

Israel Philharmonic Musicians Spend A Rare Free Day At The Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor

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Visitors to the Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor on Thursday, March 18th might have heard what sounded like an airplane buzzing the building. But the sound was no airplane. It was coming from a trombone, played by Micha Davis, member of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. Davis was demonstrating to the HDS second and third graders just how many “unique” sounds he can make with his instrument.

Davis was one of seven Israel Philharmonic Orchestra musicians who spent the day at the Hebrew Day School. The orchestra was in town to play at Hill Auditorium on Saturday night, March 20th, in a virtually sold-out concert featuring violinist Pinchas Zuckerman.

While other musicians spent their free day in Ann Arbor shopping or relaxing, Davis and six other musicians — Yigal Meltzer, Principal Trumpet; Dalit Segal, Assistant Principal French Horn; Uzi Shalev, Assistant Principal Bassoon; Boaz Meirovitch, Flute; Bruce Weinstein, Principal Oboe; and Peter Marck, Principal Bass — spent several hours of their time performing for the 100 elementary school students at HDS and teaching them basic elements of music appreciation.

Davis, who not only can turn his instrument into a low-flying plane but can also make his trombone mouthpiece sound like, “Mommy, I need to go to the bathroom” in Hebrew, was a huge hit with the kids. “As soon as I heard the first song, I knew I wanted to play the trombone,” said third grader Matan Halevy.

The orchestra musicians came to HDS courtesy of the [American Friends of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra](#) which sponsors an educational program run by orchestra musicians that has made a huge impact in Israeli schools in a short period of time.

Called “Mafteach,” or [KeyNote](#), the educational program will reach 18,000 Israeli students this year and is training a whole new generation to understand and appreciate classical music. Israeli children participating in the program study several musical pieces during the school year, receive classroom visits from Philharmonic musicians, and attend six IPO concerts.

KeyNote has also created the “Arab/Jewish Ensemble,” which brings together IPO musicians with four of the finest musicians from the Arab community playing traditional instruments, like the oud and the neih. This ensemble plays both classical and Middle Eastern music and appears regularly in Israeli school concerts.

A moving force behind this program is Peter Marck, Principal Bass player with the orchestra, who was the emcee for the educational program at HDS. As he does in the

school programs in Israel, Marck expertly wove musical acoustics, music history, music appreciation, and humor into an interactive program that had the kids enthralled from beginning to end.

Marck started off the day by showing, in case anyone had any doubt, that it is indeed possible to play “Mary Had a Little Lamb” using beer bottles.

Marck used the bottles to demonstrate that notes are lower when more air is being moved around. Meirovitch then showed that when all the holes are closed on his flute (and there is more air inside the instrument) the note is lower. These basic principles of brass and woodwind acoustics were repeated throughout the day in ways that continually engaged the kids.

Flutist Meirovitch demonstrated great skill at “playing” the beer bottle, getting four very different notes out of one empty beer bottle. Emcee Marck pointed out that even with four notes, a beer bottle is not likely to become a member of the orchestra any time soon. Instead, brass and wind players need technology that will help them quickly change the amount of air in their instruments.

Both Segal and Meltzer showed how they use valves to increase the amount of air in their french horn and trumpet, respectively. Without the valves, they explained, many of the notes they need would be unavailable to them.

Davis also demonstrated how that the notes are lower on the trombone when the slide is pushed out as far as it can go. While he was showing the seven slide positions on the instrument, the trombone slide “accidentally” fell out. “I wake up sometimes in a cold sweat imagining that I am playing my trombone on the top of a tall building. . . .” he told the students, who laughed out loud, picturing the unspoken denouement to the dream.

Marck also wove a history of musical instruments into his presentation. “Why is a flute called a woodwind instrument when it is made out of metal?” he and Meirovitch asked the class. A fifth grader had the correct answer: “The flute used to be made out of wood!”

And a tougher question — “why is the french horn round instead of straight, like the trumpet”? Marck explained: “French hunting parties, in those long-forgotten days when there was no email or cell phones, used the horn to communicate to other hunters the number of deer spotted and how far away they were. Because a long pipe was too hard to carry on a horse, they curled the pipe up to make it easier to transport.”

“Why does the french horn player put her hand in the bell of the instrument?” asked a second grader. Trombonist Davis, who could easily have a second career as a stand-up comedian, had the answer: “Because it’s her hand, and she can do what she wants with it!” Actually, as students learned from listening to the same sound made with and without a hand in the bell, the hand makes the sound less quavery and richer.

“Can woodwind or brass instruments play more than one note at a time”? This turned out to be a trick question. While explaining to the kids that brass instruments, unlike piano and strings, can usually play only one note, Davis said he was going to play a “well known Hanukkah song” that would be an exception to the general rule. He then proceeded to sing Silent Night, Holy Night while simultaneously playing the harmony part on the trombone.

