

[The Saga Of Opera Tenor Vahan Mirakian](#)

I met Vahan Mirakian through a mutual friend, his attorney, almost two years ago for the first time in a small tourist town, a paradise of sorts on the Pacific near Tijuana called "San Antonio". The town was gorgeous as was the ocean view from Vahan's Villa patio. Vahan's face looked old and tired, as if he had given up. I would find out later, he virtually had.

As I sat and listened Vahan, his then girlfriend, (now wife), Marika A. and my friend, his attorney speak in Russian and Armenian, I waited after each series of conversations before each was carefully interpreted to me.

Vahan had, a year ago, been arrested at LAX at age 70, handcuffed, dragged through the airport, made to sign papers he did not understand, detained, and then deported, and not allowed to return on a technical violation.

I can only imagine after 9-11, that most immigration officers at airports in their zeal to keep us safe, tended to be more aggressive if a violation was found, than not. But Vahan was hardly a threat to anyone. This man was a world famous opera tenor, in fact one of the top five anywhere, and a former resident at the Bolshoi, not to mention having been scheduled to play Carnegie Hall.

Though he did not understand my English (even a lot of Americans don't as I was raised in Mississippi, and I did not understand his Armenian, we understood each other and developed a great affection. Whatever words we did not understand were quickly interpreted by our mutual friends.

Before the year's end, I returned to Los Angeles to visit our mutual attorney friend, and we drove again to Mexico to visit Vahan. He was sadder than ever, and his complicated case was not looking good. His fiance Marika, a television producer and talk show host at Armenian TV in Glendale, had to commute every weekend she could to be with Vahan. The strain was beginning to tear Vahan and Marika apart, I could easily see.

My 53rd birthday happened to coincide with this trip to Mexico, and we all went to a small restaurant called La Fonda's, really more or less a dive with an American pop band and very good Mexican food. At the break, I mentioned to the manager that one of the world's top opera stars was at our table and asked if he could sing accompanied by the band. "Of course," said the manager. I had not even asked Vahan yet but he gladly agreed. He had not sung at any venue in over a year and music was and is his life.

As it turned out, most the band opted out but the saxophone player was keen on doing a duo. When they started O Solo Mia, you could hear a pin drop in this packed establishment. It was surreal, like something out of a Salvador Dali painting. Nobody could believe their ears and kept yelling for an encore when it was over.

Vahan had dedicated it to me, for my birthday, out of love and respect.

Today, nearly another year later, I received an email from our mutual attorney friend that his case cleared. He is a free citizen again in the U.S. and living in Los Angeles. He plans a nationwide and possibly a world tour at age 71. His voice is as clear as ever and I can hear the well-known masters every time he opens his mouth.

Vahan also has a foundation that helps disadvantaged Armenian youth find their voice in music. It does wonders for those who would never have a chance otherwise. I salute this man for hanging in there and putting up a fight for his justice. I salute the American system for allowing him another chance to make it in this great country.

America rarely lets me down, and it proved today, that it truly lives up to what is on the base of the Statue Of Liberty and in our Constitution. May Vahan live and sing to be 120.

About the Author

Any angel of the arts should consider giving to the Vahan Mirakian Foundation to help underprivileged youth find their voice through opera at [501C3 Tax Deductible Donation](#), and [A Tax-Deductable Donation](#)