

ISSUE NO. 1 // VOLUME NO. 2 // JUNE 2018

# ATKEN

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE  
ATKEN ARMENIAN FOUNDATION



'AGROCULTURAL' REVOLUTION?

**FOCUS: AAF Horticulture in Vayots Dzor, p. 21**





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## FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOPS

The Atken Armenian Foundation (AAF) is already completing a decade of work in Armenia. So much has been achieved. In the last few months new projects, a great fundraising event, and the success of our Fellows have given the AAF a momentum never seen before. Our anchor in Armenia is the wonderful Chaghig Arzrouni, Registrar at the American University of Armenia, who donates her time to manage the finances and follow-up on all the projects. At our fundraising event in Montreal last December, musicians such as two young Armenian-Canadian violinists of immense talent, Eva Aronian and Lynette Israilian along with one of Montreal's top flautists Albert Brouwer and his wife Stéphanie Moreau, joined Aline Kutan and me to offer their talent pro bono. Our benefactor list is growing as many realize the transparent nature of our work where every dollar donated is used to empower those in Armenia today to reach the top! Indeed, it is from the top of our mountains that we are continuing to find amazing talents and beautiful souls that are worthy of all your support. From the top of our mountains, we are also developing agricultural schemes that will bring prosperity to the region. Our collaborations are multiplying and giving fruit — literally!

The new reality in Armenia, with the beautiful "velvet revolution" and a fresh sense of hope and determination it has brought, has given the green light to many possibilities. When before we made it a point to stay clear of corrupt government



appointees, who also themselves made a point to ignore our work . . . well, now, there is an opportunity to maximize government cooperation with the AAF. Some of our programs and philosophies in the regions can indeed become templates for rebuilding the damaged musical institutions and human resources in Armenia.

The great work we are doing in agro-development, spearheaded by my good friend Tony Halepli, will give even better results with a government that is adopting, finally, and at full steam, the principle of serving its population. Perhaps we are witnessing the beginning of an "Agrocultural" (Yes, just made up that word) revolution?

Dear reader, welcome to this, our second issue of ATKEN. Join us on a trip of discovery, from our amazing horticultural work in the Vayots Dzor region to vocal training studios in Ejmiadzin and Kotayk, a stunning theatre troupe and award-winning choir in Yegheknadzor, to top music talents in Gyumri and Javaghk, the AAF is in full flight! Surely with all the positive momentum of the revolution, the sky is now the limit for the AAF in its mission to leave no great talent undiscovered.

VAN ARMENIAN, EDITOR

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ATKEN ARMENIAN FOUNDATION



# THE PEBBLE MOVERS

Since the passing of Atken Armenian in 2008, many AAF volunteers have channelled their time, knowledge, and know-how through us. Shining examples: AAF Board members, Antoine and Sheila Terjanian. They have been our eyes and ears on the ground in the Vayots Dzor region for the past 8 years, achieving results that many would envy. In their humbleness, they consider themselves "pebble movers". But, from renovating education centres, providing meals to the poorest, bringing in much-needed hospital equipment, teaching English, developing collaborations with local NGO's, countless other micro-projects, and by contributing to and expanding the AAF donor base, they are moving mountains. We are truly lucky to have them in the AAF family. Read on as Antoine considers our role in Armenia and how YOU can help.

On Tuesday, December 30, 2008, almost 10 years ago, I made my first donation to the Atken Armenian Foundation. The program for the funeral ceremony stated:

*In lieu of flowers,  
donations can be made to the:  
"Atken Armenian Fund"*

*2110 Harbour, Laval, Quebec, H7T 2M5.  
This Fund will focus solely on direct aid  
and development in Armenia*

Since then, Van Armenian has invested a considerable amount of work into creating the Atken Armenian Foundation, registering it as a charitable organization

under Canada's Income-tax Act, and developing programs to fulfil the promise to use collected funds "solely on direct aid and development in Armenia".

I had met Atken in Cyberspace, in the early 90's. I met him for the first time in person at our house in Ottawa in 1996, when he had asked me to prepare the program for a study-visit to Canada of a scholar from the American University of Armenia.

