



Other Minds presents

**ALAN HOVHANESS
CENTENNIAL
CELEBRATION**

Şahan Arzruni, piano soloist

March 13, 2011, 4pm
First Congregational Church of Berkeley

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ALAN HOVHANESS

in these programs and many others.

Speaking of Music: Alan Hovhaness (1989)

Charles Amirkhonian interviews composer Alan Hovhaness for the San Francisco Exploratorium's Speaking of Music series, recorded on October 3, 1989.

Ode to Gravity: Music from Sudan and Armenia (1971)

Music performed by Sudanese virtuoso Hamza El Din, as well as a selection of Armenian folk music, and an interview with Dikran Karagueuzian, editor of the San Francisco based newspaper, the *Armenian Guardian*.

Ode to Gravity: The World of Alan Hovhaness (1976)

Radio documentary produced by Charles Amirkhonian featuring an interview with the composer and rarely heard recordings.



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2345 Channing Way, Berkeley

Above: Hovhaness in Hawaii, 1962
Image © Francis Haar Estate.

Front cover: Hovhaness with his cat, Rajah Mahatmah Hoyden, c.1948
Photograph courtesy of Frank Ferrante (from the Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness Letters collection)

Back cover: Hovhaness composing, 1965
Photograph by William Gedney, by permission of the William Gedney Collection,
Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library

ALAN HOVHANESS



Hovhaness walking on Mount Hieiizan, Japan, 1975

When classical composer Alan Hovhaness died in 2000, he left a legacy that reflected both his prodigious composing abilities as well as his trailblazing interest in music from around the world. Having written over 400 works that included operas, symphonies, concertos, oratorios, chamber works, and orchestral pieces, Hovhaness incorporated Indian, Korean, Japanese, and Armenian influences into his repertoire, forming a canon that is best described as world classical music. Considering his ability to shape the forms of classical music to his diverse inspirations, Hovhaness was not taken seriously by many in the classical world. However, his insistence on writing music that was accessible to both performers and listeners has ensured that his works—many of which have never been performed in public—will continue to influence future generations of classical musicians.

Alan Vaness Chakmakjian was born on March 8, 1911, in Somerville, Massachusetts, a nearby suburb of Boston and the home of Tufts University, where his father taught chemistry. While the elder Chakmakjian was proud of his Armenian heritage, the future composer's mother, who was of Scottish descent, discouraged him from taking an active role in Armenian ethnic and religious life during his childhood. Later, however, Hovhaness would turn to his Middle Eastern ethnic identity as a source of inspiration in his music, beginning with his Symphony No. 1, the "Exile" symphony, in 1936-37.

Hovhaness' musical aptitude was evident from a strikingly early age. By the time he was five, he had made up his own system of musical notation; essentially, he had learned music composition on his own before undertaking any formal

training. He soon began to study music in earnest, however, adopting the pseudonym "Hovhaness" at the suggestion of one of his teachers. Hovhaness was also drawn as a teenager to the Armenian community in Boston and gained experience with improvising on traditional Armenian music as the organist in a local Armenian church.

Acknowledged as a prodigy during his childhood for his obvious talent, Hovhaness was accepted for study at the New England Conservatory of Music (NEC) on a scholarship in 1932. Founded in Boston in 1867, NEC ranked as one of the leading music schools in the country. During his two years there, Hovhaness studied with prolific composer Frederick Converse (1871-1940). Hovhaness supplemented this formal training with another prestigious appointment in 1942 at the Berkshire Music Center, known simply as "Tanglewood." Established in 1936 as the summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Tanglewood brought together some of the best classical musicians of the day for seminars and performances. While at Tanglewood, Hovhaness studied primarily with Czech composer Bohuslav Martinu (1890-1959), who came to the United States as an exile from Nazi Europe.

FIRST SUCCESS WITH LOUSADZAK

In the 1940s, Hovhaness worked as an organist and teacher in addition to beginning his prolific career as a composer. In his first phase as a composer, Hovhaness wrote in the Baroque and Romantic styles that continued to dominate classical music. As he matured as a composer, however, he increasingly turned to more experimental composition techniques, including *senza misura* in his piece *Lousadzak (Dawn of Light)* for piano and string orchestra in 1944. In the work, Hovhaness repeated melodies at different tempos with various parts of the orchestra, creating a layer of sound that was both mysterious and mystical. Despite the seeming complexity of the work, however, Hovhaness more often composed pieces that were deliberately easy to play, a result of his insistence on making music that was accessible to musicians and listeners alike.

