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KOMITAS

Komitas

Marc Sinan Company

Touring project 2015

November 13th 2015, Sisli Belediyesi Kent Kultur Merkezi, Istanbul

November 15th 2015, Komitas Chamber Music Hall, Yerevan

Music by Komitas Vardapet, Vache Sharafyan, Marc Sinan

for Soprano, Guitar, Duduk, Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Trombone, Percussion and Video

A Production by the Marc Sinan Company & YMUSIC, Berlin

*in cooperation with Maxim Gorki Theater Berlin, commissioned by Schwäbisches
Bildungszentrum Kloster Irsee (Festival TONSPUREN)*



The German-Turkish-Armenian guitarist and composer Marc Sinan presents excerpts of his new project ›Komitas‹ alongside the premiere of his commission of Vache Sharafyan’s ›Dialogues with Komitas‹ on a tour to Istanbul and Yerevan in autumn 2015. Featuring some of the finest internationally acclaimed Armenian and Turkish musicians, ›Komitas‹ uses the power of music to reconcile the victims of the Armenian genocide.

Sinan’s own Armenian grandmother is a survivor of 1915. She was raised as an orphan on the Black Sea coast by a Turkish family who was unable to accept the expulsion of their Armenian neighbours. Now her grandchild reflects on her fate in his contemporary compositions linked to and based on original compositions by the great Komitas Vardapet. Vache Sharafyan developed his own ›Dialogues‹ in a similar way, reflecting the personal history of Komitas in his own compositions and connecting them with refined arrangements of some of his favourite Komitas Songs.

The tour is dedicated to the “lost voice“ of Komitas Vardapet, who has become a symbol for the neglected suffering of the Armenian people. The moving and vivid quality of his original pieces and historic recordings strike a stark contrast to the sadness of the thematic backdrop.

›Komitas‹ is a contemporary musical project which is presented by German, Turkish and Armenian artists who stand hand in hand. Their common aim is to use the power of music to rise above the horror.

The ensemble is drawn from various walks of life and includes prominent guests from Armenia and Turkey:

Artistic direction & guitar	Marc Sinan
Duduk & Zurna	Araik Bartikian
Soprano	Hasmik Harutyunyan
Clarinet	Oguz Büyükberber
Trombone	Johannes Lauer
Flute	Sascha Friedl
Percussion	Daniel Eichholz
Violin	Ayumi Paul



It is no coincidence that April 24th 2015 was chosen as the date for the premiere of the ›Komitas‹ project in Germany as this day marks the hundredth anniversary of the deportation from Istanbul of six hundred Armenian intellectuals by the Young Turks. Only eight survived – among them the composer and musicologist Komitas Vardapet. This day has gone down in history as the start of the genocide in Turkey.

Born in 1869 in Kütahya, Komitas Vardapet was initially brought up in a monolingual, Turkish-speaking household. Following the death of his parents, the youngster was sent to the monastery in Edschmiadzin to train as a monk. Komitas, who is nowadays revered as the founder of Armenia's modern classical music, studied aesthetics and the theory of music and subsequently travelled throughout Asia Minor and the Caucasus region in order to document and annotate the traditional folk songs and sacred music of Armenians. In 1910 he moved to Istanbul where he soon established the Gusan Choir, consisting of 300 members, and also recorded numerous songs in France on Edison cylinders. Following his deportation in 1915, Komitas was left severely traumatised – an ordeal from which he never recovered. He slowly wasted away in a French psychiatric institution until his death in 1935.

Marc Sinan's main priority was to search for traces of Komitas' ethnomusicological trips throughout Anatolia: audio and video projections of deserted and desecrated Armenian churches and other buildings will be projected during the concert and allow the audience to establish a virtual connection between the actual physical rooms and the projected rooms. Including original recordings of the singing Komitas, the performance will establish a musical connection to his life and times, while highlighting the absence of his voice and the cultural and human loss brought about by the murder of the Armenian population.



»As true as I'm a European, Komitas was an Ottoman.«

Marc Sinan in a publication by the Tarabya Cultural Academy; October 2013

Soghomon Gevrki Soghomonian, or the monk Komitas Vardapet, was born in 1869 in Kütahya in the west of modern-day Turkey and was brought up in a monolingual, Turkish-speaking household. By the age of eleven, not only had he lost his mother, but then also his father, and was therefore sent to a monastery in far-off Edschmiadzin by his grandmother. In the same year, 1880, the Sultan gave the German Kaiser a plot of land on the Bosphorus as a gift: Tarabya. When Komitas was presented to the Patriarch, he was addressed in Armenian as proficiency in that language was a prerequisite for admission to the monastery school. Komitas responded with a song as his knowledge of his native tongue was limited to songs. The boy's voice must have been incredibly beautiful for it was this which convinced the Abbot of his suitability. Komitas went on to train as a monk and musician at the monastery.

