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THREE SONGS from FAR FROM HOME
Arranged and interpreted by Adam Popowitz
& Mariam Matossian

Gakavig Partridge

This simple folk song is accredited to Gomidas, perhaps one of the best known of the musicologists who meticulously collected and transcribed the folk songs of my culture. This particular folk song is especially meaningful to me because it is the first song I ever sang in public, at the age of four. In it, the singer is praising the partridge, a bird that symbolizes the beauty of Armenia. She describes how this delightful bird brings greetings to all the flowers and joy to the mournful sea. The partridge sings and dances, and its infectious energy gives hope to everyone. Since this song has an almost child-like quality to it, I wanted it to be full of much percussion encouraging listeners to dance and sing along. I added new harmonies to further develop the simple melody and we created a new arrangement featuring the *oud*, an instrument that is traditionally used in Armenian music.

The sun appears from behind the dark clouds
The partridge soars above the green hills
From the top of the green hills
The partridge brings greetings to all the flowers

Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, colourful partridge

You have sewn your nest with flowers
With lilies and daffodils and other flowers
Your nest is filled with dew
You sleep and rise with songs and drums

Chorus

Your wings are soft and colourful
You have a small beak and red feet
And with your red feet
You dance with the other birds

Chorus

When you stand on the mossy rock
You sing psalms to the flowers
You make the hills and valleys cheer
You bring joy to the mournful sea

