



The Institute of Persian Performing Arts

انجمن موسیقی ملی

Robyn C. Friend, Ph.D., Director

18 September 2008

NEA National Heritage Fellowship
Folk & Traditional Arts
National Endowment for the Arts
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 720
Washington, DC 20506-0001

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am pleased to nominate John Haig Bilezikjian for an NEA National Heritage Fellowship. John has had a 40+ year record of continuous outstanding artistic accomplishment. An American of Armenian descent, John continues an active career performing, recording, and teaching.

Based on my own life-time of involvement as a scholar, performer, and teacher of Middle Eastern culture, I deem that John is *the* outstanding performer on the Armenian-style *oud* in the world today. Over the years, he has been the inspiration for countless *oud* players, delighted audiences in live concerts and dozens of recordings, elevated the standard of technique for the *oud* and hugely expanded its repertoire, documented thousands of Armenian folk melodies, and composed hundreds of musical pieces for dancing, recording, singing, film scores, etc. He is a legend in the Armenian-American community, and recognized around the world by distinguished Middle Eastern musicians as a giant in the field. He is the most significant exponent of Armenian traditional music in the United States, and has been such for decades.

John has thereby made major contributions to the excellence, vitality, and public appreciation of the folk and traditional arts of Armenia, and the variation of that culture that has developed amongst the large Armenian community in the United States. He is recognized nationally (and internationally), and has raised the visibility of Armenian culture through thousands of concerts, an immense discography, participation on dozens of film scores, teaching, books, etc.

I have known John for more than 30 years, and have witnessed the impact that I describe first-hand. No one can be more deserving of this honor.

Yours very truly,

Robyn C. Friend, Ph.D.,
Director

Nominee:

John Haig Bilezikjian
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Nominator:

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Selected web references to John Haig Bilezikjian:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oud>
<http://www.gildedserpent.com/art42/artemisjohnb.htm>
<http://www.answers.com/topic/dantz-fever>
<http://www.ambientvisions.com/musicdirections.htm>
<http://www.oud.eclipse.co.uk/bilezikjian.html>
<http://www.artistdirect.com/nad/music/artist/card/0,,404285,00.html>
[http://www.ishimmy.com/columns/Dancer To Dancer/Dancer to Musician with John Bilizekjian/](http://www.ishimmy.com/columns/Dancer%20To%20Dancer/Dancer%20to%20Musician%20with%20John%20Bilizekjian/)
... and many, many others

Sampling of Awards and Recognitions:

- "Who's who" of Professional Artists Composers and Musicians, Copyright London England, 1992
- "Who's Who" among Armenians in North America, 1994
- "Most Outstanding Entertainer", solo performer, from NAFISA, Gem Awards, 1993
- "Best entertainer", solo performer, from NAFISA, Gem Awards, 1994
- "Best entertainer", "Most Outstanding Group, soloist and group category, from NAFISA, Gem Awards, 1995

Orange County Register: "He's slightly amazing", "He speaks and performs in 11 languages—Turkish, Armenian, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Persian, French, German, Greek and both Laurence Olivier English and Willie Nelson English"

The Observer: From out of the dark light of the cabaret and into the spotlight of the concert stage the Oud is very much alive and John Bilezikjian's playing proved that there certainly can be a "Heifetz on the Oud".

Los Angeles Times: John's music needs no translation in the world of American or Middle Eastern audiences. He is a composer, teacher, entertainer, actor and soloist for the Los Angeles Philharmonic. His degrees are on the Oud, Violin and Composition. In the opinion of many qualified critics from the Los Angeles Times, *He is internationally acclaimed and considered a music dazzler* by Herbert J. Vida.

Frets Magazine: "his command of the rhythm, dynamics, and harmonic color is astounding"...**Billboard**... "a sworn statement to Bilezikjian's proficiency on the difficult 11 stringed instrument played with a quill".

Stereo Review: "...is able to push the Oud far beyond it's ancient capabilities, coaxing chords, harmonies, and contrapuntal effects that lend surprising color to his performance".