

Gregorio Bardini, *Padre Komitas: Musica e Spiritualità Armena*, Roma, 2006, 170 pages.¹

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Already, more than a century after his birth, the name and works of celebrated Armenian composer, conductor and ethnomusicologist Komitas (1869-1935) remain a centre of attraction to world musicians and musicologists. Due to his lectures and concerts in various European cities at the beginning of the 20th century, the works of Komitas were appreciated by European musicologists of his time (Aubrey, Laloy, Melichar, etc.²) and later. However, the number of musicological studies in Western languages about this eminent figure in particular³ and Armenian music in general⁴ is not great. This is why Gregorio Bardini's study entitled *Father Komitas: Armenian Music and Spirituality* is a valuable contribution. For this book, Bardini⁵ has conducted detailed research on the rather broad topic of Armenian musical culture. He has used several publications of Komitas's works and translations of his articles as well as studies by Armenian musicologists available in Western languages.

The book is divided into four major parts with different chapters. In the first part, *Sound and Silence*, which consists of five chapters, Bardini presents Komitas's biography in a broken chronological order. In the first two chapters ("The Sacrifice of Komitas", "The Genocide") Bardini focuses on the Armenian genocide. Calling it *olocausto*, holocaust, he asserts that it was the direct cause of Komitas's mental illness and the end of his creative work. Bardini sees Komitas's illness as a result of historical events during the second half of the 19th and the first 13 years of the 20th centuries (p. 13). Bardini examines the phenomenon of Komitas in the context of the musical culture of the Ottoman Empire, discloses the concerns of Turkish musicians in defining their national musical culture, and discusses their attempts at cooperation with European composers. He notes how the "group of five" Turkish composers had a Turkish musical identity in the same manner as Komitas did (p. 18) and believes that the outstanding figure of Komitas, well-known among all the Armenians, is worthy to be known around the world (p. 7).

The second part of the book ("The Musician") depicts the musical activities of Komitas - lectures in Europe and elsewhere about Armenian music, collecting national songs, trips into the different corners of Armenia and endeavours to understand the essence of Armenian music. Bardini states that Komitas "wanted to reach the very roots of Armenian music in order to revitalize it in his turn" (p. 39). Bardini analyzes the different song genres (*horovels*, lullabies, weddings songs, dance-songs, etc.), and determines their most characteristic features (monody in contrary of Georgian polyphony, the absence of chromatic scale and presence of diatonic music, the great importance of the language, etc.). The author also uncovers the efforts of Komitas in deciphering the problematic medieval Armenian notation system, *khazes*.

The third part ("Success and Envy") describes the life and works of Komitas between 1912 and 1914, the envy of Turks, Armenian clergymen and musicians, and his return to Paris.

The last part of the book ("Armenian Folk Music") is a broad introduction to the history of Armenian music from ancient times to the present. It describes in detail the folk instruments and the musical culture of minstrels as well as the musical culture of Armenia in modern times. Bardini focuses on the *duduk*, a musical instrument, and its wide usage among contemporary musicians (including pop singers). In this section separate chapters are devoted to the musical culture of the Ottoman Empire as well as to Armenian folk dances. This whole section is a deviation from the main topic, though the content is quite valuable and gives a broad insight into and comprehensive information about the musical culture of the Armenian people in general and in the times that preceded and followed Komitas. Bardini notes that Armenians played an important role in organizing musical life in the Ottoman Empire, and their dynamism was obvious in every sector of the Turkish economy, culture, and sciences (p. 127).

In the next short chapter, "Memory", Bardini speaks about the reflections of the figure of Komitas in art and literature. The book is concluded with a list of works by Komitas (p. 141-149) and a discography (p. 151-160) as well as a bibliography.

One of the advantages of Bardini's monograph is his method of observing the work of Komitas in the musical context of his time and later decades. The author draws parallels and makes comparisons with other composers and with musical cultures of close and distant peoples. The book is rich with numerous quotations from Komitas's musical scores.

However, a flaw in the book is the absence of an analysis of the religious music of Komitas. This important part of Komitas's heritage, with its immortal *Patarag* (Holy Liturgy), seems to be generally ignored by Bardini, who only mentions such songs in passing.

The monograph would gain greatly if the author referred to the works of Armenian musicologists about Komitas and gave a general overview of Komitas studies.

In addition, there are some minor inaccuracies in the book. For example, the word "Vardapet" is explained as "doctor of theology" (p. 28), while it is actually a stage in the Armenian clerical hierarchy. Bardini is wrong when he claims that Edgar Manas, the Armenian composer from Constantinople, was a disciple of Komitas (p. 127). However, Manas had good relations with him. The name of the famous Russian composer Mikhail Gnesin (1883-1957) is twice misspelled as Knesin (p. 99), and the name of composer Harutiun Sinanian is misspelled Haruthian Sinaian (p. 126). Stating that "The cinema world has dealt with the character of Komitas", Bardini quotes the Russian original and the Italian translation of the poem "Komitas" by Arseniy Tarkovski⁶ (p. 137). Arseniy Tarkovski was a Russian poet, however, and not a cinema figure. Bardini has confused him with his son, well-known filmmaker Andrey Tarkovski.

However, these inaccuracies do not weigh heavy. Gregorio Bardini's study will remain an important work on Komitas and Armenian music in Europe.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ I thank Armine Balayan who helped me in producing this review.
- ² In particular, German musician Aloise Melichar (1896-1976), in his letters to the Armenian singer Marguerite Babayan, highly appreciated Komitas, comparing him with Hungarian composer Bela Bartók (Azat Ordukhanyan, "Briefe über Komitas: die Briefe Alois Melichars an Margarit Babajan," *Armenisch-Deutsche Korrespondenz*, 2006, Heft 3 & 4, p. 24).
- ³ The interesting study *Archeology of Madness: Portrait of an Armenian Icon* by Rita Soulahian Kuyumjian (Montreal, 2001) focuses more on the history of Komitas's tragic illness. Swiss-Armenian composer, Sirvart Kazanjian (author of *Les Origines de la Musique Arménien*, Paris, "Astrid," 1984) has conducted a study about Komitas in French, which is still unpublished.
- ⁴ One of the recent studies in English and Armenian is Grigor Suni's *Armenian Music* published in 2005 in Yerevan by the Museum of Literature and Art.
- ⁵ Gregorio Bardini, Italian composer, professor of the Vivaldi Musical Institute of Bolzano, received a diploma in flute in Parma Conservatory in 1983. In 1994 he became a bachelor of Ugro-Finnish philology in Bologna University, where he wrote a thesis on the music of shamanism in Eurasia. As a composer he produced three CDs. In 2004 he produced the "Komitas" CD with folk melodies of Komitas in flute interpretations. Prior to *Padre Komitas* he had also published an article about Armenian music ("Ipotesi di Lavoro Sulla Musica Popolare Armena," in *Rassegna Armenisti Italiani*, I parte – Relazioni Lette Nel Corso del "Secondo Seminario Armenisti Italiani" 30 gennaio 1999, Casa di Cristallo Padova organizzata da Padus-Araxes, pp. 41-43).
- ⁶ See the Armenian translation of this poem by Hamo Sahian in: *Gites Yerkirn Ays? Banasteghsutyunner Nvirvats Hayastanin* (Do you know this country? Poems dedicated to Armenia), compiled by V. Babayan, Yerevan, "Hayastan," 1970, p. 40; *Haverjutyun. Rus Banasteghsnere Hayastanin* (Eternity: Russian poets to Armenia), compiled by Gurgen Hovnan, Yerevan, "Sovetakan Grogh," 1978, p. 176.