

TALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

Former Egyptian TV comedy host Bassem Youssef brings one-man show to Eugene

Bassem Youssef is enjoying life in Los Angeles, where he now lives. He says his oldest child is attending a public school and gets to experience a far more diverse classroom than in Egypt.

What's better for Youssef is that he doesn't have to worry about getting arrested by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Youssef hosted a political satire show in Egypt, called *Al Bernameg*, which used comedy to criticize the country's ruling powers and had a viewership of about 40 million on television and internet. The show was canceled due to political pressure when he targeted former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, his poor English and a big hat. Morsi demanded Youssef's arrest for insulting Islam and the presidency and for disrupting public order and peace.

Youssef, whom many call the Jon Stewart (former host of *The Daily Show*) of the Arab world, is coming to Eugene. He'll bring his one-man show, which combines storytelling, standup comedy and performance, to the Hult Center.

The performance will explore living in a dictatorship in Egypt, the hope of the Arab Spring revolution falling by the wayside, and then coming to the U.S. only to see a similar atmosphere of fear of living in a dictatorship.

"It'll be relevant if you're an immigrant or an American, especially with the times of people living here," he says.

Ever since Youssef came to the U.S. three years ago, he's been working on his standup comedy, which he says has been difficult since not only does he have to deal being a nonnative English speaker, but he also has to deal with the idiosyncrasies of American comedy.

"It's been interesting learning experience for me trying to make it here after everything was taken away from me back home," he says. "At the same time very terrifying."

The performance will include observations and reflections of the rise of the right-wing in America and Egyptian state-run media, which Youssef has found to have some commonalities with his home.

"For both of them, facts don't mean anything. It's all about ideology and rhetoric. Lie constantly without shame. Even when getting caught, they justify it that it is for the best of the country," he says. "They have a way accusing anyone who criticizes the country of being anti-patriotic —

not being American or Egyptian enough."

In addition to calling into question one's patriotism, each country's nationalist media outlets use religion a lot, he adds.

"As if these people are camping in a church — and they don't care," he says. "It's like for them being Christian is a way to set themselves apart. It's the same way with right-wing media in Egypt, who are now not religious at all but again would use Islam as a way to set themselves apart."

The Muslim Brotherhood — which Youssef says isn't democratic at all — called themselves the best Muslims. After the military overthrew Mohamed Morsi in 2013, the military began to use religion, too.

"The whole thing with military using religion makes sense," he says. "If you disobey or challenge authority of God, the next step is military leader."

Religion is basically a layer of protection, he adds.

President Donald Trump has often used religion in campaign rally speeches, and former Attorney General Jeff Sessions even set up a "religious freedom task force" — and a recent biography of Vice President Mike Pence referred to him as a Christian supremacist.

Youssef says Trump isn't a dictator, although he's got

some dictatorial characteristics, because Trump is ultimately accountable to elections.

"You cannot remove a dictator through elections," Youssef says. "Of course he has the traits of an authoritarian figure. He hates the media. He uses populist rhetoric. He incites fear. He lies constantly. But at the end of the day, at least we have a system that can contain this."

Youssef says Trump was crippled after the midterm elections by losing the House of Representatives, and he'll have to be re-elected in 2020 to stay in power.

Trump is causing a lot of damage, Youssef adds. But this damage can be reversed in the long run.

And Youssef sees some hope for the U.S. He says young people are starting to get more active in politics and references the Parkland High School students' anti-gun activism. He adds that "Reagan country" in Orange County, California, elected Democratic candidates.

Yet he says he fears a conservative setback to the Democratic Party wins, like when former President Barack Obama was elected in 2008 and Republicans took over local elections for the next eight years. ■

Bassem Youssef will perform at the Hult Center 7:30 pm Friday, Nov. 30. Tickets are available at HultCenter.org.



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BUTTERFLY LOT CURFEW

Lane County Board of Commissioners adopt an overnight curfew for the downtown lot

At its Tuesday, Nov. 27, meeting, the Lane County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved an emergency ordinance placing an 11 pm to 6 am curfew on the "butterfly lot." The ordinance is effective immediately and affects the un-housed who have been protesting there.

The county-owned butterfly lot parking structure, at 8th Avenue and Oak Street, was the site of homeless protest

camps last month and this month.

The county opened a campsite off of Highway 99 last month, near St. Vincent de Paul's Lindholm Center, in order to refer people to that site and away from the butterfly lot. The city partnered with the county on that project, canceling its own plans for a temporary shelter site downtown.

The curfew ordinance was introduced late last month by Stephen Dingle, department director of Lane County's legal counsel, when he was made aware of the butterfly lot's lack of curfew.

Dingle said, "During the situation we had on the butterfly lot, it was brought to my attention by the city attorney that our hours of operation were different than the city's." He said the butterfly lot was one of the only public areas downtown without a curfew.

This ordinance adopts the same curfew as the Wayne Morse Free Speech Plaza did in 2013. In regards to concerns from some board members of violating legal rights

by adopting the ordinance, Dingle said, "There hasn't been a single legal challenge to the Free Speech Plaza's curfew."

The butterfly lot will still be open during daytime hours, and permission can be given for events during the curfew hours, Dingle said. He cited the Farmer's Market, which sets up during dawn, as an example.

The ordinance was proposed as an emergency ordinance due to public health and safety concerns. During the meeting, Commissioner Pete Sorenson said he had heard about a specific incident in which a tent at the protest camp had caught on fire due to a lit candle.

"That's the kind of thing that causes me to think that we should think about providing for additional closure for this property," he said.

Other commissioners cited other public health issues such as public urination and human excrement around the area of the protest camp.

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