

# Newsletter

## Fall 2019



### **Hayk Melikyan US Tour for SOAR**

By Nune Sargsyan - SOAR Cincinnati



If you live in Ventura County, Chicago, Boston, or Philadelphia, you are up for a treat! And if you don't live in those cities, pack your bags to hear Haik Melikyan play! Hayk is recognized internationally as one of the most versatile and imaginative performers of the 20th century and among today's most engaging virtuoso pianists by classical music audiences and critics. As a composer, Hayk is an author of piano solo, chamber, instrumental, vocal and symphonic works. His piano transcriptions, concert paraphrases, and arrangements are among the favorites in the repertoires of pianists worldwide. Haik is known for initiating and

spearheading the 1900+ project, a World Piano Music Concerts Series of the 20th Century and Contemporary Music that presents the diverse culture of different nations through 20th century contemporary music. The project launched in 2009 and has presented dozens of premieres for the Armenian audience. The second objective of 1900+ is to propagate the new music in Armenia and raise awareness of Armenian society in the world of classical music.

Here is what one of the leading contemporary composers of Armenia, Tigran Mansourian, had to say about Haik Melikyan: "You say a festive feeling of existence or a sheer joy of living...I think that the above mentioned feelings and similar luxuries are deeply possessed by Haik Melikyan at the moments whenever he plays piano..."

***Listen as Haik performs Chopin's Waltzes op.69, N1 & op.64, N1:***

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChCOO\\_SH\\_oY&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChCOO_SH_oY&feature=youtu.be)

***Proceeds from the recitals will fund an Institution-wide Christmas party in Armenia that SOAR hosts annually.***

The following are the dates Haik will be performing in the US:

- 12/6/19 - Ventura County
- 12/13/19 - Chicago
- 12/14/19 - Boston
- 12/15/19 - Philadelphia

To purchase tickets visit the SOAR website at [www.soar-us.org](http://www.soar-us.org) and visit the event page of the chapter of the city you would like to attend.

## SOAR 15 - Year Anniversary Gala - Crimson and Crystal Carousal

### SOAR will be celebrating 15 years in 2020!

The Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR) was founded in the fall of 2005. Represented by 142 Chapters, 6 Junior groups, and more than 600 volunteers worldwide, SOAR supports 44 institutions – orphanages, special boarding schools, day centers, and orphan summer camps – in Armenia, Artsakh, Javakh, Istanbul, Lebanon, and Syria. On Thursday, March 26, 2020, SOAR will bring together staff and Chapter volunteers in Philadelphia to hold annual meetings and trainings. The weekend concludes on Saturday, March 28, 2020, with a gala at the Springfield Country Club in Springfield, PA.



*Fifteen Year Anniversary Gala*

SOCIETY FOR ORPHANED ARMENIAN RELIEF (SOAR)

*"Crimson and Crystal Carousal"*

SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 2020  
6:00 P.M. TO 11:00 P.M.

SPRINGFIELD COUNTRY CLUB  
400 W. SPROUL RD., SPRINGFIELD, PA 19064

### SOAR Transitional Center



SOAR's Transitional Center will be the first of its kind in Gyumri – a residential setting for older teenage girls who have outgrown the traditional orphanage but who are not yet ready for independent living. At our new Center, these young women will go to college; cultivate a business; be enriched by our academic programs; appreciate volunteerism; learn essential life skills, including home and money management; build self-nurturance and self-confidence; and prepare themselves for emotional, fiscal, and professional independence.

The home has been purchased, but there is still a lot of work to be done! Repairs to the home, furnishings, supplies, and everything else needed to outfit a new home. Our campaign is under way to help with these expenses. SOAR staff and volunteers have daily routines that involve a compulsive desire to assist the abandoned, the sick, the impoverished, and the abused. As SOAR's light shines, we hope that we are unconsciously giving our orphaned population the will to do the same. If you would like to help SOAR in our endeavor and be a part of this light, you can make a donation to the Transitional Center at: <https://wwwsoarusorg.reachapp.co/campaigns/soar-transitional-center>

SOAR strives to provide orphaned Armenians throughout the world with resources fundamental to their physical, emotional, and intellectual development. Over time, we aim to provide this underprivileged population with the tools necessary to become accomplished, educated, and self-supporting Armenians. Our goal in Armenia is also to assist families and their children in the state and privately run facilities.

***We look forward to our first graduating class!***

## Meet Hripsime Muradyan, SOAR's Executive Director in Armenia

Interview by Nune Sargsyan - SOAR Cincinnati

Q. **How did you come to know about SOAR and its work?**

A. In 2007 I started volunteering and then became employed as Coordinator for external relations at a state run Gyumri Child Care Center (GCCC). Children from around the Gyumri province who are at serious risk for institutionalization are served at the Center. There I was responsible for external relations and happened to contact George Yacoubian to introduce the GCCC to him. We worked together to help families of children at GCCC – many of the families of the Center are vulnerable (single mothers, guardians and caretakers of children). Soon I started volunteering for SOAR and became its full time employee in 2015. Since then, SOAR Armenian office has been registered in Armenia, established its own charter, and currently has 9 paid employees (4 of which are part time).



