

IN THE NEWS
Olmert to build Israeli government

President Moshe Katsav asked Ehud Olmert on Thursday to form Israel's next government. The endorsement cleared the way for Olmert to negotiate with other parties on a governing coalition.

"I hope to form a government with the broadest possible support as quickly as possible," the Kadima Party head told reporters.

Darfur bill passes House

The Reform movement praised lawmakers for passing the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed the measure Wednesday, imposing sanctions against individuals responsible for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sudan.

The legislation also supports the protection of civilians and humanitarian operations, and peace efforts in the region.

The Senate already passed the bill in November.

Human rights record 'poor' for Israel, P.A.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority had poor human rights records in the West Bank and Gaza Strip last year, the U.S. State Department said.

The grades came Wednesday in a report on U.S. support for human rights and democracy around the world.

The P.A. grade was "due in part to the government's failure to fully establish control of public security, including insufficient measures to prevent attacks on targets within the occupied territories and in Israel by Palestinian terrorist groups, which operated with impunity," the report said. Israel's poor record was "due in part to actions by Israeli soldiers and settlers that resulted in death and injury to Palestinian civilians."

WORLD REPORT

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Sue Fishkoff

Two-year-olds play at Gan Yeladim, a preschool run by Chabad-Lubavitch in Stamford, Conn.

Get 'em while they're young: Preschools get first crack at families

By SUE FISHKOFF

OAKLAND, Calif. (JTA) — Fact: Teaching torah to toddlers can lead to a lifetime of Jewish learning. Fact: Jewish preschools serve as a gateway to Jewish life for the whole family. Fact: Jewish preschools are bursting at the seams.

Yet despite these realities, borne out by research, Jewish preschools are the poor cousins in the Jewish educational family.

Teachers are paid poorly — \$19,400 is an average salary, according to one recent report — and few young Jews are going into the field. Job prestige is low and communal support is lackluster. Preschools are the only formal educational venue that is not a direct recipient of Jewish federation dol-

lars, according to a 2002 report of the Jewish Early Childhood Education Partnership.

Preschool directors around the country report that resources are being squeezed even as classrooms are bursting with new children.

More than 1,000 schools across the United States educate some 122,500 children, a number which has doubled in the past decade.

Still, changing the name from "preschool" to "early childhood education center" — as many are doing to emphasize that there's nothing "pre" about meeting the developmental needs of 2- to 5-year-olds — hasn't done much to raise the

profile of a field that many people still think of as glorified baby-sitting.

In addition, say a growing number of ex-

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**BEYOND
TORAH
FOR TOTS**

Jewish preschools are the poor cousins in the Jewish educational family

Continued from page 1

perts, a tremendous outreach opportunity is being squandered.

The Jewish community is trying hard to find unaffiliated Jews and bring them in, but it is paying "scant attention" to the preschool families already in the system, says Pearl Beck, director of "Jewish Preschools as Gateways to Jewish Life," another 2002 study funded by the Jewish Early Childhood Education Partnership. JECEP was a temporary organization created to study and advocate for increased attention to preschools.

The lack of commitment to the world of early childhood education is insulting, wrong and self-defeating, say experts in the field.

Their view is supported by a spate of recent studies that show that Jewish early childhood education not only influences the future course of a child's Jewish development; it can have a profound impact on the Jewish behavior and practice of the entire family.

Rabbi Ed Feinstein, the senior rabbi at Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, Calif., acknowledged both the lack of respect for — and the vital role of — Jewish educators at a recent gathering of Reform teachers and directors.

"You're the first adult outside the family a child bonds with, the first professional that will encounter these young families," Feinstein told the 150 women gathered in San Diego earlier this year for the annual conference of the Early Childhood Educators of Reform Judaism.

"Your responsibility is much more than the child, it's to teach the family how to be a family, a Jewish family. That's your sacred responsibility."

Ilene Vogelstein, special projects director in the early childhood department of the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education, known as CAJE, goes even further.

"The early childhood experience, as the start of Jewish practices at home and the understanding of Jewish values, is the gateway for the family to move into future Jewish experiences," she says.

The snowball effect is overwhelming, the research shows: Parents of children in Jewish preschools are more likely to join a synagogue; they are more likely to enroll in adult education courses; and they often begin lighting Shabbat candles and celebrating Jewish holidays at home because of what their kids learn in the classroom.

Conversely, Jewish families with children in non-sectarian preschools tell researchers they celebrate fewer Jewish holidays and feel less involved Jewishly.

Take Sarah Ritthaler's family. Her 5-year-old son, Daniel, attends preschool at the Osher Marin Jewish Community Center in San Rafael, Calif. Ritthaler's husband is not Jewish, and a condition of their marriage was that she be allowed to raise the children Jewishly.

