

March 21, 2009



# Tania Ketenjian's truth

# poetry matters

## The harvest of Abrahamyan's poem



by Lory  
Bedikian

Poems of exile usually reveal themselves to us through their titles, through the opening lines, or often through the opening images of the verse. The poet creates a tone, a type of feeling that informs us that this is a poem of nostalgia, remembrance, and even, in some cases, a yearning of wanting to go back to one's homeland from which one was displaced.

Milena Abrahamyan has written "Eating memories," which works as a poem related to the concept of exile, but takes a less-traveled path to that end. I was fortunate to be introduced to this new talent in the community through the Armenian Poetry Project blog, on which one can read several of her poems.

Abrahamyan was born in Yerevan and immigrated to the United States when she was 10 years old. She is a creative writing and women's studies double major at Hunter College. The Armenian Poetry Project blog reports, "Some of her goals for the future include publishing a memoir, and learning to read and write better Armenian."

"Eating memories" lists many of the traditionally consumed fruits by Armenian families. Alongside the fruit is a reference also to "fried sunflower seeds" which also has been a source of nourishment for so long. Abrahamyan uses most of the stanzas as stations for each type of fruit – a room within which to display the speaker's memories of eating each fruit and the memories conjured up by these moments.

### Eating memories

*Sour cherries were the first thing:  
staining my fingers bloody,  
tang on my tongue. I did not close  
my eyes to remember the taste  
of winters my mother would open  
a jar of compote and I would wait,  
sitting at the kitchen table,  
saliva rushing into my mouth.*

*Another day it was apricots  
with spots and holes where the worms  
bit their way through pink flesh.  
I remember being bothered by the fruit,  
tasting bruised and rotting,  
hosting animals. I refused to eat  
the ones where an opening had been made.*

*Then we fried sunflower seeds  
and even before my teeth bit  
the warm seed out of its hard skin,  
the smell of oil coaxed by low fire  
beneath the pan filled the house  
as we gathered in front of the TV  
to watch Bollywood films.*



Left: Milena  
Abrahamyan. Below:  
"Then we fried  
sunflower seeds,"  
Milena Abrahamyan  
writes. Sunflowers  
grow abundantly in  
Armenia. Photo: Mari  
Hakobyan.

*I remember bringing a peach to my nose,  
fuzz caressing skin, devouring  
the sweet smell before biting in.*

*Eating cantaloupe in the balcony  
on hot summer days and the bees  
that gathered over nectar in my plate.*

*I learned to love the bitter  
of grape seeds after 11 years,  
every time I bit into fruit that had been  
growing  
in the belly of thorny mountains,  
facing hot mother sun, sucking zular  
water that trickled down the hills  
of the land I had to leave.*

As I've mentioned in other columns, this poem relies on a narrative structure. In other words, it reads like a story. If you were to put the lines together in prose form, you may feel as if you're reading a short story. What makes it a poem is Abrahamyan's choice of how she decides to break the lines, thus emphasizing certain words over others.

What's interesting about "Eating memories" is that the most obvious use of figurative language occurs in the last stanza where Abrahamyan's speaker says she "bit into fruit that had been growing / in the belly of thorny mountains, / facing hot mother sun." Suddenly, the reader is given two instances, side by side of personification: that of the "belly" of the mountains and the "mother sun." Perhaps Abrahamyan decides to use personification here to heighten the reader's attention to the detail that follows. Directly after these two images, we are told that this is the speaker's land that she "had to leave," thus finally letting us know that it is not merely a poem of nostalgia for food consumed, but that the fruit are symbols of memories and experiences left behind by one who had to leave her motherland.

Another simple, yet significant, moment to point out is that Abrahamyan begins this last stanza with the phrase "I learned to love the bitter / of grape seeds." Notice that she decided to break the line on "bitter," thus asserting that this was not an easy thing to learn, but that it was bitter-sweet in time. After the line break, the speaker goes back to the concept of



fruit, with "grape seeds." That one word, "bitter" informs us of how the poet wants to shape the tone at the end of the poem. It is not just "bitter," but it is a bitterness that one has learned to "love."

One could compile several anthologies on the topic of food and how it has been used as a symbol, metaphor, trope in poems and literature over the centuries. It is definitely a vehicle to take us to a place that the poet wants us to visit. Perhaps when we do bite into that apple or taste the seeds of the pomegranate, we are taken back to places we had to leave or decided to leave, and for a moment we can relive what perhaps was short-lived, and savor the sweet and bitter tastes of the past. ☞

"Eating memories," appeared on the Armenian Poetry Project bog, January 1, 2009. Reprinted with permission.

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Connect: <http://armenian-poetry.blogspot.com/>

### Correction

In the March 14 issue of Arts & Culture, the author of the article, "Armenia's Hasmik Karapetyan charms audiences around the world with her distinctive style," was Nyree Abrahamian. We regret that she was misidentified.

# theater

## The age-old tradition of Armenian drama continues at Sundukian National Academic Theater



by Nyree  
Abrahamian



The make-up room at the Sundukian Theater. Photo: Nyree Abrahamian.

Armenians have a rich history in the dramatic arts, dating back at least 3500 years to pagan times, when religious rituals themselves were theatrical performances. Centuries later, around 100 BC, the concept of theater in its more modern sense would begin to take root in Armenia, heavily influenced by Hellenistic culture.

