

NEW YORK POST

CELEBRATE ISRAEL

YOUR GUIDE TO THE 2011 PARADE



Floats, bands, performers and more will turn Fifth Avenue blue and white this Sunday to mark the 63rd anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel.



WHEN
Sunday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
WHERE
Fifth Avenue, starting at 57th St., ending at 79th St.

For the first time in the parade's history, it will be televised live. New Yorkers and viewers from all over the country will now be able to join in the celebration on WWOR (Channel 9) from noon to 2 p.m. For more information or to watch the entire parade live online, log on to celebratesraiparade.org.



Clockwise from top left: Mama Dool Band; Kids proudly fly the flags; The Ezra troupe; Watching the parade; Rectangles restaurateur Daniel Amit.

NEW YORK POST: NADIA KALIC (2); JONAS SERRAJO (2)



DONI ZASLIFF THOMAS (shown right)/WRITES:

"Here's a song we are playing at the parade called 'Falafel' which is a term I made up about loving falafel :-]"

"Fill up your pita pockets! Falafel and flavorful My taste buds are tripping laterational! I'm so falafel!"

I eat one falafel and I wanna eat three I can't stop thinking about tuckin' My mind is swimming in a chick pea sea I'm so falafel!"

Falafel, falafel Falafel falafel falafel

Delightful (so good) Delectable! (yum) Nutritious, and oh so noshable!

Falafel stands are everywhere From New York City to Fort Lauderdale But the yummiest ones are in ISRAEL! I'm so falafel!"

GOING FOR A SONG

The Mama Doni Band brings Jewish heritage to kids' music

By ERIKA PRAEDER

IT'S bushert, or meant to be, as the Yiddish word denotes. Yes, the second act of Doni Zasliff Thomas' career seems fated. Mama Doni, as she's known to her devoted and rising fan base of children, is the singer-songwriter and lead singer of the Mama Doni band, who will be performing at this year's Celebrate Israel parade.

"Everything is clicking in my life," says the mother of two from Montclair, N.J. "I've always been drawn to children's theater and entertainment and also knew I wanted to be a mom. Some people think having kids ends your life, but for me it's the opposite. The person you become when you become a parent can be bigger and better than before kids. My kids were my fuel and excited me to do much more. I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't have them."

With degrees from Brandeis University and New York University in educational theater and performing arts respectively, Thomas spent her first years in the working world in children's media and marketing, as the creative director for an award-winning children's media company.

But when her children's preschool asked her to take a position as its music teacher in 2007, she became a trained Music Together teacher and her creative juices began flowing.

"It was a defining moment for me," recalls Thomas. On drives home from work and in the

middle of her sleep at night, "I became so overwhelmed with lyrics, harmonies and song ideas," she said.

She'd never sought out to write songs like "Chanukah Fever," the rap track "Jewperheroes" or reggae-styled "Bagel Time."

Yet, "a massive thing was happening for me — it was like having another child, it felt so big," said Thomas.

Armed with a huge notebook full of wacky, Jewish songs of different music genres, "I thought, 'what am I going to do with all of this? I'm going to do an album,'" she decided.

With "no real vision," Thomas found herself a producer and, on a whim, entered a copy of her first CD, "I Love Herring and Other Fishsticks for Kids," into the International Jewish Music Festival, held annually in Amsterdam.

Shortly thereafter, she received a letter asking her to be a part of the annual competition among 100 other competing bands.

"I didn't even have a band," she explained. "God and the universe helped me out and I found musicians, began rehearsing and performing in local shows."

After playing in the Amsterdam Festival, Thomas' band nabbed the Simcha award, given for "inspiring joy through music."

"It was like a Jewish 'American Idol,'" said Thomas. "Other bands had been touring together for 20 years," says Thomas. "It was huge for us — the beginning of Mama Doni. We've done 300 shows since then — at summer camps, Jewish community centers, synagogues, festivals and have just released our fourth CD, 'Shabbat Sha-boom.'"

Thomas also presents workshops to other Jewish pre-school teachers on how to bring music in to their classroom.

One of the tools she uses she describes as, "dipping your song in to the Jewish bucket. I take a song like,

"The Itsy Bitsy Spider," dip it in the bucket, and instead, create, "Frying Latkes or the Jewish Pan." It's easy for teachers to become songwriters," said Thomas.

Through her music, Thomas aims to "Capture things about being Jew-



"It is I, your furry pal, Grover!"

More fun for the kids!

This year's parade will also feature a special VIP — an appearance from Grover, of Shalom Sesame.

ish that I loved as a child — like being together with your family, humor, food and rauch [Hebrew word for spirit]," she said.

She also hopes to excite and engage people of all backgrounds.

Growing up in Washington, DC, and Philadelphia, Thomas was "Super into music" as a child.

"My father, a doctor, would consistently play his crazy collection of records," recalled Thomas. "He'd play one for an entire month and then change. We listened to Israeli greatest hits, as well as The Beatles. I was raised with a musical soul."

To maintain her work and family-life balance, Thomas' family attends her band's local shows as often as possible. "My kids think it's really cool that I go into a studio to work on an album. When I have a new song recorded, I bring it to my mom. If they're jumping up and down asking me to play it again, I know I have a good song. They're not going to lie!" she said.

With more projects on the way, "We want to share the celebration with children and families through books, television and music videos," revealed Thomas.

At this year's Celebrate Israel parade, the Mama Doni band will perform on a float for the first time.

"What a wonderful gathering, it's an honor and we're thrilled. I've been going to this parade for years — since I was a kid," said Thomas.

Mama Doni's CDs are available through Amazon.com. For more information, log on to mamadoni.com

"I take a song like, 'The Itsy Bitsy Spider,' dip it in the [Jewish] bucket and create 'Frying Latkes on the Jewish Pan.'"

Doni Zasliff Thomas