



Gratz Insider, December 2011 - Story Continuation

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Comedian Yisrael Campbell Brings *Circumcise Me* to Gratz College

The man who took the stage at Gratz College on Saturday night, November 12th, appeared to be the quintessential Orthodox Jew - black hat, long dark coat, tzitzit, bushy beard and peyos. But, his name was Christopher Campbell - at least, it used to be. Campbell's metamorphosis from Philadelphia Catholic to Israeli Orthodox Jew is the story of a spiritual progression that has also become great stand-up shtick. With comedic flair, Campbell has adapted his unusual life story into the Off-Broadway play and documentary film *Circumcise Me*, which has been converting audiences into Campbell fans everywhere.

"How Catholic were you?" begins one of the jokes in the film. "Catholic enough to know I was going to Hell, so I switched religions." Considering that Campbell spent much of his adolescence regularly abusing drugs and alcohol, this joke wasn't far from the truth. Searching for a spiritual connection to help him change his life, Campbell ultimately turned to Judaism - first becoming a Reform Jew, then a Conservative Jew, and finally, an Orthodox Jew with the name Yisrael.

Campbell's multiple conversions reflected the pluralistic audience during his show at Gratz, where almost 350 Jews of every denomination were reduced to side-splitting laughter. His performance was used to kick off Gratz's participation in the second annual Global Day of Jewish Learning, an event uniting the Jewish community in a day of study. Gratz president Joy Goldstein explains the rationale behind this unusual, though ultimately perfect, choice: "We at Gratz College were thrilled to kick off the Global Day of Jewish Learning in the Greater Philadelphia region with the comedy of Yisrael Campbell. By sharing his Jewish journey through laughter and poignancy, Yisrael encouraged everyone there to ponder the question of Jewish peoplehood."

Throughout his routine, Campbell repeated the question he was asked by the Reform rabbi on the occasion of his first conversion: "Do you throw your lot in with the Jewish people come what may?" Given the hilarity of his stand-up routine, audiences everywhere must be glad he has.

Written by Jodi Benjamin

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