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SPOTLIGHT | HANUKKAH MUSIC

More Than One Kind of Holiday Tune

By TAMMY LA GORCE
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Like [Adam Sandler](#) before her, the Montclair-based children's musician [Mama Doni](#) regrets that while Christmas songs ring out of every store speaker this time of year, [Hanukkah](#) songs do not.

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Only you won't find Mama Doni — real name Doni Zasloff Thomas — rhyming "Hanukkah" with "marijuana" in her lyrics.

"The thing about me is I'm a spiritual Jewish person. Everything is Judaically correct in my songs — I love and respect the tradition," Ms. Zasloff Thomas said. "I'm not trying to mock it. I'm trying to show how cool it is."

She will perform songs from her self-released second album, "Chanukah Fever," at the [Jewish Community Center of Middlesex County](#) in Edison on Dec. 14, at the [Bergen County Y](#) in Washington Township on Dec. 18, and at the [JCC MetroWest](#) in West Orange as part of its WinterFest on Dec. 25.

Ms. Zasloff Thomas, 35, began writing Jewish-themed songs for children in 2007, when she accepted a music teaching job at [Child's Way](#), a Jewish Montessori school in West Orange. Though she had studied educational theater and performing arts, she did not consider herself a songwriter, but tunes "just started exploding out," she said.

She soon earned a reputation for songs like "Bagel Time" and "Oy Veh!" from her first album, "I Love Herring (and Other Fish Shticks for Kids)," self-released in 2008.

"It's been crazy," said Ms. Zasloff Thomas, who also writes nonholiday Jewish music but is especially in demand at Jewish community and cultural centers in December. Her music has taken her as far as Amsterdam, where her band won the Simcha Prize at the International Jewish Music Festival in 2008. (Simcha means joy or happiness in Hebrew.)

"What I'm trying to do is take the fun, beautiful, quirky richness of Jewish culture and bring it to audiences of all backgrounds," she said. "I want to create music that everybody can know so everybody can learn a little bit about Jewish culture."

TAMMY LA GORCE

For tickets to the Jewish Community Center of Middlesex County show on Dec. 14: [jccmc.org](#) or (732) 494-3232; for the Bergen County Y show on Dec. 18: [yjcc.org](#) or (201) 666-6610; for the JCC Metro-West WinterFest on Dec. 25, [jccmetrowest.org](#) or (973) 929-2922. General information: [mamadoni.com](#).

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