

NEW FOCUS RECORDINGS

Movses Pogossian and his colleagues in the **Armenian Music Project** continue their tireless advocacy for the music of Armenia with this ambitious 4 CD collection, **Stanzas in August**. At the heart of the release are two sub-collections devoted entirely to the music of **Ashot Zohrabyan** and **Koharik Gazarossian**, two consequential composers who shaped Armenian music far beyond their own oeuvres. The other discs include lesser known works by **Aram Khachaturian**, **Tigran Mansurian**, and **Ghazaros Saryan**, as well as premieres of piano miniatures by **Artur Avanesov**, and premieres by **Vahram Sargsyan** and **Aram Hovhannisyan**.

Track List

Disc One: Vox Temporum

Vahram Sargsyan: **Vox Temporum**

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. I. Im Annmanin (To My Matchless One) | 7:34 |
| 2. II. Manook (Little One) | 5:06 |
| 3. III. Calmato e poco allungato - Coda | 4:51 |
| Vahram Sargsyan, voice; Jan Berry Baker, alto saxophone; Varty Manouelian, violin; Movses Pogossian, violin; Che-Yen Chen, viola; Ben Hong, cello | |
| 4. Aram Hovhannisyan: String Quartet | 13:11 |
| Movses Pogossian, violin; Adrienne Pope, violin; Andrew McIntosh, viola; Mia Barcia-Colombo, cello | |
| 5. Ghazaros Saryan: String Quartet No. 2 | 10:07 |
| VEM String Quartet | |
| 6. Artur Avanesov: Unruhig | 9:30 |
| Anoush Pogossian, clarinet; Edvard Pogossian, cello; Artur Avanesov, piano | |

Disc 1 Time: 50:19

Disc Two: Piano Works of Koharik Gazarossian

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 1. Cantique | 2:50 |
| 2-10. Huit Variations sur un thème populaire du Père Komitas Suite No. 1 | 9:04 |
| 11. I. Prélude | 2:39 |
| 12. II. L'Oiseau à ma fenêtre | 1:05 |
| 13. III. Paresse | 2:26 |
| 14. IV. Dansons! | 2:16 |
| Préludes | |
| 15. Mon enfant, ta mère et morte | 2:31 |
| 16. Chérie, ton nom est Chouchan | 2:40 |
| 17. La lune de la nuit | 2:16 |
| 18. À travers les champs | 2:24 |
| 19. Cantiques de Noël: Du monde céleste, les voix arrivent | 5:03 |
| 20. Réjouissons-nous de ta naissance | 2:23 |
| Album bien tempéré | |
| 21. I. Choral | 1:17 |
| 22. III. Pièce populaire | 1:34 |
| 23. V. Nocturne (Midi-Nocturne) | 2:21 |
| 24. XXIII. Courant d'air | 1:09 |
| Suite No. 2 | |
| 25. I. Prélude | 1:47 |
| 26. II. Au son du Davoul | 1:50 |
| 27. III. Nocturne | 2:52 |
| Messe arménienne (O mystère profond) | |
| 28. I. Prélude | 3:18 |
| 29. II. Fugue | 3:32 |

Stanzas in August: Armenian Music, New and Rediscovered

A four CD set of Armenian music curated by violinist **Moses Pogossian** & the **Armenian Music Project**

US Street Date	5/1/2026
UPC Code	613527389949
Catalog Number	FCR473
Audio Resolution	44.1kHz, 16 bit; 96kHz, 24 bit
MSRP	\$39.99
Featured Track	Disc 1, Track 1

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Movses Pogossian: [Website](#), [Facebook](#)



30. *Trois cantiques pour la main gauche: O Sainte Vierge agenouillons-nous devant Toi* 1:18
Nare Karoyan, piano

Disc 2 Time: 58:35

Disc Three: Chamber Music of Ashot Zohrabyan

1. *String Quartet No. 1* 11:37
VEM String Quartet
2. *Piano Sonata* 11:07
Artur Avanesov, piano
3. *String Quartet No. 2* 18:43
VEM String Quartet
4. *Cello Sonata* 15:53
Edvard Pogossian, cello; Artur Avanesov, piano
5. *String Quartet No. 3* 15:44
Varty Manouelian, violin; Eva Aronian, violin;
Cara Pogossian, viola; Edvard Pogossian, cello

