

SUMMARY OF THE NEW YORK ARAB-AMERICAN COMEDY FESTIVAL

The New York Arab-American Comedy Festival is a not for profit organization created in 2003 by Arab-American comedians Dean Obeidallah and Maysoun Zayid as a showcase for Arab comedians and in an effort to attract positive media coverage for the Arab community. After 9/11, we felt compelled to create a project that could show Americans a different side to Arabs in America to counter the negative depictions they were being inundated from the media.

The Festival has grown from it's first year with 3 shows and 20 performers and approximately 300 people attending to this past May with 9 shows over 5 nights with over 50 performers and 2,000 people attending. This year's Festival marked the first time ever that comedians from the Middle East ever performed in the US as we presented comedians from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. This year we even presented a stand up show all in Arabic – a first in US history.

Our Festival presents stand up comedy, short comedic films and sketch comedy. The Arab performers in our Festival are from the US, Canada and the Middle East and their backgrounds span the entire Middle East.

The Festival has succeeded in attracting many more Arab-Americans to become active in comedy which is one of our express goals. Only through direct involvement in the entertainment business can we change the way that Arabs are depicted in Hollywood films and TV shows. Over the years, many people from US entertainment industry have attended our Festival and cast many of performers in US TV, stage and film projects.

The Festival has also been very fortunate to attract a great deal of positive media coverage over the past 7 years including in media outlets in the US such as CNN, The NY Times, Time magazine, Wall Street Journal, as well as in Europe and the Middle East. Here are a few links to a sample of the media coverage we have attracted:

Time magazine:

<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1897833,00.html>

The Wall Street Journal:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124277323326336609.html>

Abu Dhabi's "The National" -

<http://www.thenational.ae/article/20090505/FOREIGN/705049830>

Saudi Arabia's "Arab News:"

<http://arabnews.com/lifestyle/sidelights/article55304.ece>

Germany's "Der Spiegel" -

<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/0,1518,625461,00.html>

Our festival also works closely in producing the Amman Stand Up Comedy Festival in Amman, Jordan which was created in 2008 – the Amman Festival is the first and only annual stand up comedy festival in the Middle East and will hold its third annual Festival this December.

In future NY Festivals, we plan to invite even more Arab comedians from the Middle East so they can show Americans first hand that Arabs can be funny –something frankly never seen in the US media. In addition, we hope to attract more people from the entertainment field to attend our Festivals so that they will use more of performers in TV and film projects.

Overall, we believe that comedy is a great bridge to bring people of the US and Arab worlds closer together. Stand up comedy is a truly an American form of entertainment enjoyed by Americans of all ages. In the past three years, we have seen the rise of stand up comedy among the young people across the Middle East- not just attending the shows, but also performing comedy. Our hope is that through our work we can continue to use comedy and our Festival as a vehicle to increase understanding between our two regions.