**The Keshet Eilon Music Center and String Mastercourse**

**Background and Profile of Activities**

**January 2021**

Keshet Eilon's profile of activity is updated to January 2021. Still, it was written before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, following which we had to change and adapt the activities to the Ministry of Health's limitations. See red notes below.

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The Keshet Eilon Music Center and String Mastercourse, founded in 1990 at Kibbutz Eilon on Israel's northern border, is devoted to training and promoting young violinists from Israel and worldwide who are intent on attaining the highest musical level. Its faculty consists of internationally renowned violin masters from Israel and the rest of the world. The Keshet Eilon philosophy is that music, one of humanity's eternal symbols, can serve as a bridge between religions, peoples, and nations. Keshet Eilon, now in its 30th year, has achieved international recognition in the music community as a sought-after training venue.

The music director of Keshet Eilon is **Prof. Itzhak Rashkovsky**of the Royal College of Music of London. Its managing director is **Gilad Sheba**, a Kibbutz Eilon member and the son of one of its founders. VPO Nitza Avidan assists him.

The Keshet Eilon Organization is led by an elected board of directors headed by **Rami Shalmor** and operates through various subcommittees, with all its members serving on a volunteer basis.

During the first years of activity, up to 25 violinists participated in the masterclasses each year, most Israelis and new immigrants. The number of participants increased every year after being selected through rigorous tests. During its 30 years of operation, Keshet Eilon was gradually exposed to the world of music, gained momentum, and acquired a professional reputation. Echoes of the informal atmosphere, the educational approach that characterizes the project, and especially its high professional level encouraged many string musicians to knock on our doors. The pursuit of excellence, shared by students and teachers, brought many world-renowned artists and senior teachers to join our faculty and participate in the Mastercourses.

It is important to note that even in days of wars and when the border in our area warmed up, Keshet Eilon's melody never stopped.

Music, so we believe in Keshet Eilon, is a human, natural and deep expression that can create a bridge between people, cultures, countries, and nations. Hence the Hebrew name "Keshet," which means an arch or a bridge, indicates this.

Our ambition is to continue to promote Keshet Eilon and turn the place into an international center of music and excellence, which will attract hundreds of outstanding young musicians from around the world every year. At the same time, we strive to turn the Keshet Eilon Music Center into a place that will grow the best Israeli musicians in the world, as it was when the project was established more than three decades ago.

This aspiration stands out against the alarming depletion of the number of violin and string students in Israel. Besides, the growing gap between the qualities of young string players in Israel compared to past talents discovered here and their peers worldwide is worrying us. Added to these facts is the alarming phenomenon of the migration of particularly prominent and talented students to musical centers abroad, to Europe and the United States.

**Keshet Eilon Goals**

•          **The Keshet Eilon Music Center** will be a magnet for string players from Israel and worldwide to pave the way for its graduates to perform on world stages as future soloists and lead musicians in reputable orchestras and chamber ensembles around the world.

•          **The Keshet Eilon Music Center** will make efforts to ensure that every talented string player, no matter from which country or community, will be able to participate in its activities, even if he/she lacks the necessary financial means to do so.

•          **The Keshet Eilon Music Center** will continue to increase the number of graduates of its activities, who serve as ambassadors of goodwill in their countries to Israel, despite its image as a country subject to security problems, experiencing Israel through a prism of positive cultural action.

•          **The Keshet Eilon Music Center** will continue to contribute to the Western Galilee and northern Israel by condensing quality classical music and other programs that will go up in its concert hall - for the benefit of the region's residents and to encourage domestic tourism in the Western Galilee.

•          **The Keshet Eilon Music Center** will work to bring hearts together, equal opportunities, and reduce gaps between young Jews and young Arabs through music.

•          **The Keshet Eilon Music Center** will continue its activities at Kibbutz Eilon on the northern border. It will do so despite the distance from the center and the security problems resulting from its location in this sensitive place.

•          **The Keshet Eilon Music Center** will contribute to creating additional sources of employment in the area and thus participate in the development of the Galilee and the north in general.