Disc 3 Time: 73:04

Disc Four: Soliloquy

1. Aram Khachaturian: *Sonata-Song* 12:15
Cara Pogossian, viola
2. Avanesov: *Chinar Es...* 4:53
Artur Avanesov, piano
3. Avanesov: *Dies ist ein Lied für dich allein* 10:25
Edvard Pogossian, cello; Artur Avanesov, voice
4. Avanesov: *Chinar Es II* 6:48
Artur Avanesov, piano
5. Tigran Mansurian: *Ode to the Lotus* 9:33
Cara Pogossian, viola
6. Komitas: *Chinar Es* 3:29
Artur Avanesov, piano
7. Khachaturian: *Sonata-Monologue* 16:01
Eva Aronian, violin
8. Avanesov: *Suonare* 4:27
Artur Avanesov, piano
9. Avanesov: *Cadenza* 6:20
Movses Pogossian, violin

Disc 4 Time: 74:11

Total Time: 256:09

Program Notes

Stanzas in August presents the sixth through ninth volumes, released under one cover, of an ambitious and laudable project spearheaded by Movses Pogossian to document the richness and history of modern Armenian concert music. This lineage is framed by some of the most consequential events of the 20th century, including the Armenian Genocide, Soviet rule, and a period of post-Soviet transition that has seen the country turn towards the West. With a diaspora that is two-thirds of the world's total Armenian population of 11 million people, the shape of Armenian music has absorbed both the vicissitudes of its recent history as well as global influences as it has evolved. Elements of traditional music, sacred repertoire, and internationalist aesthetic trends have seeped into this collective evolution of an Armenian musical style. Pogossian and his colleagues celebrate this vital and ever growing tradition of composition with this four disc set, shining light

on crucial figures from Armenia's musical past as well as some of its most active and influential contemporary voices.

The first disc focuses on chamber ensemble works in various combinations, presenting music by Vahram Sargsyan, Aram Hovhannisyanyan, Ghazaros Saryan, and Artur Avanesov. Vahram Sargsyan has cultivated an approach to composing for the voice which merges extended techniques, traditional Armenian musical practices, multi-timbral textures, and microtonality. *Vox Temporum* is scored for voice (Sargsyan himself performing the unique part), saxophone, and string quartet. The voice and saxophone meld together as a hybrid meta-wind instrument, intertwined in melismatic passages while the string quartet frames the harmony. In "Im Annmanin (To My Matchless One)," throat and overtone singing, bird song imitation, and whistling techniques expands the texture multi-dimensionally. "Manook (Little One)" percolates with furtive pizzicati and short articulations, opening up into a halo of brilliant, luminous sonorities. Sargsyan embeds a stealth element within "Calmato e poso allungato;" several gradual ascending glissandi subtly raise the overall pitch by a semitone. The work closes with a mechanical coda, a temporal suspension over which saxophone multiphonics and vocal whistling float into the ether.

Aram Hovhannisyanyan's *String Quartet*, dedicated to the memory of one of Armenia's most impactful musical figures, Ashot Zohrabyan, is taut, charged with electricity. The four instruments behave within a heightened state of vigilant anxiety, each new individual gesture triggering the other instruments in a kind of pinball game of musical reactivity. Hovhannisyanyan contrasts these kinetic passages with music that holds its explosive energy just beneath the surface of swelling chords and angular punctuations. Ghazaros Saryan represents an important lineage in modern Armenian music, a Soviet era generation of composers that followed Aram Khachaturian. Saryan's *String Quartet No. 2*, written in 1986, opens with a dense, pathos laden chorale, as accented individual entrances form complex vertical voicings. A contrasting middle section features rhythmic vitality, alternating between driving repeated notes, darting pizzicati, and syncopated figures. The collection's first volume ends with Artur Avanesov's 2024 trio *Unruhig* (translated as "unquiet" from German) for clarinet, cello, and piano. Avanesov explores several different roles for the three instruments as their dialogue unfolds. Initially, short melodic bursts circle around one another in restless anticipation. Later the piano plays off-kilter accented chords that frame punctuations from the other instruments. An extended passage features dramatic, passionate phrases in the cello supported by sweeping keyboard flourishes. The clarinet and keyboard build a fleet, jaunty passage in rhythmic unison, culminating in a dramatic *moto perpetuo* section in the piano, and a return of the irregularly repeated note gesture, now heard as an alarming texture in the high register.

