

NOV 2020

# TORNADO

magazine

## Armenia's War Hitting Home

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▪ by Armenian  
Club President  
Ani Eulmessekian

**EXCLUSIVE**

## Sev Ohanian

*from Hoover to Hollywood.*

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photograph by *Andrew Jeric*

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## Editor's Note

After many excruciatingly painful and joyous hours of writing and editing, we are very honored to be launching Hoover's first ever magazine, Tornado Magazine. During these past few months, we have been working remotely alongside Hoover's journalism staff on curating a student-friendly publication. We are excited to finally share these incredible stories with you, and excited for all the potential stories we have yet to tell. Primarily focused on the arts and culture that makeup the diverse community on campus, we hope this issue continues to add onto the legacy at Hoover and influence future students to join our Ohana. Thank you for reading and we will see you in the new year! Stay safe.


The Editors,

Nooneh Gyurjyan and Sebastian Guzman

A close-up photograph of several ripe pomegranates. One pomegranate is cracked open, and its bright red, jewel-like seeds are spilling out onto a dark, reflective surface below. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the pomegranate skins and the vibrant color of the seeds.

# History Through Jewelry

SHOP NOW

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Yerevan, Armenia, with a large Armenian flag (blue, red, and green horizontal stripes with a white cross) draped over the foreground. The city is nestled in a valley, surrounded by rolling hills and mountains under a clear sky.

## Giving Back to Our Homeland.

100% of our proceeds will be directly donated to [www.armenianfund.org](http://www.armenianfund.org). We are all in this together. Let's do OUR part in fighting against human injustice. #ArtsakhStrong #ArtsakhisArmenia

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# Armenia's War Hitting Home

by **Ani Eulmessekian** ▪ senior  
President of Armenian Club

**H**istory ignored is history repeated. This concept seems to constantly plague my mind, as I continuously scroll through the numerous informational Instagram pages discussing the current state of Artsakh. As a resident of Glendale, this news does not come as a surprise. Freeways have been blocked and multiple protests have been organized to address the topic.

Though this does fill me with a great feeling of patriotism, it also provoked my mind with a thought:

How is the world allowing this to happen?

To answer this question, a brief history of the origin of Artsakh is necessary. Artsakh was an integral part of historic Armenia. Dating back to the Urartu era (from 9-6th cc. B.C.), it was known as Urtekh-Urtekhini and mentioned in many works as being part of Greater Armenia. After the division of Greater Armenia in 387 A.D., however, Artsakh was separated and put under the Eastern Armenian kingdom, which was governed by Persian and Arab Empires. Throughout the following centuries, Artsakh fell under the rule of various conquerors including Turkic nomadic tribes to the north and the Russian Empire, however, it remained true to its Armenian roots and identity. Following the revolution and collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, both Azerbaijan and the Independent Republic of Armenia emerged as independent countries and the dispute over the land known as Karabakh or Artsakh began once more.

It was this moment in history that sparked the ongoing battle of territories between the two countries.

Over the next few years, Azerbaijan—along with Turkey—carried out massacres against the citizens of Artsakh, which resulted in about 40,000 Armenian deaths even after a preliminary agreement was signed at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Artsakh and its innocent people continued to be targeted throughout the late 19th century, as Russia's commissioner for nationalities placed the country under the administration of Soviet Azerbaijan as an “autonomous region.”

In 1988, the people of Artsakh finally raised their voice against Azeri aggression through peaceful protests and demanded to reunify with their homeland, Armenia SSR. After a long and hard battle, Artsakh came out victorious and declared independence, although this is still not internationally recognized. Even after being liberated in 1991, Artsakh still faced Azeri aggression until a ceasefire agreement was signed in 1994. This, however, did not hinder Azerbaijan's violent attempts to seize the lands of Karabakh.

Having understood this history, Azerbaijan's incentive is clear. Nevertheless, this form of transparency does not justify their current actions.

On the morning of September 27th, Azerbaijan launched a series of coordinated missile attacks aimed towards the citizens of Artsakh. This was not the first of the recent assaults, for the country threatened the wellbeing of the citizens of the Tavush region in Karabakh just a few months prior, which also resulted in the loss of civilian lives.



Residents seeking cover from  
Azerbaijan shelling in Artsakh.

Erik Grigoryan

Turkey has also supported this aggressive behavior by supplying the Azeri military with more than 4,000 “ex-ISIS Syrian jihadist mercenaries” and calling to overthrow the Armenian government. Though Armenia and Artsakh are working tirelessly to cripple Azeri incursion, many courageous soldiers have fallen prey to the results of war and villages of Artsakh have sustained large amounts of damage and casualties, including children and elderly.

It saddens me that I cannot use the past tense to describe these actions. I’m amazed as to how a “dispute” against two countries can go so unnoticed. To this day, our President has failed to say anything more than “we’re looking at it very strongly,” and the thousands of people that have families in those areas have had to restlessly watch as the two countries rip at each other’s throats.

I know the question circulating in your thoughts and I ponder it as well.

Why should I care about a country on the opposite side of the world when there is so much happening in my life already?

Before I can allow those thoughts to completely consume your mind, however,

Whether you are seated at a desk, hanging out with friends, laying in bed, or doing work at a cafe, you are safe. Your life is not at immediate risk, and you do not currently have a knife held to your throat.

My fellow students, I plead you to understand and envision that across the world, at this very moment, there are young men and women our age testing their luck on the frontlines. Leaving their families in complete distress and putting a halt on their



Aftermath of Azerbaijani shelling at Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi, Artsakh.

