

HAYTOUG

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SPRING 2011

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THOSE WHO REMEMBER, LIVE. THOSE WHO BELIEVE, WIN.



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Ruben Hakhverdyan

On February 13, 2011 the AYF brought legendary singer and poet, Ruben Hakhverdyan, to downtown Los Angeles' famous Orpheum Theatre for a one-night only performance. Nearly 2000 fans crowded into the halls of the Theatre for what was one of Ruben's largest and most memorable performances.

A few days after the concert, we had the chance to sit down with Ruben for an exclusive interview with Haytoug, covering everything from the concert to his music to his thoughts on culture and politics.

HAYTOUG: It's been six years since your last visit to Los Angeles. How does it feel to be back and what are your impressions of life here?

RUBEN HAKHVERDYAN: You know, I haven't really gotten out much since coming here. I just visited a few friends so I can't really give you much of any impression. I came here to sing, which is my job, and then I'll be going back home.

I can't really comment on how things are here because I feel one has to actually live here to really understand both the positives and negatives. Like I said, my job is to sing and I really haven't gone out too much.

H: Is there a difference between performing in a Diaspora community like Los Angeles as opposed to in Armenia?

R.H.: None whatsoever. It has never made a difference for me where I'm performing. I have even sung in France for a French audience and it made no difference at all. They received me with the same warm welcome. The translations were displayed on the screen while I performed so they understood the meaning of my songs.

I have sung for the Czechs in the Czech Republic, for Serbs in Serbia, and so on. For me, it doesn't matter who is in the audience. The most important thing is to make

sure that, whenever I perform, the audience is left pleased.

H: At the concert here in Los Angeles, you sang a song you mentioned you had written when you were 18. Can you tell us a little about when you began writing these songs and what motivated you to become a singer-songwriter?

R.H.: When I was young, the guitar was a very popular instrument and many of us back then wanted to be like our favorite bands of the time. We looked up to the Beatles, or solo artists like Johnny Cash, Joni Mitchell, James Taylor and other famous—mostly American—singers. These artists were some of my favorites and they were my first inspirations.

I started when I was around 18 years old, learning little by little here and there. We all learned something from each other as friends and then took it from there.

H: During your performance, you also referred several times to the bandukths, those Armenians who continue to leave their homeland for lives abroad.

R.H.: Yes, I touch upon that theme a lot in my music but I usually don't sing about it during my concerts. You know why? Because it is almost as if emigration has become our nation's destiny, especially these last couple of years.

H: What do you think are the main reasons for this emigration?

R.H.: People leave Armenia because they can't find work there, because life is not very pleasant.

It has to do with social injustice and economic hopelessness. Another key reason is that the people have been disappointed by all three ruling regimes in Armenia since independence. They feel as if all three administrations came to power only to rob their own people.

H: There are some who feel it is this generation's responsibility to go back to Armenia in order to be in the homeland and improve the situation. What do you feel about the concept of repatriation and Tebi Yergir?

R.H.: In every nation, there is a segment driven by ideals. Usually, these people make up around 5-10% of the population. Being ideological is a good thing if your convictions are truly your own, not something strained around your neck from above. It is positive because it makes you stand out from the rest of the crowd that simply follows a preset path.

I consider myself closely associated with, and have many friends within, the ARF-Dashnakstutsyun. Even there, however, there aren't that many individual thinkers. I would say again, in my opinion, they make up about 5-10% within the party.

I place the most importance on the rank and file members and supporters of the ARF, including especially the youth, because they are searching for their national roots within this party—nothing else.

I don't give too much importance to the leadership because it can always change. The ideals of the party, on the other hand, always remain the same.



From what I've seen, the most patriotic youth I've come across belong to this party.

H: While you've shown support for the ideology of the ARF, you've also expressed disappointment with the party. Could you explain what it is exactly that has disappointed you?

R.H.: For me, it was them joining and leaving the coalition. I was opposed to it from the very beginning. But since I'm not a member of the party, it is not my business to meddle. Nevertheless, they should never have joined the coalition knowing who they were going to be partners with.

H: Getting back to your music, you spoke during the concert about the state of Armenian music, criticizing the lack of art and meaning today. What do you think the implications of this are for Armenian culture?

R.H.: There are only a few artists today who belong to a narrow genre I call "poetic music," where the lyrics actually have meaning. Now, if you look at popular artists today who fill up stadiums, most of their lyrics have no meaning. In a lot of cases, they steal their ideas from one place

or another and use artificial melodies.

But I actually don't blame the artists who sing these foolish songs. It's the fault of the people who want to hear that type of music. It's the consumer's fault, not the producer's—just like the bribe-giver is as guilty as the bribe-taker.



I believe our society is really quite backwards in this regard. My only hope is our youth because what we need are new minds and new thinkers who can present new ideas completely different from what is the norm today.

H: What role do you see music having in the larger context of preserving Armenian language and culture in the 21st century?

R.H.: My art is a bit different in the sense of preservation. For example, I tell the story of my generation. I paint a picture in time of the Armenia of my era. I sing this type of music, not so people won't be disappointed in our language which is our fatherland, but so they will return to our language lovingly. Because our fatherland is indeed our language.

For instance, for your generation, your fatherland is not necessarily Armenia because you don't live there. Armenia for you is the Armenian language. So, for me, the Armenian language holds more importance than, say, paintings of scenery and mountains or rivers.

