Ali Al Sayed

Issue 2015

Comedian | Actor | Director | Writer
Producer | TV Presenter | MC

Listed in the
"Most influential comedians in the world" 2011
Toastmasters USA

"Funniest People of the year"
Rolling Stone ME

Published by Dubomedy ©

"King of Comedy"
Ahlan! Magazine

"His headlining was nearly flawless"
Festival Magazine UK

"Leaving you doubled up with laughter"
Ahlan! Magazine

"Knockout Comedian"
Ahlan! Magazine

"Who needs Russell Peters?"
Alpha Magazine

"Hot 100 List 2011"
Ahlan! Magazine

"Best Personality"
Runner-up 2012 & 2013
Best in Dubai Awards

"Impossible not to laugh"
TimeOut Dubai

BIOGRAPHY

Dubai's Ali Al Sayed started writing, performing and producing comedy in 2008. His lightning fast wit and rapport with audiences has allowed him to perform in numerous shows on the iconic and historic Comic Strip Live in New York - Headlining in Caroline's on Broadway, performing in the Gotham Comedy Club and the New York American Arab Comedy Festival. Ali has performed further major international gigs including the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and Theatre of Change Festival in Greece where he has taught on numerous occasions.

Further to his Stand-Up career, Ali has featured Specials on PBS, CBS, BBC World, articles in New York Times, and classed as "Funniest People in 2012" by Rolling Stone. Numerous shows and interviews have been aired on UAE and New York Radio stations.

As the Co-founder of Dubomedy, who do "all things comedy", Ali co-started the first comedy school in the region, introducing Stand-Up Comedy from an Arab perspective and paving the way for many young comedians.

Producing numerous accredited festivals with Dubomedy International Performing Arts Festival, Dubai International Comedy Carnival and led Ali onto having a weekly segment on Abu Dhabi TV and as OSN Consultant, Producer and Presenter. With a significant number of followers and viral acclimation, Ali was recently scouted and considered for a supporting role in Will Smith's latest movie 'Focus'. He is now scripting his first feature film and working on a new Arabic show for 2015/2016.

As brand ambassador for Etisalat, Ali Al Sayed is currently one of the hottest comedians in the UAE and can be seen in his own Comedy Special, "Onestly Sbeaking" this year at the Dubai Comedy Festival.

Ali's aim is creating a comedy industry instead of only importing entertainment - but to export entertainment and give comedians from Dubai the opportunity on the international big stage. ■

Carolines on Broadway
NYC's Premiere Stand-up Comedy Nightclub

As seen in & heard on

**CBS, PBS, OSN, BBC, MBC,
Dubai One, Abu Dhabi TV,
Sharjah TV, Al Hurra, Al Rai TV,
France24, Dubai TV, OMNI TV Toronto**

**the regular comedy commentator on
Abu Dhabi Sports TV's
"The Beautiful Game" Show,
USA Travel Channel Special**

**The Bob Loneberry Show - New York,
The Brother Wease Show - New York,
Radio 1, Radio 2, City 1016,
DubaiEye, Dubai 92 FM**

As featured in

**New York Times, Rolling Stone,
Ahlan!, Vogue India,
TimeOut Dubai, Alpha Magazine,
Gulf News,Khaleej Times, The National,
Xpress News, Al Khaleej, What's On
Magazine, Metro Magazine, 7 Days**

IN THE HAPPENING

Audience Responses:

Amal A. Bin Shabib @amalSays 13 Apr
@AlSayedcomedy funnier than maz jobrani
Collapse Reply Retweeted Favorite

shabib bin shabib @shabas123 13 Apr
@alsayedcomedy @fluffyguy 's twin brother you were just as funny and even funnier than @mazjobrani
Collapse Reply Retweeted Favorite

Shereena A Lootah @Shereena_Lootah 14 Apr
@AlSayedcomedy great job yesterday I rly enjoyed ur standup just as much as maz's, hope to see more of u in the future Inshallah :)
Collapse Reply Retweeted Favorite

Layne Redman @LayneRedman 21 Apr
@MEFCC Ya got it right with both ya hosts for the first year both Stu and @AlSayedcomedy are the best in the biz for such an event
Hide conversation Reply Retweet Favorite

Dan Kaabi @dkaabi 17 Feb
Bout to checkout the best comedy show in town @AlSayedcomedy
Expand

figo @figo29 10 Mar
@AlSayedcomedy You were great tonight in Abu Dhabi. Thank you for the laughs.
Collapse Reply Retweeted Favorite

Souad Jamal AlSerkal @SSerkal 9 Mar
@NEMRCOMEDY @AlSayedcomedy. Were ABSOLUTELY amazing!!!!!! LOVED it!
Collapse Reply Retweeted Favorite

mina liccione @minaliccione 9 Mar
By request of the Sheikh @AlSayedcomedy will be performing again 2nite :D @ADComedyFest @Dubomedy #fb
Collapse Reply Retweet Favorite

Nagham @nagham 20 Apr
.@alsayedcomedy is an awesome host! #MEFCC
Retweeted by Ali Al Sayed
Collapse Reply Retweeted Favorite

Abu Dhabi ComedyFest @ADComedyFest 7 Mar
Tomorrow's featuring standup performance will be performed by the one & only pioneering Emirati comedian @AlSayedcomedy!!! #ADComedyFest

Nouf توف الجهضمي @Nouf_AlJ 25 Feb
@AlSayedcomedy saw you @ boldtalks and u.. are... hilarious! mashallah. any upcoming shows?
Collapse Reply Retweeted Favorite

ahmad galadari @ahmadgaladari 21 Apr
@AlSayedcomedy u turned the comic con to comic fun man!! Thanks alooot
Hide conversation Reply Retweet Favorite

IN THE PRESS

AL QUDS AL ARABI
AED 4.00 QR 4.20 OR 4.000 BD 4.800 KD 0.400
1702/ARABIC

DO WE STILL APPRECIATE BERTOLUCCI?
PAGE 10 | CULTURE

QATAR SEES OPPORTUNITY IN WORLD CUP
INSIDE | MIDDLE EAST WITH REUTERS

THERE'S NO PLAN B FOR AMERICA
PAGE 9 | THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

International Herald Tribune

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2010 THE GLOBAL EDITION OF THE NEW YORK TIMES GLOBAL.NYTIMES.COM

Pushing the envelope through workshops and festivals

DUBAI

Armed only with jokes, performers sharpen their humor on Mideast stages

BY SARA HAMDAN

"When people wanted to watch my shows at underground cafes in Beirut, their families would say, 'Well, underground, at least that's safe,'" said Nemr Abou Nassar, a Lebanese stand-up comedian performing in Dubai during a regional tour. "You think it's tough to start out as a comedian in New York or Los Angeles? Try Beirut."

Such double entendres are reliable weapons for local comedians who are popularizing stand-up comedy in the Middle East. Comedy has always been taken seriously in the region, mainly in Egyptian theater and on slapstick television shows, but Mr. Nassar is part of a recent movement that is encouraging locals to get up onstage in front of a live audience, armed only with punch lines.

"I vent my frustrations in a very funny way that can turn something bad into something you can laugh at," said Mr. Nassar, 27, who quit his job as an insurance broker to become a full-time comedian in 2006. "It's a means of expression for me, but it's also about representing a truthful image of the region."

He must be doing something right. This year alone, he was the headliner at shows in Los Angeles and New York and was completing a comedy tour of seven cities in the Middle East.

All the laughter is having a ripple effect. Amman held its third annual stand-up comedy festival last week, bringing local and international talent onstage. Dubai held its first international performing arts festival this year, and dedicated two nights to stand-up comedy and improvisation.

Workshops are held in main cities throughout the year, including the nine-week rotating sessions held by the Dubaimedy team in Dubai — Mina Liccione, a New York comedian who is a professor at the New York Film Academy's branch in Abu Dhabi, and the Emirati comedian and entrepreneur Ali Al Sayed.

"We don't just want to do one-off shows around the region and leave; we decided to do courses to create a community of comedians, which doesn't really exist here yet," said Mr. Sayed, a full-time comedian and the founder of the entertainment company Viva Dubai.

"When I was growing up, we always imported entertainment. Locally we've been telling the same jokes for 15 years, and it's time for the younger generation to show that there is mad talent here."

He and Ms. Liccione started the comedy school in 2007 for 15 students, all expatriates. Today, about 70 students participate in shows every nine weeks to showcase talent.

"Now, we're getting more Arabs and Emiratis in the course, which we didn't have at first," Mr. Sayed said. "Next year we will start a comedy course in Arabic, too. We need to keep deviating from what we've been doing to keep things fresh."

American comedians of Middle Eastern descent, particularly the original Axis of Evil group, are a big source of inspiration for regional artists.

Ahmed Ahmed, Maz Jobrani and Aron Kader broke ground when they first toured the Middle East in 2007, after forming Axis of Evil in 2005 and touring in the United States. The first regional tour was fully sponsored by Showtime, which aired a documentary about the experiences of the comedians in Jordan, Kuwait, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon — and helped raise their profile internationally. The group ended up selling out 27 shows in five countries in 30 days.

A frequent visitor to the region, Mr. Ahmed completed another tour this month with the American comedians Erik Griffin and Angelo Tsarouchas, and regional comedians like Sherif Azab of Saudi Arabia. In 35 days, the group visited Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Jordan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and the Emirates, and, for the first time, brought its international comedy to Syria.

"You can only talk about being Arab for so long, making terrorist and hairy chest and airplane drama jokes, but then it gets redundant," said Mr. Ahmed, who recently directed the film "Just Like Us," which deals with misconceptions about comedy in the Middle East — like whether or not people in the region speak English well enough to appreciate stand-up.

"My material is becoming more mainstream on this tour; it's not just about Americans learning about the Middle East and vice versa," Mr. Ahmed said. "Laughter is a common language around the world."

Mr. Ahmed, who used to make a living playing roles as a cab driver or terrorist in major films before becoming a full-time comedian, makes an effort to give local amateurs in different cities a chance to get onstage with him.

This is key for local comedians, who struggle to find venues to practice. There are very few comedy clubs and open-mike nights, even in main cities.

Aside from workshops, amateurs pick up tricks from watching YouTube clips and coaching one another.

"It took 10 years of bars and little stages and two drunk people in the audience for comedians in America to get on TV and get spotted by an agent," said Jamil Abu Wardeh, an entrepreneur who was credited with bringing Axis of Evil to the region when he was a producer at Showtime. "Here we don't have venues, and it was a real challenge at the beginning to give stand-up comedians TV exposure."

Without Nielsen ratings to gauge the popularity of regional shows, and without a precedent for stand-up comedy on television, Mr. Wardeh had a hard time persuading his superiors to put Axis of Evil on the air. It was not until Comedy Central aired the group's successful U.S. tour and management shifted at Showtime that he was able to start organizing a regional tour for the group. Still, it wasn't easy.

"The sales people who were supposed to help us get sponsors for the event would say, 'You want to bring guys over to make fun of Arabs and Muslims? I'm not touching that. I want to live,'" Mr. Wardeh said. "I was constantly on the phone begging for them to take some of the cost of putting on the event, and the few promoters that agreed to work with us acted like they were doing us a favor."

Even Mr. Nassar, the Lebanese comedian, had great difficulty when he started. Along with the radio station Mix FM, he helped finance Beirut's first comedy festival, in 2008, and played host to a comedy program on the local

COMEDY, PAGE 14

Dean Obeidallah performing his routine. "Nobody knew how huge" Middle Eastern stand-up would be, he said. "And it's getting bigger."

M4 | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2010

MIDDLE EAST CULTURE

Pushing the envelope with comedy

COMEDY, FROM PAGE M1

radio station. But he got so disheartened when his money ran out that he nearly gave up.

"It's still a risky time for stand-up now because we're in that middle stage where we're no longer small, but still not big enough," said Mr. Nassar, who now makes a comfortable living as a full time stand-up comedian. "We're still missing a community."

To develop this community, he said, more people need to hone their skills and get up onstage. Dean Obeidallah, who performed with Axis of Evil in the Middle East, frequently hosts local workshops and was in charge of the Amman comedy festival this year.

"When Axis first asked me to tour with them in the region, I honestly didn't think it would make money and didn't want to quit my full-time job and risk nobody in the Middle East coming to see us," said Mr. Obeidallah, who also is host of the Arab-American comedy festival in New York that includes comedians from the Middle East. "Nobody knew how huge it would be. And it's getting bigger."

With high audience attendance rates at shows and the increase in workshops and classes, Mr. Wardeh is hoping that spreading the word on stand-up will encourage more people in the region to participate.

"The ultimate goal is that enough of them will replicate the Western model and lead to a community of strong writers, which will lead to better sitcoms and talk shows and local film stars," he said. "We are in desperate need of good comedy writers, especially in the Arabic language, and stand-up is a great way to develop this industry."

Mr. Wardeh had the foresight to add Wonho Chung, an ethnic Korean who was born and raised in Jordan and who speaks flawless Arabic, to the Axis of Evil mix. The comedians named the new group Three Guys and Wonho, giving their extra team member a crash course in stand-up comedy before sending him on tour.

"My second time on stage, ever, was in front of Queen Rania and King Abdullah of Jordan," said Mr. Chung, who has a background in musical theater and vocal studies. "You know how you lie on your C.V. and learn the skill you say you have later? I did that with stand-up. I was the only person who spoke Arabic among the Axis comedians, so, since Day One, a lot was thrown on my plate and I had to learn fast."

Mr Chung does up to four events a month, performing family-friendly sets mostly in Arabic. Like most regional comedians, he avoids bringing up religion, politics, sex or the use of profanity.

"We are pushing the envelope one step at a time," said Mr. Chung, whose YouTube clips have nearly 1.5 million views. "The Arab American comedians can get away with more than we can. For a local comedian, it can be limiting, but I grew up in this part of the world and I understand the cultural sensitivities."

That is not to say that comedy is completely censored. In a smoke-filled bar in Dubai, Mr. Griffin and Mr. Tsarouchas, Americans who toured regionally with Mr. Ahmed, held nothing back from audiences.

Mr. Ahmed spoke freely about the restrictions placed on comedians by promoters before events, including negotiating how many expletives each person is allowed to say and how some countries are more conservative than others.

Sherif Azab, a comedian born and raised in Saudi Arabia, chooses to keep his material clean. He toured around the region this month with Mr. Ahmed, who was one of the first international comedians to visit Riyadh. Local shows, which are usually advertised using social media to close networks of people, have grown from performances for 50 people in underground cafes to audiences of thousands in the kingdom and neighboring countries, including Bahrain.

"We used to get shows canceled every now and then because of venues afraid of getting blacklisted, not sure of what we would say," Mr. Azab said of his start in comedy in early 2009. "People realize now that we're not a threat.

"It's just laughter. And who doesn't love to laugh?"

Ali Al Sayed performing stand-up in Dubai.

International Herald Tribune
December 16, 2010

THE POWER COUPLE

ALI AL SAYED & MINA LICCIONE

The U.A.E.-based couple aiming to build a grassroots comedy scene

THE PROCESS OF FORGING a comedy scene in a city like Dubai is fraught with obstacles. But for comedians Ali Al Sayed and Mina Liccione, fostering a viable comedy community in the U.A.E. has not only brought them a huge amount of professional satisfaction, but a large personal payoff as well. The pair, now husband and wife, met after mutual friends recognized that they shared a dream of building a local scene that could provide a platform for comedians to refine and showcase their acts, while also encouraging new talent to come through as well. "To become a stand-up comedian anywhere else in the world, you're going to do open-mics for 10-15 years before you even get noticed," says Emirati Al Sayed. "Typically, in the U.K. or U.S., you perform two-to-three shows a night, every single night of the week. In Dubai, that was impossible. We couldn't create 40 open-mic nights. So we thought that we would start a school, and meet people halfway." The result was Dubomedy, a comedy and urban arts school that combined Al Sayed's passion for a homegrown comedy circuit with New Yorker Liccione's extensive experience in musical theater, circus work, stand-up, improv, clowning and just about everything in between. The grassroots organization began holding events – their first ever stand-up show, 2009's Monday Night Funnies, returns to Dubai this month, and the Dubomedy International Performing Arts Festival will celebrate its third edition in January 2013 – while also giving local comics a platform to build on. "Comedy is the hot thing right now," says Liccione. "There's only so much Ali and I can do. We set the groundwork, we have lots of community events, but these graduates have to take the comedy baton and continue. And now that they have, our graduates are performing on a fairly regular basis. They're really getting out there."

MATT ROSS

Rolling Stone ME
October 2012

INVOGUE

EDITED BY **ANINDITA GHOSE**

DOUBLES

Funny bones

MINA LICCIONE and **ALI AL SAYED**, Dubai's first couple of comedy, look at two sides of living in a city where camels do the catwalk

There's never a dull moment at the Dubai residence of comedian couple Ali Al Sayed and Mina Liccione. An Emirati stand-up married to an Italian-American funny woman from New York, things often get lost in translation when the two get talking. "I asked Ali what *maamaa* means and he kept saying he couldn't hear, so I repeated it loudly several times only to learn that it means 'I can't hear you'," says Liccione.

A vegetarian in the land of meat eaters, Liccione, who moved to Dubai six years ago, boasts of being a good catch. "I'm a cheap date and my husband is happy that he gets double the meat, mine and his; I just slide it over to his plate," she says. A true-born Arab, Sayed has grown to accept his wife's dietary orientation: "In my culture, when deciding on food, we think around the meat. You be vegetarian, I'll take my high blood pressure to go, please," he says.

As the founders of Dubomedy, Dubai's first comedy school, the two have been busy spreading the cheer. *Vogue* eavesdrops on the hilarious couple to understand their retelling of life in the city of malls.

ONE WAY OR ANOTHER

MINA: We all know men don't like to ask for directions. But even if you convince your > male partner to ask for directions in Dubai, you'll still get lost because people here don't give you an address or street name. Directions are given by landmarks and you are often told to "go straight, then straight, and more straight and then, maybe, left."

ALI: Now you're just being racist. I grew up giving and following directions that way! Go straight, after the fifth traffic light we're in the house next to the one with a Ferrari. Don't worry, the Ferrari's always there. Now put down the map, I meant to drive through the desert, I know a shortcut.

