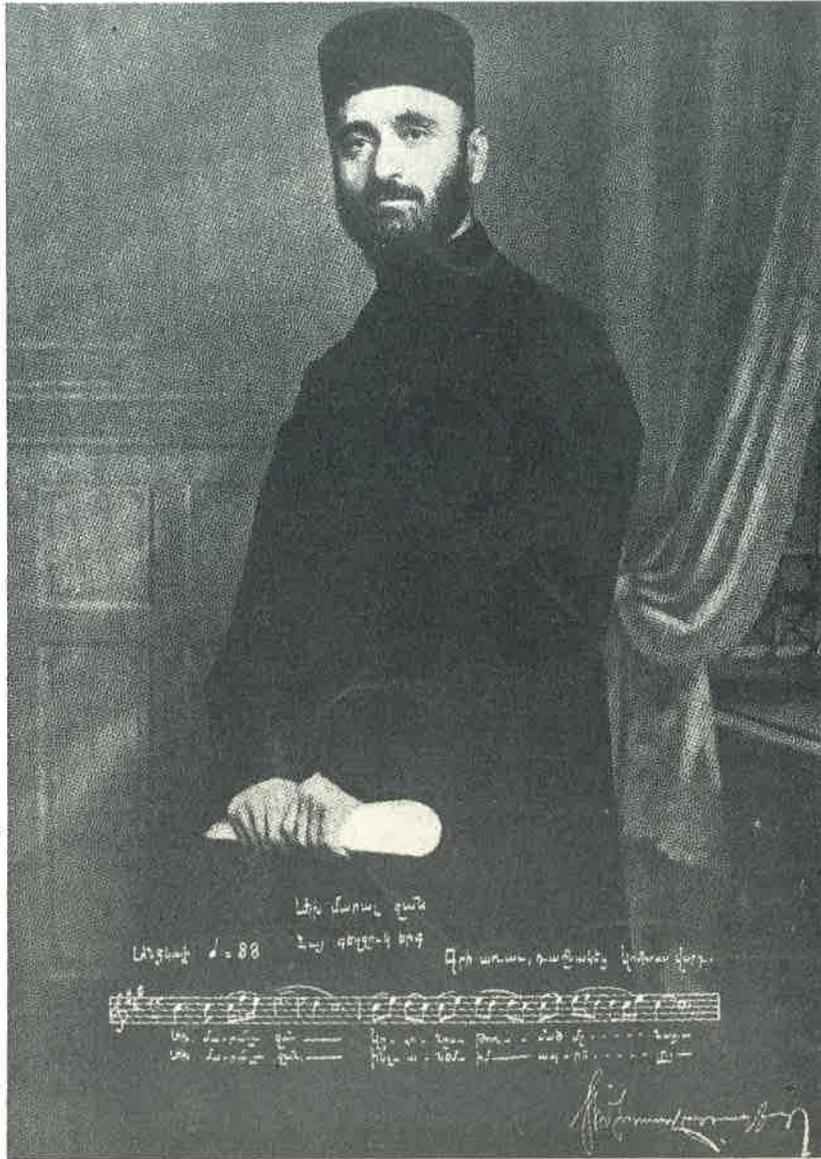


KOMITAS VARDAPET

FATHER OF MODERN ARMENIAN MUSIC



ԿՈՄԻՏԱՍ ՎԱՐԴԱՊԵՏ

1869 - 1935

ARMENIAN PROGRAM

34th Annual Women's International Exposition

November 4-10, 1957

71st Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 34th St., New York City

ARMENIAN DAY PROGRAM

Sunday, November 10, 1957, 5:30 to 7:00 P. M.

The National Anthem

MADAME SILVIA BALABAN

Words of Welcome

MRS. ANNIE SEROPIAN

*Chairman of Armenian
Exposition Committee*

Chairman of Program

MRS. ANNETTE ZEMANIAN PROVINZANO

Soprano Solo

MADAME SILVIA BALABAN

Group of Armenian Songs:

a) "Kanee Vor Janeem"

SAYAT NOVA

b) "Doon Aree"

ARMEN TIGRANIAN

c) "Khentzoree Dzareen Daque"

H. MEHRAB

MRS. LOUISE MARDIROS at the Piano

Address:

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"Komitas Vardapet: The Pioneer Architect of Modern Armenian Music"

A.Y.A. Dance Group of Watertown, Mass.

