THE WORK OF A.I.C.F.

PATHS OF ISRAELI ARTISTS
Imagine yourself

in a concert hall to see the Berlin Philharmonic perform. Guy Braunstein, an AICF recipient, is the concertmaster. The violin section swells, its sound overpowering. You catch the fingers of the first-chair violinist and remark that his hands appear to be part of the instrument itself.

You pause in front of a particularly captivating piece by artist Itamar Jobani in Manhattan’s Andrea Meislin Gallery and wonder about the artistic process that created such a complex and yet wondrously simple work.

Perhaps you are attending a performance of the Batsheva Dance Company in Tel Aviv. The dancers’ movements seem impossibly graceful, as though they had been performing this piece their entire lives.

Or, you have just left the movie theater, having seen a moving documentary by Tomer Heymann you can’t stop talking about. This list goes on and on. AICF recipients, it seems, are everywhere.

Year after year, our recipients recount how their careers could not have been launched or sustained without the help of the America-Israel Cultural Foundation.

It’s a joy to hear of the latest awards, gallery openings, upcoming concerts and recitals, film premieres. Sometimes, it’s a single moment, a turning point that launches their career—that inspires them to pursue art.

So what do these artists have that is so special? Why are they different from the thousands of others all striving to create something new? Where did their gift come from, and how was it nurtured?

There is no simple answer. The path that each artist takes is unique…
The following AICF recipients would like to take you on their artistic path

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**DANCE**
Bar Etzyoni, ballet dancer
Idan Sharabi, dancer/choreographer

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**VISUAL ARTS**
Yael Alkalay, graphic design artist
Nivi Alroy, animator and designer

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**MUSIC**
Mahmoud Soleiman, horn
Elad Kabilio, cellist
Zvi Plesser, cellist
Maya Belzitsman, cellist
Shauli Einav, saxophonist

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**FILM AND THEATER**
Ido Rozenberg, actor
Daniel Efrat, actor, writer, translator, and director
Tomer Heymann, documentary film director

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*Let’s start at the beginning.*

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COVER ARTWORK: Above path: Adi Brande, Tamar Latzman, Anat Even-Or, Aylam Orian, Tamar Ettun, Dvir Cohen-Kedar; Below path: Meital Gueta, Shahar Yahalom, Matan Bentulila, Nivi Alroy, Gadi and Hila Amram, Mushon Zer-aviv, Inbal Abergil, Ofri Cnaani, Naama Tzabar, Refael Salem
Time and time again, the same maxim sounds— if you want to be a professional artist, you have to start young. This is doubly true in music and dance, where children as young as five pick up a violin and pluck their first note, or slip on ballet slippers and glide across the floor. Following in her sister’s footsteps, Bar Etzyoni (now age thirteen) began dancing in a local Matnas (arts community center supported by the Government). Many artists start at these local centers, and progress towards more professional studies with the encouragement of teachers and their families. By seven, she was studying classical ballet in a private dance studio.

Young artists require both talent and encouragement to blossom. Often, this encouragement comes from acceptance into a special institution. But as our recipient families tell us, practice and sacrifice go hand in hand.

Aware of the financial barriers to her daughter’s studies, Bar’s mother encouraged her to audition for a renowned AICF scholarship. Having won a coveted dance scholarship just this year, Bar now prepares to audition for studies at the Thelma Yellin High School of the Arts, in hopes to join her sister Coral Etzyoni (also a recipient).

Of all the avenues available to artists pursuing their craft, early career support is the most important and often the most difficult to obtain. Through our Enrichment Programs in Dance and Music, Young Music Ensembles Program, and Periphery Encouragement Program, we provide that early career support. Still, there simply aren’t enough opportunities. With your help, we can change that.

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Pascal Etzyoni, mother of Bar Etzyoni, dancer.

“It took hours in traffic to drive my daughter to Tél Aviv. But I always peeked through the little window on the dance studio door. As we saw how serious our daughter was, we had to take her to more advanced programs.”

