



Passage through Light and Shadows: The Children of Ararat

VENUE

[Theatre at St. Clement's](#)

OPENED

October 22, 2010

CLOSE

October 31, 2010

CREATORS & ARTISTS

Cast

Harout Barsoumian, Carlos Fittante, Olsi Gecji, Zobeida Ghattas, Erin Jennings, Sira Melikian, Carolin Melkonian, Nadia Maria Michael, Jean Musacchio, Janet Poriadjian, Anahid Sofian, Harout Takvorian, Stephanie Vartanian, Saro Jahani, Gilda Kupelian, Rosine Tanashian, Vaghenag Tarpinian

Author/Creator

Anahid Sofian

Choreographer

Anahid Sofian

Sets

Joseph Spirito

Lighting

Kia Rogers

Costumes

Meganne George

Video

Jeremy Haik

Associate Director
Jeffrey Lewonczyk



Pictured: Carlos Fittante and Sira Melikian in a scene from Passage through Light and Shadows: The Children of Ararat (photo © Jeremy Haik)

nytheatre.com review

[Victoria Linchong](#) · October 23, 2010

Passage Through Light and Shadow: The Children of Ararat is a bittersweet valentine to Armenia by dancer Anahid Sofian that weaves together dance, poetry, folklore, film, and photography. Although at times the production felt like a PBS special, there were many compelling moments, which ultimately left me pondering the various elements that coalesce to form cultural identity; how culture is shaped not just by language, geography, music, and food, but also by opposition and struggle. I'm not Armenian and I can't completely grasp the significance behind the elegiac songs, the poems and images that Sofian presents in this piece, but being Taiwanese and also having a [massacre in the family closet](#), Sofian's contemplative dance drama seems to me not so much an attempt to suture the open wound of the past, but an evocative investigation into the otherness of being Armenian.

It's perhaps not an accident that the symbol of Armenian spirit is the isolated, ice-capped Mount Ararat, legendary resting place of Noah's Ark. Surrounded by Muslims but obstinately practicing Christianity, Armenians were further marked by the [tragedy that engulfed them in 1915](#) when more than half their entire population was forcibly deported and murdered by Ottoman Turks, an atrocity the Turkish government continues to deny ever happened. Sofian, whose parents survived the genocide, doesn't refrain from reflecting upon the long shadows of this unresolved trauma, but she also presents an

ancient mystical Armenia, closely connected with the rites of pagan Europe and the mysteries of the medieval church.

Solemn and suffused with enigmatic images, the production begins with black and white photographs of a young couple in the early 1900s, which fade in and out of focus as Sofian rises from a fetal position and a recorded voice intones a poem written by her father, "There is melancholy music, jubilation and grief in my heart... Will my heart ever wake from this night to sing this latent song?" Three women in long headscarves glance backward and begin a choral dance, pointing toes and flexing heels in ritualistic unison. At the top of a tower, a child sifts through an enormous tome as books flap around him like ragged birds in Sergei Paradjanov's surreal masterpiece *The Color of Pomegranates*. In a partly enacted, partly danced vignette, a man recalls a mysterious parable that his grandmother once told him, in which Fate spurns a rich woman's gift but accepts the meager offering of a poor woman. As we listen to an eyewitness account of the genocide, shadows of people multiply behind a sheer curtain and women in medieval dress lay candles on the floors in rows, their wimples flapping.

Sofian is lithe and expressive in her solos, but I particularly enjoyed her group choreography, which is both simple and complicated at once, with the ensemble rotating amongst one another in circular patterns. Lighting by Kia Roger and the drapery by set designer Joseph Spirito provide an austere elegance that offsets Meganne George's sumptuous costumes, which perfectly evoke medieval splendor and a uniquely Eastern European sense of beauty. Perhaps the only thing I found missing in this immersion in Armenian culture was live traditional music, which might have provided a liveliness to counterbalance the pervasive somberness of the production. To Sofian's credit, her somberness has clarity; *Passage Through Light and Shadow* never feels heavy-handed and refrains from sentimental nostalgia. Rather, Sofian seems to be offering a provocative invitation to peer backward, or perhaps inward, to the unattainable homeland in her heart.

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