



FLIP THE SCRIPT

The Los Angeles-based Groundlings, along with Louisville Improvisors (from left above) Josh Lane, Chris Anger and Alec Volz, headline the eighth annual Improvapalooza Jan. 11 and 12 in the Kentucky Center's MeX Theatre.

You never know what's going to happen at an improv show because, well, neither do the actors...nor anyone else for that matter. Improv (short for improvised) is the comedic equivalent of tight-wire and trapeze acts rolled into one and executed without a net. And the River City's own Louisville Improvisors will be tag-teaming audiences with Los Angeles-based The Groundlings for the annual Improvapalooza, now in its eighth year, at the Kentucky Center on Jan. 11 and 12.

Unlike stand-up comics, improvisers only know a show's loosest details — or sometimes nothing at all — before hitting the stage. The audience then provides most of the content and leaves it up to the performers to make it work. "It's a shared experience," says Louisville Improvisors co-founder and artistic director Chris Anger. "You're in the same exact moment that the audience is, and you get the joke at the same exact time, or hopefully about a second before, the audience does."

That shared moment makes for a revelatory experience for cast and crowd mem-

bers alike. "The audience loves to see you working: 'How's he going to get out of this one?'" Anger says. "It's hilarious."

Getting The Groundlings to appear onstage with Anger and fellow Louisville Improvisors Alec Volz and Josh Lane was a tremendous coup for the trio. The current crop of Groundlings set to do the show includes Kevin Berntson, who has been on *ER*, *Monk* and *Reno 911!* and plays an insomniac having a late-night chat with a talking beaver and Abe Lincoln in a commercial for the sleep aid Rozerem; and Colleen Smith, who is a correspondent on *The Showbiz Show* with David Spade and has appeared on *The Office*, *Carpoolers* and *King of the Hill*.

"For the festival, we really go all-out in terms of trying to get the best people possible in...and this year we got The Groundlings for God's sake, and that's a pretty big deal," Anger says. "In terms of improv, these are major people...From 30-odd years ago to today, these people have had a pretty major impact on the history of modern comedy."

For example, Groundlings alumni have

been a part of *Saturday Night Live* since the original cast (see Laraine Newman). Groundlings and SNL alumnus Will Ferrell is easily one of the world's most visible stars. Other former Groundlings include SNL's Phil Hartman, Julia Sweeney, Jimmy Fallon and Cassandra "Elvira" Peterson, and *Friends* star Lisa Kudrow.

Anger, who jokingly ran for the mayor's office as the Blue Party candidate in 2006 — "Vote With Anger!" was the catchphrase — is a man who sometimes seems unable to switch off his funny bone. But get him talking about improv, and he apologizes for how deep and serious it's about to get. "Improv's an art form just like any other," he says. "It's just a pure form of comedy."

Luckily for the audience, though, there shouldn't be any of this seriousness at Improvapalooza.

Improvapalooza 8 is January 11 and 12, at 8 p.m., in the Kentucky Center's MeX Theatre. Tickets are \$25. Call 584-777 or visit www.kentuckycenter.org for more information.

— Christopher Hall