- Pascal Etzyoni, who always waited outside the dance studio so she would not make her daughter nervous.

“We did this for the sake of experience and prepared her for rejection. When we received the scholarship letter last July, we could not believe it. She learned so much from the experience, and how to deal with auditions. The money factor is, of course, important, but, above all, the recognition was the best thing we could ask for.”

- Pascal Etzyoni, on the commitment it took to support her daughter’s dreams.
OUR SCHOLARSHIP PROCESS

- We hold annual auditions before an independent panel of experts to award hundreds of scholarships to young artists.
- We re-audition the artists each year to ensure that the best continue to receive our support.
- Among our large pool of applicants, the recipients who are selected are considered the most talented, and without AICF support, many of these artists would be unable to afford their studies.
- All of the cultural institutions in Israel recognize our recipients as those with the greatest talent and potential; in fact, many base admission upon whether applicants were awarded an AICF scholarship.

PRIDE

“We were so proud! The phone keeps ringing with people calling to congratulate us. Covering all the many costs is not easy. Besides the lessons and traveling, there are also instrument related costs. AICF helps us to make sure Mahmoud is on the right track.”

- Mother of Mahmoud Soleiman. His mother a teacher and his father a mechanical engineer, Mahmoud was the first in his family to play an instrument.

RESPECT

“The panel was sitting in front of me, the elite theater actors of Israel. Now I feel that I finally closed this chapter of my life, because now I perform with all three of them. AICF only takes top-notch performing artists. AICF, I will never forget it. I actually have already performed with them the last three years, the most talented, gifted actors. I couldn’t believe it!”

- Ido Rozenberg, actor
CULTIVATING TALENT

“For as long as I can remember, visual arts took a main role in my life. At Thelma Yellin, the teachers treated us as professional artists from the very first day.”

- Yael Alkalay, graphic design artist

Meet Yael Alkalay, who was awarded the “Excellence Award” in the Visual-Communication Department from the esteemed Bezalel Academy of Arts and Designs in Jerusalem and was the winner of the 2009 UNESCO “Cultural Diversity Logo Competition.”

It’s no coincidence that Yael, like so many other AICF recipients, attended schools such as the Thelma Yellin High School of the Arts, or the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance High School, along with several other key High School Arts departments around Israel. For so many of our artists, high school is where the most crucial development of their careers took shape. In many cases, former AICF recipients teach the next generation of artists at these schools under the generous support of AICF, often referred to as the “Keren Sharett” in Israel.

“Thelma Yellin helped me develop my intellect and open me up to new ideas and styles. One of the great qualities of the school is the unique and special integration between the arts disciplines, which inspired and shaped me as a young artist.” - Yael Alkalay

It’s at this vulnerable age when young artists begin to hone their craft, working to understand and perfect the fundamentals that will support their creativity in the years to come. Those who study with AICF support enjoy a crucial advantage, with more time to practice, better instruments or materials, and professional mentoring. On the verge of adulthood, our artists are soon presented with a startling realization: the arts are underappreciated. The fortunate, like Yael, discover encouragement at special art schools or through mentors to help propel them forward. They experience a broader spectrum of the arts, encounter influences coming from different disciplines, and become better positioned to overcome the unique challenges they will each encounter.

“My mentor exposed me to the new media in contemporary art and to the artistic discourse, and by that, helped me find my own and unique artistic language.” - Yael Alkalay

Those who eventually become professionals attend one of a select few institutions, making important connections in the artistic world. All too often, the financial burden falls mainly upon the parents. For many, this is a hardship that can be too great to bear, making the value of receiving an AICF scholarship even more critical.

“Being accepted to the ‘Sharett Scholarship’ family was a great honor; knowing I’m a part of this group of well respected artists that were supported throughout the years.”

- Yael Alkalay
“I remember the first day of school. Where I grew up, there was no stage for the arts. I felt like a stranger. When I got to Thelma Yellin, I went up to rooftop, and saw my fellow students – people that I’d be spending the next four years with. There were teenagers from all over the country, of all different styles. But, we each shared the same dream to create art that inspires.”

