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THE ENTERTAINMENT ISSUE

Starring

ALEEN KESHISHIAN *P.04*

with

GEORGE DURAN *P.08*

KATHERINE SARAFIAN *P.12*

TENI MELIDONIAN *P.16*

MICHAEL'AGBABIAN *P.20*

PLUS When Politics
Meets Economics with
Daron Acemoglu
P.26



Teni Melidonian

Profession: **Director of Communications**

Company: **Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences**

Location: **Los Angeles, California**



QUEEN OF THE RED CARPET

Inside the Oscars with
Teni Melidonian

1. Melidonian, show producer Neil Meron and recording artist Lady Gaga;
2. Neil Patrick Harris on stage during the opening ceremony of the 87th Annual Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre on February 22, 2015;
3. Recording artists John Legend and Common take a break from rehearsal;
4. Melidonian chats with Bono during a reception.



It may be just five hundred feet long, but it takes Hollywood's elite nearly two hours to wind their way through all the photo positions, screaming fans, and entertainment reporters on what may very well be the most glamorous red carpet on the planet. With the eyes of the world watching, in the midst of all the celebrities, nominees and performers, AGBU alumna Teni Melidonian is carefully choreographing each step, ensuring the procession of the world's biggest stars unfolds without the slightest delay or disruption. Next year will mark her eleventh Oscar ceremony. "It's been quite an exciting ride," admits Melidonian. "Being in the middle of all that, it's really kind of surreal and it's exciting."

As the managing director of publicity and corporate communications for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), Melidonian is responsible for the overall strategy and execution of the Academy's publicity and corporate communications. A

large part of the job involves coordinating the throng of media from around the world during Oscar week by arranging interviews with celebrities backstage, inside the Governors Ball and on the prestigious red carpet. Although the ceremony is six months away, Melidonian and her team have already had their first planning meeting, aiming not only to improve upon the previous year, but also explore new directions in which to, above all, entertain the audience. "I try to instill upon my team a sense of fun, that comes from the top. We work hard to create a three-hour show that people will really enjoy and be entertained by."

Despite all the meticulous planning, detailed spreadsheets and complicated-looking grids, there are always a few unforeseen events, or what she refers to as "petite emergencies." Just last year, meteorologists had predicted sunshine all week long, when right in the middle of arrivals on the red carpet a sudden downpour overloaded one of the tents that subsequently collapsed,

gushing water in all directions. While staff scrambled to cover everyone with umbrellas, Melidonian helped make sure no one lost their composure, ensuring the interviews could proceed without delay. Part of the job description, she says, involves "being calm when there's chaos around."

Melidonian's interest in public relations and communications developed during the time she spent as an intern with the AGBU New York Summer Internship Program (NYSIP). She was tasked with researching the collapse of the Soviet Union—at the time the dominant issue in international relations. Naturally curious about Armenia's status as a newly independent nation, she remembers at the time thinking, "this is a whole new world, this opened a new opportunity for communication and connection." Her experience later motivated her to apply for a position in communications at the Armenian Embassy. "The ambassador said to me, here we need help with a press release and I had no idea what to do, but



quickly figured it out!” In that capacity Melidonian honed her skills in communications by working with the US Congress and through her efforts to lobby for Armenian relations, foreign aid and humanitarian assistance. The experience taught her, she says, “the power of communications to tell the Armenian story.”

That strong sense of community spirit has always been a central part of Melidonian’s identity. Born in Beirut, she moved to Pasadena when she was four years old. Her parents insisted the family speak Armenian at home and made every effort to preserve their culture, including having the children attend Armenian Saturday and Sunday school. Her father was very involved with AGBU in the

tance of perseverance and of being open to all possibilities. “My mom would always say, try to talk to everyone you meet, make that connection, because you never know where that might lead in the future. I honestly believe that’s part of how I ended up at the Academy.” Indeed after moving back to LA in 2000 to be closer to her family, she decided to focus on the entertainment industry. It was through her connections that she learned of an opening as a publicist with AMPAS in 2005. After landing the job, she says she hasn’t stopped cultivating new relationships with everyone she can, within the media, the entertainment industry and among her peers.

A decade later, Melidonian is now man-

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1950s in Beirut, and later with the Pasadena-Glendale chapter where he organized performances of the Sardarabad Dance Troupe. Melidonian and her brother grew up attending AGBU meetings, programs, international conferences and, of course, Camp Nubar. “We experienced a community and what it meant to belong to a cause rooted in benevolence, art and culture,” she recalls. “That sense of community carries through today. The Academy’s work very much embodies a cultural community—a community of the most accomplished filmmakers and artists sharing their stories with a global audience.”

Melidonian also credits her parents with instilling in her from a young age the impor-

aging director—a job she says never gets repetitive. Among her numerous responsibilities, she helps highlight AMPAS global membership initiatives, which involves producing brief videos and biographies of its members online. She is also currently spearheading public relations efforts for the future Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. The 350-million-dollar campaign is being backed by major studios and has already received approval from the city. Expected to open in 2017, the museum will be devoted to the work of Oscar winners and nominees and provide interactive exhibits exploring and curating the history and future of the moving image. “Everyday is different,” affirms Melidonian. “I learn something new pretty much every day, discovering different filmmakers artists and movies.” And it’s the power of those movies to bring people together over a shared experience, she says, that never ceases to amaze her. “Every time I step back and think about it, it’s pretty magical.”