The second volume is devoted to solo piano works by Koharik Gazarossian, a composer, pianist, and teacher whose early life unfolded amidst the backdrop of the Armenian Genocide in the last years of the Ottoman Empire. Born in Constantinople in 1907, Gazarossian's family was

part of a community of Armenians who were subject to mass arrest, deportation, and subsequent death marches and massacres. Despite this hostile environment, particularly for intellectuals and artists, Gazarossian's family managed to survive in what would soon be renamed Istanbul, and she was able to continue her music studies there and later in Paris, absorbing wisdom passed down from mentors who had themselves studied with Liszt, Ravel, and others. Despite the global upheaval in the middle of the 20th century, Gazarossian was able to return to live in Istanbul later in life, and also toured throughout the world as a soloist. While her compositional output extends to chamber music, choral music, and concertos, this collection focuses on her solo keyboard music.

Several of the works reflect the incorporation of folk materials and melismatic embellishments into Gazarossian's writing style for the piano, sometimes virtuosic, other times impressionistic, such as *Cantique*, *Cantiques de Noël*, and "O Sainte Vierge agenouillons-nous devant Toi" from *Trois cantiques pour la main gauche*. *Huit Variations sur un thème populaire du Père Komitas* affords an opportunity to hear the tools Gazarossian had at her disposal for developing thematic material, mapping it on an approach that spans ruminating melodic over sonorous chordal accompaniment and jocular, characterful textures that showed her prodigious facility on the keyboard. The adaptation of a theme by Komitas, the central turn of the 20th-century figure in Armenian music and indeed a cultural representation of the targets of the genocide itself, reinforces the strong bond Gazarossian maintained with her heritage even as she pursued her studies and career abroad. The two Suites included here demonstrate her unique blend of impressionist and late Romantic tendencies, moving freely between character gems like the hummingbird texture in "L'Oiseau à ma fenêtre," the rugged "Au son du Davoul," the Eastern European inflected melancholy of "Nocturne," and the Lisztian pianism in the two Preludes. Gazarossian imbues the quasi-French overture Prélude and weighty Fugue from *Messe arménienne (O mystère profond)* with sufficient ornamentation and invention to elevate them beyond their formal strictures and add her individual stamp. The balance between folk and sacred materials, while not being exclusive, is a core component and foundational concern of Gazarossian's music. Pianist Nare Karoyan has devoted herself to championing the piano oeuvre of Gazarossian, and delivers powerful and sensitive performances on this recording.

Volume 3 is dedicated to the chamber music of Ashot Zohrabyan, one of the most pivotal figures in the lineage of Armenian avant garde composers, beginning with Komitas' emphasis on traditional music and eschewing of the Romantic mainstream, and extends now to Artur Avanesov, Vahram Sargsyan, and many others. The specter of Soviet aesthetic control loomed over Armenian music for much of the 20th century, requiring composers to walk a fine line in their work to conform to imposed expectations while exploring new directions that they were becoming aware of. Zohrabyan's music stands in the middle of these tensions, and emerges as a body of work that is focused on economy