Chorus

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Mariam Matossian

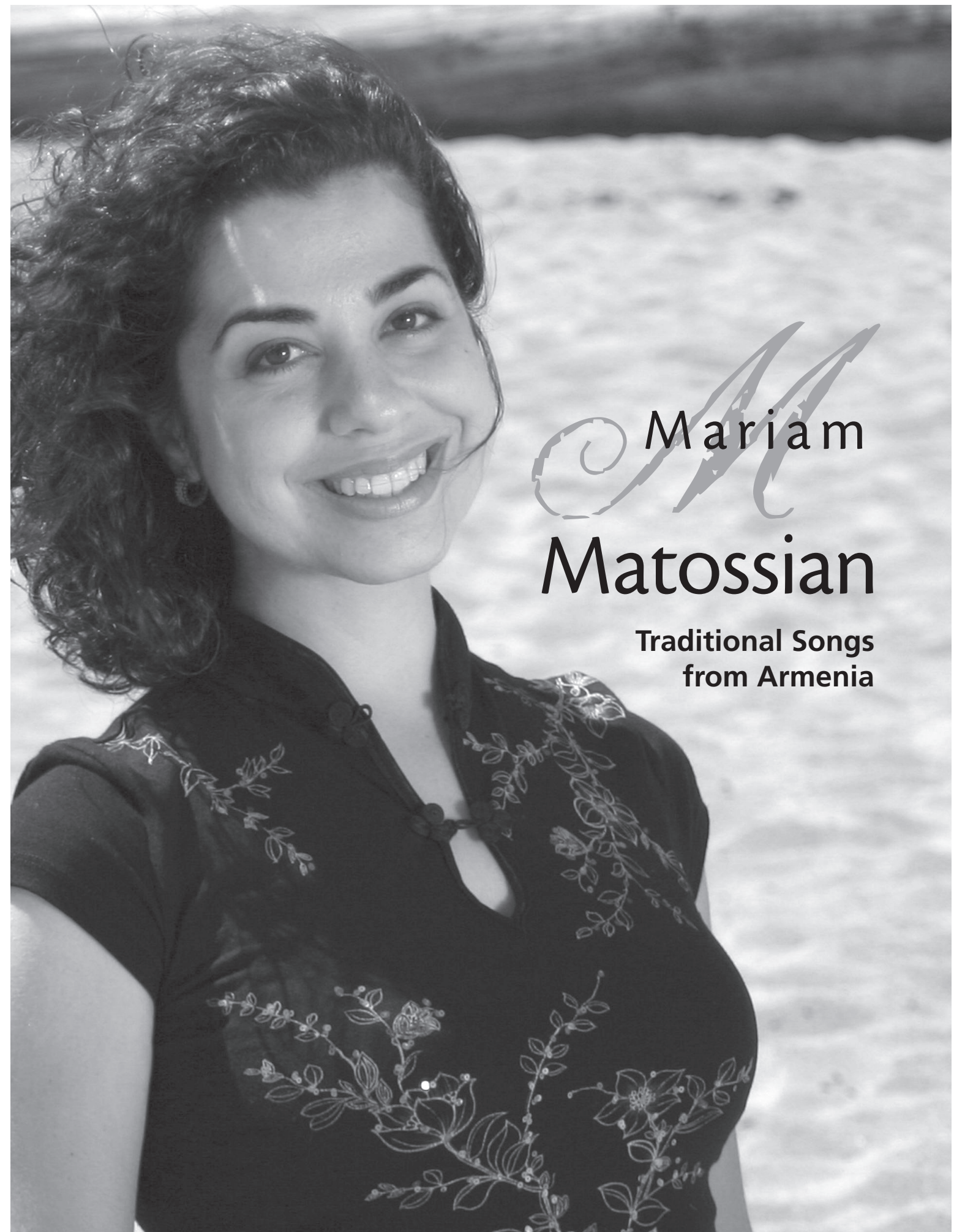
Almast Jewel

When I first discovered this old folk song in my mother's precious book, it was a beautiful poem. We could not locate a transcribed melody in the resources we had, so I had to rely on my mom's memory for the melody of this love song that she had learned as a child. And I instantly fell in love with the lyrics and the simple melody that she sang to me. In this song, the singer speaks of her beloved with such admiration, comparing him to an unfading flower among the most fragrant roses. He is her hero and she lovingly describes the jewels that seem to surround him. After analyzing the moving text, we began the all important task of arranging this song. The *duduk*, an instrument that evokes such emotion for Armenians, seemed the best choice to introduce a new counter melody and then weave that same theme throughout the entire song, almost charming listeners as they discover more about this enchanting lover. I wanted to create an atmosphere of longing and desire; thus, we slowed down the rhythm considerably, added new textures with the percussion, and developed new harmonies. In doing so, we have tried to give this song an almost dreamlike quality in which the yearning of the singer for her beloved is felt.

Composer Koosan Shahan

Shogher Jan Ray of Light

Another song accredited to Gomidas, this timeless folk song tells the story of Shogher Jan, the Ray of Light, who is waiting for her lover to come home. Throughout the song, she is encouraged to remain hopeful and to keep dancing and singing. The singer tells Shogher that in the distance, snow is falling, so her beloved must be on his way home. We decided to intertwine two voices throughout this song to emphasize Shogher Jan's desire to be with her beloved. Again, we used much percussion to underline the hopeful, upbeat nature of the song. This particular folk song holds much significance for me because one of the children I worked with while I was in Armenia taught it to me. This child loved to sing, and he and I developed a close bond. While his life is full of many hardships, his spirit remains joyful. This inspired me deeply. For me, he represents the hope that this song celebrates.



MARIAM MATOSSIAN

I was born in Vancouver, BC, where the Armenian community is small. However, my culture has remained an integral, precious part of my life. My love for my heritage intensified when I decided to travel to and work as a volunteer in Armenia in the summer of 1998. I was the first one from my family to ever see the homeland. As I worked and ate and laughed with fellow Armenians during the week and then visited the country's treasures—the ancient churches, monasteries, and even Mount Ararat from afar—on the weekends, my passion for my culture was deepened all the more. In 2002, I decided to take a leave of absence from a career I loved—teaching—to go back to Armenia with the hope of working with street children. I volunteered with 2 local non-governmental agencies in Yerevan, the capital city, and helped develop programs for the children. It was a life changing experience.

