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Mama Doni to play Purim Carnival

Mama Doni and her band's Jew-ified jingles a perfect fit for Stamford Center's annual carnival

By Ray Hogan STAFF WRITER

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With a new four-song EP called "I Love Purim!," Mama Doni and her band are as appropriate an act as there is to headline the Stamford Jewish Community Center's Purim Carnival on Sunday.

Purim is one of the more joyous holidays on the Jewish calendar and Mama Doni, who performs songs such as "Kooky Cookie," "The Funky Gold Menorah" and "The Purim Bash," brings plenty of celebratory spirit with her music, which is written for children, but with parents (and grandparents) in mind.

"We call it Jew-ified jingles," says Doni Zasloff Thomas, aka Mama Doni, a mother of two who lives in New Jersey. "I really love being Jewish, with its humor and culture. I threw myself into that through the music and what I love about being Jewish in the cultural sense. What I'm doing with this music is making Jewish culture accessible to everybody. It's pulled together in a way to make sense to everybody and not to offend anyone who is looking at it from a religious perspective."

Thomas became Mama Doni in early 2007 when she was asked to teach music at her children's preschool. With a background in drama, dance and children's media and marketing, Thomas had little trouble identifying with Judaism and children. Much to her surprise, she couldn't find the type of fun music that would appeal to and educate a preschool audience. There was plenty of strong Jewish music for adults, but she was looking for songs with pop music appeal that also drew on elements of traditional



Jewish music.

"I couldn't find the music I thought I'd want to rock out with them," she says. "I couldn't find it, so that's how it started."

At that point, Thomas had yet to write a song and was so unsure of the process that she was querying Internet search engines on how to do it. She had an epiphany while at home with her children.

"I was at home with the kids on a snow day and out of nowhere I felt like I had written a song. Literally, from that point I wrote 30 or 40 songs. I felt like I knew a new language. There was a huge rush of creative energy."

Her music contains elements of reggae, pop/rock, klezmer and bluegrass with lyrics that integrate Yiddish expressions into a modern lingo.

The Jewish Community Center's 17th annual Purim Carnival usually attracts a few hundred children plus their parents, according to Sarah Evans, director of children's programs at the center.

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"I just loved how [Mama Doni] took a creative spin on music and the Jewish religion," Evans says. "She teaches but it's also fun."

In addition to Mama Doni, the event will feature carnival games, a moon bounce and food and drink. This year the party has a Hollywood theme and children are encouraged to dress as their favorite movie character.

Purim celebrates Esther's saving of the Jewish people of Persia by appealing to King Ahasuerus in an effort to thwart a plan by Haman, the king's adviser, to destroy them. Purim is celebrated on the 14th day of the Hebrew month Adar -- the 13th day was when the Jews were to have been exterminated.

The holiday is often marked by public recitation of the book of Esther, giving gifts and food and drink, charity to the poor and public celebration.

In Stamford, part of that public celebration will include songs like "Costume Conundrum" and "Hey Man," which plays off of the holiday villain's name.

"I wrote this music in my kitchen," Thomas says. "The feedback and response were instant. I had no idea if anyone would even get it. It makes me feel like this is what I was meant to do."

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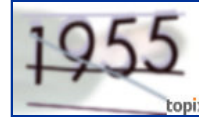
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