



On Stage

TOP STORY



Two New Off-Off Broadway Shows Use Humor To Break Down Stereotypes

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Two new off-off Broadway shows use humor to draw attention to cultural stereotyping facing Muslim and Middle-Eastern Americans in the wake September 11th. NY1's Clover Lalehzar filed the following report.

Rediscovering one's identity and heritage is at the heart of two poignant works: "I come in Peace," and "Bootleg Islam." Both are written by and star Middle-Eastern comics: Dean Obeidallah and Negin Farsad, who give us a humorous take on the cross-cultural struggle suffered by Middle Eastern Americans in the aftermath of 9/11.

Dean Obeidallah's "I Come in Peace" is borne out of his politically-minded stand-up routine, but sees himself more polarized as an Arab American over the last several years.

"The stories now – the retrospectives of 9/11— are going to bring up the terrorist attack of course and I keep fearing that this will be the only image of Arabs, but we're Americans," says "I Come in Peace" writer/performer Obeidallah. "We happen to be Arab and our lives happened to change as a result and while my story is personal I think it reflects the challenges Arab-Americans have faced in this post 9/11 world."

"I Come in Peace" is enjoying its second New York run, after a successful stint at last month's International Fringe Festival. For Obeidallah, humor is the best tonic to combat ignorance, and displaced hatred and racism.

"I always think if people are laughing it's really hard for them to be angry and hate you and I always have this delusion that they're agreeing with me," says Obeidallah. "So when people meet an Arab, a Muslim their first thought is not 'terrorist.'"

Farsad's "Bootleg Islam" focuses on the culture clash an Iranian-American woman encounters when she attends her cousin's wedding in Tehran.

"Bootleg" was also written with a political motive in mind – to diffuse the stereotypical idea of who Iranians actually are.

"The stories that we hear about Iranians is like, 'they're enriching uranium, they want to build bombs and there is never a good human story coming out of that country, and so what I really wanted to do – especially since Iran was mentioned as a member of the axis of evil – is tell a story about Iranians that is human," says Farsad.

The evening of Arab/Muslim Theatre is only running through Thursday, September 7th at the 45th Street Theatre on West 45th Street. For more information, you can log onto www.brownpapertickets.com/event/6606.

– Clover Lalehzar