

# The Gurdjieff Ensemble



“... delicate, haunting and atmospheric selection of instrumental pieces. ..they range from drifting, mesmeric arrangements for the duduk Armenian woodwind to subtle, sparse passages, or more sturdy dance pieces played on the zither-like kanon, the oud or the santur dulcimer. An intriguing, often gently exquisite set.”

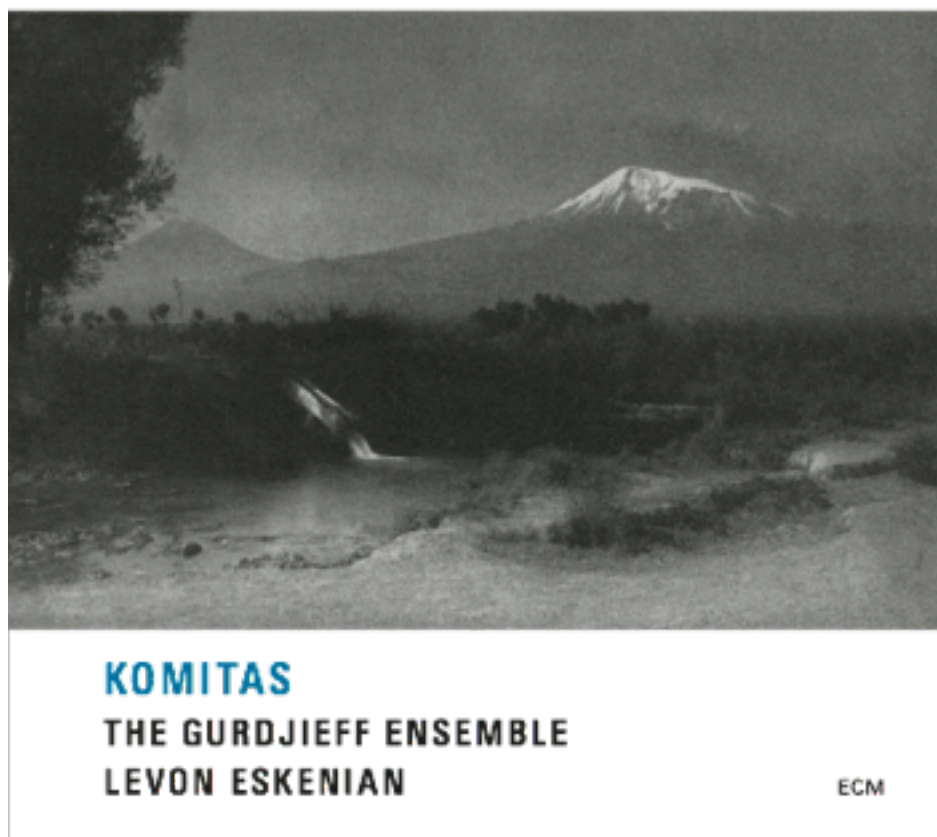
Robin Denselow, “The Guardian”

“...Sie präsentieren sich mit berückenden, sehnsuchtsvollen, tief beseelten Klängen, die auf musikalische Rituale des täglichen Lebens zurückgehen, auf Kirchen-, Liebes- und Tanzlieder, Hirtenmelodien und rituelle Musik. Das ist wie eine akustische Brücke über die Jahrhunderte und ein Toleranzprogramm der Weltgegenden.”

Ulrich Steinmetzger, Mitteldutsche Zeitung

“...The combination of instrumental voices, and the otherness of the voices themselves creates deep, mysterious yet marvelously relaxing soundscapes to sit awhile in.”

Phil Johnson, “The Independent”



**New Release: October 2015**

**Music by Komitas**

**The Gurdjieff Ensemble**

**Levon Eskenian** director

**Emmanuel Hovhannisyan** duduk, pku, zurna

**Armen Ayvazyan** kamancha

**Avag Margaryan** pogh, zurna

**Aram Nikoghosyan** oud

**Davit Avagyan** tar

**Mesrop Khalatyan** dap, dhol

**Vladimir Papikyan** santur, voice

**Meri Vardanyan** kanon

**Norayr Gapoyan** duduk, bass duduk

**Eduard Harutyunyan** tmbuk, cymbal, kshots, burvar, bell

**Release : October 2015**

ECM 2451

CD 473 2246

## KOMITAS

Music, its forms and rituals, has the power to bring us close to distant civilizations. Armenia offers a special case: a sacred culture that was preserved and presented at its fullest flowering through the work of one man, the scholar-monk Sghomon Sghomonian (1869 – 1935), known under his religious name as Komitas, to which is sometimes appended the title Vardapet (archimandrite).

