



NATIONAL
CENTRE FOR
CULTURE
POLAND

Gurdjieff Ensemble: *Zartir – Awakening*

9 November (Saturday) — 8.00 pm

All Saints Church
3/5 Grzybowski Square

Works by the extraordinary mystic, spiritual teacher and composer Georges Gurdjieff, as well as songs by the poet and musician Paghtasar Dpir and the most outstanding bards of the Caucasus of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – Sayat-Nova and Jivani – performed by the Gurdjieff Ensemble from Armenia. The ensemble will play traditional Armenian (duduk, pku, blul) and Middle Eastern instruments (kanun, tar, kamancha, oud, tombak, dap). An extraordinary musical journey along the Transcaucasian Trail and into oneself, in search of an awakening (*Zartir*) to a higher state of consciousness.

Concert programme

Material from the album *Zartir*
(2023)

Performers:

Gurdjieff Ensemble:

Leon Eskenian
artistic director, arranger

Norayr Gapoyan
duduk, bass duduk

Gagik Hakobyan
duduk, pkou

Armen Ayvazyan
kamancha, voice

Avag Margaryan
pogh, zurna

Aramayis Nikoghosyan
oud, voice

Davit Avagyan
tar, voice

Mesrop Khalatyan
dap, dhol

Vladimir Papikyan
voice, santur

Meri Vardanyan
kanun

Gurdjieff Ensemble: *Zartir – Awakening*

The Gurdjieff Ensemble was established in 2008 and brings together leading Armenian musicians playing traditional Armenian and Middle Eastern instruments. The ensemble was founded by Levon Eskenian, an Armenian musician born in 1978 in Lebanon and living in Armenia since 1996. Eskenian is a man of many talents. First of all, he is a pianist, organist and harpsichordist, performing music from different eras as a soloist and chamber musician – from the early Baroque to the present day. He is also a composer, improviser and arranger, arranging piano music for Armenian and Middle Eastern traditional instruments. What is more, he is an organiser of musical life – initiator and artistic director of several ensembles as well as founder of the ‘Akna’ Cultural Association, which focuses on the research and promotion of rarely performed repertoire. One can say that the Gurdjieff Ensemble is at the intersection of the experiences and activities of its founder and director.

However, in order to understand the idiosyncrasies of this ensemble and the programme presented during the concert, one should take a closer look at its spiritual patron, whose name is included in the name of the group.



Georges Gurdjieff

☐ author unknown

Georges Ivanovich Gurdjieff (ca. 1866–1949) was an Armenian philosopher, mystic, spiritual teacher, composer and dance teacher. In the early years of his adult life, he made numerous trips, including to Central Asia, Egypt, Iran, India and Tibet. During his encounters with fakirs, yogis and monks, he developed a method that one of his students, Pyotr Demianovich Ouspensky, referred to as the ‘Fourth Way’, adapted to

the needs of modern people. This method, called by Gurdjieff ‘The Work’, understood as working on oneself, aimed at the balanced development of emotions, body and mind. This work was supposed to result in an awakening to a higher state of consciousness (by fully integrating the human being) and thus in breaking out of the state of hypnotic ‘waking sleep’ in which – according to Gurdjieff – ordinary people remain, deprived of self-awareness. The awakening was to allow the use of hidden potential, rarely manifested.

This is the awakening – although not only – that the title of the discussed concert refers to. But it is worth remembering that the patron of the Gurdjieff Ensemble had a much greater influence on the music they perform, not only ideological. The ensemble primarily performs arrangements of piano music written jointly by Gurdjieff and his spiritual student, the pianist and composer Thomas de Hartmann, and the debut album of the ensemble entitled *Music of Georges I. Gurdjieff* was awarded the 2012 Edison Award. These works, amounting to about two hundred, come primarily from the middle and late period of Gurdjieff’s activity; they were inspired by what he had heard during his visits to distant shrines, monasteries and other places during his travels. In this output,

we can therefore see influences of Caucasian and Central Asian folk and religious music or Orthodox liturgical music. It is worth noting here that many of these compositions were created during Gurdjieff’s marriage (1912–1926) to a Pole, Julia Ostrowska, and she was often the first to listen to his pieces.

Nevertheless, the Gurdjieff Ensemble also performs other music. An important place in their repertoire is occupied by works by Komitas (actual name Soghomon Soghomonian, 1869–1935), a monk, musicologist, ethnographer, choirmaster and composer, considered a forerunner of modern Armenian music. This artist’s compositions are featured on the ensemble’s second album. In addition, the group presents sounds from the Middle East, ancient and medieval Armenian religious music, songs by bards of the Caucasus, Armenian folk pieces and compositions by Béla Bartók and other contemporary composers.

The concert programme is set in the repertoire coming from the third album by the Gurdjieff Ensemble, entitled *Zartir (Awakening)*. As already mentioned, this awakening refers to Gurdjieff’s concept, but also to the title of a song by an Armenian poet and musician from the seventeenth century, Paghtasar Dpir, in which it means ‘waking up from a royal dream’. Therefore, although the programme includes a number of Gurdjieff’s works composed to hymns, prayers and ‘sacred dances’ (‘Gurdjieff’s moves’), songs by Dpir and two of the most outstanding Armenian ashughs, that is bards, also play an important role. The former was a musician and poet of King Heraclius II of Georgia, Sayat-Nova (actual name Harutyun Sayatyan, eighteenth century), who was expelled from the court due to an affair with the king’s sister. His oeuvre, which greatly influenced many later artists of the Caucasus, is dominated by secular works, abounding in romantic expression and philosophical issues. The second bard included in the programme is Jivani (actual name Serob Stepani Levonian, nineteenth century). He was one of the most famous authors of the Caucasus, creating in a romantic style, marked by irony or realism. The subject of his work was mankind, their mental states and social problems.

Compositions by the aforementioned bards were arranged by Eskenian for instruments typical of Armenia: subtle double-reed duduk (also in the bass version), sharp-sounding pku clarinet and blul flute. Among the instruments used in a greater geographical area, one should mention the kanun zither, the long-necked tar lute, the long-necked string kamancha lute, the short-necked oud lute, the tombak goblet drum, the dap hoop drum, as well as cymbal, bells and triangle.



Jivani

☐ Grigory Ter-Ghevondyan

Tomasz Nowak



Gurdjieff Ensemble

The internationally acclaimed Gurdjieff Ensemble, led by its founder Levon Eskenian and comprised of Armenia's leading musicians performing traditional Armenian instruments, has recently released their highly anticipated third album, *Zartir*, on the prestigious German label ECM Records. This album reimagines the Armenian philosopher, musician and choreographer G.I. Gurdjieff's music with folk instrumentation and delves

into the rich tradition of Armenian ashughs and poets, featuring songs by Jivani, Paghtasar Dpir, and the legendary Sayat-Nova. Their illustrious history includes celebrated albums *Music of Georges I. Gurdjieff* and *Komitas* on ECM Records, earning prestigious awards such as the Edison Award in the Netherlands. With a remarkable track record of performances in nearly one hundred and fifty cities across thirty countries

and consistently sold-out concerts at major venues and festivals worldwide, the Armenian Gurdjieff Ensemble transcends boundaries, seamlessly connecting ancient and contemporary traditions from East and West through the soulful essence of Armenian music. *The New York Times* lauds their music as 'powerfully hypnotic', delivering a culturally specific and vivid musical experience.

