

International School of Music in Bethesda Brings Friends and Families Together from around the World

By Nicolas Czierpinski

Three years ago, Inja Stanic had a vision that people of all nationalities could come together and make music. Her belief that music truly can be the international language, and her dedication to creating a nurturing environment for learning, has made the International School of Music of Bethesda an overnight success.

Stanic opened the school in the summer of 2004 with the goal of providing a joyful oasis from everyday hassles, a community school that would bring families and friends closer together. Stanic now admits that, though the work has been more difficult than she expected, the program's success has exceeded her dreams: "I never expected there to be such a response from the community for musical training, especially among families of foreign cultures. The camaraderie among the students is wonderful. Younger children love it as much as the older people do," she observes.

September 1st 2006 marked the grand opening of the School's expansion, which added seven beautiful studios to the existing space. The school provides comprehensive musical training and offers a variety of musical styles – from jazz and popular, to classical and Suzuki. Throughout the program, the teachers' goal is to foster a love of music and encourage creative self expression. The curriculum introduces beginning children and adults to the basic elements of music to help them develop aural ability and a musical sensibility. The program helps more advanced students prepare for competitions and performances, and challenges them to explore deeper musical expressions.

Families find that studying music brings them closer together. Nancy, an ISM student for the past year, has found that playing cello has brought her new unexpected pleasures. "Some people have golf; I have the cello. Playing cello takes me away", she says. "It carried me through a personal crisis, and it gives me great confidence in myself."

The benefits of playing with her son in the Suzuki method are self evident. Having known a woman who took up violin with her child, Nancy had a frame of reference for her decision to begin music lessons with her family. "I initially started lessons so that I could be a good role model for my son and help him motivate him to practice. Now I am experiencing firsthand the enormous benefits of music lessons for myself," Nancy says. "Nathan's 10 years old now, and to be able to share something that brings us both pleasure and joy is wonderful," Nancy continues.



Not surprisingly, the International School of Music draws a high percentage of its clientele from foreign nationals living in the D.C. area. "It's wonderful to hear the diversity of languages being spoken by our teachers and our students right here in the lobby of the school," said Stanic, who herself grew up in the former country of Yugoslavia. "We are creating a community here for people who might otherwise find it difficult to adjust to the Washington region. Music truly is the international language."

"We are here all the time—it feels like our second home," said Martin, an adult guitar student whose wife Ana is a pianist and whose 7 year old son Matt studies flute.

The sense of home—and extended family—that ISM provides was underlined for me this spring as I watched graduating seniors, Molly on violin and Nicky on piano, finish beautiful performance of their Beethoven pieces. They acknowledged the applause with big smiles and a skirt hug, a unique curtsy that they invented as a performing duo.

While providing a family-friendly environment, ISM is also serious about its musical training. Most of its teachers have masters degrees, and many of them are accomplished performers in the D.C. region and around the country. ISM prepares its students for recitals, auditions before judges, and the opportunity to be evaluated by the Royal School of Music. "Our goal," says Stanic, "is to encourage the student's musical growth, whether the student's dream is to master an instrument, play in an ensemble, sing, or join a 4 year old child in sharing music."

"We believe that there are many rewards of music study: the discipline of learning an instrument, the delight of experiencing music through movement and song, the confidence gained from performance, and the friendships made through participation in ensembles," says Stanic. "Through numerous classes, performances and other opportunities, ISM gives each student the opportunity to find his or her own creative depth and talent. We are committed to our mission statement, which is 'To provide students of all ages with the skills they need to enjoy music for their lifetime'".

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