

dancers to meet the production's demands.

In addition to the year-round shows, Keshet Chaim also produces concerts that bring Israeli culture to Los Angeles in the form of popular musicians such as Rita, Idan Raichel, Rami Kleinstein and David D'Or.

Benson initiated that aspect of the company in 1997 when she brought Israeli pop rock singer Yehudit Ravitz to audiences in Los Angeles. The concert was a huge success — professionally produced and well attended — and led to the company's frequent involvement in event pro-

**"To see 800 children dancing on a basketball court, shouting out parts of the song with such enthusiasm — that's powerful."**

— Cecilia Hanono

duction.

The concerts serve two purposes simultaneously: furthering Keshet's mission to present Israeli culture in the Diaspora and raising funds for the group's expenses. An additional side benefit is increasing Keshet Chaim's presence and recognition in the Jewish community.

In an altogether different sort of community involvement, Keshet Chaim has been bringing Israeli folk dancing to LAUSD schools for the past 15 years. Its educational outreach programs are headed up by Cecilia Hanono, 31, a dancer from Argentina who has been dancing with the group for five years.

In an ironic repetition of history, Hanono joined the group after Benson saw her dancing at an Israeli folk dance session run by David Dassa, Danny Dassa's son. As education director, Hanono dedicates much of her time to developing Keshet Chaim's school programs, which introduce children to Israel's culture and teach them tolerance through dance. The program has recently expanded to Jewish schools, temples and camps.

"To see 800 children dancing on a basketball court, shouting out parts of the song with such enthusiasm — that's powerful," said

Hanono, recalling a dance class she taught at Camp Ramah. "The power of folk dancing fascinates me."

"There was dancing in biblical days and Jews have danced in one form or another throughout the ages since then," Erica Goldman wrote in a recent Keshet newsletter. Goldman is a Keshet Chaim dancer who also choreographs numbers for the company and runs her own folk dance session in Los Angeles. "Today we dance both to celebrate our freedoms and communities and to remain connected to our past and our people."



Through all its various activities, the 25-year-old dance ensemble maintains one central mission: to communicate the richness of Jewish traditions through dance.

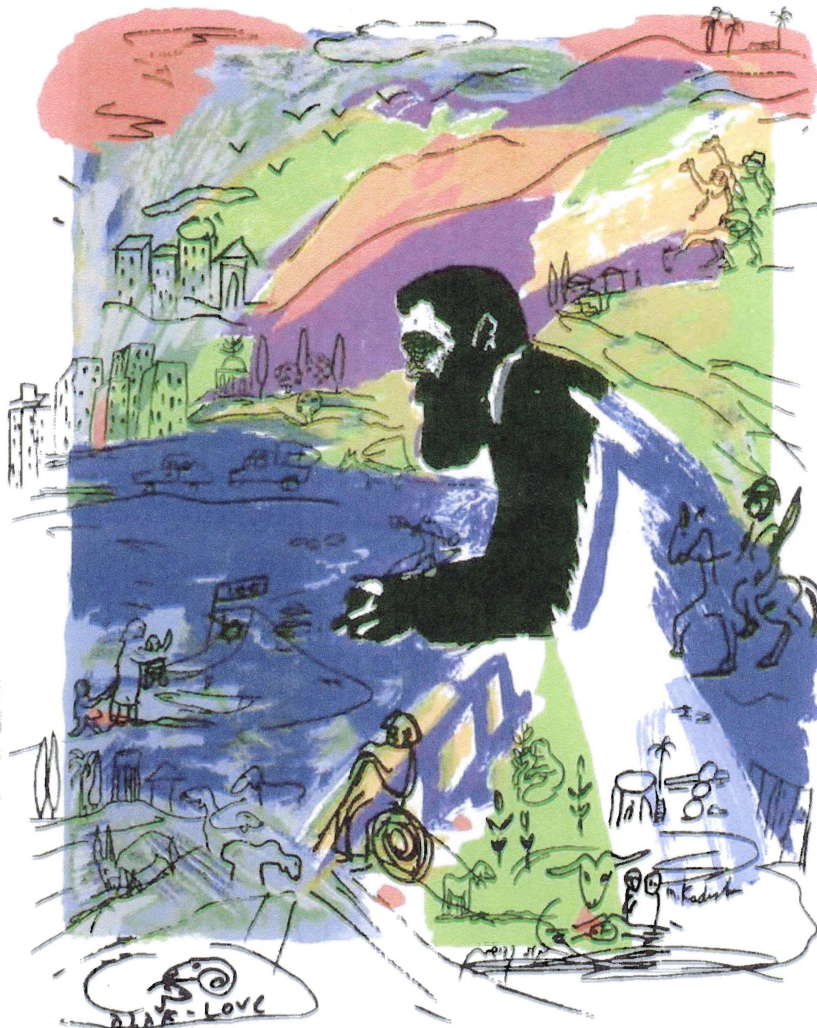
"Our heritage is so rich," said Avisar, whose creations are invariably steeped in Judaism. "It is a never-ending source of inspiration. Conceiving of something that is not related to my culture would be like asking me to step away from my Judaism. I can't do it."

Although a new generation is introducing innovative techniques and dance styles to Keshet Chaim's repertoire, Avisar hopes that his vision will not end with him.

