

Comedian laughing all way back to his roots

BY SIMON YAFFE

COMEDIAN Danny Lobell is preparing to return home — kind of. The comedian will take his one-man show, *Broke As A Joke*, to thespace@jurysinn at the Edinburgh Fringe from August 4-24.

Though raised on Long Island, New York, his mother, Vivian, is from Glasgow.

"I have been to Scotland a lot, so I have spent a lot of time there," Danny said from his home in Los Angeles. "I even did a Scotland Lubavitch summer camp one year!

"Because Edinburgh is such a big undertaking, I thought I would go for it this year, as I usually put it off."

His grandma, Alice Malcolm, still lives in Glasgow.

"She is my biggest inspiration as she is hysterically funny," Danny said. "She always calls me with jokes and I hope she will come to one of my shows."

Danny's show is a collection of funny stories about being broke.

"It starts at high school and takes in my choosing ridiculous jobs to stop me being broke," the 34-year-old said.

Danny's jobs have included selling cassette tapes at legendary comedian Jackie Mason's Broadway show, breeding hairless cats and selling light bulbs door-to-door.

"That last one was a tough gig because everybody already has light bulbs, right?" he laughed. "I didn't encounter any dark homes."



CLASS CLOWN: Danny Lobell

Danny was raised in a frum family, one of four boys, by an occupational therapist mother and a photographer father.

He attended a yeshiva for a time — until he was kicked out for misbehaving, at which he was sent to another yeshiva "for messed up Jews in high school".

Danny never even knew stand-up comedy existed until he was in high school.

"I was always the class clown, but I did not know anything about stand up until I saw Jerry Seinfeld," Danny recalled.

"I actually thought he invented it. My parents were less than thrilled when I told them that was what I wanted to do. It took them a while to come round to it."

They were used to his comedic behaviour, however, as Danny wore a yellow suit to his barmitzvah thanks to his love of the Jim Carrey film *The Mask*.

His first experience of stand up was an open mic night at a local Starbucks.

After graduating from New York City's Baruch College with a degree in communications, Danny continued to work the circuit and made money with a variety of bizarre jobs, as mentioned earlier.

He learned a lot from Mason, too.

"One night, when I wasn't supposed to be working at one of his shows, Jackie called me up and told me to come down," Danny recalled. "When I got there, he introduced me to George Carlin, which was amazing."

"George became a guest on a college radio show I was hosting and I still say he ended our friendship by dying!"

Danny moved to LA five years ago — and found it a huge cultural shock. He moved there with his now wife, Kylie.

"I left behind my support group in New York, as in friends, my family," he explained.

"We arrived in LA with \$60, no credit cards and no savings."

"Because we didn't want to move straight from New York to LA, we went to Florida first, where I spent time working in comedy clubs."

After moving to LA, Danny started a podcast called *Modern Day Philosophers*, where comedians are partnered with a modern or ancient philosopher.

Guests have included Carl Reiner, Mayim Bialik, Marc Maron and, of course, Jackie Mason.

He added: "Carl Reiner actually invited me round to his home for dinner with him and Mel Brookes

and they were just as hilarious in 'real life'.

"After about 20 minutes, the three of us were talking like old friends. It was surreal."

Much of Danny's material is centred around his Judaism — and his faith is something he has returned to only in the past few years.

He is Shabbat-observant, too. He said: "I was no longer observant, but Kylie wanted to convert to Judaism, so I went on a journey with her."

"Obviously, I see the world through Jewish eyes, but it is not a deliberate choice, it is an organic one."

Danny is also set to release a

He ended our friendship by dying

comedy album, called *The Nicest Boy in Barcelona*.

The title came about as his family were kicked out of Spain during the Inquisition.

Danny said: "My grandma, Alice, was born in Austria and fled the Nazis on the Kindertransport."

"Her father was born in Turkey and has roots going back to Spain."

"I had always assumed my father's family, which came from Lithuania, were Ashkenazim, but when I visited the Museum of Inquisition in Girona, I saw that among the list of names, was 'Lobell'."



PLAY: Nicholas Tolkien

JRR Tolkien's great-grandson writes a play about Terezin

THE Jewish great-grandson of author JRR Tolkien has written a play about Terezin concentration camp, which is currently playing in New York, writes **DOREEN WACHMANN**.

Nicholas Tolkien is the son of the author's grandson Simon Tolkien, who married an American Jew, Tracy Steinberg.

