



SRFF PRESENTS

**NORA ARMANI**

*in*

**MERCEDES  
AND  
ZARUHI**

*A solo performance in 1 act*

***WELCOME NEW SOVIET CITIZENS THE FATHERLAND AWAITS YOU***

WRITTEN BY

*Anush Aslibekyan*

ADAPTATED INTO ENGLISH BY

*Nora Armani*

**THEATER ROW  
NOVEMBER 6 2022**

Photos: Xiaopeng Zhan





## **SYNOPSIS**

**Mercedes and Zaruhi** tells the story of two sisters from Greece, the younger of whom, Zaruhi, driven by her patriotism repatriates to Soviet Armenia in 1948 during the mass repatriation movement (nerkaght). Mercedes, the older and wiser sister, stays behind in Greece. The play starts with them in Greece when Zaruhi decides to leave and unfolds through their correspondence in which Zaruhi is unable to freely tell her sister about the real situation behind the Iron Curtain because of heavy censorship and the threat of Siberian gulags. The audience bears witness to everything Zaruhi goes through, and while her letters to her sister are always positive, glorifying the Soviet Union and the Communist Paradise, she is nonetheless able to communicate through previously agreed-upon codes the real situation of her daily life. The play spans a period of almost 50 years from 1948 to the 1990s post independence of Armenia.

### **World Premiere of the English version**

This story inspired by true life events was successfully presented by Nora Armani to the New York theatre going public in the current English version as Mercedes and Zaruhi. A World Premiere that took place on November 6th, 2022 at the UnitedSolo Theatre Festival (the biggest solo theatre festival in the world) on Theatre Row in New York City. Nora Armani produced the play under SRFF (SR Socially Relevant Film Festival, Inc.) and self-directed it.

Judging from the audience's reactions, laughs, emotions, and the standing ovation at the end of the performance the audience thoroughly enjoyed every moment and understood every reference. Two positive reviews followed the premiere, as well as words of praise by Distinguished Professor of Theatre and Performance Prof. Marvin Carlson. The links to the full reviews may be found on the website [www.noraarmani.net](http://www.noraarmani.net)

**The play is now available for touring in different venues in the US and Internationally.**

*Nora Armani proposes Master Classes accompanying her presentations (for actors and non-actors alike).*

*To view a video clip from the performance and for related updates visit: [www.noraarmani/soloshows](http://www.noraarmani/soloshows)*



## PRESS QUOTES:

“I am delighted to tell you that I loved the performance. I was generally familiar with the tragic history of modern Armenia, but you added many new and fascinating details, and the relevance of the work to our contemporary interest in migration and dislocation was really striking. **You tell a great story--suspenseful, warm, human and funny**, with great characters, and your depiction of the slowly aging protagonist was deeply moving; especially the final scene. A memorable evening in the theatre.”

**Marvin Carlson**

Distinguished Professor of Theatre and Performance  
Graduate Center, City University New York

“Armani provided **an impressive and gut-wrenching performance** as Zaruhi, whose struggles worsen and become more heartbreaking as the play unfolds. The intensity and dedication with which Armani portrayed this character was unparalleled and, one can only imagine, emotionally exhausting. She was able to capture Zaruhi throughout an entire lifespan, from an optimistic young woman eager to return to the homeland to a mother scarred by numerous hardships to a grandmother working toward acceptance and reconciliation. She crafted the character physically and emotionally, with the entire gamut of human experience.”

**Dalita Getzoyan**

*The Armenian Weekly*

“...Armani seems to have hit her stride in this most recent performance, bringing everything in her dramatic repertoire to bear, and moving some in the sold-out audience to tears. **[Armani] handles the play’s humorous and tragic passages with brio and holds the audience’s attention throughout.**

The multitalented Armani has made performing at the United Solo Theatre Festival a yearly event. It is a prestigious showcase and this year Armani was on her mark, translating and adapting the original play into English, and then producing and directing the performance.

Aslibekyan is also an accomplished playwright, dramaturg and author whose work has been performed internationally.

*Mercedes and Zaruhi* won the coveted Armenian Book festival award in 2017. The play is now part of the National 10th Grade Curriculum in Armenian Literature.

**Christopher Atamian**

*The Armenian Mirror Spectator*



## **A WORD ON MY EXPERIENCE ADAPTING, PRODUCING AND PERFORMING THE PLAY**

A few years ago I was invited to the Patani Hadisates National Theatre in Armenia to play the lead role of Zaruhi in the full-length play *Mercedes* written by Anush Aslibekyan and directed by Hakob Ghazanchyan. It was a memorable experience, and I fell in love with the character of Zaruhi, the young repat, and loved portraying her as she ages over the span of 50 years into the 1990s while she witnesses the independence of Armenia.

