

This Week

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Comedy troupe performs without a net

Today I — a writer — will perform my art before your very eyes. I will write something I've never written before. You out there in the audience can call the shots. What shall I write?

"How about a politically conservative column?"

I'm sorry. Could we try something that's at least feasible?

"OK. Write us a theater review."

Oh, that's much better. What sort of theater?

"How about some comedy? We could use a few laughs."

Amen to that! **And an energetic group of Bozeman thespians are ready, willing and — most importantly — able to bombard their quickly expanding audiences with large floppy bouquets of laughs.** They call themselves the Spontaneous Combustibles, and when they're on stage, anything can happen and it's almost certain to be funny.

Organized a little over a year ago by Katie Goodman and Soren Kisiel, who are also responsible for the Bozeman-based Equinox Theatre Company, **the Combustibles are four men and three women with enough energy and excruciating puns to fill nearly two hours with brand new material every time they get together.** When I saw them last Friday, they also had Ron Newman on synthesizer to add musical depth and atmosphere to their scenes.

The important thing about improvisational theater is that the actors are seeing each little playlet for the first time, just like their audience.

"Sounds like it could be a little scary. Like watching trapeze artists perform without a net."



Marjorie Smith

Chronicle
review

Well, I suppose it could be. But these guys have spent enough time working together by now, they almost always catch each other as they fly through the air. Even when a skit falls flat, no one gets hurt.

"Is this improvisational stuff interactive? Do I have to get involved?"

Not unless you want to. They ask for a couple of volunteers during the evening, but otherwise **the audience's job — besides laughing — is to come up with suggestions to help launch the scenes.**

"We're going to do an opera," Kisiel announced last Friday at the Leaf and Bean. "How about a location?"

"A laundromat," someone suggested, setting up for Jack Kroll the drollest final line for any opera I ever saw. After the tenor and the baritone had sung out their angst and stabbed each other and the soprano was bemoaning the cruelty of fate at the top of her lungs, Kroll appeared in the door of the imaginary laundromat lugging a heavy, imaginary bag. "Quarters!" he sang. "I've got freshly minted quarters."

Grasping the gory (but entirely invisible)

weapon, the soprano sang, "It's too late," and stabbed herself.

Kroll shrugged. "Gee," he said. "I thought the change would do you good."

And so it goes. Stephanie Campbell and Paddy Culham become Siskel and Ebert and review a porn film noir (genre chosen by someone in the audience) with film clips acted out by other members of the company.

When asked, members of the audience suggest a television theme song, a Christmas carol and a show tune and then Kroll, Kisiel, and Craig Stauber create a "scene for three tunes" by singing all their lines to, respectively, "The Theme from Mr. Ed," "The Twelve Days of Christmas" and "There's No Business Like Show Business."

As the troupe negotiate a series of improvisational "games," there seems no end to the possibilities. Obviously many in the audience have been there before and have come back to see if the troupe can pull it off again. I may go back soon just to see what happens if someone decides the next opera should take place at the dump. Or in a shoe store.

Or how about a romance about to be destroyed by the heartbreak of cat allergy?

What's that? Well, now that you mention it, maybe I could write a politically conservative column. What music would you like to go with that?

The Spontaneous Combustibles will be performing again at 8 p.m. Fridays, Aug. 15 and 29, at the Blue Slipper Theatre in Livingston, and next Friday, Aug. 22, at the Leaf and Bean in Bozeman, also at 8 p.m.