

FEATURED TOPICAL

Movement and thought in improv

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Feb 22, 2024

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This improvisational exercise focuses on repetition in lines and actions.



ENGLEWOOD — Curious expressions, Freudian slips and impromptu words are all a part of the improvisation creative process.

It may seem easy to say whatever thought comes to mind, but improv is a little more complicated than that.

It's all about communication, imagination and trust.

The organizer of Englewood Creative Arts' improv class is Jeff Dillon that takes place at the Englewood Art Center.

He said the center has been cooperative and supportive, with the two organizations' messages align.

“All of this has to do with the message of the Englewood Creative Arts, which is to provide a healthy environment of the greater Englewood area,” he said.

The Englewood Art Center is continuously finding ways provide creative outlets, education and instruction for the community.

Karle Murdock knows all about improvisation with her experience in theater and being a Ringling College graduate. The Art Center is a division of Ringling College Continuing Studies.

There are a lot of different styles of improv. Murdock focuses on the Spolin Technique, which derives from Viola Spolin, and was popular among actors during the 20th century.

This form of improv centers around spontaneity, and being present in the moment while acting on the performer's impulses without overthinking or doubting.

"She's one of the first people who's ever taught what you might call improvisational theater," Murdock said. "That type of theater has evolved on its own, and so now when people talk about improv, they're not necessarily talking about Spolin."

Murdock said it's different than other forms of improv because there is no use of props, costumes or scenery. It's all imaginary, yet tangible to the audience if done properly.

"It develops stories out of relationships with people, activities and in the space which is a little bit different than popular improv which tends to be comic and scene work," she said. "Working with Jeff, we decided to create with what we have."

The class is a free program drawing inspiration from the "[Bullets to Band-aids](#)" exhibit at the Englewood Art Center. The exhibit focuses on combining the written stories of veterans with visual arts.

"One of the missions is to serve an underserved community, so this veteran's experience will help us bring awareness to that community along with rehabilitation and recovery," Dillon said.



Improv actors laugh with their instructor as they fail the exercise several times.

PHOTO BY JESS ORLANDO

Dillon has the intention of doing a veteran-inspired improv storytelling to go along with the exhibit.

“Perhaps we can take that material and use it as a performance piece because they’ve already taken the stories to writers then to artists and now we’re taking it into the theater,” Murdock said. “I can’t really tell you what it’s going to be — because it’s improv.”

Murdock has been teaching improv since the 1970s. A recent Tuesday class included three students with varying knowledge in theater.

Riley Bacon, 20, is familiar with stagecraft, but after hearing about the free improv classes from his grandmother, he thought he’d give it a try. Bacon has been interested in improv but wasn’t sure if he would be a great fit for it.

“I decided to try it, and I absolutely love it,” he said. “We’re always doing something different, so it’s not the same thing over and over again.”

Julie Larsen has been doing improv since 1978. She also has experience as a dancer and choreographer.

“I love being in the moment, and the spontaneous reaction from fellow improvers,” Larsen. “I’m a dancer and choreographer, and some of the best choreography I’ve seen has been improvisational because you’re living on the spur of the moment.”

Pull Quote

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For Larsen, it’s about the element of discovery and surprise.

“Sometimes when you’re in scripted format, you don’t have those opportunities,” she said. “You don’t have those opportunities to keep it fresh.”

Improv is a learning experience because it has to do a lot with each performer’s personality.

“I’m still learning because it’s what the others are contributing to that process,” Larsen said.

The class consists of exercises engaged in repetitive behaviors, rhymes and movement-thought coordination. One of the goals Murdock wanted to examine was the ability to make an imaginary item real to the audience through the actions of a person or a group of people.

“Was the item you were holding real to yourself or the audience?” Murdock asked. “At times it can appear real, and you can catch a glimpse of the object.”

For more information, visit englewoodcreativearts.org, email jeff@englewoodcreativearts.org or call 941-681-0091.

