

KESHET CHAIM DANCE ENSEMBLE/ADAM BASMA MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE COMPANY

The Middle East peace plan may be signed, but implementation has been characterized by frustrating cycles of advances, setbacks and stalled negotiations. In the shadow of the on-again-off-again official governmental rapprochement, encouragement can be found in cultural and social contacts such as this weekend's ambitious collaboration by two dance companies — one Arab, one Israeli (pictured are members of both troupes). Both are devoted to preservation of their respective traditional dance and extending it into contemporary forms. For this concert, entitled "Debka for Peace," Keshet Chaim Dance Ensemble and Adam Basma Middle Eastern Dance Company have collaborated to explore the shared roots of the Debka, a line dance for men that appears in both Arab and Israeli cultures. Arabic in origin, the Debka developed in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon as a dance to fertilize the land and celebrate a good harvest, but now appears at other festivities including weddings or the birth of a child. Israelis adopted and adapted the basic Debka into their own distinctive version. Since 1983, Keshet Chaim, which translates as Rainbow of Life, has captured Jewish spirit and culture in dances from Israel and the Jewish Diaspora in an effort to combat racial prejudice and anti-Semitism. Led by Eytan Avisar, the 18-member troupe has toured internationally and represented L.A. in Israel's major folk-dance festivals. The Adam Basma Middle Eastern Dance Company specializes in Arabic dance from countries stretching across North Africa to the Arabian peninsula. The 30-member ensemble marks its 20th anniversary this year. This admirable cooperative effort to explore similarities and respect differences may be far from the formal negotiating table but generates local understanding as well as momentum for the larger Middle East peace process. At Cal State Northridge, New Performing Arts Center, 18111 Nordhoff St.; Sat., Feb. 26, 8:30 p.m.; Sun., Feb. 27, 2 p.m. & 7:30 p.m.; \$75-\$20. (818) 677-2488 or 784-0344.

—Ann Haskins

