

# The Dallas Morning News

## It's all about the eggplant

### In 'Bootleg Islam,' an Iranian-American chews on Tehran

By **MATT WEITZ**  
Special Contributor

The 2005 Dallas Comedy Festival got off to a rather slow start this week, with about 300 people attending a pair of Wednesday night "clean night" showcases in the West End, and a reported 400 attending a larger, three-venue round robin of performances Thursday evening.

Truth be told — and taking into account the weeknight jinx — 400 folks was a pretty good haul for the wildly uneven night of humor, which for the most part seemed to vacillate between mediocre and bad.

One of the shining exceptions to this impression was *Bootleg Islam*, a PowerPoint-propelled examination of a voyage of discovery undertaken by a thoroughly assimilated (Palm Springs childhood, anyone?) Iranian-American woman. Negin Farsad's visit to her cousin's wedding in Tehran not long ago formed the seed of her screed.

### COMEDY REVIEW



Negin Farsad

Even though she begins her act with a declaration of war against the eggplant, a vegetable apparently dearly loved by many Iranians, she really is just trying to understand a culture that's very different from her (and our) own, but nonetheless resonant.

In Tehran, she experienced a world as unbalanced and crazy as our own, from toilets that split apart at the worst moment to a former playboy uncle whose decidedly nonextremist speak-easy is his theology ("There is no jihad in my bathtub," he says of his homemade gin).

Whether she's recounting delighted relatives who tell her, "You are like a little prostitute!" or comparing the sexual awakenings (via PowerPoint) of herself and her virginal, betrothed cousin, Ms. Farsad is a not-quite-so-innocent abroad, substituting a dark-blue Martha Stewart sheet ("I didn't think the mullahs would mind a 120-

thread count") for a *chador*.

Her political commentary is backhandedly astute, from her observation that her countrymen are free from "the knowledge of Budweiser, whether it be in cans, bottles or keg," or that they've also been liberated from "bowling, alcohol and freedom of assembly."

Just when you're wondering how she's going to make this anything more than a my-crazy-family riff, she mentions not only the resurgent good feeling with which she sent her cousin off into marriage, but also a student demonstration that occurred as she was leaving the country.

Agitating for democracy, what she saw as a rebellion, was never reported in the land to which she returned.

That really is too bad, but her ending rapprochement with the diabolical eggplant allowed her show a proud, positive exit.

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**The 2005 Dallas Comedy Festival** continues tonight with a show headlined by Eddie Brill, David Letterman's warm-up comic, at 9 p.m. in the Dinosaur Room at 603 Munger St. For more information, go to [www.dallascomedyfestival.com](http://www.dallascomedyfestival.com), or call 214-880-9990.