



Parental Guidance: Carrie Stetler

Star-Ledger features writer talks about parenting advice and child care

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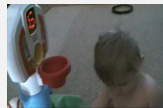
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Mama Doni sings funky Chanukah songs

by Carrie Stetler/Star-Ledger
 Tuesday December 16, 2008, 6:21 AM

The gentiles have "Jingle Bells." But Chanukah songs aren't so, well, jaunty.

Doni Zasloff Thomas felt compelled to change that with songs like "The Funky Gold Menorah" and "La Vida Dreidel."



Thomas, a Montclair mother who calls herself "[Mama Doni](#)," is proud to have a schtick.

And that schtick, she says, is to "Jewify" all forms of music - from country to reggae to holiday songs.

"Growing up, you hear Christmas songs constantly, but I can barely remember any Chanukah songs. I loved the ones that existed, but why not make them funkier? There are fun, light Christmas songs - why not a song like "Jingle Bells" for Jewish kids - and even non-Jewish kids?"

Her CD "I Love Chanukah," released last month, is a playful celebration of Jewish culture, with songs such as "You Say Hanukah (I Say Chanukah)" and "Latke Man" ("*Everyone who meets him/Agrees he's quite the dish/Schmaltzy and delish/With his cousin Mister Knish.*")

The result is a kind of wacky Jewish indie-rock for kids.

"I try to take all the things I love about Jewish culture, the food, the humor, the quirky sensibility, and put them into something I love, which is music," says Thomas, a stay-at-home mom of two preschoolers.

Thomas, a former creative director for the kids' website MaMaMedia.com, never seriously played music until she wrote the songs on her first children's album, "I Love Herring," released in May. (It featured "Shvitzin," "Kvellin" and "Mensch Appeal.")

She doesn't use words like "divine inspiration," but she was moved by forces larger than herself. "I had, like, this creative explosion of Jewish songs come over me," she says. "I wrote 30 songs in a matter of weeks. It was bizarre."

When she realized "I couldn't just sit in my kitchen for the rest of my life doing this stuff," she formed a band with in-laws and friends. Despite the

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Yiddish jokes, however, she's serious about the music.

"We're a real rock band," she boasts. "We really rock."

Audiences agree. In the spring, her band won an award at the International Jewish Music Festival in Amsterdam. Last week, she played Chanukahpaloozafest in Toledo. And on Dec. 25, she'll be playing at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in Manhattan.

And she's booked through summer at Jersey synagogues and Jewish community centers.

"I had no idea if people would think this was the weirdest thing in the world, but they love it," said Thomas. "Moms are coming to me from all over."

She vows not to disappoint them.

"I'm already writing songs for Purim," she says.

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