

THE JEWISH CHRONICLE

Life

ER star Noah Wyle: Why I'm playing a Jewish doctor in The Pitt

In an exclusive interview, the Hollywood star reveals the background to his acclaimed role in the HBO Max series

By [Elaine Penn](#) April 7, 2026



Trust me, I'm a doctor: Noah Wyle as Dr Michael 'Robby' Robinavitch and Lucas Iverson in *The Pitt*

beating, too. And now he's playing another doctor in *The Pitt*, set in Pittsburgh's Trauma Medical Centre, with every series representing a single shift, and each episode an hour of it. But while Carter wasn't Jewish, Wyle's latest medic is.

"It's the first Jewish character I've played, and this is my first interview for the *Jewish Chronicle*, so let's make them proud," smiles Wyle, whose Jewish lineage runs on his father's side.

"Making him Jewish was a joint decision that came out of a conversation with [former *ER* showrunner] John Wells when we were figuring out what we wanted this new show to be. John asked me about my family who were Ukrainian, so Russian Jewish, and the name was Robinavitch. He suggested calling him Robby, which is a nice homage."

It's rare for an interview to start with an apology. But this one does because Noah Wyle initially mistook me for someone else.

"I waved at you from across the room," he says. "Because, from a distance, you look just like my publicist." It's the hair, Noah, and you are forgiven.

As Dr John Carter in 15 series of *ER*, Noah Wyle not only set hearts aflutter, he kept them

And so, Dr Michael ‘Robby’ Robinavitch was born.

“Robinavitch was my great grandmother’s father’s name, so that’s at least four generations. The other family name was Ravinsky and they were from roughly the same area.

“As the show began to formulate, the idea of his having a Jewish background became more interesting to me. This was all before October 7. After the pogrom, it became something significant about the character. We wanted Robby to be far from his faith and in need of some connection to it. This seemed like a wonderful architecture for the first season.”

So, how does the character’s Jewish identity manifest itself? Is it something most non-Jews could be expected to reasonably notice?



Humane: Dr Robby cradles the series' so-called superbaby Jane Doe

“Is anybody ever Jewish enough? These are such tough questions,” laughs Wyle. “Well, you learn he was raised by his grandparents who went to temple [synagogue] and that he went there out of a sense of obligation. He wears a Star of David around his neck but it’s not something he really thinks about. But in season one when he’s on the floor of the paed’s room, having a

full-on nervous breakdown I wanted him to find, to have something he could cling to. So, he holds that Star of David and repeats the Shema that comforted him in his youth.”

Wyle – who has a son and daughter, Owen and Auden, with his ex-wife Tracy Warbin and a daughter, Frances, with his wife Sara Wells – did not have a Jewish upbringing.

“My family were anarchists,” says the 54-year-old, who has also written, executive produced and directed episodes of *The Pitt*. “Not bomb throwers, but artists and free thinkers against all social convention. We were raised with an exposure to multiculturalism but not really in any faith or ideology.

“But I have religious cousins, and I went to a school with Jewish kids, so got a lot of exposure to the culture. In my youth, I went to many bar and batmitzvahs.

“And in my early twenties, I met a fascinating Israeli rabbi with whom I did a weekly learning for a few years. I was curious, this guy was bright and the debates were engaging.

“But it is fair to say it’s my 10-year-old daughter who’s expressed the most desire to pick up the mantle of Judaism. It is through her and the show, that I feel Judaism now has more relevance to my life than ever before. Her batmitzvah is booked, and she helped me with my pronunciation of the Shema.”

And what of Robby’s Magen David in the show. Is it a family heirloom?

“It belongs to a very significant person in my life, who’s a very devout Jew. I asked him to procure it for me so that it would be a talisman from him.”

Wyle is especially keen to talk about the third episode of the second season, which airs this week and which he wrote. It features a patient who’s a member of the Tree of Life, the Pittsburgh synagogue where 11 people were shot dead in October 2018, the deadliest attack on Jews in American history.

“It seemed odd that we were doing a show set in Pittsburgh and we’d never mentioned the shooting,” he says. “It was such an enormous, terrible event for the people of Pittsburgh and for American Jews.”

