

MUSIC

Musician helps bands 'record' their heritage

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
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When Ara Topouzian was in school he played a cornet. He figured playing in the band was just something he'd do until he graduated.

But he hadn't figured on falling in love with the music of his Armenian heritage.

He had gone to ethnic conventions and festivals with his parents and his older brother played the oud (similar to a lute), but it was the sound of a 75-string, zither-like instrument called a kanun that drew him to become a professional musician.

"That was an instrument I loved and it was not common in Armenian music, more common in Middle Eastern, belly dance music," he said. "The sound is just such a beautiful sound, I fell in love with it."

Topouzian of Bloomfield Hills taught himself to play and began to make the usual rounds of weddings and church affairs. But he found that he had to record to get his name known. That led to the formation of American Recording Productions in Farmington Hills.

The company's first project

was finding some old 78s of Armenian music, cleaning up the sound and recording on cassettes.

"Today, the company records five new albums a year."

"I did it out of necessity. I was playing in a band and I needed recordings to sell," Topouzian said. "I was going to school, not thinking of making this a career."

One of the company's first projects was "For the Children of Armenia," recorded as a benefit for a pre-natal clinic in Armenia, which raised \$20,000 for the cause.

Since the founding the recording company, interest in world music has exploded.

"World music has been revived," Topouzian said. "I was dead in the '80s. You saw Irish, Spanish, German, but not Middle Eastern or Armenian. Now music from Greece, Persia, all very popular. The market is getting saturated."

The recent Gypsy Caravan, which made a stop at Ann Arbor's Hill Auditorium, featured Eastern European music related to the Middle Eastern and Armenian music recorded by Topouzian. The tour drew a lot

of publicity.

A Middle Eastern band, according to Topouzian, will usually include a clarinet, oud (a lute type instrument), dumbek (a percussion instrument) and kanun. The sound is fast, rhythmic, sensual and, often, quite complex and layered.

Topouzian said he isn't interested in recording the best known names in the music, but those who play the regular wedding and festival circuit.

"I've made it a point to record friends, talented Armenian and Middle Eastern musicians that haven't been heard. I want to go after the music that isn't as well known," he said.

His most recent project is "Cafe Makam," a recording of Middle Eastern belly dance music. The title combines the ideas of coffee house and musical set (makam), a reference to the different scales used in Middle Eastern music.

Another new company release features the music of oud player and vocalist Chick Ganinian.

ARP records are available at Tower and other major record stores. The company also has a Web site at www.arpmusic.com



Musician: Ara Topouzian plays a 75-string zither-like instrument called a kanun.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL DIXON

ART BEAT

Want to publicize an arts event, or know a talented local artist who deserves recognition? It's news that belongs in Art Beat.

Send information to Art Beat, Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009, fax (248) 644-1314.

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CURATOR NAMED

Joelene Magoto has been named curator of education at Cranbrook Art Museum.

Magoto's responsibilities include developing and administering educational programs to supplement the museum's exhibits.

Before arriving at Cranbrook, Magoto served as executive director of the Old Jail Art Center in Albany, Texas. She also taught studio art classes and served as director of the art gallery at Clarion University in Pennsylvania.

WOMEN ARTISTS AT DIA

The Detroit Institute of Arts "Where the Girls Are: Prints by Women from the DIA's Collection" will be on view through Sept. 26 in the Schwartz Graphic Arts Galleries.

The prints explore the technical developments of printmaking from the 1880s through the 20th century.

A related exhibit, "Where the Girls Are: Photographs by Women from the DIA's Collec-

tion" opens this Sunday, July 25 and runs through November 7.

EVERETT ARTIST OF MONTH

The paintings and greetings cards of Pat Everett will be on exhibit through July at the POSA Gallery, Summit Mall in Waterford.

For more information, call (248) 883-8779 or (248) 338-4132.

SUMMER CLASSES

The Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center offers nearly 40 classes for children and teens.

Among the classes is "A Feast For Your Eyes," which provides children in grades 1-3 an exercise of working with papier-mâché, foam, fabric, paint and clay in creating their interpretation of a full-course meal.

Other classes include photography, drawing, ceramics and beginning drama.

BBAC is located at 1516 S. Cranbrook. For information, call (248) 644-0866, Ext. 102.

CONSERVATORY RECEIVES FUNDS

FAR Conservatory of Therapeutic and Performing Arts has received \$20,660 from United Way Community Services.

The funds will be used in 1999-2000 for creative arts therapy, arts instruction, athletic training and leisure services for children and adults with mental and physical challenges.

ART & WSU COLLABORATION

Dance students in the Ameri-

can Ballet Theatre and Wayne State University's four-week instruction program will hold two performances 12:30 and 3 p.m. Friday, July 23, at the Detroit Opera House.

The concert is open to the public. Donations will be accepted. The collaboration, now in its second year, provides intermediate to advanced dance training to students age 13-18.

For information, call (313) 237-3416.

NEW DEPARTMENT HEAD

Under the direction of newly named department head and renowned ceramic artist Paul Young, the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center is expanding to include six new teachers and 20 additional classes.

In total, the ceramics department includes eight teachers, including Carolyn Court, Kaiser Suidan, David McGee, Sandra Belcher, Mike Magoto and Itham Mahfouz.

BBAC is located at 1516 S. Cranbrook. For information, call (248) 644-0866.

VAN GOGH FACES

"Van Gogh: Face to Face" will be on exhibit at the Detroit Institute of Arts, March 12 to June 4, 2000.

The exhibit includes 50 paintings and drawings from international public and private collections.

After the DIA showing, the

exhibit will travel to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, then to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

DIANA ROSS AT ORCHESTRA HALL

Legendary singer and former Motown star Diana Ross will perform with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra on Friday, Sept. 17.

The concert at Orchestra Hall, entitled "Classic Legends: Opening for a New Millennium," will also feature conductor Neeme Jarvi and pianist Ivo Pogorelich.

For information, call (313) 576-5145.

WRITERS' RETREAT

The first annual Walloon Writers' Retreat welcomes writers and poets to attend workshops, readings and panel discussions, held at Michiganiana on Walloon Lake, Sept. 30 to Oct. 2.

The retreat is produced by Springfed Arts, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the craft of writing.

Michiganiana, a collection of cabins on 375 acres, is owned and operated by the Alumni Association of the University of Michigan.

Instructors include Joyce Maynard, Michael Moor, Rosemary Daniell, Alicia Ostriker, Ben Hamper, M.L. Liebler, Larry Smith and Keith Taylor.

For more information, call John Lamb at (248) 689-3913 or visit this Web page: www.springfed.org

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