Komitas was many things: composer, priest, collector and arranger of folk songs, choirmaster, singer, rigorous researcher into khaz, the neumatic system developed in Armenia between the ninth century and the fifteenth. His musical education took place at the seminary attached to Echmiadzin Cathedral, the Holy See of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and in Berlin, where his teachers included Richard Schmidt, the theorist Heinrich Beller-mann, the prominent folklorist Max Friedlaender and Oskar Fleischer, a specialist in European medieval music. Acquainted with western classical music as well as the Armenian tradition, he also had a deep understanding of Middle Eastern and more distant Asian musical cultures, which helped him understand and define what was unique to Armenian music.

While living in Armenia he gathered thousands of folk songs, sacred songs and instrumental melodies, to notate which at speed he often used the Armenian system, though he also made arrangements for piano, solo voice or chorus in standard western notation. In his compositions he was able to combine Armenian modality with aspects of the western classical tradition and thereby establish practical models and a theoretical basis for the development of a specifically Armenian classical music.

In his work as a collector of thousands of folk songs, sacred songs and instrumental melodies, he explored the connections that uniquely bind together Armenian sacred and secular music.

This program indicates the breadth of his achievement and something of his methods. His practice was to select the most interesting variants of traditional melodies and rhythmic patterns while remaining true to the original style and spirit, which partly accounts for the unusual character of his piano writing in solo pieces and accompaniments.

In an effort to go more deeply into the music and its interpretative potential, as well as to recreate the sounds Komitas encountered, the pieces are here arranged for traditional Armenian instruments, without altering Komitas's structures and details. Some of the instruments date back to antiquity, and it has been necessary to build replicas of those no longer in use.

Komitas preserved several dance melodies as piano pieces, and included in the manuscripts of his Yot Par (Seven dances) and Msho shoror instructions for how to imitate the styles of traditional instruments on the piano. He would constantly revise these dances to make the conventional notation more closely fit what was particular in his source material.

Many of these dances and their music reach back to Armenia's pagan time, long before the state adoption of Christianity in 301. Komitas wrote that: 'The pagans had two major types of dances, sacred and secular, that have kept their original functions to the present day' – though he noted also that 'religious traces still survive in folk or secular dances'.

"Dance", he further observed, "is perhaps one of the most significant manifestations of human existence. It expresses the particular traits of a nation, especially its customs and the level of its civilization. For through its manifold movements dance unconsciously exposes the workings of the spirit."

Levon Eskenian

Further Release : In 2016 ECM will release an album by Lusine Grigoryan playing

Komitas :Piano Compositions (Seven songs, Msho Shoror, Seven Dances, Pieces for Children, Toghik)

## ***Music of Komitas and Georges I.Gurdjieff***

### **Current Project**

The Gurdjieff Ensemble's second project focus on the music of **Komitas**

### **Armenian ancient and medieval, secular and sacred music**

Seven dances, Msho shoror, Pieces for children and others songs performed by the Gurdjieff Ensemble, authentically arranged by Levon Eskenian for Armenian traditional instruments.

### ***The Ensemble***

One of the leading Ensemble's of the world specialized in ancient and medieval music from the East, the Gurdjieff Ensemble was founded by the Armenian musician Levon Eskenian in 2008 to bring the music of the Armenian philosopher, author and composer Georges I. Gurdjieff back to its ethnic inspirational sources. Their debut album on ECM, Music of G.I. Gurdjieff, was widely acclaimed, and won an Edison Award as Album of the Year in 2012. Now Eskenian and his musicians turn their attention to the music of Komitas Vardapet (1869-1935). Composer, ethnomusicologist, arranger, singer and priest, Komitas is popularly held to be the founder of contemporary music in Armenia, and in his work as a collector he explored the connections that uniquely bind together Armenian sacred and secular music. With Eskenian's special focus on folk instrumentation and inspired arrangements the Ensemble illuminates the deep roots of Komitas's compositions in this programme.

The ensemble consists of some of Armenia's leading traditional music practitioners playing duduk, blul, saz, tar, kamancha, oud, kanon, santur, dap, tembouk , dhol, pku, zurna, kshots and burvar.

