

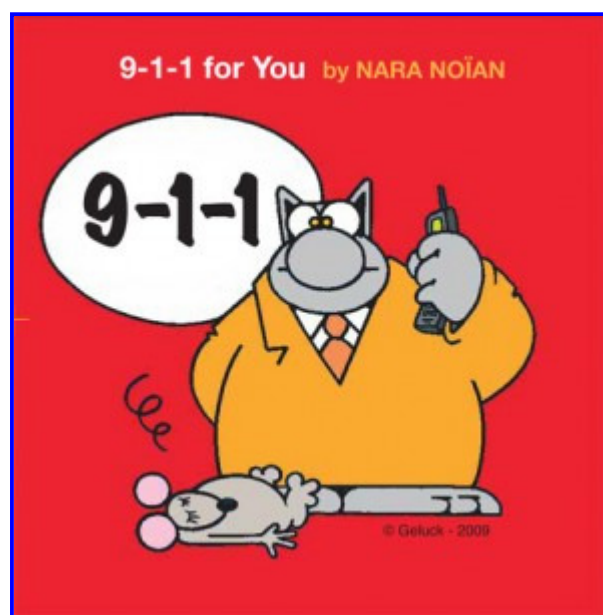
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Nara Noian Raises Awareness About 9-1-1

By [Yelena Allakhverdov](#) • on April 9, 2009 • [✉ Email This Post](#)

WASHINGTON (A.W.)—When Nara Noian and I first met in Washington last month, she was preparing for a performance at the 9-1-1 Honor Awards Gala. We sat down at her hotel to chat about her life, her career, and her journey as musician from Yerevan to Europe, and finally this (first) trip to the United States.

Nara arrived here last month on behalf of the 9-1-1 awareness campaign, created to build awareness among children of the importance of the universal emergency call number. Although the emergency number 9-1-1 is virtually ubiquitous among adults in the United States, the European Union must still make a concerted effort toward raising awareness of its own emergency calling system—the 1-1-2 continent-wide number. Nara's popularity in Europe, coupled with her clear, airy voice convinced the 1-1-2 campaign to tap her talents to compose and perform a song to draw children's attention to the campaign. Eventually, when the promoters of the American 9-1-1 system heard her French-language rendition, they decided that American children would also take notice of her song. She had become the new messenger of emergency awareness. And as a messenger communicates between different worlds, it is often external forces that dictate not only where she begins and where she ends up, but also what that message is. Though it was the 911 campaign that brought Nara to the United States for the first time last month, her life in Europe started under very different circumstances.



The poster of the 9-1-1 campaign

In the 1990s, Nara came to Europe as a student to study at the Paris Conservatory. But when the Soviet Union dissolved, her passport became meaningless. “I never wanted to move to Europe permanently. My life was set for me in my own country,” said Nara. But without a passport, she had to find a way to go back to Armenia, so she filed for refugee status just to get the proper paperwork and be able to travel to Yerevan. “I think I was the only refugee in the world who was not in danger and actually wanted to immediately go back to my country,” Nara said.

Nevertheless, Nara stayed in Europe and continued developing her career, recording albums, performing, starring in films, and eventually gaining the spot for 112. She did everything from teaching to serving as headmistress at music schools in France and Belgium. She adapted to a new life and eventually became the mother of two boys. In the meantime, her role as messenger stayed with her, almost unconsciously.

Nara describes herself as a musician first. The messenger part just happens, it is not intended. There do not need to be words, even though at times words are there. There simply has to be a melody, a rhythm, a few piano keys that unite people regardless of geographic, political, or language barriers. Most of her fans in Belgium, in Europe, are not Armenian, says Nara. Her music extends to and attracts the general public, regardless of cultural background, while still remaining a beacon to those familiar with Eastern melodies and classic folk instruments like the duduk.

Some messengers are born that way, as Nara's experience shows. Nara has thought of herself as a musician since she was a little girl. Music was not only in her blood, it was everywhere around her; she always knew she would be a musician, from her days as a four year old composing songs for her cats and elephants at the zoo, to her classical training at the best schools in Armenia. Her father an orchestra tuba player and her mother an actress and singer, Nara grew up backstage and in the orchestra pit. "There was never a question of what I would do when I grew up. It was as if the path was predestined for me," Nara told me. Sometimes, as in Nara's case, the predestined path comes with predestined direction. "I am not political," Nara says, "but I am against genocides, especially because there were two that affected my family."

"For a time I actually imagined I was adopted, because I would compose melodies that were in not Armenian in origin, they were not Russian or classical in origin. So I thought, jokingly, that maybe my parents were from some other distant place, and that I just landed in this family accidentally." Nara says she would question her own background based on the music she herself would create. "My compositions finally forced me to go to my grandparents and ask, 'Why? Where is it coming from? Who are you to me?'" Already at seventeen or eighteen years of age, Nara was only just finding out the extent and variety of her roots. Through the music she composed organically, she finally found out that she was not only of Armenian background, but also of German and Jewish ancestry. Without knowing it, and without purpose or direction, Nara was already a messenger of the past.

Perhaps it is this *mélange* of melodies, of notes and chords that come from all over, belonging to several places at once, that Nara's music creates fans of Europeans, Armenians, and Turks alike. "The musician is the messenger," says Nara, "I have the chance to talk about serious things, but in a more natural, non-dramatic way. But, it stays on message." It is not for a lack of awareness about her heritage. "I don't hide that I am Armenian. People know I'm Armenian," says Nara.

Her last album, *Cristal*, featured a track dedicated to the victims of the Armenian Genocide. In her own words, Nara's music transcends genres. It's neither classical, nor pop. And while someone of Armenian origin will definitely identify with her work, those of Turkish, Greek, Jewish, and European culture would as well. Her music makes her accessible. It does not try to convince the listener of anything. It is simply there, to be enjoyed. And if the listener takes away something from it, then be it. But Nara makes it very clear that she writes from the heart, with no intentions. She makes music for the human soul, with no motive. She sees herself as the messenger of something greater than simply herself as a musician. Rather, Nara is a messenger of unity and understanding across cultures and geographic limits.

Asked about her plans for the future, Nara mentions the new album she is working on, tentatively titled "The Wheel of Life." She would also like to visit the U.S. again, she says, perhaps next time to connect with the Armenian Diaspora on this side of the Atlantic. Until that happens, the intended musician and accidental messenger, will continue her work of composing work that unites, instead of dividing, the children of the world, as she calls them, perhaps referring to me and you.

To learn more about Nara, or to listen to or download her music, visit www.nara-noian.com