

"Light, Creator Of Light"

The Armenian Sacred Singing is a diamond from the world art treasury. Eventoday this singing enchants with its crystalline sounds and spiritual harmony. It comes from the depths of the centuries though it is amazingly modern and boundless.

Sharakans - the Armenian Sacred Chants - originated together with the creation of the Armenian alphabet. They have national roots rich in tradition. Sharakan (row of precious stones) means a row of songs corresponding to the Church Feasts.

Unity in diversity and diversity in unity - this is the most important poetic characteristic in the Sharakans. The life of Sharakan which lasted a thousand years has different historical periods. It lived happiness and sorrow, praise and repentance, lament and love, struggle and victory. Sharakans are the living and immortal memorials of the Armenian land and its very essence.

Armenian Sacred Singing was born in the monasteries and was created by the monks and most of all through the ascetic works and prayers of the high clergy. The first Sharakanakirs (Sharakan composers) were Mesrop Mashtots and Sahak Partev, who lived in the 5th century and are considered to be the founders of the Armenian art of Sacred Singing.

Words are the foundation of this art of singing; through them the colour and the tone of the song is defined: Man and stone, fearful heart and tearful sorrow, beating of heart in silent darkness and a single narrow window clearing the naked wall of the monastery, which leads to heaven, the Sun, the light, to the warm and open bosom of God that is full of love.

Sharakans have been preserved and passed down from generation to generation always being the highest form of expression for the multitudes. Even some of the Sharakanakirs considered themselves unworthy to mention their names, convinced that heavenly things can never become earthly. And only due to the devotional research of Great Komitas of the 20th century, the secret of the khazes (Armenian notation) was revealed and many Sharakans composed by unknown authors were written down and brought to us.

Movses Khorenatsi, Stephanos Syunetsi, Hovhan Mandakuni, Komitas Aghtsetsi, Anania Shirakatsi, Sahak Dzoraporetsi, Hovhan Odznetsi, Grigor Magistros. These Sharakanakirs of 5th-9th centuries were scientists and poets, philosophers and historians. They continued to fulfill the commandments of Mashtots and Partev, they raised the poetic and musical language and value of Sharakan to a higher level.

The 10th century was a time of rest between endless wars. The genius taghs (songs) of Grigor Narekatsi proclaimed the renaissance period of the Armenian poetry and singing. If till his times Biblical figures and historical events had been depicted in Sharakans, now the taghs of Narekatsi completely revealed the psychological condition of a person.

Taghs astonish us with their variety of colour and image, with the unity of man and nature, with the harmonic and marvellous explication of spirit and flesh. Nature is perfect but man is sinful and imperfect. To reach the perfection of nature is impossible, but to strive to reach it is yet necessary, writes deacon Hovhannes Imastaser, who was a scientist, philosopher, poet, sharakanakir (sharakan composer) and one of the peaks of the 12th century Armenian poetry and music. He teaches to listen and to see nature, to perceive it as something perfectly unreachable. No other teacher can teach as good as nature. The warbling of a bird, the scent of a flower, the roar of the wind and the mad waves of the sea, the unfinished sculpture of a wild rock, the daring rays of the sun splitting the clouds, the heavy rain and the nights full of stars should be anchored in the voice. Only the heart and the soul full of love and living faith can produce all these things and glorify the Creator.

The return to the traditions of Sharakan writing by Nerses Shnorhali proclaims another peak in the sphere of Armenian Sacred Singing. Numerous Arevagal (Sunrise prayers), Sharakans full of light and about light, resound in the Armenian Church in the mornings. "Light, Creator of light", sings the monk, his hands raised open to the sky, while the morning rays of the Sun inundate the archaic walls of the church and warm the hearts of the people. There is always a beginning and an end in the world, only the spirit is immortal and eternal.

Living a whole millennium, 5th-15th centuries, the art of Sharakan finished its earthly path, it moved to the spiritual world becoming a source of amazement and astonishment for the people. They became a unique basis for creating the marvellous Liturgies of Yekmalyan and Komitas. The Armenian Mass is considered to be one of the most beautiful in the world art of Sacred Music. It is impossible to perceive Armenia without Sharakan. Wherever you are in the wild nature of Armenian land, Sharakan seems to fill the forgotten colours of the canvas called iArmeniaî.

So here I am, standing on the top of a rock and shouting against the powerful howl of the wind:
"Light, Creator of light."

Anna Mailian