- Ido Rozenberg, who is widely recognized as one of the most promising young actors in Israel.

“AICF helped me a lot through my first years of professional dance studies in high school. Knowing someone was out there to encourage me gave me the motivation to continue my studies. AICF’s support provided me with the confidence to transition from the periphery of Israel to Tel Aviv, and follow my dreams of becoming a professional dancer.”

- Idan Sharabi, dancer

AICF’s investment in Idan, coming from a family outside of the arts and without the means to send him to Thelma Yellin, made a profound difference. From Thelma Yellin, AICF supported his studies at Juilliard, which provided him with the training to join the Netherlands Dance Theatre. Idan recently returned to Israel to join his friends and become a key member of the Batsheva Dance Ensemble.

“Tens of thousands of dollars in workshop support are given for summer programs and partnerships with schools throughout Israel.”

- Elad Kabilio, cellist and Professional Studies candidate at the Manhattan School of Music.
This is the story of a teacher and a student. In the 1970s, the Israeli Defense Force changed the mission of the Educational Branch of the army, where many musicians and other artists serve.

“We had a really unique role -- it wasn't just 'another performance' for us. We worked hard at finding ways to help our audience to understand us. We went around the country to play for tired combat soldiers after a night with no sleep. We had lots of amazing experiences and learned tools to communicate with any audience—something you can't get anywhere else.” - Zvi Plesser

Isaac Stern, who helped lead AICF for 40 years, was instrumental in this new vision of a musician's role in the army. Artists would be sent to army bases close to home so they could spend half their day serving, the other half practicing their craft. After being chosen by the Minister of Culture, Zvi Plesser went to do what he did best--play the cello.

“‘In a way, the concerts over there were more exciting than the ones I perform right now. We had to play for a skeptical audience in the army. Only if the audience heard something extraordinary would they understand the importance of what we were doing.” - Zvi Plesser

Isaac Stern believed that musicians could heal Israel with music and bridge cultural gaps. Through the Jerusalem Music Center that he helped found, young musicians in the army were ordered to produce “Cultural Sundays”, where soldiers in different bases could attend dance and music concerts in Tel Aviv. Zvi met life-long friends in the IDF String Quartet, conducting concert lectures, and performing throughout Israel.

“It wasn't easy to communicate with the audiences and break down barriers. The trick was finding the right language and common ground. Music provided us with that connection.” - Zvi Plesser
Thirty years later, his student, Maya Belzitsman, served in the same unit, but with a different mission. In July 2006, during the Second Lebanon War, she went to play for civilians and soldiers in army bases.

“The people we performed for (especially in shelters) were really touched that, for an hour, we made them forget about the war. We brought smiles to their faces. Everyone was doing whatever they could to make the people happier. We could feel that they were grateful that we came just for them.” – Maya Belzitsman

Nearing the end of her service, Maya’s group was called to perform in an army base at the tallest point in Mount Hammon. The soldiers stationed there had never had an army group or band to perform for them. The musicians had to fill three hours of music, and they managed to do so, bringing new material. The resulting jam session, from the top of a mountain, was an event none of those present would ever forget.

“My parents were hysterical during the war. I couldn’t tell them much, just that I was fine. The people with me saw what we were doing as a real mission. This was our role in the war. Some people fight, some people entertain and help them forget. We could see how the fear left their faces as soon as we started playing. Under fire, it’s really crazy, but they were able to escape for a moment. They forgot where they were, and so did we.” – Maya Belzitsman

A few months later, Maya was walking in a shopping mall, carrying her cello, when a soldier approached her. Was she the one he had heard so much about, he asked, the musician who played for the soldiers? She smiled and said simply, “Yes.”

