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NEA National Heritage Fellowships
Folk and Traditional Arts
National Endowment of the Arts
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 720
Washington DC, 20506-0001

Attention: Advisory Panel of Folk and Traditional Arts

Re: Nomination of John Bilezikjian for a National Heritage Fellowship in the Folk Music Category

Gentlepersons:

I have known John Bilezikjian personally for over a quarter of a century, and followed his work for about five years prior to our first meeting. I am thus very familiar with his work.

I also did cultural work with Southern Californian Mediterranean communities for several years, including the Egyptian, Lebanese, Moroccan, Armenian, and Persian communities. My activities included helping with planning and staffing for the huge, multiethnic Los Angeles Festival of 1990. The Los Angeles Festival was probably one of the largest and most diverse cultural and arts festivals in the history of the city.

I also acted as on-site cultural advisor on the daytime drama "The Bold and the Beautiful," for a series of segments set in a fictional Arab country. I acted in this capacity, during the illness of UCLA anthropologist Fadwa el Guindi.

For a number of years, I reviewed and publicized Middle-Eastern cultural events, and interviewed middle-eastern musical artists for publications such as the Beirut Times. Mr. Bilezikjian's professional reputation

among other performers and ethnomusicologists became very apparent to me.

Mr. Bilezikjian is considered to be the principal proponent of traditional and contemporary Armenian oud music in the country, and perhaps the world. In addition, he is a major proponent of Turkish, Russian, Persian, and Sephardic music. As such, he is sought after as an instructor for the annual Mendocino Music Camp. The instructors for this camp are drawn from among the finest teachers of Middle-Eastern music in the world. He is first choice for the performance of any of these, and other music for concerts, folk festivals, and private affairs. He is probably the premier oud and mandolin artist in the world.

I can't possibly describe his range and accomplishments in a brief letter. So, I have enclosed a full resume, for your review. However, here are just a couple of my favorites of Mr. Bilezikjian's accomplishments:

- For a period of time, Mr. Bilezikjian played with the famous pop artist, Little Richard, on a flat-backed oud of his own design.
- He asked for, and received, permission from the late Joaquin Roderigo to transcribe and arrange the Concierto de Aranjuez for oud and orchestra. This he debuted with the Santa Monica Symphony Orchestra in 1988.
- He performed, as primo mandolinist, Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet with the Joffrey Ballet at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles.

This letter was a bit challenging to write, because there is simply too much to this artist's career to describe briefly. However, my personal feeling is that of his broad range of musical talents, and his prolific accomplishments, the music that is closest to his heart is the music of the Mediterranean countries

I also believe that Mr. Bilezikjian's influence has been instrumental in adding music of the middle-east to the spectrum of cultural music found and appreciated in the United States.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,



Kari Sprowl, MA

Enclosure