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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Isabel Bayrakdarian's "Remembrance Tour," Sponsored by Zoryan Institute,  
Dedicated To All Victims of Genocide**

Toronto— The International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (A Division of the Zoryan Institute) (the IIGHRS) is honoured to sponsor the Remembrance Concert Tour, as it is dedicated to the victims of all genocides. The tour features the music of Gomidas Vartabed (1869-1935), starring Isabel Bayrakdarian, who has captivated audiences all over the world with her beautiful and moving soprano voice.

Why is the IIGHRS sponsoring such a concert tour? Perhaps it has been best expressed by Isabel Bayrakdarian, herself. "Their objective is to raise awareness of genocide, this gross violation of human rights, through the concert tour's profound theme of remembrance."

George Shirinian, the institute's Executive Director, stated, "We believe in using every opportunity and medium to educate the public at large about this heinous crime, and in this case through the musical genius of Gomidas, and Isabel's interpretation of it. Defending truth and human rights is everybody's business. We must all do our part."



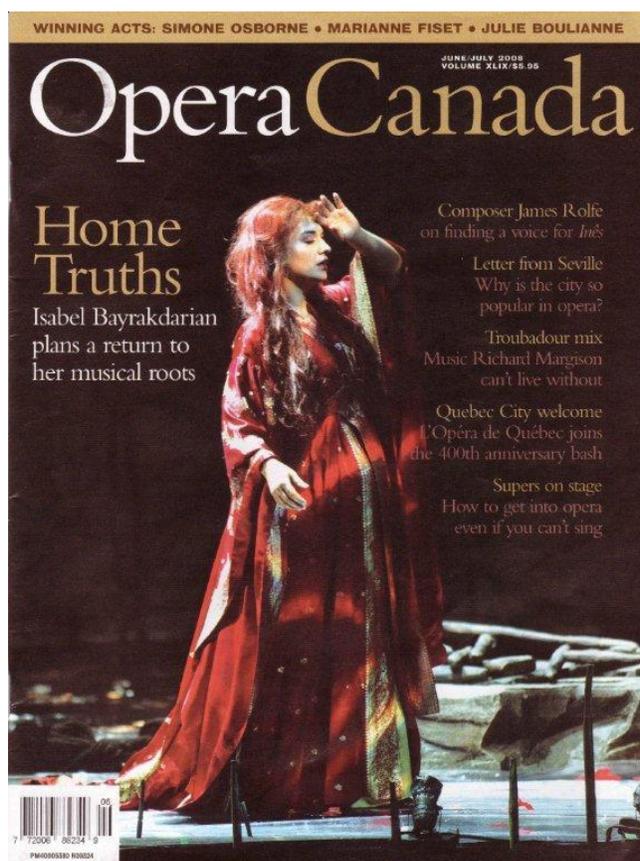
"Gomidas, who collected, purified and preserved the essence of Armenian music, had his life and music interrupted by the Armenian Genocide," explained Greg Sarkissian, President of the Zoryan Institute. "Only God knows how many other musical and artistic geniuses have been lost to humanity due to the many genocides in the past seven decades alone—Cambodia, the Jewish Holocaust, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor, and now Darfur. It is therefore imperative that we use this venue to bring about the awareness of and the sensitivity for this universal trauma. It is equally important that the survivors of genocide and their descendants, whatever their ethnicity, generously support our institute for such a large undertaking—stretching from New York to San Francisco, from Vancouver to Toronto—not only by attending the concert itself, but also by helping the institute underwrite the enormous costs involved."

Through Serouj and Isabel's journey of discovery with Gomidas, they learned that one doesn't have to be Armenian to be touched by his work. There is a mystical and a universally soul-stirring quality to his songs, with an air of blissful sadness and child-like simplicity that captures and moves the listener regardless of nationality, race, or religion.

Given that the trauma of the Armenian Genocide is also part of Isabel's identity, as the grandchild of a survivor, her working with Zoryan's IIGHRS is a natural partnership.

