



CHICAGO READER

CHICAGO'S FREE WEEKLY | THIS ISSUE IN FOUR SECTIONS

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Festivals

Chicago SketchFest

The fourth annual Chicago Sketch Comedy Festival, presented by Lukaba Productions, features more than 80 local and out-of-town ensembles, including folks from Toronto, Vancouver, New York, LA, Seattle, Cleveland, Portland, Dallas, Denver, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. Some well established, some new to the scene, they repre-

sent a remarkable range of styles and viewpoints. SketchFest runs through 1/16 at Theatre Building Chicago, 1225 W. Belmont, in the venue's west, south, and north theaters. (In addition to the schedule below, comic puppeteer Harvey Finklestein entertains in the lobby before shows.) Admission is \$12 per show except where otherwise noted; \$30

provides admission to all performances any single Friday or Saturday evening; and a festival pass costs \$75. For reservations, call 773-327-5252; tickets are also available through Ticketmaster at Hot Tix booths (www.hottix.org for information) or online at www.ticketmaster.com. For updated fest info, visit www.chicagosketchfest.com.

Critic's Choice

Bootleg Islam

It's not quite "My Big Fat Persian Wedding," but Iranian-American Negin Farsad's autobiographical comic monologue about a trip back to Tehran in 1999 for a female cousin's nuptials does tread some familiar ground as this all-American party girl confronts old-world traditions. A hit at the 2004 New York International Fringe Festival, *Bootleg Islam* has a few bits that don't quite pay off, but Farsad does create poignant snapshots of postrevolutionary Iran as "a country obsessed with waiting"—whether for personal or political change. Witty portraits of her extended family include her uncle, a former playboy who runs a Prohibition-style speakeasy in his house ("There is no jihad in my bathtub!"); a gay cousin who's a wedding planner;



Negin Farsad

and the bride, a virgin eagerly anticipating the pleasures of her wedding night. Overall Farsad quietly reminds us that life in the Middle East is far more complex than what our "free" media feed us. ▶ Sun 1/16, 5:30 PM. Theatre Building Chicago, 1225 W. Belmont, 773-327-5252. \$12.

—Kerry Reid