**The Keshet Eilon Music Center operates the following programs:**

**• The Keshet Eilon International String Mastercourse, a three-week program for violin and string students from Israel and the rest of the world,** offering personal instruction by distinguished teachers, masterclasses, innovative workshops, opportunities to perform as soloists in concerts, and a unique archery sports program for string instrumentalists. The Mastercourse is attended each summer by some 50-60 outstanding young violinists, violists, and cellists from all parts of the world, many of whom are prizewinners of international competitions.

Approximately 1,500 alumni of Keshet Eilon throughout the world continue to keep in touch with the Music Center and help promote it. During the International Mastercourses, all activities, including individual lessons and masterclasses, are open to the public at no charge, except for the concerts held every evening in the Bar-Uryan Concert Hall.

**Note**: Like the entire music world, Keshet Eilon also had to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 and recalculate its route. The skies were closed; members of the international faculty and students were not allowed to come to Israel, and multiplayer gatherings were banned. Unfortunately, The Keshet Eilon economic sources also dwindled and reduced to a minimum. Therefore, Keshet Eilon's management decided to hold the international summer Mastercourse in an alternative-virtual format. For three weeks, 93 students from all over the world participated in masterclasses, individual lessons, and concerts using the "zoom" software, guided by the faculty members Keshet Eilon.

***Seminars for Israeli String Students and their Teachers***

The seminars, aimed at stimulating and encouraging string playing in Israel, were held twice annually, led by the professional Keshet Eilon faculty.

**S**ome-60-70 young violinists and violists from all parts of the country arrive for three days of intensive study. Each student receives three individual lessons from a senior faculty member and participates in enrichment activities such as playing in ensembles and attending concerts, lectures, and masterclasses. Some of the participants come from music institutions in the Arab community, and this interaction fosters personal connections through music. At Keshet Eilon, we believe that once the participants return to their homes and families, they become ambassadors of music study to all who surround them.

In its effort to nurture violin study In Israel for excellence, Keshet Eilon supports students in additional ways, like loans of instruments for students who cannot afford to purchase them and scholarships to cover part of the seminar tuition.

Notably, the number of young Israeli violinists accepted in the International Keshet Eilon Summer Mastercourse has increased since the project initiated the Seminar program.

**Note:** Due to the Corona limitations, we had to cancel the Spring 2020 seminar at the last minute, which we have already prepared for all its details. Winter 2020 Seminar for Israeli musicians was also held virtually. Since we are still committed to the same limitations – the Spring 2021 Seminar will take the same format.

***Annual Concert series – "The Sounds of Keshet Eilon,"***mounted in Keshet Eilon's Bar-Uryan Concert Hall, featuring world-class performances for the music-loving public in the Western Galilee and beyond at affordable prices. The programs include string recitals, chamber music concerts, choirs, folk music, and more. Galilee residents who are remote from the country's cultural and music centers appreciate the series and attend the concerts. Income from ticket sales is earmarked for support for Keshet Eilon and maintenance of the concert hall.

**Note**: Due to the Corona decrees, we had to cancel concerts in the "Sounds of Keshet Eilon" series scheduled to take place from March 2020 onwards. Currently, the renewal of the series in a "live" format is not in sight.

**• The Keshet Eilon Music Library,**housing a distinctive collection of violin, piano, chamber music notes, books, tapes, CDs, and DVDs, serving Keshet Eilon students and faculty and open to the public in Israel and abroad.

**• The Violin- and Bow-making Atelier,**open to participants in all Keshet Eilon programs, providing instruction, maintenance, and instruments.

**Keshet Eilon activity in the Arab Community**

Our belief in music as a bridge between cultures and peoples has prompted Keshet Eilon to reach out to young violinists in the Arab community in Israel as well. Supported by generous donors since 2011, we have assisted the Al-Kendi Conservatory in the village of Jatt, managed by Moussa and Mohammed Khalaf. From 2015 until 2018 Keshet Eilon has developed a strategic collaboration with the Polyphony Education Center of Nathareth, based on the two organizations’ shared belief that music is uniquely capable of transcending cultural and social divides and that it can bridge the chasms between Israel’s Arab and Jewish communities. Guided by this vision, the two organizations worked to develop and foster excellence in classical music and to create opportunities for Arab and Jewish youngsters to pursue their musical activities together, and held joint seminars during 2017 – 2019.