STORM IN A COFFEE CUP

MINA: I prefer American coffee to Arabic, not because I'm American but because I am a coffee lightweight. I need the milk, extra sugar and not-so-strong taste. My favourite American coffee is Ben and Jerry's 'Coffee coffee buzz buzz buzz'. Yes, that is a real flavour!

ALI: American coffee is like the Kardashians... utterly useless but looks good on the table. Arabic coffee is where it's at... about a quarter of the quantity and like three days of awake.

LO! BEHOLD

MINA: I was really excited to finally attend a camel beauty pageant! But once I got there, it was disappointing. I was expecting the camels to have their hair and make-up done or at least sport colourful tutus on their humps. The stylists clearly didn't know what they were doing and there wasn't even a runway category.

ALI: Okay, what you just said doesn't make sense... but I was happy that Sarah Jessica Parker won.

CONFESSIONS OF A NON-SHOPAHOLIC

MINA: What's the one place you can catch a movie, pick a meal from 50 different cuisines, grocery shop, stop at the bank, go ice-skating, hang out with sharks, get lost a few times, watch dancing fountains, take a selfie in front of the world's tallest building, all in one visit?

ALI: I love shopping malls, too; they're the best places for people who don't want to shop. I meet a lot of men outside fitting rooms. We all share a bond—our women have been in there way too long.

Dubai's top-billed comedians, Mina and Ali, don't seem to agree on anything

"American coffee is like the Kardashians... utterly useless but looks good on the table"
—ALI AL SAYED

TALE OF THE TORTOISE

MINA: Marathons are very popular in Dubai; so popular that there's one every few weeks. I ran in my first and last 6km a few years ago. I was beaten by a pregnant woman, a 11-year-old, several senior citizens and a man who was actually carrying a child. But I ran. Okay fine, I walked, but I finished.

ALI: I would never participate... After running that long, your shorts go up and then it turns into a marathong.

WHO IS THE SLOWEST OF THEM ALL?

MINA: Men always complain that women take too long to get ready. Well, since I'm married, I can tell you that men spend more time in the bathroom. My husband is in there for a good 30 minutes every morning and my friends tell me the same about their husbands. I wondered what they do in there. I thought maybe he zoned out, but one day I received five emails in a row that I was CCed on, all sent while he was there. Clearly, he's on his phone. So I got smart. On days we had to leave early for some place, I'd make sure to hide his phone before he went into the loo so he wouldn't be long. But then I also realised that men will read anything in the toilet. So one day I left a Malaysia holiday brochure in there and, sure enough, he wants to go to Malaysia, and it was his idea.

ALI: Where do you think I'm sending this from? *Flush* ■

Photographed by SIDDHARTH SIVA

Hot seat

Ali Al Sayed

Emirati comedian and co-founder of Dubomedy, Ali Al Sayed, is coming to the capital to perform for one night only on April 25. *Caitlyn Davey* found out what Abu Dhabi can expect...

So, you're coming back to Abu Dhabi! Do you come here much?
Not as much as I would like to – I only get to do a few gigs a year.

You're based in Dubai. Do you notice a difference between the audiences in Dubai and Abu Dhabi?
I think it's the same type of audience – if anything, the audience in Abu Dhabi is more laid-back. They just take it all in, which is kind of relaxing. Not as rowdy as the crowd in Dubai!

Can you tell us a bit about how you come up with your material?
Jokes for me come from life. It's all from personal experiences – whether it's about travelling or something that happens to me. I will write it down, or key it into my phone, and hopefully it's a good story. I like telling stories more than one-liners. Taking one thing that happened and expanding on it – exaggerating the story a little bit.

You do impressions in your act. How do you practise them to get them so right?
Actually, I don't rehearse – which is probably a bad thing. I could probably get better if I did! I like to play it by ear. I feel like overdoing it could kill it, or it might offend the people I am doing an impression of. The rawer it is, the easier it is, I guess. I don't really rehearse or practise at all.

Can we expect to see some new material in Abu Dhabi?
I'm going to be doing a few fresh jokes – I am working on my new special, so there are going to be some original jokes that I will be trying out on the audience. I will also be hosting this one so I am going to be interacting with the audience a lot more and that kind of stuff, so it's going to be fun. I am looking forward to it.

You work both on stage and behind the scenes. Which do you prefer?
I'm the sort of guy who would throw you a surprise party just because I want to see the look on your face. I find the process just as beautiful as being on stage and performing. I'm specific with how I like the events that we produce – what they look like, the comedians we bring, seating arrangements – I want to be involved with every little thing. It is a lot more fun and it keeps me part of the community. Plus it keeps me humble and I just love it.

Do you source the comedians?
Yes, we are acutally bringing down Ron [Josol], who is a friend of ours. It's pretty co – we are going to be talking to a brand new audience in Abu Dhabi which is always something I enjoy.

Who is your favourite comedian of all time?
I couldn't pick one if I had to. I have plenty. Chris Rock is one of my favourite comics. I also love George Carlin – he's wonderful. I think he is a comedian's comedian; in fact, I think he is every comedian's favourite comedian. I also like Bernie Mac, Seinfeld... the list goes on!

See Ali at the Abu Dhabi Golf Club, April 25, www.timeouttickets.com.

TimeOut Abu Dhabi
April 2014

STAND-UP COMEDY

ARE YOU KIDDING?

SHHH: Ali Al Syed says he is trying reach out to the diverse crowd in Dubai

For this funny Emirati man, who you are or where you're from supplies loads of howlers

BY JAY B. HILBTIN
CHIEF REPORTER

DUBAI When asked where he's from or which part of Dubai he grew up, Emirati stand-up comedian Ali Al Syed replied: "Slow down, buddy. You gotta buy me dinner first."

Al Syed, who won't reveal his age just yet (probably in his late 20s or early 30s), has risen from being a family clown to performing on the professional stage, drawing on Dubai's daily grind as a rich source of ribbing lines.

"People get shocked when they learn I'm an Emirati. They nervously ask: 'Can I touch you'?"

But why does he pick on the Chinese, Indians, Mexicans, etc – and of course Emiratis?

"That's not nice of you to assume that I make fun of those races, I have since moved on to Filipinos, Singaporeans, Canadians, Iranians and South Indians ... I respect and love all nationalities and races."

SUPPLIED PHOTO

SCREAM: Ali Al Syed with Mina Liccione

Asked why an Arab is doing stand-up comedy in English, he quipped: "Arabs don't talk Arabic with each other any more ... We wanted to reach a broader audience as Dubai has such a diverse crowd."

The challenges faced by local comedians are not funny, said Al Syed, who has launched Monday Night Funnies, a weekly comedy and variety show featuring local talent. Al Syed and his partner, Italian-American Mina Liccione, top-bill the shows as professional performers, but they also welcome guest performers.

Liccione, a veteran Broadway and MTV performer, said: "The majority of working artists in the UAE only get to perform at corporate events. We wanted to change that and allow them to perform for the community and, in turn, create a local performing arts and comedy hub."

To help local talent, the duo launched the First Annual Dubomedy International Performing Arts Festival, allowing local musicians, comedians, dancers and theatre artists to take the stage.

And as part of its drive, Dubomedy Arts is hosting a workshop from December 11-14 to be conducted by Dean Obeidallah, an award winning Arab-American comedian. Obeidallah will then choose one or two budding comedians from the workshop to open for his show on December 15, called *From the Axis of Evil – Dean Obeidallah Live in Dubai.*

"PEOPLE GET SHOCKED WHEN THEY LEARN I'M AN EMIRATI"
ALI AL SYED, COMEDIAN

FROM AXIS OF EVIL – DEAN OBEIDALLAH LIVE IN DUBAI!
FEATURING ALI AL SYED AND DEAN OBEIDALLAH
WHEN: DECEMBER 15, 8PM
VENUE: REEL CINEMAS, THE DUBAI MALL
TICKETS: DH175
CONTACT: 050-440 0994

LAUGHING WITH A PURPOSE

Dean Obeidallah, an award winning Arab-American comedian, will hold a stand-up comedy workshop in Dubai from December 11-14.

Obeidallah has appeared on numerous US and international TV shows, including Comedy Central's *Axis of Evil* comedy tour, ABC's *The View*, CNN's *Inside the Middle East*, and Al Jazeera's *Min Washington*.

The workshop will be capped with a back-to-back show with Ali Al Syed on December 15 billed as *From the Axis of Evil – Dean Obeidallah Live in Dubai*. In an interview with XPRESS, Obeidallah sheds light on the upcoming show and how he uses comedy to fight life's battles.

How did you guys (Ali Al Syed and Mina Liccione) meet?

On the internet!

How does it feel to work together on a project like this?

I'm looking forward very much to teaming up with Ali, Mina and their Dubomedy Arts for the workshop and the show on December 15. I love the work Ali and Mina have done in building a true comedy infrastructure in Dubai. The key to encouraging more and more people into the art is creating a place that can teach them the fundamentals in a supportive environment, and that is exactly what Ali and Mina are doing with their work.

SUPPLIED PHOTO

What do you expect from this one-off show in the UAE?

I'm actually more excited about the workshop because it will hopefully contribute to encouraging people to pursue stand-up comedy. The one-off shows are a lot of fun, but the legacy of teaching stand-up comedy is more lasting.

Do you have a role model in the industry?

I admire comedians who use their comedy to do more than just make people laugh, that is to use comedy as a form of activism. Comedians like Chris Rock and Jon Stewart, in addition to making people laugh, make people think and that is the type of comedy I admire the most.

How is the comedy scene in New York different from the one in the UAE?

NYC has a history in stand-up comedy for 50-plus years. In the UAE, it's in its infancy and is developing. Hopefully, I can help contribute to the growth of comedy in the UAE with my work.

© XPRESS VARIETY DEAD

XPress
December 2, 2012

THE UAE'S KING & QUEEN OF COMEDY

Dubai's famous comedy duo Ali and Mina open up about married life, jokes-gone-wrong and clown school...

Ever wondered what happens when a comedian falls for a clown? You get Ali Al Sayed and Mina Liccione, a hilarious performing pair-turned-married couple who dominate the UAE's stand-up comedy scene. Ali is one of the first Emirati comedians and Mina is an award-winning entertainer from New York, making them a powerful duo and *Ahlan!* fave – appearing in our Hot 100 2011 list. They set up Dubomedy, the first comedy and urban arts school in the region, and are on a mission to inject some honest humour into the Gulf. We caught up with them about what it's really like to be the UAE's funniest couple.

You're married and you work together. Do you ever get sick of each other?
Ali: Let's just say, as a man it is your responsibility to ensure that you provide a very comfortable couch in the living room for arguments that require an overnight resolution!
Mina: We lead our own projects, have hectic schedules and often perform at events independently, so this keeps things fresh and allows us some space!

Mina, you're a native New Yorker and Ali, you're an Emirati. Are there ever any culture clashes?
Ali: Honestly, I don't notice. We're both really open minded and Mina respects my culture as I do hers.
Mina: Our main difference is dietary as I'm a vegetarian! Another cultural difference that we bump heads on is driving! In America we drive like grandma turtles, and here the driving makes me very nervous.

"Comedy is a celebration of mistakes – the one time that your imperfections are gold!"

Mina, you often perform as your alter-egos Audrey Heartburn, Madge Raps and Anna Banana. Who's your fave to play?
Mina: Audrey Heartburn. Audrey was originally created because I went to visit my great aunt at the senior centre she'd residing in and was deeply saddened by how depressed and lonely many of the residents were, so I created a character and developed a show especially for them! Audrey was inspired by my late great-aunt Lulu, many wonderful women I grew up around in New York, and the TV show *The Golden Girls*.

Mina, you went to clown school in San Francisco. Was it as funny as it sounds?
Mina: Yes and no. Some lessons were absolutely hilarious, for example spit takes, trips and prattfalls, pancake tossing, spinning plates, bouncy stilts and watching your classmates take huge risks. However it was a vigorous eight-hours-a-day, four-times-a-week programme. It was a lot of work and lower back pain but I loved it!

How do you both come up with your material?
Ali: Most of the stuff that I talk about has happened to me in one way or another. My humour is also to tackle stereotypes, so if I see something I don't like happen to somebody based on a stereotype they fit, I write a joke about that and hope it makes a difference.
Mina: I'm really a story teller. My comedy process happens in three stages: observation, documentation, exaggeration. I live it, write it down then bring it to life.

Do you ever have moments when you're on stage and a joke bombs, and no one laughs?
Ali: Of course not, I am the best!
Mina: It happens to every comic, especially when performing to an international mixed crowd. There's no need to dwell on it or pretend it didn't happen, just laugh about it and the audience will too.

What kind of humour goes over best in the UAE?
Mina: The laughs come from honesty! Comedy is a celebration of mistakes – the one time that your imperfections are gold!

As comedians, do you get sick of people coming up to you and asking you to tell a joke?
Ali: No, I like it! It's because they're so excited that they want to share jokes with us. What is annoying is when people say, 'Habibi, this is what you should talk about in your set...'

What advice would you give to aspiring comedians in the UAE?
Mina: Write, write, write! Get a notebook and write down all of your ideas for potential jokes and situations from your life experience. Taking a class is also a great starting point.

Dubomedy offers comedy classes. Can being funny be taught or is it something you have to be born with?
Ali: Like sports, you can be born with the talent and the natural instinct, but you must train to learn the skill behind it.
Mina: Absolutely agreed. You can't teach people to be funny. However, you can help people see the humour in life. It's an attitude adjustment.

INFO: *Watch Ali and Mina perform every week at Monday Night Funnies, Blends, The Address Dubai Marina. For more gigs and info about Dubomedy visit www.dubomedy.com or www.facebook.com/UAEComedy.*

TOP 10 UAE FAVOURITES

MINA

THE BEACH: My fave place to de-stress is Jumeriah Beach.

LUNCH: The Lime Tree Café always!

DINNER: Arabic restaurant Reem Al Bawadi – we go there every year for iftar and birthday celebrations!

GET A FACIAL: Eternel MedSpa in Jumeriah has amazing staff!

THE MOVIES: I love going to the movies; my favourite cinema has to be the one at Ibn Battuta Mall.

MINI-BREAK: We enjoy going to Al Ain Rotana for a quick refresher.

BOWLING: Yep, I love it! Dubai Bowling Center is way fun!

VOLUNTEER: I love going to visit the kids at SENSES Center for Children with Special Needs, Mawaheb from Beautiful People and others with our Clowns Who Care Project.

ART: I enjoy seeing art shows or film screenings at Traffic Gallery.

DUBAI FOUNTAINS: I absolutely love dancing along to them!

ALI

DINNER: Karachi Darbar is my favourite Pakistani food chain with great food and excellent value.

ESCAPE: Nothing clears my head like a drive down to Fujairah!

SHOPPING: Sahwa as the energy, local shops and cheap prices are a very good combination.

MUSIC: Mojo @ Republique: a non pretentious jam of live music and other homegrown shows.

MINI-BREAK: Jebel Hafeet. As a kid, I always went there with my family. I love staying at the Mercur hotel.

LUNCH: Tuscana Restaurant: Make sure you get a seat by the water!

ART: Al Qasba in Sharjah is a real treat, with local artists' exhibits and great authentic Egyptian food.

WALKING: I love ditching the car and heading down JBR.

SWEETS: If you like your Arabic desserts try out Firas!

PARK: I love strolling in Zabeel Park.

Ali Al Sayed

MASTERING THE LAUGH AND LEADING THE PACK

Famous American humorist Will Rogers said, "There's no trick to being a humorist when you have the whole government working for you." Think of the last successful political speech you heard. Did it include a joke or two? The ability to make constituents laugh often helps leaders sway opinions and even rule nations. Now, that's influence! So how can you build your sphere of influence with humor? Maybe you won't change the politics in your country (or the world for that matter), but you can influence your local community of family and friends — in many ways — with a well-aimed joke. There's only one catch: Humor is hard! Try these tips to encourage your audience to laugh *with* you, not *at* you!

- **Be yourself.** Think about what types of humor you appreciate, then create a library of such items. Don't like jokes? Try a humorous anecdote or a witty observation from your own life.
- **Be mildly amusing,** rather than eye-dabbingly funny.
- **Use humor sparingly.** Try using a humorous introduction, a quote or an offhand observation to start.
- **Keep it relevant** to your speech topic.
- **Avoid retelling jokes** found on the Internet. Others have probably already heard or seen them.
- **Keep it clean.** Humor is supposed to make people feel good, not embarrassed, insulted or offended.
- **Keep it appropriate to the audience *and* the situation.**
- **Self-effacing humor is safe,** but a little of it goes a long way.
- **Work on your delivery.** Incorporate vocal variety and gestures into your humor.
- **Timing is everything!** Pause before the punch line.

Iskander and Kumar are part of the "Kings and Queen of Comedy Asia," a show with five top comedians that tours internationally.

A sample of Iskander's humor:
I love to go to the Malaysian cinema and watch movies .... They have subtitles in three languages — blocking half the screen! Malaysians don't even watch the movie. We just read the subtitles.

Australia

While Australia's international reputation for comedy was once limited to Paul Hogan of *Crocodile Dundee* fame, the continent now boasts many big-name stand-ups who perform around the world. One of the most famous is Adam Hills. Best known as the host of a popular Australian music trivia show, he has also won much acclaim for his performances at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland.

A couple of samples of his humor:
I'd like to start on a vaguely controversial note. Deaf people, I've learned, are really racist. That's right. I'm not afraid to say it out loud.

I reckon Americans are the most optimistic people on the planet. Only Americans would name their children after personality traits they hope they're going to grow up with. You see Americans on the street with their kids, going, "Oh, Faith, have you seen Hope?" "Yeah, she's over there with Charity. They're waiting for Honor."

Dubai

Ali Al Sayed has an indisputable claim to being influential in the Dubai comedy scene. He's considered the first professional comedian in Dubai. Perhaps equally important, Al Sayed co-founded Dubomedy Arts in Dubai — a pioneering comedy and urban arts school in the region. Part of its mission is "to create a solid local comedy community."

