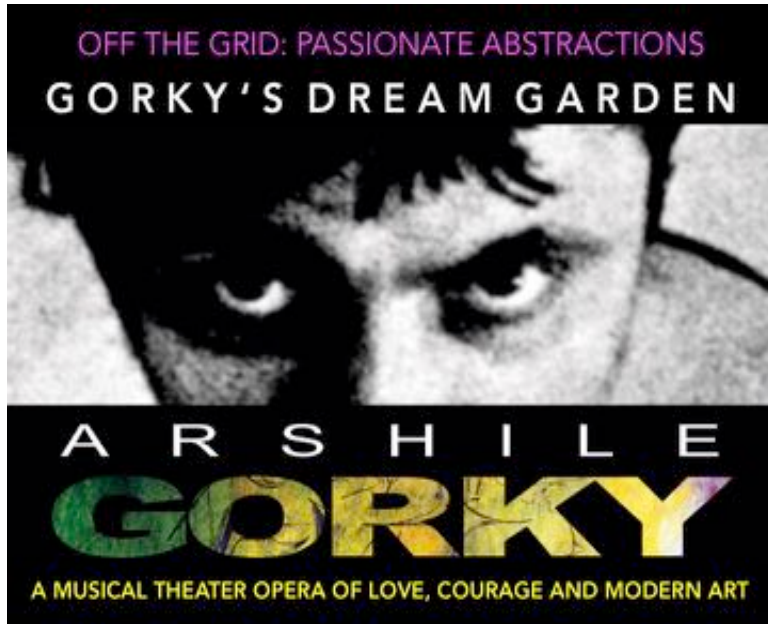


**The Center for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation  
and Bergen Community College present  
a DREAM GARDEN Concert and Soirée with Art Installation  
Celebrating an Armenian-American Story of Survival**



**Left Photo:** Arshile Gorky, 1930's (archival). **Before Arshile Gorky's 1936/37 mural panel *Mechanics of Flying* at Newark Museum of Art** (photo, Tony Mark): with some of the performers of the Dream Garden's Love Songs Showscape with composer Michelle Ekizian (3<sup>rd</sup> from right), leading man Brent Barrett (center), artist Vahakan Arslanian and choreographer Lynn Needle to his left. Mezzo Hasmik Mekanejian and dancer Janette Dishuk 2-1 from right. Palisades Virtuosi 1-3 from left in Dream Tees designed by Ekizian.

**PARAMUS, July 2023:** The Bergen Community College's Center for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation honors **Lynn Needle**, dancer/choreographer (and BCC faculty member), and composer/writer **Dr. Michelle Ekizian** for their collaboration on the composer's **GORKY'S DREAM GARDEN: a musical theater opera of love, courage and modern art** with the **2023 Peace, Justice and Reconciliation Award**. In tandem is scheduled **THE DREAM GARDEN Concert + Soirée – OFF THE GRID: PASSIONATE ABSTRACTIONS**, Wednesday, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 PM at the campus' Ciccone Theatre, 400 Paramus Road, Paramus, NJ 07652. The Concert-Event will introduce Ekizian's hybrid praised by The New York Times for its "forceful and intricate...inspired touch" and hailed in Broadway World as a "genre bending opera." From recent showcases presented by Jazz at Lincoln Center, the Armenian Diocese and Newark Museum of Art, and its documentary film winning the *Grand Finale Award* from the Ridgewood International Film Festival, this festive, informative happening will herald the complete opera's upcoming mainstage orchestral reveals.

## ***THE STORY in FOUR DREAM GARDEN MOMENTS***

Of exile, love, heartbreak and dreams, OFF THE GRID: PASSIONATE ABSTRACTIONS explores up-close the art and life of artist **Arshile Gorky**—a founding father of American abstract-expressionism and a child survivor of the 1915 Armenian Genocide, the first genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As in the opera, it fuses the everyday of Gorky’s dynamic modern art world of pre and post-World War II America with tragedy (of genocide, amouiricide and suicide) where dreams of nighttime, enigma and nostalgia collide. A mystical, magical, mystery tour of the artist’s incredible story of survival, the hour-length September concert is in ***Four Dream Garden Moments***. The concert/soirée’s grand evening is dedicated to: ***Remembering*** the Armenian Genocide of 1915, ***Commemorating*** the September 21, 2023 Armenia Independence Day of The Republic of Armenia on her 32<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of freedom from the USSR, and ***Celebrating*** the Armenian-American artist Arshile Gorky on the 2024 and 2023 120<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of his birth and death respectively. Of a global perspective, the musical psychodrama is in tune with today. Dr. Ekizian states: “From 2020’s relatively unnoticed Azerbaijan War upon Armenian territories—echoing the disasters of the Armenian Genocide—to today’s War in Ukraine, the circle continues.”

