

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Creativity and Synthesis
in the Music of John Bilezikjian,
an Armenian-American *Oud* Player from Los Angeles

by

Gail Barbara Schwartz
Master of Arts in Ethnomusicology
University of California, Los Angeles
Professor Ali Jihad Racy, Chair

This thesis focuses on the work of Armenian-American *oud* player John Bilezikjian—his background and training, his sources of creative inspiration, his philosophy about his audiences, and the elements of creativity and synthesis in his own compositions. Its purpose is to investigate the creative process and the juxtaposition of the many different genres in which he performs in order to determine how and to what extent stylistic elements of each genre overlap or are enculturated with prevailing (American-Western) musical elements.

Mr. Bilezikjian's incorporation of many diverse elements, both folk and classical, Near Eastern and Western, sets him apart as an exceptionally versatile, multi-faceted musician who represents, in effect, a microcosm of the ethnic communal makeup of the City of Los Angeles. His music embraces the traditions of Armenia, Turkey, the Arab world, Greece, Russia, Israel, Eastern Europe, Spain, Asia and Latin America. He has orchestrated classical works for *oud* and

mandolin orchestra, has written and recorded Rock 'n Roll, music for belly dancing, television and motion picture sound tracks, and has produced myriad original compositions. He plays over fifty instruments although his focus has been and remains the *oud*.

Unlike most *oudists*, Mr. Bilezikjian refuses to confine himself to any one particular style or genre. His work is therefore of particular interest to ethnomusicologists as a study of how and to what extent his ethnic background and the prevailing culture have shaped his perception of himself and his work, to what degree he retains or moves beyond the stylistic guidelines dictated by the traditions in which he performs, and what part innovation plays in his compositional process. It is the hypothesis of this thesis that both creativity and synthesis are integral components of Mr. Bilezikjians's music. Because of the astonishing range of his repertoire, critics of his work have objected that it violates time-honored traditional stylistic parameters. I hope to show that its very eclecticism plays a major role in the process of creative synthesis.