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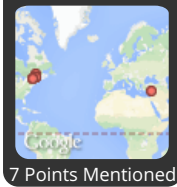
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Where's the story?



Classical music brings it home for those living in Boston-area shelters

Arlington violinist gives free concerts for homeless with the help of a Jewish fund
By Alexandra Lapkin
Advocate Staff



Julie Leven

Julie Leven takes classical music to a place where it has never gone before in Boston: homeless shelters.

Leven, who is Jewish and lives in Arlington, plays the violin with the Handel and Haydn Society Orchestra and tours with the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra. But although she has performed with the Jerusalem Symphony and the Aarhus Symfonieorkester in Denmark, and in music festivals all over the world, she believes that classical music not only belongs in gilded concert halls, but also has the capacity to thrive in the unlikely places.

That simple idea inspired Leven to launch Shelter Music Boston, a nonprofit organization that brings professionally trained classical musicians to homeless shelters in the Boston area. The organization, which began four years ago after Leven read a news story about a similar nonprofit in New York City, now works with seven area shelters including the Pine Street Inn Shattuck Shelter in Boston, the Community Day Center of Waltham and others. The musicians play concerts at each of the seven shelters once a month. After one of her performances at a homeless shelter, a woman came up to Leven and said the music felt like "water for my soul when I

was thirsty." After another concert, two men got into a friendly argument about which composer was better: Beethoven or Dvorak. Just a short while before, these men "did not know they could talk about music with each other," Leven noted. But her concerts brought them and many others together.

In an interview with The Jewish Advocate, Leven said no one should be excluded from classical music. She believes access to music is just as important for survival as food and a roof over one's head, and works in concert with the work done by psychiatrists and social workers at the shelters. She said it gives people without a permanent home a sense of dignity. Many audience members tell her that at the end of a difficult day on the streets, coming to a shelter and listening to classical music has an uplifting and calming effect.

One of the unique features of Leven's nonprofit is that the musicians, who mainly perform in duos and trios, receive pay for their work in the shelters – which, Leven explained, encourages them to be more committed to their relationship with Shelter Music Boston. And in order to be able to pay the musicians, Leven raises money for her organization.

Shelter Music Boston, since its conception, has raised about \$100,000 from various philanthropies and individual donors. This fiscal year, Leven's budget is \$75,000. A significant portion of that funding comes from the Good People Fund, a philanthropic organization run by Naomi Eisenberger out of her home in Millburn, N.J.

The Good People Fund, which provides financial support to about 65 to 70 organizations in the United States and Israel, was founded on the Jewish principles of tzedakah and Tikkun Olam. In the course of six years, Eisenberger has raised more than \$6 million, which went toward charities that alleviate poverty, hunger, disability, mental illness, trauma, social isolation, and other societal and personal ills.

In order to qualify for a grant from the Good People Fund – which, in addition to funding, also supports nonprofits with guidance and mentoring – an organization must have a budget less than \$500,000. But most importantly, "There has to be the presence of a good person or good people; there's got to be an individual who is responding to something – either something personal in their own life or something in this world that they feel passionately about and feel they need to change," said Eisenberger. "It's the story of the individual that guides us – that's the first piece."

The Good People Fund's donors, the majority of whom are Jewish, range from family foundations that give hundreds of thousands of dollars, to individuals who contribute one dollar a month, to Hebrew

Poll

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The Good People Fund supports some of the nonprofits in the United States that are not oriented toward specifically Jewish causes, such as Shelter Music [Boston](#). Eisenberger met Leven through Root Cause, a Massachusetts-based organization that serves as an incubator for nonprofits. After a 15-minute conversation with Leven, Eisenberger said, "This is a no-brainer for us. It's such a creative and unusual program. [Leven] could have been a poster child for the Good People Fund."

Leven, who has a strong connection to the Jewish principles of charity and social justice, said the work done by the Good People Fund resonated with her. With the grant from the fund, Leven's organization was able to begin performing at two new shelters.

And Eisenberger, who attended a recent Shelter Music [Boston](#) concert, said, "It was unlike anything I've ever experienced."

She added, "I cannot imagine what it would be like to report to a shelter every night in order to have a place to sleep. It was a moving experience and I came away even more pleased that we had decided to work with [Shelter Music [Boston](#)] and help them grow."

Visit sheltermusicboston.org and goodpeoplefund.org for more information.

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