

The Producer's Debut In His Fatherland *By. G Balian*

In 1955 initiated the first steps of Varouzhan Khedshian in theatrical art with the "Gaspar Epejian" national company in Beirut.

In 1963 he left for England to get professional training. In London he staged the productions of Paronian, Soundoukian and Shant with the members of the "Armenian Youth" Club. During 1964 - 65 he dramatized plays in Paris, Lyons, Valence and Marseille.

Upon his return five years later to Beirut he assumed the management of the "Levon Shant" company in Bourj-Hammoud, and in 1970 he set up a new troupe called "Theatre-67". Recent events in Lebanon settled the producer in Aleppo where he is busy theaterizing several productions.

In 1979 he accepted an invitation extended by the Committee for Cultural Relations with Armenians Abroad to visit Yerevan, where he familiarized himself with the activities of the local play-house and undertook the stage presentation of Niel Simon's "Barefooted in the Garden".

As the final curtain dropped we address Varouzhan with several questions.

"Clearly Simon is a favourite author of yours. Would you enlarge on your "acquaintance" with the American playwright?"

"Still in London I had a bent for tragedy. I appeared there in Macbeth and Othello. Moreover, I would hear of no comedy. I was told that I'd better act comedy. However, I've a liking for psychological productions. Besides, I was hard put to find a "serious" comedy. Notwithstanding my dislike for comedies I read Simon. I was barely through the second act when I decided on staging it. I made a rapid translation of the play. I put it on the stage in five weeks.

The success took me by surprise and I clearly sensed that I had discovered my author. And in 1978 we managed to present the comedy "Barefooted in the Garden" to the Armenian public in Beirut. We had hardly performed the play thirteen times on the stage of Saint Francois school when shooting started in Beirut again. The designs were left on

the stage without actors.

“What is meant by “serious” comedy that you hinted a while ago?”

“One of the kind is Hakop Paronian’s “Alafranka”. It is very important to look into the implicit meaning of the author. So far the theatrical idiom has failed to enunciate in full measure the seriousness and tragedy of the satirist. True, the spectator laughs and relaxes, yet Paronian the artist laid another claim to me. And I theaterized “Alafranka” in a totally different vein.

This is what the arts critic Khachik Peghchian writes: “Paronian’s works are undoubtedly sad stories couched in laughter. In the idiom of the stage they need an uphill struggle to attain the summit.”

To play Paronian is good, just for an instant. But how to communicate the Paronian tragedy to the audience retaining at the same time the cloak of laughter?

Though most people take the “Paronian” style of presentation as their starting point, yet their ascent of the tragic summit ends on the slopes of the comical.

Khedshian attained the summit, “Alafranka” confirming the truth of this statement.

“How do you train for the stage presentation in Yerevan ?” “It was a tough do . I was unfamiliar with the actors. I had no idea of their acting qualification. In a word, my final days were “consumed” on our mutual acquaintance. However, my projects as a producer to a happy conclusion. I could stage the play twice I must frankly confess that their play was enthralling. They listened to me, displayed a favourable attitude and trusted me. And I reciprocated. This stage presentation was of cardinal importance to me. I've always thought of abiding an Armenian producer, not Arab, nor English. True, all my stage presentations were made for the Armenian public and in Armenian but on alien soil. I believe that the appreciation of a person (including any man of arts) comes in one's fatherland. And my long-cherished dream came true. My stage presentation was brought forth on Armenian soil for which I am grateful to the entire company of the play-house for their selfless assistance. My acknowledgments are extended to all - the

Committee for Cultural Relations with Armenians Abroad, the arts director of the theatre Hrachia Ghaplanian, who made the most of the time to bring ...assistant producer on literary matters who helped me in securing an accurate translation of a typical American play in making it sound Armenian. My second dream is to put Paronian on the stage of Armenia.

Varouzhan Khedshian is a congenial interlocutor with a fine sense of humour and typically melancholic Armenian eyes. He is 42 years of age. His wife is English, but an English woman who has herself taught their children Armenian. They have been working together for ten years; she is also an actress. The producer was keenly looking forward to the first show staged recently.

The play hit a big success. The enthusiasm of the audience had blazed the actors and the producer. The parting was thrilling over-whelmed with the desire of meeting again.