AICF proudly supports IDF artists continuing their studies while serving their country.
EXPANDING HORIZONS

“My graduate studies were priceless.”
- Nivi Alroy, animator and designer

For so many Israeli artists, studying abroad for a period of time before returning to Israel is essential to the development of their craft. Before they are even ready to explore opportunities abroad, artists typically spend thousands of hours practicing, taking lessons, and studying in schools of the arts. This attention to their craft wouldn’t be possible without the support of AICF funding.

Visual artist Nivi Alroy served as an animator and designer in the IDF, developing interactive computer programs. After her service, she attended the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem. Upon graduation, Nivi, like most artists, began to look for opportunities abroad.

“After graduate school, she was awarded the A.I.R. Gallery Fellowship for outstanding achievements of woman artists. Her solo show, Fruiting Bodies, led to her next exhibit, Pixelville, which was selected by the Dumbo Arts Center in New York as one of its two 2010 large-scale exhibitions. The New York Magazine called the show “gorgeous and playful” and described her work as “impeccable.”

“To progress as an artist, I was encouraged by my professors to study abroad for my graduate degree. I didn’t have the financial means to pay the tuition and applied to the AICF abroad scholarship program; it was the only way I could reach the next level in my studies and career.”
- Nivi Alroy, visual artist

AICF ABROAD SCHOLARSHIPS

- AICF provides targeted, two-to-three-year grants to the most talented Israelis in all art forms for international graduate study.
- Scholarships are reserved for those artists who have the greatest potential to make a significant and positive impact on the world.
Shauli Einav’s story offers another example of how the AICF has made a difference. A saxophonist from Kfar Uria, and one of today’s rising stars in the NYC jazz scene, Shauli studied at the Jerusalem Music Academy in cooperation with the Rimon School of Jazz. After a performance in Israel of the legendary saxophonist Walt Weiskopf, Shauli approached the musician and asked where he taught. “Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York,” his hero replied.

Pursuing his studies abroad, Shauli has since performed with his ensembles and some of today’s finest jazz musicians on prestigious stages such as the Red Sea Jazz Festival, the Israel Festival in Jerusalem, the Rochester International Jazz Festival, Tel-Aviv International Jazz Festival, and the Knitting Factory in New York City.

Having the opportunity to study abroad is priceless. For the thousands of artists like Nivi Alroy and Shauli Einav, traveling abroad is not only vital to their careers but, in a larger sense, essential to the expression of art itself.

Through your generosity, AICF can provide more talented artists with the opportunity to study abroad so that they can enrich the cultural experience when they return home to Israel.

“In Israel, I would juggle working at several different jobs just to be able to afford school, rent, and living costs. This meant that I had to run from one gig to another, or from one teaching place to another.”

Shauli Einav, saxophonist

“Receiving the AICF scholarship in Israel helped me focus on what direction I wanted to take.”

Shauli Einav

Artwork by Nivi Alroy
THE PROFESSIONAL’S STAGE

“I was struggling to survive, making very little money as I pursued my art. The AICF scholarships saved me from financial disaster.”

- Daniel Efrat, actor, writer, translator, and director

At AICF, we watch artists as young as five mature into world-renowned performers. Yet for many who have finished their graduate studies, the moment when a young artist becomes a professional is fraught with difficulty. Success becomes a constant struggle after formal education ends; artists only have their craft to share with the world.

“I went on hundreds of auditions, performed at productions for children, as well as taught, directed, and translated plays at the Beit Zvi School of the Performing Arts. Upon graduation, I quickly realized just how difficult it would be to pursue a career in the arts.”

- Daniel Efrat

Many young artists join notable institutions and find their place among other professionals. Others choose to begin their own projects, breaking from tradition as they pursue their own distinct paths. Yet what defines a successful artist?

“The turning point for me came when my friends from Beit Zvi and I wrote, directed, produced, and performed our own show after graduation. In order to find our place in the very small theatre world in Israel, we would have to put up a show and invite every single figure in the industry. The show gave us strength and reassurance that we can put up a production by ourselves. Two years after, Beit Lessin Theatre “adopted” our group and we were asked to produce a new program.” – Daniel Efrat

Although our artists have overcome many obstacles in developing their career, that first, brave step off the beaten path into a new frontier can be both exciting and terrifying. As our recipients have told us, securing funding and exhibit space is among the most challenging aspects of their artistry—in fact, it is one of the biggest barriers in their ability to practice and create new work.

