

LETTER OF NOMINATION FOR JOHN BILEZIKJIAN TO RECEIVE A
FELLOWSHIP FROM THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS
PROGRAM, SUB HEADING, NATIONAL HERIGATE FELLOWSHIP.

August 23, 2008

To The Nominating Body:

In 1970 I was at a party in a house in the San Fernando Valley, California. Through the din of conversation and laughter, I heard music being played by an instrument that sounded like a guitar, but also not like anything I had ever heard. Following the sound, I threaded my way through the mass of party goers and finally reached the living room. People surrounded a man, who was sitting on the floor. In his arms was an instrument that looked like a lute, or a pregnant mandolin without frets. With a raucous, perfectly intoned baritone voice, he was singing "She Came In Through The Bathroom Window," by Lennon and McCartney. This was followed by "Lady Madonna," and "Get Back." Then, through the enthusiastic applause he played an invention by Johann S. Bach, but with the same foot stomping, finger popping intensity as the Beatles' songs. The downbeat of each note was of seismic intensity.

I stood there with my guitar in its case, not feeling its weight. Finally, he looked up at me and, with a grin, asked, "What'cha got in there? Open up that case and sit down next to me." We spent the next few hours jamming together. All of what we played was in either 2/4 or 4/4 meter, (except for a lively version of "Take Five"), but this powerhouse was able to create rhythmic permutations that challenged even my well developed ability to keep a steady beat.

Finally, about 4:00 am, the party ended and we introduced ourselves.

"John, John Bilezikjian."

"Mike Kollander."

We shook each others' sweaty hands. Thus began a close personal friendship and professional association that we enjoy to this day.

John Haig Bilezikjian is the most extraordinary musician I have ever known, and I have known more than a few. Although the Oud has brought John the most recognition, he is equally expert on the other fifty or so instruments that he not only plays, but writes for as well. He has transcribed orchestral works, for Oud and orchestra. Among these was a commission from the Boston Pops Orchestra, conducted by associate conductor Maestro Bruce Hagen, to transcribe two pieces for Oud and orchestra, and one piece for solo Oud from The Spanish Classical Guitar literature. His performance was met with popular and critical acclaim. (The recording of this unique accomplishment is in the possession of the Boston Pops Symphony, and may possibly be obtained through them). He has composed, conducted and performed in numerous film scores and has worked with many major Hollywood composers throughout the years. John once turned down an offer from the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra to accept a chair in the *violin* section in order to devote more time to transcribing classical music for the Oud.

The accounts of John Bilezikjian's musical superpowers could fill a large book. From undulating Belly Dance venues to the lofty halls of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, John has played his music to packed houses around the world, including a tour of Europe as the featured accompanist and soloist to Leonard Cohen. That tour lasted from 1979 to 1988, on and off.

In the thirty-eight years that I have known and worked with him, he has never ceased to amaze me with not only his encyclopedic musical knowledge, but his ability to solidly and consistently demonstrate that knowledge in any venue. Being on the stand with John Bilezikjian meant that your playing was being underwritten by the entire mass of the Rock Of Gibraltar, while simultaneously being guaranteed a rich, fulfilling and enjoyable experience as a sideman.

Granting a fellowship to John would be contributing to the continuation of a living, national musical treasure. As his physical ability to perform wanes, his enthusiasm and unconditional love of music continue to expand. He will be outlived by the profound influence his work has had upon the hearts, minds and lives of many. Through his concerti, film scores, songs, numerous CD's and students, John's influence will be felt for hundreds of years.

I hope you will support this great creative artist in his declining years. You will be serving all of us by doing so.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mikhael Kollander', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mikhael Kollander

Composer, recording artist, musician, music director, author, teacher and business owner.

12120 Stonegate Lane
Garden Grove CA 92845
(714) 892-8035
mkollander@socal.rr.com