



from the office of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America

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ARMENIANS INTRODUCE COMPOSER GOMIDAS VARTABED TO AMERICAN PUBLIC

An estimated 800,000 Americans of Armenian descent will pause on Sunday, December 22 to pay their respects to the memory of an Armenian musician of great accomplishment, Gomidas Vartabed, who remains little known to the outside world.

Born Soghomon Soghomonian in a small village in the western reaches of Anatolia in 1869, and orphaned at the age of 11, the young Armenian was sent to study music in Etchmiadzin, the Mother See of the Armenian Church, when it was discovered that he had a good voice. Ordained a priest at the age of 24, Gomidas travelled throughout the eastern provinces of Armenia, meticulously gathering the folk songs of her villages, and purifying that music from an accumulation of foreign influences.

Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, the Primate of the Armenian Diocese of America, says, "In Gomidas Vartabed, we have a clergyman and musicologist who singlehandedly assembled and refined Armenian music, captivating the hearts of his audiences. He harmonized the music of Divine Liturgy, the musical foundation of our Armenian Apostolic Church service. It is said that the composer Debussy, Gomidas's contemporary, after listening to the clergyman's composition "Andoni", said that even if Gomidas never wrote another composition, that one haunting melody would ensure his posterity. Fifty years after his death, we hope to re-present this composer to the world.

"In a very real sense, Gomidas's lack of recognition to date is an aftermath of the Genocide, as Armenians put all energies into rebuilding their lives, and little effort into honoring their artists. Gomidas, too, was an indirect victim of the Genocide, as he lived a life of creative darkness after witnessing its atrocities, and finally died in an asylum in Paris, leaving us to imagine what further masterpieces he might have left us. As it is, he preserved the music which is the soul of the Armenian people."

In order to invoke his life and accomplishments, and to introduce his music to the Armenian public, the Diocese has declared December 22 as **Gomidas Vartabed Day**, and in cooperation with other leading Armenian organizations, is presenting a concert of Gomidas's music in St. Vartan Cathedral on Second Avenue and 35th Street in Manhattan. Seven Armenian artists will perform the works -- both religious and secular -- of Gomdas, including bass Ara Berberian and contralto Lili Chookasian, both of the Metropolitan Opera.

The concert will commence at 3:00 p.m. The public is invited to attend; donation is \$10.00 at the door.