

Improv comedy group entertains on the spot

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FOR THE WICHITAN

A large group of students file into the Shawnee Theater and take their seats. The air is filled with the soft murmur of conversation.

Seven well-dressed students sit center stage talking amongst themselves. The audience quiets as the MC comes to the podium and introduces the group of seven. The crowd focus on the group. The audience has high expectations.

"Funky Monkey and the Ebola Virus" is a student improv group that performs shows on campus throughout the year. The group is comprised of MSU students Joey Dassinger, Derrius Burks, Dustin Webb, Simon Welch, Jacob Casey, Bronson Wilson, and Rob Gray.

Improv or improvisational theater is a comedy acting technique that is performed spontaneously. Actors typically use audience suggestions to guide the performance as they create dialogue, setting and plot.

An example of a famous improv troupe is the cast of ABC's "Whose line is it anyway?" starring Drew Carey, Ryan Stiles, Wayne Brady and Colin Mochrie.

The group started after junior

theatre major Joey Dassinger had a conversation with some fellow theatre students.

"David Henne, Donald Gibson, Mary Okonkwo, and myself first thought of the idea. The original name of the group was 'Risky Brisket Slow Cooked Comedy.' We are all in theater, but everyone else was busy with other obligations so I took it under my wing," Dassinger said.

Dassinger held open auditions during the spring of 2007. About 35 people showed up for the two-day tryout.

"I was really surprised how many people came out for the first audition. There were a lot of people interested in being a part of the group," Dassinger said.

Dassinger picked nine students to be a part of the improv group. The original group was made up of Dassinger, Webb, Welch and Casey, as well as Pierre Lafaille, Aaron Munoz and E.J. Eddins.

Senior Dustin Webb went to the original audition as a joke.

"It was kind of by accident. I went to the audition with a friend. The only reason we went was to see people make a fool of themselves and get a quick laugh. We saw some people struggling so we got up there and tried out. Joey talked to us after and asked us both to be in the group. We both agreed and it's been awe-

some," Webb said.

After the auditions the group got to work practicing. The practices are held in Killingsworth Halls upstairs lounge.

"It's funny to see some of the girls reactions when a bunch of guys head upstairs on their elevator. We hold the practices there because we all live on campus and Killingsworth has large lounges and it is pretty quiet. We try hard not to bother any of the women in the building," Dassinger said.

Dassinger explains how the practices are run.

"We practice twice a week. A lot of people think we don't have to practice for improv, because it's improvisation, but during our practices it's more of training. We run through the games and get familiar with the rules. Improv is all about keeping your mind fresh and being able to come up with scenes and scenarios on the spot. We don't memorize any scenes or characters before shows, it's all at random," Dassinger said.

The group held its first show in the spring of 2007. The hour-long show was done in front of a packed house of about 70 students in Shawnee Theatre.

"All of us were kind of nervous. We just didn't want to bomb on stage. Plus, during the

show, we rely on the audience to give good suggestions and be involved, so we hope they were into it," Dassinger said.

"For our first show it went really good. There were a lot of people just cracking up and really into it. It's a good feeling to have people congratulating you after the show," Webb said.

At the end of the semester the group lost Lafaille, Eddins, Munoz so more auditions had to be held when classes resume in the fall.

"Pierre was trying to become more focused on academics, and Aaron and E.J. transferred to other schools. It was tough because they all brought a lot of talent to the group," Dassinger said.

After a second set of auditions were held, the group brought in three new members, Derrius Burks, Bronson Wilson and Rob Gray.

"Improv has really opened up a whole new crowd of people to me and forced me to find new ways to be funny. Also it has given me a chance to work with some really cool guys," junior Derrius Burks said.

Though the shows have gone well this year, at one show the group ran into a problem.

"We had a situation where two of the members couldn't show

up. Simon hadn't practiced with us before the show because he had a lot of tests and wasn't able to put in any practice time. We asked him at the last minute if he could fill in and he ran over no questions asked," Webb said.

"It was just unexpected, plus I hadn't been to any practices in about a month. I got over my nervousness and just went up there and did my best. The show went really good though," junior art major Simon Welch said.

To date, the group has done eight one-hour shows, including a show during Greek Week and last year's Final's Frenzy.

"It's been really fun, I really enjoy it. It thinks it really cool how other organizations want us to come and work with them," Webb said.

The group has received very positive feedback from students that have attended the shows.

"The shows are good. They do very well and are really funny. The only thing they really need now is a funny girl in the group," sophomore Stefen Nweke said.

"My favorite game is when they do 'say P and die.' It's so funny because they can't say any word with the letter P in it. I love that," junior Patrick Johnson said.

"Those guys are innovators and it's cool. They put themselves out

there and just have a good time," junior Melissa Higgs said.

"I've only had the opportunity to go to two shows. I wish they had more. Every time I hear about a show I can go to, I try my hardest to make it," junior Britney Martin said.

"I think the students enjoy our shows because it gives them something else to look forward to. Its different from the other run-of-the-mill activities on campus," Burks said.

The group has many plans for next year, including a trip out of town.

"We're going to try and have a little retreat where we attend a Improv workshop run by a professional group in Fort Worth," Dassinger said.

"I see us having a television show in a bout a year, and Joey getting kicked out of the group because of money laundering or for being involved in a prostitution ring," Burks jokingly said. "But seriously we would really like to have more shows and get some of the ladies involved," he said.

The group will have its final show of the year Thursday May 1st at 6:00p.m. in Comanche Suite located in the Clark Student Center.

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