

California State University, San Bernardino

CSUSB ScholarWorks

Armando F. Sanchez Productions collection

Special Collections & University Archives

8-2021

"The Cold War: Living Under Its Shadow" featuring guest Irakli Gabriel

Armando F. Sanchez Productions

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/armando-sanchez-papers>

Recommended Citation

Armando F. Sanchez Productions, ""The Cold War: Living Under Its Shadow" featuring guest Irakli Gabriel" (2021). *Armando F. Sanchez Productions collection*. 3.

<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/armando-sanchez-papers/3>

This Video is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections & University Archives at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Armando F. Sanchez Productions collection by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

Armando F Sanchez Production

The Cold War: Living Under Its Shadow

Guest: **Irakli Gabriel**

Interviewer: Armando F Sanchez

August 1, 2021

Copyright © 2022 by Armando F Sanchez

Video Production: <https://youtu.be/7BwIzdzh1wc>

Irakli Gabriel

He was born in Georgia (former Soviet republic). He shares his memories as he grew up in Georgia. Irakli Gabriel is a song writer and singer living in Nashville, TN.

Armando F Sanchez: Ladies and gentlemen thank you for joining our program “The Cold War: Living Under Its Shadow” series.

This is a series of interviewing individuals who are directly impacted by it and are willing to come on the show and share how their personal stories surfaced how they were impacted their families were impacted and their views about it one person today that we're going to interview Irakli Gabriel who also goes by Dr. Duende. I like the title. He's in Nashville, Tennessee. He is a songwriter and he is also a recording studio person and the whole idea of writing music is an outstanding background I mean I'm thrilled about that before we introduce him. I want to take a second to thank a great poet David Dephy who put us in contact together so I want to thank David for taking the time to connect us as well. Irakli and his wife Anana Kaye continue to write music and recently were part of an album yes whispers and size that's a very touching song is this mostly in the because you're in Nashville is this mostly country and western or is it a different genre?

Irakli Gabriel: Oh, not at all this is not this record is not country-western and we definitely don't do country and western music. We're songwriters we love a lot of country music and you know songwriting is at the heart of country music and but this record is I don't want to say fusion but it's it has some European elements of classical music as well as sort of more traditional American folk and blues and rock-and-roll elements.

Sanchez: That's a cool interesting mix of we're going to have to do a different show on talking just about songwriting that is shared that as well what makes the interview very interesting for me and when we're talking about the Cold War is that you are you were born and raised in Georgia. The

country that at one time was under the Soviet Union (now Russia) and now it's an independent country. It has one of the points of fame is that Joseph Stalin was born.

Gabriel: Here we go, okay, I can't change history!

Sanchez: It was there.

Gabriel: Please don't yeah it's important to keep it as much as I don't like it we can't change it.

Sanchez: He was just if I can take you back and ask you to reflect on your childhood years living in the country of Georgia and living under the Soviet Union especially understanding that your country goes back almost to the Copper Age (4,500 B.C. - 3,500 B.C.). I mean your country has been around for centuries. Your people have known this area for centuries. So it's not like people move there (Georgia) all of a sudden. You were born there. What was it like? What was it like in your years living there?

Gabriel: Well, I mean in childhood I have nothing really bad to say it was as a childhood it was a wonderful thing. It was you know it was peaceful. I had a nice family up until a certain point everything was going great and it was pretty peaceful. However, you could as my memory as I'm jogging my memory a little bit starting around the age of seven or eight you know or six even when you start overhearing some news broadcast that your parents or your grandparents are watching or you start seeing newspapers. You realize that there's a problem going on in the war in the world and between two countries. You know which now we call Cold War right as we remember it because there was definitely an aura of threat and fear. Huge fear that the third world war would break out you know and the Americans were, of course, the evil imperialists and bad guys who are you know bloodthirsty and so on, and the Soviet Union we were at the time as it was portrayed as peace-loving. We just we're just wonderful you know we're just wonderful I don't understand with what's going on why what do they want from us you know that was the narrative that was constantly pushed. But it was pretty strong because you would think that the ghost of World War II was very much alive. You know you could see it everywhere. We grew up on the stories my both my grandfathers served there it was one horror story after another World War II of the Nazis. Most of the movies and television programming were still about the war documentaries so we grew up knowing that it's a very horrible thing that just happened recently and the idea of a third world war possibly happening and now with nuclear weapons I mean that's you know that's pretty terrifying to be hearing about it every day. You know so I do remember that. It's quite horrible, You know, of course, later I learned that Americans were fed a similar narrative how you know the evil Soviet Empire and Russians there just wanted to eat everything out then Americans were the good guys just defending themselves.

