

GYO Teacher Is Dedicated to Students

Safa El-Zein is without question one of the most committed violin instructors in Vero Beach. Not many would commute almost two hours each way from Orlando to teach their students. And yet this is exactly what Safa has done for the past year – and what she intends to continue doing as long as she’s able. Why does she do it?

“I remember how important music was in my life when I was young,” she says, “so I feel it’s important to be an inspiration, if I can, to other kids. I want them to be excited about music. The better they get the more excited they’re going to be. And as they keep improving they’ll find even more chances to play. It keeps building on itself in this positive cycle.”

Safa joined the Gifford Youth Orchestra staff after being recommended by Vero Beach High orchestra director Matthew Stott, who also had been her private teacher. Safa was living in Vero Beach at the time and leapt at the chance to work with the GYO. After only a few months, her day job as an interior designer was transferred to Orlando, about a hundred miles away.

“I didn’t want that to interfere with my teaching here at the Gifford Community Center for the GYO,” she says. “And it hasn’t. I still get to see my parents regularly but at the end of the day I have something to do that I really love. So it’s worked out well.”

Safa was born and raised in Indianapolis, where she began her musical training. Local ninth-graders came to her elementary school to demonstrate their instruments. Safa, whose grandmother had taken her to several concerts, knew immediately that she wanted to study violin. She showed great talent and joined the middle school orchestra within the year.

Her family moved to Vero Beach when she was a junior in high school. But Safa returned to the Midwest to accept a music scholarship to the University of Indianapolis. After graduation in 2016, she returned to Vero and found the GYO.

Currently, Safa teaches the orchestra's oldest and most advanced students privately. She works with them on pieces they are doing with the GYO itself. "But they also do a lot of outside performances and are in their middle school and high school orchestras," she says. "So I help them with all that music as well." In addition, the students are active competitively and count on her to help them polish their approaches and interpretations.

Safa's background in teaching spans a wide arena. She has worked with senior citizens and young children who have never previously held a bow. She has prepared players for auditions, refined solo renditions and helped chamber groups ready themselves for presentations.

Safa has noticed changes in the orchestra over the year she has been teaching. "When I first started a boy asked me how he could get everything done that was facing him. How could he get all his school work finished as well as do his music and sports? We worked on making a priority list so could handle his tasks in some kind of order. I've seen a big improvement in his work ethic and a lot of growth in him over these past few months."

Safa, like all the GYO's teachers, has a strongly positive influence on her students. We're fortunate to have her as part of the Tiger team.