Marck skillfully inserted music history into the presentation as well. The musicians played pieces by a variety of composers, and Marck had a short but interesting biography prepared for each one. Among the many pieces were Bach’s Badinerie (which the kids recognized as a popular cell phone ring), Handel’s Fire Music (composed, according to Davis, because “Handel wanted to fire his musicians”), and Haydn’s Surprise Symphony (where the kids all but fell out of their seats at the “surprise” in the slow movement).

Marck had each musician play a few measures or the theme from his individual part, then had two players play, then had the kids listen for individual parts and melody lines as all of the musicians played together. In this process he was able to get across basic musical concepts like “theme,” “melody,” “harmony,” and “bass line.”

As part of his introduction to the concept of a “theme,” the three woodwinds played the themes for their respective characters from Prokofiev’s Peter and the Wolf. The kindergartners and first graders correctly identified the bassoon as the grandfather, the flute as the bird, and the oboe as the duck.

Moving on from traditional classical repertoire, the instrumentalists played Scott Joplin’s Maple Leaf Rag, which had the second and third graders dancing in their seats, and Virgil Stamps’ Oh When The Saints Come Marching In, which had them clapping and stamping their feet, as the musicians concluded their program.

The musicians were treated to a concert in turn by a new music ensemble at HDS called the “Klezmer Kids.” The ensemble is led by second grade teacher and flutist Linda Smith. It includes string instruments, brass, woodwind and percussion. The ensemble performed klezmer and other traditional music with aplomb for some of the best orchestra musicians in the world.

“‘Klezmer Kids’ as well as today’s program from the Israel Philharmonic is part of a new music curriculum and emphasis on music education at the Hebrew Day School,” according to Principal (and saxophone player) Dina Shtull-Leber. “The Klezmer Kids ensemble has already performed for seniors at the JCC and at the Kerrytown Concert House” as part of a concert to benefit the new music program.

“Singing and drumming has long been incorporated into the curriculum on a daily basis,” she said. “Our new program, established under the leadership of Prue Rosenthal and Beverley Geltner, is designed to make sure that all HDS students can read music, understand basic principles of music theory, play the recorder, and write out simple melodies and harmonies before they graduate.”

Shtull-Leber noted that Ann Arbor schools have one of the best music programs in the country, and that HDS students entering public middle school “will now be prepared to participate fully in public school instrumental music programs.”

Shtull-Leber said that following the Philharmonic musicians’ appearance at HDS, there was a sudden upsurge in kids interested in taking music lessons. Fourth grader Liad Leheavy termed the Philharmonic music program “awesome.” Inspired by the dynamic young flutist Meirovitch, who said that he started out on the recorder at the age of 10, Leheavy has decided to take recorder lessons.

Similarly, Rebecca Greenberg, also a fourth grader, started piccolo lessons. She is hoping shortly to join the HDS Klezmer Kids ensemble. Several other students, newly motivated by the engaging Micha Davis, have expressed interest in taking up the trombone.

On the night before the orchestra played at Hill, when a large percentage of the orchestra was hosted for Shabbat dinner by Ann Arbor families, the kids couldn’t resist showing off what they had learned.

At the home of Doron Lamm and Smadar Karni, third grader Yaakov Schultz told violist Roman Spitzer and violinist Olga Stern all about what he had learned from Micha the trombonist and Peter the bass player. (And Schultz, who is learning Hebrew through the HDS immersion program, insisted on talking to them in Hebrew although both musicians speak English).

At the home of Caroline Helton and Matt Kaplan, kindergartner Hava Kaplan explained to her parents’ dinner guest, Philharmonic bassoonist Carol Patterson, exactly how the double reed works on her bassoon, much to her astonishment.

“I loved the program. It was great!” fourth grader Julia Rothchild told Principal Second Violinist Loka Saltzman and Principal Cellist Marcel Bergman. “I especially liked how Micha the trombone player got his mouthpiece to ‘talk,’” said her brother Daniel, a third grader.

Shtull-Leber, the HDS Principal, expressed her appreciation to IPO principal violist Miriam Hartman for arranging the logistics of the musicians’ visit to HDS. Hartman has a special connection to HDS. In 2003, when Saddam Hussein was a looming threat to Israel, Hartman sent her 10-year old daughter Noa to safety in Ann Arbor for several months, where she attended the school.

“My daughter would do anything to come back and go to fourth grade again with teachers Eileen Nadler and Amalia Poris,” said Hartman. “HDS is a special place, and I am so glad that my daughter had the chance to have this experience, if only for a few months.”

