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SOUTHWEST Jewish Press

Dance group builds bridges to local high school students

By Ari L. Noonan

In a world where bridge sellers badly outnumber bridge builders, a dance company of Americans and Israelis will try to make the score a little closer next Sunday, Oct. 8, at Van Nuys High School.

The popular Keshet Chaim Ensemble will seek to show hundreds of Hispanics, black and other non-Jewish children — for the first time — that the mysterious tradition of Judaism can be interpreted through entrancing artful performance.

This is the first of several visits that Keshet Chaim will be making throughout the school district to demonstrate that Judaism has a fascinating dimension apart from scenes of exotic-looking men, draped in a *tallis*, praying from a book containing information accessible only to Talmudic scholars.

The matinee program at Van Nuys High starts at 2 p.m., and before the afternoon is over, says Genie Benson of Keshet Chaim, students who know less about Judaism than they do about Hebrew will catch the fever and be singing Israeli songs along with the performers.

"Our message," says Benson, "is to build bridges by teaching Judaism through the arts" to both children and adults.

Keshet Chaim, which will be joined by the extraordinary talented entertainer Sam Glaser, form a company that figures to be a refreshing departure for the Valley students and their families. The audience will be familiar with Christian tradition, which is *not* known for being interpreted on stage.

How do you get non-Jews to attend a Jewish program?

One way is to include performers with whom the students are familiar, such as the Van Nuys High Vocal Ensemble, the Valeria Street Chorus and the Coldwater Canyon Elementary School Chorus.

Keshet Chaim, a 20-member troupe that was organized a dozen years ago, has entertained around the world, interpreting the Jewish influence from Biblical times to today.

Keshet Chaim means "Rainbow of Life," a theme that should resonate for students from Grant High, Van Nuys High and several grammar schools who have been invited.

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Tickets cost \$5. Information is available through Keshet Chaim, (818) 784-0344.

The performance has been underwritten in part by the Milken Family Foundation and the Culture Affairs Department of the City of Los Angeles.