“I was moved by the Tree of Life documentary on HBO. We created this character who was a parishioner there, who had gone inside after the shooting and who is now suffering from PTSD. She’s a grandmotherly type and Robby has an immediate affinity because she reminds him of his own grandmother. There’s a cultural sort of intimacy and through that, we get a little sense of where he is spiritually.”

He adds: “One detail in the horror that moved me was the solidarity of the Muslim community in Pittsburgh, how they marched and raised money to pay for the funerals and medical expenses of all of those who had been injured.”

How does Wyle – who has won five major TV acting awards, including two Emmys and a Golden Globe – feel about portraying a Jewish character at this antisemitic moment?

“I see it as a wonderful opportunity,” he says. “An opportunity to present a character with a Jewish background, who is at heart, a humanist and a healer and a decent, honourable person who is trying to do more good than harm in this world.”

Put another way, he is pleased to be countering some prevailing narratives.

“I was raised in 1970s Los Angeles where we were exporting Woody Allen and Mel Brooks into the world. I didn’t realise that the world didn’t have a full frame of reference for the diversity of Jewish people. When I read accounts of people’s perceptions now, I’m so confused at how they could arrive at these attitudes, so I’m happy to be participating in some positive messaging. I have come to learn that the world’s knowledge of Jews comes through depictions of them in the media.”

While Wyle’s paternal family has furnished him with Jewish information that he mines for *The Pitt*, his mother’s has provided him with medical expertise.

“Mum was a nurse and technically still is as she keeps her licence. When *ER* was going out, every Thursday night at 11.01pm she’d call and tell me I did something wrong. But she likes this new show and is a lot less critical.”

She’s far from alone. *The Pitt* has won plaudits from medics and scooped numerous awards. The second season has also become something of a family affair as Wyle’s actor wife Sara appears later in the run.



Alexandra Metz, Patrick Ball, Noah Wyle, Gerran Howell and Amielynn Abellera in the new medical drama

“She plays a patient who’s overdosed on turmeric,” he laughs. “I was in the make-up trailer when she was on set, but I could see her on a monitor, and she took my breath away. She’s

beautiful inside and out and I'm happy that she's getting back out there professionally, because she's been a dedicated mother and wife and helper and left arm and right brain to me for the last 15 years."

When he jokes that he's 100 years older than some of the *The Pitt*'s cast, I ask if he feels he's been handed the mentor baton by *ER*'s George Clooney, Anthony Edwards and Eriq La Salle. Before he can reply, the publicist tells us our time is nearly over. "But we're just getting warmed up!" says Wyle who requests an extension.

"Calling George, Tony and Eriq mentors is a bit of a stretch," he says. "Maybe corrupting uncles or older brothers who looked out for me."

Is he still close to his former *ER* cast mates?

"Emotionally close, yes. I recently saw George in his Broadway debut which was spectacular and then we presented each other with trophies at the AARP Awards."

Away from filming, Wyle is a huge musical theatre fan. While in London, he's seeing his friend Richard Kind in *The Producers*, but he recalls being overwhelmed by an earlier performance of the musical.

"Mandy Patinkin's wife, Kathryn, is one of my mother's oldest friends. I met Mandy for the first time in 1977, backstage at the Pantages Theatre in LA in 1977 when he played Che in *Evita*.

"I remember thinking that man was 27 feet tall. And then when we went into his dressing room, I wondered where the giant had gone. It was one of the first times I realised that somebody's performance could literally be larger than life."



[Eriq La Salle, Noah Wyle and Maura Tierney in ER, in 2001](#)

Having played a doctor for so long on screen, Wyle admits that he is sometimes mistaken for a real one.

‘I had an interesting encounter while out for dinner recently. I was in a restaurant with my wife and some friends, and this couple came over to say how much they enjoy

watching *The Pitt*. Then the woman told us she'd recently had knee surgery and asked if I wouldn't mind looking to see how her incision was healing and pulled up her trouser leg.

"I gave it a look over and said it was doing very well. I was conscious that this isn't normal fan interaction!"

And with that, our time really is up, and Wyle is whisked away to talk to more people about his hit show.

Season one of The Pitt is now available on HBO Max, with episodes of season two launching weekly. The third episode of the second series airs on April 10