As Serouj Kradjian noted, "On April 24, 1915 Gomidas Vartabed was one of 300 Armenian intellectuals arrested and deported in the first stage of the Armenian Genocide masterminded by the Ottoman government, during the course of which some one-and-a-half million Armenians perished. Due to the efforts of United States Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, Gomidas was one of the few to return alive, only to find that he had lost everything – friends, students, and most of his life's work. He succumbed to intense physical and mental anguish, became a ghost of his former vigorous self, and never composed or sang again. He died in a mental institution near Paris on October 22, 1935. Gomidas purified Armenian music of all foreign influences and gave it back to its people, laying the foundations of a national music culture. This explains his rightful recognition as the 'father of Armenian classical music.'"

"The program of the concert tour is woven around the orchestral arrangements of Gomidas' folk songs and relates to the music and culture of all persecuted nations," explains Isabel. "There are other gems included in this unique program," she added, "such as Maurice Ravel's *Kaddish*," a prayer which is one of the masterpieces of Jewish liturgy, *Three Pieces in the Olden Style* by Henryk Gorecki, best known for his stunning *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* depicting misery and death in a Gestapo cell, and Nikos Skalkottas' undiscovered 'Greek Dances.'



In the liner notes to the CD, "Gomidas Songs, which will be released by Nonesuch Records to coincide with the concert tour, Atom Egoyan wrote, "Serouj Kradjian has provided arrangements of sublime sensitivity, carefully harnessing the alternately meditative and expressive gestures so specific to Gomidas' music. There are moments—such as the end of "Karoun a" (It's Springtime), where Kradjian's effects are truly miraculous." The recording of the CD was supported by the AGBU and Ms. Louise Simone.

"The songs of Gomidas have a very special place in my heart," Isabel confided. "I feel each song encapsulates in it the pride of the Armenian people and its tenacity and determination to survive despite its difficult history. As one of my earliest artistic

compasses, these songs – with their unique nuances and inflections – continue to influence everything I sing, interpret, and express,” she concluded.

Gracing the front cover of the June/July 2008 issue of *Opera Canada*, Isabel Bayrakdarian is admired as much for her stunning stage presence as for her exceptional musicality, and she has followed a unique career path completely her own. Since winning first prize at the 2000 Operalia competition founded by Placido Domingo, she has burst onto the international opera scene, gracing the stages of the Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera House, La Scala, Paris Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera, Salzburger Festspiele, Dresden Semperoper, Bavarian State Opera, and the Canadian Opera Company among others. Singing under the baton of such eminent conductors as James Conlon, David Zinman, Michael Tilson-Thomas, Mariss Jansons, Leonard Slatkin, James Levine, Peter Ounjian and Richard Bradshaw. She has won four consecutive Junos (Canada’s equivalent of the Grammys) for her work. She sings on the Grammy award-winning soundtrack of the blockbuster film *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, and her voice can also be heard in the multiple award-winning Canadian film *Ararat*. She is also the subject of a film entitled *A Long Journey Home* that documents her first trip to Armenia. A collection of songs by Gomidas, recorded with her husband and the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra, will be released on Nonesuch Records to coincide with the concert tour.

Apart from her musical accomplishments, she holds an honors degree in Biomedical Engineering from the University of Toronto.

### **2008 North American Tour Dates & Venues**

San Francisco Performances, Herbst Theatre – October 4  
Philharmonic Society of Orange County, Renee & Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall – October 5  
Vancouver Symphony, Orpheum Theatre – October 7  
Toronto, Roy Thomson Hall – October 17  
Boston Celebrity Series, New England Conservatory’s Jordan Hall – October 19  
New York City, Carnegie Hall’s Zankel Hall – October 20

For more information on Isabel Bayrakdarian, please visit <http://www.bayrakdarian.com/>

The IGHRS’s mission is to encourage a new generation of scholars to engage in research and publication in the field of genocide and human rights studies. This is achieved through a comparative and interdisciplinary analysis of such cases of genocide as the Jewish Holocaust, the Cambodian Genocide, and the Rwandan Genocide, among others, using the Armenian Genocide as the point of reference. It seeks to help develop an academic support system for those who work toward the prevention of genocide. It strives to show, through the study of the genocidal traumas of many peoples, that genocide is a shared human experience and that, as such, it must be the concern of all individuals and institutions.

For more information, visit [www.zoryaninstitute.org](http://www.zoryaninstitute.org), email [zoryan@zoryaninstitute.org](mailto:zoryan@zoryaninstitute.org), or telephone (416) 250-9807.