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# The axis of arab comedy

by Staff Writer on 23rd May, 2011



**Stand-up comedian Aron Kader of famous comedy tour Axis of Evil, talks to CreativeLab about the political situation in the Middle East, the future of Arab comedy and what ticks him off about Disneyland**

He is an Arab comedian, but Aron Kader says it would take a woman to make him leave his sun-drenched home in Hollywood and move permanently to the Middle East. His roots are Palestinian on his father's side and American-Mormon on his mother's side (something he often brings up in his stand-up: "Any Palestinian-Mormons in here?"), but Aron grew up in the US and regards it as his home.

"Maybe I would live in the Middle East, if I was madly in love with a woman, but otherwise I have to stay home," he says. Nevertheless, he professes a strong connection to this region.

From an Arab comedian stand-point, the situation in the Middle East is giving him plenty of new material to work with – finally something to fill the large void that George W. Bush left behind when he finished his presidency.

"I have a few jokes about the situation but haven't nailed it yet," says Aron.

In the same breath he goes on to crack a joke anyway: "The Oscars nominated True Grit for best picture, which is a remake. The original came out the same year Qaddafi took power in 1969! If you've been in power for so many years that they're remaking movies from your era, you've stayed in power way too long!"

Aron is known for his unparalleled impersonations of Bush, but says he draws inspiration from the strangest of places.

"You have to stay open to everything and not restrict yourself to only the things you like to do. I went to Disneyland recently, and I hate that place. Pirates of the Caribbean should add some Somali pirates – racist, man!"

Aron first became a household name in this region when he performed across the Middle East as part of the trio that formed the famous comedy show Axis of Evil, which also included Maz Jobrani (Iranian-American) and Ahmed Ahmed (Egyptian-American).

The three quickly became an overnight sensation, thanks partly to their popular TV program on Showtime Arabia, and were pioneers in paving the way for stand-up comedy in the Middle East.



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A fourth member was added to the group – the unassuming Arab-South Korean Wonho Chung. He still lives in Dubai and is continuing the legacy the other three left behind by doing stand-up comedy in Arabic for a living.

It has now been three years since the Axis of Evil tour first arrived in the region, and Aron has noticed that the younger Arab comedians are catching up much faster than he had expected.

"If the economy can sustain an entertainment industry, it will thrive. However, the audience needs to support it, and they also need to support the freedom to speak your mind publicly, or else it won't work," he says.

Indeed, the current political shifts are making way for more tolerance towards the notion of freedom of speech, and Aron is optimistic about the future for comedy in the Middle East.



"More shows and more comics are good for the region. Honestly, it's not great for my business, because it's more competitive! But I'll be happy if the region has more voices for artists."

Aron is particularly impressed with a couple of voices, coming from two people who are making waves in the Arab comedy industry: Dean Obeidallah and Maysoon Zayed.

"Dean produces the Amman Comedy Festival, and, together with Maysoon, he also produces the NY Arab-American Comedy Festival. Those two festivals have changed the way Americans and Arabs view artists, actors and comedians," he says.

Between writing scripts and auditioning for various TV shows, Aron continues to hop back and forth between the US and the Middle East to perform, but always remembers one particular time in his life with great fondness.

"I'm proud of the Axis of Evil; we were the only Arabs to ever get on TV here for being Arab, so that was a great achievement! I have great memories of being on the tour, it was really fun... Hopefully, I'll have that much fun again someday."

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