On the Web:

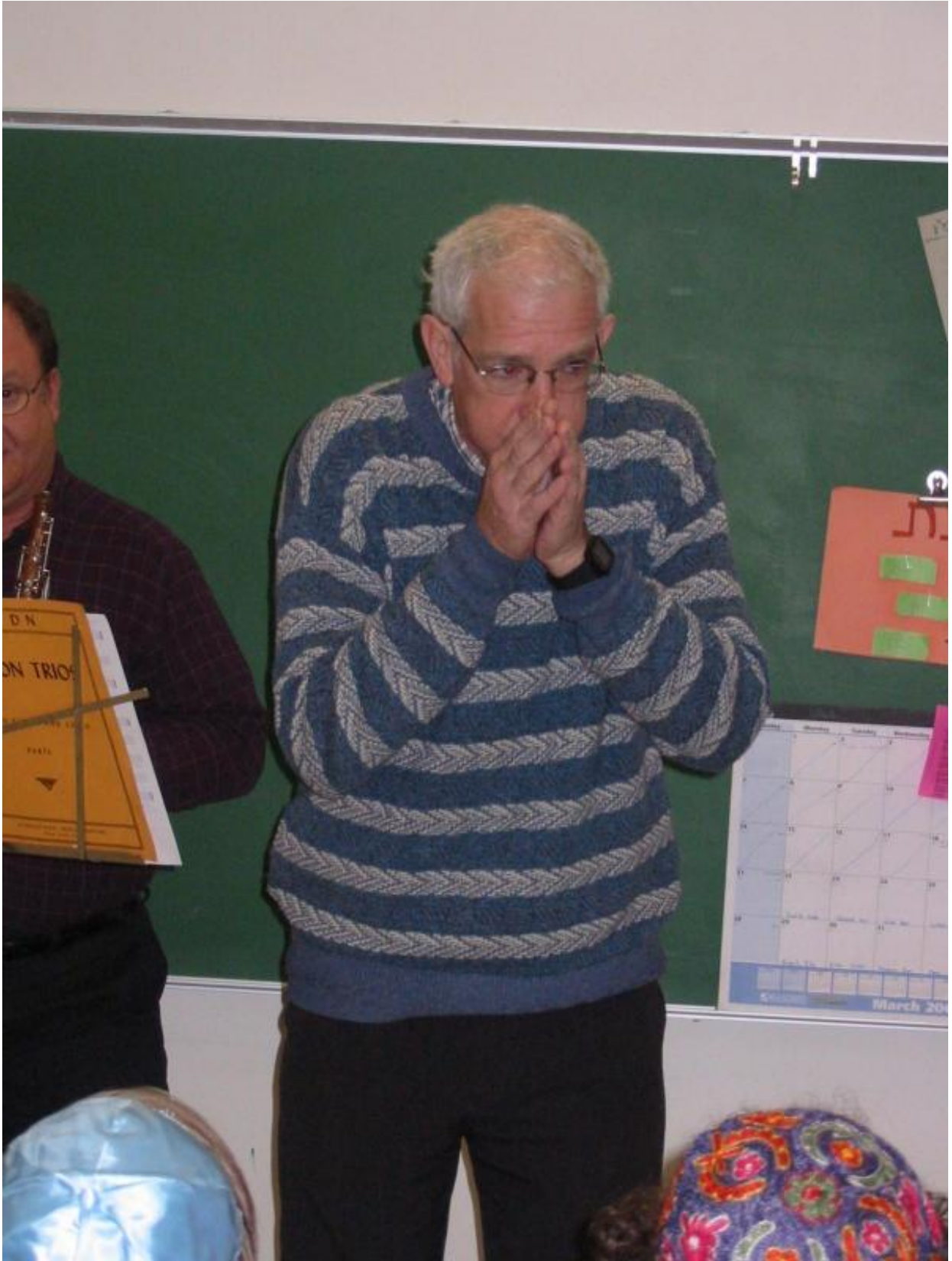
[KeyNote Program of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra](#), (photos of orchestra members at HDS will be up shortly!)

[Israel Philharmonic Orchestra](#)

[American Friends of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra](#)



IPO winds with HDS 4th & 5th graders



Peter Marck blowing on a paper "reed"



Dalit blowing shofar



IPO brass w/ 2nd and 3rd graders



IPO brass w/ shofar



Micha Davis and two beer bottles



Duet for flute and beer bottle



IPO flutist



IPO musicians watching performance of HDS Klezmer Kids



Peter Marck blowing paper "reed" w/ HDS kids



Peter showing a beer bottle to HDS second grader



Peter Marck sharing a funny moment with HDS 4th and 5th graders



Trombonist Micha Davis laughing with HDS kids



IPO musicians visiting HDS



IPO musicians, Head of School Dina Shtull-Leber, and thank you note written by HDS kids to IPO



IPO musician Miriam Hartman, sister Joan Hartman, and Federation Executive Director Jeff Levin



HDS Klezmer Kids perform for IPO musicians



IPO musician Bruce Weinstein at HDS



Peter Marck and IPO woodwinds



IPO brass perform at HDS



Peter Marck and brass players with shofar



IPO brass



IPO woodwinds w/ 4th and 5th graders



IPO bassoon and oboe players