



Studio

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Song

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**Special
Christmas Songbook**

John Bilezikjian

Studio: Please tell us about yourself.

John: My background in music started in 1953 and I have been a student of music ever since that year. In fact, I consider myself still a student of music and most likely will feel that way until the day I die. I am an Armenian-American first generation son of parents that were both born in Turkey. We are Armenian but that was the land that my parents were from. At the age of 5 I began the study of Classical Violin from my Father, Andrew Bilezikjian who was a gifted and talented Violinist from Europe. By the time I was 10 years of age, I was performing professionally on the Violin and traveling as well as concertizing. At the same time, at 10 years of age, I began the study of the Oud. This instrument was part of our (Armenian) folklore even though the instrument is a Persian one dating back some 2500 years having 11 strings, no frets and is played with an eagle feather's quill. We players of the Oud call this plectrum a Mzrap in Turkish or a Resha in Arabic.

I fell in love with the sound of the Oud on old 78 rpm recordings that my Grandfather, Haig Bilezikjian who was from Turkey as well, brought with him when his family came to America. I studied and studied these recordings endlessly for hours and hours, writing down everything that I was listening to. My Mother Alice Bilezikjian who was also from Turkey would help me with words and meanings to songs as she sang as well at parties that my parents would host for family and friends in our Los Angeles home at the time. She had a magnificent voice that I still hear today in my soul all the time. It was fantastic for me. Food, Church, Family and to me most importantly music. The practice of music which I loved to do and the performance which came later but that I always felt blessed in order to be able to do so easily and so fluently. I could go for hours at a time with no rest, just practice and the self enjoyment of practicing

*World Renowned
Oudist*

&

Composer

and working out musical lines or composing new music for the Violin and Oud as well as Orchestra. What a life!! Making Music. That's what it was all about for me.

Throughout my school years, I was concertmaster of the school Orchestras, that is the first chair Violinist. Ultimately I received a full scholarship to study music in 1966 at then San Fernando Valley State College. It is now CSUN, where I graduated with honors as a Music major and a History minor. After my graduation in 1970, I took my portfolio of original music that I wrote and my Oud to Paramount Studios in Hollywood. I decided I would try to make my mark as a studio musician and hope that I would be accepted as a part of the various studio Orchestras. I had recently gotten married and had my first son on the way. So I had to make a living and it seemed the right thing to try if nothing else. I figured what did I have to lose, they would just say no to me if they didn't like what I had to show them. So I tried.

I met the head of music Leith Stevens at the time at Paramount Studios and showed him my original scores of music and showed him my style of music orchestration, part writing and composition for full Orchestra. He seemed genuinely interested in me. I also demonstrated the Oud





John Bilezikian is "America's Oud Virtuoso" Mr. Bilezikian may be the most prominent Oudist of his generation. He is a master Oudist who has elevated this instrument to the concert stage as well as continues to perform as a folk musician. He has performed for some 46 years on this ancient eleven stringed Persian fretless instrument dating back some 2,000 years. The Oud is performed with an eagle's quill.

Mr. Bilezikian has given command performances for the King and Queen of Spain and for Mrs. Anwar Sadat of Egypt to name only a few. He has filmed and recorded background music for over 50 TV and Motion Picture Film Soundtracks in Hollywood, California.

John has his own record company, Dantz Records in Laguna Hills, California and has made over 25 CDs that are available on his website www.dantzrecords.com

Photos and text courtesy www.dantzrecords.com

and after hearing me perform on it, he immediately asked if I would be interested in working on the score for the then TV film "Mission Impossible" with Lalo Schriffin which was being worked on at Paramount Studios at the time. I was so excited, cautiously optimistic and hoped that in fact, I would get a call from them so that I would actually be apart of this opportunity that was being offered to me. Well sure enough the following week I got a call from the head music contractors office and spoke to Julian Davidson who set up the sessions and the interviews for me.

As they say, the rest is history. That was all it took. I read all the music that was put in front of me to read and improvised as well on the spot the main theme and what is referred to as the incidental music to a film or TV show and to this day if you listen closely, you will hear an Oud in the original "Mission Impossible" TV series theme. That's me. I later went on to record for some 50 films in Hollywood and I am still active in that part of my musical life to this day, recording music for sessions and writing music as well for Films and TV productions that I get the call to write for. By the way, I have also recorded music for the more recent "Mission Impossible" series that are seen in theatres lately.

