

## **Film-Project “Armenian Spirit”**

### **Executive Summary**

ARMENIAN SPIRIT (see trailer at <https://vimeo.com/351183749>) will be a movie about contemporary Armenian artists in the fields of music, literature and the fine arts, who see their job as reviving and furthering the cultural heritage and traditions of Armenia in new ways. But the film doesn't only give artists a chance to speak, it also presents Armenia's marvellous landscape and sceneries and cultural landmarks, not just as a visual background, but as the very source of inspiration for Armenian artists.

This documentary of approx 45 to 50 minutes is foreseen for TV stations and channels in Europe, also to be presented during special events (e.g. in jazz clubs such as Porgy & Bess in Vienna or on documentary film festivals etc.). The main purpose of the film (see following detailed concept and description) is to illustrate and visualize the ARMENIAN SPIRIT.

"We Armenians are scattered all over the world. Actually, we are everywhere 'at home' " says Karen Asatrian, the film's main protagonist, a respected Jazz-Piano-Professor at the Gustav-Mahler-University at Klagenfurt/Carinthia as well as at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna.

"Whoever carries and preserves his inner home can say this sentence serenely and does not need to be afraid of a foreign environment - on the contrary, the artist takes it as an opportunity for new ways, be it in Vienna or Yerevan. This always creates something new without any need to give up your own individuality and identity. This is the 'Armenian Spirit', which is the topic of this movie: It presents artists who are searching incessantly for their historical roots and their Armenian identity. An art stimulated by Armenian spirit is excellent, independent and international.

## Concept

### 1. Key Message

The key message of this film will be illustrated by the opening sequence: a pomegranate is broken into two pieces and the dark-red seeds jump out and fall down on a world map, landing on all continents. This visualisation will symbolize the fact that wherever Armenian people live, the Armenian spirit works underground or in the subconscious. For Armenian artists this is a permanent source of inspiration, be it in Armenia or abroad. Art nurtured by the Armenian spirit is *excellent, independent and international*.

### 2. Main objective

The main purpose of the film is to illustrate and visualize how the ARMENIAN SPIRIT works, by presenting artists who use it as a resource of new inspiration. ARMENIAN SPIRIT will be a movie about Armenian artists in the fields of music, literature and the fine arts, with a focus on reviving and furthering the cultural heritage and tradition of Armenia.

"We Armenians are scattered all over the world. Actually, we are everywhere at Home", says Karen Asatrian, the film's main protagonist ([www.asatrian.net](http://www.asatrian.net)).

"Whoever carries and preserves his inner home can express this sentence serenely and does not need to be afraid of foreign environment - on the contrary, the artist takes it as an opportunity for new ways, be it in Austria or Yerevan."

All artists presented have Armenian roots, but found their own ways of expression in dealing with different cultures. That's what makes this spirit special: to be open to suggestions from other cultures and styles, to be inspired by them and to interpret your own tradition that shaped you in a new and contemporary way. In the context of Armenia's history, which has driven many artists abroad, this has an identity-building effect *without excluding others*. It goes without saying that for example Karen Asatrian's band also includes non-Armenians, like saxophonist Wolfgang Puschnig (Austrian), bassist Ante Jurinovic (Croatian) and drummer Reinhardt Winkler (Austrian). Thus "Armenian Spirit" brings together people who share their enthusiasm for openness, transculturalism and love of music. But not only in the field of music: something new is created without giving up your own individuality and identity. This is the Armenian Spirit, which is the key topic of this movie: It shows artists who are constantly searching for their historical roots and also for their Armenian identity.

### 3. Indirect Benefits

A first and implicit goal of this project is to widen the scope of attention for Armenian culture in Western Europe.

Over the last 30 years governments, public institutions, private associations and many individuals provided enormous assistance in cash and kind to overcome the disastrous effects of the 1988 earthquake. This project is to shift the scope from Armenia as a poor country to the wealth of her culture and tradition.

“Armenian spirit” doesn’t present Armenia as a poor country in need following natural disasters, the Karabach conflict and persistent political instability. It also doesn’t focus on more recent political upheaval. But it puts the focus on Armenia’s cultural wealth, a wealth not confined to museums and a few festivals, but deeply rooted among Armenia’s population. We believe this to be a unique approach in presenting Armenia both to the Armenian community and beyond.

Second, this film doesn’t give the chance to speak to artists only, it also presents Armenia’s marvellous landscape and sceneries and cultural landmarks, not just as a visual background, but as the very source of inspiration for Armenian artists.

To avoid the usual post-card picture when shooting in Armenia filming will also take place in less known areas, with particular focus on mountain areas where traces of prehistoric times can be seen (“petroglyphs”), as well as old cratered sceneries like in Ughtasar near Sisian - this is why the second shooting tour has to be organized in summer 2020 (unless it appears from the circumstances of the Covid-19-Crisis that it has to be postponed).

Gushing Armenian hospitality and delicious Armenian cuisine as well as wine and cognac will be unmissable in this film, so it will also be excellent advertising for Armenia abroad.

### 4. Protagonists

Key protagonist is Karen Asatrian, he is the guide throughout the film, as a bridge between the artists in Armenia and abroad. For the time being, the following artists will be interviewed:

In Armenia:

- Tamara Harutunyan (Yerevan, ceramist),
- Hovik Hoveyan (Yerevan, poet and ethnologist),
- Albert Vardanyan (Gyumri, sculptor),
- Hrachya Vardanyan (Gyumri, artist),
- Murad Malkhasyan (Gyumri, vocalist),
- the Youth Orchestra of Gyumri,
- the Tchaikovsky Music School in Yerevan,
- a Duduk-group of 6 Persons lead by Emanuel Hovanesyan,
- Rosa Hovhannisyan (Gyumri, poet).

