The arts

Hilarious ImprovBoston offers consistent laughs

By Joshua M. Andresen

IMPROVBOSTON


STAFF REPORTER

Improvisational comedy is still somewhat newer to the comedy scene than the more established stand-up format. Still, there are a few noteworthy improvisational performers in the Boston area. In particular, the city’s oldest improvisational comedy troupe, ImprovBoston, gives a hilarious performance that is well worth checking out.

In improvisational comedy the comedic material is not written beforehand. Rather, only its “structure” is set. The troupe will elic- it a few apparently random pieces of information from the audience and weave them into the setting of a scene. The comic material is then comosed on the spot, as it is being performed. While this leads to a less consistent and less tightly constructed line of gags than stand-up material, it is much more sponta- neous, and very funny if the fact that the per- formers are making everything up as they go along is kept in mind.

For example, after prompting the audience to give a type of relationship (professor/graduate student was the response), a location (an archaeological dig), and a host of emotions, the performers set upon a skit of a professor and a graduate student at an archaeological dig, and a host of emotions, the performers set upon a skit of a professor and a graduate student at an archaeological dig. At regular intervals, another member of the troupe would yell “freeze” and then tell one of the two performers at that moment to give a type of relationship (professor/graduate student was the response), a location (an archaeological dig), and a host of emotions. The comedy performances are making everything up as they go along is kept in mind.

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The highlight of the performance is the improvised musical that ImprovBoston offers. The troupe does an amazing job with this. The audience was prompted for a time (Civil War Era), a location (Virginia), a setting (a rutaba- ga farm) and several genres of music. The rutabaga provided comedic material that was quite fortuitous, as a steel/rutabaga alloy became the key secret weapon of the South as it fought against the evil General Sherbert. The storyline that unfolded was quite entertaining.

The background music provided by music director Stephen Gilbane is often the factor that makes a scene truly hilarious. The music, like the comedy, is entirely improvised, though Gilbane is well versed in all the musical clichés. He plays a keyboard/synthesizer, feeding off the performers just as the perform- ers feed off each other, adding to the spotten- taneity as well as the humor.

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The best parts of the musical, though, were the songs that were performed. Not only are the lyrics improvised (nearly always in rhyme), but the melody is as well. In addition, the cast joins in with the singing for choruses (sometimes adding harmony or counterpoint) just as would happen in a normal musical. The musical styles add the final touch. ImprovBoston performed a high school football song, a rap, a heavy metal tune, and (the best of all) a disco cut. “The Rutabaga Disco” was only made funnier by the choreography added by the performers. The improv musical is a won- derful idea for improvisational comedy.

ImprovBoston performs at 8 p.m. at Joe Tecce’s and Saturdays at 10:30 p.m. at the Back Alley Theatre. Friday perform- ances are $6 and Saturdays are $10 (88 for students). Call 484-9994 for information.