***"This isn't a dispute  
over territory  
or ethnicity. This is  
an issue of  
human injustice."***

future. The very future we dearly hold on to.

This isn't a dispute over territory or ethnicity. This is an issue of human injustice. Whether you are Armenian or not, the mentality should be uniform. The thought that human oppression is unacceptable should be ironically accepted by all.

As such, Turkey and Azerbaijan rely on the world's indifference and culture of silence to execute another genocide of the Armenian people.

If you can take away anything from this article, I encourage you to donate to the trusted ArmeniaFund, which works directly with Armenia and Artsakh, and ensures an abundance of resources and money is being sent over.

Your contributions have a direct effect on the wellbeing of the innocent men, women, children, and soldiers fighting desperately to keep their homeland.

I urge you to ask yourself: What can I do to ensure peace and justice for everyone? As Martin Luther King Jr. said, **"Injustice somewhere is a threat to justice everywhere."**



**hhs.armenianclub**

- follow on Instagram for more information and ways to contribute.



- donate at [www.armenianfund.org](http://www.armenianfund.org)

# The War and Its Impact

- How some Hoover students and alumni are coping with the effects of the war.

**Sona Ovasapyan, Hoover senior** ▪ "While I am dedicating all the possible time I have volunteering at Armenian fund and attending rallies, I will never feel sufficient with the amount I've contributed because there is always more to be done. Everyone plays a role in this current war. The easiest way to prevent the next genocide is to inform and be informed, speak out about the atrocities happening in Artsakh before Turkey and Azerbaijan move into Armenia. If you'd like to volunteer, contact Armenia fund for specific events and Armenian foundations. Armenian Youth Foundation is extremely involved, whether it be packaging donations, leading marches, and or collecting funds."



Ovasapyan at one of the many protests for peace in Artsakh.

**Ani Sargsyan, Hoover senior** ▪ "Being a part of the Armenian diaspora, the conflict has taken over my life. Every hour of every day is spent in concern about how everyone is doing there and I'm constantly trying to think of new ways to help raise money to donate. With the conflict I've realized how small the problems we have here are compared to the



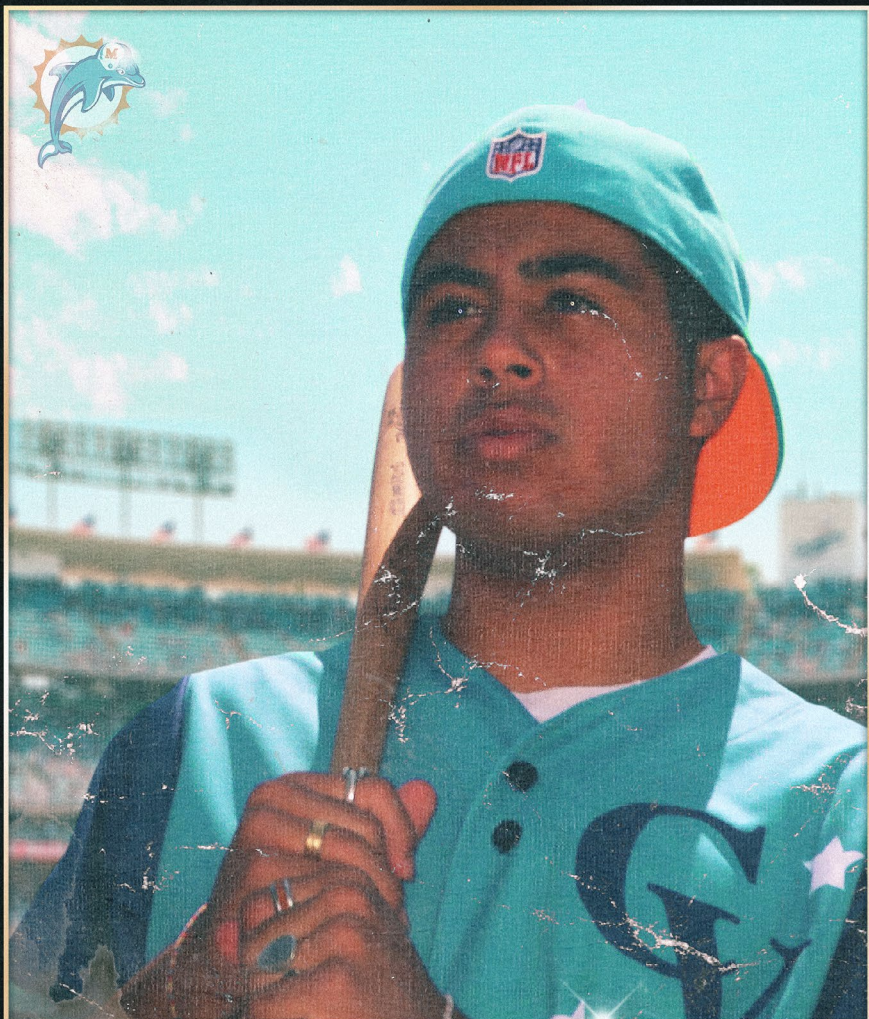
A photo Sargsyan took at one of the protests she attended.

problems that the young children have in Armenia. They are thinking of their family and friends fighting on the front lines and wondering if they'll wake up in ruins the next morning. While we're here worried about finishing our school work on time, they can't even go to school. I've also come to realize that there are bigger things in this world and to live in comfort is never an option when people are suffering all over the world. We need to do everything to help anyone we can, however we can. I spend every extra moment of time out of online school going to protests, raising money and checking the news. Even during classes it really does seem that I'm physically sitting in front of the zoom class but in reality my mind is taken with thoughts of Armenia and the people there. This is a conflict that requires everyone stand up, speak up, and volunteer."

