AICF
Cultivating Israel’s Future Artistic Leaders

Cover image by Gili Levy. Islands, Oil on Canvas, 54”x50”, 2011-2012.
A LIFELONG COMMITMENT

AICF ensures that the most talented Israeli children in the arts, regardless of their means or where they live, study and flourish under the best of teachers.

Nothing can replace talent, but even the most naturally gifted students in the arts spend hours studying and practicing.

Your artistic work doesn’t encompass or define all of you, but it is how you are judged. At the earliest stages, AICF creates a safe environment to grow into a promising young artist, and offers the recognition and support to succeed.

THE CULTURAL LINK

We judge solely on talent and determination. Audition Juries specific to each discipline independently judge hundreds of applicants, and when the jury panel of top professionals all agrees, we know we have a star in the making, perhaps even at age 10. These artists receive more than recognition and a scholarship—they become part of a long-standing family of alumni who are driving forces in culture worldwide.

SEVEN DECADES OF IMPACT

We have funded over 16,000 scholarships to artists in music, theatre, dance, art/design, and film/TV, with over $150 million given to support the arts in Israel since 1939.

Every $2,000 donated funds a young artist who has successfully passed our auditions.

$10,000 sponsors a group of the most talented young artists for summer intensives and workshops.

Over $100,000 a year is targeted to assist artists who demonstrate additional need.
Why did you want to audition for AICF this year?
Estelle: Everybody told me that it marks the beginning of your career, that it opens many doors.

When did you start to play the oboe and why?
Estelle: I started when I was in 4th grade. My parents let me listen to a record, and I fell in love with the sound of the oboe.

And your parents are musicians too?
Estelle: My mother is the director of the Music Center in Ra’anana and my father teaches there. They were also AICF recipients.

Danielle, how long have you been playing the cello?
Danielle: About three years.

Was it hard at such a young age with such a big instrument?
Danielle: Not that hard. It became harder as my repertoire got more complex.

And how was the audition experience for you?
Danielle: I was nervous at the beginning but then I let go and really enjoyed it. I felt as if I was part of the cello.

Is there anything else you’d like to share with us?
Danielle: Yes, we have another sister, Ariel--she’s eight. A couple of years ago, she needed to go through two very expensive surgeries, and music was what saved our family! My parents released two special CDs for the sale of my father’s music, one called Yaldut and the other Ha Tikva, and that eventually paid for the surgeries.
How did you get started in music?
My whole family is in music. My parents are professionals playing for the Cameri Orchestra and the IPO. My brothers play the clarinet and the cello.

What inspires you and keeps you interested in what you do?
There is an interesting process of development for a musician -- first technical, then musical. You are able to go deeper into the expression of the music as your skills get stronger.

How did the AICF scholarship help you?
It funded lessons and also allowed me to purchase a new bow, which cost 3000 euros and will probably last for the rest of my life.

How was the audition for AICF this year and how did you prepare?
Preparing for the audition is a great way to motivate yourself to stretch and explore your limits. I see it as an educational tool.

Congratulations on your AICF Scholarship! How many have you received so far?
This is my third. The first one I received as part of the quartet Fortissimo. Then I got one for myself two years ago, and now I have an Excellence Scholarship.

And how did you feel as a musician in the army?
I was in the IDF Orchestra. Coming from Nofit, a small town near Tivon, it was my first encounter with the mentality of people from Tel Aviv and the center, which I found intriguing and different.

How do you feel being an Israeli artist abroad?
It is powerful. I know that I’ll be back in Israel and want to eventually live in Israel as it’s my real home. I am grateful that I get to absorb so much abroad, so I can eventually come back and apply what I learned. I often come across people who are very interested to talk about Israel, and I’m glad that I get the chance to explain how life really is over here.
Ziad is a classical cellist who moved to Israel when he was seven. He lives in Nazareth. He is an AICF recipient and takes part in the efforts of Polyphony, and he dreams of playing with the Divan Orchestra.

Tell me about your background and how you started to play.
I was born in Haifa. My grandfather played the accordion. Back in Russia, he survived the war thanks to his music. My mother is Moroccan.

