

**“What do we care if life is dying, When the dream is immortal”**

**TANIEL**

Directed by **Garo Berberian**

Narrated by **Sean Bean** (Lord of The Rings; Game of Thrones)

English, Armenian with subtitles | 19.58 | UK / Armenia | 2018



**Soundtrack featuring award winning composers Philip Glass, Michael Nyman and Tigran Hamasyan**

**Awards: 11**

**Best Short, Best Direction, Best Cinematography, Best Trailer, Best Direction, Audience Award**

See the interview - Bermuda International Film Festival [here](#)

## SYNOPSIS

### Logline

April 24th 1915: while under cover of the darkness of war the British are preparing their landings at nearby Gallipoli, mass arrests of Armenians are taking place across Constantinople. Poet Taniel Varoujan's home is broken, his poetry scattered, name checked and ticked on ordered list of intellectuals – never to be seen again.

## Synopsis

One of the greatest innovative poets of the 20th century, a respected teacher, exciting public speaker, loving father and husband, Taniel Varoujan at 31 foresaw the looming darkness that was approaching and the destruction of the Armenian nation in what became known as the Armenian Genocide.

Film Noir in style, “Taniel” pays homage to the era of dramatic filmmaking with extreme lighting and camera angles. The narrative is mostly heard through poetry, with Varoujan’s poems in Western Armenian – an endangered language now - expressing the emotions in each of the scenes; and narrative poetry in English written by Ben Hodgson telling us the story of Varoujan’s last months of life from arrest, detention, incarceration and murder, delivered with an emotive depth of feeling by Hollywood legend Sean Bean.

“When we talk about the tragedy of Armenia and Genocide, what can be forgotten under the immense shadow of the loss of life, is the individual. Taniel looks at the human spirit, the textural fabric of a person lost in facts, stats and arguments about what word you should call the murder of a race.”, says the director whose family has also been affected the Genocide and wars.

Music by Philip Glass played by Valentina Lisitsa sets the scene of World War 1 with heartfelt minimalist tones. Tigran Hamasyan and music from the album “Luys i Luso” are the driving force across the film through his complex and emotive cascade of notes and vocals, and Michael Nyman with his “Out of the Ruins” score builds and develops the feeling of tragedy and ultimately resurrection.



[Trailer](#) | [Website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#)

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## **Background to the film**

**Garo Berberian's** "Taniel" is no ordinary film. It uses dark, elegant Film Noir images and a poet's tragic personal story – voiced through poetry of Varoujan in Armenian and Ben Hodgson's in English and does not fit any conventional definitions.

Taniel Varoujan was one of the brightest minds and visionaries of his time, a magnificent poet, respected teacher and celebrity, loved father and husband – who was arrested and murdered in 1915 when he was only 31 at the start of an event in history which later became known as the Armenian Genocide.

Filmed in the Armenian town of Gyumri and in Portsmouth, writer and director Garo Berberian combines his love of Film Noir and arthouse filmmaking to create an exquisite, moving tribute to the majestic man and poet: "When you are dealing with tragic events in history we tend to lose sight of the individuals concerned, their personalities, expression, feelings and loves, and I wanted to focus on someone that offered so much and asked for little".

He says that he wanted to film in Istanbul – Taniel's Constantinople, but it was obvious this was going to be impossible in the present political climate, so Armenia and Gyumri were selected as the setting for the film, the city had all the locations needed and most importantly many creative and talented people. "Working with the theatre in Gyumri was a real pleasure, not only were they consummate professionals but they were a joy to work with, focused on their art and the importance of representing one of Armenia's greats. I feel the cast, their love of Varoujan, understanding his terrible pain, was something really special, it is something we all share and understand, this is not something that needed to be talked about.", says Garo.

**Sean Bean's** magnificent voice is the films narration through Ben Hodgson's poetry. It was hard to get into a diary of an actor of Sean's calibre, in between filming in Central America and Italy, in a small recording studio near his West Country home, we were able to sit down with Sean and record "Taniel's" voice. It was a privilege to work with a Hollywood great like Sean, who was kind and intelligent, taking direction and contributing greatly with his understanding of the poetry, its rhythm and emotion. Sean brought Ben Hodgson's poem "Indelible" to life, giving a challenging subject warmth and emotion and the film – a voice to be proud of.

**Tigran Gaboyan**, one of Armenia's brightest stars of the stage embodies Varoujan in the film. "Playing Varoujan has been my baptism in the film world. And I was lucky to get baptised in a great group of creative people. It was wonderful and hard to play Varoujan, a poet I love and a person who embodied a whole nation".