## The Gurdjieff Folk Instruments Ensemble Levon Eskenian



ECM

Music of Georges I. Gurdjieff

### *Concerts*

In 2011, ECM released the Gurdjieff Ensemble's recording "Music of Georges I. Gurdjieff" to international acclaim and prestigious awards. Since the ECM release, the Gurdjieff Ensemble has presented concerts throughout Europe and Asia, Australia and South America including performances at many prestigious festivals such as the Holland Festival in the Netherlands, the Wege Durch Das Land, Lux Aeterna, Rudolstadt and Morgenland festivals in Germany; the Imago Dei in Austria; the Stansern Musiktage in Switzerland; the Fiestival in Belgium; the Nostalgia Festival in Poland and many concerts at famous venues such as the Frari Church in Venice, the Pushkin State Museum in Moscow, the Albert hall in Australia, the muziekgebouw in the Netherlands, the Sala Radio in Bucharest, the Gulbenkian hall in Lisbon, the Sala Sao Paulo in Brazil and others.

These concerts have vividly demonstrated the ensemble's appeal to varied audiences from classical to folk to jazz to world music.





## ***Music of Georges I. Gurdjieff***

Gurdjieff, who was born in Armenia in the late 19th century, created the approach of the Harmonious Development of Man in the course of his journeys throughout the world in search of truth. His extraordinary musical repertoire was based on the music he heard while traveling in Armenia, the Caucasus, the Middle East and many parts of the Central Asia, India and North Africa, where he witnessed a myriad of folk and spiritual music, rituals and dance traditions.

Gurdjieff's music consists of some 300 pieces and fragments for the piano he composed in the 1920's by dictating them orally to his pupil, the Russian composer and pianist Thomas de Hartmann. To date, Gurdjieff's compositions have been studied in the West, largely via the piano transcriptions of Thomas de Hartmann. With The Gurdjieff Ensemble, Armenian musician Levon Eskenian goes beyond the printed notes to look at the musical traditions that Gurdjieff encountered during his travels.

The pieces that Eskenian has collected have their roots in Armenian, Arabic, Greek, Assyrian, Kurdish and Caucasian folk and spiritual music, and the rearrangements were created with an eye towards preserving their authenticity. This revelatory interpretation allows the listener an experience where Gurdjieff emerges close-up and in full colour, as it were from the source, Gurdjieff with the instruments of the East.

Levon Eskenian at Edison Award

### **The Gurdjieff Folk Instruments Ensemble**

Awards and International recognition

January/February 2016

Editor's choice as top 10 albums for the Songlines Magazine (UK)

November 5, 2012

Edison Award Jazz/World 2012 for best world music album, Netherlands

April 17, 2012

Best Folk Music Album 2011 at Armenian National Music Awards, Yerevan, Armenia

January 7 2012

Q2 classic music radio, music album of the week for January 7 2012 (US)

November, 2011

Editor's choice as top of the world for the Songlines Magazine's November/December issue (UK)

September 19 2011

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Classic FM CD of the Week

## INTERNATIONAL PRESS REVIEWS

“the results are mesmerisingly beautiful, as different permutations of these instruments create delicately different textures, together with the occasional addition of the human voice.”**Michael Church**, *Songlines UK*, January /February 2016

"This is a substantial piece of musical archaeology and resuscitation."  
**Simon Broughton**, *Songlines UK*, December 2015

“...the ensemble makes sounds that are startlingly strange and beautiful..”**The Independent (UK)**  
December 2015

“Faszinierend anzuhören ist die nun dokumentierte Rückführung dieser für den Konzertsalon ‘veredelten’ Volksweisen in den ursprünglichen Kontext durch den Komponisten Levon Eskelian, der die ergreifenden Melodien mit Akribie, Einfühlungsvermögen und Sachkenntnis für sein 14-köpfiges Folkensemble restaurierte: Back to the roots!”

**Jürg Sommer**, *Aargauer Zeitung*

“Georges Gurdjieff composed and dictated volumes of piano music. Levon Eskenian’s Gurdjieff Folk Instruments Ensemble reclaims these pieces from the salons of Paris and takes them back to their roots in the Caucasus. [...] they reveal their origins and themselves.”

**David Honigmann**, “*The Financial Times*”

This CD by the Gurdjieff Folk Instruments Ensemble, under their director Levon Eskenian, consists of arrangements of Gurdjieff’s compositions for traditional Armenian instruments. The duduk permeates everything with its mournful grace, with the oud and zar lute, the kanun zither, and the daf frame drum adding their evocative sound. We get religious chants and dances from Georgia, Greece, and Arabia, plus a beautiful Assyrian mourners’ song.