"The impact has been profound," she says of her son's preschool experience.

"My husband didn't know what a sukkah was, and now he's building one in the yard because Daniel at 3 years old came home and said, 'Where's the sukkah?'"

The family also now celebrates Shabbat every Friday evening.

"We live on a Jewish calendar because of this place," Ritthaler says, holding her son in her lap as his teacher shows the class a chart of the Hebrew months.

"What gives me chills is our son identifying as a Jew. People say, why spend the money at this age? But I'm seeing before my eyes the unfolding of a Jewish soul."

The latest findings on the impact of Jewish preschools, about to be released by the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Edu-

cation of Greater Philadelphia, surprised even those who directed the study, according to Helene Tigay, the group's executive director.

The study surveyed parents of 4- and 5-year-olds at 25 of the 48 preschools in the greater Philadelphia area. Among the key findings from the

218 survey forms that were returned:

- 70 percent said they are now more aware of the Jewish calendar;
- 41 percent said they starting lighting Shabbat candles;
- 27 percent have begun attending synagogue services;

• 62 percent said that engaging in observances that included their children is "more of a priority;"

• 51 percent indicated they are "more aware" of positive feelings about being Jewish; and

• 93 percent said they plan to send their children for further Jewish schooling.

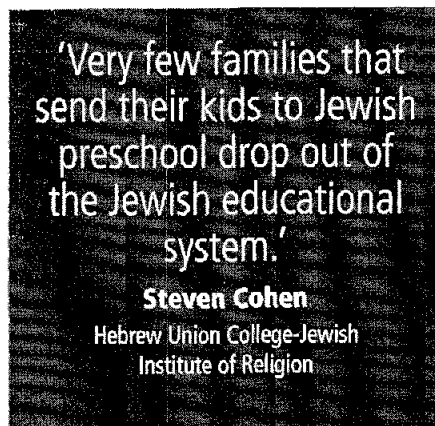
The 2002 "Gateways" study by the Jewish Early Childhood Education Partnership, which interviewed parents of preschoolers at JCCs and Reform and Conservative congregations in Detroit, Chicago and Baltimore, found similar results.

Nearly 70 percent claimed they were doing "something different" in terms of Jewish observance or lifestyle, and had an "increased interest" in Jewish education as well as an "enhanced sense" of Jewish community.

The impact on the children themselves is equally dramatic. Kids who go to Jewish preschool have a higher chance of remaining Jewishly involved throughout their lives, says sociologist Steven Cohen of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

In an analysis of the early childhood education data from the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey, directed by the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group of North American federations, Cohen found that more than 40 percent of Jewish children who go to Jewish preschool continue on to Jewish day school.

He also found that 86 percent of Jewish preschoolers go on to day schools, supple-



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mental Hebrew school and/or Jewish camp.

While preschool doesn't necessarily convince parents to continue a child's Jewish education — they might have done that anyway — Cohen says the linkage is clear.

"Very few families that send their kids to Jewish preschool drop out of the Jewish educational system," says Cohen, who analyzed the data for a December 2005 report for the Avi Chai Foundation, which supports Jewish education.

Rabbi Josh Elkin, executive director of the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, a group focused on day-school education that is looking at the links between day schools and preschools, says that it is clear from research how profound an effect early childhood education can have on a child in general.

While there is a lack of hard data on the Jewish programs, he says, anecdotal evidence shows "there is a lot of hard-wiring of Jewish identity and Jewish values that takes place in many Jewish early childhood programs."

When Fred and Allison Greenbaum moved to Stamford, Conn., they chose their home because it was close to one of the city's best public schools.

But after their oldest son, Richie, spent two and a half years in the Gan Yeladim nursery school run by Chabad-Lubavitch of Stamford, they decided to send him to a non-denominational community day school.

It was obvious, Allison Greenbaum says, that he wanted to be in a Jewish environment.

"We started him in the public school, but he was drawing pictures of boys with kippahs, and he'd point to mountains and say, look, that's Har Sinai," the mountain where the Bible says Moses received the 10 Commandments.

"I saw it was so much a part of him, so much he had enjoyed and was now missing — the singing, the traditions."

If he hadn't gone to preschool, she says, "day school wouldn't have even been on our radar."

In addition, the family, who was totally unaffiliated, has joined a local Conservative congregation and Allison Greenbaum now sits on the board of the local federation.

The preschool connection is particularly important among non-Orthodox families, who are, experts say, less likely to continue their child's Jewish education than Orthodox parents.