Sanchez: You know let me ask you about the narrative at that time was it the process that the United States was going to invade Russia and bomb everything or it was just going to happen from one day to the next for no reason whatsoever. Do you remember that kind of discussion?

Gabriel: Well, I remember the idea was then that you know I mean it's a fact there was an arms race right and both sides were blaming each other for constantly escalating it. They're (Soviets) saying that Americans you know want to dominate the world. I guess we're saying that the Soviets want to dominate the world. In retrospect, probably they both were absolutely right but it does sound terrifying. I would think like oh because you watch the movies of World War II and you see footage and you hear stories so in my head. You start imagining like, oh yeah, you know there's going to be a huge atomic bomb or a missile flying through the blue sky because those you know are the pieces of

training in schools and even in America. They said that they would have taught kids to go under the tables.

Sanchez: Wooden tables. Yes. Right because they don't catch fire in an atomic explosion.

Gabriel: Right yeah no radiation gets through that right yeah all right so we did that too and I mean it's ridiculous it's not it's pretty terrifying so I remember that then that was not a nice thing but other than that you know my family life and going out in the countryside and home those I have beautiful memories of my childhood in that sense.

Sanchez: As you were getting older, was there talk about you having to serve in the Russian military?

Gabriel: Absolutely, you were going to have to be conscripted there. You knew that Afghanistan was happening so everybody who had a son male kid was deadly afraid that eventually, the time would come time to serve. They were very afraid. My grandparents and my parents to the point that I think when I was 10 or 12 or something and that would have been you know maybe like 1985 or something like that before the Russians withdrew, my parents and grandparents tried to bribe some doctor or something to make you a little story history that I have a serious medical condition that I could serve that was a common thing to do but yes definitely we were it was you know there were stories after story just like Americans in Vietnam of you know kids going off there and they're coming back in coffins. Yeah, that was a big thing.

Sanchez: How did you manage to leave Georgia and become part of the world citizenship around and then go to the United States?

Gabriel: Well, that's the interesting thing because technically I was never a refugee in a sense because I left Georgia at a seemingly very optimistic and wonderful time right in 1991. Right after Georgia declared its independence after this huge movement for Georgian independence, happened huge demonstration protests, and big turmoil, it seemed like you know a big dream was achieved. We had our first democratically elected president that was hugely popular at the time. There were a lot of new opportunities and reasons for optimism or so it felt I managed. I happened to enter a writing competition in a foreign language in German. I won and as a prize, it was a one-year exchange program abroad and it was like a thing you just won. It was really good you're going to go abroad for one year and it's a good experience and you're going to come back and we're going I was going to continue studying at the university in Georgia maybe like international relations or something. That was like a big thing everybody was like you should do that. But as I left and I had to go to Norway, which I love very much to this day, the things in Georgia just started deteriorating very quickly and rapidly. I mean, unimaginably rapidly, like within months I'm talking about where in June of 1991 and seemingly everything's okay and in September to October everything's upside down and it's already like heading towards full-on civil war. They [Soviets] overthrew the president, the supporters of the president, and the opposition who became the position. There it was just a full-on brutal war, a civil war so I was in shock because all of a sudden you were in Norway living in a host family with Norwegians you're studying, and then you can't go back. All of a sudden your country is up in flames. You're cut off completely and you know back in the day it's something no internet, nothing. You're getting some letters every once in a while. The phone works because most of the time it doesn't. You can't get through so if you can't get through someone you can't even hear their yelling. They're saying, no, it's horrible, don't come back, do whatever it takes not to come back and it was pretty wild. It's just so often like okay well what does that mean?