Q. **Please describe the operations of the Armenian office.**

A. Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR) strives to provide orphaned Armenians throughout the world with resources fundamental to their physical, emotional, and intellectual development. Over time, we aim to provide this underprivileged population with the tools necessary to become accomplished, educated, and self-supporting Armenians.

Our goal in Armenia is also to assist families and their children in the state and privately run facilities. Our work occurs in 4 various fields:

1. **Night care facilities.** They are similar to boarding schools. We help with study materials, clothes, hygiene products. We also help with tuition coverage for those students who want to continue their education at universities or vocational schools. We also do renovations and construction to make the conditions better for the kids, provide beds, mattresses and other relevant items.
  2. **Residential care facilities.** These are designated for children with special needs and severe disabilities. Diapers are one of the main provisions we help these institutions with. We also help with education through various "suites:" pottery making, hypotherapy (horse therapy), shoe making, and green houses. For hypotherapy suite we built an arena and are providing a specialist who works with children as they take advantage of socializing with and riding horses. Students who succeed in making pottery are able to sell their work and that helps financially as well. Typically, residential facilities are for children 0-6 years and older and they live in those facilities until the age of 18. We help children with surgeries by mainly providing important medical supplies (shunts, lens) which are not available through state. We also help with heart surgeries and surgeries to relieve severe scoliosis.
  3. **Group homes.** Children with mental/psychological disabilities live here. They are not able to work and study. Examples are Warm Hearth group home and Prkutyun (Salvation) day care.
  4. **Transitional facilities.** Mer Doon (Our Home) and Mer Houys (Our Hope) Centers help orphaned and disadvantaged young girls in Armenia break the cycle of dependency by providing education, job and vocational training, and a loving home environment. (<https://www.mer-doon.com/>)
- Additionally, I am personally so very proud of the **I CAN** Festival project; we organized our first one in 2018. This is a sports related project similar to the Special Olympics, and we plan to hold it every three years. It was an amazing partnership of so many organizations, well known sport federations, who were united by one goal: bring joy of sports and sports competitiveness to children with disabilities and make it as inclusive as possible.



**I CAN** was held at the sports complex in Tsakhkadzor, and 150 children competed in boccia (developed for people suffering from cerebral palsy, boccia is a sport that requires accuracy, muscle control, and high amount of focus and concentration), canoeing, football, basketball and tennis among others. In the spirit of inclusiveness, the girls from Mer Doon and Mer Houys group house and Orran Vanadzor center performed at the closing ceremony. Children and youth who never thought they would be able to participate in any competition, were overjoyed by being able to take part. It mattered to them, and consequently mattered to us!

We started 2019 with a Christmas celebration for the children. 500 children were brought together on Christmas day at a handicap accessible restaurant. We had cake, presents, and we also got to take children to a reception by the President of Armenia, Armen Sarkisian.

Summer is here, and that means that children who do not get to take summer vacations, are enjoying Summer retreats. They spend five days in nature, make art, learn about ecology. As you noticed, we are all about inclusion and mixing where possible. We bring together 2 groups of girls – younger and older than 18 and let them spend time together to learn from each other. Additionally, when and where possible, we mix children with light developmental disabilities with children without disabilities. This year culture is big at our Summer retreat – we travelled to Tbilisi, Georgia, to learn about another culture, food, and art.

All institutions which we support are equipped with computer labs. Children can learn languages, basic accounting, business planning foundations, computer science, and even learn about other cultures via Skype.

**Q. *What keeps you doing what you do?***

A. Work has become a lifestyle. And seeing the change we make makes big difference. I am so very honored to be able to impact lives and bring change. Genuine gratitude from program participants and families and the fact that they share with me their achievements, truly makes me feel grateful that I can serve. Here is an example: There was a call for help from Vanadzor orphanage graduates who had been provided with an apartment, and the apartment was on the verge of breaking down physically. Two girls, Anna and Tatevik, lived there and were at the danger of ending up in the streets. As soon as we found out about their case, we rented out another apartment for them, furnished, and helped them finish their education. Anna studied English and was also trained as a nail beautician.

Tatevik was very good at sewing, and we helped her get trained in that. I am happy to tell you that today Anna lives in China and teaches English to Chinese kids. The best part? She says that when she has means, she will sponsor a child! Tatevik married and has her own children, and is a very popular tailor with lots of clients and orders in Gyumri. They keep me posted about their lives and achievements. ***I am happy to be part of SOAR since no other organization in Armenia has such significant impact on the lives of children.***

**Q. *What are strengths and weaknesses of the orphanage system in Armenia?***

A. I have to give credit to Armenian government for providing roof, food, education, workforce, healthcare (doctors and nurses) for children with disabilities in the orphanages. However, the government is reluctant to divert those resources directly to families so that families can have resources to take care of their children. Our society has a long way to go towards real inclusiveness; only in 2019 public schools are officially becoming all inclusive (including children with disabilities). There is reluctance on macro level to answer the question: "what is the root cause of a child ending up at the orphanage?" There is no communication between educational, healthcare, social supports systems to answer this main question.