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## The fundamentals of humour

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Stand-up comics, Aron Kader and Dean Obeidallah, are using their Arab-centric humour not only to entertain and amuse people, but to shed light on important issues



**WHEN FORMER PRESIDENT** Bush coined the term 'Axis of Evil,' little did he know that not too far in the distant future he would be providing an ensemble of Arab-American comics with the perfect title for a stand-up tour that would give a platform to a previously little heard voice in the US cultural landscape.

Founding members Ahmed\_Ahmed, Aron\_Kader, Maz Jobrani joined by Dean Obeidallah and Won Ho Chung would go on to prove extremely popular with both Arab-American and mainstream audiences in the States as well as gleaning success further afield, bringing their show to the Middle East where the comedians will regularly sell out three thousand seat venues from Beirut to Bahrain. Arab-centric humour provides a chance for those of Middle Eastern heritage to get together and share common experiences in a light-hearted manner but some might say more importantly sheds light on issues that people outside that particular ethnic sphere would not usually address and can help facilitate dialogue and better understanding.

This Dubai Shopping Festival the Jumeirah Beach Residence Sales Centre has been turned into The Comedy Cafe, an American styled stand-up hall, where Aron Kader will host and introduce a fantastic line-up of comics to entertain and amuse daily. This week it was the turn of Dean Obeidallah, a Palestinian-Italian-American former lawyer from New Jersey. Sharing a Palestinian background both Aron and Dean's humour stems from the same roots but neither manages to step on the other's toes when out on stage.

Aron and Dean told us more as we caught up with them just before the Cafe's opening night.

### You've both been to Dubai before how does it feel to be back?

Dean: I've only done one private show here before a couple of years ago so this is the first time I'll be doing a public show. I'm excited; wherever I go in the Middle East it's interesting to see the area and experiment with what works and doesn't work as it changes from place to place. Even in America that's the case.

Aron: Sometimes what works in New York won't work in LA. But Dean was out here four or five years ago before the Axis of Evil tour really started up. I was here more

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recently and it's great to be back.

**How would you describe your brand of comedy?**

Dean: Aron, not funny! I'm very not funny. No, I've always loved politics and being able to talk about political things.

Aron: It's funny to see so many Middle Eastern stand-ups with the same background and experiences and not have an extreme amount of overlap because an Egyptian guy, a Lebanese guy and a Palestinian guy will always have a different take on things. Even though we share experiences, we look at them differently

**What are Americans' perceptions of this part of the Middle East?**

Aron: People don't know anything else about Beirut other than 'oh it sounds dangerous.' It's the same with most places around here. When they hear that we're coming to Dubai though they will go 'oh Dubai!' because it's the safe place. It's known as being wealthy and open and we hear about the good things on the news so people are excited.

Dean: If you tell someone you're going to Beirut they're worried for you but say Dubai and they're interested. It's kind of a hip thing. Cairo will always be popular because of its history but Dubai is known for its beauty and, especially in the entertainment industry, it's a place that Americans hold in high regard.

**Dean you produced the Stand-Up for Peace show with your Jewish comedian friend Scott Blakeman, do you think with the current crisis in Gaza you would like to bring the show forward? How can comedy help in these situations?**

Dean: Stand-up comedy has a tradition, especially in the US, of being able to raise serious issues about society such as race and being able to entertain. At the same time it does highlight the issue and begin discussions about it. I can only hope comedy achieves this with any of the issues from being Arab in America, being Muslim in America or Arabs and Jews getting along. One comedy show isn't going to change the world but they are all baby steps to one particular goal. We do have a history in the States with people like Richard Pryor using comedy and Chris Rock today with John Stuart talking about serious stuff but being funny. You hope you can bring people together and show them a different side to who they thought we were or should be.

**With a new, more eloquent President in the White House has the opportunity for comedy gone out of the window?**

Dean: No! We'll find something on him. He's got to do something. May be he'll have an affair with an intern? I hope he doesn't but if he does that's ten, fifteen minutes of material right there. It'll be difficult because we like Obama, it was fun to mock Bush.

Aron: He'll be sleep deprived. He's the cool guy, I read somewhere that he's like the cool jazz guy - and he is - but once he gets into the work he's going to be sleep deprived and something will happen. There's opportunity there. It's going to be a challenge because Bush was way too easy.

**What do Arab-Americans in general think of President Obama?**

Aron: The night before the inauguration Dean and I were hired to do the American-Arab Institute in DC where Arab leaders came from all over the country to this big ball. It was one of the most excited crowds I have ever seen. The city was the most excited I have ever seen it and this is one of the murder capitals of the US!

There was nothing negative going on. You got swept up in the feeling. The Arab community we witnessed on Monday night was just over-the-top excited about Obama and the future.

Dean: And getting rid of Bush too. It was two sides to the coin I think. Everyone was happy for Obama but getting rid of Bush and his policies was also another reason to celebrate. Truthfully he has been a failure on all fronts and everyone in the community is happy to see him go. I think it would be good for the world if Bush became head of Al Qaeda now. Because if he runs Al Qaeda the way he ran America he'll destroy them.

### **Do you think George has gone for good?**

Aron: He is going to put a Presidential library together, he is going to publish a book so there will be some parts of George Bush available to us as comics.

### **What are your hopes for these shows during the Shopping Festival?**

Aron: These shows will have a mixed crowd, which is great. It's scary because they are more difficult to read but that makes it fun. I'm looking forward to maybe discovering an Emirati stand-up as we will have open mike nights throughout the month and there aren't really any Gulf comedians yet so who knows?

The Comedy Cafe will be open until February 15, 6pm-11pm daily at Jumeriah Beach Residence Sales Centre, The Walk. Throughout the week open mike sessions will offer the perfect platform for up and coming amateur comedians who want to take to the stage and showcase their talent to the world. Aron Kader himself will be presenting you to the public every night. If you believe that you have what it takes to be an up and coming comedian and you want to show off your comedy talents call 050 5055092 or email [HYPERLINK "mailto:comedycafe@sundance-hq.com"](mailto:comedycafe@sundance-hq.com) comedycafe@sundance-hq.com to schedule an appearance or alternatively head down there to have a drink and a few laughs. The next headliner will be Sugar Sammy on January 31.

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