

ARI!

ALUMNI AWARD

By Edward Z. Epstein



Energy. Enthusiasm. Drive. Charm.

Known to family, friends and fans as "Ari," Ararat Zakarian has been an exciting and colorful figure on the skating scene for years. A competitive skater-turned producer-director-impressario, both in the United States and around the world, Ari has been described as a "showman extraordinaire," a producer who doesn't merely put on shows he likes, but one who produces shows he thinks the public will also like (Sonja Henie would have loved him).

"Kings on Ice" is regarded as his signature production to date. It stars his most famous client – he is also a manager and agent – Olympic champion Evgeni Plushenko.

Ari was born in Yerevan, USSR. He began skating at age four. His mother was an accountant, his father a tailor. "I was lucky," says Ari. "He made my costumes! He was a talented man – a wonderful singer, he did magic tricks, and he was a great musician. I got my sense of music from him."

And his drive from his Mom. Young Ari composed music from an early age, and played the piano "by ear." He was self-taught. His sister became a music teacher.

But Ari's goal was clear: he was determined to pursue the American Dream. With only six hundred dollars to sustain him, he embarked on a journey that would have overtones of both James Bond and

the Jason Bourne novels. He developed into an international athlete under the guidance of legendary Russian skating coach, Aleksei Mishin. He won many competitions. In 1991, he graduated from the Lesgaft Academy of Physical Education in Leningrad. As a professional skater, Ari performed with a variety of shows, traveling throughout Europe and Japan. He has been featured in the Leningrad Ballet on Ice, Disney on Ice and – from the beginning – Ice Theatre of New York, where the company founder, Moira North, and attorney George Akst, were instrumental in

launching Ari's U.S. career.

"Working with Moira and Ice Theatre enabled me to understand skating from the American side," notes Ari. "How to incorporate 'artistry' into skating, so important. Her classes were invaluable." As was her advice on how to navigate the byzantine skating world. "Moira, and George, were very generous – the great things that happened couldn't have happened without them." Ari, in turn, was able to sponsor other skaters from overseas and help bring them to America.

When Ari first came to work with





ITNY, the company brought in Debbie Brown, choreographer for Cirque de Soleil, to work with Ari and his skating partner Akop Manoukian. The two men had developed a unique – “the first ever,” notes Ari – acrobatic duo-on-ice that got stronger audience reaction than performances by Olympic champions. Tom Collins featured them in “Champions on Ice,” they were consistent show-stoppers, and one opportunity led to another.

Eventually, Ari struck out on his

own. His performing career included many TV specials, commercials, movies, and tours throughout Armenia, France, Israel, Russia, Bulgaria, Poland, Baltic Republics, Italy and Japan.

His producing career began with “Global Ice” in New York City. Since then, he has produced and choreographed not only for ice shows but also for competitions, notably the Xtreme Ice World Championships.

Ari is a dual citizen of the USA and

Russia, and currently resides in Moscow. He speaks four languages: Armenian, Russian, English and Japanese. He maintains ties to Olympic skating via his position as Vice President of the Armenian Figure Skating Association. He remains a featured commentator on skating for ESPN and the USA Network.

He is passionate in his pursuit of new venues for figure skating, and often writes about the sport. His eye for talent is, as one journalist observed, “right on the money.”

“Ari combines imagination, and a flair for showmanship, with a very practical ability to get things done,” notes Moira North. “To paraphrase the Sondheim lyric, he’s great at ‘putting it together.’ And he’s great fun to be with, an asset no matter what one’s profession. ITNY is proud to present him with our Alumni Award for 2017.”

Edward Z. Epstein’s current book is “AUDREY & BILL: A Romantic Biography of Audrey Hepburn and William Holden” (Running Press). It is under option for a film. He has written a play, “AVA,” based on the life of Ava Gardner.



Congratulations Ari!

Akst & Akst PLLC
800 Third Avenue 26th Fl
New York, NY 10022
(212) 308-3999
Specialists in Immigration Law