

Arabs enjoy a bit of comic relief

Stereotypes stir laughs at Mideast festival

Dale Gavlak THE WASHINGTON TIMES

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AMMAN, Jordan

Torrents of raucous laughter erupted through the crowd, packed mainly with youths clad in T-shirts and jeans who were eager for some good, clean fun.

"This is great. Everybody's on time. All the Arabs showed up," Jordanian-American comic Mike Batayneh said, ribbing the audience of 3,000 about the penchant for lateness in the Middle East.

"Normally, it's like, 'What time did you get here?' Ah, 'Sometime between 2:30 and Monday,'" the Detroit native joked in English.

The audience in the capital's plush King Hussein Cultural Center auditorium roared.

Palestinian-Italian-American **Dean Obeidallah**, 38, didn't let up on the crowd.

"There's a reason why there's no Arab superhero, like Batman or Ironman," he said. "That's because he'd be 20 minutes late for every emergency."

Mr. Obeidallah, formerly of the Axis of Evil comic group, was one of 16 performers at the Arab World's first stand-up comedy festival last week. The object: to show the humorous side of a region often stereotyped as militant, repressive and depressing.

The Axis of Evil comedians - Americans of Middle Eastern origin - were best known for wielding their humor as a weapon against prejudice until they disbanded a year ago. **Aron Kader**, Ahmed Ahmed and Maz Jobrani are the other members of the group, which reunited for a performance at the festival.

"Comedy in the Middle East is exploding," Mr. Ahmed said, laughing at the pun. He noted that the comedy initiative started less than a year ago in the region and has taken off with shows in Lebanon, Bahrain, Qatar, Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

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COURTESY PHOTOGRAPH PUNCH LINEUP: Comedians get a raucous welcome from Arabs at the Amman Stand-up Comedy Festival in Jordan, saying ...

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