According to **Plutarch**, Armenia's first official theater was built in the city of Dikranagerd by **Dikran the Great** in 69 BCE, 14 years before the opening of great Pompeii theater in Rome. Dikran's son, **Artavazd II**, who was reared in Greek culture, wrote several Greek tragedies, comedies and historical commentaries. When he became king, he built the second permanent public theater of Armenia in the old capital of Artashat. He is considered the first Armenian playwright and director.

From its early days well into the 18th century, Armenian theater would go through periods of growth and decline, as historic Armenia was divided and passed time and time again through the hands of different rulers. By the mid-19th century, theater was reemerging in a big way, both in Western Armenia and in the Caucasus.

The first Western Armenian amateur theater group was established by **Sra-bion Hekimian** in 1855. In the coming years, other small theater groups would form and their success would lead to the construction of new auditoriums and theaters throughout Constantinople. Plays were performed in both Armenian and Turkish, and it is said that the Armenians played a principal role in the birth of contemporary Turkish theater.

Many great Armenian playwrights emerged from Turkey during this period, including **Bedros Turian** (1852–1872), who is credited with breaking the rigidity of Armenian classicism by moving to vernacular usage, and **Hagop Baronian** (1843–1891), who satirized greed, vanity and hypocrisy in such classics as *Apisoghom Agha* and *Medzabadiv Muratsganner* ("Honorable Beggars").

Perhaps the most significant Western Armenian classical dramatist was **Levon Shant** (1869–1952), who not only wrote plays, but short stories, poems, essays and textbooks. He was also an important political figure and a lifelong member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. Born in Constantinople and educated in Europe, he moved to Tbilisi where he joined the prestigious Verna-tun Armenian literary group. During the 19th century and early 20th century, Tbilisi was the major Armenian cultural center of the Caucasus. Shant's first

plays were published and performed there, including the symbolist drama, "Ancient Gods", which was translated to German, Italian, French, and Russian.

After escaping to Europe during the Armenian Genocide, Shant went to Yerevan and served as a member of parliament in the short-lived Armenian Republic (1918–1920). Upon the takeover of the Bolsheviks, he was imprisoned – and freed shortly thereafter by an underground movement. He fled to Tehran and later in his life, became the founder of the Hamazkayin cultural association and the Armenian academy of Beirut. His plays were banned in Soviet Armenia due to their symbolic revolutionary content, but are now frequently performed and highly acclaimed.

In the 1920s, there was a general trend among artists and intellectuals to move from old Armenian cultural centers in the Caucasus, like Tbilisi and Baku, to Yerevan, the new capital of the Armenian SSR. Among them was the great playwright and novelist **Alexander Shirvanzade** (1858–1935), who was born just outside of Baku. He lived most of his life and created the majority of his works there, finally moving to Yerevan in 1926.

Until the early 20th century, Yerevan was not much more than a village, but thanks in part to the new wave of intellectuals who came in to build the city up from scratch, it soon became a distinguished and reputable capital.

In 1922, what would soon be known as the Sundukian National Academic Theater was founded in Yerevan. It was the first theater company in present-day Armenia. Founded by members of the Portsarakan Tadron company, who had come to Yerevan from Tbilisi, the Sundukian Theater embodied the continuation of Armenian dramatic arts in the nation's new administrative and cultural center.

The theater was named after **Gabriel Sundukian**, the greatest Eastern Arme-

nian playwright of the late 19th century. Sundukian (1825–1912) was born in Tbilisi and studied in France and Russia. He was the first dramatist to deal with the Armenian middle and lower classes, and his play "Pepo" is among the most widely performed in Armenia to this day.

For years, the Sundukian Theater was the only playhouse in Yerevan and soon after it was founded, it gained stature, attracting many prominent actors from across Western Armenia and the Caucasus. As there was a great demand for performances in the burgeoning capital, the theater built up a vast repertoire very quickly, ranging from Armenian plays to translations of classical, European and American pieces.

Ever-present on the playbill are productions of Armenian classics such as **Dere-nik Demirchyan's** "Kach Nazar", Baronian's comedies, Shant's dramas, and of course, Sundukian's masterpieces. The Sundukian Theater is also renowned for its impressive renditions of Shakespearean classics. Its early productions were so impressive that the first Shakespearean Festival and Conference in the Soviet Union was held in Yerevan.

Over the decades, many fine actors have graced the stage of the Sundukian Theater, such as its early favorites, **Vahram Papazian** (1888–1968) of Constantinople, who is reputed to have played Othello 3,000 times in the Armenian, Russian, and French languages and **Hasmik Agopyan** (1879–1947) of Nakhichevan, a reputed actress who was known all over the Caucasus simply as Hasmik. She was the leading actress of

the theater from the day it opened in 1922.

Some of its more contemporary stars include **Khoren Abrahamyan** (1930–2004), who went on to become the theater's executive director, **Sos Sarkisian**, who has gained wide acclaim throughout his impressive career for both his stage and film roles.

The Sundukian Theater has undergone some extremely difficult times in its over 85 years of existence. In the early years, just the task of creating a reputable theater company in a city that just beginning to become established was a challenge. Then in the early 1960s, after a tragic fire, almost the entire theater was lost and had to be rebuilt. Perhaps the most difficult period in the theater's history was the "dark years" of early independence, when performances were all but discontinued for a few years because there was no electricity. When it reopened in 1996, it was like starting from scratch, with a new cast of actors, a new playbill, and very limited resources. Yet despite these huge hardships, the Sundukian Theater continues to be an important cultural presence in Yerevan.

