

THE 'FLOWERS' OF ADISS

Posted on March 14, 2015 by Keghart



Boghos Shahmelikian

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By **Boghos Shahmelikian**

Translated and expanded by Vahe H. Apelian, OH, 12 March 2015

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Among Armenians who are interested in the theater, Calouste Jansezian is well-known stage actor. He has successfully played different roles in the Hamazkayin Armenian Cultural Association's Kaspar Ipekian Theater Group in Lebanon. He also loved to sing and wanted to produce **Ծաղիկներ** (Dzaghigner). He approached Daniel Der Sahakian, a successful producer of records. Daniel saw a business opportunity in Calouste's proposal and financed the orchestration of the song with Reddy Bobbio, who was a well-known musician in Lebanon and played in prestigious nightclubs such as Phoenicia and Paon Rouge. The recording of the orchestration went smoothly. It was time to produce the record.

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Ipekian Theater Group in Lebanon. He also loved to sing and wanted to produce *Ծաղիկներ* (*Dzaghigner*). He approached Daniel Der Sahakian, a successful producer of records. Daniel saw a business opportunity in Calouste's proposal and financed the orchestration of the song with Reddy Bobbio, who was a well-known musician in Lebanon and played in prestigious nightclubs such as Phoenicia and Paon Rouge. The recording of the orchestration went smoothly. It was time to produce the record.

Any song that is produced on a record has its orchestration done ahead of time. Later it is played in the studio as the vocalist sings the song. The situation was no different when Calouste attempted to record the song. But alas, he did not succeed. His repeated attempts to record the song ended in failure. It became obvious that he did not possess that particular talent.

❌ Daniel Der Sakakian, who had invested a lot of money in the orchestration of the song, naturally did not want to give up on his investment. He looked for singers to record the song. He approached Eddy Kev (Kevork Khacherian) and Manuel Menengichian. The two were notable singers with national acclaim. Both had won first prize in successive years in *Pêlè-Mêlè*, the Lebanese national television talent competition. They sang European songs and both refused to sing *Dzaghigner*.

Daniel then approached Ara Guiragossian who sang Armenian classical songs and exuded opera influences whereas the orchestration and the lyrics of *Dzaghigner* were of the popular genre. They agreed the song was not a good fit for the singer.

Daniel then approached Ara Kekedjian who had established a reputation as singer of Armenian children's songs. His records for more mature audiences had not been well received. After further consideration neither one found the song to be a good fit for Kekedjian.

Daniel was close to giving up on his investment when Antranig Mardirossian, who ran Lebanon's first record store, suggested a young singer he knew from the Bourj-Hammoud neighborhood. "He sings well. He has already produced a record in French," said Mardirossian and asked whether Daniel would like to try him. The young singer's name was Adiss Harman. Having produced a record, Adiss had acquired experience in recording in a studio. His voice proved to be a natural fit for the song. They recorded the song and produced it under Daniel Der Sakakian's label, VOS (Voice of the Stars). To promote the record, Adiss dropped his adopted surname, Harmand, in favor of his family name but retained his adopted artistic name. The rest is Armenian musical history.

Ծաղիկներ (*Dzaghigner*) became an instant hit with demand for more. The Armenian community seemed to have been craving for lighthearted songs and had finally found one. There was no time to

waste. Soon after, they recorded other songs that proved to be no less popular: *Մանուշակ* (*Manooshag*), *Մթնշաղ* (*Mntshagh*), *Ծաղիկներս ում Նուիրեմ* (*Dzaghigners Oum Nvirem*), *Այլ Աչեր Կան Իմ Սրտում* (*Ayl Acher Gan Im Srdoum*). The songs were simple, easily understood. Hasmig Manasserian, a self-educated composer in Armenia, had composed the songs.

After Reddy Robio left Lebanon following his orchestration of the *Ծաղիկներ* (*Dzaghigner*), Jacques Kodjian took over and worked with Adiss for many years. Overnight, an Armenian pop--*estradayin'*--star was born. Adiss gave concerts in many countries. He even toured the United States--some fifty years ago no small feat. It was unprecedented for an Armenian singer to travel so far to give a concert. For a while I accompanied Adiss. It is hard to fathom that an Armenian singer could have mustered such popularity in the Armenian Diaspora or that the Armenian community could bestow such adulation on one of them, as they did on Adiss.

Adiss was 20-years-old when he burst on the Armenian pop music scene. He had good looks. His overnight rise from obscurity to national fame arguably remains unprecedented in Armenian Diaspora music. Calouste Jansezian was the catalyst of Armenian pop music in the Diaspora. A catalyst accelerates the rate of a happening without itself undergoing any permanent change. He remained the notable stage actor but Adiss emerged as the undisputed pioneer and idol of Armenian Diaspora pop music.

Adiss' baptismal name is Avedis. His name means someone who brings good tidings. Indeed, he brought good tidings to Armenian culture by popularizing Armenian music. Thanks to his stamina, good looks, drive, likeable personality on and off the stage, Adiss remains an undisputed leader of Armenian pop music. His contribution to Armenian culture was formally recognized when Catholicos Aram I bestowed upon him the Order of Saint Mesrob Mashtots in 2005. Adiss Harmandyan, the first Armenian pop music singer is also the first modern Armenian pop music star to be bestowed with an ecclesiastical order.