When I returned to Vancouver, I found my job had disappeared. Surprisingly, another part of my life suddenly took control—music. I have been singing all my life, whether at community events, in church or in choirs; music has always been one of my passions. I had developed a demo CD of four Armenian songs in the Fall of 2002 before I left for Armenia. When I returned home again, I met Adam Popowitz who became my producer and we applied for a grant from the Canada Council to make a recording of Armenian songs. To my amazement, I received a letter telling me that I had been awarded the grant. Early in 2004, I had completed the CD—*Far From Home*.

Most of the songs I sing and have recorded are hundreds of years old. They are all precious to me in some way. Many of the songs are love songs communicating one's love for her beloved, or more often, one's love for the Homeland. Most of the songs are my mother's favourites, and having heard her sing them all my life, they have become favourites of mine. Finally, many of the songs are precious to me because they were merely words on paper when I first found them—poems in an old tattered book that my mother has hung onto over the years, and I have brought them to life again. As I began to re-interpret each song and created new arrangements for them, I realized I was participating in the timeless tradition of passing down music to a new generation, ensuring that each song remains alive well into the future.

Often having only a basic melody with which to work, I attempted to capture the original beauty of each piece while at the same time making each song my own. While the melody and lyrics for each song remain true to the original music, the harmonies, the arrangements, the accompaniments, the rhythms and the use of an assortment of ethnic and non-ethnic instruments are all new. Using the most basic elements: lyrics and a simple, at times non-transcribed melody, I wanted to breath new life into each song.

After recording these songs, I organized a concert to celebrate the release of the album. To my amazement I was able to fill a three hundred-seat theatre. After witnessing such an overwhelming positive response at the

CD release concert and after much praise for the album itself from non-Armenians and Armenians alike, I was encouraged to begin to take things a step further. Thus, I began to send the music to some of the programme hosts at CBC Radio. The purpose was to try to fulfill my original goal, which is to give a world audience, both Armenians and non-Armenians, the opportunity to experience the beauty of our music. I was delighted to hear *Mayrigis/ To My Mother* in honour of Mother's Day on Richardson's Round-up. Jowi Taylor of Global Village and Philly Markowitz of Roots and Wings played some of the songs, as have Sheryl MacKay, Ede Wolk and Jurgen Gothe. The response from both the radio hosts and the audience has encouraged me to take the music as far as it will go.

I have found musicians who can help me perform the music. Adam Popowitz, Elliot Polsky and Nick Apivor all are experienced performers who have toured widely. With them I hope to perform my music in as many places as I can.

My dream has always been to share the story of my culture with as many people who want to listen. My grandparent's story—especially accounts of their faith, resilience, and hope despite the many obstacles that they endured—and more recently, the plight of the street children in Armenia—the very children who taught me some of the songs which are now on this album—have inspired me. I long to share these stories with people as I, in turn, learn from what others have to say. As a teacher, I encouraged my students to embrace their cultural histories, and I shared my own culture with them through my personal experiences and through translations of Armenian poetry. And now, as a singer, I have the chance to share my culture with others through song. And as I pass on this music, these stories to others, I hope that people will be as enriched as I have been.

Mariam Matossian Ensemble Member Biographies

Adam Popowitz *Producer, Guitar, Mandolin*

Born and raised in New Westminster, B.C., Adam has been playing professionally for 15 years throughout Canada and the U.S. From 1996 through 2001, with the groups Mollies Revenge and YveAdam, he was signed as a recording artist with Atlantic Records and as a published songwriter with Chrysalis Publishing. He has been fortunate to write with many talented artists including: Taylor Rhodes (Celine Dion, Aerosmith), Dave Tyson (Amanda Marshall, Alanah Miles), Jeremy Rezumma (Macy Gray), Kevin Savigar (Rod Stewart), and Charlotte Chaffey (Jewel, The Go Go's).

