

2012 Winner of the Kresge Artist Fellowship for the Performing Arts

Voted "Best Local Folk Artist"-WDIV-Channel 4 Detroit



Ara Topouzian cannot remember a time when music was not a part of his life. Born in Detroit, Michigan in 1969, he first performed live with an Armenian band at the age of 10, playing the def or (tambourine). While he played cornet at school, it wasn't until toward the end of college that he became more interested in

performing traditional Armenian and Middle Eastern music using hand percussion instruments such as the dumbeg (hour-glass shaped hand drum) and def. And, it was while performing with local Armenian bands that he first learned how to play the Kanun, a 76-stringed laptop harp. This set the stage for a successful career, performing as both as a solo and ensemble musician with Armenian and Middle Eastern artists throughout the country.

In 1991, in order to record and preserve Armenian, Arabic and other forms of traditional music, Ara founded American Recording Productions (ARP). Since then, his record label has produced over 30 recordings of Armenian, Middle Eastern, Bulgarian and Greek music with worldwide distribution in both retail stores and online. In 1995, he was commissioned by the Armenian Relief Society (ARS Red Cross) to produce an album with proceeds to benefit a prenatal clinic located in an earthquake devastated area. *For the Children of Armenia* CD raised over \$20,000 that was then donated to the clinic in the memory of Ara's late mother. In 2002, he produced another album that was dedicated to the thousands of children that had been saved by the Nork Marash Medical Center in Yerevan, Armenia.

Ara's music has been featured in several Public Broadcasting System (PBS) documentaries nationwide. He has not only collaborated with Armenian musicians, but also performed with artists

from around the globe as well as some of the foremost contemporary jazz musicians.

For his accomplishments, Ara was honored twice with the Armenian Music Awards, winning Best Traditional Album in 2000 and Best Traditional Instrumental Album in 2001. Since 2009, he has been included as "**one of the top performing artists**" with the Michigan Humanities Council and the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs as part of a directory, which offers performers the opportunity to present their work throughout the State of Michigan.

In 2010 Ara was part of the *In Transit* ensemble; a 19-piece world music group led by a local Detroit musician that premiered to a sold-out audience at Detroit Orchestra Hall.

In January, 2012, Ara also starred as a guest artist on a new recording for award-winning composer Doug Richard's **Ben Seni Variations**—an 80-piece orchestra and nine jazz soloists at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA. This 30-minute piece is based on a Middle Eastern folk song and scored in a modern jazz concerto grosso style. The recording brought together renowned artists from around the world including jazz soloists, as well as the Montreal-based Ensemble *Appassionata* along with the VCU Symphony Orchestra.

In July, 2012, Ara was awarded the **Kresge Artist Fellowship for the Performing Arts**.

In September, 2012, he was voted the best local folk artist through **Vote4TheBest** sponsored by WDIV (NBC) Television.

Ara likes to share his heritage and talent with others through workshops for both children and adults, which include demonstrations of various Armenian and Middle Eastern instruments, as well as folk music.