ImproQuo and the Bridge Street Irregulars

at Gullivers NQ, Manchester

Reviewed by John Waterhouse , January 2018

It's theatre Jim but not as you know it, as Dr McCoy would have almost certainly said to Captain Kirk, had they both been at Gullivers Pub in Oldham Street on Tuesday. This is improvised comedy, performed without a script, theme, props, or anyone having any idea at all what's coming; just six actors (or sometimes less) being given random ideas and letting everyone see where it leads them. The result is unpredictable mayhem which is fast, funny, and engaging.

Improvisational comedy has an established scene in London, serving both as a way for certain types of performers such as stand-up comedians to hone their skills whilst being very much a genre in its own right. Part of the reason *ImproQuo* started was because it was felt there wasn't nearly enough opportunity for people in Manchester to have a go at improv as a way of performing and having some fun, and ImproQuo grew out of the Manchester Improv Jam which was set up to fill this gap.

Improvised comedy is perhaps a distant cousin to conventional theatre and a half-brother (or sister) to stand-up comedy. It requires skill, energy, quick-thinking versatility and all these qualities were admirably on display at Gullivers. *ImproQuo* is a group of improvised comedy performers who regularly meet at The Salford Arms, essentially to indulge in what they themselves describe an improvised comedy jam.

From being given just a single word or short phrase, they create the kind of sketches and entertainment pieces, described by some as rude, ridiculous, irreverent and raunchy, but often as not just basic fun. It was impressive how almost every time an actor came to speak, there was virtually no pausing or suddenly going wildly off subject, often giving the impression pieces were actually scripted. Improvisational comedy is clearly as much about listening to what has come before you, as much as what you actually say.

The Ringmaster of this comedy circus is **Eji Osigwe** who acted as compere, co-performer and referee throughout the evening, giving the actors a variety of tasks and structures to work with, ranging from a simple overall theme or idea for an ensemble to each actor having to come in and out of the scene at Eji's random whim. To keep the atmosphere vibrant, the acting group was changed several times throughout the evening which included
ImproQuo
,
the Bridge Street Irregulars
(Improquo's training group) and certain guest performers. As far as could be observed, this was done without a set schedule so none of actors could be sure exactly when they would could be called back to the stage or whom they would be performing with; in keeping with improvisation.

A feature of this genre which must not be overlooked is that the audience is very much involved

in the show. Ideas for themes were typically shouted out from those watching, and it was almost a case where anything went; I say almost because my own suggestion of ‘Brexit’ was turned down but I suspect this was more to avoid controversy rather than any suggestion of limitations on the performers. The general feeling was very much one of close involvement between performers and audience, as with the best stand-up comics. This type of comedy is perhaps an acquired taste but if you have never been to an improvised comedy night, the experience is highly recommended.

ImproQuo’s regular Jam takes place every Thursday, 7.30pm–9.30pm at the Salford Arms Hotel. It's free, and suitable for all kinds of improvisers, from absolute beginners to experienced players looking to meet new performers or just have fun. Find out more about I *mpro Quo's* other events including workshops and shows at https://www.improquo.co/ .