



Hommage à Komitas

aud 92.570

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American Record Guide (Boyer - 2007.05.01)

Komitas (1869-1935), born Sghomon Sghomonian, took the name he is known by following his ordination as a priest of the Armenian Church in 1893. His work in preserving the folk songs of Armenia, akin to the work of Bartok and Kodaly in Hungary, has earned him the unofficial title of "Father of Armenian classical music". This album concentrates on his folk song arrangements for voice and piano (26 are included), concluding with nine recently discovered settings of German poems (including Goethe's 'Meerestille' and 'Glückliche Fahrt') that he wrote in the late 1890s while studying in Germany. He was active as a composer and choral conductor from the 1890s until the First World War, but his later witness of the horrors of the Armenian Genocide put an end to his creativity.

Komitas's music has been discussed in these pages only a few times (July/Aug 1990, July/Aug 1999, Mar/Apr 1996). His folk settings, which appeared in a series of volumes beginning in 1895, have a strangely modern sound, now strongly suggestive of the exotic moods that would later be explored by Alan Hovhaness in the 1950s, now recalling Ravel's Greek songs of 1904-6. His German songs are cast in a more conventional late romantic style.

Soprano Hasmik Papian handles her part well enough, but one wishes for a bit more relaxation in her voice. Always there is a suggestion of forcing, as if the tessitura were too high for her natural range. Audite's engineers also cloud the matter by including too much (probably artificial) reverberation in the sound picture, some of which may be a result of the processing for SACD.

The handsome booklet is marred by some awkward notes. Texts and multilingual translations are thoughtfully included.

Despite its faults, one hopes that the album will stir more interest in the work of Komitas and Armenian folk music.