**Michael Church**, “*BBC Music Magazine*”

“A wistful Armenian Song is a hesitation waltz that would fit perfectly on a soundtrack for the Armenian movie that Fellini never made.”

**William Dart**, “*The New Zealand Herald*”



“Gurdjieff’s music was explored by Jarrett on his 1979 ECM album “Sacred Hymns” (which is worth revisiting). Here, though, it is rescued from classicism by Levon Eskenian, who has assembled some of the best Armenian traditional musicians into a flexible ensemble that delivers Gurdjieff’s music... though all have some kinship with vernacular or classical instruments in the West: flutes, harps or zithers, reeds. The effect is strong and strange, and unexpectedly its very physicality and peasant alertness restore something of Gurdjieff’s muscular spirituality. Simply but immaculately recorded, it’s a beautiful set.”

Brian Morton, “The Wire”

“SILLONNER LE CAUCASE MUSIQUE TRADITIONNELLE Duduk, blul, kamancha, santor et oud... Rien qu’à entendre ces noms, on a déjà fait la moitié du voyage: cap sur la musique traditionnelle qui se cueille le long des routes de Grèce et des pays du Caucase. A l’instar de son contemporain Béla Bartók, Georges Gurdjieff s’était inspiré de ces notes vagabondes dans ses compositions. Levon Eskenian fait aujourd’hui le chemin inverse et replace ces œuvres dans leur contexte d’origine. La douzaine de musiciens qu’il rassemble autour de ce projet ne manquent pas d’affinités avec ces mélodies aux titres évocateurs. Ancienne danse grecque, Mélodie du berger kurde, Chant du Sayyid... et l’âme s’évad.”

## LA LIBERTÉ

“Mentre però al pianoforte le musiche di Gurdjieff sono l’apoteosi di un’iterazione estatica e di un esotismo assai posticci, qui accade una sorta di miracolo. Un breve, Levon Eskenian ha riunito un ensemble di eccellenti musicisti armeni e ha arrangiato – o meglio dis-arrangiato – una manciata di melodie di Gurdjieff riportandole nel loro alveo musicale originario e immaginario insieme. Semplice, perfetta, fittizia in quanto mai esistita in quella veste nella mente e nell’esperienza di Gurdjieff, ma solo in quella di Eskenian e dei suoi partner, questa musica emana un fascino straordinario. Forse proprio perché è finta, cioè reinventata, come tutta la grande arte.”

Giordano Montecchi, L’Unità

“Die Wüstenei der Stille wird immer wieder durch winzige Klanginterventionen durchbrochen, was typisch für Gurdjieffs Werke ist. Im Herzen seiner Musik liegt ein tiefes Schweigen, das an den Prediger Salomon aus der Bibel erinnert oder an die Wahrheit, die aus der Stille eines weit entfernten Ortes zu uns herüberweht, einer Stille, über die sich noch kein Schatten gelegt hat und die in ihrer Intensität dieses Schweigen makellos erscheinen lässt.”

KlassikAkzente

“Man hört berückende, sehnsuchtsvolle, tief beseelte Klänge, die auf musikalische Rituale des täglichen Lebens zurückgehen, auf Kirchen-, Liebes- und Tanzlieder, Hirtenmelodien und rituelle Musik. Das ist wie eine akustische Brücke über die Jahrhunderte und ein Toleranzprogramm der Weltgegenden. Das ist wie eine Ankunft zurück daheim, die erst durch die Erfahrungen des Unterwegsseins beglaubigt und in eine neue Qualität überführt wurde - so wie auch die romanhafte Biografie ihres Sammlers und Fusionierers Georges I. Gurdjieff.”

Ulrich steinmetzger, OTZ

“Es ist Musik, die stark von bestimmten Instrumenten geprägt und mit deren Ursprungsland verknüpft ist.”

Südwind

“Mystical, moody and spacious, the mix of strings, reeds and hands takes you on a trip to the Byzantine Empire.”

JazzWeekly

“La idea es fascinante y como tal a lo mejor no es nada más que otro falso apaño pero la verdad es que esta nueva visión puede y engancha.”

Distrito Jazz

“In a way, Music of George I. Gurdjieff is more than just music inspired by a certain figure from the past; it is a wonderful introduction to the music of the Armenian region, as well as another entry into the world of Gurdjieff. It opens up the doors to a rich musical world in its full glory and serves as a wonderful document awaiting discovery.”

