



The Second City Almanac of Improvisation

By Anne Libera, Second City Inc.

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The Second City Almanac of Improvisation By Anne Libera, Second City Inc.

It all began in a converted Chinese laundry on Chicago's north side on a cold December night in 1959. No one could have known that by the next century, The Second City would have established itself as the premier comedy institution in the world. Taking its act north, The Second City would build a second permanent home in Toronto where it would create the Emmy-Award winning television series "SCTV." Pioneering the use of improvisation in developing talent and creating satiric revue comedy, The Second City has become - in the words of the *New York Times* - "A Comedy Empire."

The Second City Almanac of Improvisation - like the theatre itself - is a collection of diverse ideas, viewpoints, and memories, written by a vast array of teachers, actors, and directors who all got their start at the legendary comedy theatre. Fred Willard recalls his introduction to The Second City style in the mid-Sixties; Tim Kazurinsky gives a hilarious visual demonstration on the art of object work; "Saturday Night Live" star Tina Fey talks about re-improvising material as a mode of writing revue comedy; noted director Mick Napier takes on the thorny debate between long-form improvisation and short-form improvisation. Anne Libera guides the reader through each essay by providing a road map for understanding how The Second City method of improv-based comedy has become the industry standard.

Mike Nichols, Elaine May, Alan Arkin, Joan Rivers, Robert Klein, Peter Boyle, Harold Ramis, John Belushi, Dan Aykroyd, Bill Murray, John Candy, Martin Short, Gilda Radner, George Wendt, Jim Belushi, Bonnie Hunt, Mike Myers, Ryan Stiles, Rachel Dratch, Nia Vardalos - no other theatre can boast an alumni list of this magnitude. *The Second City Almanac of Improvisation* provides practical instruction, personal details, and inspiration to both improvisers and their fans.

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Editorial Review

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Most previous books about Second City, Chicago's improvisation-based comedy cabaret (the most noteworthy is Sheldon Patinkin's *Second City*, 2000), just chronicle its history and list illustrious alums (Alan Arkin, Barbara Harris, John Belushi, Gilda Radner, Bill Murray, Tina Fey, et al.). None explores SC's complex creative process and its relationship to comic improvisation as thoroughly as Libera's does. While SC-style comedy rests on the foundation of Viola Spolin's theater games, for a long time at SC, improv was mainly a tool for training actors and generating material. That caused much grumbling by lovers of pure improv; meanwhile, director Del Close dreamed of creating fully improvised shows so good that transcripts could be published as finished plays. In gemlike essays by SC directors, teachers, and actors, including improv guru Martin de Maat and Dan Castellaneta (the voice of Homer Simpson), and additional material by Libera, the book reveals the extent to which there is no single SC creative method but, instead, an ongoing, heated discussion of SC's art and its 45-year winning streak. *Jack Helbig*
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Review

"Second City is not only a Chicago treasure, it's one of the most important theatre companies in the United States. Their legacy and commitment to improvisation and comedy is invaluable!" -Robert Falls, Artistic Director of The Goodman Theatre

"The alumni of Second City from John Belushi to Martin Short have changed my entire life and brought a new kind of comedy to America and the World." -Bernie Brillstein, Founding Partner of Brillstein-Grey Entertainment

"Second City teaches its actors what it means to be part of an ensemble. It's a technique that forces the actor to listen and be supportive during a scene. In an audition, I can always spot a Second City trained actor. First, I check their resume and then I observe an actor whose characters are well developed, honest and real." - Dick Blasucci, Executive Producer, *MadTV*

About the Author

Anne Libera is the artistic director of The Second City Training Center and also resident director at The Second City.

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Roberto Reyes:

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