Preschool does not greatly influence the

Jewish behavior of most Orthodox families, says Rabbi Moshe Krupka, national executive director of the Orthodox Union. Since Orthodox families are already observant and affiliated, preschool complements a Jewish home life and "sets the foundation for a lifelong pursuit of Jewish knowledge and practice," he says.

According to CAJE figures in 2004, of the 122,500 children in Jewish preschools, nearly 104,000 are Jewish. According to CAJE figures, one in four Jews under the age of 6 attend a Jewish preschool.

While different studies give different numbers for the under-6 Jewish population in the United States, experts in the field generally cite the CAJE figure of 430,000.

Of the Jewish children in Jewish preschools, 29,000 are in Orthodox schools. Nearly 75,000 are in Conservative, Reform, JCC and other community-run preschools. Many, if not most, of those families are unaffiliated; many observe few if any Jewish rituals at home.

But despite the increased interest and connection to Jewish life that families of preschoolers display, the organized Jewish world isn't following up on that interest, say those involved in the field.

"Unfortunately, and it continues to baffle me, many of the Jewish institutions — the philanthropists, the federations — only see a 2-year-old, they don't see the family," says Vogelstein of CAJE. "It's a package deal. What we do in early childhood programs will have an impact, in a positive or negative way, on the entire family."

Preschools are a great way to reach the key 20- and 30-something demographic that the Jewish community is trying so hard to engage, says Tigay of the Auerbach agency.

"Early childhood education is the ultimate opportunity to reach young Jewish adults," she says. "You don't have to go to bars to reach them. Their kids are in Jewish nursery schools."

The history of Jewish preschools in America show how things have changed. A handful of preschools were set up in the 1930s to provide working mothers with day care for their children. Those early schools were non-denominational, communal schools, focused more on integrating the children of Jewish immigrants into American culture than instilling Jewish identity, which it was assumed they would get at home.

The first Orthodox and Conservative preschools appeared in the late 1940s and early 1950s, followed later by Reform preschools, says Rena Rotenberg, founder of

the early childhood department for Baltimore's board of Jewish education.

The preschool at Temple Beth Hillel-Beth El in the Philadelphia suburb of Wynnewood, was set up 45 years ago by young parents who "wanted play opportunities for their children in a Jewish setting," says director Ann Altus. "The goals were different than today — it was to serve members' needs."

Today, when people live far apart rather than in the close-knit Jewish neighborhoods of their grandparents, preschools can fill an important community-building function, she says.

Young Jewish parents develop social circles with other parents from their kids' preschools, and that often leads to greater Jewish community involvement. "People want to connect with others like themselves," Altus says.

Early Jewish childhood education experts agree that while a lot more resources need to be invested in bolstering early childhood education and cultivating the families involved, the situation has recently begun to improve.

"The whole field has been elevated significantly in the past three to five years," says Steve Kraus, director of day school, congregational and communal education initiatives at JESNA, the federation system's organization focused on Jewish education.

Indeed, more Jewish colleges are offering early childhood certification and degrees, and more preschools are obtaining national accreditation. There are new funding initiatives, such as the Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative, which is running a pilot program to help reach out to Jewish families, and Project Kavod, a joint project of CAJE and the Miami federation, which last year researched work conditions for preschool teachers in southern Florida.

The Reform and Conservative movements have hired national coordinators for their preschools in the past few years. And three years ago, the Early Childhood Educators of Reform Judaism became the first professional organization for Jewish preschool teachers and directors.

Cathy Rolland, president of that organization, says 10 years ago she was making \$20,000 a year as a preschool director. Today, she says, directors in the larger schools can make \$75,000, and almost all of them have been brought into the Reform movement's pension plan.

"Now we're fighting to get pensions for our teachers," she says.

Prague undergoes matzah metamorphosis

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — An anonymous source breathes heavily on the other end of the receiver, softly intoning that the only way to get the goods is from an inside contact.

Through friends, I discretely discover my intermediary, who leads me through several dark corridors for an encounter with an angry man.

His gruffness is unmistakable: He is the Czech version of the infamous “soup Nazi” from “Seinfeld,” a man so demanding of his customers that he would ban them for life if they showed any signs of sauciness. I am trembling, fearing that if I cross him, all is lost.

The problem is, I don’t want the whole box; I don’t need that much. This angers my ersatz dealer.

“Well then what DO you want?” he asks, irritated.

I make a pathetic gesture indicating that I will take half. He sniffs disapprovingly, but cajoled by a front woman, he surrenders.

For the final score, I have to come back in a few hours, go deep into a Prague basement, find a waiter whom I only know by first name, and pay an exorbitant amount for the rest of my booty.

It’s all very hush-hush, and of course, Kafkaesque. And it’s not cocaine or heroine I am trying to obtain, although I feel as if embroiled in the drug deal of the century.