I am sick and tired of people asking me where I'm from. Because they always come up with something ridiculous anyway. One girl said to me once, "Oh God, you have, like, Chinese eyes. Are you from China?" What? There are no brown people in China.

England

As the original home of the English language, England has produced many well-known comedians. One of the newer ones is Sarah Millican. Since winning the Best Newcomer Award at the 2007 Edinburgh Fringe Festival and placing second for the main award in 2010, she has become a fixture on British radio and television. She also performs to packed audiences at comedy clubs and festivals.

A sample of Millican's humor:
[Interacting with audience.] "Are you married? How long you been married? Three and a half years? Oh, you're nearly done."

And another sample:
My diet's not the best. I was in a restaurant the other day with my

Who needs Russell Peters?

Thanks to a talented group of locally-based gagmeisters, Dubai's stand-up comedy scene is growing like the smiles on their audiences' faces. We spoke to the leading lights about whether the city is ready to take things to the next level

Text: Craig Hawes
Images: Grace Paras, Tina Patni

MINA LICCIONE: CLOWN WITH A CAUSE

Like her fiancé Ali, Mina is multi-talented. As well as being co-founder of Dubomedy, she's also a professional comedienne, a performing arts educator and a tap dancer all rolled into one. "Yes, I pretty much do it all and I've performed since the age of three, making my first TV appearance at 17 on MTV's *The Grind*."

The Italian-American originally came to Dubai for just two weeks to perform in a show, then she was asked to teach comedy workshops and three years later, she's still here with no plans to leave. "I met my soon-to-be husband here and the country is incredible, unlike anywhere else," says Mina. "I love the mix of cultures and being able to create something from the ground up."

Apart from providing an array of entertainment, Dubomedy is also giving back to the community with the Clowns Who Care volunteer project. "Our team of volunteer artists go to hospitals to tell jokes and sing with the patients – laughter is the best medicine after all!"

ALI AL SAYED: KNOCK-OUT COMEDIAN

As a complete all-rounder in the entertainment industry, Ali is known for his work as a comedian, artist manager, producer, director and teacher, as well as founder of Viva Arts and co-founder of Dubomedy Arts.

Describing himself as loud, crazy and hairy, the UAE-born multi-tasker recently signed on the Orbit Showtime team as a producer, presenter and writer as he develops his own Arabic comedy show, due to be broadcasted this autumn.

"It's a challenging job making people laugh, but it's the challenge that makes it such a fantastic ride," says Ali who admits he didn't always think he's be a comedian. "I actually come from a very corporate background and after seven attempts to quit my job, I finally stepped down from the ladder and formed the comedy partnerships with my fiancée, Mina. We have always imported entertainment from the West and my dream is to one day export entertainment from here."

Ali also has one other bizarre dream. "My fiancée's dad is an Italian-American boxing promoter, so I would like to do a Middle Eastern re-enactment of *Meet The Parents*!"

Spotted

Irish stand-up comedian Jimeoin (left) at Dubai International Airport, waiting to board a flight to Edinburgh after a tour in Australia. Also at Dubai Airport, American entrepreneur Chris Guillebeau, author of *The $100 Startup*, hopping on a plane to the Congo.

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Hot seat
Ali Al Sayed

The twentysomething comic and founder of Dubomedy this week becomes the first Emirati to perform at Edinburgh Fringe Festival. *Rob Garratt* quizzed him

Excited about Edinburgh?
I'm thrilled. I was there last year as an audience member and it's beautiful – one of the most energetic cities – and to be able to go back to perform there is one of the reasons why you become a comedian.
How do you think you'll go down with the audience?
The pressure is high because in a specific city you have to make the comedy as relevant to them as you can. But I'm the kind of comedian that doesn't want to sell out. I don't want to swear or disrespect anybody, but in the UK a lot of the comedy can be quite crude. I don't want to fall into that.
Do you feel pressure to represent the region?
That's what I was going for when I started doing comedy. There are a lot of different cultures here and they can be misunderstood. I want to make sure people get to see a different side to Arabs.
Nervous? Edinburgh crowds aren't easy...
What I'm worried about is not understanding what they're saying. There are a lot of accents in Scotland: if someone comes in from Aberdeen and heckles, it's going to be tough. One thing I do like is that UK audiences have a lot of heckling experience, so it's going to be creative heckling.

'People who make other people laugh are miserable'

Back in the UAE, how does being Emirati affect the audience's perception of you?
Comedy is a big part of our culture. We're always laughing and joking among ourselves, but the second you walk on stage, no matter who you are, everybody sizes you up. 'He's local, so he's a bad driver...' I like to broach that early on in my set, and when you do that you enter the cool club.
Do you ever get any flak for doing comedy?
I'm not going to say everybody loves me, but nobody has come to me and said they don't like it.
You're known as a double act with your American wife, Mina Liccione. How did you meet?
She'd just moved here (in 2008) and she had this vision of starting a comedy school. I didn't think it would be a great idea, but that's when we started running together. There was no scene at all when we started Dubomedy.
What's the scene like now?
It's growing. There are more opportunities for people to perform. But I think we should work more together. Comedy is very competitive. You're not the funniest man on earth because you got through a five-minute set and made people laugh.
So what makes a typical comedian?
People who make other people laugh are generally miserable. A lot of comedians are insecure. Right before I go on stage I have three minutes of questioning the world where nothing makes sense.
Ali's weekly comedy night, Monday Night Funnies, starts at Blends, The Address Dubai Marina on September 24.

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TimeOut
August 8, 2012

Al Majlis

It's a Funny Old World

By Mehak Alam

Question?

What do you get if you cross an Emirati ex-businessman with an Italian-American wife and the UAE's changing comedy scene?

Answer?

Ali Al Sayed of course!

Despite having tested huge success, Ali Al Sayed is very much a down-to-earth kind of guy. The funny man has left many a person chortling away after an evening in his company, is ranked in Toastmasters International Magazine as one of the most influential comedians today and has just been nominated in the 2012 Best Personality in Dubai Awards and yet, funnily enough, he manages to keep his feet planted firmly on the ground, even if they are dressed in Mickey Mouse socks!

Ali is quite literally a jack of all trades. His comic performances are just one of his many skills. Each week, his work sees him doing stand-up, coaching comedy classes, working as a writer, directing and hosting a TV show and that's before we even look at the other special projects he's involved in. He works as a diction coach for Hollywood's Navid Negahban, as an acting coach for the movie Mallal (the first ever Emirati-Indian movie), is the founder of local entertainment company Viva Acts and is co-director of Dubomedy, Dubai's first training center for aspiring comedians. Quite a turn of events for a man who started out as an event organizer in the corporate world.

After realizing that the world of business was not for him, Ali bravely quit his job to focus on his true passion, stand- up comedy. Performing a 30 minute gig for around 800 dentists and with only two weeks to prepare was a huge challenge for him, but one on which he thrived. He discovered he works well under pressure and his nerves actually helped to bring out the best in him. The gig brought a ton of good reviews and projects began to trickle in, giving Ali the confidence he needed to believe that he could really make the comedy route work for him.

Now known for his quirky punch lines and straight to the point one -liners, he has a fairly distinctive comedic approach. Shying away from creating laughs by ridiculing people or things, Ali instead encourages his audience to laugh at the humor in life. He also avoids joking about politics, believing that there is enough to laugh about in the world without adding political principles. "I stick to my guns on stage; I keep away from bringing politics in to comedy."

Being a top comedian requires a lot of practice and Ali is always thinking about new material. Simple, everyday things inspire his jokes and he tries to recreate situations without putting words in people's mouths, "One quality of a good comedian is to use his material in a way that says a lot of things without even saying them" he explains. Having confidence in yourself, being able to read the audience and having the ability to find humor in everyday scenarios are the keys to success in the world of comedy.

Even when away from the stage, comedy plays a big role in Ali's life as his partner, Mina Liccione, is the other half of this comedy couple. He explains that the two simply "hit it off" when they first met as they both shared the same visions. Voted in Ahlan's Hot 100 as Dubai's Comedy Couple, the pair have a strong, solid relationship. Smiling widely, Ali tells us the secret behind it, "The dynamic of the relationship is so good. We have never competed with each other. It's always been very supportive from the get go."

Keen to spread the comedy word across the country, work towards the vision of creating a comedic community and build up a comedy industry which is barely in its infancy, Ali and his Italian-American wife are dedicated to their cause. Proudly Emirati, he explains, "This is my city and I wanted to give the region and the Dubai city something more sustainable; something that can stay." Initially, it was a tough job. With no finance, venues or people ready to accept something new, Ali and his team had to work hard to promote standup comedy in the UAE. Restricted to getting the message across on TV or within the constraints of a theater performance, there was a tough uphill battle but Ali felt "like we were ready for a new generation of comedy." His goal of redefining comedy through the introduction of sketch, improv and stand-up is certainly a lot closer now, with his team's efforts certainly beginning to pay off. With definite plans in the pipeline to take Dubomedy to Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Egypt and Lebanon, Ali Al Sayed and his wife Mina are one comedy couple who hard work and whose love of life is certainly no joke.

Grabbing a few minutes to ask Ali for some advice, he happily shared his secrets to success:

LIFELESSONS

- Be creative.
- Strive hard and never give up.
- Believe in your ideas, it's never about what other people think but it is always about what you want to do.

Dubomedy re-launched their Monday Night Funnies on the 1st of October. With different weekly themes and a whole host of exciting comedians, Monday nights will never be boring again. See www.dubomedy.com for more info.

Just for laughs

Catching up with two of Dubai's funniest figures, Mina Liccione and Ali Al Sayed.

Q Who or what made you want to get into stand-up comedy?

Mina: From Off-Broadway musicals to theatrical circus productions, film and television to the Broadway show *Stomp*, I had performance experience in every genre of comedy except stand-up. Stand-up comedy found me by accident. I was hosting a charity event and right when the show was about to begin there were technical difficulties. The producer said: "Do something funny Mina!" and pushed me out onto the stage. I ended up making fun of the situation, told a few funny stories and utilised my improvisation skills. After the show a woman came up to me and said: "You have to do stand-up, you're a natural!" So I did.

Ali: I always knew I was going to perform comedy one day. I never set up a plan or put a deadline. The last company I worked for called me and said: "You're into comedy now right? We have an event for 800 dentists in two weeks and we want you to perform." As bizarre as that phone call was, I took the gig and the rest is history. Why did I want to do it? Well, I have something to say. I want to change the image of the angry bearded Arab to the laughing bearded Arab.

Q Do you think that the Middle East is producing more home-grown comedians than ever before?

Mina: Yes. Slowly, Middle East-based comedians started taking action. For example, myself and Ali launched the first comedy school in the MENA egion five years ago when there was no local comedy scene in the UAE. Hundreds of students have graduated from our comedy programmes and many continue to perform now. On a bigger level, we produced the Dubai International Comedy Carnival last January, which acted as the region's largest comedy festival offering workshops, comedy film challenges, amateur comedy contests and a slew of headliners from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon and the UAE, not just the USA.

"Growing up, we always had amazing comedy on TV, but there was a major dip in the last decade that's giving birth to numerous young stand-up comedians."

Ali: Absolutely, the audience is ready to listen and ready for somebody else's point of view. Like me, I think a lot of people are sick of what's on TV. Growing up, we always had amazing comedy on TV, but there was a major dip in the last decade that's giving birth to numerous young stand-up comedians. When we started the company, we wanted to encourage people to take the stage, to produce small shows, and to not be afraid to try out something as new and as brutal as stand-up comedy.

Q What do you think about big-name comedians visiting Dubai?

Mina: I think it's great. Big-name comedians tour major cities and Dubai should be no exception. Dubai is definitely on the map and it's wonderful to see so many musicians and big comedians coming to perform. It shows that there is a huge audience wanting to be entertained.

Ali: Somebody from a known comedy company in Dubai said just last summer that "Dubai is not a major city. If you want to be a comedian, you should look at going to major cities like LA, New York or London." One year on, we have organised the Dubai International Comedy Carnival with the help of the Dubai Events and Promotions Establishment, and other companies have also started to bring in well-known comics. It's a huge market—don't knock it.

Q How would you encourage local aspiring comedians?

Mina: I often recommend that those interested in giving stand-up comedy a try should take a course. It's a great way to learn the nuts and bolts of joke writing, get professional coaching, boost your confidence and perform in a supportive environment.

Ali: Our doors are always open for training, advice and performance opportunities. However, don't expect favours - you have to do the work. Stand-up comedy is about experience and because you were funny in your first two shows it doesn't make you a professional. The worst thing about this business is that this goes straight to your head and that's where you will slow things down for yourself.

MINA AND ALI BRING GIGGLES TO THE GCC

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Read Magazine [Issue 112]
August 4, 2013

FUNNY PEOPLE

Meet the future of UAE comedy

WHAT DO YOU CALL A BOOMERANG THAT DOESN'T COME BACK?
A STICK.

OK, so comedy isn't our forte. Fortunately, the UAE's comedic coffers are bursting at the seams with real talent, and this month sees the first ever regional tour from a group of home-grown comedians, with the launch of the Rotana Comedy Tour.

Up until 2007, UAE comedy consisted of visiting Western comics holed up in smoky Western bars telling Western jokes.

Then producer and comedy mastermind Jamil Abu-Wardeh created the *Axis Of Evil Middle East Comedy Tour* – inspired by its US namesake – to promote Arab talent from around the world. Bringing comedy into the mainstream by coining the three Bs – blue material, beliefs and 'bolitics' – the Axis Of Evil reached out to a local audience, making stars of performers like the Arabic speaking Korean-Jordanian Wonho Chung in the process.

Emirati funnyman Ali Al Sayed and American comedienne Mina Liccione followed that in 2010 by setting up their Dubomedy comedy school, with the aim of nurturing local talent, and the Rotana tour is testament to their success.

In the following pages we celebrate Mina, Ali and the first three of their former pupils to go pro – Rohit Jayakaran, Omar Ismail and Brent Jenkins, as well as popular Indian performer Nitin Mirani, who spent the past seven years building a large and devoted following with his show Komic Sutra.

So, ladies and gentlemen, please, put your hands together, and welcome to the stage, as they boldly go where no comedian has gone before, the future faces of UAE comedy...

PLEASE, WELCOME TO THE STAGE...

MINA LICCIONE

ALL THE WAY FROM... THE UAE, VIA NEW YORK CITY

How would you describe your comedy style?
I'm American, so I am loud and nasal.
Who is the funniest person you know?
My dad. He's the quintessential Italian-American 'Guido'. I'm sure he has a secret life as a boxing coach called Tony. He wears leather jackets, drives a black Lincoln and loves Sinatra.
What is the worst piece of advice you've been given?
People say that you should imagine your audience naked. Why would you do that? An Arab audience would be all hair.

"People say that you should imagine your audience naked. Why would you do that? An Arab audience would be all hair"
– Mina Liccione

PLEASE, WELCOME TO THE STAGE...

ALI AL SAYED

ALL THE WAY FROM... THE UAE
Do you remember your first show?
It was for 800 dentists at a corporate event. Dentists are scary. I remember preparing a routine and passing it to the committee who said 'Yep, everything is fine, except for the dentist jokes'.
What is your secret weapon?
I wear comedic underwear. So if things start to go wrong I can always resort to that.
What is something that you don't get but everyone finds funny?
Jackass. Why is that funny?
What was the last joke you heard?
Donald Trump is running as a Republican Presidential candidate, which is funny because I thought he was running as a joke.

TOUR DATES

June 16, Mina Liccione and the Funny Girls, Moodz, Al Ain Rotana, Al Ain, 8.30pm to 10pm, free. Tel: (03) 754 5111

June 21, Boys Night, Cooper's, Park Rotana, Abu Dhabi, 8.30pm to 10pm, free. Tel: (02) 6573333
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Al Barsha

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Hypersun Magazine
August 2011

Know **YOUR** Neighbours

Every neighbourhood has its share of 'characters' - whether it's the barber you always see, the chef, or the colourful news vendor. So we decided to speak to one of these familiar faces and find out more about the person behind the job...

Broadway to Barsha

Mina Liccione is a Broadway veteran and the award-winning comedienne behind the region's first and only Comedy and Urban Arts School - 'Dubomedy'. The New Yorker, along with her 'partner in comedy', Ali, co-direct and cook up some of the funniest stage shows in the city.

What was the joke at breakfast today?
There was no breakfast today, my husband is fasting! Though we did have a good chuckle over my very bad attempt at a Scottish accent. We are getting ready to go to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival so I was trying to prepare. I lasted about six words before busting out into laughter.

What elements are essential to a great performance?
Timing! The infamous pause between the set up and punchline is crucial. One big mistake that amateur comics make is that they speed through their set, without giving the audience a chance to react.

Do you practice your act, or do you improvise on stage?
I write and rehearse my jokes - both old and new. Between jokes I often ask the audience questions and improvise based upon their responses. There are always improvised elements to my set though the majority of it is written.

Describe your comedy...
Honest. My comedy reflects my life - I write jokes about what I experience and what cracks me up. I love being physical and full of energy on stage. My favourite jokes are ones about my family. I love impersonating my family members, the crazy characters from the streets of New York and the interesting people I meet in [illegible]. I'm a storyteller at heart.

Are you funny off stage too?
Sometimes yes, sometimes no. I love to crack jokes and make light of frustrating situations, but also really enjoy quiet time. It's important to find balance. Performers and teachers give so much of themselves to their audience and students that it's important to have some down time.

How much of your material is original?
Ali and I write all our own material, and teach our students to do the same. Stealing jokes from other comedians is just that, stealing, and it's not cool! Some comics choose to use internet or public domain jokes, these are 'joke tellers'. Comics who steal other comedians' jokes are called hacks and most producers will not book a hack. Writing is a big portion of stand up, and we teach our students the structure of a joke; ways to document their funny experiences and write a comedy set. We have them turn in a first draft then help them edit, find punch lines, work on delivery, timing and add physicality to their performance.