Group of Armenian Folk Dances

Soloists—

MISS SONA CACHOIAN

MRS. BERJOUHIE JAVIAN PARSEGHIAN

Accompanied by Armen Band of Watertown, Mass.

A Group of Armenian Folk Songs

MADAM SILVIA BALABAN

By KOMITAS VARDAPET

a) "Hov Arek"

b) "Groong"

c) "Kele Kele"

MRS. LOUISE MARDIROS at the Piano

Komitas, Master of Armenian Music

By ARAKEL TATIAN

Komitas was the first and finest Armenian folk composer. He was a personality endowed with the qualities of a highly trained, scientific musician, by international standards.

In 1899 when he completed his courses at the Conservatory of Music and the University Faculty of Philosophy in Berlin, he read before a large gathering of musicians a paper on the subject of "Armenian Folk and Sacred Music." In appreciation of this the title of "Ehren-Doktor" was conferred upon him.

On July 1, 1914, he was the representative of Armenian music at the International Congress of Music held in Paris where he read three papers on the subjects of "Ancient Armenian Church Scores," "Armenian Folk Music," and "The Tempo, Scale, Accent and Measure of Armenian Music." His audience included world-renowned composers, among them Claude Debussey, the master of impressionistic music. For this he was accorded their high praise.

The greatness of Komitas is not limited to his role as scholar and writer in his field. Beyond his serious study of Armenian folk music, he mastered its form and captured its spirit to such an extent that he was able to add his own distinctive creations to the national folk repertoire. He thus furnished the conditions necessary for the building of an authentic musical culture by later generations of artists and students of the subject.

Komitas was born in 1869 in the town of Guidinia in Asia Minor. His baptismal name was Soghomon. At the age of 11 he was left an orphan, with the death of his father, Kevork Soghomonian, in 1880. His mother, Takouhi Hovannesian, had died in 1870, the year after his birth.

In 1881 young Komitas was taken to Echmiadzin by the Reverend Vardapet Kevork Tertsgian, the primate of his region, while on his way thither to be consecrated bishop. This was at the instance of Catholicos Gevorg, so that young Komitas may enter the Gevorgian Seminary. From this school he graduated in 1893.

Three years later, in 1896, Komitas left for Berlin for advanced study in music. There under the guidance of Joachim, the world-renowned violinist, he entered the Conservatory of Music of Richard Schmidt, whence he graduated three years later. While pursuing the courses in the theory and practice of music in this institution, he also studied the philosophy of music at Friedrich-Wilhelm University. Thus thoroughly versed in his field of specialization, Komitas returned to Echmiadzin in 1899, where he was appointed lecturer on music and choirmaster. Meanwhile he spent his summer vacations touring the villages to collect Armenian and other ethnic folk songs. He worked hard and subjected to a critical analysis all those themes of folk music which later were to become the basis of his own creations.

During that period, the predominant type of Armenian music consisted of patriotic songs, with melodies taken over from European songs of little or no merit. Komitas, with his profound understanding of folk culture, struggled vigorously against this trend of the alienization of Armenian music. Cultivating his collection of folk songs, he developed their themes into solos and choral selections, and made a series of valuable contributions to the literature of lay and church music.

Komitas created great enthusiasm among the masses of the people everywhere he went, with his numerous concerts and lectures on Armenian music. Both the Armenian and foreign press wrote glowingly about his cultural activities and achievements. He had hoped to found a conservatory of music in Constantinople (a major Armenian center at the time), where future generations of artists may receive their training. He had also hoped to complete his opera "Anoush," as well as a number of other Armenian studies on music. However, with the outbreak of World War I, and the barbaric persecution of his people by the Turks, Komitas broke down physically, even though he had been able to find personal safety in Paris through the

mediation of influential Europeans. There, however, his physical weakness was followed by a mental breakdown. There also the end came, when this priceless representative of Armenian culture closed his eyes forever on foreign soil. Today, his remains are at rest on the soil of the motherland, and his valuable musical legacy serves as an inspiration for creative Armenian musicians. At present, all his extant works—compositions, essays and other writings are being published in the motherland.

The main characteristic of the folk music of Komitas is its simplicity, free from technical restrictions. It consists in its natural creative form. Such musical creations are the product of collective effort and concurrence. Folk songs, which pass on by word of mouth, without notation, from one generation to the next, preserve for a long time the rhythmic length and measured lines of the folk melodies; and their natural endings reveal the wonderful, innate sense of balance which the folk mind has regarding musical forms.