In June of 1945, the New York premiere of *Lousadzak* marked Hovhaness' breakthrough with critics and the public. As reviewer and composer Lou Harrison told the *New York Times* more than 50 years after attending the event, "It was ravishing. . . . He deserves major status, because he wrote some of the best music around. When he first came along, there were the 12-toners, and there were the Americanists, and neither camp knew what to make of him." As

Hovhanness himself recalled in a National Public Radio profile, “I believe very much in melody, but melody as far as the usual Western scales, I felt, was exhausted. All good melodies have been written by Schubert and Mozart and the old composers. So I thought I’ll try using different scales.”



Portrait of Hovhanness by Mary Zakarian

As Harrison acknowledged, some were put off by Hovhanness’ style in the 1940s as it went against the grain of contemporary classical music. One frequently repeated comment about his Symphony No. 1 had New York Philharmonic conductor Leonard Bernstein dismissing it as “filthy ghetto music.” Apparently, Hovhanness took such criticisms to heart. At some point during the mid-1940s, he burned most of his compositions, an act that he undertook as a catharsis and rebirth. Indeed, the composer increasingly incorporated new musical styles from around the world into his works during the 1940s, an era that became known as Hovhanness’ “Armenian Period.” Drawing inspiration from Armenian folk music and traditional musical themes, Hovhanness wrote works for trumpet and strings (*Khrimian Hairig* in 1944), symphonies (Symphony No. 8, “Arjuna” in 1947), and other miscellaneous ensemble pieces (*Kohar* in 1946).

WORLD CLASSICAL MUSIC

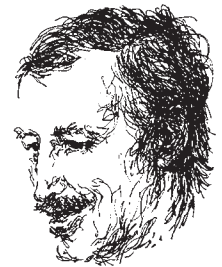
Hovhanness benefited from a number of important grants during the 1950s. As a Fulbright and Rockefeller Foundation scholar, he traveled throughout Asia, including South Korea, Japan, and India. The results of these travels were immediately apparent in his music, as Hovhanness began to write in the style of Indian ragas—ancient music with traditional melodies—and gugaku—the traditional music of the Japanese court—as well as other works for Korean percussion and strings. His best known work, Symphony No. 2 (“Mysterious Mountain”) also dates from this period. Written in 1955, it demonstrates the other dominant interest in Hovhanness’s life: a concern with spirituality. While some earlier works carried explicitly religious themes, Hovhanness increasingly explored the connection between the environment and the human spirit. Later works included *And God Created the Great Whales* in 1970, a sort of New Age orchestral piece with prerecorded humpback whale sounds intended for the popular audience, and Symphony No. 50 (“Mount St. Helens”). As his *Los Angeles Times* obituary recounted, Hovhanness once remarked, “I love

mountains. They’re symbolic of the meeting of Earth and heaven, man and God. They’re also symbolic of the mountains you seek within yourself.”

Hovhanness received a drubbing from the classical world for *And God Created the Great Whales*. Out of step with most critics, Hovhanness was accused of being too eager for a popular audience and not concerned enough with writing serious classical music. Yet the composer grew less concerned with critical attention as his career progressed. “My purpose is to create music, not for snobs but for all people—music which is beautiful and healing, to attempt what old Chinese painters called spirit resonance in melody and sound,” he was quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*. In fact, Hovhanness deliberately removed himself from the center of the classical music world to avoid the distractions and pretensions that it often entailed. Although he lived in New York City for much of the 1950s, Hovhanness moved to Seattle, Washington, in 1966, where he became a composer-in-residence with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.

CALLED “MAJOR PIONEER”

Hovhanness’ output remained impressive even in his final decades. The total number of works he composed exceeds 400, with more than 60 symphonies, nine operas, two ballets, 100 chamber pieces, and 23 concertos. Even a year after the composer’s death his wife, Hinako Fujihara Hovhanness, continued to find original compositions in the piles of papers left behind.



Sketch of Hovhanness, circa 1960s, by Adrina Zanzanian

Although Hovhanness’ output was voluminous, his place in the modern classical music canon has yet to be determined. As David Raymond pointed out in a 1998 *American Record Guide* review of a Hovhanness release, “This composer’s music can be bland and endless, but when he’s good, he’s exquisite.” Mark Swed of the *Los Angeles Times* admitted, “In most histories of American music, Hovhanness is a minor character,” but he nevertheless predicted that “Hovhanness was a crucial figure in the whole development of the world and spiritual traditions now so much a part of the musical mainstream. The twenty-first century may well count him as a major pioneer.”

