

Valley festival samples diversity of Jewish culture

By Janet Weeks
Daily News Staff Writer

The rich diversity of Jewish culture will be celebrated Sunday at a fair billed to be the biggest of its kind west of Chicago.

The Valley Jewish Festival at Pierce College promises to have hundreds of food and information booths, dancers, music, rides for children and an awards presentation featuring Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan.

Organizers are expecting a crowd of at least 40,000.

"The purpose is for people to come and see what is available in the Jewish community," said Dan Shuster of the Jewish Federation's San Fernando Valley Alliance, sponsor of the event. "They come and mingle and sit outdoors and have fun."

The festival is also meant to be a day of cultural pride.

"No matter what kind of Jew you are, be proud you're Jewish and have a wonderful Jewish experience at the festival," Shuster said.

Entertainment at the fair will range from the Pacoima Gospel Choir to Keshet Chaim, an American-Israeli contemporary dance troupe. Other acts include the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony and Laurie Rubin, a 16-year-old singer from Encino whose voice has been compared to Barbra Streisand.

"It'll be kind of eclectic and really

represent the pluralism in Jewish art and Jewish culture," said Neal Brostoff, entertainment co-chairman.

Although similar fairs have been held at Pierce College in the past, this is the first festival to tie together all segments of Jewish culture, Shuster said.

In 1991 and 1993, the federation's San Fernando Valley branch sponsored Exodus Festivals aimed at bringing Eastern European immigrants into the fold of the Valley Jewish community.

This festival will incorporate elements of Askenazic and Sephardic Jewish culture, especially in the area of entertainment, Brostoff said.

"We've been a wandering people and a very musical people, so we have soaked up all kinds of music from all over the world," he said.

But many Jews living here probably don't recognize the diversity of the community, he said. The festival is an attempt to open ears to new Jewish sounds.

"We're very Yiddish-centric here because that's the dominant Jewish culture in Los Angeles. So if music doesn't sound like music of Eastern Europe, we don't relate it to being Jewish."

Shuster estimates that there are 300,000 Jews living in the Southland. He said the festival aims to introduce these scattered segments to others who have much in common.

"We're doing it because there is a need for it," he said.



Keshet Chaim, an American-Israeli contemporary dance troupe, will perform at Sunday's Valley Jewish Festival in Woodland Hills.

The festival is scheduled from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the Pierce College campus, 6201 Winnetka Ave.,

Woodland Hills. Admission is \$4 for adults, \$1 for seniors and children under 12.

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The schedule of entertainment events:

■ 10 a.m.: The festival opens with the singing of pop artist Sam Glaser.

■ 11 a.m.: Sephardic singer Isabelle Ganz of Houston accompanied by John Bilezikjian on the oud.

■ Noon: Keshet Chaim Dance Ensemble.

■ 12:30 p.m.: Sixteen-year-old singer Laurie Rubin will perform a variety of show tunes and traditional Yiddish songs.

■ 1 p.m.: Presentations to community leaders and festival organizers.

■ 2:30 p.m.: Los Angeles Jewish Symphony and the Pacoima Gospel Choir.