



'The Muslims Are Coming' to Salt Lake City Saturday

By Keith McCord



SALT LAKE CITY — A stand-up comedy group is working to increase understanding about the Muslim culture by raising a few eyebrows.

They call their show "The Muslims Are Coming;" and while cast members are making a first appearance in Salt Lake, they've been making the rounds across the country with their out-of-the-box mix of political, topical and personal humor.

Creators Negin Farsad and Dean Obeidallah developed the show to address what they say is a long-festering feeling of "Islamaphobia" in this country.

We're comics. We use what we have to reach out and make people laugh, break down some of the stereotypes in an appealing way.

—Dean Obeidallah, 'The Muslims are Coming' creator

"The polls became more and more alarming. The anti-rhetoric became more alarming, to the point where we had to do something," Obeidallah said. "We're comics. We use what we have to reach out and make people laugh, break down some of the stereotypes in an appealing way."

Much of the material involves poking fun at themselves, sharing life experiences, and telling anecdotes of the odd things people say to them.

"They range from really good ones to negative ones," Obeidallah said. "One is like: 'You're Arab. Hey, I like Hummis!' Or people will say: 'Hey, you're Arab. You look normal! Weird.' But those are truthfully comments that I've heard."

Each of the shows features four or five comics sharing their stories. They've done about dozen performances so far, and every one was free. Farsad and Obeidallah believe in "During the recession, we found that the shows really draw. People might hate us, but (they say), 'I'm going to go laugh at these Muslims! I'll go home and hate them later.'" Humor to soften cultural differences? Why not.

"If you can get together a diverse group of people and joke about something and laugh, you forget everything else. And I think that's great," said Noor Ul-Hasan, with the Islamic Society of Greater Salt Lake.

At the conclusion of the each of the shows, the cast takes questions from the audience. No subject is off limits.

"It's kind of refreshing for people in the audience to say, 'Oh, her parents are totally nuts just like mine.' Those are all sentiments that bring us together."

"The Muslims Are Coming" will perform at The Complex, 560 W. 100 South, Saturday at 8 p.m. You must be at least 21 years old to be admitted to the show.