I had met some of my Armenian relatives who had immigrated to Armenia during the post WW II mass repatriations (nerkaght) and learned about their own experiences first hand. I spoke my text from the stage first in Western Armenian and as the play progressed gradually changed my speech into a mixture of Western and Eastern Armenian, eventually transitioning into Eastern Armenian as I had seen it happen with many repats including my own relatives. It added a certain flavor to the character.

When I found out that the playwright had written a monologue version of the play, I felt it would be a good idea to bring it to the non-Armenian-speaking audiences outside of Armenia to tell them about this important part of our history. It became necessary to translate it into English.

While translating, I noticed that some of the references that were quite obvious to Armenians when spoken in Armenian, did not make much sense to an uninitiated non-Armenian audience. Therefore, I suggested a few minor changes to the author, in addition to including a number of important references and contextualization. As a result, the play became more comprehensible and accessible to an older audience with no previous knowledge of Armenian cultural references. This English language version of the play was adapted from the monologue *Madame Zaruhi*. Upon my suggestion, we changed the title because in English *Madame* may have a different connotation. This English version now has the title *Mercedes and Zaruhi*.

I strongly identify with this protagonist as I had experienced the Soviet Union back in the early 70's when I was invited to Armenia as a student to spend a summer in the pioneer camps there. My interpretation of Zaruhi is an amalgam of the women I met at that time, my relatives who I was meeting for the first time, and a part of my own imagination, bringing to life the character of Zaruhi as written on the page by Anush Aslibekyan.

Nora Armani



## BIOS

**Nora Armani** *Performer, English language adapter, Director*

Nora Armani is an award-winning actor/filmmaker with extensive International stage and screen credits. Recently she filmed *Absolute Dominion* a feature film by Lexi Alexander due to be released next year. She has appeared Off-Broadway in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Pirandello, *Terrorism* by Presnyakov Brothers, *Mercedes* by Anush Aslibekyan (in Armenia), *La Fête Virile* (in Paris), *The Plebians Rehearse the Uprising* (in London). Her TV and Film Credits include, *Blacklist*, *Redemption*, *Golden Boy*, *Casualty* (BBC), *The Friends* (EG TV); and films; *La Nouvelle Eve*, *Voisin Voisine*, *Last Station*, *Labyrinth*, *Bourek*, *Good Funk*, *I am Gitmo*, *Hungry*, *Moving Stories*.

Armani was recently awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award at the 38th Alexandria Film Festival, Egypt.

Full bio and films on [www.noraarmani.net](http://www.noraarmani.net).

**Anush Aslibekyan** *Playwright*

Anush Aslibekyan is an Armenian playwright, dramatist, and a member of the Association of Armenian Writers since 2012. She is the author of five books. Many of her works have been translated into different languages. Her plays have been performed in Armenia and internationally in over 20 festivals, winning awards. A Professor and Arts Candidate, she teaches theatre history and manages the literature and dramaturgy courses since 2006. *Mercedes and Zaruhi* is the winner of the 2017 Armenian Book Festival, and in 2022 it was included in the Syllabus for Modern Armenian Literature for 10th-grade classes.

**Vahan Arzruni** *Composer*

Vahan Artsruni is a Armenian composer with a distinctively new approach. He creates music in a variety of radical contemporary styles including chamber, electronic, symphonic, film/theatre and ballet.

**Mike Doughty**

PR & Digital Marketing - contact for interviews and writeups on Nora Armani: [miked@theS1group.com](mailto:miked@theS1group.com)



## **TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS**

### **Performance space**

20ft x 20ft (smaller and larger spaces are possible).

### **Lighting**

Professional stage lighting with minimal light effects and gels (to be worked during rehearsal).

### **Sound**

15 sound effects in total that are available as MP3s (provided by the performer) and can be played over a sound system at the venue from a smartphone or a computer.

### **Props & costumes**

All props and costumes are provided by the performer with the exception of two cardboard boxes (moving box type) that can easily be found anywhere.

### **Furniture** *(to be provided locally)*

- Rectangular writing table.
- A sewing machine console, or an actual singer-type sewing machine on its own table.
- Two old wooden chairs preferably black.
- Tailor's Mannequin (dress form).

### **Rehearsal time**

A minimum of three hours' rehearsal is required with the local technical crew who will be in charge of the lights and sound board. Preferably the rehearsal should be scheduled the day before the performance and not on the same day. The same technical crew must be available for both the rehearsal and the performance.

### **Travel and accommodation**

Not included in the honorarium

### **Honorarium**

The artist's honorarium for a one-time one-off performance away from home is **\$3000** (for theatres of 150+ seats).

For the same size theatre in the Greater New York/NJ area it is **\$2500**. For smaller spaces, weekly runs, or a number of consecutive performances on the same stage or nearby stages, the honorarium is negotiable according to the specific conditions in each case.



*Nora Armani with playwright Anush Aslibekyan.*

**For bookings email: [rsvp.srff@gmail.com](mailto:rsvp.srff@gmail.com) or call (917) 318 2290**

**An SR Socially Relevant™ Film Festival production.**  
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