



Live

Spirit Health Culture Pastimes

Jewish Doo Wop

Songwriter/performer Mama Doni's remarkable knack for entertaining and educating comes through loud and clear in her spirited new album, "Shabbat Shaboom."

By Sue Tomchin
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While some wring their hands in despair about the purported disappearance of Jewish identity in our community, Doni Zasloff Thomas is definitely not among them.

Thomas, aka [Mama Doni](#), is the powerhouse whose animated personality and energetic performances with her band inspire Jewish children, their parents and even grandparents to dance in the aisles and embrace the *ruach* (spirit) of Judaism, while learning about their Jewish identity.

Her latest album "Shabbat Shaboom," her third, is due out March 22, and features a Jewish smorgasbord of musical styles—pop rock to doo wop to funky disco to bluegrass to tango (about a chicken no less) with klezmer as part of the mix. "What I've done is to take all the different musical styles I love and weave Jewish content through them in a way that 8-year-olds and 10-year-olds think it's cool," says Thomas.

Thomas has a remarkable knack for writing lyrics that range from hilarious to insightful, often within the same song. Her song "Challah-Day," for example, conveys her love of baking challah with her bubbe with an energetic chorus that gets listeners to step to the right and left, forward and back in a Macarena-like line dance. And "The Bat Mitzvah" song captures a younger sibling's picture of her sister acting like a diva "with her brand new dress and matching shoes and pantyhose," yet ends in admiration for how great a job the sister does on her Torah portion and speech.

Don't tell her young listeners, but while they're groovin' to Mama Doni songs they're also imbibing Jewish cultural currency. Among the songs that she has written for the new album are lively looks at the occasions when you wish "Mazel Tov," the quirks, craziness and joy of extended families ("My Mispocha"); and the meaning of the inimitable Yiddish word *fahklemp* ("No one is exempt from feelin' fahklemp").

The most heartfelt songs on the album convey the beauty and meaning of Shabbat ("No matter where I go Friday comes I feel at home/I'm right where I belong/ When I light my Shabbat candles.") in a way that is inspiring, accessible and fun. Also included on the album are new melodies (her own) for the Friday night blessings, as well as the late Debbie Friedman's melody for *Havdalah*.



There's even a song that hails Jewish women. Called "Jewish Cowgirl," it salutes Jewish women's strength and "the wild Jewish female spirit." When Thomas does the song at concerts, she invites all the moms and grandmoms to come up to the stage to sing along with the chorus.

Thomas, herself the mom to a seven-year-old and a five-year-old, says that she's always loved communicating with kids. In addition to having a degree in educational theater from NYU, she worked as a bar and bat mitzvah tutor, a camp counselor, a Hebrew school music teacher and the creative director for a children's media company.

"When I found this," she says of her songwriting and performing, "I felt all the stars had aligned for me, that it was clear what I was supposed to be doing."

Since May 2008, Thomas has done over 200 concerts at day schools, synagogues, JCCs and camps. In addition, she has done educational workshops designed to help teachers tap into their potential to create *ruach* in their classrooms. Says Thomas: "My goal is to be able to go to any community that wants me."

Go to <http://www.mamadoni.com/shabbatshaboom1.asp> to find free downloads of some songs, to purchase "Shabbat Shaboom," and to find Mama Doni's performance schedule.

[Read more about Mama Doni.](#)



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