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Muslims and Jews united in laughter

Published on Friday November 30, 2012



Friends Eman El-husseini, left, and Jess Salomon launched the comedy night to celebrate the common ground between their two cultures.

Denis Grignon

Special to the Star

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Entertainment Video

It might be ambitious to expect the crowd at a cross-cultural standup show to join hands and sing “Kumbaya” — or its Jewish or Muslim equivalent. But the comedians behind “Kosher Jokes for the Halaladays” — which features six standups representing both religions — believe their show can be a kind of societal bridge for its intended audience. It already has for its performers.

The comic showcase/peace summit takes place Sunday at the Lower Ossington Theatre.

“Our relationship is how you wish it could be with the rest of the world,” says Jessica Salomon, who’s Jewish, referring to [Eman El-husseini](#), the Muslim comic who’s her best friend and co-producer on the show.

They hatched the concept in typical comic fashion: over drinks in a bar in their hometown of Montreal. But they maintain its genesis was not from that constant comic craving for an audience. Rather, it was born of the heated political debates they would get into, usually about the Middle East.

“We’re both very moderate,” says El-husseini. “But our debates could get ugly.”

“Yeah, we could pretty much clear the room,” adds Salomon, a former UN war-crimes lawyer, with a laugh.

But when it came to comedy, points out El-husseini, “I realized how much Jews and Muslims were drawn to each other . . . and there was so much to celebrate.”

Salomon suggests that comic common ground exists because “we’re both outsiders.” And, she adds with a laugh, “playing the victim card is a big thing for both our cultures.”

While the comics on the bill mine their respective heritages for fodder, don’t wait for incendiary or controversial topics to be explored. So, more jokes about overbearing mothers and fasting; few, if any, about rockets and ceasefires.

Still, [Ali Hassan](#), the show’s emcee and the most polished and experienced act on the bill, concedes he’ll have to acknowledge the obvious: the recent [conflict in Gaza](#).

“I can’t act like it didn’t happen,” says Hassan, a regular writer and performer on CBC-TV’s *George Stroumboulopoulos Tonight* who moved to Toronto from Montreal a few years ago. “But it’s a tricky situation. You want to address it, but in the right way.”

Mostly, though, his goal Sunday night is similar to that of Salomon and El-husseini: “A vehicle for Jews and Muslims to get together. It’s good PR.”

Kosher Jokes for the Halaladays takes place Sunday at 8pm at The LOT. Tickets are \$15 each available via [brownpapertickets.com](#). Denis Grignon is professional comedian and writer.

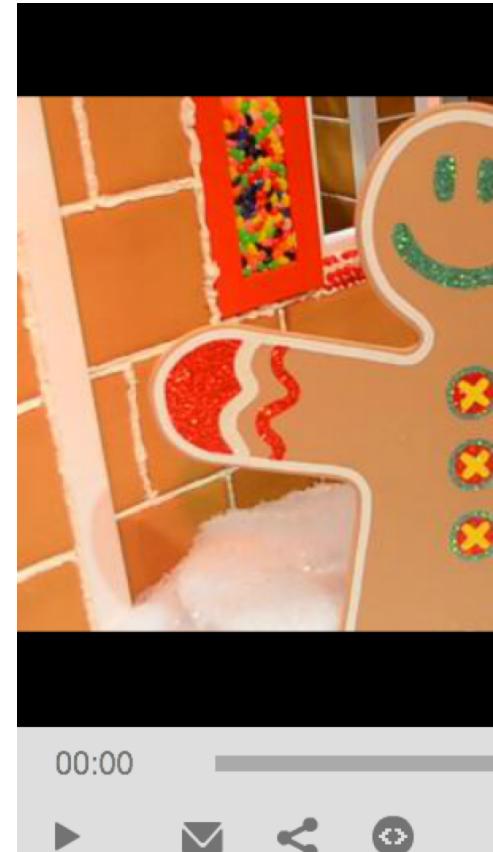
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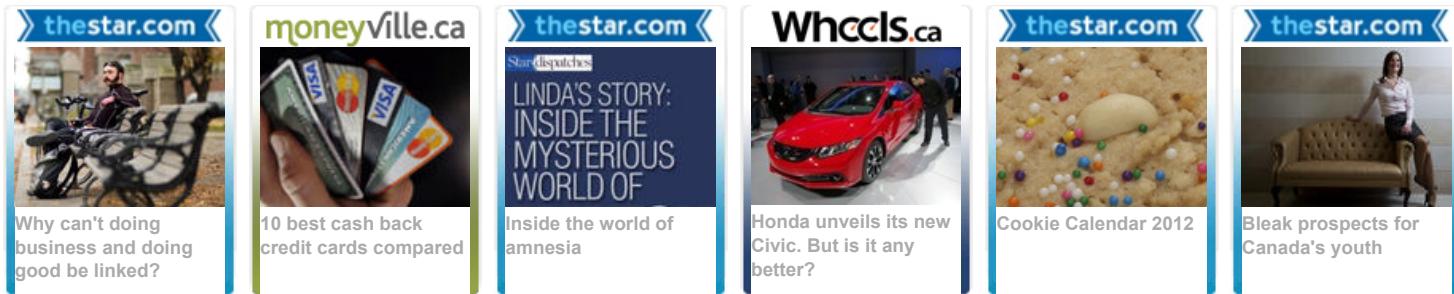
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