For Mihai T etel, associate professor of cello at The Hartt School, teaching music and starting ARIA, an international summer music academy, were practically in his DNA. T etel grew up in Romania, where his father was a professor of music and a professional double bass player. The elder T etel insisted that his son begin playing the cello at the age of 8.

“He started me with the cello with the threat that if I didn’t practice and get good, I’d have to switch to double bass,” T etel says. “When I saw the size of the double bass—and I was, of course, just 8—I thought, ‘I better practice. I don’t want to carry that thing around.’ It was a great incentive.”

T etel soon discovered he had inherited his father’s musical ability, and by the time he reached high school, he knew he wanted to play the cello as a career. Classical music was very popular in Romania at the time, which meant there was a real opportunity for him to become a professional musician.

Those plans took a slight detour. Romania was a communist country then, and many were trying to escape, including T etel’s father. He defected to Canada in 1977 while on tour. It took two years, but eventually he brought his wife and two sons to Edmonton.

“For him to defect when he was in his 40s and start all over again from zero and rebuild his life in Canada, it was a big decision and a difficult one,” says T etel. “It took many years for us to go from really poor to comfortable middle class and for him to get a professional situation that would allow us to live decently.”

T etel completed high school in Canada, went on to graduate from the University of Toronto, and received his master’s degree from The Juilliard School in New York City. His career path eventually led to The Hartt School, where he works with promising young cellists every day.

Twenty-one years ago he started the ARIA International Summer Academy, which he directs and runs on the Mount Holyoke College campus in South Hadley, Mass. The program offers an intensive
curriculum for serious, gifted musicians ages 16–28 from around the world.

“Many summer programs offer students a varied but general experience that includes orchestra, chamber music, and private lessons,” says Tetel. “ARIA’s focus is providing an in-depth, concentrated study of one’s instrument through numerous master classes, workshops, lectures, and private lessons.” Tetel has been able to recruit students in ARIA to The Hartt School by inviting them to visit the University of Hartford campus and play for Hartt professors. Some Hartt faculty teach at ARIA during the summer, giving students a taste of the teaching talent at Hartt.

Tetel has seen many of his thousands of summer students join major orchestras, like the Cleveland and Minnesota orchestras and the Toronto and Montreal symphonies. Some ARIA alumni have become teachers themselves and are now helping to shape another generation of musicians. Tetel is happy with that legacy. Decades into his career as a musician, he says teaching is now his true passion.

“As I got older and older, it awakened in me,” he explains. “Mentoring a young musician is the greatest professional pleasure I can enjoy. I get more satisfaction when I see the results of years of teaching a particular person how he or she gets better, than if I play another successful concert.”

To learn more about ARIA, visit www.ariaacademy.com.

Far left: Astrid Schween, standing, Hartt adjunct cello faculty, works with a student attending the ARIA International Summer Academy; center: Mihai Tetel, left, associate professor, cello, instructs Danielle Karpala ’12, a Hartt student who attended the ARIA summer academy in 2011; below: Rita Porfiris, left, associate professor, viola, gives a private lesson to Ariel Patkin ’14 at ARIA in 2011.