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# Improvability: Doing it For the Laughs

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Last Winter Quarter, a baby was born in Denny's.

Five undergraduates, a Canadian and a red-haired doctoral candidate held hands around empty sugar packets and pushed and pushed until Improvability poked its funny, ridiculous head through.

After the ashes of senior Gabriel Smith's now-defunct Major League Improv were swept away, Adam Curvin, a senior in UCSB's esteemed BFA Acting Program, decided he needed to resuscitate improvised comedy. Along with the six others, he founded Improvability, which is a more cooperative, free-form group based on games and a goofy point system. The tightly knit troupe performs at 8 p.m. every Friday night at Embarcadero Hall to take your money and deliver enough funny to knock your socks, shoes and leg hair off.

The quarter finale show concluded a successful fall season, complete with weekly performances and swelling crowds. With a sizable audience, the performance began as most do: with an excited member walking up to those sitting in the shadows, the corners and the far back.

"Would you mind moving a little closer? It's more fun up there." And with that, the show begins.

Philip Amler, a junior film studies major with a director's eye who "thinks the group is fucking hilarious" (and is fucking right) hosts the evening. Six snappily dressed, smiley comedians emerge from the foyer and jog to the stage, eager to start the unscripted games. The rules are quickly explained, and then the laughs commence. Over-the-top scenes like "Vacation Photos" require audience involvement. Their suggestions determine the direction the sketch will take: The crazy guy in the front row wants to see the vacation photos of the Scottish potato farmer and his sexpot wife. And that's exactly what you'll get - and more. "Spelling Bee Kid" forces three actors to function as a cohesive unit, spelling out letters to words supplied by the audience that would make your SAT tutor cry.

"Playground Dis!" Amler yells, and the rest of the troupe leaves the crowded hall. The blond-haired host



asks for a few absurd, complex adjectives and nouns that would bring forth an ass beating to your nephew if they ever escaped his mouth. After some cajoling, Amler draws an eloquent "dis" on a marker board: "Suntanned Rambunctious Boobiehead."

"Players! Are you ready?" Amler shouts, as the teams file in. Kolby Knickerbocker, a global studies junior with heavily pierced ears and a flair for Italian, sides with Marc Shaw, the Ph.D candidate in dramatic arts who teaches Dramatic Arts 60. The two jump into action, acting out the words in complete silence in hopes of transmitting the dis to their opposite partner, Chris Otte, a young sophomore English major you'd expect to find in an Abercrombie & Fitch catalog, not an elite comedy troupe.

Shaw and Kolby begin ramming their heads into one another. "You're a ram! A stupid, ugly ram!" The audience's explosive laughter is matched by the actors' growing frustration. Erica Bailey, the other BFA of Improvability, who plans on fleeing to her homeland Canada if "things get any worse," stands across Otte. She is on a "dis-mission" of her own. Her teammates, Curvin and Kristen Palmer, a business economics sophomore and self-appointed mamma of the group, try their damndest to have Bailey insult opponent Otte with "Gassy Pottymouthed Shepard." The two begin hurling in a makeshift toilet. Curvin kneels and becomes a sheep, with Palmer resembling Moses. On the other end, the action grows insane as Knickerbocker and Shaw outline a woman's upper body curves and the futility of it all. "You're a breast! You're just... I have no idea what the hell you are. Are you a breast?"

Though there are no formal rules to the improvisation, Amler explains that Improvability is "family-friendly," which means avoiding overt sexuality (though innuendo is encouraged), swearing (though slippages occur) and violence (but sometimes it's unavoidable). "That's low-class comedy," said Knickerbocker. "We try to avoid that."

Improvability works hard at getting their name out there and filling seats each week by passing out fliers, making posters and taking out ads in local newspapers. Fortunately, a small ticket price and much-appreciated donators help defray the cost of publicity. Because Improvability serves as an alternative to drinking in Isla Vista on a Friday night, the Alternative Social Programming sector of the Office of Student Life has donated money to their cause. The I.V. Community Relations Committee has also contributed to the group due to their outreach into the Isla Vista community. So far the promotion has been successful, increasing awareness of the group campuswide.

Though it may seem like all fun and games, Improvability is a serious organization. Each member came to UCSB with the intention of joining an improvisation group. If there wasn't one established already, the comedians each planned on starting their own. While most students just fall into clubs and groups on campus almost unintentionally, Improvability's members were dedicated and motivated from the get-go in their performances, practicing three hours a week and two hours of warm-up before the Friday night shows.

The seven-member group does not hold open auditions; instead they will rely on their own private stash of friends if the need should arise. "Seven is the perfect number," Palmer said. "you get to know each person individually and everyone gets a lot of stage time. There is a hole if someone isn't there." The selectivity of the troupe may be its strongest ally. The members of Improvability have quickly developed

into a cohesive family unit, where the laughs never stop and lines between real life and comedy are difficult to outline. As Shaw, the graduate student, puts it, "improv is something you can do your whole life, but you never expect to get paid for it." Yet judging by audience reactions and support, a paid gig is not too far out of sight. But until then, they'll do it just for the laughs.

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