### ***THE ART, Op/Art TALK and an INTERACTIVE WISHING TREE***

**Gorky’s seminal 1941 “Garden in Sochi”** and his compelling Artist’s Statement at NYC’s **Museum of Modern Art** describing his lost homeland’s ancient folkloristic **“Wishing Tree”** and its rituals before the Armenian Genocide “colors” and “frames” **GORKY’S DREAM GARDEN**—in which five additional *passionate abstractions* of MoMA’s Gorky collection are also key to its emotional/color spectrum. Tracing Gorky’s dramatic and “dreamatic” journey for OFF THE GRID concert’s ***Four Dream Garden Moments*** are: **“Nighttime, Enigma and Nostalgia”** (1931-’32), **“Diary of a Seducer”** (1945), **“Agony”** (1947) and 1941’s **“Garden in Sochi.”** Immersive visuals—*real, unreal, surreal*—will combine Gorky’s enigmatic, “operatic” abstractions with breathtaking landscapes of his lost Armenian lands captured by **Hrair “Hawk” Khatcherian**, Armenia’s foremost photojournalist. For the 15-minute post-concert on stage **Op/Art TALK, “Gorky’s and Ekizian’s Mysteries, Seductions, Agonies and Gardens,”** historic, emotional, psychological and spiritual implications of the four artworks cited in OFF THE GRID (which have inspired Ekizian’s music and its **“Wishing Tree” Art Installation**) will be explored with **Dr. Pellegrino D’Acerno** (Italian, Architecture & Cinema, Comparative Literature Studies—Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Hofstra University) and **Dr. Youssef Yacoubi** (Middle Eastern & North African Studies—Professor, Seton Hall University).

Adding to the wonder is the show's *Interactive "Wishing Tree" Art Installation* in the Theatre's Lobby featuring art of **Vahakn Arslanian**. With work represented internationally and featured on the Grand Canal of the Venice Biennale, he is Maybach Protégé of Julian Schnabel. Along with a defining photographic *Gardenscape* by Khatcherian and the unveiling of *A Lost "Gorky" Blonde Angel*, his two "Wishing Tree" paintings will echo the Op/Art TALK's *"Mysteries, Seductions, Agonies and Gardens."*

***THE DREAM DANCES with COMMUNITY PROCESSION OF LIGHT  
and a CALL FOR FREEDOM & PEACE***

**Art of Motion Dance Theatre**—with **Lynn Needle**, director/dancer; **Janette Dishuk**, dance captain/dancer (of BCC faculty); dancer **M.A. Taylor** and **others**—will be featured in OFF THE GRID'S six-*Dream Dances* (with Ekizian's playlist of dance tracks). Along with Ekizian's evocative musical story telling, they will traverse Gorky's exile voyage and assimilation in New York City's fast pace of modern innovation, sex and sizzle on the edge of war. Illuminating through dance Gorky's passionate biomorphic abstractions and their reach to rise above life's tragedies, they will perform a rich mix of ballet, modern, ballroom, jitterbugging, tableaux, ritual and street dance styles. Dressed in Dusty Rose Couture *"Spinning Capes,"* the dancers will shape shift among some of the opera's intriguing gender bending characters carving out facets of Gorky's mother, Gorky as a child and a man, and Gorky's enigmatic "Black Monk" avatar after the kindly village priest of his lost lands and the Chekhov story by the same name. The show's opening and closing dance tracks of Ekizian's *"Heart Chants"* will feature AOMDT guiding a "floating" *Community Procession of Light* calling for solidarity with the participation of BCC students and "dream gardeners" of all ages. Reinforcing this appeal, the show's haunting and transcending ten-minute TURNING POINT **"Dance of the Exiled Heart"** at Moment Three will feature a recording from one of Ekizian's archival orchestral installments commissioned by the Interfaith Committee of Remembrance at New York City's Cathedral of St. John the Divine featuring her formative collaboration with the late legendary "Woodstock" folk-singer **Richie Havens** for the opera's "Black Monk" cameo role as a voice for freedom and peace.