Is there a joke that never gets old and you crack up every time you hear it?
Yes, anything by the late great Rodney Dangerfield. One joke
(... continued on next page)

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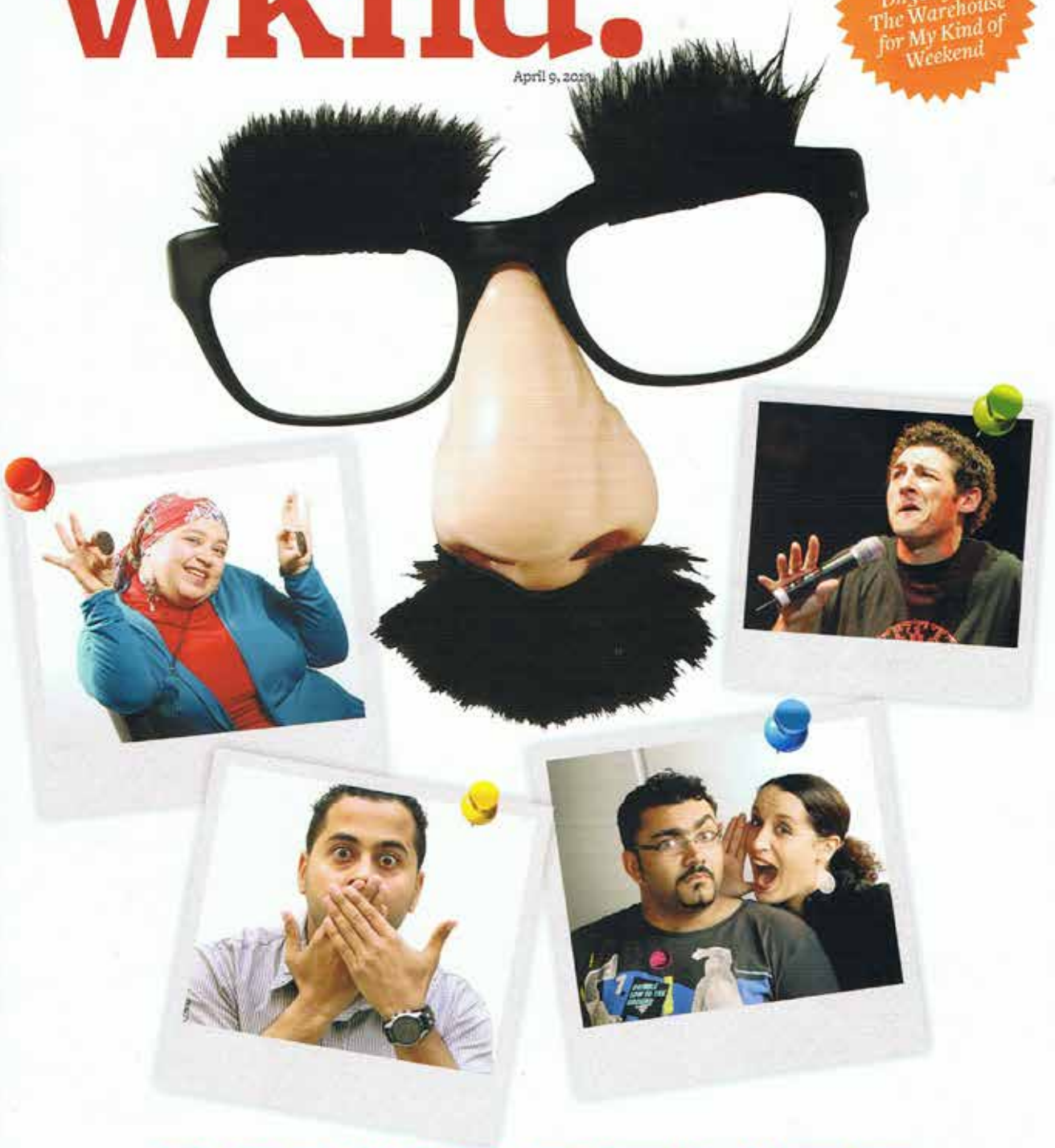

COMIC RELIEF

MEET DUBAI'S FUNNY MEN — AND WOMEN

WKND. Magazine
April 9, 2010

The beauty of stand-up comedy is: you can do it till the day you die. With stand-up, the older you get, the funnier you are! — Mina Liccione

East meets West: Together. Ali and Mina are a scream

first tap-dancing performance at age three and her first job as assistant dance and improvisation teacher at age 12, she'd read her cards right, from the outset. There was "never a doubt" in her mind that she was going to be a performer. "Comedy, in my family, is how we deal with life," says the Italian-American. "It's an attitude... you have to have a sense of humour. There are too many people and too much madness around you not to have one. The beauty of stand up comedy is: you can do it till the day you die," she declares. "With stand-up, the older you get, the funnier you are!"

According to them, the fledgling state of the comedy industry here means less rivalry and more support. Ali says they get asked so often whether they're in competition with The Laughter Factory, the oldest stand-up comedy promoter in the UAE, that he'd like to set the record straight: They are not. "The Laughter Factory are definitely the pioneers in this area," he states. "I've attended many of their shows, which have great quality. I think they're more directed towards the British crowd — and they're honest about it as well." Mina chimes in at this point to explain how they balance each other. "The Laughter Factory brings in UK humour for the British community here. We're doing the opposite by embracing the local community and

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يعالج المواقف بالفكاهة والضحك

علي السيد: لا حدود لطموحاتي الكوميدية

علي السيد

■ كيف دخلت عالم الكوميديا الهزلية؟

ـ لا أخفي أن الكوميديا هي جزء من حياتي منذ صغري، وقبل ثلاث سنوات فقط خطر لي أن أطورها وأخرج بها للناس.

■ كيف كانت البداية؟

ـ كانت صعبة جداً، ففي البداية لم يكن هناك إيمان بالموهبة المحلية لدى الكثيرين، وكانت الشركات التي تعمل في إدارة العروض الكوميدية ترغب بالكوميديانات الأجانب. وقد التقيت ميدا ليتحولي، صاحبة الخبرة في الكوميديا الهزلية، وأنشأنا شركة لتنظيم وإقامة المناسبات والحفلات، وانطلقت منها إلى عالم الكوميديا.

■ متى كان أول عرض لك؟

ـ كان عن طريق المصادفة حيث كلفت إياه عندما كنت أعمل في شركة لتنظيم المؤتمرات، واستغرق العرض نصف ساعة. بعد افتتاح شركة تنظيم المناسبات ورحلة تحضير وانتظار دام 13 شهراً، أقيم لي عرض كوميدي كفنان في أحد الفنادق في دبي.

■ كيف كان تلقي الجمهور لفنك الذي عرضته للمرة الأولى؟

ـ لقيت احتفاءً كبيراً من الجمهور، وكان ذلك دافعاً كبيراً لي إلى أن أتقدم بموهبتي إلى الأمام.

■ بماذا تتميز الكوميديا الهزلية التي تتناولها عن المسرح الكوميدي؟

ـ تختلف عنه في أنها تعتمد على شخص واحد، يتخذ لنفسه منصة صغيرة في قاعة ويخاطب الجمهور بشكل مباشر، بإيماءات وكلمات كوميدية، يلامس عبرها مواقف يمر بها الناس في حياتهم اليومية، في المنزل أو العمل أو الشارع، بطريقة معالجة تعتمد على الفكاهة والضحك.

■ من ساندك في موهبتك؟

ـ من ساندتني شريكتي ميدا ليتحولي كثيراً، وشاركتني أيضاً بالتفكير والتخطيط في تطوير هذا الفن الوليد والمواهب الكوميدية المحلية في الإمارات. وقد نجحنا في أن ننظم مهرجاناً للفنون الأدائية قبل سنة، ونحن مقبلون على مهرجان آخر هذه السنة.

■ متى كانت بدايتك الحقيقية كفنان؟

ـ كنت أعتبر نفسي في البداية رجل أعمال. وبعد دخولي عالم الكوميديا، كنت أعتبر نفسي رجل أعمال وكوميديا، إلى أن وجدت خلال ثلاث سنوات من العمل في مجال الكوميديا أنني فنان كوميدي، واكتسبت فيها خبرة تضاهي العشر سنوات.

■ إلى أين تطمح أن تصل بالكوميديا؟

ـ لا أشعر أن هناك حدوداً معينة سأصل إليها، إنما أجد أن جميع الأبواب مفتوحة أمامي.

■ هل تفكر في التمثيل في المسرح؟

ـ لا يهمني حجم المسرح كثيراً، وسواء كان صغيراً أو كبيراً، فإنه يحقق لي الهدف نفسه. وبعد لحظات قليلة جداً تصعودي للمنصة، أنسى المكان الذي أحضر فيه، اندماجي مع الجمهور، لذا فإنني أعتبره مسرحاً في جميع الحالات، وقد مثلت على المسرح الكبير والمنصة الصغيرة، ولم أجد فرقاً بينهما.

■ هل حصل أي طارئ على شخصيتك بعد دخولك ميدان الكوميديا الهزلية؟

ـ لم يحصل تغيير كبير، لأنني من محبي الكوميديا بالأساس، ومع كل إنجاز جديد أشعر بأنه تكتمل الفرحة والبهجة، وفي الوقت نفسه تزداد ضغوط العمل.

■ هل من مذهد أخرى تطمح إليها، كالتقديم والسينما؟

ـ نعم، ولدي برنامج كوميدي جديد على شبكة (OSN)، وسبق أن مثلت في أفلام سينمائية قصيرة، ومازالت الفرص موجودة ويدعمها النموذج لدي.

■ صف لنا شعورك وأنت تؤدي دوراً كوميدياً أمام الجمهور؟

ـ شعور لا يخلو من الفرح والسعادة، خاصة عندما يتجاوب الجمهور.

■ هل هناك اهتمام بالكوميديا الهزلية في الإمارات؟

ـ في البداية لم يكن هناك أي اهتمام بها، حتى الناس لم يكونوا يتقبلون هذا الفن، ولاقى تحفظ بخصوصية من قبل الجمهور والموهوبين الذين يرغبون بتقديم هذا اللون الفني، وهذا يتماشى مع النهضة الكوميدية في العالم العربي، عبر دعم شبكات الإعلام لها. وقد تجاوزنا في الإمارات مرحلة إلى الإنتاج، لذا فإننا بصدد أن نقدم عروضنا في الخارج.

■ هل يسهم الإعلام في دعم فن الكوميديا الهزلية؟

ـ دائماً الصعبة تكون في إيصال الفكرة للجميع مرة واحدة، أما الصحافة فإنها قد عنيت وما تزال تكتب عنا الكثير بشكل إيجابي، وحتى في أميركا أيضاً كتبوا عنا، ونجد الآن أن فن الكوميديا الهزلية بدأ يشتهر في غضون الأشهر القليلة الماضية، واجتاز قفزات نوعية في شهرته.

■ هل من رسالة محددة للفنان الكوميدي؟

ـ رسالة الفنان الكوميدي تحمل في باطنها معاني إنسانية، بصورة بسيطة ومصفرة، يسهل على الجمهور تلقي محتواها وتلقيها بالفكاهة والضحك. وكمجموع الكوميديين في الإمارات، هدفنا أن نعطي الفرصة والخبرة للفنانين المحليين للكوميديا والغناء.

فنان خفيف الظل، ووقع حركاته وصوته على المنصة الصغيرة أقل خفة على النفس، وتلتهم العيون والآذان.

الكوميدي الإماراتي علي السيد، صاحب الفكاهة والموقف الجميل منذ صغره، الذي اكتشف قبل ثلاث سنوات أن الموهبة إنما خلقت لتعرض على الناس، وذلك بعد أن قدم أول عرض كوميدي هزلي بالمصادفة في أحد فنادق دبي، انتقل من بعدها إلى الاحتراف، وتنظيم مهرجان للفنون الأدائية، والتمثيل في السينما والمسرح، والمشاركة في عروض كوميدية متجولة في الإمارات، ومعه كان هذا الحوار.

حوار: أيهم اليوسف

عرضي الأول جاء بالمصادفة

لدي برنامج جديد على شبكة (OSN) قريباً

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Edited by
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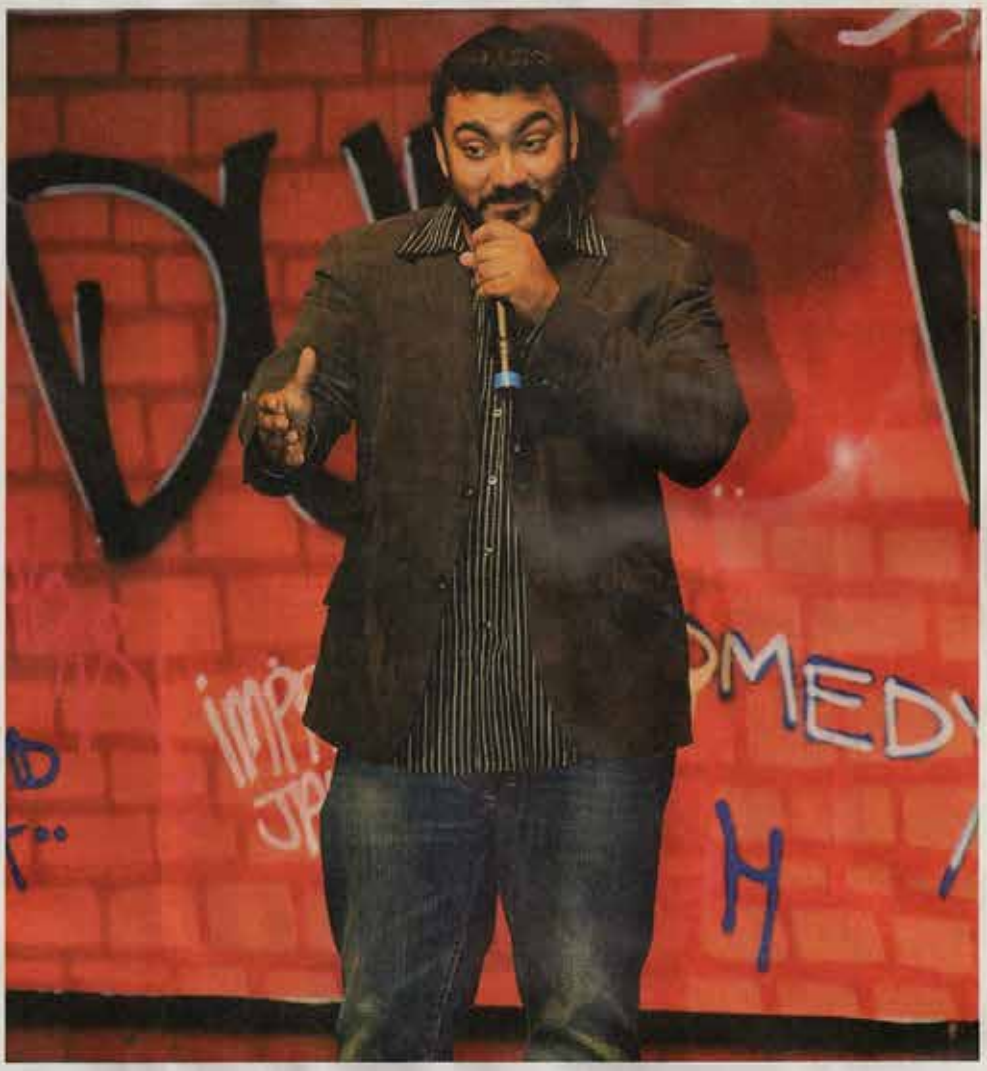
Local laughs

David Clack speaks to Emirati comedian Ali Al Sayed ahead of comedy show **Boys' Night Out**



Did you hear the one about the guy in the khandura? Nope, us neither. And while the local comedy scene may not yet be thriving in the UAE, one man has made it his mission to prove Emiratis know how to have a laugh.

Not that telling jokes has always been Ali Al Sayed's thing. Having quit his job three years ago to focus on comedy, Ali set up Dubomedy Arts with fellow funnyperson Mina Liccione. Together, they've set about

'I wouldn't call it heckling, but the British love to participate'

nurturing the region's aspiring gag-merchants, culminating in a one-off trial-by-fire show at Cooper's this week. Ahead of the gig, we spoke to Ali about what we can expect from him and his comedy prodigies.

Do crowds across the Gulf react to your comedy in different ways?
In the UAE, it's a bit of a challenge because there are a lot of different nationalities and you have to make sure the show is relevant to everybody. Performing in the UAE makes you tough, but the challenge is what makes it fun, because you really never know who's going to be in the audience. The British and Americans are used to comedy, so it's not as easy to make them happy. But that's the kind of audience you want – an audience that makes you work for your laugh.

Are there any nationalities you find are particularly hostile? Who heckles the most?
I wouldn't call it heckling, but the British love to participate, they love to be a part of the show in one way or another. But when one of the British audience members yells something out, they laugh the hardest when you come back, so it's fun.

So how would you describe your style of comedy, what kind of things do you cover in your typical set?
I like to tackle stereotypes, especially about the different nationalities that are living here in the UAE. I make fun of my culture, too – the things we Emiratis do.

So which stereotypes of Emiratis do you think are particularly true?
Arabs are always late – I make fun of that. I make fun of reckless driving, I make fun of… well, I don't want to give any of the jokes away! I like taking the things that aren't 100 per cent true as well, and sort of twisting them in the end. But not just about the Emirati culture, but about other cultures too – like Filipinos for example. They get a lot of stick from people, and there are a lot of assumptions about them, but I like taking that and twisting it round.

So tell us a bit about the other guys on the bill. What are their backgrounds and what can we expect from them?
The other guys on the bill are all graduates from the Dubomedy Arts School, which I run. We have an upcoming Emirati-British comedian, we have an American from Texas and an Indian guy.

Are you confident they'll be able to handle the rowdy audience at Cooper's?
The only way to gain experience is by doing it. When you're starting off in events like this, you have really good nights and sometimes it's really difficult. And if you go through the difficult ones from the beginning, then you're lucky because then you've got those out of the way, so you know how to handle everything.

Who are your comedy heroes?
One of my favourite comedians is Chris Rock because, you know, take away all the foul language and he's talking about society, he's talking about his culture, he's talking about how people need to get along. And eventually that's the kind of comedian I want to be – a comedian with a cause, not just going up on stage to get a few laughs. I really want to go out there and have a message.

