



All for the Laughs

With a contract from Bahrain's first talent management agency under his belt, funnyman Imran Al Aradi is out to prove that comedy does sell!

Forging out a career in stand-up comedy is no laughing matter. Ask Imran Al Aradi, Bahrain's best known stand-up comedian who has been living off what many call "a mere hobby" for the last three years. A freelance artist since 2008, he has juggled various roles as a resident DJ at Radio Bahrain and an MC at corporate events and parties to stay afloat as a stand-up comedian.

Imran, though, has had the last laugh; he's been signed up by Punchline Media, a Bahrain-based entertainment and events company that aspires to become the top talent management agency in the region.

At the newly-formed company the approach is similar to that of agencies across the USA and Europe, where signed-up talent focus on their art without having to worry about a day job or financial stability. Punchline will invest significantly in Imran's brand and market him regionally and globally.

"To all the people who disbelieved and predicted that I wouldn't survive, this is a vindication. You can be an entertainer and make a career out of it. This is a tremendous opportunity for talented youngsters to get spotted. As they say, one of the worst things in the world is wasted talent," he observes.

An entertainer since his youth, Imran is naturally gifted in the art of self-mockery, thanks to a defence mechanism developed in school where he was bullied for his mixed parentage. As a Bahraini stand-up comedian with a Pakistani background he's able to connect with both Arab and expatriate audiences owing to his understanding of both cultures and proficiency in Arabic, Urdu and Hindi.

Imran earned his first gig in 2008 at the Axis of Evil Comedy Tour Bahrain, which included international comedians Maz Jobrani and Ahmed Ahmed. Later on, in 2010, Imran brought Maz back to Bahrain with his "Brown & Friendly Tour" where he performed, promoted and organised his show in Bahrain and toured Saudi Arabia with him.

Multiculturalism and racial stereotypes have been the recurring themes in his work, but he's now modifying his style into a more subtle and sarcastic take on the sad realities of life. He'd love to emulate the success of Russell Peters, with whom he's worked recently; his idols, however, remain Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy.

Untapped potential

Punchline's advent into the regional entertainment industry couldn't have been better timed. The Arab world is finally beginning to acknowledge and understand stand-up comedy.

"As the exposure to western stand-up comic act grows, we're finally learning to laugh at ourselves. Touring international artists bring good exposure to the local performers, who get to perform with them," observes Imran.

Comedy was never looked upon as a career in the region but, with Punchline, perceptions are expected to change. "Not many corporate agencies are willing to invest money and time in local talent and this is where Punchline comes in," says one of the company's directors.

Punchline is on the lookout for all types of talent such as singers, musicians, dancers, models and so on. Many new faces will take to stage in coming months as the agency signs up fresh talent and markets them. The company will invest heavily in the entertainment scene with concerts and events lined up towards the year-end. It will also bring international personalities to Bahrain such as hip hop artists, musicians and singers as well as motivational speakers and business gurus.

Punchline seeks to make the most of social media networking through twitter and YouTube. Those interested can follow Punchline on Twitter @PunchlineME or mail their details to info@punchlineme.com to register for an audition.