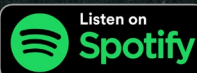
**Sev Ohanian, writer and producer, Hoover alumnus** ▪ "My home country of Armenia is not only under attack on a physical sense, but also online, there is this coordinated propaganda machine that is going full time trying to make our little tiny country of Armenians feel as if they're the aggressors, and spreading all sorts of lies. I'm working with a lot of Armenians both in America and in Armenia, to combat the misinformation and I have that blue checkmark on my social media accounts, I guess that means something. So I want to be extra vocal online." (turn to page 12 to learn more about Ohanian)



# MAKING MY WAY



# CONCEPCION



# Welcome to High School...COVID Edition

by **Audrey Parsighian** and **Emily Terkazaryan** ■ staff writers

**H**ow would you feel if you had to start high school during a pandemic? What programs would you wish were in place to help you better understand this situation?

Freshmen around the country in 2020 are beginning their first year in high school without any preparation as to what to expect. They will not have the full experience of walking down school hallways, schedules in hand, searching each room number for the correct classroom.

They will not have the enjoyment of being around their friends and classmates, ready to start a new chapter in their academic careers together. Instead, they are stuck at home, without any idea of when they will walk into high school for the first time. They will be exposed to a completely different environment in dire need of assistance.

Hoover High School has created a new program this year in an attempt to remedy this: Link Crew. Link Crew is a program that helps incoming freshmen at Hoover adjust to their new environment by giving them an upperclassman mentor. Lara Suri, teacher specialist and advisor of the Link Crew program at Hoover, said that the goal of the program is to create **“a sense of community and belonging right from the start of school.”**

Juniors and seniors collectively volunteered to the program to mentor the Class of 2024 and give them advice from their own experiences. For Eliana Artenyan, a Hoover junior, the choice of becoming a Link Crew mentor was a no-brainer.

**“I joined Link Crew because I wanted to make sure the incoming freshmen this year**



**were welcomed into our Hoover family with open arms,” Artenyan said. “I wanted the new freshmen to know that there is someone supporting them throughout their first year of high school.”**

Each mentor is assigned 5-6 freshmen to which they will interact with for the entire year. Throughout the year, these mentors will check up on the lowerclassmen and make sure they are doing well mentally and academically. They will make sure that their students are adjusting to the struggles of freshmen life. They will push the freshmen into joining clubs and school activities and encourage them to be as active in the Hoover community as they would be on campus.

However, the program is not only benefitting freshmen. Suri added that Link Crew is also helping the upperclassmen mentors.

**“This program benefits our Juniors and Seniors by developing leadership and communication skills and the Freshmen benefit by having a ‘friend’ to show them the ropes and what it means to be a Tornado!”** Suri said.

An important value Hoover holds is to treat each other like family because Hoover is our second home. The new Link Crew program captures this essence of Hoover. Upperclassmen and lowerclassmen will no longer be divided by experience, but unified by time spent together.



# Hoover's New Way of Showing School Spirit With BGD Changes

by **By Emma Ghalustians** ▪  
staff writer

**B**eat Glendale Day. Three words that bring so much adrenaline to the students and staff of Hoover High School every year. It is a long-standing rivalry – one of the longest in the entire state – between Glendale High School and Hoover that began in 1930. For the last 40-plus years, BGD has had many traditions such as class skits, posters, and other activities – from chalking in the quad to quiz bowls between each class and other fun activities and competitions. It is a week full of excitement and school pride that brings everyone together.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, plans have changed drastically for the week of BGD and students are now wondering how it will all fall out. The Associated Student Body of Hoover once again is working on solutions to make the school year more festive and to try and engage students in the most efficient manner.

So what exactly will happen this year? Although CIF pushed back all sports to the second semester, including football, during the week of November 16-20, there will be a virtual BGD, **“which means a different format while maintaining our strong**

**traditions”** said ASB President Maria Akhverdyan.

**“We will host a virtual BGD skit with our individual class themes, have a poster, and an online competition with many activities which include a video game competition against our rival: Glendale High School,”** Akhverdyan said.

The poster this year will be smaller than normal and will be created with minimal help from students.

Spirit week will still continue on during the week with a different theme each day. Like the second half of last year, students will be contacted through social media platforms and personally reached to ensure participation from students.

Due to distance learning, “it is much harder to get students to participate, but we reach out and urge them to participate still. We also post on our school Instagram accounts about any upcoming events or something,” stated Sophomore Class President Amanda Bystrom.

Junior Class President Jessica Voskanian said, “Even when we did on-campus learning, we always encouraged students to participate in activities to raise school spirit. Each class has an assigned Instagram and a Google Classroom where we post important

reminders and events like spirit week. Spirit week will also be advertised on the Hoover High School website and on Dr. Earl’s Sunday calls.”

Each ASB class president mentioned that this year there is going to be one video filmed by the ASB team using Zoom; therefore it will be pre-recorded. They are



going to work with what they have and follow the restrictions that were given to them.

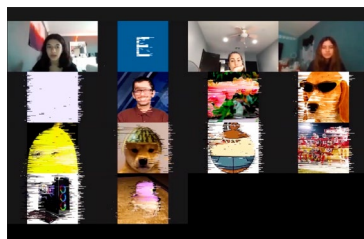
Max Metzler, the scriptwriter of the skit, gave a little inside scoop of their ideas. "The video is basically going to be a zoom parody of the movie 'Unfriended.'" The plot is basically that the BGD bell is haunted by a ghost and a group of people are attacked over zoom by it."

