

Tahoe Improv Players' Raucous Act Returns for Benefit

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By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON - A night of laughter – that's how the Tahoe Improv Players should promote their shows.

The August performance was supposed to be the last of the season; one of the reasons why I made sure it was my first time to ever see the comedic cast. A last-minute benefit show has been added for Sept. 27. The proceeds go toward maintenance of the Boat House Theatre where the show is staged.

The three of us couldn't stop laughing. To be so quick-witted in such an unscripted environment is impressive. The direction they took story lines, the richness of the delivery, the way they worked together – it was so much better than many traditional stage presentations.

If you've seen the television show "Whose line is it anyway?", then you have an idea of what this improvisational form of comedy is all about.

Many in the audience had seen this group perform before. What keeps it fresh is getting input from the audience.

With it being interactive and fast-paced, there is no time for boredom. The only issue with time is wishing it didn't end.

"From the inside perspective, the most difficult part is not thinking. Everything occurs within the now. You are trying to really not edit and not get into trying to think what the audience will like, but more what comes to mind without editing," Gerry Orton said.



Tahoe Improv Players:
Pam Taylor, Frank Riley,
Dave Hamilton, Jayme
Foremaster, Gerry Orton,
April Foiles



Gerry Orton is much more than the director of the improv players.
Photos/K. Reed

Orton is the director of the handful of players. He got involved with the comedic art form after taking a class from Dave Hamilton at Lake Tahoe Community College.

Hamilton is one of the nearly 75 people who have been part of the Tahoe Improv Players, and was on stage this summer.

Orton and Frank Riley created ComedySportz in 1993 – which did spoofs on sports. This group was part of a loose national franchise.

From there, Orton and Riley started Tahoe Improv Players. With Orton residing mostly in Monterey now, the number of shows at the lake is limited. Most summers it is two shows at the Valhalla Festival of Arts and Music. This year it was three regular performances, with the benefit next week being the fourth.

A couple years ago the gang started to bring children onto the stage. This brings a whole new element to the drama because they are even more unpredictable than the adults they have gotten used to working with.

Even though the art form is improv, the five players plus Orton and pianist Dave Fabrizio do rehearse a bit. They work on scene building, character development, staying in the now, spontaneity exercises and listening skills.

"There are exercises and games that sharpen our wit a bit," Orton explained. "I wish some of our workouts could be some of our shows."

New to the cast this year is Pam Taylor, though she has done improv before and has been in several local theatrical productions.

Jayme Foremaster is the youngest player Orton has worked she. She started at age 14. Now she is studying at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in Los Angeles.

This year's cast also includes April Foiles.