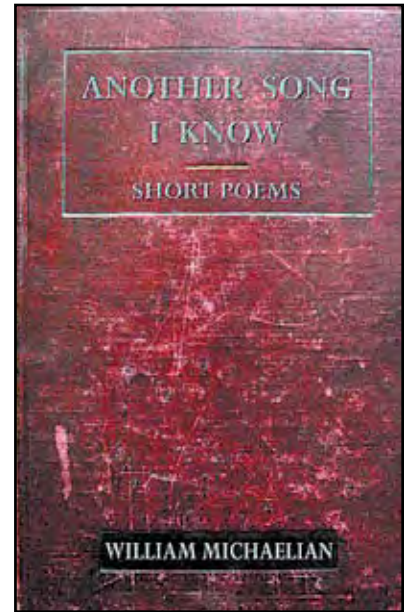
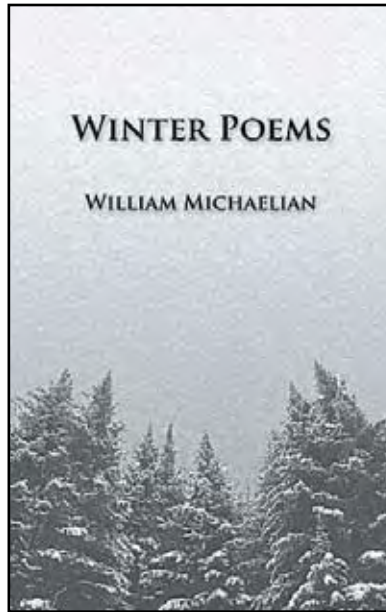
poetry matters

Reading poetry, at times, can be a harrowing task. The distress may come from reading poems that exist for the sake of a writer exhibiting their knowledge of words or forms. Sometimes, it is not the lexicon of a poet that repels us, but their ego on the page, or perhaps it is our own fault, as readers, of not wanting to make the effort to enter these rooms and observe the art upon the walls, even if the shapes make no sense or are unfamiliar to us.

I recently discovered the newly published books of William Michaelian: *Another Song I Know* and *Winter Poems*. Michaelian's poems and their speakers present the antithesis of such matters I mention above. The word choices and images are understandable, and the intentions of these small songs, or short poems (sometimes longer) seem to be in "finding out" than "showing off." His work is full of a somber sincerity or a mild melancholy presented in a voice as simple and complex as a leaf in one's palm.

In the "Author's Note" to *Another Song I Know* Michaelian writes: "to me a short poem is a happy accident." He revels in not only the amount of time it takes to write these poems, but also in the wonder of capturing what may be a complicated topic in so few words.

Lory Bedikian received her MFA in Poetry from the University of Oregon. Her collection of poetry has been selected as a finalist in both the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Open Competition and the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award Competition.



The short poems in this book often begin with nature, sometimes objects, and end in self-reflection or open-ended questions to the speaker himself and his readers.

Another Song I Know fills its pages with leaves, bridges, water, fruits, fields, and, again, questions. Clever moments of personification appear, for instance in "Chairs" when it is pointed out that "Not all of them are happy: / some groan because they remember, / and wish they could escape / into the next room," or as in the neighboring poem "Clocks" where the objects are "protective of their places / beside the bed or on the wall. // Jealous, too, of the hands / that placed them there."

In this volume, the most charming poems are those small notes to loved ones, a beloved, mother or father. In "Instead of Words" the speaker is apologetic to the beloved when admitting "On a quiet evening scented by cottonwoods / and river mud, I leave you waving / on the old front porch we still

don't have." The extended metaphor in "The Age of Us All" exemplifies the strength in Michaelian's simple diction, but complex emotional resonance:

The Age of Us All

My father is a boat
no longer fit to sail.
He sits in the harbor,
rocking in a wooden chair
by the fireplace,
waiting for the tide
to take him out.
If both of us survive,
come spring, I'll lift him
out of the water
and scrape the barnacles
from his feet.
He will like that,
and I will too.

Additionally, the specifics in these poems, such as "cottonwoods" or "barnacles" give the poems texture, something we can see, imagine and thus the color of the verse, the true voice of the speaker

and what he chooses to see from the world around him. Generalities such as “evening” or “spring” would not be as effective on their own and would not provide the unique voice, which we do receive because of those tangibles.