It’s matzah I’m after, plus gefilte fish, and for years this is the kind of ordeal one had to go through if one was in Prague for Passover and was not a member of the Prague Jewish community.

And this was the best of times, meaning the matzah was there and I was able to buy it.

The great matzah hunts of years past reflected the growing pains of a tiny Jewish community in a post-Communist country, where the availability of kosher foods was severely limited and foreigners were long kept at arm’s length.

This year, the rumor is, everything has changed.

There is a new community board, a new rabbinical presence, and the matzah, like the freedom it represents, will now reportedly be available to all.

But before I put that to the test, some reflections on past panic-stricken searches

for unleavened bread. In my first Passover in Prague, 2002, I called a rabbi who works outside of the official community, Ron Hoffberg, formerly of New Jersey, now the representative of Conservative Jewry in the Czech Republic.

He laughed at my naiveté. “Matzah? Get real. They don’t sell it here at the stores and the community has it, but it’s only for the community.”

I had no idea what that meant. I am a Jew, why can’t I buy matzah?

A Czech coworker confirmed Hoffberg’s warning. I was doomed to a matzah-less Passover, along with the other foreign Jews in Prague.

But that was a different time, when the community of some 1,500 was so inwardly focused that tourists’ knocks on the door of its headquarters were often met with a harsh rebuffs.

“Go away, this is not the museum,” was the retort I once got from the guard of the beautiful Baroque building in the heart of Prague’s Old Town. I thought he would hit me with a fly swatter.

Fast forward to 2006, and I have decided that I am finally going to get to the bottom of this matzah mischief. But it looks like someone got there before me.

“It was not so open, the way things were done, and now it’s all over and everyone can get matzah, as well as lots of other kosher stuff, we have a fully stocked store,” says the cheerful Rabbi Menachem Kalcheim, an Israeli assistant to the country’s chief rabbi, Karel Sidon.

Kalcheim is beloved by foreigners for not only his warmth, but the fact that he speaks English and is interested in the needs of all Jews.

Kalcheim explains that for years, the community was afraid to sell to outsiders because as a non-profit organization it would take a loss if it overbought.

As for stores, a spokeswoman for Tesco, the leading purveyor of foreign imports in Prague, explained that although it had stocked matzah about six years ago, it didn’t sell very well, so the store stopped buying it.

“We are producing brochures in English for the guards to give out for inquiring tourists,” said Kalcheim. “And if we run out of

PASSOVER FEATURE



Dinah A. Spritzer/JTA

Elisheva Dina Novakova of the Prague Jewish Community helps foreigners and natives alike find Passover goodies at the community’s kosher store.

matzah, well, we’ll just run to Vienna to get more, no problem.”

He even has an English-speaking assistant at the rabbinate to take calls from matzah-hunting tourists. It sounds too good to be true.

As it turns out, on the day of reckoning, Monday, the security guards are ready for all matzah seekers, shyly smiling and pointing them to the refurbished community store.

It’s still only a corner with some closets, but now there is a frozen section with enough chicken and beef to keep a kosher refrigerator well-stocked.

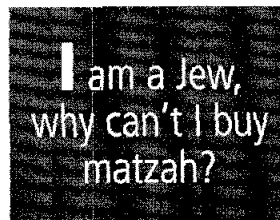
The attendant is sweet and can offer matzah packages for \$2 each, as well as gefilte fish.

Kalcheim says that the community will subsidize the cost for families, as the country’s average monthly salary is \$700.

While my matzah purchase was pleasantly painless, my other long-dreamt treasure, macaroons, were sold out, although Kalcheim insists I take his.

And so it begins all over again, the furtive calls to the Chabad rabbi to get my score.

Will he take pity on me? Probably. Because as an American, he is one of few people in the Czech Republic who even know what a macaroon is.



Seder reinvented for bored kids

By JANE ULMAN

ENCINO, Calif. (JTA) — At this year's Passover seder, during the singing of "Dayenu," Noah Kussin-Bordo will rise, gather up a pair of maracas and take his place as head of the Dayenu Band. His younger cousins, with their tambourines, kazoos and hand-held drums, will follow as he leads them around the dining and living rooms, marching and singing, while the grownups remain seated.

"We know that when 'Dayenu' comes, we actually have something to do," said Noah, 11.

Children like Noah and his cousins, who normally get bored during sedarim, are taking increasingly participatory roles at seders as families like the Kusins, who live in Northridge, Calif., devise activities for the kids.

These activities help entice children who may be bored if they are only called upon to read the Four Questions and steal the Afikomen. Now they are playing with wind-up toy frogs, staving off hunger pains with edible centerpieces, making Hillel sandwiches from mounds of pyramid-shaped charoset and competing in Wheel of Matzah games.

