



'Conversion' opens in
a converted church

Description

Infinithatre presents its latest play in a new venue

By **Byron Toben**

Infinithatre, fittingly, itself converted from Theatre 1774 back in 1998, has continued its nomadic journey from the Bain St-Michel to the Rialto third floor to the new **Espace Knox**, a converted church.



the Plateau/Mile End, it may compensate in its new NDG/Loyola

Dedicated primarily to original English-language scripts from

Quebec, many produced in its annual **Pipeline** reading series, as was **Alyson Grant's** third play **Conversion**, a perfect title for a converted church venue.

Ms Grant, a Dawson English prof, is industrious with three plays. She is still a long ways from Shakespeare's 32 or Shaw's 62, but off to a good start. I particularly enjoyed her second, *Progress*, a hospital thriller set in a vacant



building of the old Royal Vic.

An affinity for medical content continues in *Conversion*. Al, an Afro-Canadian drop out medical student converting from Protestantism to Islam, is played by **Mike Payette**, the popular actor/director now head of Geordie theatre.

Al is married to Abigail (Abi). **Denise Watt**, a Dawson Theatre grad active on the screen, now returns to the stage for this role.

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The childless couple is awaiting the arrival of Abi's parents for a celebratory dinner. They are named Joseph and Mary. This biblical allusion reminded me of Albee's George and Martha in his very American *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?*

Joseph, a philandering Jewish man, is enacted by actor/teacher **Timothy Hine**, who is co-president of our Cinegaeal Irish theatre festival.

Mary, a Catholic who converted to Judaism, is dynamically portrayed by **Diana Fajrajsl**, a NTS grad who has been involved in 120 professional productions across Canada. A real trouper, she had earlier broken her leg but carried on with boot and crutches so seamlessly that I thought it was written that way.





Some may find Ms Fajrajsl's enunciations and gestures over the top... However, trouper Fajrajsl was just being religiously faithful to Ms Grant's playwright notes.

The dinner conversation, fuelled by Mary's alcoholism, devolved into discussions of race, gender, terrorism, suppressed dislikes, rape, abortion and such niceties ending with revelation of a long hidden secret.

Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses may feel slighted in that they are not mentioned in this play.

Also omitted are theoretical or philosophical discussions of the underlying philosophies of any of the religions referred to. Just the labels and the fact of a change.

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Director **Guy Sprung** has done his usual good work in delivering this entertaining concoction to the audience.

Conversion continues until February 25.

Audience talk back on Thursdays, PWYC on Sundays.

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Byron Toben is the immediate past-president of the Montreal Press Club.

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