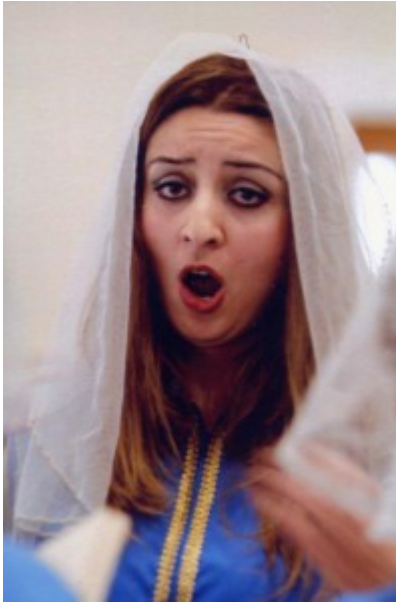


The Armenian Weekly

Armenian Singer Nerkararyan a Stranger in Paradise

Posted by Tom Vartabedian on October 18, 2011 in New England

BILLERICA, Mass.—Growing up in the foothills of Armenia, with Ararat beckoning her call, Knarik Nerkararyan spent her younger days listening to the music of Lusine Zakaryan, hoping one day to emulate the talented soprano.



Yerevan-born Knarik Nerkararyan conducts the choir at St. Gregory Church of North Andover, hoping to carve her niche as a noted songstress.

The diva's lyricism made such an imprint on the young teenager's life that hardly a day went by when she didn't persist in her dream.

“Keep in mind that it was the Communist era,” recalled Nerkararyan. “No lights. No fuel. No freedom. Her rendition of ‘Soorp, Soorp’ sent an electric shock through my body. Spiritual music wasn't exactly a common practice back then. There were no recordings of her to be found anywhere. Would I ever have the voice to follow her as a singer?”

Two years later, at Soorp Hovhanness Church in Yerevan, Zakaryan was performing solo when they were reunited, shortly before the singer's death. “It was the last time I had any connection with her,” added Nerkararyan. “Because of her voice and the way she could interpret Armenian spiritual music, it changed my life.”

Nerkararyan held true her promise to become a star in a similar galaxy. She graduated with honors from Komitas Yerevan State Conservatory with a master's degree in vocal arts and classical singing.

In 2006, she received a scholarship to continue her studies in America. Two years later, she received another master's degree in vocal performance from Azusa Pacific University in California.

In 2007 and 2008, Nerkararyan was granted AGBU scholarships as a gifted young Armenian singer and wound up taking second place at the Los Angeles International Liszt Competition for Vocalists.

She's introduced audiences to Armenian medieval spiritual music and performed lead roles in many prominent operas, including that of Mimi in Puccini's “La Boheme” only this year, after winning the American Educators of Italian Origin United 41st Annual Opera Auditions. Also this year, she was applauded at an AGBU Performing Artists Concert at Carnegie Hall.

A most recent appearance found her singing the role of Tatiana in Tchaikovsky's “Eugene Onegin.”

Her resume reads like a “Who’s Who,” underscored by the fact that she sings in eight different languages. The world appears to be her oyster and like the pearl instead, hopes to be discovered.

These days, you’ll find her living in Billerica and conducting the choir at St. Gregory Church in North Andover, where she arrived three months ago. Her voice fits the operatic mode and gives the congregation a reason to attend HolyBadarak.

“I want to break down the barriers that choirs are just for old people,” she said.

“Hopefully, I can recruit some new voices and get younger singers involved.”

Nerkararyan is combing the area in search of a teaching position at a school or conservatory. If concerts and recitals come her way, more power to the performer. She’s prepared to take the quantum leap toward stardom.

The image of Lusine Zakaryan still persists, but it shares the heart with Hasmig Hatsagortsyan, her voice teacher from Armenia and soloist with the Yerevan State Opera Company. As for another role model apart from her heritage, that would be Mirella Freni, an Italian soprano who sings an exquisite “Mimi.”

“I find the Merrimack Valley to be most welcoming,” she said. “The church has erased any strange feelings and opened doors to new relationships. My goal is to reach out to people with the power of music. It changes my mood and brings hope, faith, and goodness to others.”