

Arev Armenian Folk Ensemble

Arev CD

Watertown, 2002. \$17.99.

Any people that undergoes an event as cataclysmic as the Armenian Genocide faces not only the challenge of recovering from the horrors of the occurrence, but also the trials of retaining, rediscovering, or reforming an identity that would unify them again.

Though it may sound trite or naive, the power of music cannot be overestimated in such a situation. A culture's unique, indigenous music can often be the glue that binds after massive losses and displacement. As the ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino notes, "music is a key resource for realizing personal and collective identities which, in turn, are crucial for social, political, and economic participation. These observations are integrally related, and they form the basis of the central question for musicology: 'Why music?'"¹ The answer to this question may be self-evident when evaluating it in the context of an event such as the Armenian Genocide. Turino finds that

scholars tend to ignore something that nationalist leaders seem to grasp intuitively: that the emotional force of nationalist movements is generated through the use of nonpropositional semiotic domains. . . . Music, dance, clothing, food, and performative speech . . . typically function semiotically as icons and indices, and the indexical nature of these media especially augments their emotional potential.²

¹ Thomas Turino, "Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircian Semiotic Theory for Music," *Ethnomusicology* 43, no. 2 (1999), p. 221.

² Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 174.



The Arev Armenian Folk Ensemble, drawing upon the semiotic powers of music, has recently released a powerful recording of Armenian music dedicated to the victims of the Armenian Genocide.³ In many ways, the message of the recording is twofold: it stands in testimony to an Armenia that no longer exists, yet, with its repeated allusions to the sun (*arev* in Armenian) and daybreak, provides hope for a new beginning. Arev's task here is not a simple one, for all too often these sorts of ambitions fall prey to hackneyed, commonplace evocations of grief and mourning—cheap tricks in exchange for your tears. However, the skillful Arev ensemble approaches the recording with a refreshing dignity and aplomb that takes the listener on a journey through indigenous Armenian music in its purest state, free from the common infusions of Russian, Turkish, and Arabic elements that only remind one of oppressors past.

Under the direction of Martin Haroutunian, the Massachusetts-based Arev ensemble displays remarkable talent and ingenuity in the interpretation of the cherished folk songs on the recording. The main instruments on display—the *duduk*, *zurna*, *dhol*, and *ud*—in addition to other

³ Information about the Arev Ensemble can be obtained at <<http://www.arevensemble.org>>.

traditional Armenian instruments, receive the most virtuosic treatment in the able hands of Haroutunian, John Kozealian, Markos Shahbazyan, and Garo Der Hagopian. Ani Zargarian leads the vocals with a well-controlled voice free of overwrought embellishment, yet capable of a range of affects, from heart-rending yearning to the most joyous calls of celebration. Beautiful depth is provided by the adroit harmonies of background vocalist Tamar Melkonian.

The recording itself is a collection of Armenian songs old and new, ranging from twelfth-century spoken-word poetry by Nerses Shnorhali, to nineteenth-century folk songs immortalizing freedom fighters (*fedayis*) Arakel and Mushegh Yeghdanian; from traditional village dance and love songs to an ode to Gharabagh. Throughout, however, themes of renewal and rebirth abound. Unlike what many have come to expect of tribute albums such as these, *Arev* acknowledges the memory of the victims of the Genocide not through a mourning of the lives they lost, but through a celebration of the country they will always represent.

Sylvia Alajaji

Leonidas T. Chrysanthopoulos

Caucasus Chronicles: Nation-Building and Diplomacy in Armenia, 1993–1994

Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2002. 200 pages, map, illustrations, bibliographic references, index. ISBN 1-884630-05-7 (cloth), \$29.95

Ambassador Chrysanthopoulos has written an engaging account of his experiences in setting up the Greek Embassy in Armenia in July 1993, and of the events in Armenia and Gharabagh during the following six months until his departure for

the European Union presidency in Athens in February 1994.

Chrysanthopoulos writes of the early days of European diplomatic representation in Yerevan when Greece joined France and Germany, together with Egypt and the United Nations, in occupying, one floor above another, a 1960s hotel overlooking the Hrazdan gorge. “Tower of Babel” or “cocktail” might have been tempting descriptions but, as Chrysanthopoulos relates, a lot of collective European Union work as well bilateral business was done there, and invaluable information exchanged. The missions’ multilayer existence must have been no bad thing during an appalling winter when communications and power supplies often broke down, food was scarce, and getting around in the relentless cold was a numbing experience. But no word of complaint from the Greek ambassador whose improvisatory skills, especially in preparing dinner for his colleagues, must have been legendary. Instead, a modest pride in his and his staff’s achievements in getting the Greek mission to Armenia going, with only grudging support from Athens.

Books about the first years of independence in the smaller countries of the USSR tend to be especially valuable because events there, though often dramatic, were largely overshadowed by what was going at the same time in Russia and the Balkans. Chrysanthopoulos shows for instance how easily the war in Gharabagh might have become a counterpoint to Bosnia, had Yeltsin not won his trial of strength with Khasbulatov and if Russian troops had been withdrawn from Armenia’s border with Turkey as a consequence. Here he brings to light intelligence reports of September–October 1993, which confirmed Turkish troop deployments on the border with Nakhichevan and suggested that Ankara’s special