

Youth Orchestra and Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi Play Works by Piazzola, Rota, Komitas and...Rita Sargsyan

The holidays are over, but surprises from the SYOA continued



By Gourgen James Khachakian
Chief correspondent

As it was announced in The Highlights previous issue, a new concert season of 2013 of the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia (SYOA) was launched on January 14 at the Aram Khachaturian Concert Hall featuring "a guest star", world renowned Italian accordionist and bandoneonist **Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi**. (Auto) correction: I do not know, is it appropriate to use the word "guest" to a person who has been coming to Armenia for the fifth time, since 2006, and, especially,

has been playing with SYOA for the third time already and who's started to speak Armenian even... "Shnorhikalutyun, Rita!" These words Mario addressed Mrs **Rita Sargsyan**, the First Lady of Armenia just after the two (Pietrodarchi and Orchestra) performed a nice piece entitled as "Dedication to the Tango" and written by... Yes, indeed, Mrs Sargsyan...

...Not so long ago **Sergey Smbatyan**, the SYOA Artistic Director and Principal Conductor sent to Mario a CD with that composition recorded on.

When Sergey's Italian friend shared with him a very good impression on the piece, Maestro Smbatyan "revealed" the name of

the author. So they arranged the composition for bandoneon and orchestra, and we the grateful listeners enjoyed it -that was a surprise not only for the audience, but also for the Author herself. Mario said also he was really happy to come to Armenia, to perform with the SYOA headed by Sergey Smbatyan and heaped praise to Armenian audience. In his words, it is a great thing we the Armenians have such First Lady who creates music herself and so supports music development in the country. "We in Italy would be happy to have the First Lady such Rita (Sargsyan)", said Mr Pietrodarchi and sent, right from the stage, a nice bunch of flowers to Mrs Sargsyan, who, in turn, was applauding to our Italian friend and the Orchestra standing. Running ahead, your author will absolutely agree with the following evaluation of that Concert by a younger (and a beautiful) lady colleague: "...Words are not enough to describe the atmosphere of the evening to the fullest: Armenian and Italian artistic souls merged together creating fairy music and making thousands of hearts to beat in a completely different rhythm, emotionally saturated and complicated program, splash of bright and indescribable feelings, magical, enchanting sounds of accordion and bandoneon, and endless applauds turning to ovation...".

And right that ovation "forced" Maestro M.S. Pietrodarchi to perform five (!) encores such as "Oblivion", "Libertango", "Ave Maria" by the great Argentinean composer/musician **Astor Piazzola** who wrote a new page in the long history of The Tango, "La Vita e Bella" by Nicola Piovani/Roberto Molinelli, and "Krounk" ("Crane") by genius Komitas, the founder of Armenian classical music. Expectedly, the latter (piece) really "blasted" the audience - yours truly even saw tears in the eyes of some listeners.

That night compositions by **Fabio Conocchiella** ("Three Themes from Ennio Morricone's Soundtracks for Bandoneon, Strings and Percussion"), **Nino Rota**

("Theme from "The Godfather" motion picture"), **Roberto Molinelli**, **Nicola Piovani**, and indeed all-time favorites by Astor Piazzola were performed as well. As it was announced before, performance of "Four Seasons" by **Martin Palmeri**, a big work having four parts and written specifically for Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi (for bandoneon and orchestra), has become the world premiere.

Well, it seems the year begins with an exciting music by the Youth Orchestra and we hope it will be continued in the same mood...

Acknowledgement:
Marianna Galstyan, M.A.
Photos courtesy of SYOA
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Melikset Khachiyani: Women's national team of U.S. has huge potential

An interview with Melikset Khachiyani, coach of women's chess team of the U.S.

By T. Harutyunyan

Melikset Khachiyani is an Armenian-American chess player, a grand master (GM), he currently resides in Los Angeles. He began playing chess at the age of 8. Among his early coaches was the 9th World Champion Tigran Petrosian. He became a Grand Master in 2006, after moving to the United States. He was the first coach of GM Levon Aronian who said in an interview to a Russian periodical: "In the childhood, I - like any other person - had a coach. His name was Melikset Khachiyani, he did a lot of good for me. He discerned a talent for combinatorial analysis in me and started assigning a multitude of exercises. At his suggestion, I played numerous blitz games in childhood".

Melikset Khachiyani is now a coach of the women's chess team of the U.S. He gave an interview to Noyan Tapan.

- When did you begin to coach the U.S. chess team?

- In 2010 I was playing in the U.S. championship. One of the leading players of our team, Irina Krush approached me and asked me if I wanted to coach the U.S. women's team. She added it was outside her competence to decide

who will be the coach. Such decisions are taken by the Federation Council and the team's captain Mikhail Khodorkovsky who has dealt with all organizational issues for over ten years. They together with the team decide whether this or that candidate is a suitable coach for the national team. Apparently, taking into account my successes as a player and a coach, they decided I was suited to be a coach. I accepted the proposal with pleasure.

- Please tell us about the achievements and failures after you began coaching the team.

- In 2010 our national team participated in the Olympiad. I was the coach of the women's team; I think we competed quite successfully: we took fifth place. This is first of all the achievement of our female players, the team captain Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the U.S. Chess Federation, and the Kasparov Foundation that sponsored our participation in the Olympiad.

- At one time you coached Levon Aronian. Are there any differences in training of men and women? What about similarities?

- This is not the same thing, of course. Women are more emotional, it is important for a female player to be in a good mood before the game, a lack of confidence affects

women longer than men - they can be unconfident only an hour before the game, even when they are well-trained. Sometimes the reason is a broken heel of a shoe or some item of their clothes. It is no secret that women show great attention to detail, and when they are in a good mood, they usually play quite well. As for Levon, I worked with him when he was nine; that is, in 1990-1997. And when he was already 15 and received the title of a grand master, it became clear that he had surpassed me. And then a decision was taken that a very good coach Arshak Petrosian would mentor him. He continues to help Levon until now. And later it became evident that Levon achieved great success thanks to his huge talent.

- Let's return to the subject of the U.S. team. As is known, when you coached the team, they played against Armenian female players and defeated them. What did you feel, as an Armenian on the one hand and as a coach on the other?

- Morally, I had a hard time. The match was held in Khanty-Mansiysk in 2009. As a coach, I was obliged to properly coach our players. At the same time, I asked the team captain to allow me to be absent from the match on that day. I followed the developments on the Internet. The U.S. team won by a



small margin: 2.5:1.5.

- What do you think about the potential of women's national team of Armenia.

- It is much more balanced. The inclusion of Natasha Klimova in the team gave more confidence to the other players. I am more than certain that great success awaits the women's team of Armenia as well. A lot of work is being done today by the Armenian Federation to assist the female players and sooner or later this hard work will yield its results and the Armenian team will be among the top five and even three chess teams of the world.

- Would you like to add anything else?

Only one thing - I am very glad to coach the U.S. women's team. I hope that thanks to the support of the Federation and the Kasparov Foundation it will stand a good chance of playing successfully. The potential of the team players is huge and it is a united team so in the near future, I think, the U.S. women's team will start displaying very good results.