Voskanian mentioned that the BGD traditions were important to continue even during an unusual and chaotic school year. "BGD has been going on since the late 1930's and we have not had a year that we have not done the traditions, BGD traditions are a big part of Hoover and what we stand for." Bystrom added that "it's important to keep the school spirit going even if we aren't physically at school."

Akhverdyan also added, "Our annual BGD is an event that is awaited for, due to its adrenaline rushing experience and class involvement. We want to maintain a sense of normal for our students even if it looks a little different this year."

BGD is being attended to day by day because of the constantly evolving situation. ASB is focusing on hosting a virtual event that requires minimal to no student contact. Decisions regarding BGD have been made by ASB with collaboration with Earl. The decisions will also be influenced by the district guidelines.

"Our biggest concern is students' safety so we want to make sure that we are doing



In the skit, students are haunted by a ghost.

## What Students Think

■ We asked Hoover students about their thoughts on a virtual BGD.

### Mary Bejanyan, junior

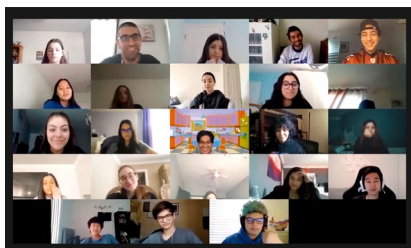
■ "Even though our school does not have much school spirit, I think it is the only event that truly put spirit into our school. It's kind of sad that we won't have that this year."

### Lucas Omori, senior

■ "It's disheartening to say the least. BGD is such a huge part of our schools identity and for it to be robbed from us on our last year feels terrible. I think I am especially sad because as a member of ASB, BGD is something we all look forward to. Every class works tirelessly to make sure BGD is eventful and something all students can cherish as a high school memory."

### Vache Sipanian, senior

■ "Since I'm the Hoover Tornado Mascot, and I get to perform at BGD, it makes me sad that I won't be able to do that this year."



ASB members acting in their "Ghostbusters" themed BGD skit done via Zoom call.

# CALENDULA CORNER



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# Hoover to Hollywood

*a conversation with*

**SEV  
OHANIAN**

by **Sebastian Guzman** ■ senior

Prolific producer and screenwriter, Sev Ohanian, a former Hoover student of the class of '05, remembers his journey from growing up as an Armenian student in Glendale, CA interested in the art of storytelling to now, creating films in the Hollywood industry that shape and move the conversation about ethnic representation and diversity in a retrospective interview with current Hoover students, Nooneh Gyurjyan and Sebastian Guzman.

Interview done on October 16, 2020

### How are you doing in the midst of this pandemic?

Before discussing the impact of COVID-19 on his personal life and career, Ohanian made several remarks regarding the current conflicts in Armenia as seen on page 6.

“But on a brighter level, to be honest, work hasn't slowed down,” said Ohanian. “I'm in post-production on a number of projects and actually in pre-production on a number of projects, and they all have actually needed a lot of my time.”

Despite the current changes within the film industry due to the virus, Ohanian said that most of his upcoming films are being worked on remotely. Although some projects find themselves completed like “Run,” others such as “Judah and the Black Messiah” and “Space Jam: A New Legacy” have yet to fully wrap up in the post-production process.

Ohanian stated that “throughout the pandemic, [they've] been giving notes on the edits, listening to the music and having the usual creative debates about what should be in the movie, what should not be in the movie.”

Jokingly, he finished his response by saying “I wish I'd used the lockdown to take up meditation, but I haven't had time for that yet.”

### HIS YEARS AT HOOVER HIGH

“When I was in high school, I was just your classic student,” said Ohanian. “I had a good group of friends that I was very tight with and I was very invested in my studies, for sure.”

Journalism, above all else, as he describes, “honestly, no joke, no cliché, changed my life the most.” His experiences within the class were his “first exposure to real team based collaboration.” It had set him apart and prepared him for life in Hollywood. It enabled him to comprehend for the first time that he

was “part of this bigger thing.”

It gave Ohanian a voice. “I had a role to play,” he said.

“If I did a good job, then maybe I would advance next year to be a news editor,” he said. “And if I did a really good job then, maybe I would be lucky enough to become one of the co-editors in chief. And that's kind of exactly what happened”

Even at a young adolescent age, it allowed him to get an internship at the Los Angeles Times, set up by then advisor of journalism, Mr. Brian Crosby.

But like any good storyteller, Ohanian always knew how to keep his secrets.

“I also had a secret passion, which was making movies, but at the time, it was just that, a secret,” he said. Soon thereafter, Ohanian began to share his story about how he began to realize film was a viable option for a career choice.

“When I was at Hoover. I suffered from a really, really awful medical condition in my life,” he said. “And that condition is called senioritis,” Ohanian joked.

This “condition” he dealt with caused him to fall short in a class: AP environmental science.

“I was probably getting a D and I had a great university lined up so I couldn't let that happen” said Ohanian. Fortunately, his professor offered him an extra credit assignment to help him improve his overall grade. He recalled the specific instructions she gave him: write an essay. Being the student Ohanian was, he offered a different solution, “Can I make a movie instead?” Making a movie sounded a whole lot easier to Sev, than writing an essay.

After being allowed to create a short film rather than an essay, Ohanian was on his way to make his amateur directorial debut in exchange for extra credit points to raise his grade.