How did you get into the Israel Philharmonic?
When I was 20 I auditioned for the Orchestra, just as a sub. I was offered a job by the Orchestra, but wasn’t able to take it because it was important to me to concentrate on school—so they were willing to wait for one year. In October 2012 I officially joined.

When did you realize you were serious about music?
I played basketball very seriously and it got to the point where I had to make a decision: I couldn’t keep doing both. My grandfather then reminded me that at thirty you’re pretty much done with basketball, while music lasts for your whole life. That convinced me.

What’s important for an artist today?
I believe it’s very important to spend time with Life! How can you express a deep human feeling with music if you’ve never experienced it in real life?
How do you feel being an Israeli dancer abroad?
When I used to go to summer intensives abroad, I often met people who expressed a lot of interest and curiosity about creative life in Israel and especially contemporary dance. They seemed deeply impressed by our choreographers and dance companies they’d seen performing around the world.
How is Juilliard?
Very exciting. I’ve been dreaming of it since I was 16, studying at Thelma Yellin Performing Arts High School. But moving out and away from home, family, and friends isn’t simple.

Where did it come from, that passion for dance?
My parents used to be dancers. That’s how they met. They studied together at the Bat-Dor Dance Company since the age of 10. But what made me want to do it was an urge I was just born with, to move. It’s certainly not something external. It is simply the only thing I want to do.

What do you need as an artist, to maintain and develop your craft?
At Thelma Yellin, we had to be at school daily from 8AM to 8PM. We were incredibly busy, because we needed to complete our studies at the same time.

How do you feel as an Israeli artist living abroad?
I feel that I’ll want to come back and dance in Israel. Being disconnected is hard for me, especially now, and I try to keep myself updated, as this is the place I belong to, my community.

Did other dancers from Thelma Yellin move with you to Juilliard this year?
No, I was the only new dancer this year, but I found lots of other Israeli artists in all disciplines and dancers from previous years at school. We’ve already found each other and celebrated Rosh Hashana together.

What was the impact of the AICF scholarship?
It is very empowering to know that there are people who care about art and are willing to invest in it.

Looking back at the past 8 years, could you share some of your insights?
Never forget your love for dance, the primal reason for moving. I think it’s almost impossible to lose connection to it, but if it’s not there anymore, it’s not worth it. I mean, always ask yourself: Why am I dancing now? Why do I want to dance today? Never do it because you have to.
Which parent do you take after in the arts?

My mother, Rina Peled, is a Professor and painter at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. My father is an enthusiastic amateur; he’s the kind of guy who always takes his camera everywhere he goes.

What are your thoughts about art in Israel?

Art is not a big enough part of our education here in Israel. Artists who do develop themselves and are supported can be immensely influential. Through their work, they make Israeli culture stronger, richer, and more grounded in our everyday lives.

What would you tell your younger self if you were just starting out?

I’d say: “Don’t play it safe just because you’re scared you won’t be understood, even though it’s tempting.”
What moment did you decide to become an artist?
My father is an attorney. My parents came to Israel in 1983. My mother died when I was 17. I don’t think I would be doing what I do today if that didn’t happen, since school started for me almost as a form of therapy. When she got sick, everything stopped and was focused on her. I wasn’t connected to anything in the world outside of her illness. I knew I wanted to study something in the arts, and decided to apply for WIZO Haifa Academy of Design and Education, although I didn’t have a portfolio. I brought what little money I had, and somehow they understood what I was doing and I got in.

Tell me about your AICF interview and your exhibition.
For my exhibition, I photograph women. I’m looking to explore the iconic parts in them. I get to know their stories.

I had just received the Shpilman Institute for Photography Scholarship shortly before the interview with AICF, so I was a little less frightened and nervous than I might have been. I remember feeling good that day and realizing that I was doing something that I believed in.
AURELLE MAOR
ACTING, 26
BE’ER SHEVA

What drew you to acting?
In high school I majored in Theatre. When I graduated, I felt the need to take a break. I went to the army, and afterwards I traveled, mainly in the US. After three years I came back and I happened to see publications for auditions for acting schools. Within two weeks I was accepted to the L & L Goodman Theatre and Acting School of the Negev, and started my studies.

