

"MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS"

Posted on July 16, 2010 by Keghart



Category: [Opinions](#)



By Yeghishe Hajakian, 16 July 2010

When theater lovers leave the theater with teary eyes and render a standing ovation, I call that staging a SUCCESS.

June 26 and 27, 2010 witnessed a play by William Saroyan titled "My Heart's in The Highlands" presented by The Greater New York Tekeyan Cultural Association Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group. The venue was the auditorium of the Dwight Englewood School in Englewood, New Jersey.

By Yeghishe Hajakian, 16 July 2010

When theater lovers leave the theater with teary eyes and render a standing ovation, I call that staging a SUCCESS.

June 26 and 27, 2010 witnessed a play by William Saroyan titled "My Heart's in The Highlands" presented by The Greater New York Tekeyan Cultural Association Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group. The venue was the auditorium of the Dwight Englewood School in Englewood, New Jersey.

This play by Saroyan has been presented many many times all around the world since 1939, especially in Armenia. Saroyan visited Armenia during the 1970's and viewed his work on the stage of the Sundukian Theater staged by the immortal director Vardan Ajemian. And, greatly impressed by the very successful production of his work, he commented to Ajemian "I had written a small story, yet you have turned it into a huge affair."



The Cast of actors

It is the story of little Johnny, the 9 year old son of Ben Alexander, the delusional poet whose works nobody wants to publish. Johnny befriends an old man, Jasper Macgregor, who has escaped from an old age institution. Macgregor thinks of himself as a Shakespearean actor and recites Shakespeare quite often; he also plays the trumpet which fascinates little Johnny who implores him to play again and again. Macgregor feels himself very much at home with Johnny and his father Ben Alexander; needless to mention the fact that they are living a destitute life with almost nothing to eat and are on the verge of being evicted from their home. Macgregor's love of freedom away from the institution and his Shakespearean dream has not missed the attention of the old age home which sends its representative to lure him back to the home only with the excuse that he will play Shakespeare on the stage organized by the old age home.

Macgregor bolts away from the institution during the second act arriving back to Ben Alexander's home happy and yelling that he is not a sick man. He keeps reciting as if he is on the stage. He becomes weaker and succumbs to his death.

The story takes place during the First World War. The havoc that war was causing, the poverty that Johnny was in, the imminent displacement from their home prods Johnny ending the play with the

words "there is definitely something wrong somewhere".

Johnny's role is played by Gor Babakhanian, the 11 year old son of Hovannes Babakhanian, who is the director of this play and who has also portrayed the role of Ben Alexander. As a happy kid he has the knack of convincing people around him to do things his way. He knows how to convince Mr Kossak, the grocery store keeper, to give him food on credit. He steals grapes from the vineyard nearby. He can sing, he can dance and he can talk.

Gor is a natural on the stage. He was born into an artistic family. He truly fascinated the audience and received many curtain calls as the surprise of this presentation.

Karnig Nercessian, who played the role of Jasper Macgregor, the old man, is a veteran actor and he is an original member of the Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group. In his role as Macgregor his portrayal is genuine and authentic. Professionalism is something he always aspires to exude. One theater critic described him as "the superstar of the evening".

Hovannes Babakhanian, as Ben Alexander, comes to us from Armenia. He is trained as an actor and painter. He sings and performs in one-man shows. In this performance he showed his directing abilities which was extremely smooth and flexible. Let the actors speak up their minds: "We felt very much at ease in his presence, he is very open-minded and encouraging constantly."

Harout Chatmajian is the founding member of the Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group, and, as such, he was always on the stage for the last 12 years, acting and directing. This time, with so much experience behind him, he became the general manager of the production making sure all actors did show up for the rehearsals and all stage props were provided and he made his business to see that this staging was truly a success beyond any doubt.

Harout Takvorian was in the role of Mr Kossak, the grocery store keeper. He has been an important actor for the group for many years. He is versatile and his many different roles has made him very lovable and sought- after stage presence.

Lucyn Jamgotchian-Djirdjrian is an actor and director born in Yerevan, Armenia. She is portraying the grand mother of Johnny in this play. Her experience and understanding the role was a big plus in this successful play.

Talar Zokian portrayed Johnny's dead mother who came dancing on the stage, waking up Johnny from his sleep. He called her "Mom". But she disappeared in the dark. She created a very touchy moment. Talar has always been an important factor in the success of the Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group. She has always been available for the group under trying situations.

Sarkis Pilavjian, Alex Chalekian, Shmavon Atamian, Ara Gemjian, Mari Babakhanian, Khachig Sareminassian, Ella and Lia Babakhanyan, all of them were on the stage for a role, no matter how insignificant the role seems to be, but I can't forget what the great master Berj Fazlian used to say: There are no great roles. They are all important.

The Greater New York Tekeyan Cultural Association Mher Megerdchian Theatrical Group was born under very humble conditions some 13 years ago and has gathered around it in excess of 50 actors and similar number of supporting volunteers. It has visited many different cities and countries for presenting many plays. Every theater lover that has seen the Group on the stage has had nothing but words of amazement and respect for the effort of the members achieving all these theatrical presentations.