Atken was constantly trying to find ways to help Armenia develop. At a





time when many of us sat comfortably in Canada wondering what could be done for Armenia, he had moved there with his wife Hasmig in the early dark years and helped. Inspired by their example, Sheila and I moved to Armenia and we learned about many of the projects they had initiated there.

When Van Armenian asked us to join the Board of the Foundation, we were very honoured to accept and we collaborated with the AAF Board in growing the social impact investments they had initiated.

AAF's core objective is to establish music education programs of exemplary standard in as many underdeveloped districts across Armenia as funds permit and to select children who are exceptionally gifted musically to receive specialized music training and career support into adulthood. But the AAF has also been responsive to other social impact priorities expressed by their benefactors. For instance, if a donor wants to implement a particular project that has a positive impact and improves Armenia's competitiveness, and, that enables its people, especially in the regions, to have easier access to sustainable







economic opportunities, the AAF finances and manages its implementation. These projects, most of which were the result of expressed needs of the local population, include:

- Providing scholarships to deserving students to complete university studies and other practical training
- Renovating playgrounds and other neglected public facilities for the enjoyment of the impoverished population
- Sponsoring music competitions and masterclasses
- Creating a musical instrument bank which loans instruments to deserving students who can't afford them
- Collecting, transporting, and donating medical equipment, eyeglasses, and supplies to regional hospitals
- Supporting the training of people in the region to enable them to earn income through Armenia's burgeoning tourism industry
- Training "Line of Contact" villagers in mountain honey production and providing them with the initial equipment to start production
- Building sun-dryers to preserve and export local fruits

The AAF has become a conduit for people of goodwill, who share our desire to help Armenia on the road of sustainable development and social progress. The AAF studies and then supports the charitable projects that benefactors believe brings the best results. Our volunteers help facilitate the implementation of their charitable wishes.

ANTOINE TERJANIAN





THE BEST  
WAY TO  
FIND  
YOURSELF  
IS TO  
LOSE  
YOURSELF  
IN THE  
SERVICE OF  
OTHERS.

- GANDHI -

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# A MUSICAL CHRISTMAS II

This past December, the AAF held its second annual fundraising concert. Just under 25,000 CAD was raised through the efforts of many, but especially our main event sponsors the amazing Me Richard Elliott and Dr Lena Terjanian and wonderful board member and international opera star, Aline Kutan. Here is Aline's account and some poignant reflections on the **WHY** of the AAF.

First off, let me thank all those who attended the fundraiser for the Atken Armenian Foundation that my good friend Van Armenian organized this year for the 2nd year in a row with the help of a fantastic organization committee. To collaborate with wonderful musicians was a musically satisfying experience for Van and me; your contribution and attendance made the concert a wonderful success. It was a pleasure to my senses to make music with the harpsichord, the theorbo, the flutes and the violin section which Van had thoughtfully composed of young Armenian talent from Montreal.

When I think about the young musical talent in Armenia and the direct benefit to them in receiving lessons, instruments, opportunities, and resources, thanks to the AAF, I think it is worth the while that I put in extra time of learning new pieces by Vivaldi, Scarlatti, and Bach. Besides playing, Van arranged some of the most beautiful Komitas songs for our "Baroque" orchestra; the audience loved it! I admire his dedication and the vision which make him realize miracles.

Being a musician, I know the hard work and practice it takes to become







one in order to get to the top. When I started taking voice lessons at the age of eleven, I had no idea it would one day take me to the world stages where I could follow my calling. I was an artistic child who just wanted to sing, express and resonate sound. It seems odd to certain people, but it is the same as someone wanting to draw buildings, to work with numbers, to write or to learn all about the human body. Music is such a calling to those with heightened auditory perception and singing is the manifestation of spirit and soul that comes from within. I can only imagine the joy of the young person who wants more than anything to make music with his voice or his chosen instrument and will have the opportunity to make it happen just the same way I did through the support of my parents and my community. We don't choose music; music chooses us and I am very glad that these children will have the chance to exploit their potential through your gift.