Your audition for AICF?
I hadn’t really known much about AICF before I was invited to audition, and when I researched it I realized it was a huge deal. I had about two months to prepare. I consulted with my teachers and chose a Shakespearean piece and a modern Lebanese piece.

What are your thoughts about the theatre scene in Israel?
I think the world provides many important things to discuss, and the Israeli theatre adapts itself to it. I see a lot more daring, less safe pieces performed. Participating in so many productions at school also gives me the opportunity to get to know the work of young directors who truly have something to say — a new generation of artists looking to make a change.

Each Israeli artist who performs on the world stage is, in effect, a cultural ambassador for Israel. By focusing attention on their art, they strongly influence a positive view of Israel.

Only the top actors receive AICF’s coveted theatre scholarships, but each knows it can lead to a future career. Up to now, few Israeli actors have received international recognition, but this is changing thanks to the increased international focus on Israeli Film and Television.

Our Directing Scholarships focus on finding new talent and creative minds, with the larger goal of providing performance opportunities and launching our top artists into their careers.

Over 1,100 of the top actors in Israel are recipients of our Theatre support, including Keren Mor, Anat Waksman, Itai Tiran, Shira Geffen, Orna Banai, Rafi Weinstock, Shanee Cohen, Yuval Samo, Dudu Niv, Liat Har Lev and many others, who shape Israel’s culture today through their work on stage and screen.

A recent audience review for Repertory Theatre, a show created by AICF Theatre recipient Eldad Cohen and performed by recipients Erez Driguez and Iftach Jeffrey Ophir: “This is simply a fantastic piece of theatre; a brilliant script and hugely talented actors. I didn’t want this to end, and if I could, I’d give it six stars.”

“This production is one of the most intelligent and funny pieces of new writing I have ever had the pleasure to see; by this I mean both intelligent and simultaneously funny”. 5 STARS (NATASHA HYMAN, EDFRINGE REVIEW)
Where are you from?
Kfar Vradim in the North. Today I live in the center. I’m one of five siblings. We all love the arts. My parents are in the army.

What drew you to the theatre then?
I was fascinated by it from a very young age… I had dyslexia, which made it harder for me to communicate in conventional ways, and I found that through humor I could touch people and connect to them more easily.

When was the first time you acted?
At the family Seder Pesach when I was about five. We used to have a break with a “commercial bit” – a little theatre performance we children would come up with. When I was in 9th grade, I would take the bus all the way to Tel Aviv to see theatre shows. I was told to stop because it interfered with my school work, and so I tried to forget about it. When I was about 17 and army service approached, I was a victim of a hit-and-run accident, which put me in a wheelchair for a few months. A friend of mine then convinced me to audition for the IDF Theatre, and I got in!

Did the accident affect your acting?
I think so. I lost my innocence in a way, confronting darker places, and so now, through the acting, I feel I have the courage to revisit these places and explore them. It transformed the way I look at things.

Where are you in your career?
I have been doing TV recently. I had a part in a very successful kids show called Aiflim. I started right after the army and worked for two seasons.

Tell me about the army.
When I joined the army, Operation Cast Lead just started. We were sent to the South to entertain the soldiers on a moment’s notice. We were asked to do improvisations using the format of the television show Whose Line Is It Anyway? So we moved from station to station, between alarms. It was very satisfying to see the transformation from the initial disinterest the soldiers down there had towards us, to their enjoyment and laughter. It was touching to see that we made a little difference.

What do you feel about being an Israeli actress?
The language, the history, and particularly the history of our theatre and culture have a lot of weight and influence… I see it as a ray of light in our reality, which is far from simple or ideal.
Celebrate Israel’s Cultural Achievements

About the America-Israel Cultural Foundation
The America-Israel Cultural Foundation (AICF) cultivates Israel's future artistic leaders, identifying and nurturing Israel's top young performing and visual artists and furthering their education and careers. AICF sustains the creative soul of Israel by promoting global awareness of and appreciation for Israel’s cultural achievements. Visit www.aicf.org for more information about how you can partner in our mission.

Join us in supporting hundreds of new artists each year!
For more information, call (212) 557-1600 or visit us at www.aicf.org