Today, playhouses abound in the capital, boasting performances of all genres, from opera to modern mime. But the Sundukian Theater, with its rich history, persevering spirit and reputation for excellence will always hold a special place in the hearts of Armenian audiences. 𐌌

For more information about the history of Armenian theater, visit: <http://www.armeniandrama.org/index.php>



## Sos Sarkisian and the struggle for statehood

One of Armenia's greatest actors seeks harmony while battling disappointment



by Maria Titizian

YEREVAN – A few months ago a fight erupted outside the Hamazkayin Theater in downtown Yerevan. Two groups of teenage boys, in an attempt to settle a score, were beating each other to a pulp. Their commotion caused **Sos Sarkisian**, one of Armenia's greatest and most prolific actors, to come out of his office in the theater and onto the street. Just as the fight was breaking up, a young boy picked up a large rock and threw it indiscriminately at the opposing gang.

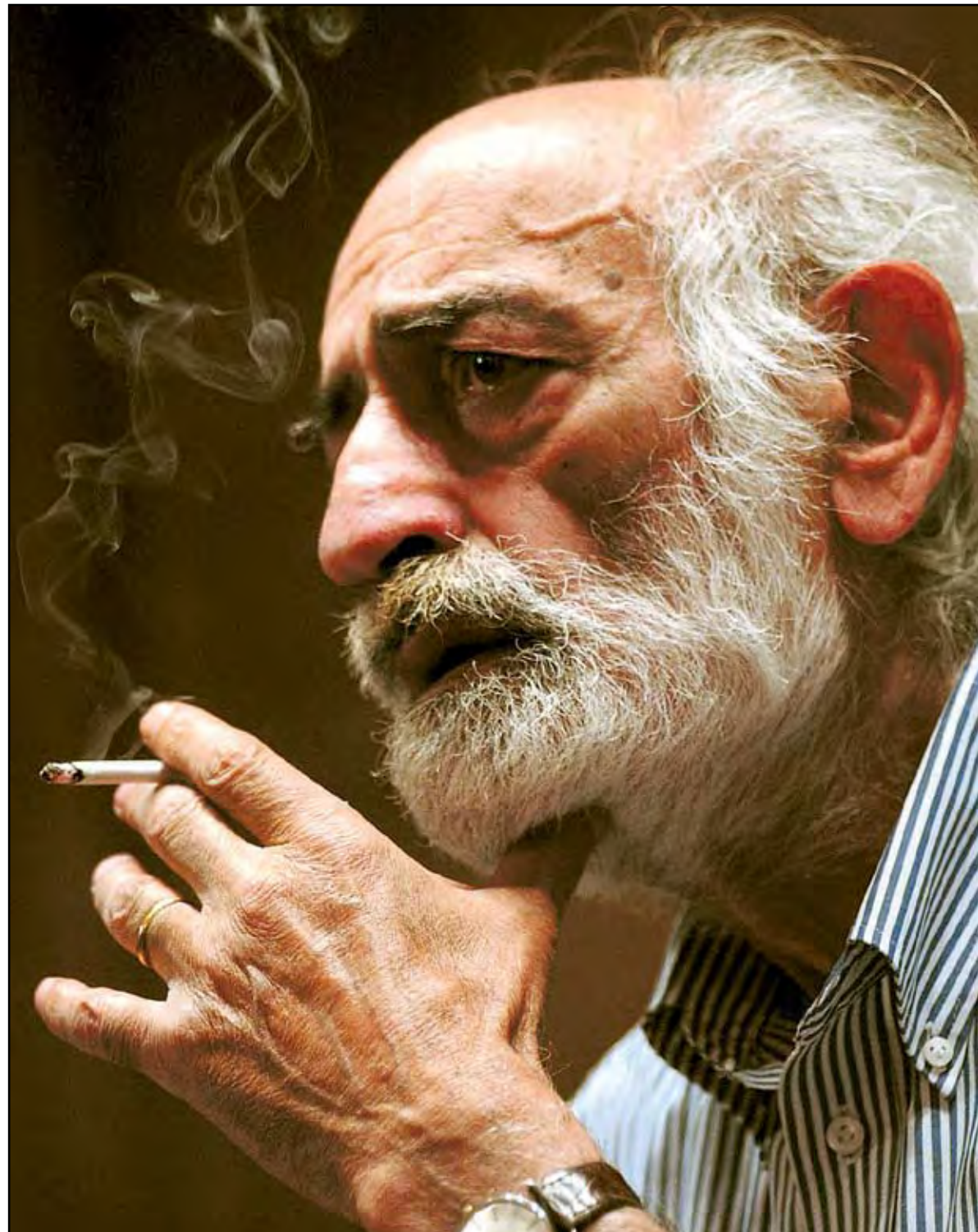
Almost 80 years old and frail, Sos strode up to the young boy who had thrown the rock. "Do you know what you have just done?" he asked. "That other boy has a mother, he has a father, he is an Armenian. You are throwing a rock at another Armenian?"

