

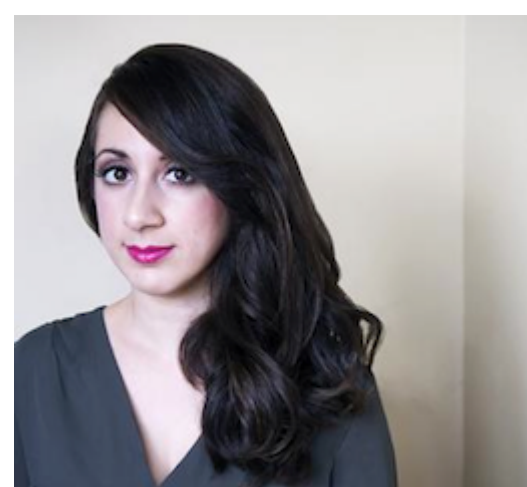


Mary Kouyoumdjian World Premiere Kronos Quartet Commission

BY LISA HOUSTON *FEBRUARY 2, 2014*KRONOS QUARTET *Feb 6-9*

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From Feb. 6 to 9 at Z Space in San Francisco, audiences will have a chance to hear why the Kronos Quartet chose Bay Area native Mary Kouyoumdjian from nearly 400 applicants for its latest Under 30 World Premiere commission. The quartet's artistic director David Harrington said of the choice, "As we narrowed down the field, we were looking for someone who seemed poised to write their breakthrough piece. And every time I came back to Mary's work, I was magnetized."



Mary Kouyoumdjian

Kouyoumdjian was raised in Pleasant Hill before attending University of California at San Diego where she received her B.A. in Music Composition. She already has over a dozen short film scores to her credit has received her M.A. in Scoring for Film and Multimedia from New York University. Explaining her attraction to work in film, Kouyoumdjian says, "I always have loved film music and before getting introduced to contemporary music, this seemed a great way I could make a living as a composer, and I kept meeting really cool collaborators. It's a great way to round out a lot of my interest and do these more pop influenced scores."

When asked when she began to realize that she might be well suited to composing, she spoke of her piano lessons in Walnut Creek with Bill Wentz, who taught her the art of improvisation "which is composition in real time."

Kouyoumdjian is a first generation Armenian American. Her parents were raised in Lebanon and, like many refugees of the Armenian genocide, lived through the Lebanese Civil War, which took place from 1975 to 1990, though as Kouyoumdjian points out, "It's a topic that's still an issue. Lebanon still has so much violence, as well as other neighboring regions."

The 23-minute piece that is the result of the Kronos Quartet commission, which is the fifth such commission in the group's Under 30 Project, features interviews with the composer's family and friends discussing their wartime experiences as well as audio of bombs and missiles recorded during the conflict. When asked how it is she is able to integrate music and issues that are very violent and troubling, such as war, and whether she wants the music to be disturbing to listen to, in the way those experiences are disturbing to experience, she answered as follows.

"First, I think music, and the arts in general, are a really wonderful way to start conversations about these controversial and painful topics. Often when we try to talk about them in words it leads to arguments because anger can arise in talking about these issues politically. But I think in music, if audiences are really open minded to hearing the duration of a piece and hearing that perspective, I love working in that medium." She adds, "it feels like the issue's been resolved if it's a really beautiful piece, and you're not going to think about how the people over there are still going through quite a lot. But if you can feel a little bit of that discomfort, just a small fraction of what they're going through, I think hopefully people will continue to think about that topic and hopefully that will lead to change, or just a general awareness of what's going on over there."

The concerts over the four evenings will be varied. The Kronos Quartet continues its support and encouragement of Bay Area musicians by opening each concert with a performance by a local artist, including Friction Quartet, Mobius Trio, The Living Earth Show, and Amy X Neuburg. The quartet's own contribution to the concert will vary as well, including works by Krzysztof Penderecki, John Oswald, Bryce Dessner, and Dan Becker on Thursday and Friday; and works by Krzysztof Penderecki, John Oswald, Geeshie Wiley, Laurie Anderson, Terry Riley, and more on Saturday and Sunday.

The topic of the Lebanese Civil War is obviously a personal one for Ms. Kouyoumdjian, and it is her wish that the concert experience will also help the audience to connect with the issue on a personal level.

"I'd really like the audience to be aware of the political issues around the topic of the Lebanese civil war but more importantly to focus on the individual stories that people are telling so that they get an idea of what life is like for one person. So often we hear about these topics when they're filtered through the news and we just hear that such and such a number of people got killed but we don't hear how that really affects the day to day life for that person and that family, what their worries are about living in a town like that so those are the things I'd really hope for them to listen for."

Lisa Houston is a writer and classical singer. She divides her time between Berkeley and Berlin.

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