



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 Rit-uale 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, Mitteldeutsche 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”**

“The undisputed star of the ensemble, though, is the duduk, a reed instrument with a malleable sound that can be porous and fragile or full-throated and uncannily human-sounding. In his transcriptions Mr. Eskenian uses it for mystical chants”

- **New York Times**

Concerts Highlights



Edison Award-Winning, ECM Records' recording artists who comprise The Gurdjieff Ensemble have successfully collaborated with many prestigious festivals and concert venues, touring in nearly 150 cities in 26 countries in Europe, Australia, Russia, the Middle East, North, and South America, among which are sold-out performances at the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, the Boulez hall, the Holland Festival, the Bozar Center in Brussels, the Tonhalle in St.Gallen, Switzerland, the Gulbenkian hall in Lisbon, the Sala São Paulo in Brazil and numerous 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 Stanser Musiktage in Switzerland, the Mustonen Festival in Estonia, the Budapest Spring festival in Hungary, the Etnokrakow and Nostalgia Festivals in Poland, the Chicago World music festival in USA and many more.



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

Projects

Music of Georges I. Gurdjieff

Edison Award-Winning Album

The Gurdjieff Folk Instruments Ensemble Levon Eskenian



ECM

Music of Georges I. Gurdjieff

ECM has had a long involvement with internationally renowned Armenian philosopher and composer Gurdjieff's music, starting with Keith Jarrett's recording of the "Sacred Hymns", which brought about an international revival of interest in the music. Gurdjieff, who is considered to be one of the most influential spiritual leaders of the 20th century, created the approach of the Harmonious Development of Man in the course of his journeys throughout the world. The extraordinary pieces by Gurdjieff that Eskenian has collected have their roots in **Armenian, Greek, Arabic, Assyrian, Kurdish, Persian and Caucasian** folk and spiritual music, and the rearrangements were created with an eye towards

preserving their authenticity. With this project and internationally acclaimed album "Music of Georges I. Gurdjieff" the ensemble returns the music of Gurdjieff to its inspirational sources.

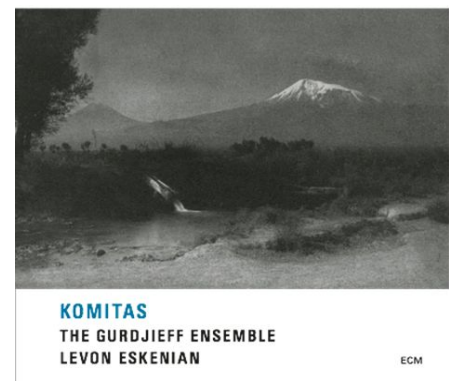
Gurdjieff at Edison Award: [Chant from a holy book](#)

Spotify link: <https://open.spotify.com/album/7xeyAHAqAd3wnSyoxTkL3w>

iMusic link: [Music of Georges I. Gurdjieff Album](#)

Komitas

The Gurdjieff Ensemble performs Komitas's works arranged for authentic traditional instruments. Komitas was a crucially important figure in Armenian music history, who collected thousands of Armenian folk and sacred songs from places where Armenian people were annihilated years after during the Armenian Genocide, some of which date back to the 5th century and more. Komitas explored how Armenian *sacred and secular* traditions have influenced each other and established a frame of reference within which new music could be created. The Music of Komitas had a huge impact on many great musicians including *Debussy*.



KOMITAS

THE GURDJIEFF ENSEMBLE
LEVON ESKENIAN

ECM

Some video excerpts: [Komitas at Muziekgebouw](#), [Komitas- Manushaki at Morgenland Festival](#)

Spotify link: <https://open.spotify.com/album/3aNJr3R27FNKZGp5X3HnI6>

iMusic link: [Komitas Album](#)

Syrian - Armenian Project

This project is inspired by the historical and current relationship between Syria and Armenia built upon supporting each other in times of distress and emigration. Pieces have been commissioned by both Syrian and Armenian composers, including the famous Armenian composer Tigran Mansurian with "Tun Ari" (Come Home) written for this project, the Grammy Award winning Syrian composer Kinan Azmeh and more. The Syrian Hewar Ensemble and The Armenian Gurdjieff Ensemble aim to blur the lines between the improvised and composed, the traditional and contemporary music in their spontaneous "dialogue" on stage.