He looks at me with an inordinate amount of sadness in his eyes. "When I see the light in the eyes of a young Armenian, I feel triumphant," he says. "But I am disappointed," he continues shaking his head as he fidgets with his cuff. "Look at what we have become."



Sos Sarkisian was born in Stepanavan in 1929 to a family of *ranchbars* (ploughmen). At the time of his birth, Stepanavan was merely a village, which used to be called Jalaloghli. The aging actor, still striking despite his tired appearance, explains that almost 230 years ago, a member of the **Hassan Jalalian** dynasty moved from Karabakh to Lori and established Jalaloghli. Lori is one of the ten provinces or marzes of Armenia. Jalaloghli wasn't a very big village, but over the years it grew. "Up until the 1980s, residents of Stepanavan wouldn't marry outside the village. They would only marry one another," he tells me, smiling. "At the most, some young men would bring brides from Shulaveridse, because they too are Karabakh Armenians." Shulaveridse, with its mixed ethnic population is a village in the Republic of Georgia. Sos Sarkisian's grandmother was from Shulaveridse. "We were somehow isolated from the rest of Lori," he says.

The actor went to a Russian school in his native Stepanavan. "It was a very good school because after the revolution many Russian intellectuals fled Russia and hid in the provinces," he explains. "Among my teachers were people who had graduated from the University of Leipzig, the University of St. Petersburg. They were people of high culture and intellect." He recalls his school years



"I often say, that loving the homeland is mandatory. But my homeland is Van, Mush, Kars, Karabakh, Armenia. This is my homeland. But my state, which can be found on this small plot of land, we have to learn to love the state. If we don't love our state, then we cannot create statehood." Photo: Photolure.

and his educators with great nostalgia, "I remember their extremely advanced knowledge, their morality... Even with their looks they were aristocratic."

### First tentative steps to the rest of his life

When Sos Sarkisian was in the eighth grade, a director from Yerevan came to his village to direct a play at the local theater. The director, **Tsolak Nigoghossian**, invited Sos to take part in the play; it was the first time he had ever been on stage. The local theater was small, with only 200 seats. "It was destroyed during the 1988 earthquake, and only now they are rebuilding it," he tells me. After his role in the play, the administration of the local theater invited him to be a part of the troupe. "I worked there for a year and half. So since the age of 17, I have been in the theater," he says as his eyes sparkle.

Did he know that the theater would be his life? "I never thought about acting," he says. "Our family was quite large, so I thought I could help my father out by working in the theater with my small pay."

Later, he was invited to Yerevan to work at the Young People's Theater, where he worked for another year and a half. That theater still exists today, con-

tinuing in its tradition of bringing the love of acting and the theater to a new generation of Armenians.

While at the Young People's Theater, the aspiring actor tried to get a job with the revered Sundukian Theater, but wasn't accepted because anyone joining the theater had to have a post-secondary education, which he did not have at the time. "The artistic director of Sundukian was **Armen Gulakian** and he rejected me. I have to say that Gulakian was a great man," Sarkisian says and goes on to admit that he only studied at university for two and a half years.

Even after a lifetime of acting, it still amazes this most prolific actor that circumstances in his life always led him to acting. There was always a fork in the road that led to the theater and he took it. "It's interesting that there were always people around me who saw me in the theater, who wanted to see me in the theater, independent of what I wanted, of course. Every time my life would take me away from the theater, they made sure it was directed back there." He admits there were times in his life when he wanted to leave acting, but conditions were created to keep him there. "It is fate. It is my destiny," he shrugs.

What would he have done if Tsolak

Nighossian had not come to Stepanavan to direct a play at the local theater? "To be honest, I don't have those answers, I don't know what I could have been. Maybe I would have been a *ranchbar* like my father. Maybe I would have worked on the land," he says. "But this is how my life turned out and now I think, 'What is better in the whole world than the theater?'"

Indeed, after studying at the Yerevan Fine Arts & Theater Institute in 1954, Sos went on to be part of the Sundukian Theater. In 1992 he established and headed the Hamazkayin Theater and today also serves as the rector of Yerevan Institute of Theater and Cinema.

### A life of film

The venerable actor has played in about 40 films, both large and small parts. His favorite film of all time was *Dzori Miro* (1979). The hero of the film, Miro, loses his family during the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and fights against the Turks. Disappointed in his life, Miro finds refuge in Soviet Armenia. His love for a refugee girl sparks his willingness to create a family and start a new life. "I loved that film because it was as though it was born from

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# theater & film

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inside me, from my soul, my dreams, my torment," he says, his voice almost inaudible. What was it that tormented him? "Hayrenasirutyun (patriotism)," he says simply. "When that film premiered, one cinema critic said that for the first time under Soviet rule, a gun was seen in the hands of an Armenian man who is protecting his soil, his country, his family. A role like that had never before existed in the Armenian cinema."

"My most beloved role was Usta Mgrdich in *Heghnar Aghpyur*," he says. "I always wanted to play the role of Usta Mgrdich again, because I could play it better now. The role was much deeper than I understood it then," he says wistfully.

Among his other well-known films is *Nahapet* (1977) about a man who tries to rebuild his life after losing his wife and child in the Genocide, based on the book written by **Hrachya Kochar**. Another favorite is *Gigor* (1982) based on the poem by **Hovhanness Toumanian** about a village boy meeting his tragic fate when he is sent to the city, Tiflis, by his father **Hambo** (played by Sos Sarkisian) to work for a rich merchant, **Bazaz Artem**.

