

# TIGRAN

## Biography



*"You are our next Komitas, may the Lord protect you," wrote a fan. His mother calls him Ashough, which means "troubadour" in Armenian. And such is Tigran. A native of Gyumri, Hamasyan doesn't remember exactly how he started playing piano. There are family videos of him at age three or four, playing and singing Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven." "It just happened; perhaps, because there was a lot of music at home – grandparents were mostly listening to classical music, my father was a great fan of classic rock, and my uncle loved jazz. The house was saturated with music, I listened and fell under its spell," says Hamasyan. In reality, a lot of people listen to a lot of music. However, it was apparent that Hamasyan clearly had a God-given gift.*

Tigran Hamasyan was born in Gyumri, Armenia in 1987. From the age of 2 he showed an extraordinary interest towards music. When he was just a toddler, he gravitated to tape players and the piano instead of regular childhood toys, and by the time he was 3, he was working his way through figuring out songs on piano by the Beatles, Louis Armstrong, Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple and Queen. It was obvious to his parents that the music was an inseparable part of their child's life. His jazz tastes early on were informed by Miles Davis's fusion period, and then around the age of 10 when his family moved to Yerevan, he came to discover the classic jazz songbook under the aegis of his teacher Vahag Hayrapetyan, who had studied with Barry Harris. His grasp and depth of the music resulted in a high level of technique and understanding of jazz thinking and it was around this time that his first compositions began to appear.

While he studied classical music at an Armenian high school geared toward music studies, Tigran continued to grow on his own as a jazz pianist. He performed at the First International Jazz Festival in Yerevan in 1998, which opened a new stage in his creative life and his participation was looked upon as a real discovery in the jazz community. *"It was a huge stage,"* Tigran said of the 1998 performance, which marked his live debut. *"I was 11. It got a little crazy after that."*

But it was his return to the Second Yerevan Jazz Festival held in 2000 that proved more fruitful, meeting jazz stars such as Chick Corea, Avishai Cohen, Jeff Ballard, Ari Roland. Along the way he met promoter Stephane Kochoyan who played a pivotal role in presenting and promoting Tigran in Europe; in 2001 he invited Tigran to take part in several French festivals, playing with Philip and Christophe Le Van. He met Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, John McLaughlin, Joe Zawinul, Danilo Perez and John Patitucci and performed with Pierre Michelot & Daniel Humair.

Tigran's reputation was growing rapidly and was highly regarded by the jazz industry; meeting idols such as Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea and Joe Zawinul, artists whose adventurous musical choices inspired Tigran to look further inward for inspiration. *"I learned how to improvise through jazz music... For me it's the most incredible improvised music that exists. But the vocabulary of it doesn't necessarily have to be the Western vocabulary, for me, that's where Armenian folk music comes in, that vocabulary."*

**Graham Lawson - MINTAKA MUSIC LTD**

Furze Hill, Kilcoe, Nr. Skibbereen, County Cork, Ireland

00 353 28 38822 / [info@mintakamusic.com](mailto:info@mintakamusic.com)

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There followed a period of study of modern jazz and Armenian folk music which later helped him achieve higher levels and recognition:

*2002 - 3rd prize at Martial Solal International Jazz Piano Competition, Paris*

*2003 - 1st prize at "Jazz a Juan Revelations 2003", Jazz Instrumental category*

*2003 - 1st prize and the Public prize at the Montreux Jazz Solo Piano Competition*

*2005 - 3rd prize at Moscow International Jazz Piano Competition*

*2005 - 1st prize at Monaco Jazz Soloist Competition*

*2006 - 1st prize at the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz (President: Herbie Hancock)*

*2006 - 2nd prize at Martial Solal International Jazz Piano Competition*

When he was 16, his parents moved to Los Angeles where Tigran studied music at the University of Southern California. Soon he began to win a series of piano competitions, including the top prize at the Monk competition and second place in the 2006 Martial Solal International Jazz Competition in Paris.

At the same time, Tigran began to make contact with such L.A. jazz musicians as Alphonso Johnson and Alan Pasqua, and started performing with saxophonist Ben Wendel and drummer Nate Wood, who continue to play with him today.

His first two releases, *World Passion* and *New Era* found him exploring the intersections of jazz, classical and rock with sounds taken from his native Armenia. In 2008 Tigran moved east to New York, releasing his third album *Aratta Rebirth*, "Red Hail" a year later, consisting of Tigran's own compositions and arrangements of three Armenian folk songs. The renowned Oud player and singer, Dhafer Youssef invited Tigran to perform with him in concert in 2010 and on his cd "Abu Nawas Rhadsody".

With his prowess established from the Monk honor as well as his small, but impressive catalog, Tigran's career has been on an upswing. With the 2011 release of his solo album *A Fable*, on Universal Record's Verve label, Tigran's displaying originality, passion and complex yet immediately approachable music – He continues to make another giant stride in the jazz world, reaching the French Jazz charts within weeks of its release. His sold out concert at Theatre du Chatelet, Paris in March 2011 saw him performing solo and with Indian master percussionist Trilok Gurtu and team up again at the Montreux Jazz Festival in the summer.

***"Jazz prodigy, composer....virtuoso pianist....Tigran Hamasyan's new solo album, A Fable, is a gem set in an amalgam of jazz and classical music.... establishing himself in a new, but much anticipated status, as a groundbreaking composer and jazz instrumentalist of our time."***

Yerevan Magazine, Mar-Apr 2011

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