



Comedians work to create understanding through laughter

'The Muslims Are Coming!' kicks off in Gainesville this Friday



"The Muslims are Coming!" is a new comedy tour featuring Muslim-American comedians, like Dean Obeidallah. The show begins a tour of red states on Friday in Gainesville at the Thelma Boltin Center. (Courtesy of BTN PR)

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'The Muslims are Coming!'

What: Comedy tour opens with Gainesville performance by Muslim-American comedians Negin Farsad, Dean Obeidallah, Omar Elba, Maysoun Zayid and Jewish comedian Scott Blakeman

When: 8:30 p.m. Friday

Where: Thelma Boltin Activity Center, 516 NE Second Ave.

Cost: Free, RSVP to vaguelyqualifiedproductions@gmail.com with "Gainesville" in the subject line.

An unnamed director of a conservative radio station was weary enough of Muslims to send Dean Obeidallah an angry email, espousing his fears of Muslims taking over America.

Obeidallah was so put-off by the email that he quickly sent a reply, a cardinal sin of hate-mail. He questioned the writer's fears and prejudice, asking him why he would demonize an entire culture for the actions of a few extremists.

"The hardest thing is trying to respond to this 'bogeyman' about how Muslims want to take over and impose Sharia law," Obeidallah said.

The writer responded and ultimately backtracked from his initial email, saying that he's only weary of extremist Muslims. Obeidallah considered it a minor victory.

Obeidallah is a Palestinian-American comedian and one of the stars and producers of "The Muslims Are Coming!" comedy tour, which will hit the road starting Friday at the Thelma Boltin Activity Center, 516 NE Second Ave.

The tour is a free, 10-day trek during the month of August that will take Obeidallah and other comedians of Middle-Eastern descent through the South in an attempt to foster understanding of different cultures through humor. The tour will continue in the fall through the "red states" of the Midwest.

"We wanted to do something positive, to reach out to as many Americans as possible," Obeidallah said. "I've never been more excited to be on any tour."

Obeidallah is an up-and-coming comedian who has appeared on numerous TV shows such as "The View," and the Comedy Central special "Axis of Evil."

Obeidallah and his co-producer, comedian and filmmaker Negin Farsad, decided to kick-off the tour in Gainesville after the town received international attention last summer when Terry Jones, pastor at the Dove World Outreach Center, threatened to hold a Quran burning ceremony on the anniversary of Sept. 11.

"Gainesville in particular is an interesting case," Farsad said. "What was angering to me about the coverage was that (the media) were covering this one guy and creating a stereotype, that Gainesville is complicit in creating Terry Jones."

Farsad knows better than to stereotype Gainesville, citing the election of Mayor Craig Lowe, an openly gay man, as evidence for the town's liberal attitudes.

While Obeidallah is out to prove that some Americans' fears are unjustified, Farsad has a personal goal to break down certain stereotypes about Muslim women.

"I'm totally secular, I eat pork, and I get totally wasted," Farsad said with a laugh. "Are you really going to protest me? I'm almost a cartoon character."

Farsad, who received acclaim on the film-festival circuit for the 2006 documentary "Nerdcore Rising," assembled a film crew to document the tour, which she will then edit into a film slated for next year.

The tour itself consists of Obeidallah and Farsad as well as comedians Maysoon Zayid and Omar Elba. A Q&A session will be held with the audience at the end of each performance, and each town also will have a special guest comedian.

Gainesville will feature Jewish political comedian Scott Blakeman, who has appeared on Comedy Central and is a regular contributor to the Fox News Web show "The Strategy Room." As part of the documentary about the tour, Farsad and her compatriots will try to meet as many people as possible through man-on-the-street interviews and events like an "Ask a Muslim" booth.

They are quite aware of what reactions to expect, especially visiting places where there may only be one mosque for miles, but they hope to make as much of a difference as possible.

"I have no concerns about my safety," Obeidallah said. "We're doing what we can. We might not change people's perspective, but little-by-little makes a difference."

"There were haters when I was making a movie about nerds," Farsad said. "If there are not haters when I make a movie about Muslims, then something is wrong with Americans."