There are folk songs from all periods of human history which have preserved their original character to our day. Folk songs, in general, have taken the sting out of hard labor among the masses of the people; they have added zest and enthusiasm to collective celebrations; and have played a major role in the natural and social struggles of men.

Komitas, endowed by nature with innate talent, supplemented by a thorough education, travelling from hamlet to hamlet, systematically collected peasant songs, subjected them to detailed analysis, and gave them measure and form.

It may be apropos, here, to cite the inspiring description appended to one of his analyses:*

How unfathomable, enchanting, adorable are the mysteries of life and nature! The *shinakan*, the rustic peasant, who strives in the heart of nature; nature, which strives in the heart of the *Shinakan*: experience newness of life, together.

The sun has already set, quietly, in the west; the evening shadows cast their mantle of darkness all about. Day is at rest; night is awake, manifest! Two boundless oceans confront each other, face to face—the gay blue depths of the heavens above; the gray silvery darkness of the earth below. The moon, taking the lead of the stars, ploughs through the drifting clouds. The wavering winds sigh and sing.

At daybreak the *shinakan* is out at the head of his ploughmen to waken the fertile fields from the torpor of the night. The gurgling brooks spray the countryside with the liquid notes of their enchanting music. The heavens above and the earth below heave with quivering breath of the first blush of the morning. The moon, the stars, and the wind-tossed clouds work their way silently in the heavens above; the plough, the ploughmen, and the sure-footed oxen kick up the dust in the fields below. Life, pulsating, quickening life in the spheres above; strife and earnest endeavor in the plains below, beguile the mind and beleaguer the soul.

The *shinakan* takes breath, and he breathes upon all about, the breath of life. The plough takes wing, and gives wing to the tiller of the soil. It rends the earth asunder, banks it up on both sides in successive rolling waves, and leaves behind endless rows of golden furrows. The fallow ground heaves; the gentle massive creatures bellow; the rustics yodel; the mountain winds whistle by; the flowers whisper and quiver; stuttering brooks gurgle. And the ploughshare? It presses, it pushes, it groans, moans, screams and screeches.

The life and work, the joys and sorrows; the hopes and aspirations of the *shinakan* give birth to the song of the *goutan*, of the plough. The *shinakan* is a gifted, ingenious artist. He reads nature as it is, in its true likeness. He spells out fruitful ideas; breathes upon them his quickening, simple breath; stamps them with his essential nature, the fulness of his inner and outer life; and baptizes as his legitimate creation the words and melody of "The Song of the Goutan."

* Our thanks are due here to the Rev. Charles A. Vertanes for his faithful and inspirational translation of the following paragraphs.

Reminiscences From Komitas Vardapet

By AGHAVNIE NIGOHOSIAN

From 1908 to 1924 my husband and I conducted a private boarding school—the Nigohosian Varzharian—in the Nishan Tash section of the city of Constantinople. It was coeducational on the kindergarten and elementary levels but restricted to girls on the secondary level. After years of diligent work we had to abandon this successful venture and seek shelter in America.

Komitas Vardapet was our instructor in music for one academic year, 1914-1915. I remember his first session. About one hundred pupils assembled in the music hall looked forward with anticipation to hear him. Within a few minutes he classified his student audience into four groups of voices. Before the session was over, they were all singing lustily in quatrain harmony his favorite theme song, "Im Chinari Yaru," as if they had practiced it already several times.

On another occasion, after the school day was over Komitas was overheard playing the piano, in the reception room, at the conclusion of which the boarding pupils who had been at play outside responded with a resounding applause. They had been drawn away from their play on hearing the Master's impromptu recital, and had listened to him with wrapped admiration. They were all invited to the reception room, and the Master played selection after selection for all of us.

Komitas had a few special students in Constantinople, who were preparing to teach music. They were V. Sarkisian, M. Toumajian, H. Semerjian V. Stvantsian, P. Ganachian, and H. Abajian. He conducted their final examination in our school. It included the teaching of a number of their own compositions to our children. You can well imagine the satisfaction Komitas experienced in witnessing the accomplishment of his special pupils.

In April 1915 Komitas with the other leading Armenian intellectuals of Constantinople was exiled to the interior of Anatolia. At the intervention of an influential friend however, he was brought back to our city; but his humor and cheerful disposition were gone forever. Mr. Nigohosian once saw him from a distance, on the Galata Bridge. You would think he was being pursued by enemies.

