



SUPPLIED

AND SANTA'S AN ALCOHOLIC Rapid Fire Artistic Director Chris Craddock's ready to get audiences hopping.

Improving on improv itself

Entering its 27th season, Rapid Fire Theatre is still serving up off-the-cuff laughter

theatrepreview

TheatreSports and Chimprov

Friday and Saturday nights at 11pm
Varscona Theatre

KEVIN CHARLTON
Arts & Entertainment Writer

Many students have heard of the mysterious, scriptless theatre event called improv, either from friends who have seen a show or whispers heard in passing. Now, those who haven't caught such a show can finally start having the chance to experience this spectacle, as Rapid Fire Theatre is starting up their 2007 season.

"On a scale from 1-100, I'd say we average out at at least 86 per cent fun," Chris Craddock, artistic director of Rapidfire jokes. "[As for] the other 14 per cent, that loss can be attributed to factors outside of our control, such as poor dates, ill-chosen companions, drinking too much, and vomiting while at the theatre. That's a big night killer for not only you, but [for] some of us."

Since that percentage is probably significantly higher than most of the marks on your university transcript, they've got to be able to put on a hell of a show—something that just might be up your alley if the mood isn't right for a night out at the bar. Rapidfire's been going strong for more than two decades, and is Canada's second-oldest improv company, meaning you're pretty much

guaranteed a good laugh.

But despite the years of experience, according to Craddock, they still need your uninitiated ass in a seat for performance-improving purposes.

"We're only as good as the audience that shows up," Craddock says. "We find that university students make one of our most challenging audiences, and we really appreciate that."

"They push us to be a bit smarter with our improv," he elaborates. "Since improv is based on the theatre audience's suggestions at the time, it increases the amount of engagement that the audience has. People under 30 really flock to it, rather than other live theatre events where the traditional age tends to be well over 30, sometimes well over 50."

"We're all trying to be the best improv ninjas we can be."

CHRIS CRADDOCK
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, RAPIDFIRE THEATRE

When you can show up to the theatre in your street clothes—and perhaps slightly inebriated—you know that they have something fairly casual going on. However, after doing improv for years, one might expect the senior players grow bored, or to have performed scenes about pretty much everything. But Craddock explains that the performers find different ways to keep improvisation fresh for themselves.

"We just have to keep pushing ourselves and make sure we're getting better and going back to pick up the skills that we left behind the first time," he says. "We're all trying to be the best improv ninjas we can be."

The Rapidfire Theatre cast comes from all walks of life and have a lot of different levels of experience: senior players have as many as 20 years of improv experience, while younger members are straight out of high school. They do have practices, but Craddock maintains that doesn't mean meticulously planning out shows in advance—it just means working on the skills required to improvise.

"We get together and do a workshop where we highlight a particular skill—or narrative thrust, or genre, or whatever it is we're trying to work on—and we focus on it," he explains. "In the workshop environment, you don't have the audience to entertain so you're free [from] some of the kinds of pressures you might be aired to otherwise."

With no scripts and wild variations in the ages and skill levels of the improvisers, the show promises to be completely different every time—although some similarities can be seen throughout shows, some more revealing than others.

"They can expect high energy, to laugh, to be charmed," Craddock explains. "They can expect to see audience suggestions transformed into hilarity before their very eyes: they can expect political humour, they can expect things that are a little bit racy, and they can sometimes expect mild displays of nudity."

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