Nicholas was raised in London where his mother and maternal grandparents, Anne and Mark Steinberg, ran vintage clothes shop, Steinberg & Tolkien, in the fashionable Kings Road, Chelsea.

He was educated at a London private school where he was bullied when he revealed his Jewish identity.

His grandfather — whom he describes as his "biggest Jewish influence" — prepared him for his barmitzvah and taught him Torah.

Nicholas, who keeps Shabbat and kashrut, later went to Israel with Birthright.

His grandfather had grown up in St Louis, Missouri, where he was friends with many Holocaust survivors. His stories left an indelible impression on Nicholas, who became fascinated with the Holocaust.

Before producing his play *Terezin*, which is being staged at New York's Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Nicholas embarked on five years of research on the infamous concentration camp. His play describes the ordeals of three child survivors.

Frankie excited

THE legendary Frankie Valli is excited about making his first appearance in Israel.

The 83-year-old will perform with the Four Seasons at Tel Aviv's Charles Bronfman Auditorium on July 4.

"I've wanted to go to Israel for a very long time, and I'm happy it's finally happening," said Valli, adding: "It might be the last time."

Meanwhile, hip-hop duo Macklemore and Ryan Lewis have cancelled their July 18 concert in Israel due to "unexpected scheduling conflicts".

Support act, singer LP (Laura Pergolizzi) will instead perform at the Tel Aviv Barby Club.

Daniel calls it a day

FILM icon Sir Daniel Day-Lewis has retired from acting.

Day-Lewis, who is Jewish through his late mother, Jill Balcon, said it was a "private decision" and he was "immensely grateful to all of his collaborators and audiences".

The three-time Oscar best actor winner is married to filmmaker Rebecca Miller, whose late father, playwright Arthur Miller, was Jewish.

Headteacher's daughter uses her background in law to pen novel about new crime fighting technology

BY SIMON YAFFE

AS a youngster, Abi Silver was enthralled with both books and the law.

Growing up in Roundhay, Leeds, her parents, Jacqueline and Sidney Fineberg, were teachers, so the family home was full of books and she and her two sisters were encouraged to read and write.

Abi read law at Girton College, Cambridge, and worked for major international law firms.

However, while on a career break, Abi decided to start writing a novel.

And the result is *The Pinocchio Brief* (Lightening Books, £8.99), which will be released on July 6.

Abi, who now lives in Hertfordshire, said: "I wanted to write a story which was engaging, pacey and enjoyable and also a good read to take on summer holidays, but also one which people would think about."

"I had always been just too busy to do any serious writing, even though it was always something I wanted to do."



BACKGROUND IN LAW: Abi Silver

The book tells of a 15-year-old schoolboy, Raymond, who is accused of murdering one of his teachers.

Abi got the idea for *The Pinocchio Brief* after reading an article in *New Scientist* about the controversial technology of facial recognition to detect criminals.

She explained: "It has been said that you should write about what you know."

"The USP (unique selling point) of the novel is that perhaps computers can do a better job than we can."

"This software films a person who is giving evidence and focuses on their faces, deciding whether they are telling the truth or not."

Her initial love for the law came from the Granada Television series *Crown Court*.

After the death of her father, who was headteacher at the Morris Silman Middle School, her mother moved to Hertfordshire to be closer to her daughters.

Abi's aunt and uncle, Anita and Harold Finlay, still live in Leeds.

In 2000, Abi and husband Daniel, who had married at Leeds' Beth Hamidrash Hagadol synagogue, moved to Ra'anana, Israel, as Daniel was working for the British Gas Group.

She recalled: "They had a find of gas offshore in Gaza, so it was politically sensitive, but they opened a new office in Israel and wanted someone to go there."

"It was a fantastic and wonderful opportunity and I had just had my first child, Noah, so I was on maternity leave, anyway."

But their move to Israel coincided with the outbreak of the Second Intifada.

"It was difficult and frightening," Abi said.

"People started to avoid public places and, during that time, people from the UK didn't visit as much."

A further two children, Nathan and Aron, were born in Israel.

In 2005, the family returned home, as the kids were reaching school age.

Abi eventually went back into law in 2010, specialising in litigation, before, in 2014, deciding that she wanted a break from being a private practice lawyer.

She is currently working on an idea for a sequel to *The Pinocchio Brief*.

"I am doing contract work as a lawyer, so hopefully that will provide me with the opportunity to continue to practise law and write, too," Abi added.