Komitas and I both share a passion for traditional music. When preparing my current work, "Komitas quietly humming a melody", which I commenced during my tenure as an artist-in-residence at Tarabya, I first set off to retrace his steps by visiting the places which Komitas also visited on his research expeditions or places which were at least centres of Armenian music and culture in Ottoman Asia Minor - rooms which once rang out to the sound of the songs which Komitas collected. Nowadays, all that remains are ruins of Armenian monasteries and churches. One established fact is that Komitas visited the city of Trabzon to meet his

fellow composer Krikor Suni. In my mind's eye I can see him back then visiting the Kaymakli Monastery, the seat of the Armenian Apostolic Diocese of Trabzon, with its enchanting little church, a bell tower, a way-side chapel, pretty adjoining buildings and an intact religious community of over 30,000 people. The monastery complex, which was located several kilometres from the city centre and commanded a great view

of the Black Sea, was reached by following a long and arduous path leading across steep hills and running through various fruit and hazelnut orchards. This is where Komitas may have paused to catch his breath while humming the words of the song 'Mokats Mirza'. Together with my wife Miriam Baute, this is where I filmed the video which, in unison with my music, is dedicated to the memory of Komitas – the first installment in a series of works currently being compiled to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of that fateful year 1915.

Vahide, my grandmother from the Black Sea city of Ordu, was also an orphan. Aged just seven in 1915 – the very same age as my, in contrast, well shielded daughter during our time in Tarabya – her ethnic Armenian parents left her behind with friends on the Black Sea when they fled in an effort to escape the destructive might of the Ottoman army. They knew what the future held as genocide had been on the cards for quite some time. Vahide was interned and her fate hung in the balance. Towards the end of the 1980s, when I myself was little more than a child, she shared with me her memories, her shame and her ultimate joy at being adopted by devout Muslims at the very last minute, people who abhorred the soldiers' atrocities.

As already mentioned, my older daughter, Alma, accompanied me during my time in Tarabya. Aged just seven, she attended the German School in Istanbul for three months. We had a wonderful time together, spending many days wandering around the secretive garden, the most remote corners of which seemed enchanted, almost as if time had stood still. Of all Istanbul's sites, there is hardly any other place where one can get so close to the historic heartbeat of the city, which is probably why the park was chosen as the backdrop for a TV series about the Ottoman court, a series which is hugely popular in both Turkey and throughout the Middle East. The world seems perfect here. Tarabya is somehow other-worldly, the gravel crunches beneath our feet, the German federal eagle hangs resplendent in gold on the gate and the houses shine a dazzling white. The bus that brings Alma to school every morning arrives punctually on

the dot of seven, but the bus ›hostess‹ still insisted on announcing its arrival per mobile phone. No private school in Berlin is as expensive as the German School in Istanbul, where English is the first foreign language, with Turkish (as a foreign language!) relegated to the status of an ›also-ran‹.

Komitas lived in Istanbul in 1913, in the quiet and leafy district of Pangalti, where he shared both a house and cook with the painter Panos Terlemezyan. Even then, when he was already acclaimed as a composer and ethnomusicologist, Komitas wrote that his dream of a conservatory for Armenian music in Istanbul would never come true as the repression since the Young Turks had come to power was simply too widespread. In the years before this, he had established quite a name for himself in Berlin and Paris, having also visited England and Egypt and collected thousands of Turkish, Kurdish and Armenian songs during his extended trips through Anatolia. Inexhaustible, he sometimes wrote down over 30 songs per day – using his own specially developed system of notation. Debussy was an admirer of his and he became familiar with Schoenberg’s music during his time as a student in Berlin during the late 1890s. Nowadays, Komitas is regarded as the most important Armenian composer of the early 20th century. After all, traditional Armenian music would have been largely lost forever if he hadn’t been such a committed researcher.

