

Jewish Folk Dance in Bolshoi

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Everything looked normal under the columns of the main entrance of the Moscow Bolshoi Theater — a full house, lots of people eager for tickets and scalpers asking for \$15, which is a lot for Moscow.

But the performance inside was a departure for the Bolshoi. Through its 200-year history, the Bolshoi has been famous for classical ballet and opera, but it was also the scene where Lenin and Trotsky spoke to ardent revolutionary crowds and Stalin greeted mass gatherings of his secret police officers during the great purges of the 1930s.

The sight of numerous bearded Chabad-Lubavitch rabbis in the VIP boxes, instead of party leaders or presidents of the states, watching Jewish dancing and singing, was very unusual, even for the Bolshoi.

Huge background images of Chagall's Israeli Knesset goblins with their flying and meditating Byelorussian *shtetl* Jews added to the unreality of what was going on in the theater.

Solomon Mikoel International Art Festival, organized by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, featured dance, vocal and musical performances by 500 Russian, Israeli, U.S., French and

to the rest of the world. The group, a pioneer in the development of Jewish dance, has performed across the U.S., and traveled to Mexico, Australia, Spain and elsewhere.

Michail Gluz, the general



Dancers from the Los Angeles-based Keshet Chaim performed at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow Sept. 19 during a weeklong festival of Jewish culture.



Hundreds of descendants of those Chagall Jews who stayed in Russia were sitting in the parterre and the boxes, while other descendants of the same Jews who fled Russia were performing Israeli folk dances before them on stage.

Sixteen dancers from Keshet Chaim, the L.A.-based contemporary dance troupe, performed Tues., Sept. 19, at the Bolshoi in the opening gala concert of a weeklong festival of Jewish arts and culture in Moscow. The Third Annual

their disapproval of Jewish girls dancing in public. But Eytan Avisar, the artistic director of the ensemble, says the troupe has generally good relations with Chabad. Moreover, the troupe and he personally are inspired by the Chassidic traditional dance, he said.

An Israeli who moved to the U.S., Avisar can devote only part of his time to the troupe. He views his mission, and that of the ensemble, to express and bring the global spirit of Judaism and the Jewish culture

Austrian artists.

Amidst the enthusiastic reaction of the crowd, some Chabad rabbis left their places in the boxes when the group was dancing on the stage — probably to show

director of the Mikoel Festival, who became a pioneer in the development of Jewish culture in post-Communist Russia in the late 1980s, met the troupe in Israel last year. Gluz, a musician, composer and producer who has always had a sense of a mission to spread Jewish culture and explore its multiethnic roots, immediately knew they had to work together.

Genie Benson, the director of the troupe, says the dancers, including herself, were a little hesitant at first to step on the stage where world-famous Russian ballet-star Maya Plisetskaya danced. But Plisetskaya, the queen of the Bolshoi and an ethnic Jew, would most probably have felt as happy as the hundreds of Muscovites watching Jewish boys and girls from L.A. performing a Chassidic dance. ■