



RUSSIAN PRIDE DANCES IN. A Week of education a& heritage

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BROOKLYN'S Asser Levy Park came alive with the sound of Russian music, the aroma of traditional cherry ravioli and the joy of hundreds of footloose kids pirouetting and bopping on the stage.

The green lawn of the park welcomed the diverse Russian community of the tristate area once again for the Together in New York festival - a staple event of the fourth annual Russian Heritage Week.

Sticking to the Russian tradition of mixing business with pleasure, participants had a chance to not only see great performances and munch on mouthwatering snacks, but also receive valuable information about a variety of service organizations that had set up shop around the park, including community centers, health care providers and educational institutions.

"In America, it's very important to receive college education. Touro College helps from the start, beginning with English [classes] and ending with a college degree," said Russ Koyfman, admissions counselor at Touro College.

Festival guests also had the opportunity to sign up on the spot for affordable medical insurance with Health Plus and receive useful advice about immigration issues and public assistance from representatives of Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

The perfect June day, complete with a brilliant sun and cloudless sky, complemented the mood of the festival-goers who had a chance to see a colorful pageant of youth ensembles perform Russian folk dances, ballet, salsa and jazz compositions, with some pint-sized dancers as young as 5.

The participants of the festival clapped along as the fancy-free boys and girls in jeweled headpieces, long veils and wide sequined belts strutted and whirled on stage, performing the fiery Lezginka and a host of Israeli and Bukharian dances that gave the event a distinct ethnic flavor.

"The kids love to dance, and they are willing to come to rehearsals in any weather . . . we want to preserve our roots," said Luba Yusuf, director of Kavkaz youth dance studio. "What's unusual about our ensemble is that we have authentic national costumes and the dances are ethnic, preserving the traditions of Mountain Jews from Caucasus."

A high point of the day was a brief but memorable performance by Sanias - the Israeli Paganini who took the world by storm with his high-voltage violin, combining spellbinding Middle Eastern melodies with electronic grooves and classical elegance.

"My audience is very diverse," explained Sanias. "It includes very young people and people of a more advanced age who understand music and enjoy the way I perform it."

This fourth annual Together in New York festival is one of the central events of Russian Heritage Week, celebrating the multicultural Russian community of New York, which was organized by the Russian American Arts Foundation with Mayor Bloomberg and the Daily News.

"Participating in festivals allows us to find out new things about our community and not forget where we came from, our roots," concluded Liudmila Ziskind, director of cultural affairs at Shorefront YM-YWHA.