

Improv groups opens festival

NU's Titanic Players, national collegiate troupes explore the long and the short of it
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By Katherine Unmuth

Meatloaf, bathtubs and Broadway musicals prompted sketches by the University of Chicago's Off-Off Campus improv team Thursday in Shepard Residential College's lounge.

The group performed for about 60 people with the University of Southern California's Commedus Interruptus and Northwestern's Titanic Players. The night previewed some of the groups to be featured at the first College Improv festival, hosted by the Titanic Players.

Eleven teams will perform at the ImprovOlympic theater in Wrigleyville each of the next five Fridays, beginning tonight at 6. Besides the Titanic Players, the Immediate Gratification Players from Harvard University, Commedus Interruptus and Off-Off Campus also will perform tonight.

"My personal ultimate goal is for all the groups to be under one professional umbrella," said Mike Abdelsayed, a 1998 NU grad and the director and founder of the Titanic Players.

Abdelsayed performs in a house team at ImprovOlympics and trains the Titanic Players in long-form improvisation.

Five years after Abdelsayed started the Titanic Players, they are poised to unite with both long- and short-form college improv groups nationally to present the first College Improv Festival.

In hoping to create a college improv network, Titanic member Justin Koh, a McCormick sophomore, is working on a Web site where groups can communicate and plan tours. In other efforts to build relationships, the Titanic Players toured college campuses in several states during Spring Break.

"We exposed ourselves to a lot of groups that didn't know what (long-form improvisation) was," Abdelsayed said.

Long-form improvisation is based on building scenes from word associations stemming from an audience suggestion, while short-form relies on short games and gimmicks.

"Long form allows for more creativity," said Titanic Players member Mark de la Iglesia, a Weinberg sophomore. "It can be more intellectually based, kind of more like theater."

The team spent last year learning the basics of long form from Abdelsayed, including concepts such as agreement — building on what the person before you did.

"It was the shows that really brought us together," Koh said. "But we needed that time in rehearsal first."

Abdelsayed said that the group, with all the same members as last year, is very "family-oriented."

"Long form is based on love," he said.

The group's familiarity with each other also strengthens performances.

"We're all really tight," said de la Iglesia. "Long-form is a lot about the group mind."

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