

Artist Arshile Gorky (1904-1948), a survivor of the Armenian Genocide, kept with him during his lifetime, a single surviving photograph of the artist with his mother (Shushan, who died of starvation in Arshile's presence in 1919). Perhaps more precious because of its singularity, a single photograph can capture the zen of a moment in time and leave us longing for memories surrounding that instant for generations.

As Long As Thy Grief Lives (2014), my new work for mezzo soprano, duduk (doubling bass duduk), cello and piano, moves through a triptych of poems by Armenian poet Daniel Varoujan (1884-1915). *The Longing Letter*, *Alms (to the Starving People)*, and *Midday* are excerpted, respectively, as an almost-postcard. In writing this work, I tried to capture an excerpt from each poem just as one might have the opportunity to view a single photograph from a given year, decade or century of a life or a life shared—without access to a whole collection of photographs or memories shared. It is in this capacity of loss and longing that I chose to take a snapshot from each of these three poems by Daniel Varoujan (born 1884 and murdered in 1915 during the Armenian Genocide) to set to music.

The voice of the poet's mother from *The Longing Letter* opens the work and the title, *As Long As Thy Grief Lives*, is a line of text from *Alms* and represents the poetry of the fact that anyone who has suffered a great loss, which is most of the world, carries a piece of that grief—no matter how grief is later processed—for the rest of their lives. In my world, music speaks without a literal setting of text yet the poet's personal voice carries movies the inspirational energy of the work.

In writing *ALATGL*, I also found myself returning to Henryk Gorecki's *Symphony of Sorrowful Psalms*, a work of another twentieth-century artist who has most-of-touched my personal voice. Its text—laments from a mother and son connected through their mourning which sets a lament written on a *Gestapo* cell wall, remind me of Varoujan. Finally, the extraordinary soprano voice of Lucine Zakaryan (1937-1991) was a guiding light in crafting the melodic contour and energy of these lines of text for *As Long As Thy Grief Lives*. The music has been painted from lines from these three excerpts:

***My arms are weary at the spinning wheel;
I weave my shroud, too, with my hair of snow.
Ah, would mine eyes could see you once
again, then close forever, with my heart below!
Always I sit in sadness at my door,
And tidings ask from every crane that flies.
That willow slip you planted long ago
Has grown till over me its shadow lies.***

from *The Longing Letter* (as the voice of the poet's mother)

Come to-morrow! As bread, from my grave

***I will throw into that bag of thine
My poet's heart.
My poet's heart shall be thy blood, the blood of
thy orphans,
As long as thy grief lives."***

from *Alms (To the Starving People)*

***Forests sleep on the murky sides of the
mountain beneath silver-woven veils.
In the blue, a lonesome,
Milky cloud proceeds***

***Leaving shreds of soft wool at the
summit of the rock.
This is that hour, O, my soul, when
lonesome as a cricket,
you must remain on the heights
of spotless serenity,
drunk with your own song,
as the sun with its light—all alone with its own
light.***

from *Midday*

Setting poetry to music is, for me, an abstraction; a composer can never fully be the original voice of the poet. However, there is a certain freedom—a of exploration that a composer setting their own poetry might not possess. In writing *ALATGL*, these words of Vosdanig Adoian (Arshile Gorky) remained centered in my process: *Abstraction allows man to see with his mind what he cannot physically see with his eyes... Abstract art enables the artist to perceive beyond the tangible, to extract the infinite out of the finite. It is the emancipation of the mind. It is an explosion into unknown areas.*

In March of 2014 I had the opportunity to visit, in connection with a musical project, the monasteries of Geghard, Tatev (exceptional for their resonating sound sanctuaries), St. Echmiadzin cathedral and others. After recording my own voice and others' singing in these domes, I hear these resonating 'instruments' in all that I write. I hope that my new work will leave the listener yearning to read the entirety of each of these three poems to discover their own, more complete meaning. ©Alexandra du Bois