H: You've said both in interviews and alluded to in your songs that what we see today in Armenia is the continuation of the Soviet experience. That the new leaders are following in the footsteps of

the old. Why do you think this is?

R.H.: It's not the fault of the leaders themselves. Most of them lived the majority of their lives under the Soviet regime and that mentality has been rooted deeply within them. That's why I say we need new thinkers and new plans. The older ones need to be forgotten because they are the same Communists as before. There is no difference with the past. In fact, you could say leaders today are actually worse. Communists who have no rules or laws can steal as much as they want.

H: Do you think the dashing of people's hopes and aspirations after independence has contributed to this cycle and the disillusionment of people toward change?

R.H.: That hope during independence died because we didn't have any truly national figures. Those who we did have went on to turn patriotism into a business for themselves, with each one concerned only with filling their own stomachs. We don't have selfless leaders; we don't have national figures. That's the most painful thing about today.

H: Whether it's your songs, your concerts, or your interviews, you always seem to speak your mind without any fear. What makes you so outspoken?

R.H.: I speak openly like this because I feel an obligation towards our youth. I feel obliged to encourage them to think and speak freely, because the true concept of a homeland requires having such freedoms. Why would I be afraid to speak out?

During the Soviet times, I spoke against the Communists and, of course, there were pressures placed on me. They wouldn't play my songs or allow me to sing. During Levon's [Ter Petrosyan] administration, I spoke against him, too; during Robert's [Kocharyan] administration, I spoke against his many mistakes; and during Serzh's [Sargsyan] administration I speak up against his. It is very important to think freely and be honest, first and foremost with yourself.

H: Where do you see yourself and your music heading in the future?

R.H.: I never think about that. I haven't thought about that nor do I plan to...

H: But what can people expect from you?

R.H.: From me? Nothing good (laughs) . . . I don't know. You can expect something that you never expected...



ARPA HATZBANIAN

Hometown: Glendale

Arpa is an active member of the La Crescenta "Zartonk" AYF. She has long been involved in the community as both a student and AYF member, taking on leadership positions, volunteering for organizations such as the ANC and serving on countless committees in the AYF. She is currently studying to pursue a career in the field of education.

As a child, Arpa spent a lot of time with her maternal grandmother who told her stories about her great-grandfather and especially "Jebel Musa" (Musa Ler). She spoke about people resisting and struggling.

"Hearing these stories made me aware that there was more important things than just myself," says Hatzbanian. "Although this sounds cliché, I'm not exaggerating. I always had the will to make a difference and make something of my life so I could live up to the family name."

She describes how the passing of her maternal grandfather, Antranig Ourfalian, after her 15th birthday was a turning point in her life. The impact he had in the Armenian community was motivational for her.

"Today, when my work in the AYF begins to get too hectic," she explains, "I remember two things: my grandmother's stories—and how much easier my struggles are—and my grandfather's lasting impact. With these memories, I will keep working hard and will help motivate my ungers, so together we can honor our ancestors and leave a lasting impact."

Ancestor

Name: Serop Sherbetjian **Relation:** Great Grandfather

Hometown: Musa Ler

During the Genocide, Musa Ler (a mountainous region on the Mediterranean coast) was attacked by the Turks but the brave people fought back and were victorious. It was one of the rare instances of self-defense organized by Armenians and their heroic stance has been memorialized in Franz Werfel's epic novel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*.

For a short period, those who survived Musa Ler were brought back to their homes with the help of the French. At this time, Serop became the Muidur (mayor) of the region. He did his best, given the conditions, to serve his people who had worked so hard to keep their sacred land.

By the onset of World War II, however, relations between France and Turkey changed and the people of Musa Ler were once again exiled from their lands, this time to Anjar, Lebanon. In Anjar, Serop and his family were able to create a very influential Armenian community where he continued his leadership role as the first mayor. Until today, Anjar maintains a strong Armenian community.

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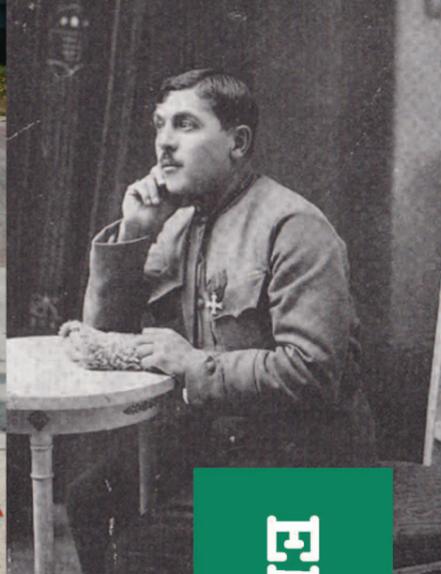


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THEIR GENERATION MYGENERATION



BERJ PARSEGHIAN

EMINEH NORAVIAN

Hometown: La Crescenta

After many years of attending AYF Camp as a camper and then a counselor, I joined the camp's committee and management and came to a realization that it was time to join the AYF. I have been a part of the La Crescenta "Zartonk" Chapter for almost 3 years now and dedicate a lot of my time and effort into the Armenian community. I have come to learn a lot about my heritage and myself ever since doing so. Taking this step has also taught me a lot about other cultures with similar struggles and has opened a lot of doors for me to gain knowledge about my family and ancestor's past.