## Revolution, independence, plunder

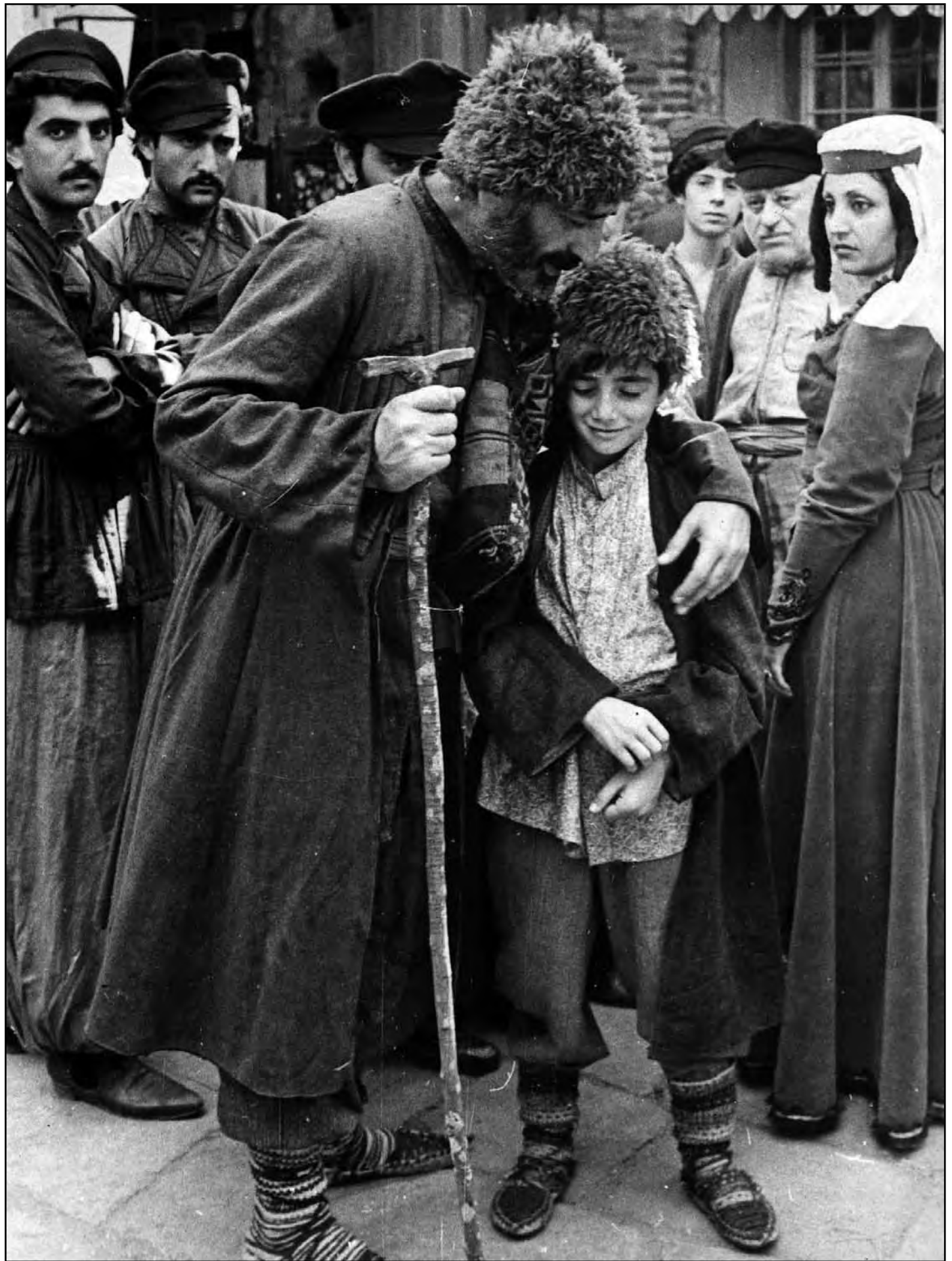
"Naturally, independence was a dream for every single one of us," he says with conviction. But he also admits that parallel with independence, there was pillaging and looting. "This patriotic people, all of whom grew up in front of my very eyes, these mountains, these buildings that rose from the ground in front of our generation's eyes; every single building that was built; every street that was paved was joyous and caused us to rejoice." With independence, came a lot of negative undercurrents. Mr. Sarkisian ran for president in 1991 as the candidate of Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

"They looted the factories, they closed down the *kolkhozes* [collective farms] and now the villager is desolate and hungry," he says sadly. "What can I say?"

He says that it is only now, in the last year or two, that he has noticed a willingness to rebuild society. "Today, we do not have a healthy society, it doesn't exist as we understand it to. We do not know what society wants, what are its preferences, what are its desires, what are its ideals," he explains. "By not having a state, we didn't understand the value of statehood. I often say, that loving the homeland is mandatory. But my homeland is Van, Mush, Kars, Karabakh, Armenia. This is my homeland. But my state, which can be found on this small plot of land, we have to learn to love the state. If we don't love our state, then we cannot create statehood."