To some, learning music may seem a frivolous, expensive and a time-consuming activity; luckily old notions are being replaced by science backing up the fact that music is an essential part of our humanity and contributes to our well-being as individuals as well as to our society. The brains of children develop better when they practice an instrument and research is showing that Alzheimer's patients are benefiting greatly from music therapy. There is still a long road ahead until we decide that music is an essential and integral part of our learning process and that it be made mandatory in schools. We are still a long way from seeing its value of enriching us culturally as opposed to limiting its value for entertainment. Or see the value of rewarding the artist sufficiently so he can make a living in his chosen discipline. I didn't start singing because it was good for me or I'd make a lot of money; I always sang because it made me feel good. When I started to sing in a choir, it gave me confidence and taught me to collaborate with others to sing with



one voice. Anyone who ever has sung in a choir understands what I am talking about. I have come to understand that music is the language of our emotions manifested in glorious sound and it can unite the world in its harmonies if we truly listen to its command. To arm ourselves with its beauty is a hundred times more powerful than arming ourselves with weapons. I have had the privilege to serve music for the last 30 years. I have performed works that spanned more than 300 years and married the inspired words and music to honour the genius of the poet and the composer. As a teacher, I am thrilled now to be imparting my knowledge to my students so they can arm themselves with the best weapon there is.

I hope your support will continue in the hopes that these young budding musicians whom you have helped one day, in turn, become the next generation of warriors, achieving greatness in the name of beauty, justice and truth. The idea that some of these children will go on to represent Armenia on international stages and fill Armenians' hearts all over the world with pride gives me much joy and reminds me that this fight is a worthy cause indeed.

ALINE KUTAN





# A STAR IS BORN

This year, Music of Armenia, a Yerevan-based organization, launched 'Women's Musical Month'. As part of this celebration dedicated to female Armenian musicians and their music, they approached us to sponsor a scholarship that became the Atken Armenian Foundation Fellowship for Young Girls in Music in the Classical Music category.

Our world-class international jury was comprised of soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian, violinist Ani Kavafian, and AAF board members, conductor Agnes Grossmann and soprano Aline Kutan. After listening to numerous videotaped online applications, the jury came to a unanimous decision and selected Javaghk-born 11-year-old pianist Anahit Stelmashova for the Fellowship valued at 2000 USD.

Already an accomplished musician, the jury found that Anahit had a natural way of playing and technical dexterity. As an AAF Fellow, Anahit can count on many years of professional career support and financial assistance. We are thrilled to have her in the AAF family as she reflects exactly the type of talent we need to support. Dear AAF supporters, we are counting on you to take Anahit to the top.





# AAF FELLOWS KEEP ON SHINING

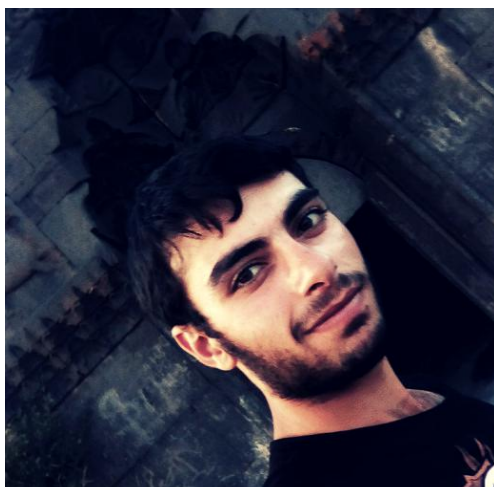
Last September, the AAF program resulted in four of our college-aged Fellows being accepted into music colleges and the top conservatory in the country. We were thrilled that the wonderful Boston-based charity YerazArt agreed to collaborate with us and provide one-year full-tuition costs for two of these Fellows, Ani and Narek from the village of Karagloukh. Both were accepted in the prestigious Komitas Conservatory in Yerevan.

The AAF continues to fully finance weekly lessons in Yerevan for two extremely talented siblings Mariam (flute) and Alexandr (piano) from Gyumri. The AAF is providing the best in Armenia for them: Narek Avagyan (principal flute of Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra) and Tigran Berkelyan, a respected pianist and teacher in Armenia, both of whom are thrilled with the work ethic and progress of the children (More on Mariam in the next pages).

Our vocal teacher, soprano Hermine Gevorgyan, is producing amazing results in the Armavir and Kotayk regions. Some students are already participating in local and international competitions. Last year, Anna from Javaghk, won first prize at a competition in Georgia and went on to win the "Special Prize" (A full scholarship for a two-week masterclass) at the finals in Pesaro, Italy. She is no doubt one of our top talents and continues to visit Hermine every month for extended stays in Yerevan (Hermine kindly hosts her during her stay). Now only 14 years of age, her exceptional and rare voice is developing splendidly.

