

# ARMENIAN VOICES



## *A warm breeze from the Caucasus*

ARMENIAN VOICES is an A Capella group who derive their heritage from the internationally acclaimed, award-winning Hover Chamber Choir of Armenia. The seven member group, all members of the larger Hover Choir, are led by their artistic director and conductor, Sona Hovhanisyan, who studied at the Komitas National Conservatory and founded the choir in 1992. Both ancient and new music from the Armenian nation has been a very well-kept secret which Armenian Voices explores, inviting the listener to share in the wealth of treasure it beholds.

.....the tale began over twenty years ago, and continues to evolve..... this youthful, musically progressive Chamber choir are mainly graduates of the Komitas National Conservatory in Yerevan, Armenia. They are a musical ambassador for Armenia and Armenian music.

In May 2010, **Valery Gergiev** invited Hover to participate in four concerts at the IX Moscow Easter Festival; in October they were chosen to perform in the Polyfolia Choral Festival, France - a world showcase for choirs and choral ensembles, encouraging choirs of excellence who focus on musical creativity and stage presence. The year closed with a magical evening at Eglise St-Eustache, Paris performing with superlative Indian percussionist **Trilok Gurtu** - combining sacred Armenian voices with subtle Indian Percussion.

In 2009, two productions were staged:

The first, *The Parallel* by composer, **Anna Azizyan** took two years of dedication with the mission to extend the borders of the choral music genre.

The performance is an assemblage of texts - *L'Oiseau Bleu* by Maurice Maeterlinck, *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll, *Odyssey* by Homer, *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift. The excerpts from these wonderful literary works lead us to the imaginative worlds full of choral polyphonic music, accompanied by a harp, vibraphone and a triangle. The performance received the Armenian National Music Award in March 2010 and Sona Hovhannisyan was honored with "Meritorious Worker of Art" in recognition and appreciation of her contributions to Armenian choral art.

The second, *Missa Solemnis!* - A notoriously difficult work by Beethoven was prepared in cooperation with the Armenian State Philharmonic Orchestra and two other Armenian choirs. Conducted by **John Nelson**, internationally renowned for his interpretation of large Romantic works and the great sacred choral literature, he considers *Missa Solemnis!* "one of the mountain peaks of the entire western classical tradition."

In 2007 they toured Germany and performed at the Gaudemater Festival in Poland and the XI Christian Culture Festival "Logos" in November and their *Armenian Folk Music* cd was released in Germany.

In 2006 Hover performed in the *Days of Armenia* festival in France and released the long anticipated *Patarag. Armenian Divine Liturgy*, a double CD funded by the Flora Family Foundation, USA. Nearly 1000 copies of this album were distributed to regional universities, music schools, conservatories, libraries, international organisations, information resource centres and churches worldwide. The message was to spread information about Armenian sacred music, the history and its people. A 48-page booklet, with a complete textual content of the liturgy in Armenian and English languages, accompanied the cds.

The male choir of Hover recorded on the soundtrack of the Canadian filmmaker, **Atom Egoyan's Ararat** which won Best Picture at the Genie Awards in 2002; the following year performed Stepan Rostomyan's

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*Entrance* alongside the **London Sinfonietta**.

The Choir has won numerous awards: Gold Medal at the International Choir Olympiad in Linz, Austria in 2000 (over 300 choirs from 60 countries participated); Prizewinner at the International Competition in Tours, France in 2000; Diploma at the International Polyphonic Music Festival in Arezzo, Italy in 1997

Music critics in Armenia, Russia, France, Italy, Austria and the United Kingdom have praised Hover for its timbre, precision and sophisticated handling of close harmonies and complex rhythms of Armenian, classical and especially modern works. The choir has a rich and varied repertoire of Armenia and Western sacred and classical works, folk songs and popular music. Among other major works the Choir has performed in the past five years are Bach's *St John* and *St Matthew Passions*, Britten's *Cantata Misericordia*, Buxtehude's *Magnificat*, Ludwig Basil's setting of St Gregory of Narek's *Book of Lamentations*, Requiems by Mozart and Cherubini, Avet Terteryan's *Sixth Symphony* as well as works by Krzysztof Penderecki, Rodion Shchedrin, Sofia Gubajdulina, Gia Kancheli and other prominent contemporary composers strengthening its reputation as one of the most versatile and skillful choirs.

Armenian Voices' youthful energy and new genres make an immediate connection with the larger listening public.

## **Armenian Voices**

**Sona Hovhanisyan – Conductor**

**Gevorg Avetisyan (Bass)**  
**Vahagn Babloyan (Bass)**  
**Areg Ghaghramanyan (Bass)**  
**Artur Manukyan (Tenor)**  
**Kim Sargsyan (Bass)**  
**Edgar Varosyan (Tenor)**  
**Narine Voskanyan (Alto)**

*The repertoire of **Armenian Voices** is drawn almost entirely from the works of **Komitas**, who lived from 1869 until 1935. He had an inspiring yet tragic life, being orphaned at a young age and spending his last twenty years in hospital in Paris, completely overwhelmed by the events of the 1915 Armenian Genocide. Nevertheless, he is an Armenian religious and musical hero; statues adorn Yerevan and musical academies are named in his honour.*

*He was an extraordinary student in the Armenian Church where he was a deacon at the age of 21. He established and conducted the monastery choir until 1896 when he travelled to Berlin, enrolled at the Kaiser Friedrich Wilhelm University and studied music under Richard Schmidt.*

*In 1899, having graduated as a Doctor of Musicology, he returned to Armenia and became the Conductor of a polyphonic male choir. Komitas collected and published 3000 songs, many of them adapted to choir singing, from all the villages throughout Armenia.*

*His major work is *Badarak* (Divine Liturgy), today still part of the church liturgy, which he started composing in 1892 and never completely finished due to World War I. For *Badarak's* fundamentals, he took chants sung by the eldest priest, and "upgraded" it with typical Armenian music elements from his collected material. Komitas' preferred version and the most popular one today, is an adaptation for a three voiced male choir.*

*He was the first non-European to be admitted into the International Music Society and held many lectures and performances throughout Europe, Turkey and Egypt. It was in this manner he was able to present Armenian music to the wider world. From 1910 he lived and worked in Constantinople where he established a 300 member choir "Gusan".*

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