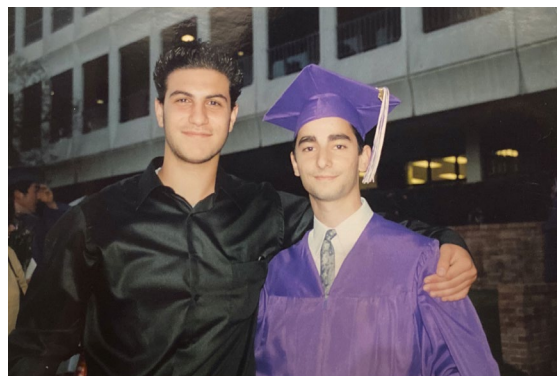
"I made a 20 minute documentary called 'Trash' about Hoover's horrific trash problem," he said. The only conflict, as Ohanian explains, was that "Hoover did not have a trash problem at all, but I kind of needed it to have a trash problem because that was conflict and drama, and it would sell. I had a lot of fun with the assignment and found ways to make it humorous and engaging, while hopefully also a little bit educational."

After recording students, who willingly at the direction of Ohanian, disposed of trash on the floor of the school's quad, Ohanian faced a dilemma: rather than just handing over the DVD to the teacher... Ohanian had to play it in front of his whole class. As a result: Ohanian's short film "Trash" received a standing ovation and got him an A in the class.

"Over the 20 minutes, the students in the class were clapping and they were cheering and they were laughing and the teacher was getting a kick out of it," he said. "That was the first time I've ever had an audience."

### **EXPANDING ON HIS NEW PASSION: FILM**

Ohanian's secret passion grew exponentially after the screening of his directorial debut, "Trash." Yet, it was still a dream for Ohanian even after graduating from Hoover in '05.



Ohanian with his best friend Arabo Sarkisian at their graduation in 2005.



Ohanian getting a Los Angeles Times Award after interning there during his high school years.

"Even though Glendale was not that far geographically from Hollywood, in my mind, it felt like millions of miles away," said Ohanian.

Growing up in an Armenian household, he had yet to be exposed to the entertainment world and had zero connections to the film industry.

For those reasons, Ohanian did not feel as though he could really make his mark in Hollywood. That all changed when his little short films and sketches of him and his friends poking good fun at their Armenian heritage and culture that he would post on YouTube attracted more viewers than just his original intended audience of close friends.

"I started shooting these little tiny videos on my father's home video camcorder that were poking fun at Armenian parents, out of love," he said. "to my shock, there were thousands of views [on my videos]."

At the time when Ohanian began to gain fame within his tight-knit Armenian community online, he was a student at the University of California San Diego studying journalism. It was then when out of spontaneous need, Ohanian thought, "Why not make a movie out of this thing?"



## MY BIG FAT ARMENIAN FAMILY

From the YouTube short films and sketches Ohanian made with his friends, and starring his own sister '08 Hoover alum Ramela Ohanian, came the birth of his first feature film titled "My Big Fat Armenian Family."

"I was the writer, the director, the producer, the editor, and I basically did every single job except for makeup...and then the makeup artist quit," he said. "So then I did that too."

The film was made with an \$800 dollar budget and premiered at Glendale High's auditorium. Marketing for the film was all done by word of mouth and flyers.

"Apparently, somebody hopped the fence at Hoover one night and filled all the lockers with fliers about the movie," Ohanian added. "That somebody might've been me."

He explained how little preparation was put into the premiere, because not much was expected.

"I can't stress how bare-bones our process was," he said. "We were projecting onto a theater screen that my mom had sewed."

To Ohanian's surprise, thousands appeared for the screening. He described the experience as being "empowering" and "inspiring." Both family and strangers arrived for a night out.

"My Big Fat Armenian Family," a film that Ohanian states was "very autobiographical" and relatable across all races (Latinos, African Americans, Asian, etc.), led him to bid farewell to journalism and apply to the University of Southern California for film school as a graduate student.

After getting admitted to USC, Ohanian knew he might never return to making YouTube videos.

"The odds were, however, that I wouldn't

get into USC and even if I did that, I wouldn't have a successful career," he said. "So I was very ready to make a sequel."

But Ohanian did get into USC and has since graduated to have a successful career in the film industry, meaning his plans for a sequel to "My Big Fat Armenian Family" never came to fruition.

But 11 years since its premiere, a new exciting opportunity has presented itself for a sequel in the form of a once loyal fan, and now collaborator of Ohanian's.

That fan and collaborator is former Hoover student Ryan Ebrahiamian.



Ohanian working on the set of My Big Fat Armenian Family.

"Now, there was one young kid in my neighborhood who was obsessed with this film, he would always want to show up [and help promote the film]," he said. "[Ryan] was probably the movie's biggest fan."

Ohanian's experience with Ebrahiamian during the promotional campaign for "My Big Fat Armenian Family" helped forge a cordial relationship between the two. As a result, Ebrahiamian's interest in joining the film industry led him to frequently email Ohanian for advice, knowing that Ohanian was now an adjunct professor at USC.

"While I was teaching these classes at USC, one day, that same young boy who was now a college student walked into my class," he said. "[Ryan] had gotten into USC."

Coming full-circle, Ebrahmanian would later join Ohanian on-set of “Space Jam: New Legacy” and other projects to do small tasks for him. Ohanian shared how this pandemic has enabled him to begin the creative process on several things and allowed him the opportunity to give Ebrahmanian a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

In recent months, Ebrahmanian has been using his social media to post humorous videos of his own loosely inspired by “My Big Fat Armenian Family.” They too have achieved viral success from the worldwide Armenian community online. Ohanian took notice and reached out to Ebrahmanian.

“If I gave you not \$800 dollars, but like, several thousand dollars, would you be down to make a Part 2, with your characters, and we make it your style, and basically the same opportunity that I was given, I can give to you,” Ohanian told Ebrahmanian.