At the AAF we have created a powerful mechanism to discover great talent. This talent needs to be developed on sound foundations to achieve full potential. This is what we do. Make it your mission to discover and develop the next Khachaturian, Galamian, Aznavour, or Komitas.

AAF FELLOWS  
KEEP ON SHINING



# Haig & Elen

## *AAF talents turning heads*

Under the direction of our voice specialist Hermine Gevorgyan, our vocal training program is giving fruit with young 12-year-old Haig from Ejmiadzin achieving stellar success at the "Future Stars" International Competition in Tbilisi, Georgia. He brought home both the Silver Prize and "Best Vocal" prize. The international jury members were truly amazed. Haig sang in Italian and Armenian. Young Elen, who sang in Spanish and Armenian received a special mention from the jury.

Both entered our program less than two years ago with no musical background. We immediately saw talent that needed nourishment to blossom. With the biweekly voice lessons the AAF provides, both have progressed in leaps and bounds.

How many more Haig's and Elen's are hidden in the regions of Armenia? Invest in the AAF to find out!

***"We immediately saw talent that needed nourishment to blossom."***





# Mariam

## *Flute power on the rise in Armenia*

Last week, 14-year-old AAF Fellow, Mariam from Gyumri, was selected to participate in the prestigious summer courses at the Yuri Bashmet Academy in Samara, Russia. She not only was accepted, but got all the "dressings" with it: A full scholarship including masterclasses, airfare, and room & board!


The AAF fully funds Mariam's 2-hour weekly lessons with

Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra principal flute, Narek Avagyan, and loans her a flute generously donated to us by Simon Channing - Head of Woodwind, Royal College of Music, London.

In Samara, Mariam will study with internationally recognized London-based, Irish flutist and pedagogue, Gareth McLearnon.

***"A full scholarship including masterclasses, airfare, and room & board!"***





EDUCATING  
THE MIND  
WITHOUT  
EDUCATING  
THE HEART  
IS NO EDUCATION  
AT ALL.

- ARISTOTLE -

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# AAF CREATIVITY HUB

Our operations in Vayots Dzor have grown exponentially thanks to the efforts of many local and Diaspora collaborators. Antoine enumerated some of what we have done (page 7) and there is more. In the eight years of our presence there we have generated an award-winning choir for whose members we provide biweekly piano, music history, and solfeggio lessons. Our instrument bank there includes 2 Qanons, 7 violins, 6 pianos, two flutes, all on loan to music students in the area. From this program, we now have half a dozen talents who are in Yerevan following their musical dream in post-secondary music institutions, usually on full scholarships.

Last autumn an important donation from the AAF's top donors, Tony and Jocelyn Halepli, allowed us to provide aid to the Yegheknadzor community. A music room where folk music is taught was fully renovated and our music program was provided with a computer and wall-mounted smart TV to facilitate communication, access, and, in particular, the music history class.

The AAF also supports of a great local theatre director in Yegheknadzor—Hrach Hovhanissyan—with the result that he and his students have enjoyed success both on Yerevan stages and in Gyumri for the Francophonie celebrations.





At the AAF we provide opportunities for our students to gain cultural knowledge through organized educational trips. They have seen operas, concerts, museums, and art galleries. This April our fantastic theatre and music students in Vayots Dzor were treated to full cultural immersion in the capital Yerevan. The 40-some youths had guided visits at the State Museum of Literature and Art and the Komitas Museum, and after a meal at a local Syrian-Armenian restaurant, went over to the Malyan Theatre (one of the top playhouses in the country) to see Aghasi Aivazyan's, 'The Physiology of Race'. Our AAF youths not only saw the play but were also warmly welcomed by and chatted with the actors before and after the presentation. We can safely say the youths and teachers alike returned home fully nourished!





