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### Manic Depressive Psychosis (MDP)

[March 9, 2005]

*Manic Depressive Psychosis (MDP) was formed in 1990 at Yerevan State University. Eduard Abrahamyan is MDP's keyboard player and lead vocalist. Arman Padaryan is the band's manager and has promoted and managed a number of other Armenian rock groups and classical soloists including Oaksenham, the Hover Chamber Choir, Liana Aleksanyan, the Komitas Quartet and Loris Tjeknavoryan.*

*This interview is one in an occasional series that will form the basis for a later article on the contemporary rock scene in the Republic of Armenia . Photos courtesy of MDP.*

#### Onnik Krikorian: When was MDP formed?

**Arman Padaryan:** The band that was established at Yerevan State University in 1990 later disbanded and two musicians, Mesrob and Vardan, from a well known heavy metal combo named Soma, joined Eduard Abrahamyan and Henry Grigoryan of MDP in 1994. So, two bands effectively came together and the sound of the band became

heavier.

#### Onnik Krikorian: But then MDP left Armenia?

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** We left Armenia in 1993 for Russia and stopped in Rostov but nothing happened. Well, actually something did happen in Rostov...

**Arman Padaryan:** MDP recorded an album and worked there for a year and a half before starting to again elaborate their music and image on the Armenian rock scene in 2000.

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** We came back on different dates. I came back in 1995. Then Henry returned in 1997 but left again for the United States where he played in a band for three years. Then Vardan came back in 1998 or 1999 and started to work on his own projects which we were also involved with. Mesrob came back in 2000 and we got together again and began to work. We've had our own studio for two years now.

**OK: How would you describe your music?**

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** [laughs, looking at Arman Padaryan]

**Arman Padaryan:** Since I used to work as a journalist, they always look at me [laughs].

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** You went to our concert on Christmas Eve?

**OK: Yes, and I bought your album.**

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** So you have a little experience [laughs]. It's a difficult question to answer. We want to create our own special style. Many groups, and not only in Armenia, attempt to play music in a particular style whether that's rock, punk or something else but we just play what want. It's hard to say what style we are but it's definitely not pop music. It's maybe oriental. It's maybe ethno-metal-syntho-rock -- it's heavy [laughs]!

**OK: When I recently interviewed Sasha from Sard and asked him if he considered that rock music was something underground in Armenia he said no because from time to time Armenian rock bands are given airtime on television. However, he did say that MDP could perhaps be considered underground because you aren't really interested in publicity or being interviewed.**

**Arman Padaryan:** That's true. The group is not vain. MDP don't like interviews or photo sessions. Another problem is that most rock groups lack the money for shooting professional videos that can be shown on television and it's instead easier for TV channels here to take a DVD or video from a shop and show a concert or clip by a foreign band without paying anything for copyright.

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** Our plans don't necessarily involve being seen on TV unlike other bands. We respect Sard and are friends but we have different plans.

**OK: In fact, MDP helped Sard record their album.**

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** Yes, we came across Sard when we decided to open our studio and offered twelve

groups use of our recording facilities free of charge. Sard was one of those groups and because they played well we decided to help promote them by organizing a concert. Then we decided to record their live-in-studio album.



**OK: Were you trying to help promote the development of rock music in Armenia?**

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** When we decided to work in Armenia again by establishing our studio and by performing concerts we discovered that it was difficult to do something without having a market. There really wasn't any market in Armenia at that time and so, when we returned, we decided to do something special by staging a concert with high quality sound, lights and dry ice. We attempted to develop the market.

**Arman Padaryan:** Yes, the market in Armenia is small and you can't earn money playing rock music unless you're working regularly in a club playing covers because it's unlikely that a young audience will be interested in listening only to your music every week. You should instead have quite a versatile program consisting of at least one hundred compositions in case someone says they want to hear something by Sweet, Deep Purple or more recent groups such as Oasis.

However, Armenian bands prefer to go in a more original direction. MDP performs only its own music and doesn't play covers. It's their credo because they have quite an original format which is not commercial. Yet, the curious thing is that many Armenian pop stars work with rock musicians. I can tell you, for example, that Nune Yesayan's backing band can boast one of Armenia's best rock drummers.

**OK: Why do you think that there isn't a market in Armenia?**

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** In the nineties there were many groups in Armenia -- maybe twenty or thirty -- but after those difficult years in Armenia, everybody went to England, United States or Russia. Therefore, the market is now not developed enough because when the quality of rock music deteriorated, the audience turned to Western groups instead. Of course, we all love western rock music but we also have something of our own to present to an audience. Incidentally, this doesn't just apply to us. There are other groups as well.