"The real purpose of the seder is to re-enact the story, but people need permission to do other than the model we grew up with," said Ron Wolfson, education professor at Los Angeles' University of Judaism and author of "Passover: The Family Guide to Spiritual Celebration."

Family educator Alice Langholt has been using her own Haggadah at her seders in Cleveland since 1999. For the plagues, she sets each place with items such as Band-Aids and Neosporin to represent boils, sunglasses for darkness and toy cows for pestilence. At the appropriate time, guests are given construction paper and crayons and instructed to draw a representation of their plague, which they then explain to the group.

For the 10th plague, the slaying of the first-born, Langholt asks all the first-born guests to rise and recite a passage from "A Common Road to Freedom," an alternative, Jewish/black Haggadah, which begins, "Each drop of wine we pour out is hope and prayer that people will cast out the plagues that threaten everyone everywhere they are found."

It may seem that balancing tradition with innovation is a modern phenomenon, perhaps traced back as far as the Matzah of Hope introduced in the 1970s to draw attention to the plight of the Soviet Jews. But New York author and Jewish researcher David

Arnow says that "this really reaches back to what the original designers of the seder

had in mind."

What can be construed as the earliest Haggadah, dating back 1,800 years to the

Mishnah, contains some fixed rituals such as drinking four glasses of wine, reclining and eating bitter herbs and matzah. But it also includes some ad-libbing. The child, while not required to recite the Four Questions, was expected to pose other questions throughout the seder.

The father would then answer those questions with a midrash or explanation that was adjusted to the child's level of understanding.

"Over the generations, the spontaneous parts became prescribed," said Arnow, author of "Creating Lively Passover Seders." "Where we are now is trying to recreate the balance with seders that are meaningful and engaging and yet tied to the roots."

And it's not only some younger children who need to be drawn in. To grab the attention of teenagers, Rabbi Mark Fasman of Shaare Zedek Synagogue in St. Louis, bought a deep fryer and held a "burgers and fries" second seder for his then-adolescent son and cousins.

In Los Angeles, Sara Aftergood has been captivating her guests with innovative seders for the past 20 years, originally motivated by wanting to reinforce her children's Jewish day school studies.

One of her recent institutions occurs at the seder's conclusion, around midnight. Bringing out a silver platter, she distributes to her 40 costume-clad guests seder fortune cookies, consisting of two long, broken pieces of matzah containing a phrase and tied with ribbon. Guests then take turns reading their fortunes. They range from quotes from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel about the importance of learning Torah, to "Isn't the hostess pretty?" and "I simply insist on staying to clean up this mess."

But Wolfson and other educators emphasize that none of these activities are designed to replace the actual reading of the Haggadah. Rather, they recommend that families use them to punctuate the reading. ■

PASSOVER FEATURE

'We know that when "Dayenu" comes, we actually have something to do.'
Noah Kussin-Bordo, 11



Courtesy of Sara Aftergood

Hostess Sara Aftergood explains the 'Plates of Seder,' the proper plates and utensils to use for each course at her Los Angeles seder.

Israeli hip-hop violinist makes it big

By LOOLWA KHAZZOOM

BERKELEY, Calif. (JTA) — She played at the Super Bowl in Detroit in early February and she was the featured performer at a Hillary Clinton campaign event in New York just three weeks later. She's the poster child for Reebok's "I Am What I Am" campaign, and she's got her own television show in the works.

After several years playing violin behind hip-hop and pop stars like Kanye West and Jay-Z, Britney Spears and Mariah Carey, Grammy award winner Miri Ben-Ari — a nice Jewish girl from Israel turned gangsta violinist from New York — is stepping into the limelight, determined to become a household name.

"I want to bring music back," says Ben-Ari, 27. "In an era where everything is music samples, I'm representing a movement that's turning to live music again."

With performances integrating classical and R&B, jazz and gangsta rap, klezmer and dancehall, Ben-Ari has managed to bring high-brow musicianship to the street level, inspiring scores of American youth to bang out today's chart-topping tunes on the once-nerdy violin.

"Miri has taken a classical instrument, the violin, and changed people's perception of how they see it," says Que Gaskins, vice president of global marketing for Reebok. "She's made it very cool. There is a subtlety that parallels what we're doing with our products."

The daughter of professional musicians, Ben-Ari grew up as a classically trained violinist in Israel — where, as a child prodigy, she caught the attention of virtuoso Isaac Stern.

When Ben-Ari was 12, Stern's foundation presented her with a violin, which she used to win one music competition after another. Yet she never felt particularly moved by the classical music she was playing.

