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U.S. dancers open Arad song festival

By BEN LYNFIELD
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ARAD – The Keshet Hayim dance group from Los Angeles gave a striking performance at the opening of the Arab-Hebrew Song Festival here last night.

Decked out in colourful Middle Eastern-style clothing, the 20 dancers enchanted thousands of spectators with a spirited performance of their original dance, "The Oriental Suite."

The number, combining elements of Israeli, Arab and shepherd-style music, was specially choreographed for the group's trip to Israel, which began with a performance in Carmiel last week.

"We are very happy to be here to try to lift up everyone's spirits. It is important that people here don't get too depressed about the political situation," said Eytan Avisar, the group's choreographer.

The Los Angeles dancers were joined by talented groups from New York, Boston and Vancouver.

The music festival is expected to draw a record 70,000 spectators to Arad over the next three days, according to Arad Mayor Avraham Shokhat.

The festival is part of the larger El Hanegev festival, which includes a rock concert at Massada today and a "Songs from the Third World" festival in Park Eshkol near Ofakim tonight.

In Arad, festivities will continue this morning with the "international hot-air balloon goodwill fiesta" featuring aviators from 15 countries.