I've always learned from my mother, grandmother and great-uncle about our family history but it wasn't until recently that I found out about who my great-grandfather was and what he did that really made me realize what an impact my role makes in the AYF. It gives me a great sense of pride to learn that my great-grandfather fought with some of the greatest figures of the ARF.

Today, we work and fight in a far different way than that of my great-grandfather and our other ancestors. We fight for what we believe in more with our words and our actions, yet, but I can only imagine how it must have felt for someone to once leave home with only a weapon, on horse or on foot, with only a small chance of return.

Ancestor

Name: Yeghishe Pahlavuni **Relation:** Great Grandfather

Hometown: Igdir

My family traces its roots to the Pahlavunis, an Armenian noble family during the last years of the Bagratuni royal dynasty. The famous Amberd "fortress in the clouds" and Bjni were built and controlled by my family, the Pahlavunis.

My great-grandfather, Yeghishe Pahlavuni, carried on this noble tradition by serving as a heroic and well respected figure in the Armenian national liberation movement.

Born in Igdir in 1884, my great-grandfather finished his schooling in his hometown and went on to study in military academies in Russia and Poland. In his youth he befriended General Dro and was a pupil of Avedis Aharonian. His house was frequently visited by generals, freedom fighters, and revolutionary activists.

He became a fedayi and participated in numerous battles as a commander alongside the legendary General Antranik, Kerri and Ishkhan during WWI. He helped defend and liberate many towns and villages from the Tatars in the oil fields of Baku in Azerbaijan, which was home to a large number of Armenians at the time. As one of the leaders, he organized the evacuation of those Armenians towards Enzeli in northern Iran when the Turks occupied Baku in 1918. We was then summoned to help in Armenia where, during the Armeno-Turkish war, he was captured as a POW for over a year. He later returned to Armenia, only to be captured again, this time by the CHEKA, the Soviet secret police. He was exiled to Tashkent-Siberia but managed to escape and eventually make his way to Tabriz, Iran in 1925.

He dedicated his whole life to the ARF and the Armenian Cause, especially in the Iranian Armenian community where he lived the last 35 years of his life. He died on February 3, 1961, in Tehran, at the age of 76.

Hometown: Pasadena

Berj joined AYF when he was 16 and has gone on to play a leadership role both at a chapter and central level. In 2008, he had the opportunity to lead the AYF's Youth Corps summer program in Armenia. In addition, Berj has been involved in the Student Anti-Genocide Coalition (STAND), Amnesty International, and teaches martial arts to over 100 students. He is currently working on his Masters in Education and teaches history at Armenian Mesrobian School to grades 6-12.

Growing up, he describes how the mood of anger in his family about the past was one that he didn't fully understand until he matured. "You're supposed to come to understand the past and move on, live life," he says. "But some pasts are hard to move on from; some pasts won't leave a family or a nation alone. Some pasts define who you are."

Nevertheless, Berj holds out a hope for reconciliation one day being achieved. "I simply want the trampling to end and a constructive future to be built," he says. "Living in fear, hate, and pain sets up endless roadblocks. These roadblocks need to be taken down without trampling people."

"That means the future must be based on truth and humanity," he insists, calling for "common sense solutions that will ease troubles away with time, and not brew anger, distrust, and hate from any side of the aisle."

Linking this hope for the future with his current activism, Berj explains, "This is why I'm active in the AYF and our community. Real solutions don't come easy, they take persistent hard work, lots of time, and a positive outlook by everyone involved."

Ancestor

Name: Vahan Parseghian **Relation:** Grandfather

Hometown: Bursa

At the age of about ten years old, one day Vahan goes into the fields and sees Ottoman soldiers and tanks surrounding his village. Soon after, all of the inhabitants are told to lock their doors and come out. They are told they will be taken somewhere for a few days and then be brought back.

In reality, they were to be taken to Der Zor by train, encountering bandits along the way who spoke of how they were going to slaughter the Armenians.

Vahan saw dead bodies being eaten by crows, women and girls being grabbed and tossed around by their hair, and men being taken apart from groups to be murdered. Him and his sister witnessed the murder of their family of eight, and were spared only because they were able to hide beneath dead bodies undetected. Soon, they would be picked up and taken to an orphanage in Syria where they would be split up, with Vahan ending up in Lebanon and his sister in Bulgaria. They never saw each other again.

Berj recalls the following about his grandfather: "He was a principled man, hard as stone, and troubled, to put it lightly. He showed and received no emotion, living and passing on a life haunted by the worst of experiences that never left him alone."



STATE OF THE ARTS

Haytoug recently sat down with three rising young talents who are melding traditional inspirations with contemporary style.

SAKO

DESIGNS



HAYTOUG: Can you tell us a little about yourself? Some background on where you're from and how you got involved in art in general?

SAKO SHAHINIAN: I was born in Beirut, Lebanon. At the age of eight my family and I moved to the United States. As a child I drew everything I saw or wanted to see. Buses, animals, tanks, and explosions are just a few examples of my childhood drawings. In fact, the drawings I completed helped hone my skills as an artist. Throughout high school I would complete a sketchbook every few months with elaborate doodles, studies, and illustrations. Hence, I continued this passion in my formal education at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Ca. Upon graduation from Art Center, I quit my part time job at an advertising company and started freelancing.

H: Is your foundation based on formal training or did you develop your talent in other avenues?

