

## The Beat Goes On (with a Slight Delay)

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In these unreal times, with the whole world Netflixing, the docu-drama "Unorthodox" is generating a buzz. A stereotypical tale of escape with caricatures for characters, one scene struck a chord: Esther Shapiro, the oh-so hapless Ultra-Orthodox bride, hides a paper keyboard under her bed, folded up and tucked away. Secretly she practices her scales, on a pretend piano behind closed doors.

The Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance piano students have not been reduced quite to practicing on cardboard keyboards, but Corona has certainly changed their routines. Before the pandemic, many came to class early, spending extra hours at Academy instruments; not all students have a piano at home. Now, according to Professor Michael Klinghoffer, Vice President for Academic Affairs, JAMD has supplied them with electronic keyboards so they can keep their fingers in shape.

Of course not only pianists are dealing with lockdown. All of JAMD's students, like students throughout the world, are coping with closed campuses and locked classrooms. But JAMD is quite brilliantly prepared for the pandemic, and the show is going on astonishingly well. "When we realized that this was coming," explains Klinghoffer, "we immediately prepared to meet the changes." Lessons were uploaded, and teachers with supplied with material to upgrade their ability to work remotely.

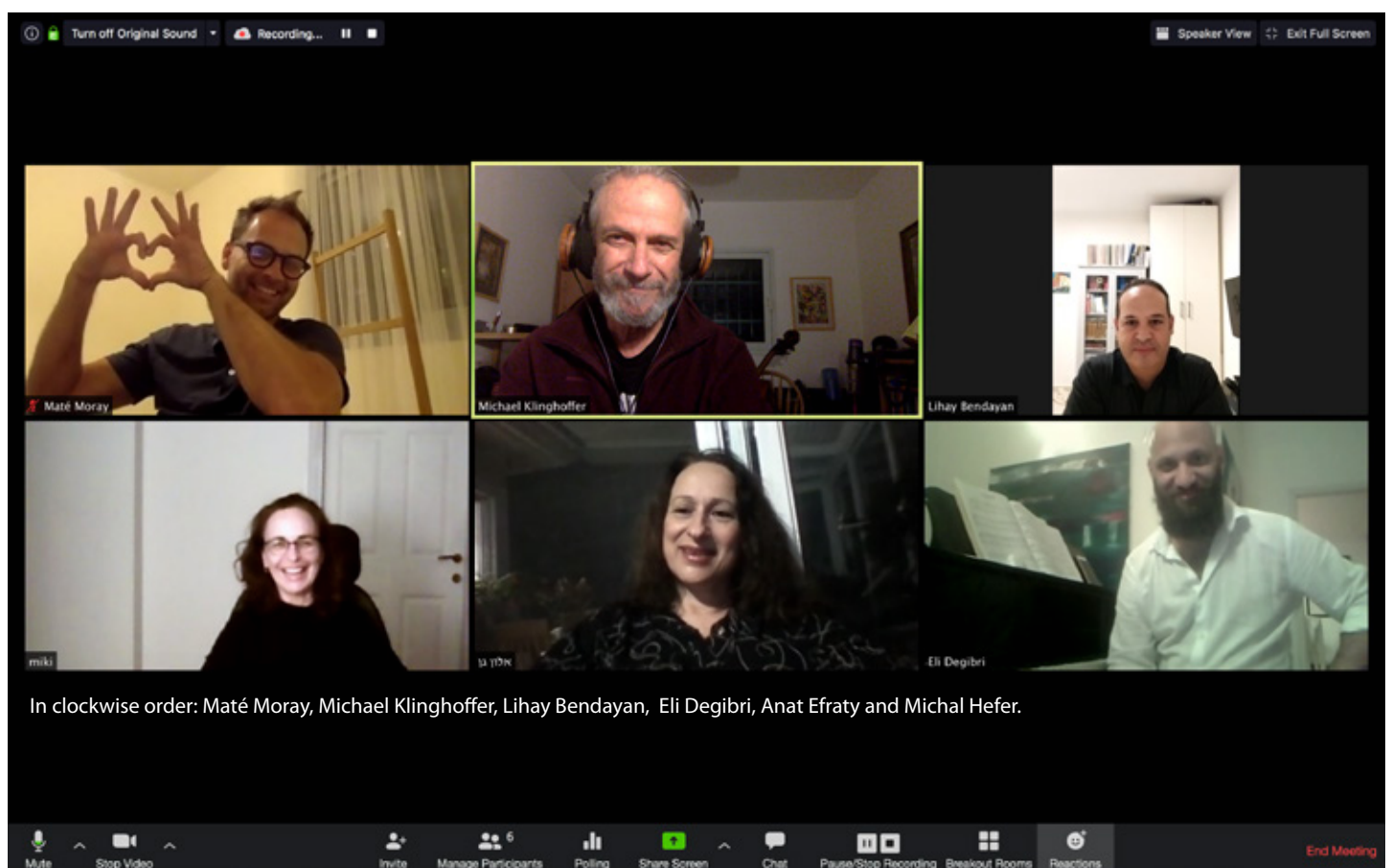
Practical issues abounded: Zoom meetings last for forty minutes and then crash out; JAMD paid extra fees to have longer time on air. Teachers are teaching to their normal schedules, albeit sometimes with a child on their lap alongside their laptops.