On November 3rd 1913, the Armenian singer Shahmuradian, from Mus, gave a famous concert in the upmarket Istanbul district of Pera. Prior to this, he had received widespread acclaim for his depiction of Faust as a soloist at the Paris Opera, in the opera of the same name by Charles Gounod. As the evening of music by Gluck and Bizet drew to a close, the euphoric Shahmuradian asked Komitas, his former teacher and mentor, to join him on stage. Komitas presented him with a medal as a sign of esteem from the Armenian community for their distinguished son Shahmuradian, and took a seat next to the piano to

accompany him as he sang various folk tunes. They must have sounded just like the few surviving recordings of the two of them from the same year. ›Mokats Mirza‹ was one of the songs sung and Komitas's voice has been interwoven into the end of my own composition.

Thanks to my stay in Tarabya I was for the first time in my life capable of fully empathising with the mind-set of the orphan Vahide who didn't know that her parents would never – and I mean never – return and who was raised by a family of strangers. All this, just because she belonged to the ›wrong‹ ethnic group. This has certainly a lot to do with the fact that I was there with my daughter and we had so many intense experiences, and of course the place which so resembled the Istanbul of Komitas's lifetime, the unblemished Turkey from the days prior to 1915, so eerily detached from the multifaceted reality of the city, the deafening noise of which seems to bellow at you in an attempt to suppress memories.

On April 24, 1915, the Kaymakli Monastery was converted into a transit camp for the deportation of the Armenian population in the form of death marches in the direction of Syria. Everybody who couldn't flee, didn't drown on the open sea or wasn't immediately murdered in their village ended up here, temporarily at least. A place between heaven and hell, as illustrated by an artist long since forgotten on the fresco on the right just above the main portal to the church in Kaymakli, showing Cerberus in the costume of a Young Turk soldier. Komitas belonged to the group of Istanbul intellectuals which was transported at the end of April to Cankiri, to a similar camp not far from Ankara. Only eight of them survived, including Komitas. However, his life was ruined. Up until his death in 1935, he slowly wasted away in various closed psychiatric institutions in and around Paris. I often wonder when my grandmother actually gave up waiting. Pluck up the courage, you descendants of the Ottomans, and welcome your long lost children back into the family – they need you and you need them more than you can ever imagine!



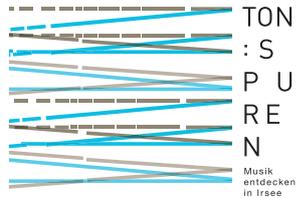
Marc Sinan is a guitarist and composer. He has made guest appearances at many renowned festivals such as the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, the Istanbul Festival, the Istanbul Jazz Festival, the Enjoy Jazz Festival, the Tonlagen Festival, the MaerzMusik Festival at the Berliner Festspiele and at the Handel Festspiele.

In addition to international solo appearances and chamber music projects with partners such as the Julia Hülsmann Trio, Jörg Widmann, the Turkish percussionist Burhan Öcal and the Iranian kamancheh player Kayhan Kalhor, Marc Sinan has also performed as a soloist with orchestras such as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the Georgian Chamber Orchestra.

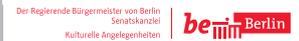
With his own ensemble, the Marc Sinan Company, he has since gone on to produce highly acclaimed projects within a contemporary, intercultural and multimedia context. His project „Hasretim – Journey to Anatolia“, which had its premiere in October 2010, was awarded the „Welthorizont“ prize by the German UNESCO Commission.

In 2014 Marc Sinan presented his comprehensive docufictional music theatre “Dede Korkut – The story of Tepegöz“ for orchestra, vocals, movement and video. “Dede Korkut“ marked the continuation of his collaboration with the Dresdner Sinfoniker and premiered in February 2014 at the Festspielhaus Hellerau and the Maxim Gorki Theater to vast critical acclaim. In 2015 he has mostly dedicated himself to projects commemorating the Armenian genocide. This includes his own musical theatre „Komitas“ which was commissioned by the Tonspuren Festival at Kloster Irsee and also presented at Berlin’s Maxim Gorki theatre as well as commissions from Vache Sharafyan and Helmut Oehring, who have written large scale chamber music and orchestral works in the context of the centennial featuring Sinan as a soloist.

Commissioned by:



Partners:



Contact

Marc Sinan Company/ YMUSIC
Josephine Heide
Choriner Str. 56
10435 Berlin
Germany

Phone +49 (0)30/98 60 83 89 19

jh@ymusic.de
www.marcsinan.com

Photos: Miriam Baute, Johanna Diehl, Graz Diez,
Adrian Figueroa