# La Paix, a success in Gyumri

*Our support of the amazing theatre director Hrach is giving quick results*

When we met Hrach and his theatre troupe in Yegheknadzor last year, we were stunned at what he was able to achieve in, firstly, such a remote area, and secondly with minimal resources and help. Consequently, AAF representatives Antoine and Sheila got to work and found an amazing donor of Persian descent who had visited them in Armenia and understood! With this help we are able to keep Hrach in town, doing what he is best at. So many talented teachers and performers are forced to find employment in unrelated fields to make a living.

His work is paying off already. "La Paix", one of the plays he directed there, was chosen to be part of the Francophonie events in Gyumri last month. This October, the troupe will present this French play at the Francophonie Summit!

It is our hope that with the new positive movement in Armenia, cultural education will reach new heights and the type of work the AAF does will be institutionalized.

***"So many talented teachers and performers are forced to find employment in unrelated fields to make a living."***







FREE THE CHILD'S  
POTENTIAL,  
AND YOU WILL  
TRANSFORM HIM  
INTO  
THE WORLD.

- MARIA MONTESSORI -

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A woman with dark hair, wearing a blue quilted jacket and a red scarf, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is holding a bare, brown tree branch in front of her face. The background shows a field of bare trees under a cloudy sky.

# Focus : AAF Horticulture in Vayots Dzor

"Agroculture" Hub

An AAF unique ecosystem in Vayots Dzor providing not only cultural development to a new generation but modern horticultural know-how to local farmers and industries



# HORTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

An important collaboration with the Vayots Dzor's Syunik NGO is growing thanks to a new cohort of AAF donors led by board member Tony Halepli of Laval, Canada. As a result of Tony's involvement, approximately 12 hectares of land have been planted (that's the equivalent of almost 16 football fields!). Coupled with Syunik NGO's training sessions that provide local farmers with the expertise gained from Swiss and Dutch experts, within 5 years, the AAF-funded projects will yield six-figure income to this region, one of the poorest in Armenia. Our biggest hope is that more people will be inspired to follow Tony's lead and imitate this model of sustainable development!

Did you know that when you go to the Vayots Dzor region, home of the oldest winemaking facility in the world and oldest shoe—thankfully found in different parts of the now-famous Areni-1 Cave—you will come across the Armenia-Quebec Friendship Orchard along with half a dozen other orchards named in the

memory, or in honour, of various individuals and families?

These orchards are the brainchild of Tony Halepli who simply wanted to do something good for the people of the land. These newly established orchards serve as centres for skill and competency development for local fruit growers





where Syunik NGO specialists teach orchard cultivation, treatment, pruning, and management using environmentally friendly methods. Local fruit growers will also have access to acquire the best quality intensive saplings for their orchards via the Horticulture Development Project.

Dwarf orchard technology is new to most local fruit growers; however, intensive orchards have the following advantages: earlier production of commercially acceptable yields by the third year (as opposed to four or five years), easier canopy management (as pruning systems are simplified), and higher and more uniform fruit quality.

The scope of this AAF project is not limited to orchards. Funds go towards developing rootstock, multiplying saplings, constructing cold storage facilities and solar dryers to allow farmers to get a bigger bang for their—and our—efforts! Of course, without bees, we cannot have trees, therefore Tony has had beehives built







and has purchased bee colonies. These have been distributed to over a dozen families to date, consequently almost doubling their yearly income. Recently, about 30 kg of the honey harvest was donated to our soldiers guarding the Armenia-Nakhichevan border.

The Syunik-NGO knowledge and know-how gained from agricultural experts at the Swiss Heks Eper, the Dutch PUM, and other international organizations, has been essential in the present and expected future success of our horticultural projects in the region. The Syunik-NGO is indeed an oasis in Vayots Dzor. The young, energetic, and educated staff there include agricultural and social development experts. Not only will the local farmer profit from this project, but funds from the expected revenue will go towards top-notch social development programs and to expanding the scope and modernization of our agro-development activities there.

Armenia's government considers that the Vayots Dzor region will be best served with agricultural and tourism-based development initiatives. Thus, Tony has also included funding for English language courses for local B & B owners, taxi drivers and restaurant staff. The sky is the limit in Vayots Dzor!

And who are our contacts in Vayots Dzor; the eyes on the ground? Indeed, none other than Antoine and Sheila Terjanian without whom the AAF would not have met the good people at Syunik NGO who make all of this happen.





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