Tell us about your work with Music for Dialogue and how did it come about?

Before attending the program at Harvard, I had to give thought to a possible project I would want to develop there. Since music has always been a big part of my life – I am very committed French horn player – I knew that my project and my next chapter following the program would have to involve music. I came up with a concept, to develop a model to use music as a vehicle to mitigate conflicts. I shared it with a friend whom I knew from a previous musical project, Dr. Ori Leshman, a professional musician and an academic, who really took to the idea and developed an academic workshop which we introduced to the Interdisciplinary Center (now called Reichmann university).

So, while I was making my first steps at the ALI program, we had a “laboratory” to test this concept. It was quite successful, and we develop additional programs around this concept. Upon my return to Israel at the end of the program, we created Music for Dialogue, together with a third partner, Amnon Herzig, and after searching for a home for our venture, decided to place it at Tel Aviv University. Over the past 4 years we have been part of the School of Education at TAU, and carried our academic courses, varied academic research and numerous programs in various circles of society.

Aviad Meitar on Philanthropy, Music and Dialogue

How did you start your philanthropic journey? Was it your family background that led you into it?

First, let me start by staying that I view myself first and foremost as a Social Entrepreneur. This means that I support causes that I feel a connection to and that I am interested in being involved with in a meaningful way. My financial support is a means to advance these causes and help create more significant impact.

I got started on this journey in a major way as a result of a year-long program I attended at Harvard University in 2016 called the Advanced Leadership Initiative (ALI). This program, which started in 2009, was created in order to allow people with diverse backgrounds to get involved in doing significant work in the social field. The year at Harvard gave me the time and the resources to develop a plan to implement the social venture I co-founded - Music for Dialogue (MFD).

My family background definitely played a role in this journey. We have a long tradition of giving to social causes. This had been systemized by the creation of a family foundation 20 years ago, by my late father together with my sister, which has been supporting various causes in culture and education in Israel and abroad. Since the passing of my father 7 years ago, I’ve been more involved with the foundation, and we have a carefully selected list of projects we support.

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What inspired you to initiate and support the Synergos Global Dialogue Initiative community?

What we realized at MFD, is that while our methodology uses music as a vehicle to advance dialogue, there are other organizations that are trying to do the same using other methods. We thought that it would be great to try and bring players in this field to learn from one another and find ways to collaborate. We had a two-days’ workshop in early 2020, just before the pandemic broke out, to discuss this concept and get the process started.

I am really thrilled that over the past two years, notwithstanding the limitation of in-person gathering, we managed to build a community of people and organizations that are interested in advancing Dialogue in various ways. We’ve had frequent virtual meetings in which we featured several guest speakers and organizations. Last year we also implemented a first collaborative project called the Power of Dialogue (POD), in which 6 youth organizations from around the globe met (virtually), learned about each other and developed local social projects that they committed to carry out. This is exactly what we had in mind in suggesting the GDI.

It is important to note that the key word in Music for Dialogue is Dialogue, not music. Our programs are all geared to create a meaningful interaction between participants using their own music lists, in a process that advocates profound listening, acceptance of the “other”, empathy and social responsibility. Our long-term objective is to have significant impact on the way people relate to one another and their ability to accept “others”.

What does Synergos mean to you? What parts are you engaged in and how?

Our family foundation joined Synergos in 2017, after an introduction to the organization through the philanthropy arm of an investment bank we work with. I thought that being part of community of people and organizations with similar interests, especially from around the globe, would be of interest to us and help us gain insight on how others operate in this domain. I also felt that Synergos could be a place where we might develop collaborative efforts in areas that we have a keen interest in.

Personally, I’ve been involved with the Spiritual Civilization community. I’ve also, together with my partners at MFD, laid the foundation to the creation of the Global Dialogue Initiative.
What is next for you? Does your family want to be involved in your philanthropy?

I am still looking to develop MFD in a major way, both in Israel and abroad. I think that outside Israel a very effective way could be through the Synergos platform and especially through collaborative projects as part of the GDI. Dialogue seems to be in a great need in many parts of the world and I would like to contribute to advancing its use and impact.

Regarding carrying on this type of work in the family, I definitely hope that the next generation of the family would get involved in “doing good” in the world. I’ve exposed them to what we do as a family foundation and also to my personal work. I believe that they will find their own interest and “voice” in this field and carry on the family legacy.