An excerpt of the project: [Tamzara at Elbphilharmonie](#)

Bela Bartok and Komitas Project

Both composers were among the first ethnomusicologists. Several compositions of B.Bartok collected from Anatolia will be premiered by the Gurdjieff Ensemble in Budapest and together with the project Komitas or Music of Georges I.Gurdjieff will be performed by the Gurdjieff Ensemble starting from 2020.

Contemporary Classical Music Project

Starting from 2021 the ensemble will perform new works by major European modern composers commissioned for the Gurdjieff Ensemble and classical instruments or choir.

Awards and International recognition

2016, January/ February - Editor's choice as top 10 albums for the Songlines Magazine (UK)
2012, November 5th - Edison Award Jazz/World 2012 for best world music album, Netherlands
2012, April 17th - Best Folk Music Album 2011 at Armenian National Music Awards
2012, January 7th - Q2 classic music radio, music album of the week for January 7 2012 (US)
2011, November/ December - Editor's choice as top of the world for the Songlines (UK)
2011, September 19th - Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Classic FM CD of the Week

The Gurdjieff Ensemble



The Gurdjieff Ensemble is one of the leading Ensembles of the world specializing in ancient and medieval music from the East, combining some of Armenia's leading traditional music practitioners playing duduk, blul, saz, tar, kamancha, oud, kanon, santur, dap, tmbuk, dhol, pku, zurna, kshots and burvar. Being founded by Armenian musician Levon Eskenian in 2008, The Gurdjieff Ensemble brings the piano music of the Armenian philosopher, author and composer Georges I. Gurdjieff back to its

ethnic inspirational sources. The Gurdjieff Ensemble now turns attention to the music of Armenian composer, ethnomusicologist, arranger, singer and priest Komitas. With Eskenian's special focus on folk instrumentation and inspired arrangements the Ensemble illuminates the deep roots of Komitas's compositions. The Gurdjieff ensemble now expands its repertoire with premieres of works collected by Bela Bartok and major European modern composers works commissioned for the Gurdjieff Ensemble and classical instruments or choir.

Instruments

Duduk, Pku, Zurna - Emmanuel Hovhannisyan

Kamancha - Armen Ayvazyan

Pogh, Zurna - Avag Margaryan

Oud - Aram Nikoghosyan

Tar - Davit Avagyan

Dap, Dhol - Mesrop Khalatyan

Santur, Voice - Vladimir Papikyan

Kanon - Meri Vardanyan

Duduk, Bass Duduk - Norayr Gapoyan

Tmbuk, Cymbal, Kshots, Burvar, Bell - Eduard Harutyunyan

Levon Eskenian

Artistic Director of The Gurdjieff Ensemble

The Armenian musician Levon Eskenian was born in Lebanon in 1978. In 1996 he moved to Armenia where he currently lives. In 2005 he graduated from the Yerevan Komitas State Conservatory where he obtained a Master's degree studying the piano with Professor Robert Shugarov. In 2007 he took his Postgraduate degree in the class of Professor Willy Sargsyan. He has also studied composition, organ and improvisation classes at the Conservatory and harpsichord in Austria and Italy with the English organist and harpsichordist Christopher Stenbridge. One of the most active figures in Armenia's musical life, a director of various ensembles and artistic institutions, Eskenian has performed both as a soloist and chamber musician with a program ranging from early baroque to contemporary music in Europe, Middle East, Asia, South America, and Australia.



