

# *The Renaissance*

2009-10: volume 18

## **The Second City**

The Second City is a long-running improvisational comedy enterprise which originated in Chicago's Old Town neighborhood. Second City evolved from the Compass Players, a 1950s cabaret revue show started by undergraduates at the University of Chicago. The style of comedy has changed with time, but the format has remained constant. Second City revues feature a mix of semi-improvised and scripted scenes with new material developed during unscripted improv sessions after the second act, where scenes are created based on audience suggestions. A Second City innovation is the inclusion of live, improvised music during the performance. A number of well-known performers began careers as part of the historic troupe and later moved to television and film. In the mid-1970s, Second City became a source of cast members for *Saturday Night Live* and *SCTV*, which borrowed many of the writing and performing techniques pioneered by Second City and other improv groups.

**February 19, 2010**  
**8:00 PM**

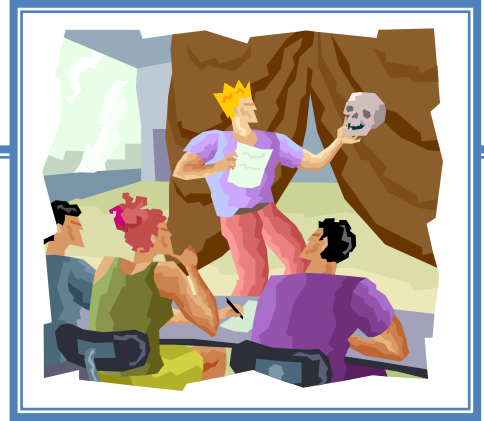
## **Improv**

Improvisational theatre is a form of theatre in which the actors use improvisational acting techniques to perform spontaneously. Actors typically use audience suggestions to guide the performance as they extemporaneously create dialogue, setting and plot.

Improvisational theatre performances tend to be comedic, although some forms, including Playback Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed, are not necessarily intended to be comedic.



## Ten Rules for Improv



### 1) Say Yes-and!

For a story to be built, whether it is short form or long form, the players have to agree to the basic situation and set-up. The who, what and where have to be developed for a scene to work.

### 2) After the `and` add new information.

An improvised scene can't move forward or advance unless we add new information. That is why new information is added after the Yes of Yes-and!

### 3) Don't Block.

The opposite of saying yes-and is blocking or denial.

### 4) Avoid Questions.

A form of blocking (in its more subtle form) is asking questions. Questions force our partners to fill in the information or do the work. It is a way of avoiding committing to a choice or a detail. It is playing it safe. However, on more advanced levels, questions can be used to add information or tell your partner the direction to go in.

### 5) Focus on the Here and Now.

Another useful rule is to keep the focus on the here and now. A scene is about the people in the scene. The change, the struggle, the win or loss will happen to the characters on the stage. Focus on what is going on right this at this moment.

### 6) Establish the Location!

Good scenes take place somewhere and at sometime. They do not take place on an empty stage. A location can easily be established in one or two lines without breaking the scene.

### 7) Be Specific - Provide Details!

Details are the lifeblood of moving a scene forward. Each detail provides clues to what is important. Details help provide beat objectives and flesh out characters.

### 8) Change, Change, Change!

Improv is about character change. The characters in a scene must experience some type of change for the scene to be interesting. Characters need to go on journeys, be altered by revelations, experience the ramifications of their choices and be moved by emotional moments.

### 9) For serious and emotional scenes, focus on characters and relationships.

A long form improv set should contain a variety of scenes. Some scenes will be emotional, some will be tense, and some should be funny. The easiest way to make a scene serious is by focusing on the relationship of those on the stage (their characters).

### 10) For humor, commit and take choices to the nth degree or focus on actions/objects.

A good long form set is balanced. Shakespeare knew that too much pathos was wearing on the audience; hence, he had minor characters in humorous scenes such as the drunken porter in *MacBeth*.

**For more info on Second City, go to: [www.secondcity.com](http://www.secondcity.com)**