



# St. Peter Armenian Church & Youth Ministries' Center

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Rev. Fr. Vazken Movsesian, Director and Parish Priest

12 July 2012

National Endowment for the Arts  
1100 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Suite 720  
Washington, DC 20506

Dear Grant Review Board Members,

It is with pleasure that I write this letter of support for John Bilezikjian, candidate for an NEA grant. I am a priest of the Armenian Church serving in the Southern California area, one of the largest concentrations of Armenians outside of Armenia. Within the Armenian Diaspora, our church is the center for spiritual and cultural life.

John Bilezikjian is among the few Armenian artists who has readily used his talents to preserve and propagate the Armenian culture through his mastery of the Oud and his unparalleled knowledge of Armenian and Middle Eastern music. I have known John since the early 1960's, when he was already exhibiting his musical aptitude in Armenian circles. His performances throughout the Armenian Diaspora became rallying points where people's curiosity about Armenian musical tradition was satisfied by John's innate ability to entertain and educate. People leave each one of his concerts, shows or performances with a heightened awareness of the broad history and rich cultural heritage of the Armenian people.

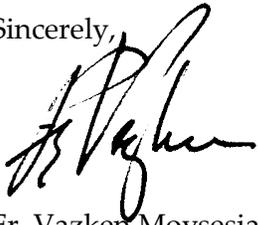
It is important to note that the Armenian Diaspora was created in the aftermath of 1915 Genocide. From the ruins of Genocide, a few survivors resurrected the cultural elements of our people. John Bilezikjian is among a handful of Armenian artists who has diligently and methodically captured the music of pre-Genocide Armenia and Anatolia – both from the villages and from metropolitan areas – and has successfully transferred that music to the children of subsequent generations. It is safe to say that John Bilezikjian is an institution within the Armenian community. His name is synonymous with Armenian music. His artistry preserves and teaches through his unique talent to articulate the past in musical expressions.

On a personal level, I can vouch that John's passion for the Armenian cultural heritage and its preservation is a calling for him. He readily avails himself to members of the Armenian community and even more to Armenian organizations, offering his talents purely for the sake of spreading Armenian music. On several occasions that I know of,

he has organized and played concerts to benefit Armenian churches, Armenian fraternal and social groups, and Armenian benevolent organizations. This includes regular appearances on the annual Armenia-Fund Telethon, which has brought financial relief to war-ravaged Artzakh and earthquake-torn Armenia.

I wholeheartedly support John Bilezikjian for a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. I make this recommendation without reservation. Also, please do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything further I can inform you on regarding John Bilezikjian, a treasure of the Armenian Community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fr. Vazken Movsesian', written in a cursive style.

Fr. Vazken Movsesian