Studio: Music seems to be your life.

John: I consider myself a working musician. I love music and all its facets. Whether it be recording for Film or TV or performing as a soloist live with a major Symphony Orchestra or for a Belly Dancing show or a concert of my own, I am most lucky to be in a field that I love so much. I am also very lucky to be able to make a living in a field that I love and which nowadays is not so easy to do. Music to me is my entire life. Next to my family, Helen my wife, John and George my sons as well as my grandchildren Anthony, Alex and Julian, it is the next most important ingredient in my life. I am happiest when I am working and making, creating music.

Studio: John, you've made many impressive connections in the music industry.

John: I am most fortunate for those people in my life that say that I am so talented and gifted. I feel so blessed and fortunate to have the opportunities that I have gotten over the years and this I believe is because of the hard work and practice that I have put into my music. Jascha Heifetz one of my mentors growing up would say, "it is 90 % perspiration and 10 % inspiration. This keeps me going. I am very proud of my affiliation with the Belly Dance

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community. I have been blessed to be apart of many shows with talented dancers and musicians over the years who make me shine so well with them on stage. I am very proud of my professional accomplishments as well such as being selected as soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, the LA Mandolin Orchestra, The Pacific Palisades Symphony Orchestra and most recently on June 11, 2005, I was the Oud soloist at Symphony Hall in Boston with the venerable Boston Pops Orchestra. I debuted last year on that date and performed the Antonio Vivaldi "Lute Concerto in D", Aram Khachadourian's "Sabre Dance", both pieces performed with Orchestra. I made the transcriptions not only for the Oud but for Orchestra as well. I also performed as a solo piece a Classical Guitar transcription I made of the "Asturias-Leyenda" by Isaac Albeniz.

Another accomplishment I am proud of is my record company "Dantz Records" that I have had since 1970. Dantz is an Armenian word that means Pear. I was so influenced by the Beatles and Apple Records while growing up in the 1970's, the name Dantz seemed like a great word to use as my company name since it almost said to my potential clients, "get up and dance"! That is what I wanted my customers to do. I have now some 25 titles of CD's with a line of T-shirts as well and musical instruments that I sell to the public. All of this is from my web site, www.dantzrecords.com. I am also very proud of having written an Oud Method Book for the Hal Leonard Company, the largest manufacturer of sheet music and music learning books in the world. The book has been released and an audio CD also comes along with the book as part of my presentation. The book and CD are available at the present time.

Studio: You also have a very talented family.

John: My wife Helen is an exceptional singer. She has studied Opera for over 30 years. She has appeared with Opera companies in Los Angeles, Long Beach and in Orange County. She is a major part of my life. She is my inspiration as well. She has altered the way I think about so many things that have happened to us both. Her influence is felt throughout my work and life. She has 2 sons, Mason and Morgan. Morgan is not married yet and Mason has 6 children at the present time. Helen is very busy helping to raise all of her grandchildren.

I have 2 wonderful sons, John and George Bilezikjian. They are both musicians and music producers as well. I am very proud of them. Both sons perform with me in my Band. John produces, wrap music for clients and makes CD's as well as performs on the Dumbeg and is also a DJ. George is an exceptional Dumbeg artist as well as a kit drum (traps) set player. He is not only a member of my Band but is a member of The Hosharian Brothers Band, Levendia, (a Greek Folk dance band) and is a member of The Classic 50's Band of Montebello, CA.

I have 3 Grandsons. Anthony is 15. He is learning the Oud and Violin presently. He is the son of my son John. He already performs on the Dumbeg as well. Alex and Julian are the latest of my Grandchildren. They are Fraternal twins of my youngest son George and his wife Leanore. They are 2 1/2 years old. They play some Dumbeg already. They keep a steady rhythm already of any rhythm pattern. They are beginning to learn the Violin and Oud as well from their Papa. George also has a daughter Alycea as well who is a big part of his and our lives.

Contact John Bilezikjian at: www.dantzrecords.com

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