

Jewish Woman

JEWISH WOMEN INTERNATIONAL

Family & Lifestyle

▶ WINTER ISSUE 2008 ▶ SUBSCRIBE

Catchy Tunes

Step aside, "I Have a Little Dreidel." This year, there are some new Jewish songs on CD players and iPods, thanks to Mama Doni. Who is Mama Doni? She's Doni Zasloff Thomas, the mother of two behind the spirited and kooky Jewish songs that a growing number of children, not to mention their parents and grandparents, love groovin' to.



I Love Herring (and Other Fish Shticks for Kids), Thomas' first CD, debuted in May and features 16 songs and a foldout poster with lyrics. In the months since, she and her band have played at JCCs, synagogues and Jewish music festivals. At the International Jewish Music Festival in Amsterdam, she and the band received the Simcha Prize for Inspiring Joy Through Music.

"I want to bring back the spirit of celebration to Jewish culture," she says, "to take things that are Jewish and introduce them in a totally fun way that kids will think is cool."



Her success is reflected in lyrics that are fresh and enormously fun, tapping into Jewish humor, culture and traditions, with many Yiddish words in the mix. Her songs are lyrically ingenious. In the title song, for example, an 11-year-old girl asks if she will be able to hide her love of herring from the cute boy she meets at a bar mitzvah party, who shuns the fishy Kiddush table essential. "Could I hold on to this secret...eating spoonfuls of herring and covering it with spearmint gum?"

Thomas moves easily among musical genres, from reggae to folk to country to classic rock to klezmer. "I like to Jewify all genres of music," she explains.

A graduate of Jewish day school, she attended Brandeis and NYU, where she earned a degree in educational theater, and went on to work as creative director for a children's media company. Thomas' foray into songwriting, however, was born when Rabbi Susan Lazev, director of her children's Jewish school, heard her singing the prayers and asked her to become the school music teacher.

A flood of ideas for songs just started coming. "I didn't have a choice about the matter," she says. "I would wake up in the middle of the night with melodies in my head and had to leave myself phone messages about lyrics that came to me in the middle of the carpool line."

Just out is Mama Doni's "I Love Chanukah," a collection of four songs including "Funky Gold Menorah," downloadable digitally from www.mamadoni.com.

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Jewish Women International 2006
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Washington, DC 20036

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