SS: Self-motivation and self-education has always been the core of my training. However, I am always eager to learn new techniques and explore different areas in Art. I have taken private lessons by countless local artists, signed up for drawing sessions, and participated in various art shows. During high school, I enrolled in many art classes such as figure drawing, life drawing, painting, etc. Furthermore, I graduated from the Los Angeles County High School of the Arts. After graduation, I enrolled in figure drawing classes at Glendale Community College in order to prepare

for a possible acceptance to Art Center College of Design. Soon after, I was accepted to the Art Center College of Design Illustration department where my formal training officially began.

H: How would you describe your style?

SS: I have always been torn between style and function. Some viewers suggest my artwork can be characterized by a particular style, but my ultimate concern is to be functional. Each job requires a different style and purpose; therefore, I believe an artist must possess the ability to function within those diverse circumstances. I consider my work to have an attitude rather than a style. Artists go through great lengths just to create a style of their own, however, when a particular job calls for another type of style, it becomes difficult for such artists to be functional.

H: Can you tell us a little about Sako Designs? When did it start, what kind of things do you do and what are some key projects that you've worked on?

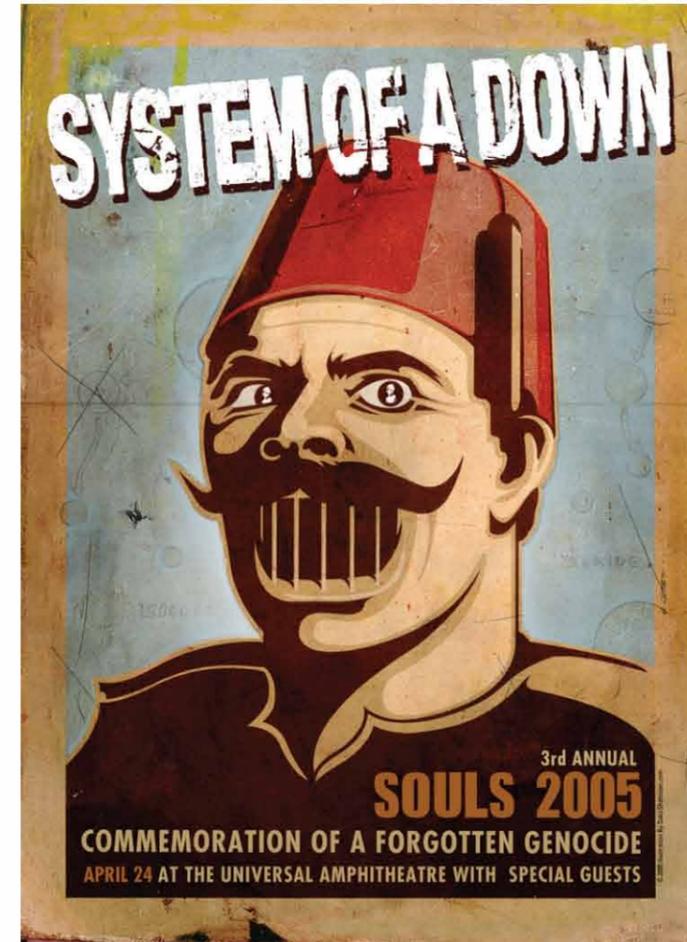
SS: In 2004, I officially launched Sako Designs. Throughout the years, I have worked on interesting projects within very different industries. For example, in the music industry, I have worked with System of a Down and Wiz Khalifa.

In the magazine and print industry, I have created a cover for Progressive Magazine and an illustration piece for The New Yorker. Some other key projects I've worked on include commercial companies such as Nintendo, where I created a graphic

animation for their main store in New York, and Camel Cigarettes, where I developed a concept for the packaging.

H: Is your focus on print and design only or do you dabble in other mediums as well?

SS: I don't limit myself to print



Samples of Sako Shahinian's graphic design work

and design. I work with multiple mediums such as motion, photography, corporate branding, and product development.

H: For many people, finding motivation to be creative and developing original concepts is not easy. Where do you find your inspiration?

SS: Unfortunately, there is no inspiration well I can tap into every time I have to develop a concept. On the other hand, interest in a subject and just the process

of developing something itself is what I need for inspiration.

H: What role do you think art and design plays in Armenian culture, especially for us today in the Diaspora?

SS: Art plays a fundamental role in Armenian culture; it is one of the brightest features in our national identity. For many years, in the Diaspora, we have had a preservationist approach towards art, which is understandable, but I would like to see us create more and more art to push forward a newer, better identity for ourselves, rather than a static one.

H: What are some recent and upcoming projects we can expect from you?

SS: I just signed on to a big project called 180South. It's a new outdoor brand that makes high quality mountaineering and expedition gear. I am in charge of creative direction and development of visual. We are slated to launch next year, and are planning a Mt. Ararat expedition. We will be giving 1% of all sales to charitable organizations and plan to make Armenian environmental issues a priority. I hope AYF members who love the outdoors could participate in the brand and we can voice our common concerns together.

H: How can people get in touch with your company if they want to commission any work?

SS: My contact information can be found on my website:

sakodesigns.com



bei ru

HAYTOUG: Can you tell us a little about yourself? Some background on where you're from and how you got involved in art in general?

