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'Jewified' jingles for the holidays

Friday, December 19, 2008

Last updated: Friday December 19, 2008, 9:13 AM

BY JENNIFER V. HUGHES

NorthJersey.com

SPECIAL TO THE RECORD



December can be somewhat of a musical wasteland if you're Jewish.

Amid all the "Silent Nights" and "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeers" twinkling on the radio, there's usually only the Dreidel Song and Adam Sandler's "It's Time for Hanukkah."

Mama Doni would like to change all that.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Mama Doni & The Mama Doni Band.

AGE: All ages.

WHEN: 12:30 and 2 p.m. Thursday.

WHERE: Family Celebration Day at The Jewish Museum, 1109 Fifth Ave. (at 92nd Street); thejewishmuseum.org or 212-423-3200.

HOW MUCH: Museum admission \$12, seniors over 65 \$10, students \$7.50, children under age 12 free.

STROLLER CHECK: Yes.

The Montclair resident, Doni Zasloff Thomas, offers four more Hanukkah songs on her self-produced CD, "I Love Chanukah," and she'll be performing them at Family Celebration Day at The Jewish Museum Thursday.

But these may not be your Bubbie's beats. "La Vida Dreidel" has a Latin flair, and "The Funky Gold Menorah" rocks it with a rap beat. Thomas said she loves to mix different musical styles and joked that she's always finding new styles waiting to be "jewified."

"I felt like there should be cool, fun Hanukkah music for everyone — I think Jews and non-Jews like it," said Thomas, who has two children, a 4 1/2-year-old daughter and a 3-year-old son. "Everyone should

know a little about a latke. We're all in this world together and we should rock out on it."

Earlier this year, Thomas self-released her first CD, "I Love Herring & Other Fish Sticks for Kids." It includes the song "Jewperheros":

Vroom! There he goes past in a blur, it's the

Fastest Jew in the whole world — Flash Goldberg

What's that he's chasing? Is he saving the day?

No, he's on his way to a Chinese buffet ...

"I love being Jewish, and the part I love most are food, humor and tradition," she said. "I love Yiddish — I love all of that and I wanted to share it with kids, I wanted to make it cool."

Thomas said she threads Yiddish words and traditional Jewish musical sounds, like Klezmer, into her songs, hoping to appeal to older generations as well as kids.

"I thought, 'Wow, maybe these grandparents can get into it because they can hear the words they love,'" she said.

Thomas was always musical, but worked in marketing in her 20s. After she had children, she sang in their preschool class one day and was hooked. She worked as a Music Together teacher and then started writing her own songs.

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Her first was "Sportin' My Kippah," which extols the virtues of being a "schmaltzy groovy Yarmikalicious skullcap-wearing Jew — Yoo-hoo!" She said the lyrics just came to her one day and soon she was scrawling ideas on scraps of paper and leaving herself voicemails with harmonies.

In May, Thomas and her band won the Simcha Prize for Inspiring Joy through Music at the International Jewish Music Festival in Amsterdam. She joked about feeling fahklempt going up against bands that had played together for decades at gigs worldwide because her group had just gotten together a few weeks earlier.

"It was amazing," she said. "I'm really humbled and happy and I feel really grateful about it. And it's fun."

*

The Family Day Celebration will feature an art workshop from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. where kids can use patterned collage paper, markers and colored pencils to create a theatrical scene inspired by the museum's exhibit, "Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theater, 1919-1949."



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