



# Longer lasting laughs

■ Absolute Improv switches gears to present a lengthier presentation rather than its traditional short-form improvisation

By Mason West  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Theater-lovers of all shapes and sizes! Starting today, the University's one and only improvisational troupe, Absolute Improv, is hosting a one-time-only event for three consecutive days. The members of the group are going to great lengths to make improvisational theater in: "Absolute Improv Goes Long."

The performances today, Friday and Saturday at 5 p.m. in the Pocket Playhouse mark the group's first

public attempts at long-form improvisation. Using a form called a Harold, the group will take one suggestion from the audience and create a performance that will last somewhere around 40 minutes. Because nothing is planned by the cast, each show will be entirely different and never seen again.

This marks a giant deviation from the troupe's traditional use of short-form improv games. During the games, a few troupe members take suggestions from the audience and play out a scene lasting only a few minutes. These short games require much less effort and attention on the part of the players.

Rich Brown, the graduate teaching fellow who introduced the long-form idea to Absolute Improv, said, "Long-form is the art in

improv, where short-form is just the sport."

The Harold is a style that was developed by late comedian Del Close. He worked with many members of Second City Television and Saturday Night Live, but his lasting mark was in the creation of the Harold. Participants in the improv start giving monologues that generate ideas sparked from the main suggestion. Then the troupe launches into three sets of three scenes that create characters, action and, ideally, resolution.

Quinn Mattfeld, an Absolute Improv member, explained that this is totally new for the troupe and that it has helped them grow.

"I think that we're adding on to something that was already really

good," he said. "We all have absolute — ha ha — faith in each other whether we're on stage or not."

Last year, the group had a regular gig every Friday night at Charley's Comedy Club. They have since stopped those performances and have been looking for other ways to perform. Doing the long-form is a way to give the group a shot in the arm, but it has taken time to prepare.

"We've kind of been underground to rehearse for this," troupe member Sam Super said.

The last time the group performed publicly was in late September at the Robinson Theatre.

Brown has been working with the group during this hiatus and

said the group has made a lot of progress with a challenging art form. Not only are the troupe members carrying themselves, but they have to carry the audience along with them for the duration of the show.

The departure from caricatures to characters and the absence of the cheap laugh may catch traditional improv audiences off guard, but Brown is certain that it's for the best.

"There may be a bigger investment from the audience at the beginning than in the short-form games," he said, "but you get a bigger payoff at the end."

Performances will be in the Pocket Playhouse in Villard Hall with a suggested donation of \$1.

## DVD-Audio met with mixed reviews by music buffs

By John Hanan  
Knight Ridder/Tribune

Just when music fans thought it was safe to lean back and listen to their collections, here comes the music industry to mess with the mix.

Choices are multiplying again — but not between hip-hop and jazz, Waylon and Willie, Beatles and Stones.

The newest next-generation format in home audio has arrived, and it's called DVD-Audio. Although the disc looks like an ordinary CD, in the bold words of one manufacturer, it represents "the most important development in sound quality since the introduction of the CD."

Warner Music and other music software makers rolled out the first DVD-Audio discs in November. A few months before, the first mass-marketed DVD-Audio players began competing for the hearts and minds of sound fanatics when Panasonic and Technics introduced their trailblazing products.

If DVD-Audio catches on, prepare to add it to the alphabet soup of ways to hear music: CD, MP3, DAT, SACD, MD, LP and cassette. Prepare also for more confusion at music and electronics stores — maybe even a format war.

Battles over new audio formats are fought across the nation in

homes such as Joe Prahler's. The Waterford, Mich., music buff uses several types of music players.

"I've been using DAT (digital audio tape) for choral recordings for about eight years," he says. "I ventured into MiniDiscs about two years ago and find that a better format than cassettes. For daily listening, I stay with the plain old CDs, which I found so much better than vinyl."

Prahler says he's not ready to commit to DVD-Audio. For him and others evaluating all the formats, there are many factors to consider.

If perplexing choices and glowing promises of audio nirvana seem familiar, maybe it's because the ad pitches from the last format introductions haven't completely faded from memory.

In the 1980s, compact discs were introduced as "perfect sound forever." In the early 1960s, RCA described its Living Stereo series of long-playing albums, or LPs, as "technical perfection."

In short, what is billed as the ultimate remains the ultimate for only so long.

So what's a buyer to do? Industry analysts recommend that consumers ask themselves and sales representatives some tough questions.

"Just follow the software," says

Bob Olhsson, an audio consultant in Novato, Calif. To paraphrase, listeners should think twice about buying a machine to play music in a format in which they will own little music.

Warner Music and several other manufacturers have DVD-Audio ti-

“So what's a buyer to do? Industry analysts recommend that consumers ask themselves some tough questions”

tles out, but the number of discs so far is few. A listener would be hard-pressed to assemble a library of more than 25 discs so far, and most of those can be bought only through mail order.

Furthermore, few of the discs make full use of the format's advanced standards. Through "up-sampling" and other processes, the discs may simulate DVD-Audio sound, but they do so by using music originally recorded in the CD format, which holds less data.

In short, some of the first discs may be only marginally better than CDs.

The International Recording Media Association expects mass production of DVD-Audio titles to begin in earnest next year. Production will climb to 40 million discs in 2001 and 97 million in 2002, the industry group predicts.

By comparison, 939 million compact discs were produced in 1999, and that figure will climb in 2000 if the pace set in the year's first six months holds, according to the Recording Industry Association of America.

Music industry experts say consumers can expect cassettes, compact discs, MP3 files and other media to all be useful for the foreseeable future.

"I think people will continue to use all of these," says a Warner representative, also noting that CDs will play in DVD-Audio machines. "You can still keep your music library."

Muddying the waters for DVD-Audio is Sony's rival high-end audio format, the Super Audio Compact Disc, or SACD. It also is billed as sounding far better than CDs. SACD and DVD-Audio are not compatible, and experts believe only one will survive.

"It's a standoff at the moment, depending on the arrival of significant mainstream releases in the

two formats," says Kalman Rubinson, a contributing editor to Stereophile magazine. "DVD-A and SACD sound better," but CDs are still a more practical choice, he says.

So-called universal players, which could play CDs, DVDs and SACDs, are in the works and would offer protection from a Betamax-VHS problem.

Warner is marketing DVD-Audio as a new, high-quality option for music lovers, but not necessarily as a replacement for established formats. Some experts wonder whether the average listener's ears can tell the difference between the new and old.

Finally, technology journalist Gene Steinberg, who writes for Cnet, is among participants in Internet audio newsgroups who champion rigorous scientific listening tests as a way to determine which products and formats are best.

That's the only way to keep listeners from jumping on bandwagons because of marketing claims, he says.

"Opinions without such tests are nothing more than that," he said. "They will not help you determine whether the new CD audio systems are truly superior in terms of sound."



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