and formal cohesion, and steers away from extraneous components of virtuosity and filigree. One hears influences of Ligeti and Lutosławski in his music, as he moved away from the neo-tonal aesthetic that took hold both in the late and post-Soviet world as well as in the West. His three **String Quartets** presented here, written over the course of twenty six years, are all one movement works; the first two were commissioned for the Kronos Quartet, and stand out for their adventurousness. The first Quartet balances lyrical melodic fragments passed between the members of the ensemble. These strains of activity alternate throughout the work. String Quartet No. 2 contains a reference to a quintessentially Armenian song by Komitas, *Antuni (Exile Song)*, highlighted at 1:08 in an angular motive on the violin of an ascending major 3rd and ending with a double stop minor 9th. The rest of the ensemble stretches this earthy motive, extending its pitches into an accumulating sound mass. Unsettling, sul ponticello tremolos, sharply accented staccato entrances, and syrupy unison lines harmonized with dissonant intervals create uneasiness that is momentarily soothed by passages of ethereal, luminous harmony. Zohrabyan's third string quartet (2015) is the newest work in this volume, written for Movses Pogossian's Dilijan Chamber Music Series and given the subtitle *Stanzas in August*, which in turn named this collection of recordings. Indeed, Zohrabyan organizes the piece as a series of succinct, self-contained stanzas. He writes, "this work purposely lacks consistent development, and short passages of music are separated with suspended rests... My idea was to create poetic music broken down in 'strophes,' and to shed such a tender August light over each of them." The individual sections are gems of expressive clarity, opening with a poignant chorale, and moving variously through fluid imitative lines, propulsive rhythmic passagework, wrenching sustains peppered with accented entrances, pointillistic pizzicati accompanying a haunting melody, and intimate moments of expressive directness.

Zohrabyan's **Piano Sonata**, written in 1979 and revised in the 1990s, is a three movement work heard here in one track. It unfolds largely as a meditation on a group of thematic elements, led by a dramatic grace note figure featured in the opening passage. Zohrabyan explores a suite of instrumental behaviors that one might understand as coming from traditional performance practice, embedding them within classical contexts, so as to merge characteristics from different styles instead of tokenizing the folkloric material. This grace note idée fixe reappears in many guises throughout the work, highlighting Zohrabyan's ingenuity in spinning out a musical cell into myriad extrapolations. These motivic ideas seem to spill over into Zohrabyan's **Cello Sonata**, written in the same period, now mapped onto his approach to chamber interaction. While the piano articulates similar brilliant flourishes to those in the Piano Sonata, frequently activating the resonance of the high register, the cello plays rhapsodic lines and ferocious double stops. This contrast between roles, pointillistic on one hand and legato and expansive on the other, frames the work, with two moments of repose providing relief to the overall structure.

The final volume on *Stanzas in August*, “Soliloquy,” features nine works, seven of them solos, that further illustrate the wide net cast by Armenian composers who were responsive both to global trends and allegiance to aesthetics native to their homeland. Aram Khatchaturian is perhaps Armenia’s most famous composer, but was also one of musical figures most widely associated with the Soviet Union in general. His larger orchestral works are his best known pieces, but the last years in his life he produced a series of more introspective solo chamber works, including the **Sonata-Song** for viola solo (1976) and **Sonata-Monologue** for violin solo (1975). The *Sonata-Song* was Khatchaturian’s final significant composition. It opens with a string of arpeggios that outline implied counterpoint and are connected by fluid melodic lines. Later in the piece, idiomatic viola passagework and coloristic pizzicato chords lead the texture through expressive peaks and valleys. The song referenced in the title is one that is in fact claimed by several West Asian cultures besides Armenian, including Iranian, Turkish, and Azerbaijani. The violin *Sonata-Monologue* loosely adheres to sonata form, often developing material more along the lines of a variations set where several themes are present at once. Khatchaturian emphasizes mournful melodic lines with ornamental embellishments that lend the violin a vocal quality. At the 6:25 mark, we hear an uncharacteristic percussive timbre, sounded by the screw of the bow hitting the chin rest. In these two late solo works, we can observe Khatchaturian going outside the extroverted milieu for which he is best known, reaching for an expressive world that is more reflective, and at times more experimental.