"The whole time in my classical journey, I knew I wasn't going to be a classical violinist — I wasn't feeling the orchestra thing," Ben-Ari recalls.

"I always wanted to improvise," she continues, excitement growing in her voice as she remembers. "One of the best moments of my classical career was doing chamber music with kids in Jerusalem. My favorite part was where they let us

fake something, make up something. The improvisation stuff got me crazy — being creative. Other than that, I don't have a lot of recollections of amazing moments of my classical stage."

After serving in the Israeli army, Ben-Ari decided to move to New York, where she had been granted a scholarship at Mannes College of Music. The decision struck her parents as another typical act from their rebellious daughter.

"They didn't get what I was doing," she says. "I said I was going to the USA to study jazz. My dad said, 'You'll have no future.' I was in tears."

Armed with a violin, high-school English and determination, Ben-Ari headed to the Big Apple in 1998. Hustling gigs to pay the rent, she found herself unable to attend classes at Mannes, and she was kicked out of school within a year. Still, she kept playing.

"If I walked into a club and there was a stage, I'd pull out my violin and play. If there was no stage, I'd still play," she recalls. "I always believed that if I played a lot in front of audiences, at first I'd get my ass kicked again and again, but then I'd get better. When you perform in front of an audience, and you don't do well, you go home and practice all day. Then go out and get your ass kicked again."

Ultimately her persistence paid off: After working the scene and getting to know musicians, Ben-Ari was invited to perform at a WBLS radio party in New York with leading industry professionals. When she arrived, she was asked to play — with no jazz band in sight.

"I was like, no, man, what am I going to do, a violin solo?" Ben-Ari recalls. "Back in the day I was a jazz musician, I wanted the rhythm section."

Noticing a DJ on the stage, she decided to try something new.

"You have to trust me, it's hot, I've done this a million times," Ben-Ari lied to the DJ. "Just flip records behind me, go crazy."

Unfamiliar with hip-hop at the time, Ben-Ari had no idea what the DJ was playing.

"There I am with a violin and he's playing the best of hip-hop, and I'm playing along. I'm thinking, 'This s-t is so hot,' I'm getting into it myself, improvising," she recalls.

Eyes closed, Ben-Ari thought a fight had broken out when the crowd began screaming. Actually, they were hollering for her — a sound she would quickly get used to. After her gutsy act that night, Ben-Ari was invited to perform with hip-hop artist Wyclef Jean at Carnegie Hall, where thousands of fans went crazy; at the Apollo Theater, where the audience was so worked up they named her an Apollo Legend; and on 106 & Park, a hip-hop show on Black Entertainment Television, where there was such an onslaught of fan mail that BET brought her back within weeks.

Hip-hop mogul Jay Z saw one of her performances and asked Ben-Ari to be one of three featured artists at the hip-hop Summer Jam event — where she received a standing ovation from 20,000 audience

members.

"I was a nobody," Ben-Ari chuckles, "but I had the second feature, after Missy Elliot."

Today Ben-Ari receives a deluge of fan mail, mostly from youth who began studying violin because of her. Taking advantage of her impact on kids, Reebok expects the dynamic Ben-Ari to create a buzz for its brand.

"Through research we found that youth respect brands and products that are authentic and speak to something real," Gaskins says.

"They are all struggling with the question, 'Who am I?' They want to fit in but stand out too."

As a pioneer violinist with celebrity status, Ben-Ari does both at once, he says, making her the perfect magnet for the youth market.

Ben-Ari says she's "humbled" by her status as a role model, and that it gives her a heightened sense of responsibility about how she behaves and what she says.

"Especially in hip-hop, many artists talk about things that are either irrelevant or destructive," she says. "Kids don't need to hear that."

ARTS & CULTURE

Ben-Ari has played with hip-hop stars Kanye West and Jay-Z.

COMMUNITY

TRANSITIONS:

■ The Hebrew College appointed Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld as dean of its rabbinical school.

■ The Jewish Council for Public Affairs elected Lois Frank its national chairwoman.

■ Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion appointed Cantor Bruce Ruben director of its School of Sacred Music.

■ Jewish Family and Life founder Yossi Abramowitz has stepped down from his CEO position in the group. He will remain associated with the organization as an editor.

■ Gary Zola, archives director and associate professor at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion has been appointed to serve on the national advisory committee of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission.

■ Rabbi Mark Golub was named CEO of Shalom TV, a national Jewish cable channel to premiere in the United States this summer.

■ Dr. Theodore Miller was elected president of the International Board of Trustees of the Israel Cancer Research Fund.

■ The International Council of Jewish Women elected a new president, Leah Aharanov, who is based in Israel.