**Yeğya Akgün** is the voice of Taniel, keeping the authentic Constantinople accent of his poetry alive. “While making the film we were conscious of our great responsibility in making a short film of such a talented man, a legend, a hero, and recording the voice of his poems in the city that he lived, on the land where he was born, we hoped to bring life to the beauty of his work. It is a sincere source of happiness for me to be a part of this project, with a deep respect for his memory...”, says Yeğya.

**Tatevik Ayvazyan**, the film's poetry producer, says that it's wonderful to be involved in a film celebrating our one of our majestic, innovative poets, whose ideas of beauty, peace and love are still alive and relevant. “He was an artist, transcending national boundaries, and while he loved Armenia, he wrote for mankind, singing their pain, beauty and desires”. She also says that it was extremely important we hear Varoujan's glorious, rich Western Armenian in the film, which is now an endangered language and needs to be heard, spoken, preserved and loved.



Photo: Zham Magazine

## **Directors' Statement**

My grandparents were refugees fleeing the horrors of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire during WW1 and in 1974 following the invasion of Cyprus they were again forced from their homes, leaving everything behind. Thus, I grew up in our refuge Chiswick in West London, with a family celebrating their freedom and life in Britain whilst grappling to hold onto their culture and the complex multi-layered memories of trauma, loss, love, life and death.

I knew at some point I needed to express some of these feelings through the eye of a camera, feelings that are very difficult to describe with words. With all the politicisation of the Armenian Genocide it was imperative to create a factual film based on history but I felt an arthouse approach to the subject would allow me the freedom to express some of the deeper emotions through poetry and poignant imagery.

Taniel Varoujan became my protagonist because firstly I felt he represented the Armenian people's plight in the Genocide, the process of extermination was the same for most: arrest, deportation, exile and death. Varoujan was a sophisticated man, a highly respected poet, teacher, pacifist, humanist, and loved by many, but his fame would not save him.

His poetry was eclectic, some poems were deep and reflective, some erotic and sensual, and some were based on dark memories from his childhood of the catastrophe and destruction of the Hamidian massacres

of Armenians of 1896 and these were truly prophetic expressions about events that were to unravel his and my grandparents' world in 1915.

I also wanted the film to be relevant for today's world, and Varoujan represents the lost face, lost memory, lost history, lost personalities of so many people who are forgotten under the cataclysm of Wars and conflicts resulting in Genocides, in places like Rwanda, mass displacement and refugee crisis in Syria and Iraq to name just a few.

When explaining why he changed the ending of the story of Joseph K. in Kafka's adaptation of The Trial, Orson Wells, wanting to give dignity to his subject, famously said "We are all Jews since the Holocaust". When Hrant Dink was murdered in Istanbul by a Turkish nationalist in 2007, 100 thousand Turks came out on the streets and said, "We are all Hrant Dink". Taniel was written with them in mind, after all Varoujan was an Ottoman subject. Taniel is made as a statement of humanity, Turks, Armenians, British, Americans, French, Jews and anyone to be able to feel sadness at the cruelty in our world and unnecessary destruction and loss of the beauty of life.

### **Director's Biography**

Director Garo Berberian was born in Chiswick, London, and graduated from Berkshire School of Art and Design with a merit in Photography, also winning Fuji's student street photography award.

Garo then moved into Broadcast Television, rising up through the ranks from editor to director, working on numerous award-winning television, documentary, commercial and hard hitting viral campaigns.

Garo's first short film - "Return of the Tyke", was the winner of the Best Short audience award at the 2014 ARPA film festival in Los Angeles. His new film, "Taniel" looks at the last months of poet Taniel Varoujan's life.

# TANIEL



REBEL REPUBLIC LTD PRESENTS A FILM BY GARO BERBERIAN 'TANIEL' NARRATED SEAN BEAN YEGYA AKGUN STARRING TIGRAN GABOYAN  
SOUNDTRACK PHILIP GLASS VALENTINA LISITSA TIGRAN HAMASYAN MICHAEL NYMAN  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY GURI GOLIADZE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR MARIAM DVALISHVILI WRITTEN BY GARO BERBERIAN BEN HODGSON  
POETRY TANIEL VAROUJAN BEN HODGSON POETRY PRODUCER TATEVIK AVVAZIAN  
PRODUCED NARE TER-GABRIELIAN DIRECTED GARO BERBERIAN

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