Sanchez: How did you feel? I mean you sound like you were close to your grandparents to hear them tell you don't come back.

Gabriel: It is very serious because I would never imagine it because they were reluctant to let me go because they love me. You know there were a lot of good things happening in Georgia at the time. It seemed like it was changed for the better. It seemed like that so when they say to their only grandchild and my parents to their only child like you know there's no way you can come back. Man, it's like you're gonna die. It's just bad. You know it's gonna be bad. You know it's serious because they would never say that so I didn't have I didn't feel like I have my choice but I mean honestly I was so disillusioned and so heartbroken that such a divide happened in a country in a society that seemingly just months ago was very united and very optimistic. It was a big lesson of how quickly things can escalate and turn into just a complete nightmare. It's very weird.

Sanchez: Did you ever get a chance to go back and see your grandparents?

Gabriel: Yes, I thank God. They lived a very long life. They both passed away five-six years ago in their 90s so after the year 2000 things got better. I went quite frequently and got to spend some time with my mom and question come up.

Sanchez: Something because of what you were sharing we were talking about your upbringing and how your parents and grandparents impacted you because they went from close to the end of World War II up until they passed away. How do you see their lives having been impacted by the Cold War living in Georgia?

Gabriel: I think well my grandparents lived through something much worse than the Cold War and then the 70s and 80s I mean it was a piece of cake compared to the 1930s and 40s because of the Stalinist repression and then subsequent World War II. I mean that's like very serious business. I don't know a single family in Georgia really who didn't lose a member of their family to the concentration camp in Siberia or they were just straight up executed for I don't know what reason. You know, anybody could have been declared the enemy of the people. It was very common for people to be taken away and disappeared overnight. So they live through that and then they come then the war comes right and the war didn't physically come to Georgia. The Nazi Germans never quite made it there. They were stopped by Stalingrad but my grandfather was in Stalingrad. He fought there and his two brothers died in the war. He got wounded but miraculously survived and came back. It's like every family has a story like that. So when you are raised on that and you grew up with that yeah I can only imagine what they went through. That's not a joke.

Sanchez: It sounds to me that because they were so loving that they tried to shelter you away from all those stories.

Gabriel: Yes, you were absolutely right I wouldn't I would because you know on tv and in stories, the World War II theme was over and over and over again every second. Other movies were about World War II. You'd see this documentary footage and the films that were made it's horrible. I mean, it's really heavy to watch. I watch them sometimes now and again. I rewatch them and it's pretty traumatic. I think for a kid to be watching that but that's all that was happening. I would sometimes ask my grandpa things and he wouldn't want me to watch those things. He'd always like to make some kind of joke and tell a funny story about the war but once he said oh I was like well how was Stalingrad? Did you know grandpa like did you shoot Germans, Did you kill them? He was like oh yeah I remember like one time I went out for a smoke after you know bombing and shelling were over

and I saw the kids and they were sledding and I just walked over there and I was wondering what they were sledding on and then I realized it was frozen corpses that they were using as sleds and after that I was like I don't think.

Sanchez: I'm gonna ask you more questions. You're beginning to sort of become aware of the cruelty that was aware. No more questions! You know were you ever in a situation where you know when you were a child not to say certain things or you weren't supposed to you know shout out anything as a child that you may have heard from someone else a sense of silence.