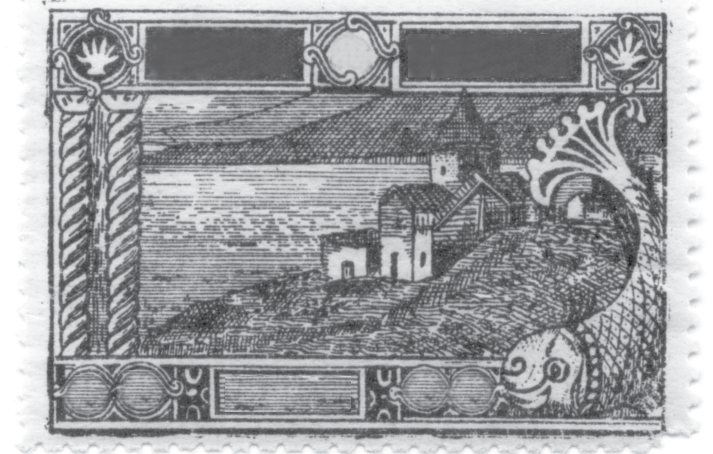
Since the spring of 2000, Adam has focused on production and songwriting. Production highlights include: Andrea Klas Orion (February 2003), Teresa Louise *24 Hours* (Spring 2003), Mariam Matossian *Far From Home* (January 2004) and Carmelina Cupo *15 Dreams* (Summer 2004). He continues to perform live as well, playing regularly for Mariam Matossian. Adam owns and operates Rear Window Studios.

Elliot Polsky *Drumset, Percussion (Djembe, Udu, Dumbec, Bongos, Kanjira, Riq, Shakers, etc.)*

Originally from Edmonton, Alberta, Elliot was trained in Classical and 20th Century Contemporary Percussion at McGill University, from where he holds both a Bachelor of Music and a Licentiate of Music with Distinction in Percussion (1988).

Moving to the West Coast in 1989, Elliot followed his muse into World Music where he began to integrate drum set with hand drums and traditional, ethnic percussion instruments from Central and South America, Africa and the Middle East. This unique approach helped set Elliot apart in the Vancouver music scene, and his incredibly versatile playing fit comfortably into a myriad of musical situations.

He currently plays with the Juno Award winning group "Zubot and Dawson" (considered two of Canada's most gifted young performers), Elliot also works with, and has worked with a who's who of artists, including Rykodisc artist Kelly-Joe Phelps, Telarc artist Colleen Sexton, Black Hen artist Jim Byrnes and his Acoustic Band, Chin Injeti (Bass is Base), Pacifica, Danielle Hebert, Stony Plain artists the Paperboys, Shawn Smith Group, Alpha Yaya Diallo, Ache Brasil, Yard Sale, Kin Lalat, and Steve Dawson's solo project. In addition, Elliot is a sought-after studio drummer and percussionist with several dozen recordings to his credit. Several of those recordings have been nominated for, and won, numerous awards over the years.



Nick Apivor *Percussion and vibraphone*

Nick received his Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Victoria in 1986, studying with Sal Ferreras. In the classical/new music world he has played with the Victoria Symphony, Pro Musica, the Drosera Ensemble, and recorded with Grammy-nominated composer, Paul Dolden.

As a jazz vibraphonist, he has performed with the N.O.W. Orchestra, Out of the Woods and many other groups. Nick has played in over 30 different music theatre productions, including last year's Playhouse production of "Hello Dolly!" and award shows including the Jessie Awards and West Coast Music Awards.

For the past 10 years, Nick has immersed himself in a variety of Latin musical styles, performing and recording with Juno-nominated Rumba Calzada, Ache Brazil, the John Gilliat Nuevo Flamenco Group, and Corcovado. In 2001, Nick studied Brazilian music in California and performed with the noted Paris-based Brazilian vocalist, Bia.

Most recently he has performed with the legendary Iranian singer, Dariush, recorded with local group Mimosa, and currently teaches percussion at Trinity Western University.