BEI RU: I was born and raised in Los Angeles - my parents moved to the U.S. in the mid-1970s from Lebanon. As a kid, my parents would play a lot of Armenian music in the house. We visited Armenia when I was 6, and my folks took me and my siblings to see orchestral concerts and operas. I think all of that nurtured my love for music. I also started taking piano lessons around the time of our Armenia trip, and stuck with it for about ten years. When I was 15 I started getting more and more into hip-hop and DJ'ing, which is what I eventually started to pursue. I got a job at a local dry cleaners and saved up enough money to buy a set of turntables, a mixer, an amp and some speakers. After DJ'ing house parties and clubs for some years, I bought a small Casio keyboard and started working on creating my own music.

Is your foundation based on formal training or did you develop your talent in other avenues?

The years of piano lessons definitely helped, and DJ'ing gave me a better understanding of the structure of contemporary music, so I guess it was ultimately a combination of training and experience.

H: How would you describe your style?

B: I think it's a combination of all the music I've been exposed to and still listen to. I'm just a fan of real, soulful music, no matter where it comes from. I really just try to add certain elements of whatever style fits a particular piece of music.

H: Can you tell us a little about Bei Ru? When did you start doing what you do, what kind of music do you create and what are some key projects that you've worked on?

B: I started out working in a group called the Backwash Foundation with a couple of friends who were vocalists. After working in a group for a few years, I started to branch out and work with other vocalists and musicians, mainly hip-hop and R&B based. I released a remix project of Jay-Z's American Gangster album in 2008, where I took his acapella vocals and added my own music to it. It was really well-received and was even published in the legendary hip-hop magazine *The Source*, as one of the best remix projects of that year. That definitely gave me the push to take it even further and come up with the ideas that lead to the beginning of Little Armenia.

H: Your album Little Armenia reveals that you do not stick to a singular genre but are instead more global with your music, can you talk more about that and the different types of music you explore.

B: My tastes in music tend to shift every now and then. I think it's

crucial that any musician be open to every genre of music, no matter the style. It's really all the same when it comes down to it. I listen to a lot of jazz, hip-hop, funk, soul, rock, folk, classical, electronic, you name it. I've definitely always been partial to Armenian music, and that's one of the main reasons I decided to make the Little Armenia album. I wanted to try and use Armenian music as the foundation to work around and add my own touch to.

H: For many people, finding motivation to be creative and develop-

ing original concepts is not easy. Where do you find your inspiration?

B: My inspiration really comes from everywhere. I think musically speaking, there's a certain energy you get from listening to a song that moves you. When you surround yourself with that type of energy, it cultivates your own inspiration. That's something I try to stay immersed in, that energy; and music is just one facet of it. Sometimes it happens by just looking at the sky or making eye contact with someone you passed

on the street. It's just a matter of how you take that feeling and express it through your own outlet.

H: What role do you think music (and the reinterpretation of it) plays in Armenian culture, especially for us today in the Diaspora?

B: Music has always been a huge part of our culture. Armenians in the Diaspora tend to gravitate towards whatever popular music is big in their respective countries. It's not a bad thing at all, but many times people tend to forget their own culture's music. Many Armenians I spoke to told me they don't listen to Armenian music, but they loved Little Armenia. I think that a lot of Armenians in the Diaspora have lost touch with their music, mainly because contemporary Armenian music brings up thoughts of pop influenced dance tunes that you'd hear at a wedding. I wanted to show people that there's a whole world of beautiful Armenian songs and melodies out there that I simply presented in a different light, with my own ideas and concepts.

H: What are some recent and upcoming projects we can expect from you?

B: I've started work on a follow-up to Little Armenia. I initially planned on it being a one-shot thing, but after all the love and support it's received and the fact that I had a blast making it, I couldn't resist the idea of a follow-up album. It's not quite a sequel, more of a continuation. I'm also working on some collaborative projects with various vocalists as well as a project with an instrumental band, all of which I'll be revealing more about in the next few months.

H: How can people get in touch with your company if they want to collaborate or want you to mix at an event?

B: People can contact me through my website, beirusic.com. Thanks to everyone for all the kind words and support they've been sending my way! To anyone who hasn't yet heard Little Armenia, you can sample the entire album on iTunes or Amazon if you just search "Bei Ru". I hope you enjoy... Peace.

“ Sometimes it happens by just looking at the sky or making eye contact with someone you passed on the street. It's just a matter of how you take that feeling and express it through your own outlet.



Bei Ru's debut album entitled "Little Armenia" (L.A.)

ROUBEN MALAYAN

HAYTOUG: Can you tell us a little about yourself? Some background on where you're from and how you got involved in calligraphy in general.

ROUBEN MALAYAN: I was born in Yerevan in the spring of 71. Went for four years to Terlemezian college of art (painting), continued to the academy (graphics) and in May 93 left Armenia for Israel. 16 years in Tel Aviv, 2 years in Amsterdam, now I am trying my luck back home in Hayastan. Many questions, few answers, but its an ongoing process of reconnection and I was prepared for it before I made the leap forward. Its challenging but very interesting experience. Two years ago I had a request from the Editor of upcoming "The Encyclopedia of World Calligraphy" to contribute to the edition by drawing samples of Armenian script. It was a challenge since I have not practiced calligraphy extensively and my interest in the art of writing was part of a larger issue of typography in graphic design. But it was clear to me that calligraphy is where it all begins. I was fascinated with what I have found when I began to look for answers. Some of it can be found here <http://15levels.com/art/armeniancalligraphy/>

H: Is your foundation based on formal training or did you develop your talent in other avenues?