HONORS:

■ Dr. Rick Hodes was named to the Medical Missions Hall of Fame. Hodes is the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's medical director in Ethiopia. He has overseen medical operations in Sudan, Rwanda, Zaire, Turkey and Albania.

■ U.S. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) was given an honorary doctorate by the American Friends of Bar-Ilan University in March.

■ Yeshiva University honored four educators at a convocation in Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University's president, Prof. Moshe Kaveh; Rabbanit Malke Bina, founder and educational director of MaTaN, The Sadie Rennert Women's Institute for Torah Studies in Jerusalem; Victor Geller, Jewish communal administrator; and Shlomo Riskin, chief rabbi of Efrat.

■ Jewish Funds For Justice honored Judith Obermayer, Shulamit Reinharz and Hanna Yarmolinsky at its Women of Valor awards celebration in Boston.

■ The Jerusalem Prize was awarded to Michael Freund and the Shavei Israel Foundation at the Jerusalem Conference.

■ Diane Ravitch, an NYU research professor and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, was honored by the American Jewish Historical Society at a ceremony in New York.

Young London Jews get rhythm

By VANESSA BULKACZ

LONDON (JTA) — When Two Live Jews penned their hip-hop hit "Oy, It's So Humid!" in 1990, tongues planted firmly in their cheeks, their humorous, Jewish-themed lyrics were meant as a response to the controversial — and, at the time, inescapably popular — rap songs of Two Live Crew.

A decade and a half later, call them Heeb Hoppers, Heebsters or harbingers of Jewish hipsterism, young Londoners are picking up where Two Live Jews left off, intent on questioning tradition and creating dialogue about what it is to be a Jew.

A recent article in Metro, the free daily paper distributed in London's subway and train stations, heralded the rise of hip-hop artists promoting themselves with their Jewishness, including Chasidic New York-based beatboxer Matisyahu.

More surprisingly, though, Britain's youth is getting in on "Heeb Hop" more and more, as homegrown Jewish klezmer/hip hop acts like Emunah and Ghettoplotz are cropping up and winning awards.

Even London's hip-hop parody television personality, Ali G, whose real name is Sasha Baron Cohen, began his career rapping about Jewish life.

Antithesis, a Cambridge-based university student and Zionist hip-hop artist, thinks the trend will continue.

"It's great to hear someone standing up, not being aggressive or anti-British but proud of their Jewishness," Antithesis told Metro.

Performances from Emunah and Ghettoplotz, rapping and remixing Hava Nagila, had attendees at a recent Punk Purim "radical Judaism" event in London dancing wildly.

Punk Purim was a joint presentation by a nine-month-old, London-based organization called Jewdas and New York's Heeb Magazine.

Similarly styled Heeb events have

been popular in New York's Jewish hipster culture for years, but Jewdas says this is the first event of its kind in Britain — mostly because, as the group sees it, traditional Anglo-Jewry is "increasingly suburban, conservative and dull."

"We're trying to start a new movement in British Judaism," Jewdas co-founder Joseph Finlay told JTA.

Jewdas' statement of purpose includes "whipping up Talmud, satire, heresy and cream cheese into a chicken soup of underground Diaspora culture."

Apparently their recipe for Jewish penicillin went down easy. Finlay, 25, estimates some 600 people turned out for the event, which also featured live

Jewish graffiti, "radical" Torah study and experimental Jewish film screenings.

Because of their fledgling status, Jewdas organizers want to make sure they don't put off potential newcomers — not for the wrong reasons anyway.

Referring to the event's donation-based pricing structure, which undoubtedly is attractive to struggling artists in one of the world's most expensive cities, Finlay said: "One of the things we're against is the perceived materialism of mainstream Jewish culture. We will never turn anyone away for lack of funds. We want to keep it accessible to people of all incomes."

While some may see Jewish hip-hop as the new voice of renegade Jewish culture, Finlay believes it's just one piece of a larger radical Jewish youth movement happening in Britain, one that includes artists, filmmakers and poets.

"We want to make a new space for people who feel excluded by the Jewish mainstream," he said.

With such a massive turnout at Jewdas' first official event, it looks like there are more than a few people who have already found that space. ■

ARTS
&
CULTURE

Jewdas' statement of purpose includes 'whipping up Talmud, satire, heresy and cream cheese into a chicken soup of underground Diaspora culture.'

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Abbas asserts control of Palestinian borders

Mahmoud Abbas sought to assert his control over Palestinian border crossings.

"Administration of the crossing points and borders will fall directly under the jurisdiction of the president," a statement from the Palestinian Authority president's office said Wednesday, Reuters reported. Abbas, a relative moderate from the Fatah Party, is in a power struggle with the Hamas-led P.A. government over control of the security services.