On 2018 we initiated cooperation with the conservatory in the town of Qalansuwa. A violin class was formed with 6 advanced students under the guidance of Lina Getman, a violinist of the IPO, who gives them individual lessons and is about to open a second class for beginners. Keshet Eilon has provided the students with instruments and is in continuous contact with this conservatory. Keshet Eilon also support several gifted Arab violinists from different parts of Israel, by means of scholarships made possible by contributions from our Friends in the US.

**Keshet Eilon's activity budget**

Keshet Eilon activities are largely covered by donations from funds, business entities, government ministries and generous private donors. And yet, revenues do not cover current expenditures, nor the needs of the development budget, not in the short term and certainly not in the long term. We strive to deal with the lack of resources also in an independent way, by organizing fundraising concerts in Israel and abroad, in halls and private homes, with all proceeds received at such events being dedicated to promoting and developing the project. These concerts, mounted by Keshet Eilon committees in Israel and abroad, feature Keshet Eilon's graduates and faculty who appear on a volunteer basis and bring the spirit of our work to performance halls and homes all over the world. Such concerts were held over the years in London, New York, Washington D.C., Paris, Geneva, Los Angeles, Miami - to mention only few - and in several private homes in Israel.

**Note:** At the outbreak of the Corona pandemic many of the contributions which enabled us to carry on our activities were stopped. Although we held a number of virtual fundraising concerts, initiated and organized by friends committees in the US and in Israel – the sources of funding for continuing current and future activities are extremely scarce since then.

**Constructing a new campus**

Keshet Eilon reached a point where its physical infrastructure could no longer accommodate the growing number of student applicants and faculty during its various programs. Moreover, it was unable to expand its activities further, or actualize its proven potential.

With the goal of enabling the Keshet Eilon Music Center to operate year-round, the Music Center was allocated an exceptional site of 28 dunams (7 acres) adjoining Kibbutz Eilon, and with the assistance of generous donors such as **Raya Strauss Bendror,** a native of the Western Galilee and a steadfast supporter of Keshet Eilon over the years, **Lina and Patrick Drahi** and a legacy by the late **Isacc Ribatzky** of New York, we succeeded in commencing construction, and in two years (2013-2015) Stage 1 of a Campus was completed. It is consisting of 13 dormitory units (housing 52 double bedrooms, hosting close to a 100 students); a cafeteria seating 130; and an acoustic shell for outdoor concerts on a lawn accommodating an audience of 400.

During periods when Keshet Eilon's music activities do not take place, the campus hosts groups from music schools, musical organizations like orchestras or ensembles who come to practice and hold rehearsals. The concert hall and the accompanying spaces are also at their disposal. The place is also rented as guest apartments for families and groups of tourists. All income from the rented accomodation is dedicated to promoting the center's activities.

The construction of instruction and practice rooms, offices, faculty and staff residences, an ensemble hall and an auditorium - remained a vital necessity and were scheduled to take place in Stages 2 and 3. Architect **Ada Karmi-Melamede** and her staff have already prepared the design for Stage 2, and the earthworks began to prepare the construction of it, with a generous assistance of the **KKL Germany**.

**Future plans**

Keshet Eilon’s 5-year development plan looks ahead to becoming a year-round music academy - a world leader for young musicians from all over the world who are striving for excellence. An important element of this program is the continued construction and completion of the Music Center campus, namely, the addition of an ensemble hall and a new auditorium, instruction rooms, rehearsal rooms, faculty accommodations and social facilities to our existing student dormitories and cafeteria. We envision and hope that this campus will become the most advanced musical center of its kind.

This goal is well on its way to being realized. We are currently at the investigatory stage, with the hope to start the construction of first 4 instruction rooms quite soon (projected for 2023-2024).

To sum up: Keshet Eilon is already an important and well-known center in the music-world. It thus contributes to the cultural reputation of the State of Israel, hopefully even in a larger scale following the completion of its campus.

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*Keshet Eilon is managed by a non-profit organization funded by grants and donations from public bodies, foundations and individuals. Members of the organization, including its committee members, function on a volunteer basis.*