Fortunately, Ebrahmanian agreed and signed on. Development for an upcoming sequel to “My Big Fat Armenian Family” with Ebrahmanian taking the helm as director is now in the works.

“It’s gonna be for a whole new generation,” he added. “I’m very excited.”

## **A NEW AGE IN FILM: DIVERSITY**

We had the opportunity to speak with two of Ohanian’s main collaborators. Writer/director Aneesh Chaganty and producer Natalie Qasabian, who both helped shed more light on Ohanian’s producing style.

“He’s very inclusive of people’s opinions and the team that’s working on the movies,” Chaganty said. “[Sev] is actively wanting to pursue making really high quality crowd pleasing movies by pleasing every single demographic: male, female, above a certain age, below a certain age.”

Qasabian agreed, adding “honestly, [Sev]’s producing style brings a lot of fun when we start off on a new movie together,” She continued, “when we’re all working together, he brings a lot of the culture.”

One of Ohanian’s primary goals as a screenwriter and producer is to include more minority voices on screen. By integrating culture into the lively creative discussion during the development of their films, Ohanian is one of the few prominent figures in Hollywood working to bring Armenian talent at the forefront of studio motion pictures.



Ohanian and the cast of “My Big Fat Armenian Family.”

“Any chance [Natalie, Aneesh and I] can, why not try and give a little bit of a taste of other marginalized peoples, whether it’s disabilities, ethnicity, background, anything? It’s always been important to us,” said Ohanian.

Fortunately, for the Armenian community, more representation is on the way.

“[We are developing] a movie that we’ve been wanting to make from the very beginning,” he said. “It is a heist movie set around the world of immigration and one of the main characters is an Armenian woman.”

In a previous interview with Michael He, Qasabian described the character as a “bad ass.” Ohanian put emphasis on the fact that the character was not a “caricature” and “certainly not a cliché.”

"She is like a real fully realized character who represents this entire country," he added. "And there's an Indian character, there's other characters from different ethnic backgrounds as well."

Ohanian's career in the film industry is not just a job. It is an escape.

"It's been super hard for me to work these past two weeks, with all the horrible things that's happening both on the ground and on the internet [in Armenia]," said Ohanian. "It's been nice for me to sometimes take a break with Aneesh into the story world that we're writing, because it's another way to kind of show humanity for people that don't look like any of us, you know, whether they're Armenian, Indian, whatever ethnicity or color or race."

## MAKING OF "SEARCHING"

Before becoming the "Swiss Army knife of a producer" as Chaganty describes, Ohanian struggled to determine which pathway to navigate towards as a newcomer within the industry.

"So when I was at USC, I entered thinking I wanted to be a director," said Ohanian. "I kind of found out very quickly that that wasn't really my calling, I had a lot more

(from left to right) Aneesh Chaganty, Ohanian, and John Cho promoting their film "Searching" in 2018.



(from left to right) Ohanian, Ryan Coogler, and Michael B. Jordan at the Independent Spirit Awards in 2014, where "Fruitvale Station" won Best

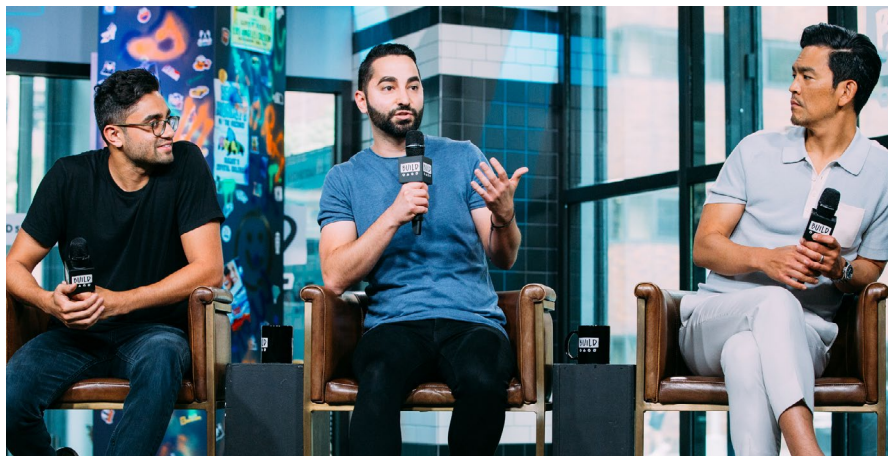
creative satisfaction producing, being the guy who helped bring the director's dreams to life, but at the same time also challenging them to make the best film possible."

In addition to producing, he was also very passionate about screenwriting. Both, his interest in producing and writing, made him very eager to work, from the very beginning, on any project that would come his way.

"Especially in film school, anytime somebody had a project that they wanted to pitch to direct, I would really keep an eye out for the ones that I thought were really ambitious or exciting," said Ohanian.

In the summer of 2013, Ohanian co-produced "Fruitvale Station," written and directed by "Black Panther" and "Creed" director Ryan Coogler.

"I was reading Ryan's script, halfway





through it, it hit me like a bag of bricks, it's [the Oscar Grant story]" he said. "And I had to get on this movie."

He mentioned that "it was honestly, [especially] growing up in suburban Glendale, my first exposure to police violence against black men."

The film's success at the Sundance and Cannes film festivals would later give him the confidence and ability to graduate USC in the summer of '12 with several projects lined up for the foreseeable future.

