

# 21st century Jewish radicals



## ⤵ Dina Brawer, 43

**OCCUPATION:** ambassador for Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA) UK; training for Orthodox *semikha* (rabbinic ordination)

**TELL US MORE:** I never thought of becoming a rabbi, but in retrospect it flowed from my personal narrative and the roles I played with my husband as *shelichim* (leaders) for Chabad (Orthodox chasidic movement), and as rabbi and rebbetzin. I became aware of Orthodox feminist issues at the Kolech conference in Jerusalem in 2003, then got involved in JOFA and launched it in the UK in 2013. It has generated a lot of interest but there are still issues to be tackled: gender balance in Jewish education and finding ways to inspire young people. We have launched a Mikvah Salon, a safe space for women to discuss *mikvah* (the ritual bath) and the Jewish approach to sexuality. It's been very successful.

Doing the Maharat programme (Orthodox rabbinic training for women) in New York was at first a fleeting idea. I decided to do it in order to provide a role model and change attitudes. There are many entry points to Judaism; they're all open to men but only a few are open to women. I'd like to inspire people to take ownership of their Judaism – through asking questions, through learning and thinking more critically and deeply. [dinabrawer.com](http://dinabrawer.com); [www.jofa.org/uk](http://www.jofa.org/uk)



## ⤴ Joseph Finlay, 34

**OCCUPATION:** A founder of Jewdas, a group dedicated to exploring alternative Jewish identity through culture and politics

**TELL US MORE:** Apart from Jewdas, I co-founded a range of other grassroots Jewish groups: Moishe House London, Wandering Jews and the Open Talmud Project.

Jewdas was created in 2005, aiming to satirise the Jewish establishment and suggest alternative and creative new ways of being Jewish. Following our legendary punk Purim squat party in 2006 we've put on a large range of events: Rootless Cosmopolitan Yeshivas, the East London Sukkah (a festival of arts and talks at Whitechapel City Farm), a Dalston film festival called Treifspotting and a party to choose 'the People's Chief Rabbi'.

After a couple of years of relative quiet, Jewdas is extremely active: as well as holding events most months, fighting to save East End shuls from being turned into luxury flats and engaging in interfaith work in Tower Hamlets, we are soon to embark on Birthwrong – a five-day trip to Spain to celebrate Jewish culture that doesn't revolve around Israel. Despite all this serious activity Jewdas hasn't forgotten its *raison d'être* – to poke fun at the absurdities of Jewish life and put on great parties in the process. Mostly our events are about having fun – we think the Jewish establishment takes itself far too seriously! [www.jewdas.org](http://www.jewdas.org)



## ↗ Jess Gold, 44

**OCCUPATION:** Eco-musician

**TELL US MORE:** I use music to raise awareness about climate change and sustainability. Caring about environmental issues, I wanted to become 'activated', but felt frustrated about the lack of knowledge among Jews. I got involved in Friends of the Earth, ending up on its board. Over the past six years I've created a multimedia resource for schools to teach about climate change through songs. I'm excited to be back working as a musician in the Jewish community at Finchley Reform Synagogue.

The environmental movement has a profoundly Jewish message. A few people being fine over here, and everyone else not fine over there – that's not the Jewish view of a community. The green campaign is about just that: the poor, who suffer the consequences of climate change the most.

It's about choices: I walk. I hardly use my car. I've stopped flying – you don't have to go to Australia! As for the elections: our country is run by rich people whose main concern is to get richer, pretending it's better for the country. Any sense of a cohesive society is lacking. People could say: 'I don't need two cars or a big house'. If they aligned their lives with the needs of the planet, it would make a big impact. Lack of knowledge is the problem. [www.projectearthrock.com](http://www.projectearthrock.com)