

Packing the seats without a script

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TANU KULKARNI

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Improv theatre is a challenge for performers, entailing more energy and practice



QUICK-THINKING: This form of theatre requires more training as it demands transformation of characters within seconds.— PHOTO: BHAGYA PRAKASH K.

Six actors, no script, one host, one stage and the audience that controls what happens on stage. An improvised comedy as the team, Improv, puts it, performs on stage as per the audience's whims and fancies.

The show is produced by Centerstage, a Bangalore theatre and filmmaking group, where the actors are set to deliver on-the-spot performances. From funny to emotional to random and some 'real' moments, the Improv group has completed 25 shows in the city.

The stage for introducing this form of theatre to a Bangalore audience was set by filmmakers Saad Khan and Siddhanth K.S. "During our college days, Siddhanth and I would sit in the canteen and enact waiter-customer roles. Within minutes, a huge crowd would surround us to watch our act.

That was when we realised that script is something that we didn't need," Mr. Khan added stating that this form of theatre was his stress buster.

From fan to banker

When *The Hindu* dropped in at one of their rehearsals, stand up comedian Kenneth Sebastian enacted a thrilled Shakti Kapoor fan and within seconds switched over to an enraged bank manager who was waiting to make the most out of his customer's fat bank balance.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Sebastian said this form of theatre was more challenging and required more energy and practice.

Danish Sait, actor and radio jockey, says observing people around helps him change roles quickly.

"I spend more time at the supermarket watching and observing what people do," he said. Mr. Sait, who was a part of the audience during one of the shows, decided to join the group as he was pretty much taken up by their enthusiasm. "The product has a high aspiration value. I wanted to be a part of it as I was amazed to see the actors change roles as per the demands of the audience."

Mr. Sait also mentioned that the group first understands the audience and builds up its acts based on how the viewers reciprocate. Although the members of the group state that the audience is allowed to tell the story and can change the direction of the show, every show has a host who fields situations from the audience. "I need a small spark from the audience to create an atom bomb," said Mr. Khan, who is going to play the host for their show on March 31.

After several shows and performing in more than 1,500 situations, Mr. Khan said: "There is more pressure... but we are able to offer more variety in our content."

He also points out that this form of theatre requires more training as it demands transformation of characters within seconds. "We want to create a new brand of comedy. We need to rehearse more as we are always in store for a surprise. Before every show, our actors feel like it is their first show!"

Next performance

The next show is at Chowdiah Memorial Hall at 7 p.m. on March 31, in aid of the HCG Foundation. For reservations, call 9880445430.