Boys' Night Out takes place at Cooper's on June 21 at 8pm. Entry is free. Visit www.dubomedy.com for information about Ali's comedy classes

Around Town

Edited by
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Making the funny

Home-grown comedians rarely get stage time in Dubai. *Laura Chubb* discovers how they're seizing the spotlight with new show Monday Night Funnies

Get down to Warehouse Lounge on a Monday night and you may see any, if not all, of the following: a veiled Egyptian female stand-up comic; an Emirati guy playing in sketch comedy; an Italian-American New Yorker tap dancing and performing body percussion. It sounds odd, and it probably is, but that's what happens when you pool the city's varied local talent in one show. The new *Monday Night Funnies* aims to do something we've never seen before in the city: stage live comedy using only performers from Dubai.

Ali Al Sayed (pictured, above) is a local boy. He's also the founder of events management company Viva Dubai, and runs Dubomedy, a non-profit outfit that seeks to train budding comedians in the emirate. Al Sayed has been an aspiring comic for years, but he's found it difficult getting a break. 'People don't even want to see a video, they don't want me to audition, just because I didn't hop on a plane to get here,' he says. He thinks there's a lack of confidence in local talent, an unwillingness to take a chance. '[People] don't believe that you have what it takes to be on stage,' he tells *Time Out*.

So rather than wait around, Al Sayed has created his own opportunity. Along with Dubomedy co-founder Mina Liccione (pictured, right), a Broadway veteran who also runs the Laugh Out Loud! Comedy Institute in Dubai, he has put together *Monday Night Funnies*, after auditioning scores of acts from all over the city. Al Sayed is grateful to Warehouse Lounge for giving *Monday Night Funnies* a go. 'We started working on this project a year ago,' he tells us. 'It took us that long to find a venue that's going to take a risk on a non-commercial event. We owe it to Le Méridien and Warehouse for actually going ahead and doing this.'

The weekly show promises to be different each time, and there are four themes on rotation throughout each month: week one is always a variety show, featuring all kinds of talent; week two will be a sketch show; week three is stand-up; and week four will be improv (in the vein of popular improv show *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*). There is one constant during all of these shows, and that's the host, Audrey Heartburn. As Liccione's 60-year-old brassy alter ego, it seems that Heartburn has her roots firmly in Liccione's own Italian-American family.

Two of the female stand-up comedians are veiled

'The character is based on my father's Aunt Lulu,' says Liccione in her *Sopranos*-esque croak. 'She was really, really funny, she said what she thought, she had big blonde hair, this huge lipstick, these huge glasses, she was really tacky, but everyone loved her because she was who she was. So that's the inspiration. The Christmas after she passed away, I showed up as Audrey. It was like Aunt Lulu was still in the room. It was a joke with my family, then it kind of escalated and now she's one of my favourite characters to play.'

Audrey Heartburn aside, *Monday Night Funnies* is a great opportunity for new talent in Dubai to perform in front of an audience. That talent has jumped at the chance. Both Al Sayed and Liccione have been stunned at the amount of women they've cast. 'Often when Mina and I are casting, we say, "Oh no, we need one more dude",' says Al Sayed. 'We have four or five female stand-up comedians, not including Mina.' Two of them are veiled – the Egyptian Lamya Tawfik and Sri Lankan Sabina Giabo. There's also a lot of interest from Emiratis, Liccione says. 'A lot of local boys have been coming to class [at Laugh Out Loud!]. We're even considering doing a comedy class in Arabic that Ali would translate,' she adds.

Perhaps the best part of *Monday Night Funnies* is the way in which it has brought this local community of would-be entertainers to the fore. Previously, it seemed they had no way to make themselves heard. Now there's a weekly opportunity. 'Dubai's got talent,' declares Liccione. 'Bring it on.'

Monday Night Funnies is at Warehouse Lounge, Le Méridien Dubai, Garhoud, every Monday from 9pm. Call 050 440 0994 or see www.comedyuae.com for more details

Dubai's got talent

The acts performing at *Monday Night Funnies* will vary each week, but here are a few to watch out for

Lamya Tawfik: A veiled female Egyptian comic who talks about her nationality and wearing a veil

Caitlin and Janine: An acoustic duo from Australia and Holland respectively

Stephanie Inglesfield: A 40-year-old mum of four trying her hand at stand-up. 'She says she's going through a mid-life crisis,' says Liccione. 'I said, "Well if you're gonna do it, do it in public, let's all laugh at it."'

NEXT ISSUE Foto Weekend by Gulf Photo Plus: the new must-attend event on Dubai's calendar

TimeOut
November 5, 2009

BEING FUNNY IS NO JOKE

'I can't teach anyone to be funny,' says Arab-American comedian Dean Obeidallah, who recently led a stand-up comedy workshop in Dubai

By Samia Badih
Staff Reporter

Sitting in the audience of a stand-up comedy show, you'd think being funny is easy. Well, not really. Going up on stage and making people laugh can take days, sometimes months, of writing and rehearsing.

That certainly was the case for the students of the stand-up comedy workshop organised by the Dubomedy Arts school in Dubai, the first comedy school in the region.

Led by Arab American stand-up comedian Dean Obeidallah, almost 20 students took part in the workshop to learn how to write a joke, perform, and the ethics and business of comedy.

"It's hard work," Obeidallah, who was in Dubai for the workshop and a public show last week, told tabloid!.

"I can't teach anyone to be funny," he said. "What I can teach is the structure of stand-up, the idea of a joke, and how you can build on a stand-up comedy foundation that is good."

He said that stand-up comedy is not about being the funniest person at work, among a group of friends or at school. "Many people who are hilarious off-stage, are not good stand-up comics." It's like learning a new language, he said. It's about learning how to tell jokes to strangers and making them relate to it.

Following the workshop, students were put to the test by performing in front of a real audience. The best two were in for a treat — the opportunity to open for Obeidallah's show.

It was interesting to see students who had not done comedy before progress and get over their fear in just three days, which is why it was tough to make a choice, he said. "We were really torn," he said. "We went with experience and having a diverse line-up."

Mohammad Fahad Kamal, a Qatari stand-up comedian, was one of the winners.

PIONEER

Kamal who's been doing stand-up comedy for the past two years is the first to do it in his home country. He said he feels like a pioneer with a bullet-proof vest because a lot of people have been criticising him for what he's doing.

"Comedy is new in the Middle East. We don't have enough clubs and people interested in comedy and that's why we need to connect with all the comedians in the region and have a platform where we can travel around and do our gigs," he said.

Ali Al Sayed, who is one of the founders of Dubomedy Arts school, wants to reach out to the Arabic speaking community.

Mohammad Fahad Kamal, winner of the workshop, says: "Comedy is new in the Middle East... that's why we need to connect with all the comedians in the region and have a platform where we can travel around and do our gigs."

Brent Jenkins, an aspiring stand-up comedian from the United States, was the runner-up. He said he took a comedy class about nine months ago and had only been up on stage three times before Obeidallah's show. "It was kind of accidental," he said speaking of how he got into it. "After taking a class, I started to write more and the more fun it was. Now, I'm hooked."

For the past year, Obeidallah has been making it a point to work with local talent in the Middle East and while it's new to the region, he says it's really growing. "We need more Arabs doing comedy," he said. "From Oman all the way to Amman, from Cairo to Riyadh people are doing comedy and I think it's great. Some are really really funny and some need more work."

Locally, Ali Al Sayed and Mina Liccione, have been doing just that. The two started Dubomedy Arts three years ago with only 12 students. Today, they have over 200 students from different nationalities.

STEREOTYPES

"Comedy breaks barriers. The closest distance between two people is laughter and so have a room of all those nationalities laughing at stereotypes and laughing at themselves — this is it," said Mina Liccione, head teacher and co-director of Dubomedy.

The school is looking at expanding its programmes from January to 10 next year, said Al Sayed, the CEO of Viva Arts, which runs Dubomedy, also a stand-up comedian. While most classes have been in English, he said they plan on starting some Arabic programmes.

DIFFERENT VOICE

The reason is to reach out to the Arabic speaking community and to create comedy with a different voice.

"I believe the format that's been used has been exhausted and people are stuck in a place where creativity has been very limited and everyone's been looking from a commercial standpoint," Al Sayed said. We want Arabs to let down their guard and try to make each other laugh, he added.

Fifteen years ago, Obeidallah decided to put his law degree aside and pursue a career in comedy.

He said he's been inspired by comedians such as Richard Pryor, Jon Stewart and Chris Rock, who talk about political and social issues.

"I love Jon Stewart and 'The Daily Show,'" he said. "I like the guys who are smart and talk about smart stuff."

TOP TIPS FROM THE DEAN

1 Try it. Don't give yourselves excuses for not doing it. Just do it. Take a class. Go to open mics or small shows.

2 Watch comics on YouTube and write a couple of jokes down verbatim to how the joke structure.

3 It's hard work. You have to write, rewrite, perform, rewrite and perform again.

DEAN'S BEST JOKE

When asked to tell us his best joke, Obeidallah said it's usually his most recent one. This is the one he told.

"Here's the difference between Arab men and American men when the bill comes after dinner.

There's a group of white guys and the bill comes, so they divide it up and they'd be like "Okay you got two sodas; here's your bill." But when a group of Arab guys put the bill down, it's like throwing meat into a shark tank.

They'd be like "No, no, no, habibi, I'm going to pay. Habibi, I will pay this." The other guy says, "If you pay this I will never speak to you again; I swear we are not talking."

Another guy says, "If you pay this, I will defriend you. I will block you from my Facebook." One says, "If you pay this, I will divorce my wife. I swear I will divorce my wife."

It makes me wonder about this expression. Does this ever happen? Does the guy go home and tell his wife: "I'm sorry. You gotta go. My friend paid for lunch. Bye bye now. Nice meeting you".

DEAN'S HEROES

Chris Rock.

Jon Stewart.

Richard Pryor.

Art school's show to feature new crop of Arab comedians

Ali al Sayed co-founded Dubomedy. Courtesy of Dubomedy Arts

Festival will be venue for students to apply their showmanship

Anna Seaman

DUBAI // It took a while, but Mina Liccione eventually worked out how to coax a chuckle from audiences in the UAE.

"When I first got here I realised people didn't laugh enough," said the professional comedienne and tap dancer from New York, who performed on Broadway in the percussion dance show *Stomp*. "I had to tweak my physical show of improvisation to find out what worked for people here and once I figured it out, I couldn't leave."

Three years ago she started and then almost immediately merged her comedy school Laugh Out Loud with the entertainment firm Viva Dubai, which was run by her now-business partner and fellow professional comedian Ali al Sayed.

The performing arts school Dubomedy Arts will hold its first festival of live dance, drama, music and improvisation on November 10 and 11 at Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre (Ductac). Two more days are to be added at additional venues.

The festival marks the culmination of a new nine-week term of courses launching Saturday.

They will include a weekly comedy class, three levels of tap dance, body beats, improvisation and training for those who want to learn how to write for a performance.

Mr al Sayed, who grew up in Dubai, said his dream was for the festival to become a regular fixture and to eventually attract international attention. "As long as I remember we have been importing entertainment to Dubai," he said. "My vision is to start exporting it. Instead of flying in Arab-American comedians, why can't we fly out our own Arab comedians to America?"

The four-day festival will also give most of the students their first exposure to an audience.

"The whole thing is about giving more performance opportunities for local artists," said Ms Liccione. "There are few outlets in the city for that."

Although Ms Liccione had a completely different background from Mr al Sayed, they both had an appreciation of the universally bonding nature of comedy, she said.

"Dubai is a transient city, people come and go but we all know about the drama of driving on these roads, the heat, the mall culture. This is what we have in common and this is where comedy is. The first thing I teach in my class is that comedy is truth.

"You don't have to lie or fantasise, you just have to observe and realise the more details you add the funnier it is."

Ms Liccione will be joined by guest teachers including Jamil Abu Warda, producer of the comedy show *Axis of Evil*, Nick Karavatos, a professor of English and writing at the American University of Sharjah and Sol Abiad, the director of a physical theatre group called Star Too.

The prices of the nine-week courses, which take place at Ductac in the Mall of Emirates, range from Dh850 to Dh1,500, and the training will all be geared towards the final performance in November. For more information, email LOL@vivadubai.com.

aseaman@thenational.ae

> *When I first got here I realised people didn't laugh enough*
> Mina Liccione comedienne

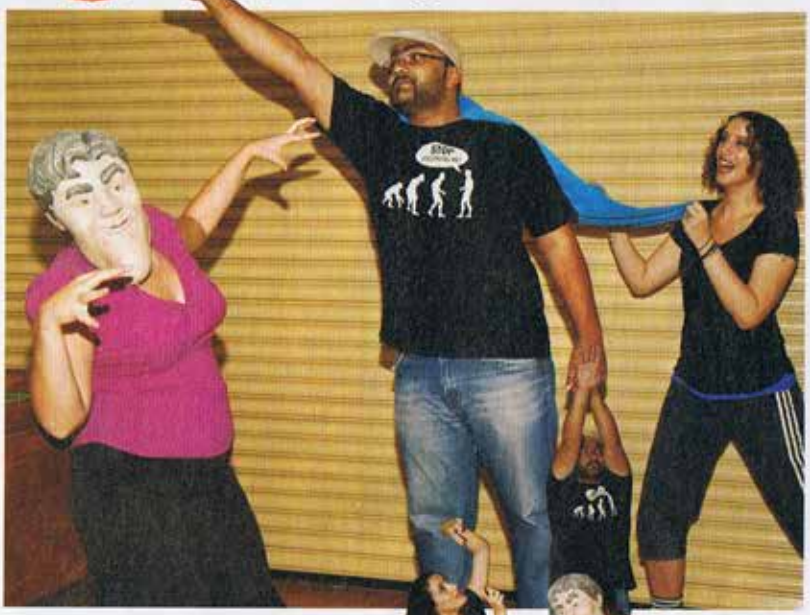
Learn something new

WE TRY

STAND-UP COMEDY

Daisy Carrington, Food editor

Because Daisy reviews all restaurants anonymously, we've protected her identity with a rubber mask of her choice.



I've often fantasised about performing a stand-up routine. I have a rubbery face and I seem to make people laugh (with me, at me… is there really a difference?). So I figured I'd drop into Dubai's only comedy class, run by stand-up veteran Mina Liccione. She offers three nine-week sessions each year: stand-up, improv and sketch comedy. Each culminates in a free-to-the-public performance at Ductac at Mall of the Emirates.

'I spend the first four weeks of every course working on improv skill, because you can't do stand-up without being able to improvise,' explains Liccione. We start our session with the kind of games you might see on TV improv show *Whose Line Is it Anyway?* – in one, we take turns using props and pretending they're something else. As it happens, the mask I'm wearing to protect my identity (see above) is a brilliant tool. A towel turns into Jay Leno's nose wipe, his bib and even his veil. It's freeing and fun.

In later lessons, once students have mastered improv, Mina teaches them to observe things about their lives and write them into a stand-up routine. I think I might have to sign up.

Dhs1,100 for a nine-week course, including nine group classes, one private coaching session, 'Stand-up Writing: Proof Reading and Editing', rehearsals and final show. Private coaching also available. (050 927 3621)

Top:
The National
May 2010

Bottom:
TimeOut
July 15, 2010

hear we

That Ben Affleck may have found his next directorial project. He is apparently in talks to direct a hostage drama set during the Iranian revolution

Stand up for UAE

Comedy classes taught in Arabic should mean a boost for home-grown, regional talent, writes Zaineb Al Hassani

Mina Liccione (grey shirt) instructs her comedy class at the Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre. Photos by Jeffrey E Biteng / The National

If Ali Al Sayed and Mina Liccione have anything to do with it, home-grown regional comedy is set for a boost. The co-directors of Dubomedy Arts – the community arts collective started up by Liccione in 2008 – are soon due to begin teaching stand-up comedy workshops entirely in Arabic – a first for the UAE.

But why now? "Our classes have evolved in the right way," says Al Sayed, the Emirati who gave up his day job two years ago to work with Liccione, a former performer with Cirque du Soleil. "Arabic was the right transition."

"English is the common ground," adds Liccione, an ebullient Italian-American who moved to the UAE to start up Dubomedy. "It brought everyone together. We had to teach people what stand-up comedy was, and that it didn't have to be a lot of swear words and just talking about gritty stuff. You can totally be a clean comic and be funny, so we had to re-establish that.

"Now that we are all on the same page, there are a lot of people that really want to pursue it and we have this amazing Arab culture that people haven't really been tapping into. There used to be a lot of comedy coming from Egypt and there are a few stand-ups who specialise in Arabic, but not in this region. Now that people know what it is, they're comfortable. This was the perfect time to say: 'Hey, let's start an Arabic programme.'"

From the small group of Emiratis sharing a private joke, to the charming Texan (a veteran of the English-taught workshops) conversing loudly with the entire room, the first class of the year at Dubomedy's base in Dubai Community Theatre and Art Centre is full of aspiring comics, each there for a different purpose. The first workshop is a mix of English and Arabic speakers, including every single one of Dubomedy's fledgling comedians, as a means of introducing the groups to one another. The Arabic classes will get underway in earnest later this month.

At the initial session most are friends, with plenty having met at previous workshops although, stranger or not, there are no awkward silences here. As one might expect of aspiring stand-up comedians, they are all gregarious by nature: the spacious room is soon full of chatter, abating slightly (the ticking-off from Al Sayed only making the perpetrators giggle more) when teaching finally commences.

From simple word association games, all of which descend into farce, on to harder tasks where pupils act out a certain scene conjured up by their partner before passing the baton on to the next pair, the first workshop is the ultimate icebreaker – watching people wrestle an imaginary crazed monkey into an equally imaginary small box or milk a cow (a popular scenario) sends the entire room into convulsions.

The excitement is palpable, even more so among the Arab pupils. Shaima Al Sayed, Ali's sister and one of the most vocal members of the group, agrees that the time is ripe for Arabic comedy to make a stand. "Arabic comedy as such, the idea of comedy, is very, very old in the Gulf region. As far as we can remember, Egypt and Kuwait were the pioneers of this, although what they would have was a stage drama that would go on for two or three hours. It's a story, a set-up, within which you would have glimpses of what we call stand-up comedy. So comedy on stage is not a new thing for us. But the idea of one person standing solo and catching the attention of the audience? That's not something that we've had in the region. It's going to be quite fascinating."

