

Critics' Forum

Music

Mosaic: A Celebration of Sound

By Tamar Salibian

It was with great anticipation that over 1,000 audience members braved the chilly weather on January 14 to experience Mosaic: a Celebration of Sound at the Alex Theater in Glendale, California. Presented by the Hamazkayin cultural organization, Mosaic highlighted talent from around the country and was hosted by Voki Kalfayan and Lory Tatoulian.

Dressed as an eccentric immigrant couple, Kalfayan and Tatoulian opened the three-hour program by meandering through the audience, animatedly chatting with people and posing for photographs on stage. The over-the-top antics proved entertaining, if quite predictable. As Kalfayan and Tatoulian told stories of their ventures in the "old country," they managed no less a feat than exhibiting their break dancing skills, while offering everyone sweets and pastries from Tatoulian's massive handbag, which she carried around all evening. Tatoulian was engaging, asking the crowd for the *jezveh* she'd lent to a fictional neighbor before utilizing the length of the stage for her dance sequences, all with a deadpan facial expression. Kalfayan's earnestness proved a good match to Tatoulian's larger-than-life persona, helping the duo present their own take on the ups and downs of immigrant life.

The highlight of the program was an impassioned set by *a capella* trio Zulal. Paying tribute to the village life of an Armenia long gone, Teni Apelian, Yeraz Markarian and Anaïs Tekerian proved the most engaging act of the evening. The trio captivated the audience with playful and informative explanations of the traditional Armenian folk songs in their set. The performance itself was highlighted by intricate, playful arrangements and perfectly choreographed dance steps, all accompanied by the trio's clear and lush voices. Most enjoyable was Zulal's performance of *Ghapama*, which the trio performed with charm, wit and passion.

Also noteworthy was opening act Tallulah Sound Experiment, an ensemble of self-proclaimed "scientists" who cite a wide variety of musicians, from Radiohead to The Red Hot Chili Peppers, as sources of inspiration. Lead singer Soseh Keshishyan's near-perfect pitch, accompanied by the band's eclectic and fiery sound, generated an infectious energy most evident in the group's final piece, LaDaDa.

K'noup, the lead singer of Visa, also managed to impress the audience with the distinct intonation and texture of his voice, going so far as to pepper his lyrics with chants of "I love Glendale!" The energetic performances of percussionist Danny Shamoun and drummer Hiram Rosario helped lend a unity and coherence to the performance of the 8-member group.

Touted as the "concert of the year" in numerous invitations and advertisements, Mosaic promised a night to remember for both Armenians and non-Armenians alike. The evening

generally managed to live up to its billing, creating a veritable “mosaic,” a tapestry of sorts with a number of standout performances. And yet, while each musical act brought an eclectic element to the stage, the thread that tied the various acts together – apart from the fact that they were performed largely by Armenian individuals – was difficult to see. Finding an underlying theme or unifying force for the evening, therefore, proved somewhat elusive. The end-result was an uneven program that failed to provide much insight into its acts or engage the audience beyond the performances’ immediate entertainment value. It would have been wonderful, for instance, to have incorporated more commentary on the different performances, as the members of Zulal did. It would also be interesting to find out how many non-Armenians heard about the event and, more importantly, whether any were actually there on the 14th.

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Tamar Salibian is a filmmaker and writer living in Los Angeles. She has written for AIM magazine. Her latest film, “Beautiful Armenians,” was released in 2006.

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