

# Newton's Bithyah Israel brings soothing sounds of cello to Boston youth



JONATHAN WIGGS/ GLOBE STAFF

**Bithyah Israel, founder of City Strings United, leads a cello lesson with the nonprofit program's students in Roxbury.**

By [Kathy McCabe](#)

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It's a rainy Saturday morning in Roxbury.

About 30 youths, with cellos slung over their backs, scrambled into [Twelfth Baptist Church](#) for their weekly lesson with [City Strings United](#).

Bithyah Israel, a professional cellist from Newton, started the music program for students ages 3 to 20 two years ago. She teaches lessons, with the help of volunteer instructors from the [Berklee College of Music](#) and [New England Conservatory Prep School](#), a community music program.

For two hours, the young cellists practiced tempo, technique, and the delicate placement of their fingers on the strings. On this day, Israel led a group of seven players through the first measures of "[Rondeau](#)," the theme from public television's "Masterpiece Theatre."

"We're going to learn a new piece today," Israel, 38, told her young charges seated in a semicircle. "I need you all to do your best," she said before adding, "Are we all tuned?"

"Yes, Miss Bithyah," replied many young voices.

The first few attempts produced screeching strings.

"Relax your thumbs, guys," Israel said. "It will allow your fingers to move up and down the fingerboard more easily."

City Strings United was born out of Israel's dream to create harmony in often troubled neighborhoods.