One day in July Komitas visited our school. He had composed especially for our children a "Lord's Prayer," which he taught them. As he stood among them, they sang with their hands spread wide open. What a touching scene that was!

During this period we were all depressed at the news of the massacres of our people in the provinces, news of which was reaching our city in dribbles. Four of our teachers, Daniel Varouzhan, Digran Tchegurian, Shavarsh Krisian and Dr. Armenag Parsekian were among the exiled. Dr. Parsekian, who had also been a teacher in the American College for Girls in Arnavood Keuy had been aided by Mr. Henry Morgenthau, the American ambassador to Turkey then. The others, like most of the rest of the exiled Armenian elite were never to be seen again.

In those days the house of Komitas became a shrine—open to all who needed a word of comfort or encouragement, even though he himself needed these more than they. In his presence we attempted to conceal our anguish but we could not hide anything from him. On one occasion he reproved us: "How can you in your depressed state of mind uphold the courage of your pupils?"

Broken-hearted, brooding over the sufferings of his own people in Turkey, one day something in him snapped—and this brilliant mind, with his exquisite talents and sensitive spirit was gone forever.

What a loss! for he could have contributed a good deal more through his active participation, in the revival of his nation in the post-war years.

Exile to Changiri With Komitas Vertabed

By MATTHEW A. CALLENDER

It was after nightfall on that Monday (April 30, 1915) when the ancient locks of the gate of the old Mehterhanch dungeon clanged and we were called out to the high-walled yard where we had been allowed to saunter most of the previous day and had sadly greeted new arrivals, most of them acquaintances of long standing, all of them well-known Armenians from the various quarters of the city.

An order was called to form ranks and we were marched in pairs out of the outer gate under very heavy guard with fixed bayonets down Divan Yoli. All traffic on that wide avenue had been stopped and we could see amazed faces peering at us from the windows of the lighted street cars.

Bedri Bey himself, the sinister chief of police, riding on a horse was racing up and down along our column of two hundred and ten bewildered but yet unruffled men, Komitas Vartabed with two other Vartabeds and half a dozen priests, doctors, pharmacists, lawyers and writers, publishers of newspapers and men of business, for we had committed no crime! And yet there were at least two hundred policemen and twice that number of soldiers with fixed bayonets marching along with us. What an escort!

Through the Orta Kapou Gate thence the restricted roads in the Seraiglio Palace enclosure we were marched to a landing stage at Saray Bournou, at the water's edge, where one of the newest and best steamers of the Bosphorus was waiting steam up, all lights on, full of soldiers with fixed bayonets. Like sheep taken to the slaughterhouse, we, the intellectual leaders of the Armenian community in Constantinople, were herded to the main saloon and the boat was soon under way.

I happened to be in a group with Dr. Torkomian, Komitas Vartabed and Puzant Ketchian. We were too dazed to talk but all of us were trying to look out the window through the maze of bayonets of the troops on the outside corridor of the boat to see in what direction we were going. Suddenly Dr. Torkomian exclaimed: "They are taking us out to the Marmara Sea and will dump us into the sea!"

The beloved, sensitive and amiable Komitas Vartabed, sitting next to me, blanched, began to tremble, opened his mouth . . . but was speechless, plunged into stupor. Ketchian's and my pooh poohing was of no avail. He hung his head low and did not seem to hear us. It was too well known by all of us how Abdul Hamid used to have Turkish students from the medical and law schools of the University dumped into the troubled waters of the Marmara in the middle of the night sewn alive in sacks.

A little while later we saw that we were heading into the direction of the Haydar Pasha railroad terminal on the Asiatic side and in about twenty minutes our boat was warped to the quayside which was brilliantly lighted by all the arc lamps. Rows of soldiers three deep were drawn up in lines leaving a narrow avenue for us to march through them, up the steps of the station to its first-class waiting room.

At least a couple of hours must have passed while we waited in that large hall, two hours which seemed interminable, but we were too numbed with the expectancy of the unknowable to enable us to carry on any kind of conversation. Suddenly the doors were flung open and Bedri Bey walked in, surrounded by three officers of high rank, whispered a command to them, and we were marched to a waiting train. Half a dozen of us were placed in each compartment with two soldiers and two policemen taking their seats nearest to the doors on each side, all curtains carefully drawn.

