



Martin Trejo, 10, learns to play the drums at the temple.



Symphony members Beth Elliott, left, and Leslie Lashinsky dance.



David Berkovits, 11, listens to harpist Marcia Dickstein during the concert.

LATINO KIDS GO TO TEMPLE

Van Nuys pupils learn music of area's Jewish students



Tina Burch/Staff Photographer

Rob Rosen teaches Latino students from Kittridge Elementary School in Van Nuys how to play a trumpet at the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel on Monday during a cultural program and concert of Jewish music.

By **Connie Llanos**
Staff Writer

WESTWOOD

Despite going to school in Van Nuys, an area with several synagogues and a large Jewish community, fourth-grader Macarena Reyes had never set foot inside a Jewish temple or learned a Hebrew word until Monday.

As Reyes, a Kittridge Street Elementary School student, stood inside the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel, the young girl's beaming smile revealed how she felt about the day's field trip.

"This is all really new to me," Reyes said.

"But this is something I will never forget. I will keep it forever in my memory."

After weeks of receiving lessons from musicians with the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony, Reyes and hundreds of other kids from predominantly Latino public schools got a chance to hear a full-length concert at the Westwood temple.

The event culminated an educational program launched by the symphony as a way to bridge the gap between the two cultures.

Symphony founder Noreen Green said the obvious connection for Latino children to the Jewish culture comes by way of the Sephardic Jewish community that speaks a mixture of Hebrew and Castilian Spanish called Ladino.

With songs like the Sephardic Hanukkah song "Ocho Candelikas," Latino kids can understand much of the lyrics and sing along because of Ladino's close proximity to Spanish.



Estdelin Serna sings and claps to the music during the Jewish music program.

"For many of these children, it is their first time talking to a Jewish person. This helps to take the mystery away," Green said.

Cantor Marcelo Gindlin, who energetically led the rambunctious kids to sing along to the Sephardic tunes, said he was moved by the enthusiasm he saw in the children.

"I didn't have this opportunity growing up," Gindlin said.

"Discrimination is a heavy word and it is based on ignorance. Through this education, we are showing kids in many levels that they can be together, sing together and experience a fun time together."

The program also reaches out to students at Jewish day schools to expand their connections with Latino children.

Leslie Lashinsky, a symphony bassoonist who also taught many of the students in the program, said the experience is positive for both Latino and Jewish kids.

"This is an eye-opening experience for the kids in the Jewish day school, who are also perhaps in an insular community. For them to relate to kids from all backgrounds is really a lesson in getting along and finding common ground," Lashinsky said.

Sporting a colorful yarmulke, fourth-grade Sinai Akiba student Michael Rahimian said he enjoyed seeing so many non-Jewish children in a temple.

After all, "we're all kids," Rahimian said. "We all like the same things."

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For an audio slide show of the cultural program at Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel, go to dailynews.com.