

Jewish Community Voice

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Choreographer to Beyoncé brings spirited Israeli dance performance to Margate JCC

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Keshet Chaim captures the spirit of Israel.

Born just outside of Tel Aviv, 37-year-old dancer and choreographer Kobi Rozenfeld left Israel for Los Angeles in 2006 in search of fame and commercial work. He found both.

The sought-after choreographer, who will soon be visiting our community with the Keshet Chaim Dance Ensemble on March 12, has performed alongside of Beyoncé at the Grammys, helped Britney Spears make her comeback, and worked with many other pop stars worldwide.

But for Rozenfeld, the Keshet Chaim Dance Ensemble, a Los Angeles-based dance company dedicated to "showing people the culture of Israel," is family.

"Big names come and go, but family stays forever," said Rozenfeld, who became Keshet Chaim's lead choreographer and assistant artistic director shortly after arriving in Los Angeles 12 years ago.

During that time, he has also helped transform Keshet Chaim (which means "Colors of Life") from a well-loved troupe of Israeli folk dancers to a polished, professional ensemble of amazing young dancers who perform his versatile and varied choreography worldwide.

The entire community will have a rare opportunity to see this exceptional dance ensemble perform locally at the JCC in Margate on March 12 at 7:00 p.m. Tickets cost \$18 in advance and \$25 at the door. Patron tickets, which include premier seating and a post-show meet and greet with choreographer Rozenfeld and his dancers, costs \$50.

Admission for those 18 and under is free, making this performance a great opportunity for aspiring young dancers in the community, as well as for parents and grandparents wishing to expose local teens to a cultural experience rarely available so close to home.

Keshet Chaim was founded 35 years ago by another Israeli, Eytan Avisar, a seasoned Israeli folk dancer who performed on the Ed Sullivan Show and for audiences throughout Europe and North America before starting Keshet Chaim in Los Angeles. Avisar's vision was to spread the culture of Israel through

dance, touching people emotionally while providing them with a spiritually uplifting experience. Avisar is Keshet Chaim's artistic director.

Accordingly, the ensemble's dance performances include pieces that show the richness of Israeli culture and explore Jewish stories and themes through dance. Some dance pieces—like "Jerusalem of Gold" and "The Return" illustrate stories from the Torah or Jewish history; others—like "Adon Olam" and "Shir Mammalot" (Psalm 121)—express the deep feeling and emotion contained in Jewish prayers; while still others—like "Spirit of Israel"—demonstrate the exuberance of the Israeli spirit.

"Colors of Israel" will be the theme of Keshet Chaim's performance on March 12 at the Margate JCC, said the ensemble's executive director, Genie Benson. The performance will include dances that are Yemenite, Chasidic, and Middle Eastern, choreographed to Israeli music and to Jewish prayers. "It's a combination of everything that represents the culture of Israel," said Benson. The performance should be "enjoyable to all, even to people who have not seen much dance. Parts of it are beautiful, parts are fun, and parts are very entertaining," said Benson. A young Israeli-American vocalist, Ameet Kanon, will also perform.

It is the dance ensemble's unique commitment to spreading Israeli culture through dance that inspired Rozenfeld, a rising star in the world of dance and choreography, to remain dedicated to Keshet Chaim over the past 11 years. "We're very Israeli," said Rozenfeld.

Even though Rozenfeld had planned to strictly do commercial work upon arriving in the U.S., he was drawn to Keshet Chaim because it felt like home.

"It's important to spread positive feelings about Israel through dance," added Rozenfeld, who is also proud of Keshet Chaim's education program for schools. The fun, interactive program teaches kids about both dance and Israel. "It's really cool that the company isn't just [about] dancing, we're also teaching the younger generation that doesn't know a lot about Israel.

Notably, Keshet Chaim members will be doing a program at Kulanu High School of Jewish Studies the night after their JCC performance. Designed for teens, the program will incorporate drumming and hip hop.

Rozenfeld and the 14 Keshet Chaim dancers who will be performing at the JCC have been brought to our community through the joint efforts of the Jewish Federation of Atlantic and Cape May Counties, Congregation Beth Israel, and the JCC in Margate. According to Kirk Wisemayer, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Atlantic & Cape May Counties, this special event is one of many being planned to celebrate and highlight Israel's upcoming 70th birthday.