***THE MUSICIANS & ART WHISPERER***

Special Guests in the Concert are the female vocal trio **MOIPEI**. The Kenyan born identical triplets—Mary, Maggy and Marta—will sing at the concert's climax, the opera's cathartic anthem-ballad **"Prayer for the Children"** for a universal appeal for remembering all who have suffered at the hands of inhumanity throughout the ages. Direct from sold-out performances at NYC's 54 Below and DC's River Run Festival, Kennedy Center and the State Department, the

sisters will add an extra special meaning and depth to the song. Quick-cutting scripted set-ups will be delivered by Cuban born actor **Adela Maria Bolet**, the opera's lead *Art Whisperer*. **Virtuoso soloists, oboist Matt Sullivan** (Professor/Chairman Emeritus of NYU's Woodwind Department) and Neapolitan-American **pianist/conductor Maestro Carmine Aufiero** (director of the Terpsikord Orchestra and others) will perform medleys of some of the opera's outreaching songs in Ekizian's sublime instrumental transcriptions. The Armenian born operatic mezzo **Hasmik Mekanejian** will intone with oboe an ancient Armenian requiem hymn of the Armenian Apostolic Liturgy.

***THE DREAM GARDEN SOIRÉE with GLOBAL HIP-HOP,  
DREAM GARDEN SPARKLERS & CREATIVE DRESS***

Following the concert in the Ciccone's Lobby, *The Dream Garden Soirée* will debut **Neo YAR!**—the new global Neapolitan/Yiddish/Armenian/Reggae Hip-Hop band. Especially formed for the occasion, it will feature the guitarist and Neapolitan music expert **John LaBarbera** (of BCC's music faculty), the Yiddish Reggae Hip Hop drummer and music therapist **Marlon Sobol** and the multi-ethnic/Armenian folk keyboardist/vocalist **Vikin Makochian**. Their jam, dedicated to the universal spirit of GORKY'S DREAM GARDEN, will be perfectly in tune with the mission of BCC's Center for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation. Like its "YAR" acronym for its worldly beats, its course—no pun intended—will be like the description Katharine Hepburn described in 1940's "The Philadelphia Story" of the honeymoon *True Love* boat she and Cary Grant cherished: "*Easy to handle, quick to the helm, fast.*" ***The Dream Garden Sparkler*** will consist of sparkling mineral water, alongside juices representing Armenia's national fruits of pomegranate and apricot. In line with the *Dream Garden* theme, guests are encouraged to come in creative dress—***Dream Garden and Modern Art Fantasy Fashion!***

**TICKETS: \$10., students \$5. Box Office: (201) 447-7428      Inquiries (914) 698-2996**  
**tickets online: [cicconetheatre.ludus.com/index.php](https://www.cicconetheatre.ludus.com/index.php)**

**UNLISTED MEDIA LINKS to Hear, See, Feel and Imagine THE DREAM GARDEN:**

**1. Trailer (5-minutes)** from the opera's Chamber Concert Redux at Newark Museum of Art, fall 2019, featuring Broadway leading man Brent Barrett, Art Whisperers Bolet & Sannutto, Palisades Virtuosi, Art of Motion Dance Theatre, opera singers with central TURNING POINT "Sorrowful Intermezzo" video montage featuring legendary late "Woodstock" folksinger Richie Havens singing in ancient Armenian calling for peace.

**<https://youtu.be/iiV0oQ8pcRY>**

**2. Documentary Featurette (10-minutes)** SEVEN GATES TO GORKY'S DREAM GARDEN (a Quick Tour) tells of the opera's ties to art, history, filmmakers Parajanov & Tarkovsky, Lady Gaga, the Armenian Genocide and 2020's Azerbaijan War upon Armenian territories narrated by Bolet over the show's waltzes performed by Palisades Virtuosi + Cocktail Party (at credits): **[https://youtu.be/Fh\\_KOCAei9Q](https://youtu.be/Fh_KOCAei9Q)**