Paired with Khatchaturian’s *Sonata-Song* is Tigran Mansurian’s **Ode to the Lotus** for solo viola. Mansurian represents a generation of artists after Khatchaturian that was more grounded in writing a distinctly Armenian music, in opposition to the prevailing southern Soviet style that the ruling party in Moscow aimed to cultivate for many of the southern regions of the USSR. But just as Mansurian was more deeply connected to Armenia itself, living there in his later life in contrast to Khatchaturian, he was initially engaged with avant garde trends that were burgeoning far from Yerevan. Ultimately, he imported these avant garde elements to forge a unique approach to treating traditional materials. Despite the differences in their life trajectories, *Ode to the Lotus* and *Sonata-Song* have quite a bit in common, shaped by a similar approach to motivic development, timbral expansion through the use of pizzicati, and shared expressive textures on the viola.

Artur Avanesov’s **Dies ist ein Lied für dich allein** is scored for singing male cellist, specifically calling for the intimacy of a non-professional vocal approach. The piece sets texts by Stefan George, whose writings had been set by Webern, Adorno, and Egon Wellesz. Avanesov references a Baroque performance practice with an initial theme by Marin Marais, relying on implied counterpoint, accented appoggiaturas, and tonal harmonic progressions to evoke the grandeur of the style. Within that frame, Avanesov subverts expectations with more contemporary instrumental techniques and pitch content, with the inclusion of the voice acting as a kind of ritualistic internal mantra that accompanies the cello.

Chinar es is a traditional Armenian rural folk song that is heard in three treatments. Komitas’ transcription of the folk theme is realized for piano by Villi Sargsyan and captures the serene simplicity of the tune. The other two settings are by Avanesov from his book of piano solos, *Feux Follets*. On **Chinar Es...**, we hear a chorale setting with tone clusters and parallel perfect intervals that gives the theme a reverent, sacred quality. Avanesov provides one additional setting of the tune with **Chinar Es II**, this time in the form of a late Renaissance set of variations, with Dutch composer Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck’s music as a model.

Suonare is Avanesov’s solo piano homage to Ashot Zohrabyan, incorporating elements of Baroque, Armenian music, and jazz into an improvisatory fantasy. Finally, *Stanzas in August* closes with **Cadenza** for solo violin performed by Movses Pogossian, an adapted version of a new cadenza Avanesov wrote for Khatchaturian’s Violin Concerto. Avanesov consciously fused elements of avant gardists Xenakis and Berio with materials from the Khatchaturian concerto, creating a dynamic merging of aesthetics across eras. In this way, *Cadenza* is a perfect ending for this remarkable contribution to the trajectory of modern Armenian music, a chronicle of a living tradition that has been shaped, but never daunted, by the historically transformative events that have taken place during its evolution.

Bio

Movses Pogossian made his American debut performing the Tchaikovsky Concerto with the Boston Pops in 1990, about which The Boston Globe wrote: “There is freedom in his playing, but also taste and discipline. It was a fiery, centered, and highly musical performance...” Laureate of several competitions, including the Tchaikovsky International Competition, he extensively performs worldwide. A devoted chamber musician, Pogossian has performed with members of the Tokyo, Kronos, and Brentano string quartets, and with many internationally renowned artists. He frequently collaborates with the Apple Hill Chamber Players, teaching annually at their summer music festival in New Hampshire. A committed champion of new music, Pogossian has premiered over 100 works, and works closely with composers such as G. Kurtág, K. Saariaho, T. Mansurian, Gabriela Lena Frank, and many others. Pogossian’s discography includes the *Complete Sonatas and Partitas by J. S. Bach*, solo CDs *Inspired by Bach*, *Blooming Sounds*, *In Nomine*, and, most recently, *Hommage à Kurtág*. The Bridge Records CD of *Complete Violin Works of Wolpe* made the 2015 Top Ten list in Sunday Times (UK), and the recent releases of Armenian contemporary music: *Serenade with a Dandelion*, *Modulation Necklace* (both on New Focus Recordings) and *Con Anima* (ECM) have garnered critical acclaim. Pogossian is Distinguished Professor of Violin at the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music and Founding Director and Advisor of the UCLA Armenian Music Program. As co-director of the Los Angeles Chapter, he actively participates in the Music for Food project.