A natural-born story teller, it would be hard not to imagine the bubbly Emirati telling the same stories to a much larger audience. But there are a few hurdles she – and the other Arab pupils – have to contend with first.

"Generally we're very funny people, the people from the Gulf. But although I think it's amazing to have classes to generate a new class of stand-up comedians here, my family just think it's a hobby. As long as it's not something I'm going to depend on for income, they're cool. It's not a taboo thing in society, but when Ali quit his day job to pursue this, everybody was like: 'You've got to be kidding?' you know. And he's a man!"

"This is a great step," says the Arab-American comedian Dean Obeidallah, who taught a three-day Dubomedy comedy workshop last year.

"I have performed around the Middle East and there are an increasing number of young Arab comedians who perform in Arabic. But there is no one teaching comedy classes in Arabic. The Arabic comedy classes," he adds, "will open the door to people who want to try stand-up comedy but feel they can be funnier and more comfortable performing in Arabic. I believe that Arabic comedy will become more popular across the region in the near future as more and more young people start hearing how funny these Arab comedians are in Arabic."

Where there is enthusiasm, there is a way, but given that some subject matter is regarded as being off-limits, could this have an adverse effect on Arab stand-up? Not according to Liccione. "It just forces people to be more creative." Their pupils agree. "There are things that are wrong with us which we need to address and sort of rectify," says Shaima Al Sayed, nodding her head fervently in agreement. "But it needs to be done in a comedy manner so that nobody gets offended.

"When you're laughing, you really can't think of anything negative. When you make people laugh, and you address an important issue in a sarcastic manner and in a joke, they will accept it better. Perfect comedy is an awesome way of communicating with people."

"I am sure we will have some difficulties in the beginning, some challenges," adds Ghassan Al Katheri, an Emirati actor who trained as a doctor before pursuing his dreams in the media industry, "but I think that after some time the people will accept it. This could be a benchmark for other Arab countries. This is a nice beginning for the people in the Gulf. They need some new kind of art, and I feel this is it."

Class over for the day, the group makes its way outside, the chatter continuing along the hallway and outside the building. As Liccione and Al Sayed say goodbye to the stragglers, I ask them if there's anything they'd like to add. "Ali always likes to say this quote which I love," says Liccione. "You can say it because I don't want to misquote you."

"I can't do it now!" interrupts Al Sayed.

"Go on!" she laughs. "You tell it so well."

"The idea is, why I do what I do, and why we do what we do, is that we've imported entertainment for as long as I can remember," adds Al Sayed. "The dream is to start exporting entertainment from here. We have the talent."

● For more information go to www.dubomedy.com or call 050 44 00 994

Teachers Mina Liccione, right, and Ali Al Sayed.

The Emirati actor Ghassan Al Katheri, centre, at the comedy class.

The National
February 9, 2011

review

the saloon

A comedy of others

At an Abu Dhabi stand-up audition, both where you're at and where you're from supply the laughs

Tragedy may illuminate what's universal in human affairs, but most comedy, like most politics, is provincial. More often than not, what's funny is specific to a place: to a certain set of cultural references, local hang-ups and – when push comes to shove – stereotypes about people from other places. Jokes and geography, in other words, go together like an Indian, a Filipino and an Arab walking into a bar.

One evening this week at Club Eight, in Abu Dhabi's Souq Qaryat al Beri, a handful of aspiring comedians showed up to audition for a forthcoming fortnightly variety show called Monday Night Funnies. It was just after 6pm, and a crew of uniformed waiters were pushing brooms around the well-lit club, sweeping up the previous night's gum wrappers and cocktail straws. Onstage, a man in a pinstriped shirt, an undersized bow tie, a large fake moustache, and a sticking plaster over his right eyebrow recited poetry to a couple of people taking notes at the front table.

"This poem is about trying to catch the attention of a taxi in the middle of August," he said. "It's called *Heatwave*." While gradually crumpling to the ground, he wailed breathily once, twice, then three times – referring to his notebook in between moans as if actually reciting a poem – then abruptly got back up. "There are another 12 pages, but I think you get the gist."

The aspiring comedian Zulfiqar Ali takes up the microphone while Mina Liccione and Ali al Sayed, the hosts of Monday Night Funnies, listen and appraise his performance. Lauren Lancaster / The National

The comedian was an experienced performer named – or at least stage-named – Hartley Pool, after his hometown in the north-east of England. Having been in Abu Dhabi just six months, he was still working up local material. He recited a poem about ordering takeaway food in a city with no addressing system, then followed it with another on the theme of local navigational challenges, called *Love and Stupidity*: "I smile at the elevators coming down/ But you are not in any of them/Then I realise/I am in the wrong building."

That first act unwittingly posed a vexing question: in the UAE, what reference points do we all share besides a few very sweaty months and a sense of disorientation? Other would-be comedians at the audition had more experience in the Emirates (if usually somewhat less experience behind the microphone) and listening to them, a pattern seemed to emerge: what's funny here is where people come from.

A guy named Omar Abdul Aziz Hassan Awad Mfour Hsein Gheith Abu Holy immediately introduced himself as Palestinian and then launched into a series of jokes about long Arabic names. "My mum used to hold me and say, 'What's my baby's name!? What's my baby's name!?'" he said, a look of panic on his face. Then he launched into a rapid series of cultural caricatures, some (of Lebanese and Syrians) delivered in Arabic, the last (of Indians) delivered in English. "Oh my God, Rajiv, did you see the new Nissan Tiida?" he cried with eye-popping excitement. "They say it only seats five, but I know it can seat 10."

A prim-looking young man in a button-front sweater came onstage and immediately cracked a joke about Filipinos and karaoke, then introduced himself as "Ricky from New Zealand" and apologised that his act might include some profanity. "I am from a country where there are as many swear words as there are sheep," he said. Then came a few jokes about the forthcoming 2012 Olympics. "East London is already like an Olympic village," he said, betting on his audience's familiarity with a neighbourhood 5,000 kilometres away. "You've already got lots of people walking around in tracksuits struggling to speak English." (Afterwards, Ricky – again, a stage name – revealed that he spends most of his time in the air, working as a flight attendant for a local carrier that starts with the letter "E".)

Next!

"Being Syrian means being so hairy. It's the major story of my life," said a large, slow-spoken and deep-voiced young man named Assem. "In grade five I started shaving. In grade six I had hair on my chest. In grade seven I had hair on my back. And in grade eight I got married." Then he added: "Just kidding."

And on and on it went. Xulf, the stage name of a moonlighting estate agent named Zulfiqar Ali, lampooned the bad dancing styles of various ethnic groups in Dubai's nightclubs. A young woman got up and started speaking in a completely untraceable accent that bore the signature of about five different places. "Hi everyone," she said, "My name's Tanvi and I'm, like, home-grown Abu Dhabian." It wasn't a joke.

"People are tied to stereotypes here," said Ali al Sayed, an organiser of the event. Comedy is often about baiting – and then lampooning – prevailing notions of us and them. But the UAE presents an unusual case: a shooting gallery of "thems" where there is extraordinarily little safety in any unified notion of "us".

"Breaking stereotypes is a big part of comedy," said al Sayed. But what happens when a shuffling deck of stereotypes is what binds a place together? Al Sayed, an Emirati, runs a number of initiatives – including a comedy school in Dubai and a talent-management company – designed to create a self-sustaining community of comedians in the UAE. "Eventually we'll get to that stage where people will let loose and stop talking about where they come from," he said. But he allowed that it could take a while: "It's because we don't know each other yet."

✱ John Gravois

The National
March 12, 2010

إحدى الفعاليات الجديدة لدورة 2013 وتنظم بين 22-26 يناير

كرنفال دبي الدولي للكوميديا يستقطب ألمع نجوم المنطقة والعالم

■■ دبي ـ «الخليج»

ضمن سعيه المتواصل لتقديم واحتضان كل ما هو جديد ومتميز، أطلق مهرجان دبي للتسوق فعالية «كرنفال دبي الدولي للكوميديا» التي ستنظم بين 22 – 26 يناير/كانون الثاني الجاري في دبي فستيفال سيتي، وتهدف إلى تسليط الضوء على فن الكوميديا الارتجالي الذي يحظى بشهرة واسعة في أنحاء العالم.

عروض فنية وموسيقية ومسابقات في الرقص والتمثيل والإنتاج السينمائي

علي السيد وخديجة تركي خلال المؤتمر الصحفي

جاء هذا الإعلان خلال مؤتمر صحفي، ظهر أمس، أعلنت خلاله مؤسسة دبي للفعاليات والترويج التجاري، إحدى مؤسسات دائرة التنمية الاقتصادية والجهة المنظمة لمهرجان دبي للتسوق، عن تفاصيل الحدث الذي يأتي أيضاً في إطار حرص المؤسسة على تنويع الفعاليات التي يقدمها المهرجان لزواره من مختلف أنحاء العالم، بحضور خديجة تركي، مدير أول تطوير العلاقات العامة والإعلام في مؤسسة دبي للفعاليات والترويج التجاري، والممثل الكوميدي والمخرج والمنتج الإماراتي علي السيد، المدير التنفيذي لشركة «دوباميدي» المنظمة للحدث.

وقالت خديجة تركي: «لطالما عودنا مهرجان دبي للتسوق على إطلاق كل ما هو جديد ومبتكر على مدار السبع عشرة دورة الماضية، وأنتم تدركون جميعاً كيف أسهم مهرجان دبي للتسوق في تحويل دبي إلى واحدة من أهم وجهات التسوق والترفيه، وهذا يشكل تحدٍ بناء لنا جميعاً في مؤسسة دبي للفعاليات والترويج التجاري، كما أننا نسعى دائماً إلى رفع مستوى المهرجان والمحافظة على طابعه الفريد من خلال الفعاليات والأنشطة التي لا تقدم في أي مكان آخر. ويعتبر مهرجان دبي للتسوق دليلاً على روح الابتكار التي تهدف في المقام الأول إلى خلق ذكريات لا تنسى، ومن هذا المنطلق، تفخر مؤسسة دبي للفعاليات والترويج التجاري بتقديم عرض كرنفال دبي الدولي للكوميديا، والذي يمثل مفهوماً جديداً تستضيفه دبي لأول مرة من خلال مهرجان دبي للتسوق».

وأضافت: «نهدف من تنظيم هذا الكرنفال إلى تسليط الضوء على فن الكوميديا الارتجالية الذي يحظى بشعبية عالية واسعة ولكنه ما زال جديداً على المنطقة بشكل عام ودولة الإمارات بشكل خاص، وقد نجحنا في استقطاب أهم نجوم هذا الفن لتقديم عروضهم أمام جمهور المهرجان بالترافق مع إتاحة الفرصة للمواهب الواعدة التي تبحث عن فرصة لإظهار قدراتها وأدائها الكوميدي من خلال هذه المنصة، علماً بأن الحدث يتضمن أيضاً العديد من الفقرات والمسابقات التي ستمتع جميع زوار الحدث».

وشهد المؤتمر إعلان أسماء نجوم الكوميديا المشاركين لهذا العام، والذي ضم بدر صالح من السعودية، وهو الكوميدي الذي يحظى بشعبية واسعة على قنوات التواصل الاجتماعي من خلال برنامجه المشهور «إيش اللي» الذي يتصدر البرامج السعودية على قناة يوتيوب، ومايكل وينسلو من أمريكا، النجم الذي اشتهر بأدائه الكوميدي في الفيلم الأمريكي «بوليس أكاديمي».

كما يشارك أيضاً الفنانان الكوميديان الأمريكيان من أصل عربي دين عبيدالله وآرون قادر، وعمرو قطامش الكوميدي المصري الحائز المركز الأول في برنامج «آرابز غت تالنت». كما يشارك أيضاً الفنان الكوميدي اللبناني نمر أبو نصار والفنانة مينا ليكسيون، إضافة إلى الممثل الكوميدي والمخرج والمنتج الإماراتي علي السيد.

وقام علي السيد خلال المؤتمر بتقديم شرح مفصل عن الحدث والبرنامج الخاص به، حيث يتضمن عروض سيرك وورش عمل ومنافسات في الرقص والغناء (أغنيات كوميدية) وعروضاً موسيقية.

وقال السيد: «نشكر إدارة مهرجان دبي للتسوق على تنظيمهم هذه الفعالية المتميزة، وعلى إتاحتهم الفرصة لنا للارتقاء بفن الكوميديا الارتجالي من خلال هذه المنصة المتميزة، لقد عملنا جنباً إلى جنب مع مسؤولي المهرجان لتقديم الأفضل وتنويع العروض ضمن هذه الفعالية، ونأمل أن تتزايد شعبية الكوميديا الارتجالية في المجتمعين المحلي والإقليمي، حيث إننا نهدف لاستقطاب المزيد من نجوم الكوميديا المحلية والإقليمية خلال السنوات المقبلة».

وأوضح السيد أن الفعالية تهدف إلى تشجيع الممثلين الكوميديين الإماراتيين وهواة التمثيل الكوميدي، وخلق المزيد من فرص النجاح لهم في المجال المحلي، كما تتوافر فرص التدريب للهواة من خلال ورش العمل التي تتضمن الرقص الفني والموسيقا والعروض الكوميدية.

وتقام من خلال نفس الفعالية مسابقة البريك دانس للراقصين من دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي، ومسابقات لهواة الكوميديا، وأخرى لدرسة الروك، ومسابقة اصنع فيلمك بنفسك، علاوة على العروض التي تقدمها الفرق المحلية.

Al Bayan Newspaper
January 14, 2013

فنان إماراتي يشارك في عروض ديلي آرتيه

موسى أبو العيد

تتميز مشاركة مركز ميركاتو في مهرجان دبي للتسوق هذا العام بتقديم عروض فنية ايطالية رائعة تعود لعصر النهضة، وتحظى هذه العروض بإعجاب الزوار نظراً لتنوعها ما بين عروض راقصة وقصص مسرحية وباليه وعروض كوميدية مضحكة ومعزوفات موسيقية لأشهر الفنانين، بالإضافة لعروض المهرجين الذي يتجولون في المركز ويتجاذبون الحديث مع الزوار وخاصة الأطفال منهم.

حضرنا جانبا من هذه العروض ومنها عرض كوميديا «ديلي آرتيه» أو عرض ماريا نسبة لاسم بطلة المسرحية كما اخبرنا الفنان الإماراتي علي السيد والذي يشارك في تقديم هذه العروض المسرحية حيث قال إن هذا العرض كوميدي كلاسيكي ايطالي اعتاد فيه الممثلون الخروج إلى الساحات والأسواق وارتجال إعمالهم المسرحية، وفي هذا العرض هناك عدة شخصيات تثير ضحك المشاهدين حيث تقع البطلة في حب المهرج وتتزوجه، والعمل من إخراج الفنانة الأميركية والايطالية الأصل مينا لوكينوني، وهي أيضا مشاركة بدور رئيسي في المسرحية.

علي السيد: العروض هدفها إثارة البهجة في نفوس المشاهدين

وتحدث علي السيد عن عرض اوبرالي يحكي قصة احد الملوك الأثرياء في بيزا الايطالية والذي لديه ثلاث بنات وأعلن أنه سيختار من تحبه أكثر لوراثته، فقالت الأولى والثانية إنهما تحبانه أكثر من الذهب والمجوهرات لكن الثالثة قالت له إنها تحبه أكثر من الملح فغضب منها لاعتقاده أنها تسخر منه وقام بطردها، لكنه اكتشف أنها صادقة جدا في حبها فاختارها لوراثة عرشه.

أما العرض الايطالي الآخر فقد اشتمل على عدة لوحات تقليدية راقصة تعبر عن الشعور بالحب والحياة وتعود للفنون الكلاسيكية في القرنين السابع عشر والتاسع عشر والموسيقى للفنان المشهور باخ كما أخبرتنا بذلك رينيتا يولي الفنانة الايطالية المشاركة في هذه العروض، والتي لاقت استحسان المشاهدين.

Al Bayan Newspaper
February 11, 2011

numbers #

8 days until the vote on November 27

6 months, the duration of a World Expo

years, ti
eac

expo2020

Dubai residents tell world of their love

Dozens of city's people in YouTube film

Emirati comedian Ali Al Sayed splices together six-minute clip paying tribute to the emirate and expressing hope for world fair success

Ramola Talwar Badam

DUBAI // It is a magical place – a city where dreams can come true.

These are the views of dozens of UAE residents from across the world who are backing the emirate's bid to host Expo 2020.

Emirati comedian Ali Al Sayed spliced together tributes to Dubai in a YouTube video supporting the Expo 2020 bid after asking more than 40 residents one question about the emirate.

He asked people on Facebook "what do you love about Dubai?", and then produced a six-minute video in which residents speak in their native languages about why Dubai is the city of their dreams.

"It was amazing to see how people are rooting for Dubai. It's as if Dubai was going to win the World Cup," said Mr Al Sayed, who performs in the UAE and overseas.

"When I asked people if they would be here in 2020, many said they didn't know but they really wanted the Expo to come here. So the city, the Government, the people are ready."

The Dubai Expo 2020 logo along with flags of nations including Poland, India, Morocco, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Palestine, Armenia, Austria and Kazakhstan is displayed behind residents as they speak.

To Dana Dajani, a Palestinian writer and actor, the city is a magical place. "It has helped us grow our dreams," Ms Dajani said.

The safety and security, cosmopolitan nature of the emirate, great weather, fast cars, good food and strong business environment were among boxes checked by residents.

A Bosnia-Herzegovina national said: "It's constantly growing and changing and I hope to grow with it."

A woman from Algeria said: "When I heard Dubai wanted to host the World Expo 2020, I thought to myself they have to win because we live the World Expo all year round. There are people from all over the world."

The video signs off good-luck messages

One catchy clip has a US citizen, Mina Liccione, clap her hands over her head as she says: "I love the music and the way they dance. 'Aiwa, aiwa, aiwa, aiwa.' I love it."