**OK: So, if you were to advertise a concert in advance, how many people do you think you could attract?**

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** The Firewall Festival that you've seen on DVD attracted 500 people so I think that we could maybe attract a maximum of 1,000 people. Certainly, it's not possible to fill something like a large auditorium.

**OK: It's still very small, isn't it?**

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** Yes, for Armenia it's small because the rock scene is not developed enough and anyway, the country is small. We tried but have now started to go in a different direction with Arman such as performing at various festivals in Europe. Of course, we will still work in Armenia because it is our homeland and we have a studio here.

**OK: Who do you consider your main audience to be?**

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** We have an audience ranging from fifteen years of age to fifty.

**OK: What about CD sales?**

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** I can't say exactly and I'd rather consider the 500 we produced as promotional copies. However, we know that at least one of them was bought by you [laughs]!

**OK: It was very cheap.**

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** I don't think so. You probably paid 2,000 drams which is not cheap for Armenia because the usual price is 1,500 drams. If we sold it for 5,000 drams we would have a problem with pirate copies. Anyway, we're not thinking about profit right now because to make \$2 a disc on selling 100 copies is insignificant.

**OK: Maybe you guys shouldn't be in the music business if you don't seem to be concerned with making a profit.**

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** We don't care about making a profit if it's small [laughs]!

**OK: However, there is potentially a larger audience in the Diaspora although it would appear that it is very difficult to break into that market because Armenians living abroad want traditional, kef, rabiz or patriotic songs.**

**Arman Padaryan:** Yes, they want to relax with Armenian music. However, when you speak about Armenian rock groups you should understand that there are groups and musicians such as Bambir (II), Lav Eli and Gor Mkhitarian that can be quite successful in the Diaspora while bands such as MDP, Sandaramed or Oaksenham are basically orientated towards a more professional market such as the club and festival scene in Continental Europe although not the UK which is very difficult to crack.

Armenian rock music is more philosophical and introverted with its own niche that is appreciated in continental

clubs rather than in Britain which is too party-orientated. Anyway, MDP basically plays music for themselves and not simply to make money. This makes them different from other rock bands.

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** I've thought about this and can say that we don't plan to target the Diaspora because it wants nostalgia and we're not playing nostalgic music. We're not playing Sayat Nova or Komitas and so I don't expect that many in the Diaspora will become fans. Actually, you're probably right in what you said earlier. We're not in the music business. We just want to play our music although it would be great to have concerts in Holland or Belgium. However, our main objective is to play well and to synchronize our inner world with what we are doing. We tried to develop the Armenian market and we at least succeeded in doing something.

We're also not smart enough to use someone else's money. We use our own money instead which is why we're not able to stage an event every month. Pop is well developed. Nune Yesayan sings Armenian music in the Armenian language and so the attitude of businessmen who want to sponsor something is different. We only sing in English although I consider that I really only use my voice as an additional instrument. Anyway, sponsors are not interested because we have a small audience whereas the whole of Armenia can listen to pop music. We don't have a large audience but I'm not so concerned by this because we prefer to be underground. We like this situation.

**Arman Padaryan:** Another issue is that it is very difficult to promote Armenian rock bands because we don't have enough resources to be personally present at important international conferences and meetings abroad. I can't afford to visit Europe regularly to promote Armenian music such as the International Artists Management Association meeting which will take place in April, for example. However, I would like to attend it because I can take lots of Armenian music with me.

Even so, there have been some projects that have been successful such as one by Oaksenham which was supported by the British Council and we hope that the band will be able to perform at a rock festival in Tbilisi. I'm also anticipating interest in MDP from American, Belgian and German promoters. If MDP is invited to work in the club scene in Western Europe or the United States I hope that a foreign promoter and producer can help develop their music and style so that they can be better understood by Western listeners.

#### **OK: What plans do you have for 2005?**

**Eduard Abrahamyan:** We plan to work on our new album and to participate in some festivals in Europe -- for example, in Belgium, Holland and Scandinavia. I hope that there will also be some interesting events here in Armenia as well, including a performance with Deti Picasso in May. We also wanted to make a series of programs on Yerkir Media TV and have already filmed one program about MDP but couldn't find a sponsor to extend this format to include other groups.

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MDP has a web site at: <http://www.mdp.am>

See also:

<http://www.hetq.am/eng/culture/0503-rock.html>

<http://www.hetq.am/eng/culture/0412-sard.html>

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