His voice straining, he continues the thread of his thoughts. "Rebuilding society means to recognize every fault it has, it means rejoicing in its good parts. If we don't rebuild the society and the state, then we can never achieve anything," he says. "This is how the nation is. It doesn't know what statehood is. After living for centuries under foreign suppressors, it has grown to hate the notion of state. That hatred toward the state has remained in our souls."

Armenians have been given freedom, but they don't know what to do with that freedom, how to act. "Freedom for the



Sos Sarkisian as Hambo in the film *Gigor*. Photo: Photolure.

Armenian means lack of restraint: 'I will do what I want when I want. If I want to murder, then I will murder.'" He believes that we have placed the nation on a pedestal, we have turned it into a deity.

His disappointment comes from the ignorance and lack of tolerance he sees around him. "Once we understand the meaning of freedom, then we will be able to keep statehood," he says. He believes the characteristic that is slowing destroying society today is disorderliness, the lack of discipline. "Because of our lack of discipline on March 1 we denied 10 young people their lives. Was it worth it? Nothing is worth sacrificing the lives of young Armenians."

Even with the disappointment that has crept into his life, Sos Sarkisian remains adamantly proud and patriotic, full of love of his country, his nation, his people. "Once we learn to respect the law, then we can move forward," he says.



Sos Sarkisian and Mher Mkrtchyan (r.) in *Khatabala*. Photo: Photolure.

		23 March	24 March	25 March	26 March	27 March	28 March	29 March
		MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
EST	PST							
10:00 PM	1:00 AM	Deal or No Deal	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	Deal or No Deal
11:00 PM	2:00 AM	Fathers & Sons	Vrijarou (Serial)	Vrijarou (Serial)	Vrijarou (Serial)	Vrijarou (Serial)	Vrijarou (Serial)	Century
11:30 PM	2:30 AM							Armenia Diaspora
12:00 AM	3:00 AM	Love E Lee	Yerkvoryak (Serial)	Yerkvoryak (Serial)	Yerkvoryak (Serial)	Yerkvoryak (Serial)	Yerkvoryak (Serial)	Yerkvoryak (Serial)
1:00 AM	4:00 AM	7 Mekhq (Serial)	7 Mekhq (Serial)	7 Mekhq (Serial)	7 Mekhq (Serial)	7 Mekhq (Serial)	7 Mekhq (Serial)	7 Mekhq (Serial)
2:00 AM	5:00 AM	TV Duel	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Discovery
2:30 AM	5:30 AM							Century
3:00 AM	6:00 AM	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Armenia Diaspora
3:30 AM	6:30 AM	Mult	Mult	Mult	Mult	Mult	Mult	Fathers & Sons
4:00 AM	7:00 AM	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	Yo Yo	
4:30 AM	7:30 AM	News	News	News	News	News	News	News
5:00 AM	8:00 AM	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian
6:00 AM	9:00 AM	Directions With Rafi Manoukian	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Fathers & Sons
6:30 AM	9:30 AM							
7:00 AM	10:00 AM	Bari Luys	Bari Luys	Bari Luys	Bari Luys	Bari Luys	Bari Luys	Armenian Teletime
7:30 AM	10:30 AM	Hayer	Hayer	Hayer	Hayer	Hayer	Hayer	
8:00 AM	11:00 AM	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Bari Aravod	Armenian
8:30 AM	11:30 AM							Movie
9:30 AM	12:30 PM	News	News	News	News	News	News	
10:00 AM	01:00 PM	Yerkvoryak (Serial)	Yerkvoryak (Serial)	Yerkvoryak (Serial)	Yerkvoryak (Serial)	Yerkvoryak (Serial)	Yerkvoryak (Serial)	Yere 1 (ye:re:van)
10:30 AM	01:30 AM							Cool Program
11:00 AM	02:00 PM	7 Mekhq (Serial)	7 Mekhq (Serial)	7 Mekhq (Serial)	7 Mekhq (Serial)	7 Mekhq (Serial)	7 Mekhq (Serial)	7 Mekhq (Serial)
12:00 PM	03:00 PM	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen	Tele Kitchen
12:30 PM	03:30 PM	Mult	Mult	Mult	Mult	Mult	Mult	TV Duel
01:00 PM	04:00 PM	YO YO	YO YO	YO YO	YO YO	YO YO	YO YO	Love E Lee
01:30 PM	04:30 PM	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	When Stars are Dancing	douk Yeteroum Ek	douk Yeteroum Ek	Yere 1 (ye:re:van)	
02:00 PM	05:00 PM	Live from America	Live from America	Live from America	Lragroghakan	Lragroghakan	Cool Program	A Drop Of Honey
02:30 PM	05:30 PM	News	News	News	News	News	News Editorial	
03:00 PM	06:00 PM	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	CLONE (Serial)	Discovery	Deal or No Deal
03:30 AM	06:30 AM							
04:00 PM	07:00 PM	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Unlucky Happiness (Serial)	Century	Blef
04:30 AM	07:30 AM							
05:00 PM	08:00 PM	Vrijarou (Serial)	Vrijarou (Serial)	Vrijarou (Serial)	Vrijarou (Serial)	Vrijarou (Serial)	Blef	My Big, Fat Armenian Wedding
05:30 PM	08:30 PM							
06:00 PM	09:00 PM	News	News	News	News	News	Armenia Diaspora	
06:30 PM	09:30 PM	Gyanki Keene (Serial)	Gyanki Keene (Serial)	Gyanki Keene (Serial)	Pakhousd (Serial)	Pakhousd (Serial)	Vrijarou 1	Directions With Rafi Manoukian
07:00 PM	10:00 PM						Vrijarou 2	When Stars Are Dancing
07:30 PM	10:30 PM	Tonight Show	Tonight Show	Tonight Show	Yere 1	Cool Program	Vrijarou 3	
08:00 PM	11:00 PM	11 (Serial)	11 (Serial)	11 (Serial)	Live From America	Live From America	Vrijarou 4	
08:30 PM	11:30 PM	News	News	News	News	News	Vrijarou 5	
09:00 PM	12:00 AM	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian	Bari Luys with Stepan Partamian		CUBE
09:30 PM	12:30 AM							