RM: I was lucky to be born to a family of an artist, so from the day one I was exposed to the world of art. My father taught drawing in the Academy for over 40 years and I had the privilege to learn from one of the best teachers of the old generation. Academic background in fine art is essential for anyone who seriously wants to develop and I caught few good years in the college and academy, before we began to lose our teachers, one by one. Today

almost nothing is left of once glorious art education we had in Armenia. Its mediocre at best.

H: How would you describe your style?

RM: I am a realist. And I love form. Somehow I have little envy for people who have a rich perception of color, since I am a graphic artist, I see the world in shapes, contours, light and shade, but rarely color. My father was a great colorist, but you cant be good at everything. But I think once I have the right conditions, I will go back to experimenting with color.

H: Can you tell us a little about 15 levels? When did it start, what kind of things do you do and what are some key projects that you've worked on?

RM: When I wanted an online portfolio, I looked for a suitable name for the domain, something abstract but with a meaning for myself. It was the years (1997) when electronic music was making it's first steps and a German DJ Riz Mazlen was recording under the label of "Neotropic". She released an album called "15levels of magnification" which I loved. So there was the name I was looking for. Basically it became the test field for my design ideas, changed its appearance for countless times, but today I am very satisfied with the way it looks. I was among the first generation of graphic designers who went digital when it became clear its the only way forward. For past decade I have been working for broadcast, art directing commercials, TV channel branding and promos in Israel and Netherlands. Now I am the creative director of a post production and 3D animation agency based in Erevan - "Triada Studio" (www.triadastudio.com). They have a lot of talent and a bright future, no doubt.

H: Can you tell us about some of the Armenian genocide awareness posters you have designed?

RM: In Amsterdam (2000), I found myself living in a predominately Turkish neighborhood of the city. I realized how small and underprivileged was the Armenian community, which was almost entirely assimilated at some point. Turks have the advantage of numbers and politics are influenced by voters. Holland is a democratic country, has a good education system, people know and remember history. But they knew little about the Armenian genocide and the atrocities Turks committed against the Armenians. The idea was born to educate the general public using graphic posters which are accessible to everyone. We called on designers to participate in the project and with help of few Dutch and Armenian friends published five winning posters (one in Turkish). On the morning of April 24th we placed them wherever we could in the city. It was an amazing feeling to see our work draw attention. I want to believe the project contributed to the efforts to have the Armenian genocide recognized by the

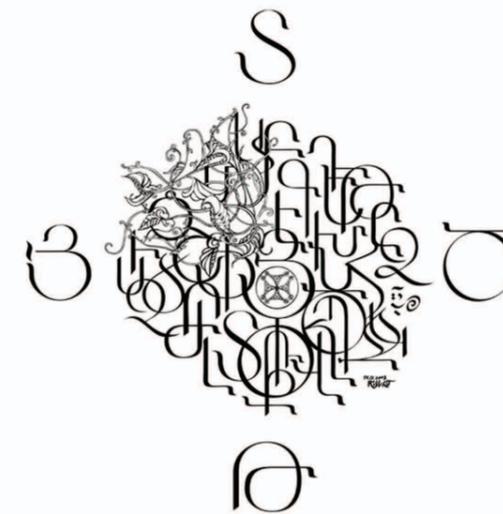
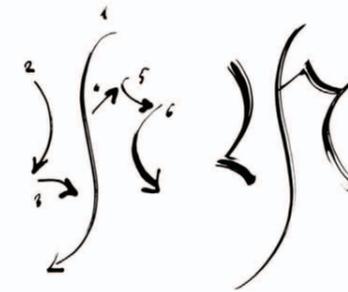
Dutch parliament. The project can be found here: <http://ArmenianGenocidePosters.org/>

H: For many people, finding motivation to be creative and developing original concepts is not easy. Where do you find your inspiration?

RM: First and foremost, our own culture. So many beautiful works of art, thousands of years of history, without roots we have no future. These days it's very easy to get absorbed in the mainstream flow of popular culture, which has very low standards when it comes to quality and originality. Everything is done and redone, copied without any discrimination. So to me, only art which passed the test of time has a real artistic value. In short, for me it stops with the Avant-garde.

H: What role do you think art and design plays in Armenian culture, especially for us today in the Diaspora? And in Armenia?

RM: I think we need a very different approach today. For Diaspora our language is "the last line of defense" so to speak. And I mean the Armenian which is not polluted by slang. Its so irritating to hear Armenians speak some sort of mutation. Our language is beautiful and rich, it needs to be treated as such. And written language is inseparable from spoken one. We have serious issues with contemporary typography in Armenian which is an essential element in visual communication. Now and then we see some problems being dealt with, thanks to the positive and constructive approach of people who haven't given up on it. Sadly the new generation is absorbed by subculture which has very little to do with anything Armenian, or anything really valuable. There always will be the forces of destruction and as long as we keep creating quality work to counterbalance it - we are good. People should realize



that our intellectual and cultural potential is all we have. From that (eventually) will come unity.

H: What are some recent and upcoming projects we can expect from you?

RM: The book on the Art of Armenian Calligraphy, is what I want to keep working on. The idea is to collect into one beautiful volume, the best and the most interesting material, most of which is inaccessible because its been long forgotten in the libraries scattered around the world. I'd love to go do research in BnF (The National Library of France) but I need a grant for it. Venice, Vienna and London have fantastic libraries as well. And its only a tip of the iceberg, so much more is yet to be rediscovered. I think the time is ripe to bring about a positive change in the education system and revive the studies of Calligraphy as a discipline in the school. Our children should learn to write a beautiful version of our letters, rather than the most primitive one. Its only changing the sample, imagine, how simple yet effective a change like that

can be? There are school books which are still used in Persia, where Armenian Classical Education is taught. I have written an article on it which was published in Asbarez and Armenian Weekly. <http://asbarez.com/90950/the-art-of-calligraphy-script-in-its-purest-forms/>

H: How can people get in touch with your company if they want to purchase any work?