Within a day, P.A. Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh rejected Abbas' claim and said Hamas would control the security forces.

Israel compensates militiamen

Israel has begun paying compensation to former members of a Lebanese militia.

The Defense Ministry sent payouts of \$2,500 each to some 600 ex-servicemen from the South Lebanon Army who fled to Israel with their families when Israeli forces withdrew from Lebanon in 2000. The total payout per family is expected to reach around \$9,000 over seven years.

Israeli boxer wins crown

An Israeli boxer recently won a heavyweight boxing title.

Roman Greenberg won the International Boxing Organization's Intercontinental Heavyweight title last month, defeating Alex Vassilev of Russia in Monte Carlo. Greenberg next may be eligible to fight for a more prestigious crown, such as the IBO World Heavyweight title.

"I want to show the world that Jews can fight," Greenberg said.

NORTH AMERICA

House committee passes P.A. ban bill

A congressional committee approved a bill banning aid to the Hamas-controlled Palestinian Authority. The bill, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives' International Relations Committee on Thursday by a 36-2 vote, now goes to the full House.

It includes some compromises demanded by the Bush administration, including an allowance for funds to be sent through P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas, a relative moderate who belongs to Hamas' rival party, Fatah. The bill also restricts U.S. aid to non-governmental organizations for basic health needs.

A similar bill is being considered in the Senate.

Bolton: Iran two steps from sanctions

The U.N. Security Council is only two steps away from sanctioning Iran for its nuclear program, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations said. Speaking with State Department reporters Thursday, John Bolton said the next step after the letter issued last week urging compliance with U.N. inspectors would be a letter demanding compliance, and then possible sanctions.

Bolton also said the United States, independently of the Security Council, could tighten existing sanctions against Iran by cutting off imports of rugs and pistachios.

Police defend behavior in Orthodox arrest

New York City police defended their conduct during the arrest of an elderly Orthodox Jewish man and a subsequent protest in the Chasidic community.

Police on Tuesday arrested Joseph Schick, 75, for being uncooperative when he was stopped for a traffic offense, police said. Two other members of the community were arrested in subsequent protests.

Jews oppose immigration bills

A consortium of Jewish groups is taking action against two controversial immigration bills.

The New York-based Jews for Racial and Economic Justice is gathering signatures for an ad opposing two immigration bills, one passed by the U.S. House of Representatives and one under debate in the U.S. Senate. The ad, which will be placed in newspapers across the country next week, calls upon Jews to remember, as they tell the Passover story, the millions of Jewish immigrants who came to America over the past two centuries.

Signatories include Ruth Messinger, president of the American Jewish World Service; Rabbi David Ellenson, president of Hebrew Union College; playwright Tony Kushner; and two dozen other Jewish political and cultural figures.

Air Force leaders meet Jewish groups

The U.S. Air Force secretary told Jewish leaders of plans to teach religious tolerance throughout the military branch.

Michael Wynne met Thursday with several leaders of Jewish organizations to discuss guidelines issued last month on religious tolerance and expression at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. and throughout the Air Force. While several Jewish groups had expressed concerns that the revised guidelines allowed for more religiously oriented discussion in the Air Force than a previous version crafted last August, Air Force leaders said the language had been condensed so the guidelines could fit on a single page, making them more focused.

WORLD

Inquest slams Israel for cameraman's death

A British inquest declared that a filmmaker killed by Israeli troops in the Gaza Strip was murdered.

The 10-member coroner's jury in London, which convened this week to discuss the 2003 shooting of James Miller in the Gaza town of Rafah, concluded Thursday that the death was "unlawful." The inquest, which the Israeli Embassy declined to participate in, lacks leverage in terms of international law but is expected to step up British pressure on Israel to prosecute those responsible for the shooting.

The Israeli army cleared the officer in charge of the unit that killed Miller, but later agreed to review the case.

French, Spanish firms remove Hezbollah radio

Two European satellite companies removed a Hezbollah radio station from their list of stations.

The removal of Al-Nour this week from French and Spanish satellite carriers will affect South America, Europe and Asia, the Coalition Against Terrorist Media said in a release. The moves follow the U.S. Treasury Department's designation last week of Hezbollah's Al-Manar television station, Al-Nour radio and the parent company of both, the Lebanese Media Group, as Specially Designated Global Terrorist entities.

U.K. arms sales to Israel reported on the rise

British arms companies reportedly have stepped up exports to Israel. According to London's Guardian on Thursday, some \$44 million worth of British weaponry were sold to the Jewish state in 2005, almost double the volume of the previous year and the most since 1999.

The sales come despite a British Foreign Office decision to list Israel as a "country of concern" because of its military confrontation with the Palestinians.