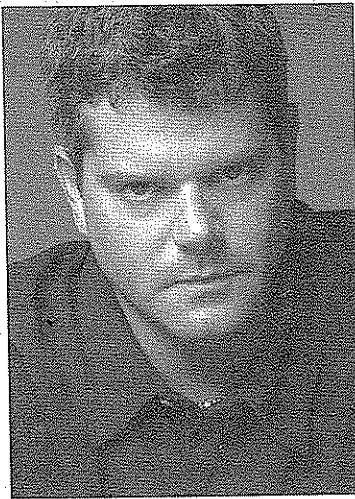


it seems as if he came from a different planet. Auslander is defiantly secular and outward-looking today, years ago with a collection of short stories titled *Beware of God* – fear begat terror and terror spawned alienation.



Shalom Auslander

In a gradual process, he broke from his past and tested the boundaries – turning away from God, nibbling on forbidden non-kosher food, riding a cab on the Sabbath, sampling pornography, trying marijuana and, in short, rejecting the values and norms of his parents.

“I wouldn’t understand why a young man like myself wouldn’t be more interested in porn and marijuana than in the Talmud,” said Auslander, whose memoir, *Foreskin’s Lament* (Penguin), was recently published to critical acclaim. “They were my escapes.”

To his contemporaries in Monsey, N.Y., the largely Orthodox town he grew up in, he was not merely a rebel sowing his wild oats but an *apikores*, a heretic.

To Auslander, whose hero is Elisha ben Abuya, a first-century rabbi who was excommunicated for heresy, only Orthodox rabbis would consider him a heretic.

Nor does he think that his harsh critique of God is unusual. “The prophets, Abraham and Moses, had a contentious rela-

tion. By then, he had worked agencies as a copywriter, a

An avid reader, he never r

He wrote *Foreskin’s Lament* hailed as “corrosively funny” Orthodox-raised wife, Orli, named Paix.

“God is a lunatic, a furious, very imbalanced character quick to anger,” said Auslander, whose uncle, Rabbi Norman Lamm, is president of Yeshiva University. “Read the five books of Moses.”

Auslander broke with Orthodoxy about a decade ago, after attending a haredi yeshiva, studying at Yeshiva University’s high school for boys and spending nearly two years at an Israeli institution known for rescuing wayward Jews.

In Israel, where he was stoned for the first six months, he temporarily reconnected with the Orthodoxy he had spurned. But succumbing to a gnawing sense of doubt and unease, he returned to form.

Part of his problem was that he never got along with his parents.

His father, a carpenter with golden hands, was emotionally unstable and got drunk on kosher wine. “For the bulk of my life, he was a negative force. He didn’t show any affection and was prone to anger and violence.”

His mother, with whom he had better relations, felt trapped in a lousy marriage and had a tragic outlook.

Film about Islam and Israel’s future is alarmist

By **SHELDON KIRSHNER**
Staff Reporter

Farewell Israel, due to be released in DVD form on Nov. 20, is a dark and alarmist film about Islam and Israel’s future.

Joel Gilbert’s documentary, supposedly a primer on the world’s fastest growing religion, sets out what it says is Islam’s view of the world and its relations with minorities such as Jews, and charts Islam’s refusal to accept Israel’s existence.

Gilbert describes Islam as a historically expansionist faith whose objective is global domination. He also claims that Islam does not recognize the political borders of non-Islamic states.

True, Islamic armies conquered new domains before being driven back in the 17th century, but does mainstream Islam seek international hegemony today? Gilbert conflates the aims of radical Islam with the positions of moderate Muslims, who accept the status quo. Does he really think that Muslims yearn to reconquer, for example, Spain?

He criticizes early labour Zionist leaders for not grasping Islam’s refusal to reconcile itself to the presence of a Jewish state in Palestine. Muslims, he says, cannot come to terms with the reality that Jews – a tolerated minority under Islam – have reclaimed Palestine. Israel is thus a slap in the face at Islam.

There is a hard kernel of truth in these assertions.

Yet, in dealing with more recent events, like the Yom Kippur War, Gilbert flies off the tracks.

He describes the 1973 war as an Arab jihad to liberate Jerusalem, when in fact it was an attempt to regain Egyptian and Syrian territory lost in the Six Day War.

He claims, untruthfully, that Israeli setbacks in that war prompted Israel’s defence minister, Moshe Dayan, to consider the possibility of surrendering to Egypt. And he exaggerates wildly in saying that Gen. Ariel Sharon’s daring foray into Africa, “saved” Israel.

Similarly, Gilbert’s contention that former Egyptian president Anwar Sadat’s 1977 visit to Jerusalem was a Machiavellian plot to weaken Israel and transform it into a Muslim state is unfounded and paranoid.

In signing a peace treaty with Israel, Sadat came to terms with Israel’s existence, even if grudgingly. Contrary to Gilbert’s claim, he did not regard the agreement as the first step in a historical process to dismantle Israel.

Gilbert is correct that the Oslo accords rescued PLO chief-tain Yasser Arafat from possible political oblivion. Arafat had undermined himself and the Palestinian cause by supporting Iraq in the 1991 Gulf crisis.

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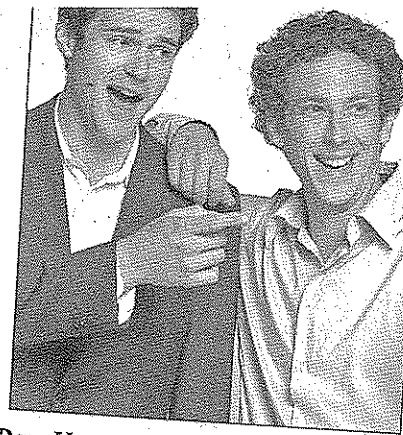
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...can be dancing a horah. But Adam is going too fast. With Alison's family, Chris puts his foot in his mouth, saying Jews are cheap and own the banks, statements that nearly cost him his relationship with Alison, and with the audience, which responds with dead silence. Strike 2.