And yet, this Zooming from the living room has had unexpected perks. "Sometimes the family dog pops up on the screen," says Anat Efraty, Head of the Vocal Department. "And students see their teacher drinking coffee from a proper cup. It's all very relaxed and friendly; the students love it."

An unexpected side-effect, apart from seeing into student and teacher bedrooms, is the surprisingly high quality of pedagogy and performance. "Teaching remotely brings a new level of precision," explains Efraty. "It's just the student singing, and me. No pianist, no concert schedule hanging over our heads, just the hitting the right notes and doing it perfectly. It's very satisfying."

Professors across the disciplines agree: the level of concentration and excellence that comes from these lessons is unexpectedly gratifying, despite the obvious, (and the less obvious) drawbacks. There's a latency on Zoom, a slight delay, and this makes playing in sync almost impossible. "We've discovered that the delay is usually one quarter of a bar," says Eli Degibri, Head of the Jazz Department. "So if we set the Metronome to a hundred BPM and start at the last beat of a 4/4 bar, then I can play together with my student!"

Degibri, one of the world's most acclaimed saxophonists, starts his online lessons by chatting to his students. Sharing feelings on how they are all coping – students and lecturers alike – calms everyone down and heightens the sense of mutual caring. Sometimes students turn off their cameras; not everyone is comfortable taking the class into their home, or presenting themselves in their pajamas. "We have to be understanding of all these issues," notes Degibri. These are complex times.



And if it's complicated to teach instruments online, how do you straighten out a student's elbow, or measure the stretch of his metatarsal muscles as he plies or grand jetes? "No one in their right mind could believe that dance could be taught effectively online," says Mate Moray, Head of the Dance Department. "Yet, with the help of our outstanding teachers, we are making it work."

Ballet classes have moved from Academy studios complete with special floors and bars, to kitchens where counter-tops and refrigerator door handles double as equipment. There are lots of more static movements that can be drilled in classical dance, explains Moray. Students work on the core of dance, internalizing each movement. "In fact," claims Moray, "our students are coping fantastically. They will become even better teachers and dancers from going through this experience."

JAMD is possibly unique in having a pianist in a virtual room during dance lessons, zooming in with familiar music, albeit with a bit of a delay. Modern Dance, with its sprawling movements and rolling choreography, is slightly trickier to teach online, but JAMD is adapting. "We take out the large spaces and go for the essence," explains Moray. And so far it seems to be working wonderfully.

Dr. Michal Hefer, Head of Music Education, agrees that students are taking these pedagogical changes in their stride, and shining through the challenges. "As one of their projects our students, who are training to be music teachers, have to present simulated lessons. In isolation they are conscripting young siblings; it's all very bonding and fun," says Hefer. The departmental online courses are scheduled at the same time as they were before Corona; the students still have a modicum of routine. They send in videos of themselves teaching Ravel's "L'enfant et les Sortilèges" and the whole class Zooms in to debrief; so far it's all working amazingly well.

The success has stunned the faculty and students alike. "The closure was so quick," explains Professor Lihay Bendayan, Dean of the Faculty of Performing Arts, "yet we transitioned so smoothly into this new world." Bendayan credits the teachers for their flexibility and approachability. "It's not as easy to listen to a violin performance on a screen as it is in a studio," he adds, "but we're working around this." All week the students submit recordings and receive personal feedback. Then, during private online lessons they play their piece from beginning to end. Astonishingly, the level of teaching and performance is remaining uniformly high, even without teachers reaching out to physically adjust the bow.

Of course there are some courses that even Zoom can't accommodate. Orchestras, with 80 members, can't practice together online; even Chamber Music is too tricky. Students are now receiving personal training; orchestras and choirs will catch up on practical work when things normalize. The plan is for students to all finish their year; theoretical lessons are uploaded to the Moodle in addition to the sessions on Zoom.

Still, nothing is altogether rosy now, except for those little scarlet blooms on the tentacles of each grey Corona globule. Students, too, are juggling: many have lost jobs; some have gone home to save rent, or live alone in isolation; everyone is out of routine, and out of cash. JAMD, according to Professor Klinghoffer, has gone out of its way to be accommodating. "We are flexible and permissive at this stage," he says, "that means less strict with deadlines and considerate with homework demands." The Academy is also meeting individual needs: JAMD lent a laptop to a student, for example, who didn't own one.

"This unexpected situation is a learning experience for us," says Klinghoffer, "and we will become better as a result."

JAMD is currently preparing for three scenarios: Going back to work as normal; not going back in the foreseeable future to normal; going back to normal but incorporating some of the online experience into the curriculum. In the meanwhile we might as well take advantage of the timeout. Eli Degibri suggests to his students that they sit still for an hour, and listen to an album from beginning to end. I don't think I've done that since I was sixteen; it sounds seductively wonderful.

So, this Pessach, let's all relax in our sparkling lonely living rooms, put on our favourite records from way back when, and chill over some cream cheese and matza, as we wait for the world to speedily heal.

Chag sameach to us all!