

Band rocks 'Purim Bash'

Mama Doni brings some intergenerational fun to traditional Jewish holiday

BY ELLEN S. WILKOWE • DAILY RECORD • MARCH 5, 2009

[Post a Comment](#) [Recommend](#) [Print this page](#) [E-mail this article](#) [Share](#) [?](#)

Some bands play the club scene. The Mama Doni Band rocks out the synagogue circuit. Temples, Jewish schools and the occasional retirement home are fitting venues for a kids' band that belts out songs such as "Oy Yoy Yodel," "Jewperheroes" and the timely "Purim Bash."



A More Affordable Option than Buying a New Car



Working Moms Can Go Back to School with a \$10,000 Scholarship!



\$2 Million in Scholarships for Working Parents Going Back to School



Advertising provided by: [ARALifestyle.com](#)

"I'm trying to make a cultural Jewish statement," lead singer and songwriter Doni Zasloff-Thomas of Montclair said during a phone interview. "I'm celebrating the culture I grew up with and taking those moments of my childhood and celebrating them in a hip, cool way."

What better an intro to Judaism than through a children's music teacher and mother plus her flock of mostly Jewish band mates. Besides, rabbis love them, kids approve, and in the interest of keeping facts Judaically straight, the lyrics are "all kosher all the time," she said.

Children, parents and "bubbehs" (grandmothers) can get pumped up for Purim tonight as the Mama Doni Band rocks out the Morris County Hebrew Academy in Randolph. The band returns to Morris County March 13 at Temple B'Nai Or in Morristown.

Purim begins Monday at sundown and is celebrated on the 14th day of the Jewish month of Adar.

The festive holiday tells the story of a Persian prime minister, Haman (pronounced Hey-min), who tried to destroy the Jews of the kingdom, and of Mordechai and Esther, whose wisdom, courage and faith ultimately defeat the forces of Haman, said Rabbi Donald Rossoff of Temple B'Nai Or in Morristown.

When King Ahasuerus of Persia banished Queen Vashti for refusing to entertain his male party-goers, he was in need of a replacement.

"Like the king in the '1001 Arabian Nights,' he conscripts all young women of his kingdom to try out, and his favor falls on a young Jewish woman named Hadassah, who goes by her Persian name of Esther," Rossoff said.

At the advice of her cousin and guardian Mordechai, Esther kept her Jewish identity a secret from the king.

When Haman demanded everyone bow down to him and Mordechai refused, Haman became enraged and ordered the destruction of the Jews.

"Like Pharaoh before him and Hitler after, Haman convinces his king that the Jews of the kingdom were disloyal subjects whose existence was a threat to the kingdom and should therefore be eliminated," Rossoff said. "The king, well-meaning but fatally naïve, puts the fate of the Jews in Haman's hands."



SAVE UP TO \$200 FOR A LIMITED TIME ON THE NEW ADOBE® CREATIVE SUITE® 4 TOOLS.

SHORTCUT TO BRILLIANT



Meanwhile, Mordechai convinces Esther that she is in a unique position to save her people: "Perhaps you were put in this position precisely for this purpose."

Esther tells Ahasuerus of Haman's plot to kill her people and the king turns the tables on Haman.

The name "Purim" translates to "lots," devices thrown randomly to determine a date, similar to throwing dice. Haman threw lots to determine the days of the Jews' impending destruction.

"The use of these lots could imply that the forces of history are as random as the dice, but the way of faith would see the apparent randomness as part of the working out of a divine plan," Rossoff said.

The holiday is celebrated by a public synagogue readings of the Megillah (scroll) book of Esther.

"In compliance with the Torah's command to 'wipe out the name of Amalek,' every time the name of Haman is mentioned, it is drowned out by loud shouts, stamping of feet, and the sounding of 'graggers,' noisemakers," Rossoff said.

Purim is also a time to donate food and money to the poor, emulating the Persian Jews, who after their deliverance sent charity to the needy.

In addition, carnivals and parties are held where children celebrate in character costumes of Queen Esther, King Ahasuerus and Mordechai.

Haman is present in edible form, as a fruit-filled triangular pastry, Hamantashen (pronounced Hoomintashin), which symbolizes his three-pointed hat in America and his ear in Israel.

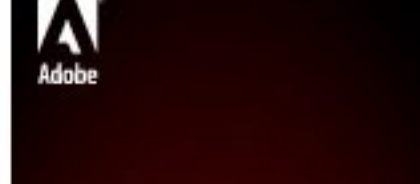
Noshin' on hamantashen is exactly what Zasloff-Thomas croons about in her song "The Kooky Cookie."

I'll be noshin'. I love the hamantashen, I love the hamantashen. At Purim time, that's what

But it's crazy that this cookie is supposed to be a hat.