# Tanya Ketenjian: In search of her truth



by Alexandra Bezdikian

A young woman sits in a New York City café and combs through the local newspaper in search of a job. The year is 1998 in the colorful world of Manhattan's East Village, yet this young woman exists in a parallel world of black and white, painted with shades of uncertainty. Her current reality is ironically captured and surreptitiously mirrored by the black on white text in the employment section of the newspaper staring menacingly back at her. She lives in a world where polarized colors appropriately depict the emotional turmoil unemployment has besieged upon this recent college grad. But she is not defeated. Tania Ketenjian is talented, determined, and ready to try something new and amazing.

Having graduated with a degree in poetry from a small college in upstate New York, Ketenjian entered the fast-paced world of life post graduation with dreams of becoming a creative type in the opulently artsy scene of New York City; gutsy and ambitious, to be sure, not to mention highly unlikely. But Tania Ketenjian did it.

"I knew I wanted to be involved in writing," she remembered thinking back. "I knew I wanted to do that because I had translated French poetry in college, surrealist poetry, so I knew I wanted to do something creative and slightly off-pieced, so to speak, and so I tried looking for a job when I moved to New York City. One of the first jobs I saw was a reporter position at a radio station in New



Tania Ketenjian. Photo: Philip Wood.

York, very left-leaning, it was known for broadcasting the first recordings on the ground in Vietnam, called WBAI. I saw that ad, and I still remember seeing that ad, I remember the café I was sitting in, I remember how I felt at that moment, because I thought, 'Wow, I think this is what I want to do. I think this is it.'

In that one moment of life-changing clarity, Tania was taken out of the black and white world of a young woman diltuted with questions over what her future held, and became a young woman placed into the vibrant world of texture,

sound, color, and creation. Today, Tania is living this invigoratingly multicolored dream in San Francisco, California, a journalist, documentarian and sound artist, and a teacher at the California College of the Arts.

She has interviewed artists, filmmakers, and musicians from all over the world, building a repertoire of names that includes **Cat Power**, **Yo La Tengo**, **Ari Folman**, the director of international success, "Waltz with Bashir," and her all-time-favorite interview, the **Dalai Lama**. "I was going to have a heart

attack, I was so excited," she said about what it felt like to sit down with someone like the Dalai Lama. "But it was a very focused interview and he is such a kind and gentle person that I felt very much at ease."

In addition to producing independently for the BBC and NPR in the past, she is the co-founder of Thin Air Media, where she and her partner, **Ahri Golden** produce public radio documentaries on topics like "happiness" and "birth practices and perceptions in America." Being the only child of Armenian immigrants from Lebanon, her parents must be so proud.

**"I've done lots of things that I'm not good at, and there are many things that I can't do, but this is something that I really can do and it's also something that I can do because I love it so much. It affords me a lifestyle that is really exceptional because in my life I get to meet so many amazing people. People who are at the top of their careers; people that have such a strong influence and who create a legacy."**

For Tania however, there's always a compulsion toward perfection; always the drive to do more. Especially when it comes to her own self-criticism. "Journalism, for many people, is not a tremendously lucrative career," she said. "It

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# Satellite Broadcast Program Grid