She said words such as "land of opportunity" rang true, as most expatriates believed that if they worked hard their dreams would become a reality. "The UAE may be a small country but there is a certain pride in living here, for locals and expats," said Ms Liccione, also a comedian and the wife of Mr Al Sayed. The couple set up a local comedy community, Dubomedy, five years ago.

"It has given us a good life that we don't take for granted and this is an opportunity to show our love for the country and to show how we support it."

The video, *Tribute to Dubai – Expo 2020*, signs off with a message from residents wishing their city good luck, from all of us in Dubai.

The other contenders to host Expo 2020 are Izmir in Turkey, Sao Paulo in Brazil and Yekaterinburg in Russia. The winning city will be declared after a vote by the Bureau International des Expositions in Paris on November 27.

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The National
November 19, 2013

February 27

In 1827, New Orleans, the US home city of jazz music, held its first Mardi Gras celebration.

Don't think, improvise

No script, no time. 'Improv' is no joke. Or is it? *Julian Pletts* find out

Having a go at stand-up comedy would have most people quaking in their boots. Imagine though, not even having the chance to even scribble a few jokes down beforehand. You've probably had nightmares that are more pleasant.

Improvisation comedy is made up on the spot. It's no laughing matter, well it is, but you know what I mean.

On Wednesday, Dubomedy Arts, the Dubai-based comedy and urban arts hub is putting on 'Improv Revolution - A Play On Words', the UAE's first show by a professional improv troupe. I was given a sneak peak at their penultimate rehearsal and was invited to give improv a go.

On my way to meet the troupe, all I could think about was looking like a mumbling moron in front of a room full of razor-sharp comedians who would then take great pleasure in using me as stand-up material for years to come.

I was relieved when I got a friendly welcome from the Mina Liccione, the lively and flamboyant co-founder of Dubomedy Arts.

"Improv happens only once and can never again be re-created," she says, explaining her love of the art. "It forces you to focus and let go of everything else – all the other thoughts in your head - and just be."

It turns out improv is more than just a good giggle, it can help you sharpen the skills vital to succeed in life.

"Improv builds confidence because it forces you to be brave and silly in front of others," says Mina. "If you train yourself to be able to react in the moment rather than panic, say yes rather than always saying no, and listen rather than always being the one who speaks, it will help you in all that you do."

Mina is director of Wednesday's show. There are five players in the troupe, including Dubai-based stand-up comedians Brent Jenkins and Ali Al Sayed. Also ready to step into the breach are back-up members who are comedy civilians - IT managers and industrialists by day. For them, improv is a bizarre, but exciting, antidote to the daily grind.

Our warm-ups begin and we sound like crazed foodies as we act out what we had for lunch that day. Mine? A boring salad.

After a few scenes practicing, the most fun is had with the 'Freeze!' game. Two people start a scene and after a minute or so another member of the team yells 'freeze' and jumps in to take the exact position of one of the players.

When the first 'freeze' was yelled, I was face down, on the floor, with my legs pulled up behind me. Nothing too rude - we were acting out an arrest. Thankfully, comic Brent Jenkins boldly, or perhaps stupidly, rescues me.

He now has to come up with a new character to fit the position I left him in. Quick as a flash, he's now a rocking horse being rocked about the floor by his improv partner. The group is merciless with Brent, each time 'freeze' is shouted they leave him in his new uncomfortable position and take over from his comedy partner. By the time he wriggles out of his imaginary straight jacket he's been ridden as a sleigh, spun like a merry-go-round and dragged like a bag of potatoes across the dusty floor. Talk about being committed to comedy!

Concentrating on the moves, and staying balanced, definitely takes focus off the self and by the end of rehearsals, you will have forgotten all about any concerns of being a shrinking violet.

Fancy giving improv a go? Dubomedy will be running Wednesday night classes starting in April. Improv Revolution's show is on Wednesday at Ductac. Tickets are Dhs100 and doors open 7.30pm. For more info, email LOL@vivadubai.com or call 050 927 3621

PILES OF FUN: Could you make a theatre full of people laugh? These guys plan to do just that - and unscripted too. Inset: Comic Brent Jenkins bends over backwards to get some giggles as Mina Liccione takes a sleigh ride.

SHOW TIME!

What can people expect from 'Improv Revolution - A Play on Words'? We put Improv Revolution's director Mina Liccione on the spot.

"It will consist of a series of high-energy improv games that will rely on the audience's suggestions. We will then create impromptu scenes.
"We will also have some hilarious comedy sketches as transitions that will crack everyone up and even a dream ballet somewhere during the night.
"The show will be full of surprises and since it's improv, even those of us performing will be surprised!
"Our troupe is very physical and not afraid to jump right in! The audience will never know what's going to happen next.
"It can be quite competitive."

7Days
February 27, 2012

Clowns launch 'good deed day'

Residents urged to raise a smile today

By Reem Buhazza

A DUBAI-based volunteer group is encouraging people to perform random acts of kindness today to make people smile.

Through social media, the Clowns Who Care Project is urging people across the UAE - and the world - to do something nice for someone they see every day, be it a family member, neighbour or barista at their local coffee shop.

Italian-American comedienne Mina Liccione, artistic director of the project and co-founder of 'urban arts' training school Dubomedy, said: "I was watching the news this summer, and it was all so upsetting - the stuff going on in Syria, Palestine, Egypt and all over the world."

Liccione, who is also a dance and theatre professor at the American University of Sharjah, added: "You can feel so helpless seeing people suffering, like you can't help them.

"I came up with the idea to start a movement where we choose a random day every month and give everyone a good-deed 'assignment' to do in their everyday lives. We're so connected globally through social media, I thought it would be a great idea to use that platform for a good cause. People from all over the world will be doing good deeds on the same day, so we can all do our part to help change the energies for that day."

They have dubbed the campaign 'Catch A Smile'. This first month's assignment is to "be kind to thy neighbour".

The Clowns Who Care Project already visits centres for children and adults with special needs, the elderly, charity groups and hospitals through comedy and art.

"We use laughter as a tool to heal and help those in need, and make the world better.

"If you extend kindness to someone, they will pay it forward. We want to create a waterfall of kindness and joy, and Catch A Smile is our humble attempt to do so," says Liccione.

Suggestions on the Catch A Smile facebook page for acts of kindness include helping someone carry their bags, leaving a waitress a generous tip or a note complimenting their service and preparing a meal for a group of workers.

reem@7days.ae

SHARE YOUR GOOD DEEDS

What will you do today to make people smile?

Email letters@7days.ae or visit 7DAYSUAE on facebook and @7DAYSUAE on Instagram and Twitter

Top:
7 Days
November 28, 2013

Dubomedy Goes Stateside

U.A.E.-based couple spend the summer in the U.S. and Canada

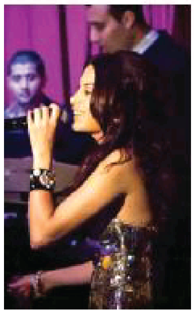
DUBOMEDY FOUNDERS ALI AL SAYED and Mina Liccione have returned from a summer tour to the U.S. and Canada. The husband-and-wife comedy team took in venues including Caroline's on Broadway (where Emirati Al Sayed headlined) and The Comic Strip, and Liccione performed a five-date run with *30 Rock*'s Judah Friedlander at The Comedy Club in New York. "I was a little scared in the beginning," says Al Sayed, "because I didn't know if the jokes would work. I did a lot of jokes about Dubai, and they went with it. It was a little surprising." "We did a show in Toronto called Dubai Comedy Cargo," says Liccione – who's originally from New York – "and we ended up selling out, and everybody that came knew that we were from Dubai. They were in that mindset, and they loved it. And in Oakville we did a show with Wonho Chung, and he performs only in Arabic. So the majority of the audience were Arabs. You could see the looks on their faces. It was like bringing a slice of home to them. Afterwards, they all wanted to take a picture, and tell us where their families were from. It created this really nice dialogue. That was something that I wasn't expecting."

Given the success of the tour, the couple are already planning to return. Al Sayed will travel to New York and Canada to headline a series of shows in November, and next year's tour, Liccione insists, will be even bigger. "We wanted to get a feel for it. The feedback was really great, so the next time will definitely be bigger, and we'll have other comedians join us."

MATT ROSS

FROM TOP: JAIME TRUEBLOOD/NBO; SUPPLIED

Bottom:
Rolling Stone
October 2013

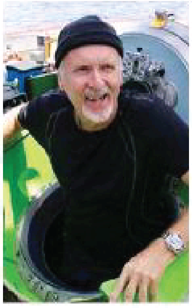


حفل

دومينيك حوراني في منتجع أتلانتس النخلة بدبي

ألهبت النجمة الاستعراضية دومينيك حوراني معجبيها الذين قصدوا منتجع اتلانتس النخلة في دبي أخيراً لملاقاتها في أولى حفلاتها في الإمارات، حيث تفاعل الجمهور مع الفنانة اللبنانية من خلال أدائها لمجموعة من أشهر أغانيها تضمنت أغنية "الماشوقة" و"عتريس". كما أدت دومينيك دويتو غنائي مع الفنان مروان داوود في أغنية "كرمالك لعمل ناطور". كما فاجأ الفنان محمد محيي الحضور بتواجده وقام بأداء أغنية "أعاتبك على إيه ولا إيه" ورحب جمهور "ليالي لبنان" بهذه الفنانة الرائعة. وأبدت الفنانة إعجابها بالحضور الجماهيري بعد أن كانت قد نشرت أنباء حفلتها على صفحتها على موقع التواصل الاجتماعي فيسبوك وأكدت أن غناءها في دبي كان خطوة ناجحة في مسيرتها الفنية. وشاركت الفرقة الموسيقية بقيادة المايسترو داني أبو خليل والفنان مروان داوود وكما شارك في الحفل فنانة الرقص الشرقي "فيروتيكا" وفنان الأداء المتفرد تصيف عطا الله. وقال عمر حمد المشرف على تنظيم الحفل: "حققت سلسلة "ليالي لبنان" نجاحاً كبيراً على مدى الأشهر الماضية ونحن بصدد استقبال ثلاثة نجوم عرب في الرابع من أكتوبر المقبل.

دبي ـ البيان



تنافس

جيمس كاميرون: سبيلبرغ سبقني في شراء «حديقة الديناصورات»

قال جيمس كاميرون مخرج فيلم "تيتانك" إنه كان مصمماً على شراء حقوق رواية مايكل كرايتون "حديقة الديناصورات". ولكن بعد مشاهدة الفيلم الذي أخرجه ستيف سبيلبرغ عام 1993، أدرك إنه لم يكن "الشخص المناسب" لهذا المشروع لأنه كان سيركز على كائنات غريبة في الفيلم الأمر الذي "كان سيعتبر غير عادل" للأطفال. وتابع "حاولت شراء حقوق الرواية لكنه سبقني (واشتراها قبلي) بساعات قليلة".

واستطرد في تصريحات لصحيفة (هافينغتون بوست) الأميركية "لكنني عندما رأيت الفيلم، أدركت أنني لم أكن الشخص المناسب لتولي إخراج الفيلم. كان هو الشخص المناسب، لأنه صنع فيلماً عن الديناصورات للأطفال. وإذا أخرجت أنا الفيلم كنت سأستخدم الكائنات الغريبة مع الديناصورات. ولم يكن هذا ليكون عادلاً".

وأصر جيمس على أن فيلم "حديقة الديناصورات" إذا أخرجه لكان "أكثر قبحاً" بكثير من فيلم سبيلبرغ، الذي لعب بطولته صامويل جاكسون وسام نيل وجيف غولدبلوم. وأعرب عن اعتقاده أن سبيلبرغ مخرج فيلم "الفك المفترس" كان يتمتع بـ"الحساسية" المناسبة لهذا المشروع.

د ب أ

يـنـوي تنظيم مهرجان في دبي العام المقبل

علي السيد: الجمهور العربي مستعد لتذوق الكوميديا

هناك أنواع جديدة من الكوميديا التي لا يعرفها المجتمع العربي

تنوع مجتمع الامارات مكن السيد من تقديم عروضه بالإنجليزية والعربية

كشف عن تصوير فيلمين، الأول روائي طويل يعتمد على فكرة زميله أحمد اليافعي

الفيلم الثاني وثائقي حول صورة العربي بعد أحداث 11 سبتمبر

علي السيد أثناء أدائه لأحد العروض

دبي ـ غسان خروب

في ظل ضغوط الحياة التي تلقي بظلالها على المجتمع، تحتاج جميعاً بين الفينة والأخرى إلى مواقف كوميدية مضحكة لتخلصنا من تراكم الضغوط النفسية، وبالاعتماد على قاعدة "ابكاء الجمهور أسهل من اضحاكه"، تكون مهمة الكوميديان صعبة، وهي التي تمكن الكوميديان الاماراتي علي السيد من تخطيها بالاعتماد على خبرته في هذا المجال، مستغلاً العديد من المواقف التي مر بها لإدخال السرور على قلب جمهوره، وقد انتهى أخيراً من جولته العالمية والتي حطت في 6 مدن عربية وغربية، أكد لـ "البيان" أن الفنون الأدائية تعد من أصعب الفنون لاعتمادها على مدى تفاعل الكوميديان مع الجمهور، وأن تقديم الكوميديا بالعربية يختلف عن الانجليزية، مؤكداً بأن الجمهور العربي أصبح جاهزاً للاستمتاع بكوميديا جديدة، كاشفاً في الوقت ذاته عن نيته تنظيم مهرجان دبي الكوميدي الدولي العام المقبل.

يتفق السيد مع القول ان "الفنون الأدائية تعد من أصعب الفنون التي يمكن تقديمها"، مؤكداً بأن النجاح فيها يعتمد بالأساس على تفاعل الكوميديان مع الجمهور، وقال: "هذه الخطوة تبدأ من اللحظة التي يعتلي فيها الكوميديان المسرح، وبالتالي عليه التعرف على طبيعة الجمهور المتواجد أمامه، لضمان تفاعله". وأضاف: "لضمان ذلك أحياناً أحاول التطرق إلى مجموعة من القضايا الاجتماعية واستحضارها في قوالب كوميدية، لأن مجرد الحديث عن تجارب مرّ بها الجمهور يحدث اتفاق ضمني بين الطرفين".

صعوبة

مشيراً إلى أن هذه الطريقة تكون أصعب في الجولات العالمية، حيث تختلف طبيعة القضايا العربية عن الغربية، ولذلك اعتمد السيد في عروضه على تقديم تجاربه والمواقف التي مرر بها خلال رحلته، وقال "الوصف في هذا الحالة يكون أفضل ما تقدمه في الكوميديا، ويضمن تفاعل الجمهور". في المقابل، حذر السيد أي كوميديان من اعتلاء المسرح دون التزود بكمية من النكات والمواقف الكوميدية لأن ذلك سيفقده تفاعل الجمهور، وقال إنه يتوجب على الكوميديان أن يكون صادقاً مع نفسه في تقديم النكتة وألا يعتمد فيها على الخيال".

نية

علي السيد أكد في حديثه على نيته تقديم برنامج تلفزيوني كوميدي خلال 2013 يحاول من خلاله تقديم أفكار كوميدية جديدة تختلف عن تلك التي استخدمت خلال السنوات الماضية، وقال: "هناك أنواع جديدة من الكوميديا التي لا يعرفها المجتمع العربي، وأعتقد أن الجمهور العربي أصبح جاهزاً للاستمتاع بكوميديا جديدة تقدمها وجوه جديدة وقادر على تذوقها إذا ما قدمت له بقالب فني". مشيراً إلى أنه ينوي جمع عدد من الكوميديين العرب وتدريبهم قبل تقديمهم للجمهور العربي. مشيراً في الوقت نفسه إلى نيته البدء بتصوير فيلمين الأول روائي طويل يعتمد على فكرة زميله أحمد اليافعي والثاني وثائقي يستكشف من خلاله صورة العربي بعد أحداث 11 سبتمبر حول العالم، من خلال ردود أفعال الجمهور الغربي حيال الكوميديا العربية، وقال إن الفيلم يهدف الى تغيير صورة العربي المتعب الى العربي خفيف الظل الذي يقدم الكوميديا العالم.

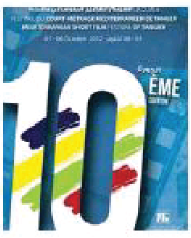
كما كشف عن نيته تنظيم مهرجان دبي الكوميدي الدولي خلال العام المقبل يستضيف مجموعة من الكوميديين العرب والأجانب لتقديم عروضهم في دبي، إلى جانب الدورة الثالثة من مهرجان دبي كوميدي الدولي للفنون الادائية الذي يشارك فيه أكثر من 230 كوميدياً.

تنوع مجتمع الامارات مكن السيد من تقديم عروضه بالإنجليزية والعربية، وبالمقارنة بينهما قال: "هناك فرق بين النكتة بالإنجليزية والعربية التي عادة يكون الوصف فيها أكثر، وبالتالي فصياغة النكتة وتوقيتها مختلف عن الانجليزية التي تكون جملها قصيرة، فضلاً عن أنه يصعب أحياناً ترجمة النكتة، حيث تفقد نكهتها الكوميدية". وتابع: "في العروض العربية عادة اعتمد اسلوب الاستكشاف الذي يقوم على التمثيل، لأن تحضير النكتة بالعربية يعتمد بالأساس على نوعية الجمهور الموجودة وجنسيته". وفي السياق أكد بأن تنوع الجمهور في الامارات ساعده في استكشاف طبيعة ونوعية معظم مجتمعات العالم، وطريقة ميولها في الكوميديا.

> **الطريق إلى ادنبرة**
>
> جولة السيد وفرقته الأخيرة شملت 6 مدن عربية وغربية، وقد بدأت من أبنا اليونانية، حيث شارك بعروض مختلفة ضمن فعاليات مهرجان المسرح الدولي ومن ثم عاد إلى دبي ليقدم فيها عرضاً بعنوان "الطريق الى ادنبرة"، ومنها انتقل إلى ولاية نيويورك ليتوجه بعدها إلى تورنتو بكندا، حيث قدم عرضاً خاصاً بالأميركان السود، ليحط بعدها في الكويت، ومن بعدها توجه إلى العاصمة الاسكتلندية ادنبرة التي قدم فيها 8 عروض ضمن فعاليات مهرجان الكوميديا الذي تستضيفه المدينة سنوياً وحظيت بإشادة الإعلام البريطاني.