“You have to do everything by yourself to make it these days. There’s no easy path and you really have to be aggressive. That means asking for every bit of help you can get, using the connections you’ve established, and contacting every institution. The industry in Israel is very small, but there’s an upside. As soon as you put up a good production, everybody will know about it.”

- Daniel Efrat
“I was asked to bring something small to my audition for AICF. I brought a short scene about my parents’ divorce. The panel was amazed by the openness of the piece, and honestly quite shocked. We had an amazing discussion about the future of cinema, and my future.”

- Tomer Heymann, one of the leading documentary film directors in Israel.

AICF believed in Tomer Heymann’s vision, and awarded him a scholarship. He attended the Camera Obscura in Tel Aviv, one of the most influential film schools in Israel. Upon graduation, he began working on his first film, but without securing any funding.

“I don’t know what will happen. It might be successful, it might not. The uncertainty can be overwhelming.”

- Tomer Heymann, who struggled to finish his first film, “It Kinda Scares Me.”

Tomer went to the Haifa Film Festival. He wasn’t sure how his work would be perceived, particularly given his young age. He won first prize for Best Documentary.

“I’ll never forget it. The festival’s jury Chairman and Israel’s top actor, Moshe Ivgy, said, ‘I’ve never seen any film as touching as this.’”

- Tomer Heymann

Artists - including those who are fortunate enough to experience success early on in their careers - need the encouragement and financial support to continue studying their craft. Each year, hundreds of students audition over a seven-month period to be awarded America-Israel Cultural Foundation study scholarships, valued at 6,000-8,000 shekels. Providing them with means in their education and early careers is essential to their continued success and professional evolution.
Our role in Israel has been so substantial that many refer to AICF simply as the “Keren” (“The Foundation”).

AICF support ensures that Israeli society as a whole has a vibrant, meaningful, and international arts scene.

Besides playing a unique role in the daily lives of Israelis, the arts often serve as an “island of sanity” during times of duress and danger.

Israeli art is crucial to our identity; accordingly, AICF is promoting artists to the world to showcase Israel and its culture in a positive light.

WHAT THE SUPPORT OF THE AMERICA-ISRAEL CULTURAL FOUNDATION MEANS

• Encourage the top young artists of Israel through our scholarships (in Israel and abroad)

• Provide enrichment and periphery support to enhance the education of artists throughout Israel

• Create stronger support and education structures for teachers of the arts in Israel

• Sponsor young artists in the critical, early part of their careers

OUR GOALS

Photos from our January Gala held at Carnegie Hall. Over 20 AICF recipients participated before a full and appreciative house.

Special thanks to Elad Kabilio and Daniel Homan for assisting with this newsletter.

Photos by Chris Lee
or see a young artist perform, think about how his or her career might have begun. Or if you enjoy a film, painting, or photograph by a young artist, imagine how that piece came to be.

Anyone who has spoken to an artist - or is an artist themselves - knows that the pursuit of passion does not happen on its own. Whether through the guidance of a teacher, mentor, or financial support, art can only thrive with the active support of others.

Thank you for your generosity.

David Homan
Executive Director
About the America-Israel Cultural Foundation

THE AMERICA-ISRAEL CULTURAL FOUNDATION (AICF) has been a pillar of Israeli culture since 1939, supporting promising young artists through over 14,000 scholarships, as well as over 600 of Israel’s leading arts institutions.

In 2010, AICF celebrates its 71st Anniversary serving the arts in Israel. Our scholarship recipients reach millions around the world, all those who enjoy and celebrate Israeli culture.

AICF is proud to be part of the fabric of Israel’s history, where the arts have nourished and sustained the soul of its people for generations.

VISIT WWW.AICF.ORG FOR MORE INFORMATION