Abroad:

- Karen Asatrian (shootings of concerts of his ensemble “Armenian Spirit” in Austria and in the Mezzo-Club in Yerevan),
- Sergey Katchatrian (violinist).

Following the opening trailer described above (pomegranate), we are looking for further protagonists in Europe, USA and South America. We are looking especially for a representative of popular music with Armenian roots. One of the famous female Armenian opera singers very successful abroad could also be candidates.

For this film, a great asset would be to do shootings in the Diaspora of Uruguay. A key person there is Liliam Kechichian, who played a central role in politics in her country for many years as a minister and as a member of the senate. Her grandparents fled from Genocide via Libanon to South America.

If our request of funding will be accepted, we shall continue our search for artists in the key countries known for Armenian diaspora.

## **5. Project timeline**

Work started in May 2019, when the Austrian film team accompanied the protagonist Karen Asatrian during his journey through Armenia and his first concert in Yerevan. In 2020 trips in Europe as well as to North and South America will take place, once contact with Armenian artists there are established and sufficient funding for those activities is secured.

As mentioned above a second journey to Armenia will take place in August 2020 to complete shootings.

Production will be finished in the middle of 2021..

## **6. Community Impact**

Preserving and promoting the Armenian identity and heritage through cultural programmes, upholding Armenian traditions and values by adapting to the demands of present times: Karen Asatrian and his colleagues perfectly fit this profile. They meet the demand of today's taste by offering new interpretations of Armenia's traditional music, aiming especially at young people.

## **7. Unique Impacts for the Armenian Community**

These days many Armenians in the Diaspora provide material support for Armenia. Karen Asatrian provides support in a different way: the film follows his activities at Yerevan's Tschaikowsky Music School, where he comes from. He supports talented Armenian children and adolescents, whose families could not afford training courses there. The film presents these students as impressive examples of up-and-coming talents in Armenia.

As mentioned above ARMENIAN SPIRIT doesn't present Armenia as a poor country quite the contrary: It puts the focus on Armenia's cultural wealth, a wealth not confined to museums and a few festivals, but deeply rooted among Armenia's population. We believe this to be a unique approach in presenting Armenia both to the Armenian community and beyond – on the background of unprecedented photographs of the Armenian landscapes, which will tempt potential tourists in the country.

## 8. Measures of success - Distribution

To ensure the widest possible distribution of this film, versions in German, English, French and Armenian language should be produced. Being aware that it is hardly possible to define operational parameters in the field of raising awareness for Armenian culture outside Armenia, we believe the following indicators will be helpful to assess the effects of the film:

Short-term:

- premiere of the film in Vienna's famous jazz club "Porgy & Bess" in January 2021 (agreed, date to be fixed) embedded in "Armenian Days" (performances, concerts and so on);
- film presentation in TV-channel 3SAT during the first semester of 2021 (agreed, date to be fixed);
- film presentation in Carinthia's capital Klagenfurt in 2021 (date to be fixed)
- ongoing negotiations to present the film in further TV-channels in Europe (for example: ARTE);
- Karen Asatrian's function as a bridge-builder between Austria and Armenia in cultural affairs will be intensified (additional invitations, media reporting);
- Submitting the film to documentary film festivals, for example ETHNOCINEAC in Vienna;
- USBs with the film should be offered to travel agencies which offer travel to Armenia.

## 9. Participants/audience

Main audience will be

- well educated Europeans, with a focus on culture enthusiast among TV consumers in Europe;
- people interested in modern interpretation of traditional Armenian music and arts (concerts, festivals, exhibitions);
- Armenia's Diaspora in Austria and beyond (for many of them Karen Asatrian is well known as an "ambassador" for traditional and contemporary Armenian music);
- Students at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna and abroad.

## 10. Operational needs and strategy

Mr *Johann Doeller*, general project manager and chairman of the Association "Spirit of Armenia" ([www.spiritofarmenia.org](http://www.spiritofarmenia.org)) initiated this project, is its mentor and Co-producer (see text "From disaster to the arts: <https://www.spiritofarmenia.org/english/about/> and Profession Profile attached).

Mr. *Gerhard Lapan*, head of Focus-Film Company Klagenfurt ([www.focusfilm.at](http://www.focusfilm.at)) is the main producer and director. He will be assisted by

Ms *Dimitrinka Pirich*, audio technician.

*Karen Asatrian* will be the guide through the film and function like a “red thread”.

Johann Döller, April 2020

[www.spiritofarmenia.org](http://www.spiritofarmenia.org)

# HANS DÖLLER

## Profession Profile

Hans Döllner has been a Senior Expert in the Austrian Ministry for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, working on fundamental issues concerning people with disabilities, since 2012.

From 1993 to 2012 he has managed different units and projects concerning the support of people with disabilities especially in the field of their integration into the first labour market. Now Mr. Döllner is a member of an in-house working group which evaluates the implementation of the National Action Plan on Disability 2012 to 2020.

He studied theology at the University of Innsbruck and continued with postgraduate studies in sociology at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Vienna, where he graduated in 1981.

One example of his international project management experience is being responsible for the reconstruction of a children's hospital in Armenia after the earthquake in 1988.

In 2018 he founded the non-profit association "Spirit of Armenia". Its main goal is to support Armenian art in all branches ([www.spiritofarmenia.com](http://www.spiritofarmenia.com)). From now on he will manage the musician and composer Karen Asatrian.

Vienna, January 2020