In *Winter Poems* — where poems come in all lengths — the speaker exudes sympathy for the natural world, such as in “To the Spider Outside the Kitchen Window.” The speaker tells us “It’s strange to build a web / this time of year, / but I think I understand.” Or as in the poem “Reflection” where the speaker vows he has “heard whole forests weeping. / And it’s more than just a sound. / It’s our sorrow speaking.”

The strongest moments in *Winter Poems* arise when Michaelian himself seems to dance with the sounds of language. In “Mardi Gras” it is winter while “robins spy / pyracanthas” and from the berries “drunken voices / erupt among the thorns.” In “Daylight Journal” we find within it “a crush of star waiting / behind a full moon.” And in “Madness Revived in Distance Born” one should read aloud “moss-slick curbs, the emerald shores / of child-cake houses lined in rows, / with button-bells and blinds that roll / and painted eyebrow shutters.”

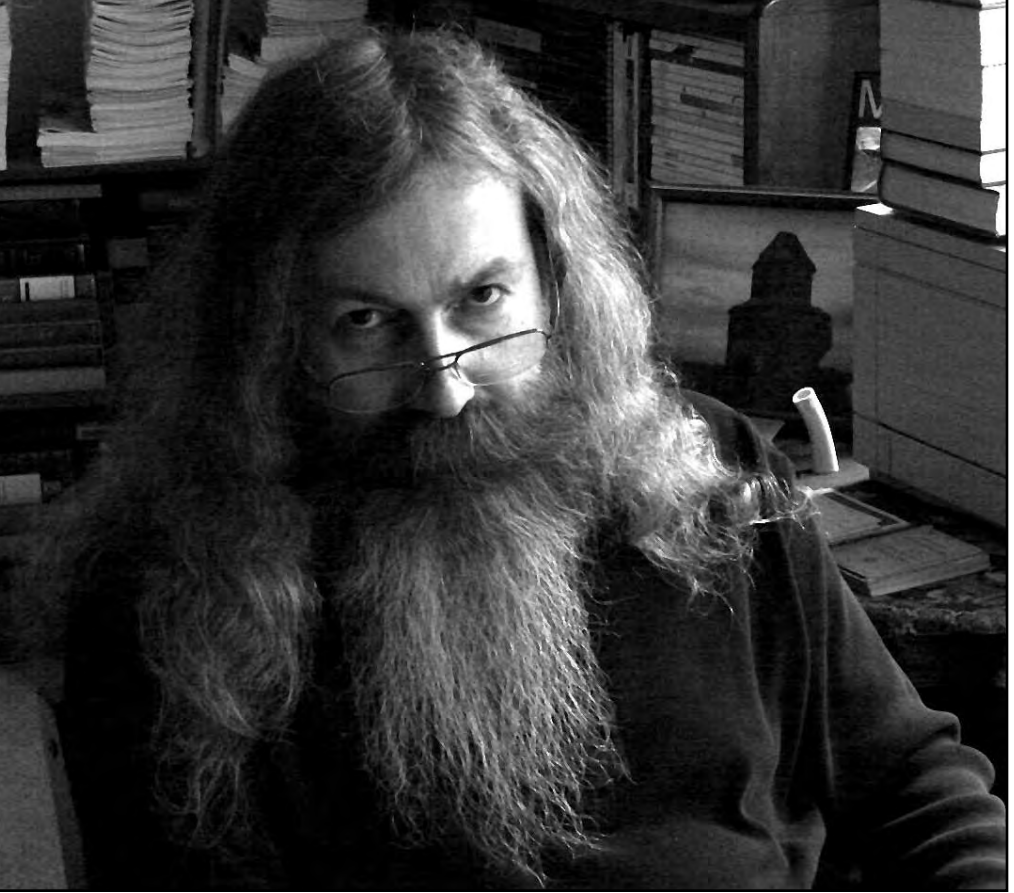
Michaelian’s use of the natural landscape, personification and sonic texture is playfully woven together in one particular poem where we listen to one month of the year address the other:

What December Said to

January

Let the record
show I did
not go willingly.

Nor am I impressed
by the ruse you
call “The First,”



which you use
to hide the fact
I passed this way.

