

Paskalian: Choreographer, Salesman

Lebanon Native Called 'a Quiet Man, a Very Ordinary Man'

By William Claiborne
Washington Post Staff Writer

NEW YORK, June 27—Sarkis O. Paskalian, who was arrested by the FBI today and charged with being a spy for the Soviet Union, quietly gave up a job two months ago as choreographer of several well-known Armenian dance companies to work in a nondescript jewelry booth on West 47th Street in Manhattan's bustling Diamond Row.

"He's a quiet man, a very ordinary man," said Arthur Friedman, who rented Paskalian one of five cramped jewelry booths in a storefront at the Equitable Diamond Co. for \$235 a month.

Irving Schwartz, who sells silver cups and plates in a stall next to Paskalian's, said, "Over here, you mind your own business. If you would look at the man, you would think butter comes out of his mouth," he added, referring to Paskalian's pleasant disposition.

Life was not always so obscure for Paskalian, 36, a native of Lebanon who studied dance in Soviet Armenia and came to New York in 1968 after, according to the FBI, he was recruited as a spy by the Soviet KGB, the secret police.

According to friends and acquaintances in New York's Armenian community, Paskalian for three years was a highly visible and widely respected performing arts director for the Armenian General Benevo-

lent Union, a New York-based charitable organization with 10,000 U. S. members and a reported \$20 million in assets.

The union sponsors amateur dance companies in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Los Angeles, Detroit and a number of other cities.

According to an official of the union, Paskalian for three years had been in charge of all American dance activities sponsored by the group and had staged dozens of productions in theaters throughout the country.

Much of his time, however, had been spent here directing the nation's leading Armenian dance company, the "Antranig," which performed at Carnegie Hall and at fund-raising events at Hunter College. He and his American-born wife, Arlene, live in a luxury apartment near the United Nations here.

The Armenian Reporter, an English-language Armenian newsweekly, said recently in announcing Paskalian's resignation, "the AGBU was most reluctant to let (him) resign. . . . He has attracted the youth of the Armenian-American community to folk dancing, and through it to the AGBU."

Edward Boghosian, editor of the newspaper and a friend of Paskalian, said in an interview that Paskalian was trained in diamond setting and goldsmithing and had sought to make more

money in that type of work.

"He's something like a playboy, always wanting to enjoy life and often spending lots of money. I think he was living beyond his means and saw a way to make more money in the jewelry business," said Boghosian.

Boghosian said that both Paskalian and Sahag K. Dedeayan, who was charged in a criminal complaint filed in Baltimore alleging failure to report illegal photographing of national defense information, were "well respected in the Armenian community. They both were prominent personalities."

"I never suspected either of them would be involved in anything like this. It obviously is a shock to the Armenian community," Boghosian said.

The official of the Armenian union, who asked that his name be withheld, said Paskalian had his own dance group in Beirut before coming to this country and had come to the AGBU with "the best of credentials."

"He used to work here nights, because that's when the rehearsals were held. We didn't see him very much, and not many people knew him very well," the official said.

Even though Paskalian had resigned his full-time job at the AGBU, acquaintances said, he had agreed to work part-time, training other instructors.

Paskalian, grim-faced and wearing a green-and-blue plaid sports jacket and a patterned shirt open at the neck, was hustled out of the FBI headquarters in midtown Manhattan shortly af-

ter noon today and taken to U.S. District Court in Brooklyn for arraignment. He was being held tonight at the West Street jail in lieu of \$100,000 bail.