## 23 - 29 March



23 March		24 March		25 March		26 March		27 March		28 March		29 March	
MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY		SUNDAY	
EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST	EST	PST
4:30	7:30	4:30	7:30	4:30	7:30	4:30	7:30	4:30	7:30	4:30	7:30	7:00	10:00
5:00	8:00	5:00	8:00	5:00	8:00	5:00	8:00	5:00	8:00				
6:00	9:00	6:00	9:00	6:00	9:00	6:00	9:00	6:00	9:00	5:00	8:00	8:30	11:30
6:30	9:30	6:30	9:30	6:30	9:30	6:30	9:30	6:30	9:30	5:30	8:30	11:00	14:00
7:20	10:20	7:20	10:20	7:20	10:20	7:20	10:20	7:20	10:20	6:00	9:00		
8:10	11:10	8:10	11:10	8:10	11:10	8:10	11:10	8:10	11:10	6:30	9:30	13:00	16:00
9:30	12:30	8:15	11:15	8:15	11:15	8:15	11:15	8:15	11:15			13:30	16:30
10:00	13:00	9:30	12:30	9:30	12:30	9:30	12:30	9:30	12:30	7:00	10:00	14:00	17:00
11:00	14:00	10:00	13:00	10:00	13:00	10:00	13:00	10:00	13:00	8:30	11:30	14:30	17:30
11:30	14:30	11:00	14:00	11:00	14:00	11:00	14:00	11:00	14:00			15:00	18:00
12:00	15:00	11:30	14:30	11:30	14:30	11:30	14:30	11:30	14:30	12:00	15:00	17:30	20:30
12:30	15:30	12:00	15:00	12:00	15:00	12:00	15:00	12:00	15:00	12:30	15:30	18:00	21:00
13:00	16:00	12:30	15:30	12:30	15:30	12:30	15:30	12:30	15:30	13:00	16:00	19:00	22:00
13:30	16:30	13:00	16:00	13:00	16:00	13:00	16:00	13:00	16:00	13:30	16:30	19:30	22:30
14:00	17:00	13:30	16:30	13:30	16:30	13:30	16:30	13:30	16:30	15:00	18:00	21:00	0:00
15:00	18:00	14:00	17:00	14:00	17:00	14:00	17:00	14:00	17:00	15:30	18:30	21:30	0:30
15:30	18:30	14:30	17:30	14:30	17:30	14:30	17:30	14:30	17:30	16:00	19:00	22:00	0:00
16:30	19:30	15:00	18:00	15:00	18:00	15:00	18:00	15:00	18:00	16:30	19:30	22:30	0:30
17:00	20:00	15:30	18:30	15:30	18:30	15:30	18:30	15:30	18:30	17:00	20:00	23:00	0:00
17:30	20:30	16:00	19:00	16:00	19:00	16:00	19:00	16:00	19:00	17:30	20:30	23:30	0:30
18:20	21:20	16:30	19:30	16:30	19:30	16:30	19:30	16:30	19:30	18:00	21:00	23:00	0:00
19:00	22:00	17:00	20:00	17:00	20:00	17:00	20:00	17:00	20:00	18:30	21:30	23:30	0:30
19:30	22:30	17:30	20:30	17:30	20:30	17:30	20:30	17:30	20:30	19:00	22:00	23:00	0:00
21:00	0:00	18:00	21:00	18:00	21:00	18:00	21:00	18:00	21:00	19:30	22:30	23:00	0:00
21:30	0:30	18:30	21:30	18:30	21:30	18:30	21:30	18:30	21:30	20:00	23:00	23:30	0:30
22:15	1:15	19:00	22:00	19:00	22:00	19:00	22:00	19:00	22:00	20:30	23:30	23:30	0:30
22:35	1:35	19:30	22:30	19:30	22:30	19:30	22:30	19:30	22:30	21:00	24:00	23:30	0:30
23:00	2:00	20:00	23:00	20:00	23:00	20:00	23:00	20:00	23:00	21:30	24:30	23:30	0:30
0:00	3:00	20:30	23:30	20:30	23:30	20:30	23:30	20:30	23:30	22:00	25:00	23:30	0:30
1:00	4:00	21:00	24:00	21:00	24:00	21:00	24:00	21:00	24:00	22:30	25:30	23:30	0:30
1:30	4:30	21:30	24:30	21:30	24:30	21:30	24:30	21:30	24:30	23:00	26:00	23:30	0:30
2:00	5:00	22:00	25:00	22:00	25:00	22:00	25:00	22:00	25:00	23:30	26:30	23:30	0:30
3:00	6:00	22:30	25:30	22:30	25:30	22:30	25:30	22:30	25:30	24:00	27:00	23:30	0:30
3:30	6:30	23:00	26:00	23:00	26:00	23:00	26:00	23:00	26:00	24:30	27:30	23:30	0:30

# Tanya Ketenjian: In search of her truth

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takes time to build your name. And once you build it, you're one of the very few who actually succeeds. It's not like getting a degree and going out there and making money, it's a totally different thing. I struggle with that constantly. Even though my parents don't tell me, 'I wish you would have become a lawyer,' I sometimes think I should have become a lawyer!"

But as we spoke more about her life, her accomplishments, moments of artistic struggle and catharsis, it became clear that Tania is doing exactly what she was born to do. "The very first reason I got into this was to give people a chance to voice themselves," she said. "To feel heard, to feel like what they do and who they are is important, and I think that that is a universally emotional challenge, to feel important. Why are we here? Why are we alive? Why do we matter? And when someone really listens to you, and listens to what you've experienced or what you've created, you suddenly feel like you matter in some way. And if I can make some-

body feel like that, or remind them that they matter, and make them feel proud of that, I feel very honored to be in that position."

Although Tania has come a long way since that day in the café, where the hurdles of life seemed like an impossibility to overcome, she has. And she has succeeded in ways that are too profound to count. For Tania, life could not possibly be any other way. "I'm sure that I could do something else, but I can't imagine it. I can't envision what that would be. I really love what I do. I really deeply love it and I'm good at it. I love people, I'm a very good listener, I'm a good editor and writer. I've done lots of things that I'm not good at, and there are many things that I can't do, but this is something that I really can do and it's also something that I can do because I love it so much. It affords me a lifestyle that is really exceptional because in my life I get to meet so many amazing people. People who are at the top of their careers; people that have such a strong influence and who create a legacy."

This is the growing legacy of Tania Ketenjian, and she hasn't stopped yet. ■



Ahri Golden (r.) and Tania Ketenjian. Photo: Keeney + Law Photography.



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