

Rodeph Sholom Speech: Joshua Radin

I was sitting on a tour bus, somewhere between St. Louis and Chicago, after a sold-out show with a Platinum selling artist. It had been a long day, coming off a stretch of four shows in a row. Most post show conversations are about that night's crowd or how long the drive was to the next city. Yet somehow, on this random night at 2:00am, we were talking about religion. The headline artist was Jewish, and so was his DJ and Tour Manager. My artist was also a member of the tribe, along with one other on our team, and, spoiler alert, I too am Jewish. We quickly realized that half of the tour were Jews, and that every single one of us felt that our Judaism was an important part of our identity.

Yet neither of the artists were known as "Jewish artists". Their lyrics weren't in Hebrew, and they didn't talk about the Torah in their songs. Even though their surnames were obviously Jewish, I'd guess that most of the fans we saw on tour just assumed they were Christian. Something about that always bothered me.

As a young professional in the music industry, I have always been passionate about fighting anti-Semitism and using the power of the arts to bring us together. Nothing is more upsetting to me than seeing the BDS movement target artists in an attempt to get them to cancel their performances in Israel. Concerts in Russia, China, and Saudi Arabia are okay, but somehow a performance in the only democracy in the Middle East is too much to handle.

I think there's a direct correlation between seeing your favorite artists avoid one place and one place only, and feeling embarrassed or ashamed of your religion. As a recent college graduate, I've seen how difficult it is to be a Jew on campus. Antisemitism is on the rise, and religious participation is on the decline. We need to see people who are like us choosing to embrace their Judaism proudly and openly.

I'm part of a fourth generation Rodeph family. 11 years ago, I was a B'nai Mitzvah on this Bima with my twin sister Danielle, who is also here tonight. In fact, when it came time to work on our speeches, we were assigned to a young Rabbi named Ben Spratt. My family all has different views on religion and what it means to us, yet we'd all say that Rodeph is equally as important to us. Rodeph is our home, it's a place that will always be here for us. Being here, upholding our Jewish values, being proud of our Judaism, and choosing to actively come and participate in whatever way works for you, is what is most important.

That is how this music series was born. When you think of Jewish artists, the first names that come to mind are probably Leonard Cohen, Debbie Friedman, or Matisyahu. And while all those artists are amazing, could you imagine if the first artists that came to mind were Paul Simon, Paul Stanley of Kiss, P!nk, Adam Levine from Maroon 5, or our special guest tonight, Joshua Radin.

With this series we are looking to redefine what it means to be a Jewish artist. Just because you don't sing in Hebrew or about lighting the Menorah, doesn't mean you aren't a Jewish artist. It's important to provide space to make this clear.

We want to reconnect with young people and make sure that they too feel home here. We want young people to be proud of their Jewishness, and to realize that so many of their role models and heroes are Jewish too. We hope that coming to temple on a Friday night can be about many things, not just this service. You can come to Rodeph to meet new people, have great food, and even hear a Gold-selling artist perform some of his greatest hits and speak about why being Jewish is important to him.

I've spent almost a year working on this series with a very talented group from Rodeph. I'd like to especially thank Cantor De Lowe, Rabbi Spratt, Scott Hertz, and Noam Lautman for their collaboration, partnership, and belief in this vision.

I hope you'll join us tonight at 8:00pm- you can register for free at <https://rodephsholom.org/joshua-radin-> and in the future for some hopefully in person additions of this series.

This is only the beginning. Together, I hope that music fans and artists around the world will come to embrace their Jewishness, so that conversations like mine on the tour bus become commonplace, and so fans realize that Jewishness is a crucial part of what makes their favorite artists so special.

Shabbat Shalom.