



The Staircase

Staircase Improv Welcome Package

The Staircase Theatre

25 & 27 Dundurn St N

Hamilton

905-529-3000

Welcome to The Staircase Theatre and Staircase Improv

The Staircase has been Hamilton's main arts incubator since the last millenium. All manner of film, play, stand up, improv, art, music, dance, poetry, craft, food and party has had its inception at the Cultural epicenter of Dundurn Street North. We have had more before, firsts, premieres and what the "hell was that"s than you can shake a script at. The Staircase is the only theatre in Hamilton to do this without any government funding whatsoever!

Mission Statement

"To offer a grassroots performance facility available to artists at all levels of their experience."

Vision

"To create a financially independent grassroots performance facility supporting artists at all levels of their experience and offering training in the arts to the community that those artists serve."

Opportunity and comfort

At all times we strive to create a comfortable and safe learning environment for people of all ages. If at any time you feel that is not the case please let us know. Adult learning in improv theatre can be a rough and tumble free association of creativity. This does not mean that participants, volunteers or staff should be made to feel uncomfortable. Please use the contact information below to send us comments or kudos.

Detailed Contact Information

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we do not have a fax machine
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learnimprov.com

OUR IMPROV WORKSHOPS

BOOT CAMP

Every Monday 7pm & 8:30pm

Improv Boot Camp is a drop in basic improv workshop for beginners and beyond. The Boot Camp is Hamilton's oldest and most established improv training programme. It's improv comedy instruction in a fun and supportive environment from experienced improvisers. Participation is limited to the first 16 students/workshop. If space permits you may attend both classes. Limited to 16 years of age and up, younger participants require parental presence. Sign in sheets are located at the Café counter.

THE NEXT LEVEL

The Next Level is for improvisers who have Boot Camp experience and want to further develop their skills. Next Level is also used by more experienced improvisers wishing to polish their improv foundations.

This workshop is scheduled on a semi-regular basis (usually monthly), and usually runs about 3 hours. Each workshop will concentrate on a particular asp of improvisational acting. For example, character, environment, the use of handles and genres, stage combat, music in improv, or other more advanced elements and skills that are critical for the development of the improvisational actor. More info at nextlevel@staircase.org

ADVANCED IMPROV

The Advanced Improv Workshop is for improvisers that have ample skills and chops to endure a more pointed and constructive assessment of their improv comedy. The workshop requires the student to not just have a solid grasp of the basics improvisation, but demonstrate the spark that may lead to performing improv comedy on stage. Selection is carried out by reference from other established improv schools, or through the suggestion of our instructors at either Boot Camp classes or Intermediate Intermediate Intensives. Students that do not maintain the standards required to participate in the advanced workshops will be asked to withdraw until their chops return. Tuesdays at 7pm sharp. \$5.

CORPORATE WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING

Staircase Improv offers Corporate entertainment and Workshops on and off site. Our advanced improvisers provide a fun and friendly environment for participants to learn in, are professional and sensitive to your needs and produce results. Staircase Improv can customize corporate training workshops to address your specific needs whatever they be; team building, thinking outside of the box, communication, leadership and innovation. Contact Colette 905-529-3000 for more details

OUR IMPROV SHOWS

ONGOING SHOWS

At one point or another Staircase Improv will have an ongoing weekly show. The city's best trained improvisational brains gel into teams that entertain the peoples of Hamilton and beyond. Formats vary from show run to show run. Sometimes it is a crack team of 2 taking audience suggestions other times it a battle royal of two teams competing for improv supremacy. Past Ongoing shows have included: Theatresports, Improv Counterpoint, Oh Show, Psychobabble, improv comedy show, The WorkShow, and others. Check staircaseimprov.com for what's happening in your time space continuum.

SPECIALTY SHOWS

Everyone likes to think they are special. So we here at The Staircase have a rack of specialty shows that happen and 'special' times of the year. Some shows have been created on site by the Staircase Improv crew, others have been outsourced. Near Halloween you can catch our story skeleton FrankenProv, at Christmas Santa Survivor, and on Valentine's Day we run Jill Bourque's How We First Met. We have also done specialty in house shows like Damsel In Dis Dress, a film noire parody, and even a spontaneous movie of the week. Check staircaseimprov.com for what's happening in your time space continuum

CORPORATE AND TOURING SHOWS

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IMPROV ETIQUETTE

The following are a set of guidelines that we ask all participants of Staircase improv to adhere to regardless of ability or level of achievement. These rules have been put in place to ensure that everyone will have an enjoyable and safe experience while with us.

- ◆ **Arrive before class starts** and wait in café area for instructor to invite you into theatre. Once class is finished quickly vacate theatre. You may continue to socialize in the café portion of the building.
- ◆ If late **enter quietly and respectfully**. Take a seat and wait for the instructor to invite you to participate.
- ◆ **No texting**, surfing during workshop.
- ◆ **Turn cell phone ringer off** or to vibrate. Quietly leave theatre if you must take a call.
- ◆ **No chatting on backline** or when awaiting group instruction.
- ◆ Provide your **focus to the instructor**. You will be given an opportunity for input.
- ◆ **Avoid side comments** no matter how witty.
- ◆ If you are attending both workshops leave what happened in the first there.
- ◆ **Stay seated** when not on stage.
- ◆ No call outs.
- ◆ **Respect** the physical and emotional space of others.
- ◆ Outside food and drink is not permitted
- ◆ Alcohol/drugs not tolerated.