All About Jazz

“You can hear the album as a musical document of Gurdjieff’s many travels. It is also an alluring and often moving window into the world of a remarkable man who sought a better understanding of life through a combination of ancient religions, self-awareness and especially music.”

Tom Huizenga, NPR National Public Radio (US)

“A prominent Armenian musician is shedding lovely new light on music hitherto heard on the piano. It is much more eloquently rendered by Levon Eskenian’s Gurdjieff Folk Instruments Ensemble.”

Doug Spencer, ABC Radio National, The Weekend Planet

“While such a large number of brief compositions outside of a variations or symphonic set can seem jarring, there’s a fluid line running through these deceptively modest works. Eskenian and his ensemble proceed with vinyasa-like flow, indulging in spontaneous yet organic movement while full of curiosity and wonder. The music is at once unadorned yet lush in an extrinsically baroque manner. Moods shift drastically and imperceptibly, the plaintive dourness of Assyrian Women Mourners sounding not too far off from the vibrant Caucasian Dance. And therein lies the appeal: Like Gurdjieff’s own philosophies, his music does not demand that its interpreters abandon any attempt to control the body, emotions or intellect of the work. Rather, they incorporate all of these elements with their own artistic alignments to present a complete, contradictory, and at times even enlightening package.”

Q2 music - WQXR

“De muziek van de Armeense goeroe Gurdjieff (1866-1949) is vooral bekend geworden door de transcripties voor piano, gemaakt door zijn leerling Thomas de Hartmann. Met het speciaal voor dit project opgerichte Gurdjieff Folk Instruments Ensemble laat Levon Eskenian Gurdjieffs composities terugkeren naar hun vaderland in de Kaukasus. Je zou denken dat al die variatie afbreuk doet aan de verstilling die zo kenmerkend is voor Gurdjieffs muziek, maar niets is minder waar.”

Volkskrant

“fabulous collection of Armenian and Middle Eastern folk music with a fascinating story behind it”. Furthermore he writes: “The tunes were composed by Georges Gurdjieff, best known as a mys-

tic philosopher and author of *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, turned into a film by Peter Brook. But Gurdjieff was also a composer who dictated his music to his pupil Thomas de Hartmann (presumably because he was unable to notate it himself). Gurdjieff was born in Armenia, but travelled widely in the Middle East and became fascinated with the traditional music he heard. In 1920 he was in Istanbul, living close to the Mevlevi meeting place in Galata and 'Sayyid Chant and Dance No 29' on this disc is very reminiscent of the Whirling Dervish music he would have heard there. So this CD is a something like what Muzsiás did on their Bartók Album, using his compositions to recreate the sort of music he would have heard and collected. It's been arranged by Levon Eskenian for his Yerevan-based group called The Gurdjieff Folk Instruments Ensemble including plaintive duduks (Armenian oboes), oud (lute), tar (lute), kamancheh (fiddle), kanun (zither), blul (flute) and tombak (drum). A lot of the music comes from Gurdjieff's native Armenia, notably the opening 'Chant from a Holy Book', a plangent, spiritual duduk tune and a gorgeous Armenian song. Another track named 'Assyrian Women Mourners' is arranged for four duduks and frame drum, confirming what Djivan Gasparyan once told me about duduks being used for funerals in Armenia. Two of the most delightful tracks are enigmatically called 'No.11' and 'No.40, arrangements from a collection called 'Asian Songs & Rhythms', and have a spontaneous, improvisatory quality, while 'Caucasian Dance' has all the verve of the mountain music of Georgia and Armenia. A remarkable work."

### Simon Broughton, *Songlines*

For one, there is just the pure enjoyment of hearing many of these ancient, soothing hymns, chants, and songs played as they were meant to be played. There is a "world music" element to this, but not in the pretentious manner that term often connotes. Rather, the pieces are heard in a much more organic way....the music recorded by the Gurdjieff Folk Instruments Ensemble is fascinating, and a great introduction to one of the true Renaissance men of the early twentieth century.

### Greg Babrick, *B C Music*

"The significance lies precisely in its re-invention of what we understand this music to be. Returning this music to its roots required considerable ingenuity in terms of both arrangement and appropriate instrumental interpretation. Mr. Eskenian and his artists with a doubt labored long and hard to produce a well-crafted work of integrity and value, yet they manage to make the result sound relaxed, informal, and effortless."

### Lee Van Laer, *Zen, Yoga, Gurdjieff-Perspectives on inner work*







For more information please visit:

[www.gurdjieffensemble.com](http://www.gurdjieffensemble.com)

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