We travelled all night, stopping occasionally for long intervals on sidings far from stations. In the morning the train stopped at a desolate place and we were

ordered out and formed a line under the very close watch of the soldiers and policemen. Soon a group of officers took their positions in front of us and a colonel began to call names from a list which he held, ordering them to step aside and form a group at some distance from the rest of us. About ninety were thus separated and the rest of us were ordered to take our positions back in the waiting train. A policeman volunteered the information that the place was called Ayash. Only two of the ninety eventually were returned alive to their families.

We were again on the move and shortly afterwards we arrived at the end of the line — Ankara.

* * *

Several officers on horse-back flanked the long cavalcade, galloping at break-neck speed up and down the column, whipping the horses of our carts to speed up and sometimes whipping the carters and prisoners as well.

The "road" on which we travelled is hard to describe for it was merely an endless series of holes, ditches and pitfalls. The thing to do was to rise from the bare boards of our seats on the floor of the cart and try to ride on air were such a thing possible, for after an hour's ride I do not think there was a single bone in our bodies that was not out of joint as the carts plunged in, shook and shivered. All day long and all along the road we saw a barren, God-forsaken land devoid of any trees and the few "villages" we passed through and stopped to allow our horses to be watered from a well, had a few tumbledown huts, clustered together, built of sun-baked mud and straw, its inhabitants in tatters and rags, their faces devoid of any human expression. This was Turkish Anatolia!

By midnight we arrived at an almost desolate village called Kalejik, high on a mountainside, and were herded into the *han* (inn) of which the courtyard and most of the ground floor was filled with donkeys. In one corner several Turks were snoring while a few others were sipping coffee and carrying on a conversation in the dim light of a single kerosene lamp hung from the ceiling. The place was soon filled by our men and the overflow, some thirty, were herded to an upstairs room reached by a rickety and broken stairway which might collapse any moment. The room was hardly more than twenty by thirty feet and the air was too foul for anyone to breathe, but the door was shut tightly and a guard posted at once. Among the thirty here were the clergymen and some of the laymen including myself. In a little while some of us began to feel faint, almost asphyxiated, and the young Dr. Dinanian and a pharmacist broke a pane of one of the windows giving us a chance to breath the cool mountain air while we were sitting cross-legged on the floor boards. The noise of the shattering glass alarmed the officers downstairs, thinking we were making an attempt to escape, and rushed upstairs doubling the guard.

I was sitting by the side of Komitas Vartabed on the floor. He was slumped immobile and silent. Suddenly he grasped my head with both hands, forced it to his knees and exclaimed:

"We shall live! We shall be free again!"

Amazed at this sudden outburst I raised my head a little but the Vartabed pressed it down to his knees again, repeating:

"We shall live . . . !"

When I raised my head for the second time the Vartabed again pressed it down almost screaming:

"We shall live . . . !"

I knew that something had gone wrong in the wonderful mind of his, perhaps by the shock Dr. Torkomian had caused him in the steamer cabin a couple of days ago . . . and lay my head on his dear knee, wondering. . . .

I must have dozed off, for the next thing I remember was that of a great stir at daybreak when the officers came to order us to our carts and we were soon on our way again to Changiri.

It was long past midnight when the carts slowed down and stopped at the gate of the barracks about a mile outside the city of Changiri, where, with a big four-

candle lantern in his hand, the military commander was waiting. While each one of us, one by one, passed in front of him he raised the light to our faces, looked carefully, made a gesture with his free hand and his head as though he meant 'I don't understand it' and motioned to the next. What it was all about that 'he did not understand' he told to a delegation from our entire group which he had asked to meet him a couple of days later.

It seems that the commander had received telegraphic instructions from Talaat Pasha to destroy the dangerous band which the Pasha had sent him. "I saw nothing desperate or dangerous in your faces and so I wired back. The answer came by wire to me that I might suffer to let you alive if I had enough soldiers to restrain you, and under my own responsibility. I have no soldiers, as a matter of fact, except the few old territorials. I am relying on your honor not to shame me." How close to instant massacre we had been on that day we had not realized! The act of one single conscientious Moslem had saved us then, at least. In those days the mass deportations and ultimate massacres of Armenians throughout Turkish territory had not begun yet.

After the so-called "character" inspection was over we were herded to one of the basement halls of the barracks, piled one over the other, and we all slumped on the cold, damp, flagstones tired, bewildered and terrified. We were in complete darkness unable to distinguish one another. However, a few of our companions who were still able to think had managed to bribe some of the guards and bought three or four candles which began to flicker here and there in the large hall.