52 فيلماً على شاشة مهرجان طنجة للأفلام الوثائقية

تونس تشارك بفيلمين قصيرين «في قاع البئر» إخراج معز بن حسن و«البابا نويل» إخراج وليد مطر



ملصق المهرجان

مومن السميحي

تونس ـ الحبيب الأسود

من المنتظر عرض 52 فيلماً في فعاليات المهرجان المتوسطي للفيلم القصير المتوسطي في دورته العاشرة بطنجة، الذي يقام خلال الفترة من 1 الى 6 أكتوبر المقبل، وسيعرض في الافتتاح الفيلم المغربي "الحفلة له سي موح" الذي أخرجه مومن السميحي في العام 1969 ويتضمن برنامج الدورة مسابقة مفتوحة للأفلام القصيرة التي أنجزها مخرجون من دول حوض البحر الابيض المتوسط سنتي 2011 و 2012، الى جانب تنظيم نقاشات تتناول الأفلام المشاركة في المسابقة الرسمية. تونس تشارك بفيلمين قصيرين، وهما " في قاع البئر" إخراج معز بن حسن و"البابا نويل" إخراج وليد مطر. ويتناول فيلم "في قاع البئر" (14 دقيقة) والذي سبق له أن توج بالجائزة البرونزية وجائزة أفضل إسهام في الدورة الأخيرة لمهرجان الأقصر للسينما الإفريقية في فبراير الماضي، حالة اليأس والإحباط التي يعاني منها العديد من الشبان وهي حالة تتصاعد لتصل أحياناً إلى التفكير في الانتحار الا أن بطل الفيلم "الطفي" الذي يجسد دوره محمد سامي غربال يشعر بالألم واللوعة التي سيتسبب فيها لوالدته ان هو أقدم على هذا الفعل وهو أن جرى ذلك في كابوس مزعج رآه في إحدى الليالي ليتراجع عن فكرة الانتحار. أما فيلم "بابا نويل" فهو عمل جديد لوليد مطر الذي حاز فيلمه القصير "تنديد" على جائزة أفضل سيناريو في الدورة الثامنة لمهرجان طنجة (سنة 2010) وتحصل في نفس السنة على جائزة الجمهور الشاب في مهرجان سينما المتوسط بمدينة مونبلييه الفرنسية.

5 أفلام مغربية

ويتم عرض أفلام بين 5 و 45 دقيقة في النسخة الأصلية بترجمة للعربية والفرنسية أو الانجليزية. ويهدف المهرجان إلى استحداث إطارات لالتقاء المخرجين والحوار حول قضايا سينمائية وتشجيع المخرجين الشباب على المضي قدماً في إنجازاتهم وإبداعاتهم الفنية. كما سيتم تسليم العديد من الجوائز لدى اختتام المهرجان على غرار «الجائزة الكبرى للمهرجان»، وجائزة لجنة التحكيم، وجائزة أحسن سيناريو، وجائزة أحسن دور، وجائزة الشباب. وقد اختارت لجنة انتقاء الأفلام المغربية القصيرة المرشحة للدورة العاشرة لمهرجان الفيلم القصير المتوسطي بعد مشاهدة 50 عملاً، خمسة أفلام للمشاركة في هذه التظاهرة، وهي «رقصة مع اسمهان» لسامية الشرقيوي، «الليلة الأخيرة» لمريم التوزاني، «الهدف» لمنير عبار، «اليد اليسرى» لفاضل الشويكة، «كيف مايقولو» لهشام عيوش. وقد ترأس أشغال هذه اللجنة الصحفي والناقد السينمائي حسن نرايس، بالاضافة الى الصحافيتين فاطمة يهدي وخديجة بوعشرين والناقدين السينمائيين أحمد بوغابة وأيت عمر المختار. ويتم خلال الدورة العاشرة للمهرجان المتوسطي للفيلم القصير عرض 52 فيلما من 21 بلداً متوسطياً لنيل جوائز المسابقة الرسمية. وأعلنت إدارة المهرجان، الذي دأب على تنظيمه المركز السينمائي المغربي، في بلاغ صحفي أنه تم انتقاء 52 فيلما من مجموع 800 فيلم قصير المشاركة في هذه الدورة. وتضم المسابقة الرسمية ست جوائز وهي "الجائزة الكبرى وجائزة لجنة التحكيم وجائزة أفضل إخراج وجائزة أفضل سيناريو وجائزتا أفضل أداء نسائي وأفضل أداء رجالي".

> **لجنة تحكيم المهرجان**
>
> يترأس المخرج المغربي لحسن زينون لجنة تحكيم الدورة العاشرة لمهرجان الفيلم القصير المتوسطي بطنجة. وتضم في عضويتها المخرجة إيزابيل بوني كلافي (كوت ديفوار فرنسا) ومونتسيرا غويالس رئيسة المهرجان الدولي (بويسكا) (إسبانيا) والمخرج صحافيا زويتي (الجزائر) والفنانة أومي ندور (السينغال) بالاضافة الى الناقد السينمائي علي حجي والإعلامي عمر سليم. وستمنح اللجنة الجائزة الكبرى وجائزة لجنة التحكيم وجائزة أفضل إخراج وجائزة أفضل سيناريو وجائزتي أفضل أداء نسائي وأفضل أداء رجالي.
>
> كما ستمنح جائزة الشباب من طرف طلبة الإخراج بمدارس السينما في إطار حصة خاصة بأفلام المدارس، وكانت جائزة الدورة التاسعة للمهرجان عادت للفيلم التركي مراجعة للمخرج سرحات كاراسلان.

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not we

The fierce bidding war to secure Pippa Middleton's first book deal has finally been won by Penguin for the equivalent of more than Dh1 million. The publishing giants HarperCollins and Random House lost out on the chance to print the book on being the perfect party hostess by the Duchess of Cambridge's 28-year-old younger sister

Dubai performs

From stand-up comedy to poetry slams, music concerts and dance, there's much to see at this year's festival, writes Maey El Shoush

Michael Winslow, the human voice machine from the 1984 film *Police Academy*, is set to perform in Dubai for the first time today as part of the city's biggest performing arts event.

He will join more than 200 talents – all but three local artists – for Dubomedy and Viva Arts's second annual Performing Arts Festival. The event will be held in various venues across Dubai and is expected to attract 16,000 people over four days, before the festival wraps up on Saturday.

The performances are to include stand-up comedy, poetry slams, music concerts, dance, spoken word and experimental and improvisational theatre, presented by artists from across the globe.

Winslow, who has been dubbed the "man of 10,000 sound effects", is best remembered as Sgt Larvelle "motor-mouth" Jones from the *Police Academy* films.

Acclaimed Egyptian comedian Mohammed Salem is also one of the most anticipated acts. Musicians, actors, dancers, poets and hip-hop artists, among many others, range from students and professionals to Hollywood legends and will perform in English, Hindi, Urdu and Arabic.

Ali Al Sayed, Emirati comedian and co-founder of Dubomedy, the local comedy and urban arts hub, will also perform. He said one of the main aims is to ensure local artists get the recognition they deserve.

"The local art scene is beautiful, active and keeps on developing, which is why a festival like this makes sense," said Al Sayed. "So expect to see talent in Dubai you never even knew existed. We hope that people come and support these artists from such a mix of backgrounds."

Earlier this year, he was also signed on to work as a producer, presenter and writer on OSN (Orbit Showtime Network) programming.

Other Emirati stand-up comedians will include Omar Ismail and Abz Ali, who will perform in Arabic on the second night at the Burj Khalifa Steps.

The Dubomedy Arts School has been offering courses in comedy, body percussion and tap dance since 2008. Its NYC tap and body-percussion students, Siobhan's Irish Dancers and the Comedy 101 and Advanced Stand Up students will perform a show called *Mix Tape: Stand Up and Dance!*, a free event to kick off the first day at DUCTAC Kitchen theatre.

Also that night, the UAE's first and only improvisational comedy troupe, Improv Revolution, will be keeping the audience on their toes, said Mina Liccione, artistic director of VIVA Arts and head teacher of Dubomedy Arts School.

"All the acts will be performing original material," said Liccione, who is married to Al Sayed. "As we grow, it's important to represent the community and UAE life in a positive way. We are using comedy as a tool to bring people together and it was very important to add Arabic and Indian artists. Next year we will represent more communities."

Most shows like this in the US, she said, only allow professional acts. The Dubai festival, however, also gives students and up-and-coming talents their chance to perform.

"We wanted to integrate every level because each drop of the waterfall is crucial and I love that," she said. "We all work together and for each other. There is no ego; just a celebration of art and expression. Each artist brings something unique to the table."

The Performance Art Jam night on day two will feature the Indian poet Jamal Iqbal, during the Urdu, Hindustani and Sufiana performances. He will collaborate with Liccione. Iqbal will be reading two to three poems, one of which will be in English.

"I started poetry before I even knew what love was," said Iqbal, stopping off at the Dubomedy office just before rushing off to a practice session.

"I will be his rhythm, so-to-speak," joked Liccione, an Italian-American stand-up and sketch comic, tap dancer, choreographer and arts educator.

The biggest challenge to mounting such an event has been securing funding for it, said Al Sayed.

"With more than 200 performers, such events are not cheap and it's difficult to find sponsors to support grassroots events, but we have gone ahead to prove we are able to do it," he said. "This is also a demonstration from us that education maintains sustainable arts."

The main musical act will be Dubai's own Emirati singer/songwriter Hamdan Al Abri, whose father is also a renowned musician from Zanzibar. Al Abri is also the frontman for local band ABRI, which has performed alongside artists such as Ziggy Marley, Kanye West and Kelly Rowland. One of his songs has also recently been picked up by US hit TV series *CSI*.

"The UAE has grown and changed so much over the last few years and I know other aspects like the performing arts would follow suit," said Al Abri, who recently released his self-titled solo debut EP. "I'm so glad to be a part of that growth and this festival is a perfect example."

Al Abri will perform on the last night at the Burj Steps, alongside other performances by Abu Dhabi Strings Orchestra and local artists acoustic solo Lauren Neuwirth, RnB singer Sal the Artist and singer/guitarist Sach Holden.

An afternoon of unconventional theatre will be presented by two of the UAE's only experimental troupes – Abu Dhabi's Resuscitation Theater and Dubai's Star Too. They promise an "out of the box" storytelling experience.

Sol Abaid, theatre director of Star Too, said the group will perform an original piece called *Who Did It?*, featuring six actors in a sequence of stories.

"Experimental theatre uses a lot of symbolism. We have no props, just silk cloth that will be shaped to represent objects," said the Dubai-based French/Lebanese national. "Like silk dancers. It takes plenty of open-mindedness because we rely more on the visuals. Being a part of this festival brings experimental theatre closer to the community, as expect the unexpected."

Abaid also teaches theatre at the Sorbonne University in Abu Dhabi and various schools. She also coaches personality development through theatre techniques.

▶ maltabouh@thenational.ae

From left, the artists Sol Abaid, Mina Liccione and Ali Al Sayed. Satish Kumar / The National

the acts

Day 1:

- *Mix Tape: Stand Up & Dance!* Dubomedy Arts School students perform original stand-up comedy sets, body percussion, tap dance and featuring Irish dancers.
- Improv Revolution: A 60-minute, high-impact show with audience interaction and surprise comedy sketches with 12 players and Mina Liccione.

Day 2:

- Local Theatre & Performance Art Jam. Edgy multidisciplinary pieces from solos to ensembles featuring Youth Theater Works, Dubai Drama Group, Hind Shoufani, Hala Al-H, Nicholas Karavatos, Page to the Stage writers, Jamal Iqbal, hosted by Liccione.
- Mehfil-e-Shama: Urdu, Hindustani and Sufiana performances: Salman Qureshi, Jamal Iqbal, Rohit Jayakaran, Ayeda Naqvi.
- Comedia Dal Wagef: Stand-up comedy in Arabic with Ali Al Sayed, Abz Ali, Fetto, Jamil Abu Wardeh, Mohammed Salem of Egypt and more.

Day 3:

- The Theatre Experiment: Abu Dhabi's Resuscitation Theatre, presents a unique version of TS Eliot's play *The Cocktail Party*, Dubai's Star Too will present *Who Did It?*, an original piece.
- The BIG Comedy Show: Hollywood legend – Michael Winslow will show off his whirlwind of staggering sound effects.

Day 4:

- Clowns Who Care and Michael Winslow: For children with special needs, with Michael Winslow, Taj El Sir and the Clowns Who Care Project. (Invitation only).
- Free comedy, dance and voice-over workshops.
- poeTEA: Poetry and opera featuring Frank Dullaghan, Nicholas Karavatos, Nigel Holt, Ayeda Naqvi, Iranian American poet Bahareh Amidi, Tenor singer Murat Selim.
- Arabic Poetry: Arabic poetry featuring Hajer Saleh, Ali Matar Al Marmoiei and Mohammed Al Mulla.
- Music Concert at the fountain. The closing concert features Abu Dhabi Strings Orchestra, Lauren Neuwirth, Sal the Artist, Sach Holden and headlined by soul singer Hamdan Al Abri.
- For more information on venues and tickets, visit www.dubomedy.com.

Fresh Prince of the UAE is a hit

A UAE parody of the opening titles of the 90s American sitcom 'Fresh Prince of Bel Air' has gained thousands of hits on YouTube.
The 'Fresh Prince of Emirates Hills' sketch by Dubomedy stars including Ali Al Sayed had gained more than 19,000 by last night after being uploaded on Wednesday. Actor Will Smith rapped in the original version about being born and raised in West Philadelphia and spending most of his days on the playground. Sayed waxes lyrical saying: "In a place called Sharjah I was born and raised, with my Filipino maid I spent most of my days."

7Days
January 15, 2013

ALI AL SAYED

ENTERTAINER AND CO-FOUNDER OF DUBOMEDY

What does National Day mean to you?
National Day is a celebration of the UAE's leadership and people. It is a reminder that on this day, we were all united - one hand, one nation and one heart.

What does it mean to be an Emirati in a country that is so rapidly changing?
Change is inevitable. What we have here in the UAE is change in the right direction; it is the birthplace of the best ideas all supported by visionary leaders. I don't think there's a more thrilling place to be in or belong to anywhere else in the world.

What do you hope to accomplish personally in the next few years?
To live by example. My aim is to represent the UAE as an artist all around the world. My dream is to be a mirror image to what people can find when they come to the UAE. We've seen the angry Arab beards in the western media, I want to replace that with the happy bearded Arab.

You are living a lifestyle that previous generations of Emiratis could not have imagined. What does this mean to you?
We are living a lifestyle that the older generations dreamed for us, the life that they had worked tirelessly to provide for us. I salute the generations that came before us for looking beyond limitations and for making the UAE what it is today.

What are your best memories of National Day? How will you celebrate this year?
I have many awesome memories of how people come together and celebrate across the country - mothers, fathers, children, grandparents - from Abu Dhabi to Fujairah. As a kid we used to drive to Abu Dhabi to see the decorations. Unfortunately this year, I will be on a plane from New York to Dubai, but I'll be with the nation in spirit.

"My dream is to be a mirror image to what people can find when they come to the UAE."

Khaleej Times
December 2, 2013

TICKLING THE FUNNY BONE

Dubomedy's Comedy 101 workshop teaches you a thing or two about how to be a good comedian

Lubna Al-Midfa

DUBOMEDY IS a comedy and urban art school in the region, founded in 2008 by Mina Liccione and Ali Al Sayed. If you are looking for something new and unconventional to learn, have a hidden talent for using rhetoric, timing and expressive puns, or simply want to de-stress after work, then Comedy 101 at Dubomedy might just be the class for you.

Held at DUCTAC (Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre) at Mall of the Emirates, Comedy 101 teaches the basics of improvisation, stand up comedy writing, and delivery and performance in a relaxed environment. Students participating in the course range from those who want to pursue it professionally to others who've choose the class as a way to de-stress and learn to relax.

Being able to relax in order to be funny is a must especially for stand up comedy, says Mina, explaining the difference between it and other genres of comedy. "There are many diverse genres of comedy: physical comedy, improv, sketch comedy acting, comedic acting for film, Commedia Dell' Arte, stand up, clowning and so on. Stand up comedy is not a theatre monologue. Someone doesn't hand you a script to memorise and re-enact. You write your own material based upon your own life experiences."

But that said, she continues, "Some comedians 'recycle' jokes from other famous comedians but we are against that and teach our students to be original. Also, unlike a traditional theater, there is no fourth wall separating you from the audience. The audience participates, shouts things out and interacts. Comedians need to include their audience."

During class, students learn to shake off tension and nerves through exaggerated physical movements and vocal expressions. Skills towards learning to improvise were demonstrated through the word association exercise and the poet-translator-dancer technique. Students are also advised on how to give their best improv performance while dealing with issues such as forgetting one's lines. Keeping in mind simple steps such as looking at one's partner, saying the first words that comes to one's mind instead of giving it more thought, or saying the words "yes, and" when in doubt, are some ways to help maintain the performance's momentum.

According to Mina the key to improvisation is to just own it, as well as remembering how other factors such as timing and ending play an equally important role. Time, for example, should preferably be concise to create the required impact, and the ending should always leave the audience wanting more.

Students will have a chance to showcase their talent after the completion of the 9-week course where a final show will be held on Wednesday, November 30, at DUCTAC as part of the Dubomedy International Performing Arts Festival (DIPAF). The show will start at 7pm and is free to the public.

DIPAF's producer, Ali Al Sayed, said "We are hoping to include more Arabic theatre in this year's festival. Many people have yet to experience that side of us and we are happy to be able to provide a platform for more Arab artists to shine."

(For more information, visit www.dubomedy.com)

news@khaleejtimes.com

COMIC SENSE: (clockwise from left) Ali Al Sayed; Mina Liccione; students getting into the act during the Comedy 101 class. Photos: Leslie Pableo

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