

# Building Bridges in Western Armenian: Istanbul-Based Hangardz Brings Saroyan's 'My Heart's in the Highlands' to Armenia

*The first tour from Istanbul to Armenia by an independent professional theater that performs in Western Armenian. Directed by Tara Demircioğlu and Yeğya Akgün.*

ISTANBUL, TURKEY, July 4, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Istanbul-based [Hangardz Independent Theater Ensemble](#) successfully completed its tour in Armenia to stage William Saroyan's seminal first play, "My Heart's in the Highlands," June 22-July 2, 2024.

"It is the first tour from Istanbul to Armenia by an independent professional theater ensemble that performs in Western Armenian, a language listed in UNESCO's Atlas of World Languages in Danger. We are also happy that the tour was funded through an award by the European Union and the Eurasia Partnership Foundation based on an application by Hangardz and after being evaluated and selected by the jury. It is exciting that independent theater staged in Western Armenian is supported and performed internationally. The reception of the tour by audiences has been exceptionally warm and encouraging," says Yeğya Akgün, Co-Founder and Director for Hangardz.

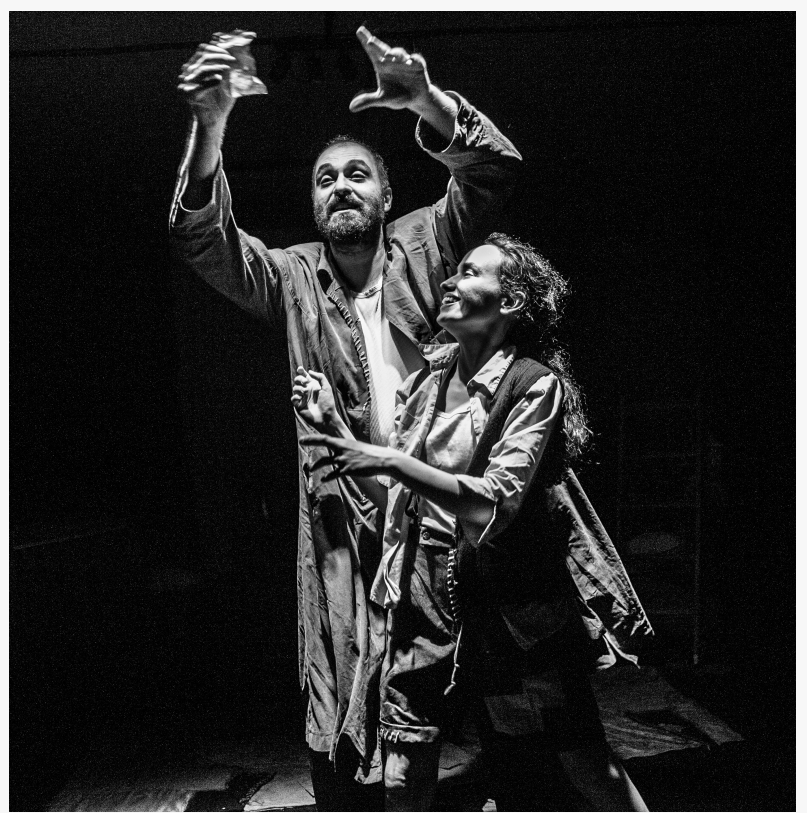
The Western Armenian translation of the play was performed by Hangardz in Vanadzor at the Abelyan Theater on June 24th, and in Yerevan at the Sundukyan Theater on June 26th and the Armenian Center for Contemporary Experimental Art (NPAK) on June 30th.

The play is directed by Tara Demircioğlu and Yeğya Akgün. Akgün played a leading role along with Diana Chilingaryan who received the 2024 Üstün Akmen Promising Actress of the Year Award for her performance in "My Heart's in the Highlands" in Istanbul.



"My Heart's in the Highlands" play on stage

“My Heart’s in the Highlands” was staged on Broadway in 1939 and is considered a predecessor of the Theatre of the Absurd movement. Saroyan penned it before Eugène Ionesco wrote “The Bald Soprano” and Samuel Beckett wrote “Waiting for Godot.” Set in Fresno, California in 1914, the play invites the audience to think through concepts such as roots, land, memory, belonging, and longing, and is based on a former Shakespearean actor who feels lost and disconnected from the world, and his encounter with a nuclear family of an elderly mother, son, and grandchild. The entire play is narrated through the eyes of Johnny, the child of the nuclear family.



Diana Chilingaryan and Yeğya Akgün in lead roles

The play’s dramaturgy is inspired and shaped by the Pulitzer award winning author William Saroyan’s foreword “To the poets of the world. To those simple and sublime people whose lives are poetry. To everyone who is, and ever was, a child. To the heart in the highlands.”

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*Yeğya Akgün*

Demirci and Yeğya Akgün.

About Hangardz

Hangardz Independent Theater Ensemble was founded by a group of young professional Armenian theater artists who gathered around a shared dream to perform theater in their native

Hangardz’ tour in Armenia was featured in Agos newspaper in Istanbul by journalist Vartan Estukyan and in English translation in [The Armenian Weekly](#) (Boston).

On July 1, 2024, [Kentron Channel](#) featured a morning television interview in Yerevan with Hangardz members Artun Gebenlioğlu, Diana Chilingaryan and Yeğya Akgün.

The Hangardz cast includes Diana Chilingaryan, Antranik Bakırcıoğlu, Artun Gebenlioğlu, Bared Çil, Dikran Peştimalcıgil, Miranda Şahinoğlu, Tvin Zeytounian, Garine Maral Çizmeciyan, Lara Narin, Nişan Şirinyan, Sevada Haçik

language, Western Armenian, and to reflect universal theater values along with their local motifs and colors. The ensemble was founded under the name 'hangardz', meaning 'suddenly', which conveys how they embarked on the journey for independent theater performed in Western Armenian. Hangardz debuted on World Theater Day in 2018 with their play "Mer Çunetsadzi İrarmov Kidnenk" [Let's Find in Each Other What We Don't Have] at the Synergy World Theater Festival in Serbia.

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"My Heart's in the Highlands" performed by Hangardz

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