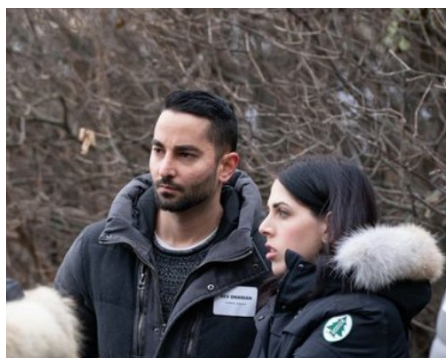
During the years after "Fruitvale Station," Ohanian began to connect with Chaganty and commenced what is now a companionship and partnership that has spanned several projects.

"[Aneesh] was always the one student in [at USC] that I felt, he and I had a very similar sensibility, when it came to storytelling," he said.

When asked what Chaganty's first impression of Ohanian was, he said, "[Sev] seemed very honest, you know, like great at emails, great at communicating, great at giving advice and opinions."

After working with Google on making commercials, Chaganty and Ohanian collaborated to create a film titled

(from left to right) Ohanian, Aneesh Chaganty, Debra Messing, John Cho, and Natalie Qasabian at the premiere of "Searching" at Sundance 2018.



Ohanian and Qasabian on the set of "Run."  
photo by Allen Fraser

"Searching," released in 2018.

"When the opportunity came to come up with an idea for "Searching," it made a lot of sense for me to bring [Aneesh] on [to direct and co-write]," said Ohanian.

In addition to Chaganty, Ohanian brought on Qasabian, who had met Ohanian while attending USC.

"Sev had graduated from the grad program, I think a year or two before, and he was back on campus for an event at the Armenian Students Association, which I was a member of," said Qasabian. "And I was one of the only film students that was there at the event, so naturally, Sev and I ended up talking."

Qasabian recalled her first impressions of Ohanian. She said, "[Sev] was so open with his experiences in the film industry. He came across as a really good storyteller immediately." As a filmmaker, Qasabian states that the word that pops into her mind when describing Ohanian is "hard working."

Naturally, this collaboration worked. They were three individuals, all from distinct ethnic backgrounds, who wanted to create something special through the lens of film.

For “Searching,” Ohanian said, “this was going to be my first time being the lead producer, I brought on Natalie to help produce it, and Aneesh to direct, and write the script with me.” He continued, “it was my chance to finally use everything I’ve learned over the past couple years as a junior producer, and now actually apply it on a project that I was creatively in charge of.”

“Searching” was made with a budget of \$880,000, then sold to Sony Pictures where it made \$75 million in the box office. The film stars Debra Messing, Michelle La and former Hoover student John Cho as the lead.

Unlike most thrillers in the Hollywood spectrum today, “Searching” was original in the sense that it was led by non-stereotypical leads; non-white actors. Ethnicity plays a minor role in the film, yet it was crucial for the 20th century audience that a film of this genre would be capable of representing diverse ethnic races. According to Ohanian, “it was important to us to try and do it in a way that would be unique and one of the things was casting a Korean American man.”

Although “Searching” was a success, the start was not all so smooth. Ohanian went on to discuss how he and Aneesh debated on whether or not to make “Searching” into a feature length film opposed to a short film when offered the opportunity at a pitch meeting.

“To us, [the initial idea for “Searching”] was a very easy eight minute short film,” Ohanian said. “In a meeting filled with a lot of financiers and executives, they told us that they didn’t want to make it as a short, and would rather make [the idea for “Searching”]

as a feature.”

Changanty said, “No.”

Ohanian recalled the initial shock. He even went as far as “kicking him under the desk,” in hopes of convincing him to sign on, which he eventually did. Chaganty initially found that a feature film with the concept of “Searching” and via computer screens might seem “too gimmicky.”

Ohanian said, “it’s crazy because we now have “Searching 2” and we just sold a TV show that’s very similar to “Searching,” so again, it’s like all these little tiny moments can have these crazy ramifications.”



Aneesh Chaganty, Ohanian, and John Cho.

When asked what his super power would be if he had to choose one, Ohanian answered, “I guess if I had to pick one, I’d say multitasking. Having seven active projects going on at any given time.”

Ohanian’s ability to be a collaborative partner on multiple projects is something Qasabian and Chaganty noted as well. Qasabian said, “his ability to multitask was put under the lens even more during “Run,” I would say, yet he managed to pull off his time management skills in an impressive way.”

The trio: Chaganty, Ohanian and Qasabian are all returning for the sequel of 2018’s “Searching.”

“We’ve actually started production [on “Searching 2”] without ever exposing



Ohanian, Qasabian, and Chaganty on the set of "Run"  
photo by Allen Fraser

anybody to any danger," said Ohanian. "In a lot of ways "Searching 2" is the perfect movie to do in a pandemic, because of the style of the movie taking place entirely on a computer."

Ohanian also discussed the difference between the process of making "Searching" and its sequel.

"This time around, rather than spending only seven weeks on our pre-viz process, we've decided to actually spend 24 weeks, to basically spend the entirety of this year, getting this movie literally perfect, like every edit, every frame, music beats, all before actually filming on set with actors," he said.

Although "Searching 2" does not have a release date, his upcoming film "Run" does. The film starring Sarah Paulson and Kiera Allen will be coming to HULU on November 20th.

"Run" is a thriller that is directed by Chaganty, and co-written by Chaganty and Ohanian, who also produced alongside Qasabian.

Chaganty explains the film as "a very, very simple and contained thriller that feels very much like an old school Hitchcock movie." Essentially, "the opposite of "Searching," he added.

"Run" is about a mother and a daughter who lived together in a single house in the middle of nowhere and one day, the daughter discovers something about her mom," said Chaganty. "The whole film is us watching this daughter starting to investigate this journey and the more she learns, the more we start to realize that maybe this perfect relationship isn't so perfect."

