

NOX ♥ SMART WOMEN



# Bombing on stage

When Ari Fleischer said people had better watch what they say after 9-11, Palestinian American Jennifer Jajeh wasn't listening

As billboards above New York City theatres go, one carrying the phrase "I Heart Hamas" probably ranks alongside "Springtime for Hitler" in the did-I-just-read-that? stakes. Of course, Jennifer Jajeh, the Palestinian-American comedienne behind the show, doesn't actually heart Hamas – "well, it's complicated," she says – but she knows a headline grabber when she sees one, and for two weeks in August, her one-woman show will be shocking audiences with her double-barrelled assault on any number of Arab stereotypes. NOX grabbed her as she prepared to jump on a plane and head for the spotlight.

**NOX: The title of the show is obviously going to generate some headlines... Has everyone got the joke, or did the NY Post run a "Anti-Semitic hate show sees funny side of genocide" headline?**

Jennifer Jajeh: I was initially really nervous about the title, but I felt like it could provoke discussion on so many levels that I was compelled to stick with it. It's surprising how people have been afraid of being associated with a show called "I Heart Hamas" – even in art we are not allowed to push a few buttons to confront an issue. I welcome the opportunity to educate, entertain and piss a few people off.

**NOX: Do you think that after the White House insanity of the last few years, it's actually a pretty good time to be an Arab-American performer?**

JJ: Well, since 9-11, Arabs have been under a microscope, but it's a double-edged sword. On the one hand so many people have been unfairly persecuted, yet there has also been an unprecedented interest in all things Arab which has opened up a lot of opportunities for Arab artists. It's not necessarily that stereotypes or misconceptions have been altered, just that more people are interested in learning about us.

**NOX: Do you think that in a world of such bizarre, reality-phobic politicians, humour can often be the best weapon? Why do you use it?**

JJ: I think it's just part of my personality. I really enjoy shocking people and saying things that feel dangerous, and humour seems to be very forgiving in that regard. There are a lot of things that you can joke about, that you couldn't get away with saying with a straight face. The show isn't all comedy, though: it reflects my experiences growing up as a Palestinian in America, and the year and a half that I lived in Palestine at the onset of the second Intifada. A lot of them are very painful, so perhaps



“ I really enjoy shocking people and saying things that feel dangerous ”

comedy makes it easier for me to take the sting out a bit.

**NOX: How much of your show is directly political, then?**

JJ: I want to show that, as a Palestinian, everything about my identity is political. There is not a day that goes by that people don't ask me where I am from, or try to engage me in a political discussion. There is no separation for me between the personal and political – my family's 450-year history in Ramallah is being wiped out. How then do I just live my life when everything is so heavily weighted by the fact that there are people out there trying to erase my past, and deny my existence?

**NOX: Your blurb says your show is also about dating problems. You don't look like you'd have any... is that a product of being an Arab or, erm, being a woman in San Francisco?**

JJ: Appreciate the compliment... But I think it has more to do with my being a complicated woman than being Arab. I'd love to settle down with an Arab man, if I could find one who "got" me.

**NOX: And finally, will you please, please debate Debbie Schlussel one-on-one? We'll sponsor it...**

JJ: Anytime. She's insane and needs to be stopped.

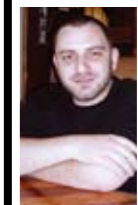
**GOING OFF**

*I Heart Hamas (and other things I'm afraid to tell you) can be seen as part of the NYC Fringe.*

**Dates:** August 8th-24th  
**Tickets:** www.fringenyc.org

## Political puppets

There are several political punchbags in Lebanon – and Wixel Studios has devised a game to prove it



We've been wasting way too much time with this game in the last couple of weeks. Not so much because of the stunning game play, but because Douma offers you the chance to kick the crap out of any Lebanese political figure you want. You can choose from Nabih Berri, Michel Aoun, Walid Jumblatt, Sleiman Franjeh, Saad Hariri, Samir Geagea – interestingly, there's no Hassan Nasrallah or Fouad Siniora – and high-kick, punch and special move your way to political supremacy. And you don't even need a tent in Downtown to get it.



**NOX: Are you looking to get your butt kicked with this game...?**  
Ziad Feghali: I got a sign on my butt that reads "Please kick on the right side of the green light", but so far I'm still walking straight, thank God.



**NOX: What's the idea behind the game?**  
ZF: I had this idea back in December about the problems between the government fans and the opposition. Lebanon is often characterised as a puppet world, constantly being operated on behalf of the interests of others. So, we reversed the roles so that we become the puppeteers.



**NOX: The characters are some of the main players in Lebanese politics. But how come there's no Hassan Nasrallah?**  
ZF: Well, Hassan Nassrallah is a religious figure and if I included him, then I would have to include patriarch Mar Nassrallah Sfeir and the mufti Qabani – but I just wanted to keep politics and religion separate. Douma is not a fight between religions. We have been criticised for this but Lebanon is a country formed on respect between all of its religions. We still have that.



**NOX: What's been the response since you went online?**  
ZF: When we first launched, we had 8,000 unique visitors in 32 hours. The Lebanese people really liked the caricatures and the special moves each had. The government was busy electing a president, so we'll see if they'll come after us. It's not like they don't have better things to do!

New games every month at: [wixelstudios.com](http://wixelstudios.com)

►►►►► Culture divide From world's most famous Arab-American to a right-wing Bush crony actor

**ADD detective**  
Tony Shalhoub



**Wild pitcher and Vietnam vet**  
Charlie Sheen



**Face-painted Kiss lead singer**  
Gene Simmons



**Right wing goon**  
James Woods



Currently married to someone called Brooke

Claims to have slept with over 5,000 women

Appeared at least twice as himself in *Family Guy*

**JOBS SHORTAGE**

It's not just us that doesn't know about anything

Thanks to notcot.com



Proving people who write magazines know less than nothing, **NOX** found an August 1985 issue of *Fortune* with this cover line: **The Fall of Steve Jobs**. Which is wronger than the word "wronger". Everyone's favourite **Syrian-American**, thankfully, lived to tell the tale. And invent the iPod.