

The Titanic Players will take your suggestions now

Improv group gear up for their Sunday performance at Memorial Union, ready to take audience's lead for what is sure to be downright hilarious show

By Jenna Severson

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A reality sitcom is at Madison's back door, courtesy of the Titanic Players.

It's a somewhat of a comedic tragedy that not everyone is familiar with the Titanic Players, the nation's largest improvisation organization. The absence of scripted material brings the fear of public speaking to a whole new level of fear for some, or thrill for others.

The Titanic Players started at Northwestern University in 1994, and began expanding in 2007 with Madison as its first stepping stone. This type of long form improvisation that the Titanic Players are so skilled at is not only entertaining, but also involves a hefty amount of interaction with audience members.

To break it down, long form improvisation starts with a single suggestion from an audience member. That audience member can then watch an array of scenes unfold from their simple, and sometimes outrageous suggestion.

The Titanic Players are made up of four teams and every year a new team is added to the mix. The newest team, known as the Incubator Team, will make its first public appearance this Sunday at the Memorial Union Play Circle.

"It's going to be our first performance and we're terrified, but also excited," said freshman team member Lilabel McCall.

"I'm so excited to see the new group," said Executive Producer, Kelsey Davison. "I went to a practice and was really excited about it. It's fun to meet the new people and watch them grow with their improv. Everyone has to find their own style, and it's amazing when they do."

Davison, who will be performing with the Titanic Players for her last year, is also on the team Brostradamus. But just because these masters of comedic timing are divided into four teams, they reveal they're not competitive with each other, rather they all cheer each team and member on.

"We watch each other perform all the time so we can learn from each other as well as encourage one another," said Davison.

Even though the performances are unscripted, the Titanic Players practice together twice a week. Practices tend to get a little wilder than performances, which can be hard to believe after witnessing one of their shows.

“We have to keep certain shows clean. Just swearing is not intelligent comedy and we try to do better than that,” Davison said.

But cultivating their comedy and preparing for upcoming shows isn't the only item on the agenda for their practices. The Titanic Players use their practice time together to bond and grow as a large, dedicated group of downright hilarious individuals.

“Because we spend so much time together in vulnerable situations, we develop a sort of trust with each other. We actually trust each other enormously,” said freshman Incubator team member, Maurissa Myers.

The stronger the bonds of the team, the more entertaining their performances can be to watch. Practicing improvisation every week is also an offbeat way to build self-confidence.

“People back at home think I'm more confident and I owe it all to improv,” McCall said.

It could be seen as a measure of heroic bravery to be able to perform on the spot in front of a large crowd, losing your inhibitions and fears of embarrassment for the exhilarating adrenaline of getting a laugh out of an audience.

“It's really fun and really high energy,” Davison said. “The audience even gets to participate. It's like seeing a full episode of a sitcom. Then a new team comes and it's like a whole different show.”