(What's up with that?)

Don't understand the mentality Of this kooky cookie personality.



SAVE UP TO \$200 FOR A LIMITED TIME ON THE NEW ADOBE® CREATIVE SUITE® 4 TOOLS.

SHORTCUT TO BRILLIANT



Different from the bakery community,

A cross between a cookie and fashion accessory.

The fresh-baked track is hot off her latest CD, "I Love Purim," a four-song holiday compilation similar to her "I Love Chanukah," released in December.

Her song "Costume Conundrum" tells of a young girl who is tired of dressing up as Esther for the Purim party, but changes her mind because, well, Esther is the queen of cool.

It's Purim morning just woke up and I'm in a panic

I forgot to choose a costume, now I'm meshugana and manic

It's been 11 Purims and I'm starting to feel the pressure

Because every other year I've dressed up as Esther.

It's Purim today I don't know what to be

It's Purim today I don't know what to be

It's Purim today and between you and me, I'm tired of being Esther.

"The Kooky Cookie," like most of her creative bursts, was written at 3 a.m. and recorded on her cell phone.

"The challenge is take all genres and all styles of music and Jewify it," Zasloff-Thomas said. From rock to reggae, rap to klezmer, no genre or generation is left untouched.

"The music is making sense to kids, parents and grandparents," she said.

Raised outside Philadelphia, Zasloff-Thomas has embraced her Jewish culture right down to teaching Hebrew school while in high school and college, and teaching theater and drama at summer camp. She attended Brandeis University and New York University, where she earned a degree in educational theater.

Zasloff-Thomas was working in children's media and marketing when she was tapped for a music teacher position at her children's school in 2007.

The career move resulted in the debut CD "I Love Herring (& Other Fish Shticks for Kids)," released in 2007.

"I wanted to do funky, wacky songs for the curricula," she said. "It was a snow day (like today) when I wrote the 'Kippah' song. Then I became a Jewish songwriting maniac and wrote like 30 songs."

A phone call to Adam Nelson for music contacts resulted in a full-fledged band with Nelson as lead guitarist and album producer, Alex Tyshkov on bass and guitar, and Ken Walz on drums and percussion.

The band landed the 2008 Simcha Award at the International Jewish Festival in Amsterdam, "an 'American Idol' for Jewish music," she said. The Mama Doni Band took on well-established bands and impressed the panel for the prestigious award that means joy, specifically inspiring joy through music.

"It was pretty hardcore," she said.

First the award and then a flood of gigs that keep on coming.

The ultimate tests and inspirations for her music? Her children, Millie and Alexander.

"They're a good gauge," Zasloff-Thomas said. "If they jump up and down, they like it."

In addition to delivering a high-energy "rock band vibe," a Mama Doni show includes active audience participation complete with props and onstage appearances by children, parents and bubbehs.

One day, they're entertaining 90-year-old Estherettes, the next day, 6-year-olds, and she wouldn't want it any other way.

Stay tuned for another full-fledged album, including a song about a knish.



Ron Holz

The Mama Doni Band members, are from left, drummer Ken Walz, lead singer Mama Doni, bass player Alex Tyshkov and lead guitar player Adam Nelson, who also produces the group's albums. The band will be playing two Purim concerts in the area.

IF YOU GO
Mama Doni Band
Today, 6:30 p.m.
Pizza and activities at 5:45 p.m.
Hebrew Academy of Morris County
146 Dover Chester Road, Randolph
\$15 in advance, \$18 at door
(973) 584 5330
<http://hamc.org>

March 13, 6:30 p.m.
Torah Explorer/Preschool Purim Dinner
Followed by free Mama Doni concert
Dinner begins at 5:45 p.m.
Temple B'Nai Or
60 Overlook Road, Morristown
Call (973) 267-6424 for more information
<http://templebnaior.org>

The Mama Doni Band
Mama Doni: lead vocal/songwriter
Adam Nelson: lead guitar/album producer
Alex Tyshkov: bass/guitar
Ken Walz: drums/percussion
<http://www.mamadoni.com/>

RELATED NEWS FROM THE WEB
Life
Holidays
Religion
Judaism
Hanukkah
Powered by [Topix.net](#)

DailyRecord.com Text Alerts

Get breaking local news as it happens. Enter your phone number:

[Continue](#)

Standard Messaging Rates or other charges apply. To Opt-out text STOP to 4INFO (44836). For more information text HELP to 4INFO (44836). Contact your carrier for more details. Powered by 4INFO.

>> [SIGN UP FOR MORE ALERTS HERE](#)



More MorrisLife Headlines

Cuba in words and images [☞](#)

Latest Headlines

Chamberlain has second straight strong start [☞](#)