



AGBU Europe Marks the Centennial of the First Republic of Armenia with Musical Weekend in Brussels

From June 1 to 3, the city of Brussels was captivated by a multi-genre Musical Weekend organized by the Performing Arts Department of AGBU France/Europe in partnership with the Boghossian Foundation, the City of Brussels and the Armenian community of Belgium.

The three-day concert was inspired by the 100th anniversary of the First Republic of Armenia, an historical milestone in the Armenian Nation’s long road to independent statehood. “Since Armenia’s rebirth in 1991, it has showcased to the world the depth and breadth of the musical achievements of its people. This concert series has crystalized those achievements all in one weekend,” remarked Nicolas Tavitian, the director of AGBU Europe, when noting the considerable turnout at all three of the weekend’s events.

Together with AGBU Performing Arts Department of France, AGBU Europe assembled a roster of some of the best musicians of a generation, many whose talents were originally cultivated in Armenia. A new AGBU string ensemble, a classical piano trio and a jazz band played on successive nights, displaying their mastery of their respective genres.

The entire weekend also served as a fundraiser to benefit the afterschool programs of the AGBU Children’s Centers in Yerevan Armenia. “After 25 years of providing Armenia’s youth with character-building and self-discovery programs through arts and sports, these



centers are long overdue for a major renewal—not only to expand and upgrade interior space but also to enhance teaching proficiencies and enrich curricula,” explained Karen Papazian, of the AGBU Central Office in New York. As the director of Global Outreach and Development, she pointed out that “Armenia’s youth deserve to thrive in a safe and nurturing environment. And no doubt, some of these children will grow up to follow in the footsteps of rising stars like those who performed this weekend.”

The concert series began Friday evening at the Brussels Town Hall, one of Belgium’s most magnificent Gothic buildings. Opening remarks made by officials and dignitaries spoke to the significance of the occasion. H.E. Tatul Margaryan, Armenia’s Ambassador to Belgium, stated, “On May 28, one hundred years ago, our nation restored its millenia-old state by declaring the birth of the First Republic of Armenia. Although the First Republic faced numerous challenges and was short lived, it laid the foundation for the establishment and development of state institutions and democratic governance.”

He was followed by Philippe Close, the mayor of Brussels, who referred to the turbulent context in which the Republic of 1918 was founded, citing the fall of the Ottoman empire, the chaos of the Russian revolution and the admission of hundreds of thousands of genocide survivors. The mayor also highlighted the will of the City of Brussels to collaborate with Armenian organizations to host this important cultural event, noting that “culture is the best expression of a people’s vitality and of its presence in the world.”

Stepan Mirdikian, a former chairman of the Armenian community of Belgium also added words of inspiration. Quoting Ernest Renan, he mentioned, “What constitutes a nation is not so much speaking the same language or belonging to the same ethnic group, it is to have accomplished together great things in the past



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and to want to accomplish more in the future.”

On opening night, the AGBU String Ensemble[CE1], took to the stage to perform under the direction of young composer Alexandr Iradyan, who conducted the very first concert of the ensemble which interpreted the powerful and emblematic *Symphony for Strings and Timpani*, by Mirzoyan along with selected works by Komitas.

The following evening, the diverse audience of Armenians and non-Armenians gathered at the Ceremonial Hall of the Boghossian Foundation Villa Empain for the performance of pianist Varduhi Yeritsyan, known for her vast and diverse repertoire. She performed along with the Brussels based brothers Hrachya Avanesyan (violin) and Sevak Avanesyan (cello). The trio performed the works of Shostakovich and Babajanian as well as a number of encore pieces by Komitas following the wide public acclaim.

Sunday’s performance at the same venue featured the contemporary works of Yessaï Karapetyan Trio, a jazz ensemble led by pianist Yessai Karapetyan, a gifted musician who performs on the most prestigious jazz stages in Europe. Yessaï was accompanied by Sylvain Fournet-Fayas on double bass and David Paycha on drums.

Nadia Gortzounian, the president of AGBU France, hailed the event as a “brilliant” weekend. “I was thrilled to see such a high level of attendance at each of our three events and I am profoundly grateful to all the immensely talented musicians for their extraordinary performances. It was also a pleasure to collaborate



with the City of Brussels, the Armenian community of Belgium and the Boghossian Foundation that allowed us to host our concerts in the particularly magical setting of the Villa Empain in Brussels.”

She went on to say, “It was a heartwarming and inspiring experience to see just how far the Armenian Nation has come since the First Republic, as we contribute to world culture through the arts.”

Established in 1906, AGBU (www.agbu.org) is the world's largest non-profit Armenian organization. Headquartered in New York City, AGBU preserves and promotes the Armenian identity and heritage through educational, cultural and humanitarian programs, annually touching the lives of some 500,000 Armenians around the world.

For more information about AGBU and its worldwide programs, please visit www.agbu.org

THE MEDIA AS A DIASPORA-HOMELAND BRIDGE

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partnerships can help set a new, elevated agenda.”

Evidently, there is much interest both for local and for Diasporan media outlets to hear from the other, but an insufficient level of engagement. The Deputy Minister of Diaspora, Babken DerGrigorian, commented for his part that, “The Diasporan media plays a crucial role as a bridge between the various Diaspora communities and Armenia. But, at the same time, there is immense room for growth, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas. We need to have more such platforms for strengthening that bridge, we need to explore even more efficient, effective, and productive ways to collaborate.”

The key question remains: how can the Diaspora engage more fully and meaningfully with the homeland and how can the homeland reach out impactfully and



sustainably to the Diaspora? Establishments such as the AGBU are positioned to provide platforms for networking and sharing, as well as to assist in making long-term collaborations possible. Those deeper connections can take place across many fields, but surely the role of the media will always be central in maintaining ties throughout the global Armenian nation.