

## The Magic Flute

**Music provides opportunities for advancement to children who have been left behind by the traditional educational system. This has been shown through Dr. Adena Portowicz's research studying the "Musical Minds" project of the Jaffa Institute. Children of the Institute will perform tomorrow for a conference at Bar - Ilan University**



*Musical Minds* rehearsal at the Institute for the Advancement of Education in Jaffa. "I came sick because I didn't want to miss it," explains one ten-year-old. Photo: Daniel Chechik

By Tsafi Sa'ar

A big tumult, in an evening full of sounds, notes, noises and shouting, suddenly becomes one of rhythm and appealing music as the rehearsal for the concert begins. The children are excited: they are about to perform with the accompaniment of the Israeli Chamber Orchestra. One girl, serious with braids, plays the violin, another the organ and four other children stand in a row with their recorders. Opposite them, sit more children, listening quietly, waiting for their turn to perform.

The rehearsal is taking place at the activity center of the Jaffa Institute, which has created a unique project called "Musical Minds". The children that participate in this program come from underprivileged families that cannot afford to pay for music education. The concert will take place tomorrow at a conference entitled "Advancing Children through the Arts", at Bar-Ilan University.

"It's fun learning to play an instrument", says one 10-year-old girl. "If I wasn't learning music I would be bored." The lessons take place three times a week, and once, she tells us, she came when she was sick, with fever: "I didn't want to miss the lesson." She is already playing a number of years – she started with the xylophone "but I switched to the trumpet because I learn quickly." Her friend, Bat El Zituna, 11 years-old, who lives close to the activity center in the Neve Ofer neighborhood, began playing the xylophone and today is a wonder on the clarinet.

Both girls are excited about the performance: "It's tense", says Bat El, and her friend adds: "I hope we don't mess up". They both compliment each other: "She's a great player", says Bat El, "and she's also a great friend." Her friend quickly says: "She's also an excellent player- even better than me." What are they playing? "Bartok, 'Turkish March' ". As they put it, they love all of the music, "even when it's hard to play", one admits.

At the conference, which will take place tomorrow and the next day, along with the Jaffa Institute children and the Israeli Chamber Orchestra, other children and young people from Israel, Switzerland and France will perform. The Youth Symphony Orchestra of the Bern Conservatory, string players from the Thelma Yellin Youth Symphony Orchestra, young performers from MUS-

E of Strasbourg, France, and performers from the Shorashim School in Kiryat Ono will all participate. They will perform "Prayer" by Tzvi Avni, Concerto for violin No. 1, Opus 26 by Max Baruch, Symphony Number 4 by Robert Schumann and several choral pieces. The conference will discuss subjects including: "Studying the Arts: An Interdisciplinary Perspective", "Development of Communication Skills", and "Advancement of cognitive skills through learning of the arts."

Through arts in general, and specifically music, it is possible to advance educational achievements among children whom the regular educational system has failed. This is evident from new research conducted by Dr. Adena Portowicz, through the Music Department in the Institute for Social Integration at Bar-Ilan. Dr. Portowicz did her research with the children of the Jaffa Institute. "Many studies have shown that music contributes to thinking abilities and to success in studies," says Portowicz. "Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't, we can't predict in advance. We wanted to learn how to devise a music program that is planned from the beginning to help children improve their learning abilities and communication."

The study was carried out over the course of 3 years among 80 boys and girls between the ages of 7 and 12 that attend four activity centers of the Jaffa Institute. They were divided into two equal groups – one participated in the music program and the other was a control group. The test group listened to music and learned to play an instrument, both in group and private lessons. The

group lessons included wind instrument and darbuka groups. The children also perform in concerts at old-age homes and at Jaffa Institute events. Some of the children have even joined advanced music lessons at the Jaffa Music Center and play in the Tel Aviv municipal wind-instrument band.

"These are children that would never have had this experience," says Portowicz. All of this activity is supported by donations, from Israel and abroad.

Prior to the study and following it, the children were tested for intelligence, self-image and other criteria. "We found significant differences in the test group", says Portowicz, "specifically in thinking abilities, like collection of information, processing information and the ability of self-expression." More than that, "in the testing prior to the experiment, the test group was below normal levels for children of their age, whereas after participating in the music program, the test group was above average."

"We are just starting", notes Portowicz, "but all of the results are pointing in the same direction, both the empirical results and the quality results. We see the differences in the children: how they relate to each other, that they are concentrating, working together in a group, solving problems. It also contributes to their self-image: They are giving to others, appearing before other people who also have problems, like residents in old age homes. And they are having a great time."

In addition to this, study programs are being developed to combine music and the learning of other subjects such as

math and English, says Portowicz. “There are basic principles that are included in all subjects,” she explains. “We can give children who have not succeeded with numbers or letters another way – maybe this way they will find more success.”

This is what happened to a 9-year-old boy, for example, who would act out with foul language. None of the teachers succeeded with him. In the music program, he discovered a special feeling and love for music. He was persistent at his music listening classes and began to learn to play an instrument. Today, at age 14, he is an assistant counselor at one of the activity centers of the Jaffa Institute. One boy, who learns in a special education program, performs with his trumpet for his class and in concerts for the Jaffa Institute.

Back at Neve Ofer, the producer of the performance, musician Chever Perlmutter, conducts the children with patience and a smile. One of the children, trumpet in hand, steps out of the room from time to time. “It’s hard for him to concentrate,” explains one of the counselors. He sits in the hallway, with his hands on his eyes, but after a few minutes, he returns to the rehearsal room with his trumpet.