RM: www.15levels.com - or just search for me on the web. I'd love to exhibit my works, if any assistance will be offered, I'd love to share what I have done.

UNDERSTANDING THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH PEACE PROCESS



From 1923-1988, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh lived under the jurisdiction of Soviet Azerbaijan, following the decision of Joseph Stalin. The territory was designated as an autonomous region separated from Armenia proper.

May, 1994- As a result of the war over 11,500 sq. km are liberated. The Shahumian region remains under Azeri control. There is no international recognition of Karabakh, even from Armenia.

November, 1994- A Russian-brokered cease-fire between Yerevan, Stepanakert, and Baku brings the conflict to a de facto end. It is assumed that Russian peace keepers will be deployed to facilitate return of refugees.

July, 1997- OSCE Minsk Group submits a package agreement to resolve the conflict, proposing the return of Nagorno-Karabakh as a region within Azerbaijan consisting of 4.4 thousand sq. km and the Lachin corridor. The proposal calls for the deployment of international peacemakers to secure and the return of displaced Azerbaijanis, while the Armenians of Karabakh are to receive Azerbaijani passports. The Armenian side rejects the proposal.

November, 2007- OSCE Minsk Group proposes the so-called "Madrid Principles" to Yerevan and Baku outlining a step-by-step approach to resolve the conflict. An international peace-keeping force to secure the return of Azeri refugees is envisioned, while 7,000 sq km of liberated Karabakh territory is returned to Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh is reduced to 4,400 sq km, with its only connection to Armenia maintained through the Lachin corridor and Karvajar. Karabakh is promised an interim status to be determined at an undeclared date in the future by referendum. This is the current proposal under consideration today.

Spring, 2001- An unofficial proposal is presented during talks in Paris and in Key West, Florida suggesting the unification of Armenia with Nagorno-Karabakh and the Lachin corridor. In exchange, Azerbaijan is promised a corridor of its own connecting to Nakhichevan through southern Armenia. The proposal is rejected by Azerbaijan.

November, 1998- Common State solution is presented where Karabakh forces would withdraw to 1988 boundaries. Nagorno-Karabakh would become an independent state and, with Azerbaijan, form a common state. The status of Lachin is left undetermined. The proposal is rejected by Azerbaijan.

December, 1997- Step-by-Step proposal is presented which would withdraw Karabakh forces to 1988 boundaries (keeping the Lachin corridor) and leave the permanent status of Karabakh for future determination. The proposal is rejected by Nagorno-Karabakh.



The ARF On Karabakh

Karabakh is an integral part of Armenia and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation has pursued its reunification with Armenia. The annexation of Karabakh to Azerbaijan was a result of arbitrary plotting by Stalin in the early 1920s and the people of Karabakh have never accepted that arrangement.

During Soviet rule, at every opportunity, and most recently in 1988, the majority of the population of Karabakh had peacefully raised their quest for reunification with Armenia; Azerbaijan responded with violence not only in Karabakh, but all over Azerbaijan.

In Karabakh, Armenians defended themselves and in 1991, declared the formation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. A just and lasting resolution of the Karabakh conflict should guarantee security and viability for Karabakh and Armenia. Eventually, the de facto reunification with Armenia should be granted de jure recognition.

Attaining this recognition is a priority for the ARF Dashnaktsutyun.



Photo: Liana Aghajanian

HAVES & HAVE NOTS

REFLECTIONS ON SHUSHI, YEREVAN, AND LA

Vrej Haroutounian

I woke up at 8 a.m. to the face of an old lady wearing a blue dress covered with yellow flowers. She told me breakfast was ready. I smiled because she had a smile on her face. She knew I was up late the night before hanging out with my friends in the courtyard, drinking tea and conversing about our lives.

I made my way to the breakfast table where some of my friends were already seated. We were treated to a breakfast table set with butter, yogurt, cheese, hot dog, and jam made from a berry plant that grows all over the city. At that moment I realized that, other than the hot dog, all of the food set before us came from sources that were within 50 feet of where I was sitting. Most of it was from the cow that was outside in the barn.

I was in Shushi, a war torn city that was reclaimed a few years ago by a people who were determined to choose their own future. While I was buttering my toast, I was thinking, "Wow, everything I am eating here is purely organic." (I didn't

eat the hot dog). These organic products were what people in LA would easily pay top dollar for. I could already imagine it at Trader Moe's, priced at \$4 a jar, labeled "Organic Raspberry Jam" along with the butter and cheese.

A few weeks later I am in Yerevan sitting at a café. If you've been to Yerevan in the last 20 years you know it's not hard to find a café in Gendron (Central downtown). Many of the beautifully designed Soviet era parks that were once there have been covered by Cafés since independence. The free market is well in progress. Restaurants with international names and themes, billboards everywhere, and European fashion walking up and down the streets on the

fit bodies of the masses. As they stroll up and down Northern Ave, I watch them and they watch me.

