

## **FACULTY PROFILE: DR. AVIVA STANISLAWSKI**

### **TEACHING THE MUSICAL EXPERIENCE**

By Brocha David

The lilt in Dr. Aviva Stanislawski's voice is a tip-off that she's a musician. Her enthusiasm for the subject at hand and clarity of presentation are a sure giveaway that she's a teacher. And the combination of the two produces a sweet-sounding symphony with far-reaching echoes. As effortless as her music sounds, though, it—like all great music—is the result of lots of effort and hard work. "One of things I find extremely disproportionate about this profession, is that in order to perform a piece that is three minutes long, you have to practice for months," she says. "Not hours, not days. Months! It takes months to get it right and to really perfect it and bring it to the level of performance."

In fact, years of study, practice, and experience have made Dr. Stanislawski a national expert on teaching others how to teach music, and for the last 34 years she has been sharing her expertise with aspiring music students in Michlalah. Originally from New York, her initial training in piano and music theory took place there. Upon making aliyah, she earned a BA in musicology from Hebrew University and then continued on for her MA and doctorate degrees in music education. During summers abroad at Boston's Longy School of Music, she studied the Dalcroze Method, a holistic method of teaching music that emphasizes eurhythmics, creativity, and movement. "The minute I integrated the Dalcroze Method in my teaching, my classes improved tremendously," she says. "The students became more creative, the activities became more exciting. Everything was just taken to a new level." Dr. Stanislawski incorporates many other approaches and techniques as well, and describes her teaching as "creative, experiential, multidimensional, and artistic."

And speaking of artistic, according to Dr. Stanislawski, art and teaching have a lot in common. "Art is defined as choosing and organizing materials in order to create an experience," she says. "Teaching is exactly the same thing: choosing and organizing materials in order to create an experience. The experience has to be organized in a way that activates the emotions, the intellect, the senses, and social interactions."

Because both music and teaching are art forms, teaching music is a double art form, and the ideal music teacher has mastered both. "That's what we're training our students to be, that's our *raison d'être*, to develop the double dimension of the art of teaching."

In conventional teaching, the teacher masters the material and then uses it to influence the student. In artistic teaching, explains Dr. Stanislawski, the teacher, student, and material all affect and impact each other in a multidirectional triangle. The music impacts the teacher, and the teacher impacts the music through his interpretation and presentation. The teacher and the music then affect the student, who in turn becomes part of the creative experience and impacts the teacher and the music. In this model of teaching, students use creative interpretation and expression to perpetuate the ongoing creative

process and continue the work of the composer. “The word ‘work,’ as in ‘work of art,’ is a noun, but ‘work’ is also a verb because every work of art is a work in progress, subject to interpretation. That’s what music teaching has to be about—continuing that work and making it interactive.”

Dr. Stanislawski teaches her students these methods not through verbal explanation but through demonstration, giving them a chance to experience it for themselves and really sense its power. “A demonstration is worth a thousand words, or even more! I try not to explain things verbally; I give them the experience of doing it. I always demonstrate before I define.”

Apart from the fact that teaching is an art form, a lesson is like a composition. Both a musical composition and a lesson develop on a time axis, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Both must have a central theme, and present that theme in the beginning and then continue to develop it, making connections between different elements. There are moments of repetition and change, climactic moments, lulls, and moments of tension and surprise. Both a musical experience and a classroom experience can have a tremendous impact on a person, but, says Dr. Stanislawski, a music classroom combines both. “In a music lesson, the experience is two-fold. The piece of music itself plays on us this way, and the lesson affects us as well. The students go through both of these experiences simultaneously. The music and the lesson each have their own thrill, their own sense of excitement. Both affect us physically, sensorially, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually.”

With her multi-dimensional approach to teaching music, Dr. Stanislawski opens up her students to many levels of experience. The first dimension is depth, the changes that take place inside the person, from the gut to the brain. These include physical sensations as well as emotional, social, and intellectual stimulation. That sounds like a lot, but Dr. Stanislawski explains that it’s all still one dimension. The next dimension is breadth, which takes place when we allow the music to connect us to other areas outside the music itself, such as history, geography, literature, art, architecture, culture, psychology, and life experiences.

The third dimension is height. “Height is transcendence,” says Dr. Stanislawski. “The musical experience brings you beyond yourself. The musical experience will arouse inspiration and enlightenment. It brings you beyond where you are now and connects you to something beyond yourself, a higher place.” The Beit HaMikdash is a case in point. “You couldn’t bring a *korban* without music, because it wasn’t just about the physical act of the *korban* but about elevating your soul, and that’s what music does. Height is the spiritual dimension; it gives you new insights into yourself, others, and the world, and leaves you more enriched.”

Dr. Stanislawski sums up her goals with a quote from Bennet Reimer. “‘Music education is the education of human feeling.’ Music can bring a person to all kinds of places. I’m trying to teach my students, who are on the way to being teachers themselves, that you want to connect to the kids and you want them to understand that music will bring them to the world of feeling, of understanding themselves and others, and of understanding life itself.”



**Sidebar #1:**

**Dr. Stanislawski's quick reference guide to developing a great lesson:**

**COLLECTIONS**—collect and gather facts, materials, and information

**CONNECTIONS**—looks for connections within the material you've collected

**SELECTION**—choose which information you'll use to create the lesson

**DIRECTION**—build up the lesson in a sequence that makes sense, give it a direction

**INSPECTION**—check that you have all the material you need, check for accuracy of sources, etc.

**PERFECTION**—fix it and tweak it until it's just the way you want it

After you give the lesson, it's time for the process of:

**REFLECTION**—What happened in the lesson? Did students ask questions or give you new ideas or feedback that you can add or connect to the previous ideas? Now you can start to collect even more material. From the stage of reflection, you begin the whole process again. "I never repeat the same lesson twice," avers Dr. Stanislawski. "I'll always make some kind of change. It's dynamic; a constant creative process."

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**Sidebar #2:**

"Music does something to your soul that can never be put into words, and the moment you try to put it into words, you've ruined it," says Dr. Aviva Stanislawski. But here are some great quotes from Dr. Stanislawski that come close to capturing the power of music.

**"You use a glass mirror to see your face; you use works of art to see your soul"**

(George Bernard Shaw)

**"The art work begins by opening to us the landscape of its creator's inner life. It ends by revealing us to ourselves."**

(Joseph Machlis, 1955)

**"We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves..."**

(John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 1934)