Gabriel: Up to I think to the Perestroika at Glasnost time. You remember those terms which are the mid-80s after Gorbachev 1987-88. It was pretty tight, especially my grandparents and parents were like don't say this there and there we may say this in the family but don't repeat it or something like that whether it was a joke or whether it was some kind of critique of a government or something like that. I was like I'm the strict orders not to say unnecessary things once. My uncle was always the rebel in the family he was the closest person to me you know to this day and you know he was very vehemently anticommunist and he would not hold back and say stuff to me and I would pick it up and once I said all those communists blah blah and you know I remember my grand grandmother and grandfather, they just like the lost color in the face. They're just so frightened they're like who where did you hear that what's going on where are we all screwed doomed you know he's gonna repeat it we're gonna be we're gonna lose our jobs or they're gonna arrest us. But, you know, none of that happened. It was things were already a little better it's just old habits hard to break. Oh, I mean, how clear I mean if you see your fathers and your grandmothers you know taken away from you like they did as they lived through the 1930s during the repressions but one wrong thing and you know there's a knock on your door and you're taken away and that is it. I mean that's it you know you're gone. That's what I mean can you I can't imagine that I mean I've heard those stories so I was brought up on them but I still cannot imagine that I mean it's a terrifying thing anybody could have been an enemy of the people for whatever reason. People were writing letters ratting their neighbors out and their relatives sometimes they were forced to you know name names give lists of like well okay well we'll spare you but you gotta give us a list of those people you know and whom am I going to sacrifice. I mean it's just we don't want that.

Sanchez: Hopefully, that won't come back anywhere in the world.

Gabriel: Yeah, I'd like to be optimistic.

Sanchez: Lets we'll continue to do so.

Gabriel: I'm with you.

Sanchez: We are coming to the end of the show two things number one I'd like to invite you to share with us if you have anything where our viewers can learn more about your creativity work? **Gabriel:** Sure, I would love to let everyone know that I have a musical one video project with my wife Anana Kaye. We make records and our recent record with a great American songwriter artist who sadly passed away last year. His name was David Olney and we're very proud of this record. It's a very personal record for us that got it was released just recently in March. We are very grateful we got very warm feedback and great reviews all over the world and I'm very proud of it it's called "*Whispers and Sighs*" and check it out and our website is anannakay.com maybe you can write it or I'll write right and I would really appreciate people checking out if you know they're interested in you know some music.

Sanchez: I want to thank you for your time and you know to open yourself up to the stories of your childhood and I'm sure all of this has impacted your life even to today. Let me just hand it over to you as a closing statement your views on what we've been talking about.

Gabriel: Oh, I'm thanks for having me it's you know it's interesting and refreshing to talk about this subject with somebody as knowledgeable as yourself because I'm a big fan of I don't want to say fan but you know I like history. I like to study it I think it's very important and sometimes I get kind of discouraged in this country talking to some folks especially younger people who don't show much interest and history in world history. But they are very you know opinionated and passionate which is you know it's a good thing but I would encourage a lot of people to learn about the world and history how far it goes back and how many different things happen in the world and how it really does repeat itself and if we're not careful if we don't study these mistakes will happen over and over again and the experiences that I told you about you know you don't want those things to happen.

Sanchez: Well, we'll share the story with future generations for that purpose so that people become interested and learn more about the Cold War and realize that the Cold War did not pass it just switched over to a new level.

Gabriel: Yeah, it's just you know it's those things change masks yeah no pun intended.

Sanchez: Oh yes you did go ahead Irakli Gabriel, I want to thank you very much and also your family and your wife for giving your time also to get away from the recording studio a little bit and from writing more music to share the story with us in the public. But I can't thank you enough for your time and again we thank David Dephy for putting us together as well. I can't thank him enough as well he's a great guy. and I loved working with him as well.

Gabriel: So great well my pleasure Armando thank you.

Sanchez: Success with your songwriting may you continue and I'm going to dig you up look up at the website okay anandakay.com I'm gonna look it up and listen to the music.

Gabriel: Thank you, sir, thank you, everybody, okay love you.