The cell phone store has reached capacity unable to handle the forming overflow of people waiting to activate service with an eerie eagerness as if their livelihood depended on that very activation, the restaurants are full, the high-end boutiques are well-lit and awaiting customers. Yet, above the stores, all the lights are off. The residents there are corporations or Diasporans who have purchased these larger-than-life homes or offices on the city's main promenade. They seem to be occupied only a few months out of the year.

I walk around the corner into one of the large supermarkets that have recently opened. Inside, I find processed yogurt with fruit, imported cheeses, frozen chicken and beef products. The place shines, it glows. It's staffed by younger women in tight clothing who sell racks and racks of imported foods and imported lifestyle. It oozes of sex appeal.

A few months pass by and I am back in Los Angeles. I read in a newspaper that a new law has outlawed street vending in Yerevan. I read another article a few weeks later about how the Pag Shooga (indoor farmers' market) will close for renovations after which some of the vendors will not be returning due to higher rent costs and larger retail spaces. And a few weeks after that I read about the workday increasing to six days a week. I start asking, "If everyone in Armenia is complaining that there is no work, then why is the workday being increased to six days a week for certain industries?"

A few days later outside my studio in Los Angeles I am conversing with a colleague. I ask her why it is that most people in Yerevan could not wait to shop at supermarkets for factory-farm produced chicken, cellophane wrapped tomatoes, and processed dairy, while the biggest food movement in Los Angeles is organic, small farmer and locally grown foods. She replies, "People want what they don't have." I ask her why she thinks that is, and she says, "Well, if you get something that you didn't have it proves to you and others that you worked hard and got it, that you got something that you did not have before." We exchange smiles because it makes sense.

See, the have-nots in LA can't get organic food—which is reserved for the haves—and the have-nots in Yerevan can't get food from the supermarkets because it's for the haves. It is obvious that organic, locally grown food is a better choice overall for the health and long-term sustainability of an economy.

In the end, it comes down to education, choice and discipline. Things are worth the value you assign them. What is two cups of water worth to you? Is it a walk to the kitchen, a five-minute wait, a search for a water fountain, or one dollar at a gas station or a convenience store? Hopefully you picked all of the options except the last two, because if you picked the last two, you gave someone a dollar for something you could have had for a much lower cost. I use a bottle of water as an example of how wealth is trickled up by the many and

placed in the hands of the few. Bottling water and making it available everywhere can exploit a simple human need for hydration. Every day people give their wealth and power over to others. When you pay \$30 for a dress that in materials costs pennies, you trade your labor and efforts for something that marketing has convinced you is worth that by branding it. If your \$1,000



As the supermarkets increasingly sprout up, foreign banks further fuel the fire by lending money to oligarchs who turn around and happily spend it on their wants of luxurious lifestyles, creating further separation of the haves and have-nots.

dollar purse producer named Smoochi or Louis Mutton, made a great purse with materials that cost a few dollars of leather and zipper, then they could literally sell it for a few dollars, and more people would buy it because it would have the highest demand. But why don't they? Because then the masses would all have it and the separation of perceived wealth would not exist. So they keep the price high and keep you wanting. It's the same with cars, food, and what is called lifestyles.

So coming back to Armenia, I ask, "What is going on?" Well, it's simple! The wealthy open supermarkets, which attract the populous like a moth to a flame, trying to be a have because, all of a sudden, they were told they were have-nots. The international media and local media create further want in the local population. All of a sudden, local tomatoes are not good enough and the dimly-lit grocery store at the bottom of the building starts looking ugly compared to the shiny markets seen on TV. They buy

the cellophane wrapped tomato at a premium price and feel accomplished. Soon, the local storeowner realizes his customers are buying less, and eventually a law is created that puts street vendors completely out of business. Now, the supermarkets have less competition and the free market has gotten less free.

As the supermarkets increasingly sprout up, foreign banks further fuel the fire by lending money to oligarchs who turn around and happily spend it on their wants of luxurious lifestyles, creating further separation of the haves and have-nots. As small local markets disappear and the supermarkets multiply, the only competition left is between large chains. The prices increase dramatically ever since people decided that the tomatoes at the market were better, that a bottle of water was worth \$1, and a Louis Mutton purse was worth \$1000. Now since the supermarkets have taken over the neighborhood and the local groceries are closed, the population starts buying cars, which they need to lug the bulk food from the "NEW" discount supermarket located outside of the city.

A few years later, European clothes on thin, petite bodies are replaced by unhealthy Yerevantsis stuck in traffic listening to commercials on how to lose weight. Twenty years later, Trader Moe's opens in Yerevan and sells them back the raspberry jam that they were tired of for 300 times more than what it cost before.

All over the world, we are a generation that has been giving away our freedom through laziness, lack of education, and discipline to corporate power which has corrupted many governments worldwide. So I ask Armenians everywhere to start being conscious of their buying choices. It is not easy, due to the prevailing culture in most countries that we are located in, but it is possible. I ask you to think twice when you buy that bottle of water, that Panini, that Smoochi purse. Your sports car payment can buy a tractor for a village. Your Starbucks coffee can feed a family for a week and your new 82" TV is someone's annual income. Start thinking about how much change your conscious spending can create in our homeland and the countries we are currently in.

This struggle is of one against the exploitation of all people worldwide. It is a struggle against a system that is corrupt and is failing; it is time for us to invest in creating a new system worldwide, while making sure that the failed system of "free markets" does not spread further in Armenia.