I am offended,
not ended.

Do not forget,
I have frozen ponds
and cast blood-red berries
to the ground; I have
blotted out the sun.

You have crocuses,
I’ll grant you that;
but I have summoned them;
the rest you leave for
spring to solve.

My advice to you?

Take pride in what you do
and never follow suit;
your days are numbered;
be true to them.

Michaelian is a poet who puts a philosophical statement in a cof-

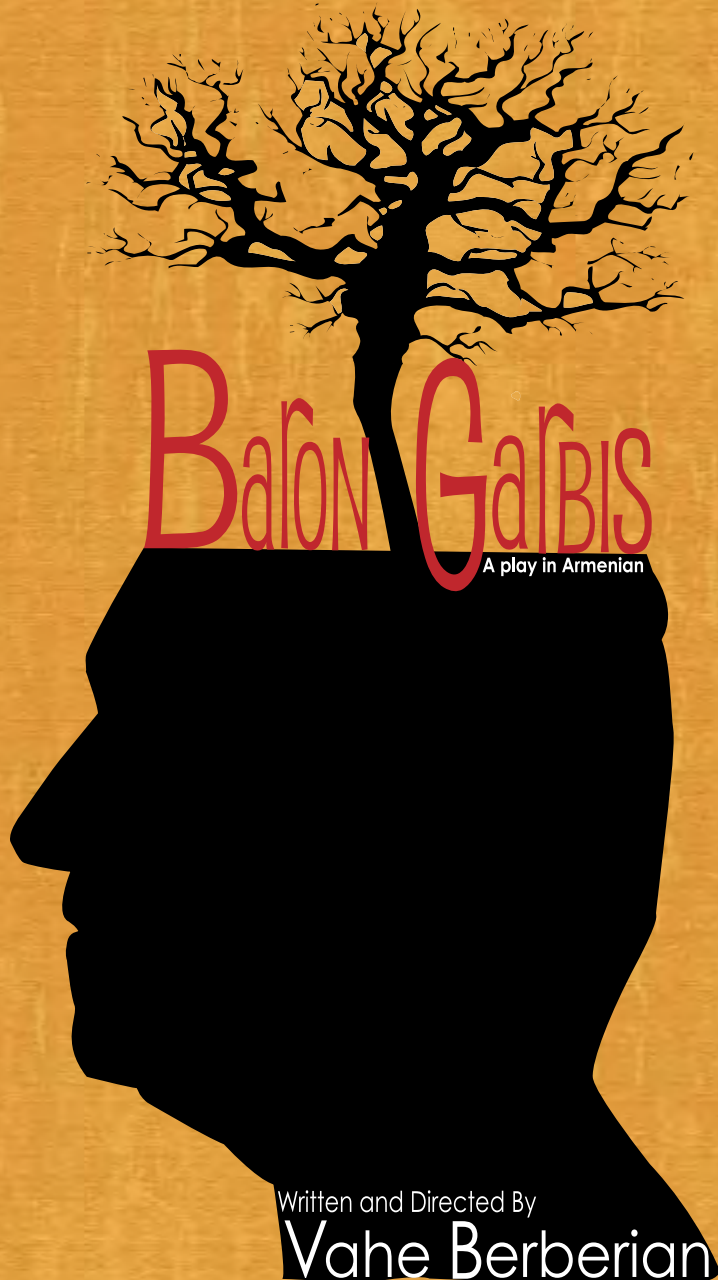
fee cup, or asks metaphysical, spiritual questions along the rivulets of a winter pond. His readers will be asked to walk alongside trees, contemplate shoes or coats, while the landscape is momentarily colored with berries and barns, grays and greens. The poems are full of simple words, sometimes few, but the sincere feelings left with us resonate.

When you read these books, the poems inside, no matter the size, will remind you of looking into that simple/complex leaf in your palm, and the experience will be either a revelatory, somber or happy one, I’m sure, but no accident. ☞

“The Age of Us All,” from *Another Song I Know*, William Michaelian, Cosmopsis Books, 2007. Reprinted with permission.

“What December Said to January,” from *Winter Poems*, William Michaelian, Cosmopsis Books, 2007. Reprinted with permission.

William
Michaelian.



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