

Singing a song of love for Armenia

By David L. Harris CORRESPONDENT

The chatter in the audience reflected the music that would soon be heard on stage - a smattering of Armenian here and bits of English there. Armenian nationalism could be felt inside Boston University's Tsai Performance Center last Saturday night, and it was all for a good cause.

All the proceeds from the concert went directly to the "Building a Healthy Armenia" project, sponsored by Brookline-based SHARED, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving access to medicines "for the people of Armenia through training Armenian health-care professionals in improved financial and management skills." According to UNICEF, more than half of Armenia's population lives below the poverty line.

Arev, an eight-member Boston-based Armenian folk ensemble, and Zulav, a New York based Armenian a capella group, entertained the roughly 250 people in attendance.

Arev's sound is a pretty good indicator that Armenia is a complex nation. The entrance of the band was dramatic - Markos Shahbazyan artfully played the drum-like dohl, his fingers tapping the beat effortlessly.

The other band members pranced on to the stage and began playing their instruments, which are interesting individually, but sound beautiful when combined. There's the duduk, which has a mellowed-out sound, and the ud, a banjo-like stringed instrument. And don't forget the shrieking sounds of the zuma, which, when played, sounds like snake charmer music. Two expressive female vocalists rounded out the band. The stage was practically bare, save a pot of flowers and a multicolored rug.

"Arev's sound was a mix of 18th-century traditional love songs and contemporary often patriotic tunes.

One song, called Lisbon Five," talked about the struggles of Armenian independence (five Armenian youths were killed in Lisbon, Portugal).

Armenia, which is, according to The United Nations, one of the oldest countries in the world (3,500 years old), achieved independence in 1991 after the USSR collapsed.

Opening for the band was the a capella trio Zulav - which means clarity in Armenian - whose beautifully-arranged songs spoke mostly about love in the mountains.



Ani Zargarlan, left, and Tamar Melkonian, members of the Arev Armenian Folk Ensemble, perform at Boston University's Tsai Performance Center on Saturday.

(Armenia, as noted by group members, is a mountainous country).

"One would think that Armenians had nothing else to do but fall in love," said Anais Alexandra Tekerian, a member of Zulav.

Surely anyone with (and even those without Armenian heritage) must have pride on this night.