

ORGAN DEDICATION AND RECITAL—APRIL 9, 1994  
ST. GREGORY OF NAREK CHURCH, CLEVELAND, OHIO

It gives me great joy to be with you here at the St. Gregory of Narek Church. With the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of your parish, the dedication of a new organ, and the magnificent recital we just enjoyed, this is certain to be a memorable weekend, and I congratulate Deacon Norair, the choir and committee members, and all the parishioners who have done such a splendid job organizing these events.

Since this has been an evening with a musical theme, I would like to devote my remarks to the characteristic

music of the Armenian people. Looking out on the historic events occurring all over the world—especially the incredible religious revival taking place in Armenia itself—I am convinced that we are living in a time when all the children of the Armenian Church are being called to sing out loudly and clearly their devotion to God, and to demonstrate that faith in their daily lives through love, charity and sacrifice.

Naturally, the most powerful expression of those sentiments resides in the ancient and sublime beauty of the Armenian Divine Liturgy. We frequently talk about the sacred music of the Church as part of our cultural and artistic heritage, but it is really so much more than that.

The Liturgy conveys the very foundations of our faith: the story of Christ, our theology, and our longing—as individual souls, as a people, and as human beings—to be united with our Creator.

Unlike other religious traditions, the Armenian Church has never hidden its theology away in books which are accessible only to a special sect of scholars. We sing our faith loudly and boldly during each badarak, reaching out to young and old, rich and poor, male and female, educated and uneducated alike. The liturgy draws all of our people into the community of the Church, and into communion with Christ. Ours is a living tradition, and it expresses its vitality through the voice of our choirs.

Of course, we must not be content with just singing the words to the sharagans: we must listen to them, as well. Some of the greatest poetry ever written, some of the most profound human truths ever expressed, are recorded in the Divine Liturgy of our Church. Listen to these powerful words; live them in your daily lives; and share this great message with your families and friends.

We must not keep this treasure to ourselves, and we must make a special effort to share it with the younger generation. The power of music is naturally attractive to children and young people. We ought to use this to our advantage—or more accurately, we should use it to their advantage, for participation in the Church is one of the greatest gifts we can bestow upon our children.

One of the most beautiful aspects of our musical heritage is the way it forms a chain of continuity through an individual's life. Men and women who learned the sharagans as children continue to sing them throughout their lives, and continue to find some of that simple joy of childhood every time they sing praises to God. This sense of joy—and the sense of responsibility and love of God which naturally will follow—must be cultivated in each succeeding generation. It is our highest task, and our greatest privilege, to render this service to our people, to our Church, and to God.

This evening's dedication centered around a more recent addition to our musical tradition: the introduction

of the organ into the liturgy. The use of the organ is an elaboration of our tradition, which beautifully complements our sacred music. And no one has done more to bring the majesty of the organ into the Armenian Church than our guest of honor, Mr. Berj Zamkochian.

His performance here tonight was, needless to say, magnificent. On many occasions, Berj has also graced the St. Vartan Cathedral with his music. When he lends his talent to an Armenian liturgy, he does more than simply accompany the choir: he elevates it, producing a powerful marriage of both the vocal and instrumental arts. And like a marriage, this is a sacred union, which is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

We Armenians are fortunate to have many artists among us, and Berj is one of the brightest stars in our constellation—a true ambassador of our people. When Berj Zamkochian's remarkable talent makes people around the world stand up and applaud, it brings honor not only to himself, but to the best that the Armenian heritage stands for. We all owe you a profound debt of gratitude, Berj, not simply for your performance this evening, but for your ongoing mission to bring the beauty, power and grace of your music into our lives. May God bless you, and may He bless us all. Thankyou.

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