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Dancers Kick Up Their Heels In Pursuit of a World Record

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LAKEWOOD, N.J. — It was supposed to be one for the record books.

Thousands of people from all over New Jersey descended on Sunday's Garden State Jewish Festival in First Energy Park—home of the minor-league Blueclaws baseball team—in an attempt to enter the Guinness Book of World Records by creating the largest hora ever recorded.

If successful, the festival's stunt would take its place among such other dance records as the longest dancing dragon — a 10,000-foot Chinese puppet that wiggled its way down the Great Wall of China in February 2000 — or the largest "YMCA" dance, when 13,588 participants danced to the Village People's "YMCA" at a 2001 Salt Lake Stringers baseball game.

There was very much a carnival atmosphere at the festival. As visitors filed into the stadium, they were given different-colored ribbons to tie around their wrists; after every thousand people, volunteers at the door switched colors, to keep count. Festival-goers spent the morning perusing various vendors' stands before the dancing started. Some booths sold women's hats or Israeli knickknacks or Coca-Cola T-shirts with Hebrew writing. Chabad set up a stall where men could lay *tefillin*, and children chomped on cotton candy and cold french fries (which the caterer advertised as "overstuffed freedom fries").

When emcee Etan G—a Jewish rapper who wore a pair of sunglasses and a knit yarmulke—jumped onto the baseball field and began psyching the crowd up for the dance, people were scattered across the festival grounds. Many were anxious to begin; others were not so anxious. Many of the older people at the event were firmly planted in their seats.

"Get up! Get up!" the *tummler* exhorted the crowd.

Phyllis Gintzler stared at Etan G from her seat in the stands. "The music is going to carry," she said, hopefully. "In two minutes, when the music starts" people will start dancing, Gintzler predicted.

A band of klezmer musicians struck up "Hava Nagila," and visitors throughout the stadium began linking hands.

According to Dr. Allen Morgan, the principal organizer of the festival, the hora falls into the Guinness category of a "circle dance." In a letter that the Jewish Federation of Ocean County received from Guinness while preparations for the event were being made, the previous record for the largest circle dance was set eight years ago in Bangor, Wales, when 6,748 people gathered to do the "hokey-coky" (not to be confused with the "hokey-pokey") on the 50th anniversary of V-E Day.

In many ways, the Guinness bid was merely a gimmick to get people to attend the festival. And on that level, it worked: Thousands attended the event. "I thought only 1,500 people were going to show up," said Morgan. "To us it was a major success."

As a record-breaker, however, the hora was not so successful. The total crowd, including vendors and volunteers, was shy of 6,000 people. As the chain of dancers began moving across the stadium, there were huge broken sections where no one was holding anyone's hand.

Still, despite missing the world record, the hora was a crowd-pleaser.

"That was unbelievable, ladies and gentlemen," Etan G said when the dancing ended, after 15 minutes. "It worked out a lot better than I expected—with everybody participating." Pointing to the small litter of people who were still sitting comfortably in their seats, he added mockingly, "except for those people."

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