Suddenly the hymn *yegestze* resounded from a corner of the hall and a complete stillness befell among the assembly. It was the melodious voice of Komitas Vartabed who had decided to do the only thing he could — to pray! All of us were suddenly on our knees, heads raised to the heavens, arms outstretched in supplication.

The *yegestze* (Thy Kingdome come) was followed by *Ընկալ զսուրբութեամբ ի խորաց սրտի խօսք ընդ Աստուծայ* (Receive with sweetness from the depth of speaking with God). Balakian Vartabed recited the first stanza of *Հաւատով խոստովանիմ* (Faithfully I confess . . .) and the entire prayer was continued through by the Vartabeds and priests and some of the laymen, each reciting the following stanzas to the end. Then Komitas Vartabed calmly sang in his wonderful voice the collect: *Փառք քեզ Տէր Աստուած մեր սր սարգիւկելիք զօրս սյր բարեաւ եւ խաղաղութեամբ անցուցանել* (Glory be to God who granted unto us to pass this day in peace and virtue. . .) It was the voice of the Armenian Church through the mouth of Shenorhali and his worthy successor Komitas Vartabed, the Armenian Church which had preserved our nation despite all hardship and persecution for seventeen centuries.

There was not a single dry eye. Nor shall mine be unto this day when I think of that moment or write about it.

Despite my emotion I could not fail to notice that the most devout amongst us were those who yet a few months ago were atheists and used to preach that religion is an opiate — the Dashnags amongst us. So cowed they were in adversity.

In a few weeks we were given local freedom and allowed to go outside the barracks to live in quarters we could rent and so we organized in small groups of congenial companionship.

On the first Sunday after that Komitas Vartabed celebrated high Mass in the local Armenian church. The community was small, that same small community which deprived themselves of all their bedding and pillows and sent them to us at the barracks so we would not sleep on the cold flagstones; that small community which was wiped out, snuffed, by massacre a few months later. Most of us deportees had crammed the very small and very low church which was reached by a few steps down, its floor of hardened earth.

I have seen the greatest and most magnificent cathedrals in the world but to

In Appreciation

The Armenian National Council of America wishes to express its heartfelt appreciation to all those who through their splendid cooperation and selfless devotion helped make the Armenian Day program and the Armenian booth at the Exposition a unique success, among them the speaker of the day, Rev. Charles A. Vertanes, the contributors of articles, Mr. Arakel Tatian, Mrs. Aghavnie Nigohosian and Mr. Matthew Callender, the soloists Madame Silvia Balaban and Berjoughie Javian Parseghian, the AYA Group of Watertown, the Armen Band of Watertown, the various chairmen and executive members of the Armenian Exposition Committee, and the faithful workers in the booth.

Special thanks are due to Master Photo Engraving Corporation for its generous and excellent artistic and technical contribution to the publication of this booklet, and to Mrs. Annik Seropian who not only has been devoting enormous time and effort, for years, for the successful participation of the Armenians at the Women's International Exposition, but also has been, and still continues to be, the moving soul of its Armenian Committee.



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this day that humble little Armenian church in Changiri remains for me the grandest of all.

The Badarak that Komitas Vartabed officiated transcended all, even the most awesome and grand one which I attended in the Armenian Cathedral of Koum Kapou, Constantinople, on the 1500th anniversary of the invention of the Armenian alphabet, officiated by the Patriarch surrounded by ten Bishops, a score of Vartabeds in resplendent robes, sung by a choir of a hundred voices, in their precious, historical, gold-embroidered surplices, when the solos were sung by Armenag Shahmouradian of the Paris Opera who had arrived the day before for the purpose. Ambassadors of foreign powers had attended it and also Talaat Pasha—the fiend who later ordered the massacre of two million Armenians.

Still, Komitas Vartabed's Badarak on that now remote Sunday on the remote hills of Changiri in Anatolia, in that humble little church remains unforgettable in my memory.

God bless his memory — foremost in our hearts.

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(15 Յուլիս, 1915. 4. Պոլիս)

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Children's Prayer for
Nigohosian Varzharan by Komitas Vardapet

The complete works of Komitas, consisting of more than 4,000 folk songs, dance music, etc., is now being published by Pethrat in Yerevan, Armenia.