

Ara Topouzian

Armenian & World Musician

Biography

Ara Topouzian is an Armenian-American musician whose proficiency at the Kanun (Middle Eastern harp with 78 strings) has made him a nationally recognized artist for over thirty years.

He has performed at concerts, music festivals and many celebrated venues across the United States, with some of the top musicians of Armenian and Middle Eastern music. Notably, Topouzian has performed to large audiences at the Detroit Institute of the Arts, Detroit Orchestra Hall, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Old Town School of Folk Music, and Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History.

Topouzian's traditional music style keeps to his Armenian heritage but has expanded to include music from around the Middle East with jazz and world music influences.

The recipient of numerous awards, Topouzian's music has been heard and sold around the globe. He has produced close to twenty recordings since 1994 and has been a guest recording artist on several albums. Many of his musical tracks have been used in film documentaries including three produced by Emmy Award winner producer Andrew Goldberg.

In 2000, Topouzian's music was used in an educational audio package produced by McGraw Hill for the purpose of teaching students different forms of world music. Topouzian also narrated one of the units while demonstrating the Kanun. His work is also mentioned in several books about Armenian, Greek, and World Music.

In 2012, Kresge Arts of Detroit recognized Topouzian with a Kresge Arts Fellowship for his achievements and contributions to his craft.

That same year, Topouzian was invited to perform with the Virginia Commonwealth University Symphony Orchestra in a premiered concerto composed by Professor Doug Richards, composer at Virginia Commonwealth University.

In 2015, to honor the 100th anniversary remembrance of 1.5 million Armenians massacred by order of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, Topouzian produced an award-winning film documentary called *Guardians of Music: A History of Armenian Music in Detroit*. This film paid homage to the first-generation Armenian musicians that kept traditional Armenian music alive in the Detroit community. The film was produced thanks to major funding by the Knights Arts Challenge and premiered nationally on Public Broadcasting System (PBS).

In 2015, Topouzian also received the Artist-In-Residence designation by the City of Farmington Hills, Michigan, which is given to notable artists who have made significant contributions to the arts in the community.

Topouzian continues to incorporate music performance with storytelling whenever possible. Engaging audiences through music and dialogue is an important aspect to Topouzian's mission of preserving traditional Armenian and Middle Eastern music.

In recognition of his accomplishments, former Michigan Governor Rick Snyder appointed Topouzian to the Michigan Council of Arts & Cultural Affairs in 2018. The council works to increase and broaden the influence of arts and culture within Michigan communities. He was re-appointed by Governor Gretchen Whitmer in 2020 and currently serves on the council's Executive Committee.

During the global pandemic in 2019, Topouzian continued to perform, albeit virtually, for audiences around the country. He was honored to represent the State of Michigan performing Armenian music for The Kennedy Center series Arts Across America, presented nationwide to uplift and showcase artists throughout the nation.

In 2021, Ara performed to a sold-out audience at TEDx Detroit.