"I have enriched the lives of my dancers through Keshet Chaim. My own life has been enriched. I hope Keshet continues to touch lives for many more years to come," he said.

*"Keshet for Life: 25th Anniversary Celebration." Sun. Feb. 1. 7 p.m. \$35-\$75. Fred Kavli Theatre, Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza, 2100 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Thousand Oaks. (818) 986-7332. <http://www.keshetchaim.org>. JF*

# From Vision to Reality



R.S.V.P.





The Consulate General of Israel in Los Angeles  
&  
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**7:30 pm**

**Cocktail Attire**



The Citizens' Empowerment  
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Barry M. Meyer- Warner Bros. Entertainment

Ron Meyer- Universal Studios

Leslie Moonves- CBS Corporation

Amy Pascal- Sony Pictures Entertainment

Summer M. Redstone - Viacom Inc. and CBS Corporation

Terry Semel- Windsor Media

### **Event Committee** (in formation)

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John Fishel

Mahnaz & Bijan Nahai

Joyce & Avi Arad

Beth & Josh Friedman

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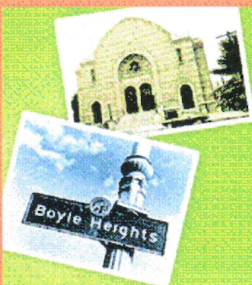
### **Arnon Milchan**



Arnon Milchan is widely renowned as one of the most prolific and successful independent film producers of the past 25 years, with over 100 feature films to his credit. His first business venture was transforming his father's modest business into one of Israel's largest agrochemical companies. This early achievement was a harbinger of Milchan's now legendary reputation in the international marketplace as a keen businessman. Arnon Milchan is a founder of New Regency Productions.

As a successful film producer, his credits include *War of the Roses*, *Pretty Woman*, *JFK*, *LA Confidential*, *Fight Club*, *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, and the list goes on. Mr. Milchan exemplifies the true spirit of tenacity and perseverance and is the model of a successful and self-made Israeli.





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Community Arts Resources:  
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[www.fiestashalom.com](http://www.fiestashalom.com)





Feb. 25, 2004

## Jewish soul in Tinseltown

By [KELLY HARTOG](#)

On February 21, hundreds of people made their way to the Scottish Rite Auditorium on Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles to see the premiere production of the California-based Israeli dance ensemble Keshet Chaim (Rainbow of Life): *Neshama - Stories of the Soul*.

Sponsored by the Tel Aviv-Los Angeles Partnership of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles and the Consulate General of Israel, the affair drew an audience that was divided fairly evenly between the local Jewish community and ex-pat Israelis.

In fact, there was more Hebrew than English spoken in the auditorium. But that's not surprising, given that almost half of the professional non-profit dance ensemble hails from Israel. As a result, the troupe of 26 dancers has garnered quite a following.

According to Keshet Chaim's founder and artistic director Eytan Avisar - an ex-pat Israeli who moved to LA to marry the woman of his dreams - the company's mission is to "express the global spirit of Judaism and Israeli culture throughout the world, and to combat prejudice and anti-Semitism through education and entertainment."

That's a pretty tall order for Tinseltown, where many contend spirituality and strong Jewish values have taken an extended vacation. But for the 60-year-old Avisar, who turned to religion 10 years ago, all his works are imbued with a deep spirituality. *Neshama* - three years in the making - reflects that.

The two-hour show is a multimedia production - a kind of Judaism by numbers - a straightforward and literal interpretation of the history of the Jews from creation to the birth of the State of Israel to the belief in the eventual coming of the Messiah. There's a sense that it's really trying to appeal to the lowest common Jewish denominator in a city full of

assimilated Jews and cynical ex-pat Israelis.

Nevertheless, Avisar remains unfazed. And the audience does indeed lap up the light and sound show, the energetic dancing - a strange combination of modern dance and Israeli folk steps - and the heartfelt but kitschy narration and its accompanying slide show.

Yet the real highlight of the performance was guest David D'Or, who has worked with Keshet on four previous occasions. He flew in for 48 hours to sing with the troupe before returning to Israel to prepare for the upcoming Eurovision song contest.

He's already a huge name in Israel and in classical music circles worldwide, and the Israelis at the show couldn't get enough of him. As if at a rock concert, massive rounds of applause broke out as D'Or sang several of his well-known ballads, including the hit "Ba Neshama."

It was actually from this song that part of the idea for Keshet's production of *Neshama* was born.

"Keshet choreographed a piece about the Jewish people with my song, and that touched me a lot," said D'Or.

"It was wonderful and exciting that they were creating the story of the people of Israel through my songs."

And as for the simplicity of Keshet's production, D'Or says he believes it's the kind of show that speaks more to the Jewish heart abroad.

"Israelis are far more cynical because of what's going on in Israel and what we're going through. But if the American Jews



Keshet Chaim gives a literal interpretation of Jewish history in 'Neshama - Stories of the Soul.'

here come away with a little bit of a sense of belonging, then that's a great thing."

Yet with or without D'Or, Keshet has clearly carved its own niche within the Los Angeles Jewish community - managing to target both the locals and the ex-pat Israelis.

Over the years, the company's works have managed to imbue its audiences with both a love of Judaism and of Israel, and they perform to critical acclaim both locally and overseas.

Avisar intends to keep creating such productions until the Messiah comes - and beyond.