

Improv

in a
box

I've been running improv (improvised Comedy) workshops in the Tesco Community Room for a couple of years. It's been great fun. Of course, when lockdown started, the room was closed and we had to suspend the workshops. At that time I thought that maybe in three months or so we could get back to normal, which didn't seem too bad.

By the middle of the summer it was obvious that wasn't going to happen, so going online was the only option. But could you do improv with everyone in those little boxes that you see on the screen when you're using Zoom? Well, that was answered for me by Ed, my own improv teacher, who restarted his classes doing just that. I started attending (if that's the word) and realised what was possible. Improv is, of course, about performing, but our improv stage is really no more than an empty space, usually with a couple of chairs in it in case the performers want to sit down. We have no scenery, no props, no costumes; everything has to be created in the audience's imagination by the performers. It's a bit more challenging to do that on screen when you're not in the same place, but it can be done.



One of Ed's sessions in full swing

I restarted the workshops a few weeks ago and decided to make them fortnightly rather than monthly. Online working has its advantages – no travelling, no need to book a venue. Despite the occasional vagaries of the technology, they've worked well and we're finding more ways of adapting the things we do to make them possible online. For instance, I often play a warm up game where we stand in a circle and throw an imaginary ball to one another. It occurred to me that as the ball is imaginary, it will pass through the ether perfectly well. All we had to do to adapt was for the person throwing the ball to call the name of the person they were throwing it to. Mind you, we still managed to lose the ball a few times.

Improv is about performing little sketches that we make up on the spot. You don't need any experience because improvising is something you can learn. All you need is a willingness to join in and have fun. My workshops are a mixture of games, exercises and sketches designed to help everyone learn to be better improvisers. If you're interested in knowing more, please get in touch.

Jim Palmer