COMMON IMPROV TERMS

The following is a list of terms used in teaching and discussing improvisational theatre. (partial list supplied by improvcomedy.org)

Accepting

Embracing the offers made by other performers in order to advance the scene.

Advancing

The process of moving the scene forwards.

Ask-for

The question asked of the audience in order to start a scene.

Blocking

Rejecting information or ideas offered by another player. One of the most common problems experienced by new improvisors. In conventional theatre, the term is used to mean something different (pre-planned stage movement).

Commenting

Stepping out of the reality of the scene by saying or doing something that refers to the fact that it's a scene being played. Also refers to "playing" an emotion rather than feeling it. Should be avoided, though used sparingly it can sometimes be effective.

Complementary offer

An offer that meshes well with what's already gone before (and usually enhances it in some way).

Conflict

Many (but not all!) scenes are about a conflict of some sort. If there's no conflict, the scene may still be truthful but somewhat dull.

Context

The broader setting for the scene (political, social, etc).

Corpse

To break up laughing while playing a scene. Usually not a good thing to do.

Denial

See "blocking".

Driving

Taking over a scene and not letting other performers influence its direction. Makes you an unpopular improviser.

Endowing

Assigning attributes to another performer's character.

Explore and heighten

To take an idea and see where it leads, exploring its natural consequences while simultaneously raising the stakes.

Extending

Taking an idea and letting it become the central theme of the scene.

COMMON IMPROV TERMS (cont)

Focus

The audience's attention should only be in one place at any given time; that place (or person) is the "focus" of the scene. If more than one thing is going on simultaneously, the focus is split. Experienced improvisors will smoothly share focus, less experienced improvisors often steal or reject focus.

Gagging

Trying to make a joke or do something funny that doesn't flow naturally from the scene. Always a bad idea.

Gibberish

A nonsense language.

Handle

The premise for a scene or game.

Masking

Standing in a place where you can't be seen properly, or in such a way that you're hiding someone else or some important action. Should be avoided.

Mugging

Making silly faces instead of reacting truthfully. Generally frowned upon.

Naming

Identifying characters, objects, places and so forth in the scene.

Narrative

The story told by a scene. Scenes should have a clear beginning, middle and end.

Objective

The thing that a character in a scene is trying to achieve.

Offer

Any dialog or action which advances the scene. Offers should be accepted.

Offer from space

Dialog or action that is bizarre and that appears to come from nowhere.

Physicalization

Turning intent into action and movement.

Point of Concentration

What the scene is about.

Post-show

Discussion of the show by the performers and crew after the performance, in order to identify problem areas that may have arisen as well as things that worked particularly well.

Plateau

A period during which a scene is not advancing. Usually a bad thing.

COMMON IMPROV TERMS (cont)

Platform

The who, what and where of a scene. The success of a scene often depends on having a solid platform.

Playlist

The list of handles and/or ask-fors to be used in a show. Also called a "running order".

Pimping

Playfully getting another performer to do something difficult or unpleasant which you probably wouldn't do yourself. Used sparingly, can be quite entertaining. Best strategy is to choose things the other performer does well.

Raising the stakes

Making the events of the scene have greater consequences for the characters. One technique for advancing.

Reincorporation

Bringing back an idea from earlier in the scene, or from a previous scene in the show, or even from a previous performance. Stand-up comedians refer to this as a "callback". Always fun, but not something to over-do.

Running order

See "Playlist".

Setup

Explaining the handle of the scene to the audience before the scene starts. Also involves doing an ask-for. The performer who does the setup usually shouldn't start off on stage in the scene.

Shelving

Acknowledging an offer but not doing anything with it, with the intent of using it later. Of course, later never comes.

Status

A character's sense of self-worth. Many scenes are built around status transfers, in which one character's status drops while another's rises. Physical environments and objects also have status.

Stepping out

Breaking the reality of the scene. See "Commenting".

Talking heads

A scene that involves a lot of standing (or worse yet, sitting) around talking rather than engaging in physical action.

Transformation

Turning something into something else (one character into another, one object into another, one environment into another).

Walk-on (or Walk-through)

The act of entering a scene, making a strong offer that advances the scene, and then exiting. Use sparingly.

Wimping

Accepting an offer but failing to act on it.

IMPROV RESOURCES

BOOKS

- x **Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre**
by: Keith Johnstone

- x **Improvise.: Scene from the Inside Out**
by: Mick Napier

- x **Truth in Comedy: The Manual of Improvisation**
by: Charna Halpern, Del Close, Kim Johnson

- x **Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art**
by: Stephen Nachmanovitch

- x **Impro for Storytellers**
by: Keith Johnstone

- x **Improvisation for Theatre-Text**
by: Viola Spolin

- x **The Art of Chicago Improv: Short Cuts to Long Form Improvisation**
By: Rob Kozlowski .

WEB

- www.learnimprov.com
- www.purplecrayon.org
- www.improvarama.com
- www.dangoldstein.com/howtoimprovise
- www.YesAnd.com
- Living Playbook
- Improv Encyclopedia
- Improv Resource Center
- Story Robot: Improv Blog