

Turkish state choir to perform Armenian work for first time

Monday 1 March 2010, by [Vercihan Zifioglu](#)

In a historic event, the Ankara Radio Polyphonic Choir, which is affiliated with the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television, or TRT, has performed a work in Armenian under the direction of Istanbul-based Armenian conductor Hagop Mamigonyan. The choir will perform the work again at an Armenian church in Istanbul

For the first time in Turkey's history, the Ankara Radio Polyphonic Choir, which is affiliated with the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television Corporation, or TRT, has performed a work by a leading Armenian composer.

Led by Istanbul-based conductor Hagop Mamigonyan, the choir performed "Gali Yerk" (Harvest Wind), a work by Armenian polyphonic music expert and ethnomusicologist Gomidas Vartabed.

Founded in 1970, the TRT decided last year to celebrate its 40th anniversary with 40 different conductors, both Turkish and foreign. One of those it invited was the young Hagop Mamigonyan of the Surp Lusavoric Armenian Choir, which has been performing in Istanbul for 80 years. Each conductor was free to select the music that would be performed. Mamigonyan told the TRT that he wanted to lead the choir in an Armenian piece.

"When I told them on the phone that I wanted to perform an Armenian work, there was silence for a few seconds on the other end of the line, but my request was accepted," Mamigonyan told the Hürriyet Daily News & Economic Review.

Still, Mamigonyan said, he had doubts until he started working with the choir and was worried that the TRT administration would retreat at the last minute, but this did not happen. Recordings of the concert will be available in the coming months. In another historic first, the Ankara Radio Polyphonic Choir will also perform "Gali Yerk" in the Surp Yerortutyun Armenian Church in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district.

Full speed ahead for dialogue

In previous years, performing Armenian songs was banned on TRT television channels and radio stations. By making his proposal, Mamigonyan achieved a first in Turkey, a historic responsibility for someone of his young age.

"I express my gratitude to the TRT administration that supported my idea," he said. "Turkish and Armenian composers created common works during the Ottoman era. Why don't we do it today? Yes, it may be difficult, but it is time to say 'full speed ahead' for dialogue and a peaceful future."

The TRT project gave each conductor five days to work with the choir. Mamigonyan, the 13th youngest out of 40 conductors, said he was very stressed before going to Ankara: "The reason for my stress was musical concerns, because I was among many conductors who were older than me."

Mamigonyan was given the first five days in February. The young conductor met with the 28-person choir on the first day and explained why he had chosen an Armenian song from ethnomusicologist Vartabed. Time was very limited for both conductor and choir. Mamigonyan translated the Armenian lyrics into Latin script and gave them to the members of the choir.

“They were very excited to perform the work. Although they did not understand the language, it was very easy for them to become adapted to the work,” he said. “The result was magnificent. We really enjoyed it. We had deep sorrow upon leaving each other at the end of the five days.”

During that period, Mamigonyan said, the group exchanged ideas over dinner. “We were generally talking about Turkish-Armenian relations,” he said, describing a humorous event during the rehearsals. “There was a retired colonel among the choir members. When he asked me something, I unwittingly told him, ‘Yes, sir!’” he said. “All the choir members began laughing at me. Later on we became friends with this colonel.”

Mamigonyan is the chief conductor of the 40-person polyphonic Surp Lusavoriç Armenian Choir in Istanbul. The choir will give a concert April 10 at Hagia Irene Museum. Kalan Music also recently released an album by the choir.

About Gomidas Vartabed

Born in the Aegean city of Kütahya during the Ottoman era, Gomidas Vartabed received theology education at Eçmiyazin, which is the Armenian Apostolic Church’s papacy center in Armenia. After he graduated, he went to Berlin to study music. He later compiled Armenian and Ottoman folk songs from Anatolia to Armenia. An ethnomusicologist, Vartabed became a leading figure in Armenian polyphonic music.

View online : <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n....>

Sources

Source: Hürriyet Daily News, 25.02.2010