"Run" was initially slated for a theatrical release before COVID-19 restricted moviegoers from attending theaters.

"Originally, we were going to come out in theaters in May, just in time for Mother's Day, but when Covid hit we ended up selling the film to Hulu," said Qasabian. "And we're honestly pretty excited because it feels like the safest way people can watch it."

Ohanian talked more in depth about the behind-the-scenes process of selling a film to a streaming service and their intentions behind the finalized decision. "We didn't want to be the reason that somebody would expose themselves potentially to this virus to see our little movie," said Ohanian.

According to Ohanian, during test screenings pre-COVID, "the audience would be whispering to each other and on the edge of their seats." He wishes that audience members could have the same experience now, but couldn't be more happier that Hulu



will be able to release the movie in any case.

Ohanian did talk about the importance of including a main character with a disability, not just for the purpose of the plot, but in terms of representation on film.

“Almost always, whenever there's a character with a disability in a movie, they're often treated as a villain or as a victim,” said Ohanian. “With this film, we wanted to make the exact opposite, she is a hero; she's a badass.”

He continued, “We all had to, frankly, overcome a lot of challenges to do this, but it was worth every second of it. Kiera Allen absolutely nailed the role. She is so fricking good in the movie!”

If creating a suspenseful thriller such as “Run” was not enough, imagine having to write lines for NBA superstar LeBron James and iconic Looney Tunes character Bugs Bunny.

The sequel to 1996's “Space Jam” titled “Space Jam: A New Legacy” will be released in theaters July 16, 2021. Alongside James, joins Don Cheadle, Sonequa Martin-Green and several notorious NBA players and Looney Tune characters. Ohanian is attached to the project as executive producer.



Ohanian and Cheganty on the set of “Searching”  
photo by Elizabeth Kitchens

Although much of the film is under wraps, Ohanian gave an update on their post-production progress: “We finished filming last year, but there's a lot of animation to be done.” He continued, “In a lot of ways, [the “Space Jam” sequel] was already a COVID friendly production, because there's just not that many animators around who do the kind of animation we're doing that we

already have to pull so many people out of retirement from all over the world that are living in different countries.”

Ohanian added, “We've already been working with them in the sense of having them email us stuff, scan things over, and using video conferencing.”

According to Ohanian, the sequel has an “insane story” and is “going to be a good one, and really emotional.”



The poster for “Run” which starts streaming on Hulu on November 20th.

## What advice would you give your younger self?

Before ending the interview, Ohanian looked back at his memorable years at USC.

“If I had to give one major piece of advice, I would say that one of my biggest secret weapons has been just total, militant self-education,” said Ohanian. “I like to read every book I can get my hands on about filmmaking and watch every video I can find online, I probably would have told younger Sev to do that earlier.”

He continued, “I would have really tried to instill into young me, and anyone who has this passion, a burning desire to consume everything you can, because it's such a hard industry as it is and it's a hard world, so the only time you can really ever give yourself a leg up—especially if you don't come from a lot of money or connections—is knowledge.”

# Hoover Sweeps Korean Writing Competition

by **Timothy Kim** ▪ staff writer

Hoover students Joyce Kwon, Ashley Chang, and Yunji Lee were announced as the winners of the Korean Class Scholarship Selection Contest on Monday.

After battling the pandemic and procrastination, the hard work of these three students paid off when they placed in the first, second, and third-place brackets. The trio won a Summer Program in Korea, the King Sejong Award, and Hunminjeongeum Award.

Kwon, a sophomore at Hoover and one of the top 10 finalists, won a Summer Program in Korea, hosted by the Korean Education Center in Los Angeles. As excited as she was for receiving the trip, Kwon felt worried about the possible cancellation of the trip due to COVID-19 restrictions.

“Lucky you, I don’t get anything for now,” said Kwon, towards the other two winners.

The competition asked applicants to write about either the global impact of Korean culture or reasons why Korean culture may have become as widespread as it is now. Kwon chose to write about the cultural impact of Korean music. “I first wrote about the history of Korean music and then I spoke about the cultural influence of Korean music,” Kwon said.

Chang, a sophomore at Hoover and one of the second-place winners, received the King Sejong Award and a \$200 scholarship. The award is named after King Sejong, who created the Korean writing system in 1443.

“My essay was mostly based on my interactions with non-Korean students who talked about Korean culture,” Chang said.



From left to right, Hoover students Joyce Kwon, Ashley Chang, and Yunji Lee.

Chang, along with Kwon, also admitted – most likely to the disappointment of their teacher Jessie Lim – that they had done the essay the day before it was due.

Lee, a sophomore at Hoover and one of the third-place winners, received the Hunminjeongeum Award and a \$100 scholarship. The award was named after the Hunminjeongeum, which was the name of the document King Sejong described and published the Korean writing system. Lee wrote about the global cultural influence Korea has seen through food and music, especially with groups like BTS and Blackpink.

“I actually was...not planning on submitting it to the contest... but [Mrs.] Lim told me to,” Lee said.

“We thank [Mrs.] Lim for giving us this opportunity,” Chang added.

Lim, the Korean teacher at Hoover, was ecstatic about the awards the trio won.

“Ashley, Joyce, and Yunji, despite all the challenges and hardships you all persisted... You all work so hard and deserve this scholarship! I’m so proud of you all,” Lim said.

During a less historically significant year, the Korean education center would have its award ceremony in person around the first week of October. They will now have an online ceremony on October 8th.

# **TORNADO**

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special thanks to Sev Ohanian, Natalie Qasabian, and Aneesh Chaganty