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Fri., March 18, 2005 Adar2 8, 5765

It sounds funnier in English

By Daphna Berman

When he first arrived in Israel nearly five years ago, comedian Yisrael Campbell's performances revolved around the holiday of Purim - a single day of the year when laughter and silliness are something of a

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"Outside of that, no one spoke about comedy," he recalled this week after a well-attended performance at the Kibbutz Tzora night club.

Anglo comedy, it seems, is on the rise locally, and last month alone there were an estimated half dozen performances scheduled in Israel's

English speaking centers.

British-born comedian Lisa Gold says that she's appeared more in the last few months than she has in the last few years, and Charley Warady, another regular in the English-language local comedy scene, says that recent months have been the first time he's made money as a comedian since immigrating here eight years ago.

country to perform his stand-up routine, as well as his autobiographical monologue on his very entertaining path from an Irish Catholic boyhood ("my aunt is a nun, which makes Jesus my uncle") to his current Jewish, and decidedly more religious life, in Jerusalem ("I'm the only guy I know who wore the same suit to his bris and his bar mitzvah").

Indeed, Anglo comedy is more available now than

Campbell, meanwhile, is scrambling around the

ever, but it's hardly a coincidence. Just a few months ago, Off the Wall Comedy, an English language comedy troupe was established by David Kilimnick, an Orthodox rabbi and comic, who immigrated here in 2003. Off the Wall Comedy's first performance drew a crowd of nearly 150, and within the next few months put together performances across the country for crowds ranging from half a dozen to several hundred.

"David has been doing a great job hustling," said Warady, who headlined at a number of clubs and appeared on Comedy Central before moving to Israel. "There is so much potential here and he got the whole project off the ground."

English-language theater and music performances

have long been part of the cultural landscape here, but a significant comedy network was lacking until several months ago, explains Kilimnick. "People had their individual shows every now and then," he said, "but nothing consistent like this existed. People would go to bars or restaurants, but the only comedy options were in Tel Aviv, in Hebrew. At Off the Wall, they have a safer atmosphere and people are

"It's great to have English-language comedy here that is accessible," says Danny Sher, a Jerusalemite originally from the U.K. "We've all gone through the same aliya process and it's great to be able to laugh at it together. They joke about issues that we are all able to identify with."

Anglo comedy, though unique to individual

performers, is certainly a distinct brand. Whether poking fun at government bureaucracy, Israeli rudeness, security guards who make inappropriate sexual comments or simple oddities like the break in the middle of the cinema - the comedy nights provide an entertaining look at some of Israel's more frustrating and amusing idiosyncrasies, especially for those with a unique outsider's perspective.

"I only wish that someone who believes in the international Jewish conspiracy theory would visit Israel," Campbell jokes in his opening act, after listing a few common grievances, among them the all too familiar Israeli phenomenon of line cutting. "It's the stupidest country."

In the meantime, Off the Wall has yet to turn into a profitable enterprise, but Kilimnick doesn't seem too concerned, and is taking the "ups and downs" in considerable stride and, of course, with a sense of humor.

"It was a matter of someone taking a chance on this," he notes. "Until now, I've been pushing this project to its limits, and now it's time to sit back and watch it take its course."

For information about upcoming shows, see

www.israelcomedy.com



Israel Time: 02:33 (GMT+2)

David Kilimnick: "It was a matter of someone taking a chance." (Tomer Applebaum / Ba)

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