Eskenian has organized numerous concerts, lectures, masterclasses and festivals in Armenia. He is the founder of the Akna Cultural Society to organize studies and promote rarely performed repertoire ranging from ancient, early baroque to contemporary music. In 2008, gathering leading musicians playing Armenian and Middle Eastern authentic instruments Eskenian founded the Gurdjieff Ensemble to play his arrangements of the G.I. Gurdjieff/Thomas de Hartmann piano music. The debut album on ECM records, Music of G.I. Gurdjieff was widely acclaimed

and won prestigious awards including the Edison Award as Album of the Year in 2012. Now Eskenian has turned his attention to Komitas, arranging for authentic instruments, which was released on ECM Records in autumn 2015. Eskenian and The Gurdjieff Ensemble are continuing the yearly tours around the world.

Georges I. Gurdjieff

Gurdjieff, 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 the truth. His extraordinary musical repertoire was based on the music he heard while traveling in Armenia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, 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 300 pieces and fragments for the piano he composed in the 1920s by dictating them orally to his student, the Russian composer, and pianist Thomas de Hartmann. Till now, Gurdjieff's compositions have been studied in the West, largely via the piano transcriptions of Thomas de Hartmann.



Along with The Gurdjieff Ensemble, 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 to preserve their authenticity. This revelatory interpretation allows the listeners to experience where Gurdjieff emerges close-up and in full colors with the instruments of the East.

Komitas



One name in particular features prominently in Armenian music history: Komitas Vardapet. Komitas (Soghomon Soghomonian) was not only a composer but also a priest and a leading ethnomusicologist, choral conductor, and teacher who is considered to be the father of modern Armenian classical music (Komitas is a religious name, Vardapet refers to a clerical rank and title in the Eastern Catholic and Orthodox churches). A respected and active figure also in Western Europe, he was deported and witnessed during the

Armenian Genocide in 1915: a trauma he was unable to overcome for the rest of his life. He spent his last 15 years in a mental hospital in Paris. Around the turn of the century, Komitas traveled across Armenia collecting folk music and dances as they were performed in the villages: work songs, love songs, and wedding songs, but also songs about the painful experience of displacement that his people were subjected to again and again. Many of the melodies, which had been passed on orally for centuries, were first transcribed by Komitas. Some of these songs and dances he transformed into extensive piano and vocal-piano works.

Komitas was committed to keeping the original character and sound of the dances alive: his scores include precise instructions to the performer about how to imitate the traditional instruments on the piano. In the composer's spirit, Levon Eskenian and the Gurdjieff Ensemble bring this original sound and world back to life.

Press Reviews

"The results are mesmerizingly beautiful, as different permutations of these instruments create delicately different textures, together with the occasional addition of the human voice."

- **Michael Church, Songlines UK**

"This is a substantial piece of musical archaeology and resuscitation."

- **Simon Broughton, Songlines UK**

"...the ensemble makes sounds that are startlingly strange and beautiful.."

- **The Independent UK**

"Faszinierend anzuhören ist die nun dokumentierte Rückführung dieser für den Konzertsalon 'veredelten' Volksweisen in den ursprünglichen Kontext durch den Komponisten Levon Eskenian, der die ergreifenden Melodien mit Akribie, Einfühlungsvermögen und Sachkenntnis für sein 14-köpfiges Folk ensemble 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'évade.”

- **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'Unita**

“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 an-other 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 allur-ing and often moving window into the world of a remarkable man who sought a better under-standing of life through a combination of ancient religions, self-awareness and especially mu-sic.”

- **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 incor-porate all of these elements with their own artistic alignments to present a complete, contradicto-ry, 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 af-brek doet aan de verstillung 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”. “The tunes were composed by Georges Gurdjieff, best known as a mystic 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 something like what Muzsiás did on their Bartók Album, using his compositions to re-create 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

Contacts:

E-mail: info@gurdjieffensemble.com

Tel:+37493210180