Dave Kerr and Matt Baramin in *Jewtopia*. [David Leyes photo]

Playing to a sold-out crowd on a recent Saturday night, *Canadian Idol*'s on-the-scene reporter Dave Kerr and Second City's Matt Baram were brilliant as Chris O'Connell and Adam Lipschitz in *Jewtopia*, at the DIESEL Playhouse, 56 Blue Jays Way.

Starting as a 10-minute sketch about two friends, written and performed by Los Angeles actors Bryan Fogel and Sam Wolfson five years ago, *Jewtopia* became one of the longest-running comedies in Los Angeles and was an off-Broadway hit in 2004, before heading to Chicago, Florida and Toronto.

The current production, which received mixed reviews because of its controversial content, is produced by Michael Rubinoff and Lindsey Steinberg, directed by well-known character actor, Avery Saltzman. It runs until Dec. 1.

Here's the premise: Chris O'Connell (Kerr) and Adam Lipschitz (Baram), two 30-year-old singles reconnect at the Rockin' Young Jewish Singles Mixer.

Chris hopes to marry Alison Cohen, the girl of his dreams, and win over her mother (Judy Marshak), while Adam searches for the perfect date – a Jewish girl of his parents' dreams.

Nothing offensive here, but as the scenes unfold, there are some question-

able moments. Familiar with the Jewish dating scene, Chris tells Adam the key to the perfect Jewish girl is *Jewtopia*, just a click away, the J-date internet dating service.

What makes Chris an expert? "I love Jewish girls," he says.

"Why?" an astounded Adam asks.

His friend, who is not Jewish, responds, "I'll never have to make another decision in my life." Strike 1: this implies that Jewish women are domineering.

The next scene proves to be hysterically funny, when Adam gives Chris a crash course in Jewish jargon so that Mrs. Cohen will think he's a nice Jewish boy. Adam tells his friend to use four Yiddish words per sentence – suggestions include *punim* and *schvitz*. If he

When Adam asks why he made the statement, Chris says this is what he's been told all his life. Strike three: it's not funny.

Where Fogel and Wolfson regain audience approval is with their own brand of humour – like the hilarious restaurant scene when Adam teaches Chris how to dine out with the Cohens. First, ask to switch tables because there's a draft. Then, when ordering, ask for changes in each dish until it's unrecognizable. Finally, when the food arrives, send it back.

Humour also reigns when Chris and Adam are on a hospital bed before Chris makes the ultimate sacrifice – he is going to have a bris to complete his conversion. Or when Adam brings an Asian doctor (Jane Luk) to the family seder, instead of his future fiancée. It's great fun to watch Adam's father (Allan Price) and grandfather (Aron Tager) in this scene.

It's too bad Fogel and Wolfson don't rely more on their own material, which is far better than stale, offensive jokes about Jews as incompetent, bargain hunting show-offs who are neurotic whiners.

Writer cut ties with his parents

Continued from page 47

For Auslander, fatherhood brought up a lot of issues. He and Orli, who is also estranged from her parents, were terrified that Paix's arrival, and his impending circumcision, would reintroduce them to everything they had worked so hard to distance themselves from.

In keeping with Jewish tradition,

their son was circumcised, but by a doctor in a hospital, and his foreskin became a metaphor for Auslander himself – unwanted and cut off.

Auslander today is not observant, but is "painfully, cripplingly, incurably and miserably" religious.

He and his family live in Woodstock, in upstate New York. "I love the woods and the solitude."

Auslander, who supplements his income with freelance copywriting assignments, thinks that his next book will be a novel. "I'm fascinated by the ancient Israelites who stayed behind in Egypt. They were cursed and called heretics. They fascinate me."

Ever the iconoclast, he said, "I think I would have stayed behind, too."

Film is rife with assumptions

Continued from page 47

Gilbert, however, misleads viewers by falsely comparing Israel's concessions to the Palestinians in 1993 with Neville Chamberlain's concessions to Adolf Hitler in 1938.

He claims that a western-style Arab-Israeli peace agreement is unattainable. So how does he account for Israel's peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan? Or the current Arab League peace plan, which offers recognition and normalization in exchange for a withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines?

Or better still, the willingness of

Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, to sign a peace treaty with Israel? Gilbert is confusing Fatah with Hamas.

Facts do not deter him. Indeed, he says that Israel will be weakened by current American attempts to achieve a diplomatic solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In implicit and explicit references to Iran's desire to acquire a nuclear arsenal, Gilbert suggests that Israel could be defeated in a surprise missile attack, and that Israel's safety is now at great risk.

Missiles do pose a dire threat to Is-

rael, but, as he knows, Israel is hard at work trying to develop a missile shield that could blunt missile attacks by Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas or Islamic Jihad.

To say that Israel could be destroyed by a missile barrage is like saying that Egypt's secular government could be supplanted by an Islamic fundamentalist regime. At the end of the day, it is nothing more than just a claim.

Farewell Israel, which comes off sounding like a propaganda film from Israel's far right movement, is rife with such suppositions and assumptions.

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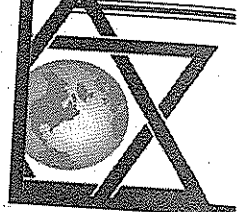
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