Hovhanness died on June 21, 2000, in Seattle, Washington, at the age of 89. He had suffered from a severe stomach ailment for three years.

— TIMOTHY BORDEN

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Alan Hovhanness Centennial Celebration

Şahan Arzruni, piano

Introduction by Charles Amirkhania

Achtamar (1947)

Lake of Van Sonata (1946, rev. 1959)

- a) Rubato - Allegro
- b) Solenne - Allegro
- c) Rubato

Mystic Flute (1937)

Two Ghazals (1933, rev. 1966)

Yenovk (1946; rev. 1951, World Premiere)

- a) Fantasy
- b) Canzona
- c) Jhala
- d) Canzona
- e) Ballata
- f) Fugue

KOMITAS: Shoror of Mush (1906-16)

Intermission

Laona (1956, World Premiere)

Pastoral No. 1 (1952)

Visionary Landscapes (1967)

- a) Allegro rubato
- b) Allegretto
- c) Evening Bell
- d) Allegro brillante
- c) Midnight Bell

Suite (1954, rev. 1967)

- a) Doloroso
- b) Invocation Jhala
- c) Mysterious Temple

Macedonian Mountain Dance (1937)

Achtamar

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ŞAHAN ARZRUNI

In addition to his reputation as a recitalist and chamber music partner, pianist Şahan Arzruni has achieved recognition as a composer, ethnomusicologist, teacher, lecturer, writer, recording artist, broadcasting personality, producer and impresario. He has toured in these capacities throughout North and South



Front Row Photo, Felix Arustamyan

America, Europe, the Middle East, the Far East and Australia. Arzruni has become a familiar figure through many television broadcasts, such as *The Johnny Carson and Mike Douglas Shows*. He has been featured in a number of PBS specials—*Around the World in '82*, *Gala of Stars*, and *A Place of Dreams: Carnegie Hall at 100*—and has recorded for European radio networks, including the BBC. Mr. Arzruni has given command performances at the White House, as well as the British, Danish, Swedish and Icelandic courts.

Motivated by ethnic awareness in the United States, Arzruni continuously researches the musical roots of his Armenian heritage. He recorded a three-record anthology of Armenian piano music, and co-produced an eight-disc set of instrumental and vocal Armenian music. He also delivered papers and organized symposia for such institutions as Harvard University, Columbia University and University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Şahan Arzruni is the author of scholarly books and a contributor of articles for academic journals; he has also written for various editions of *The New Grove Dictionary* and the *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*.

An artist of striking versatility, Şahan Arzruni has performed with Victor Borge, playing the role of straight man in the master's hilarious musical programs. As a teenage writer, he authored a textbook of music in his native Istanbul. As a performer, he recorded many albums featuring twentieth-century works intended for pedagogic use. Arzruni also hosted a radio program on New York's Municipal Broadcasting System for five years, addressing issues concerned with the didactics of piano playing.

A Steinway artist, he was invited to perform on an 1869 Steinway piano at the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the inaugural of the centennial celebrations of

the Museum's collection of historic instruments. In 2001, Mr. Arzruni delivered a lecture on Armenian liturgical chants at the invitation of the U.S. Library of Congress, in Washington D.C. In 1996, he received from His Holiness Karekin I an encyclical and the Sts. Sahak and Mesrob Medallion.

On the occasion of Aram Khachaturian's Centennial in 2003, Şahan Arzruni was appointed the full-fledged representative of Armenia's Ministry of Culture in the Diaspora. In 2007, to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the Armenian Hospital of Istanbul, he was asked to produce cultural events to mark the occasion. In 2010, through an arrangement with the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs he presented a number of concerts, including a program at Van University on the eve of the inaugural Divine Liturgy that took place at the Holy Cross Armenian Church of Aghtamar.

Mr. Arzruni holds degrees from The Juilliard School and has pursued doctoral studies at New York University. He records for New World Records, Composers Recordings, Inc., Musical Heritage Society, Hearts of Space, Philips, Varèse-Sarabande, Good Music, Positively Armenian and Kalan Music.

Other Minds would like to thank the following supporters of the Alan Hovhanness Centennial Celebration, without whose generosity this program would not be possible.

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OTHER MINDS, INC., is dedicated to the encouragement and propagation of contemporary music in all its forms through concerts, workshops and conferences that bring together artists and audiences of diverse traditions, generations and cultural backgrounds. By fostering cross-cultural exchange and creative dialogue, and by encouraging exploration of areas in new music seldom touched upon by mainstream music institutions, Other Minds is committed to expanding and reshaping the definition of what constitutes "serious music."

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