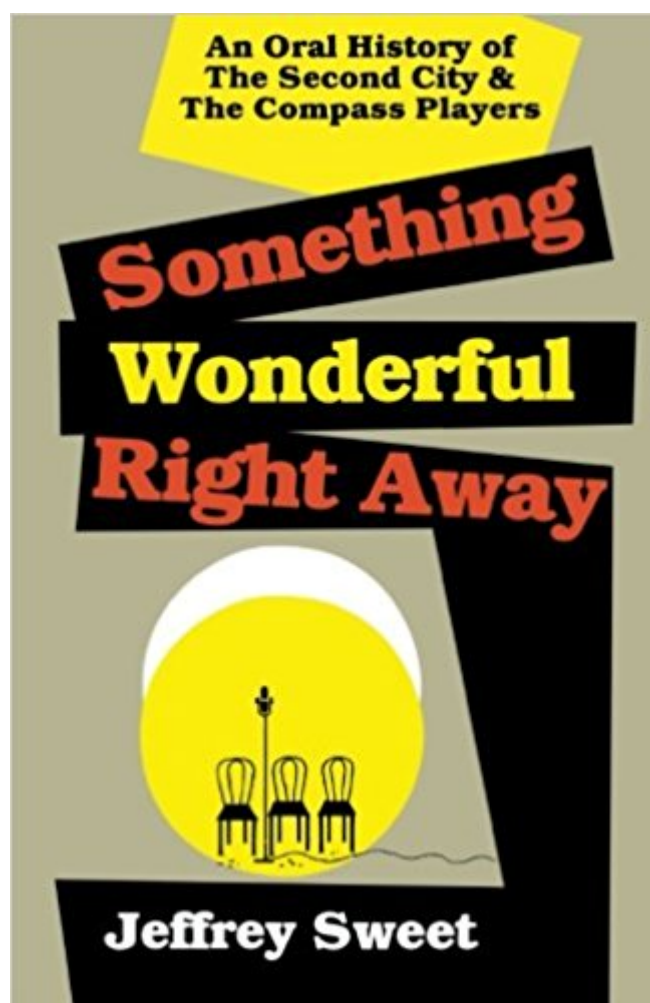


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Something Wonderful Right Away: An Oral History Of The Second City And The Compass Players



Synopsis

Prominent alumni (Mike Nichols, Joan Rivers, Robert Klein, among others) bring theatrical improvisation to life, with all the vitality, the power and the exuberance - the satire and spontaneity - that they made famous and that launched their careers. "An important book about the most important American theatrical endeavor since the Group Theatre. Plus, it's fun to read". -David Mamet

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have watched many live Improv shows, and was able to learn the basics from "The Improv Trick" in Los Angeles, and then took classes and joined a short for troop at "Pan Theater" in Oakland. I was looking for some material about Improv, and chose this book to get a historical perspective on the formation and development of the Improv method. I would not call the book an easy read, but it is thorough. The groupings of the interviews seemed strange when I started reading, but by the end I realized it was sort of the "purists" (the founders, the art-form crowd, the "zen" of Improv), then the "splinters" (where can Improv take us?), then the "commercials" (how can we make a watchable profitable act out of this), and then the "look back" (What worked, what failed, what were the flaws of the "greats") This is not an instruction guide, but it has the basic principles, and some really good pointers for how you can use those to "act" better, to "write" better, and to work with other performers - in any setting. If you want to "grasp" Improv, this is a great jumping off point and I think you will be better for it. If you ever want to teach or lead Improv, this book would also help. If you just want basic, tips, structures - there are better books. But if you want some History, if you want so real

stories of the people shaped by the movement, this book is worth the effort. As far as my rating - I find the book tough to rate. It's probably a 3 due to its slow read and limited scope, but assuming you get this book looking for history and concepts, it delivers.

If you are taking part in improv this is one of the great books about the beginnings of the art form.

SCTV rules

An insightful and even-handed look at the origins of Chicago-style improv, through the varied, humorous, and occasionally conflicting perspectives of the pioneers themselves. Sweet does a masterful job of understanding the relevant history, personalities, and creative process in such a way as to elicit meaningful and fascinating reminiscences. Rich in priceless anecdotes, it makes one wish the uniquely qualified Sweet would pen a second volume with more interviews with and about the other early improvisational groups, the developments of the 70's to the 90's in Chicago, the broader effects of SNL/SCTV-style sketch shows on comedy, and the contemporary use of improvisational techniques by screen writers and directors.

For those not familiar with the Second City, it is basically the granddaddy of all comedy troupes. Started in the mid-'50s as the Compass Players, it transformed into Second City in 1959 and has been going strong ever since, even opening sister theatres in Toronto & Detroit. So many of our current and past comedy stars have started here, it's mindboggling. The Belushi brothers, Bill Murray, Alan Arkin, Joan Rivers, Robert Klein, Chris Farley, Bonnie Hunt, Ryan Stiles, Richard Kind, David Steinberg, Alan Alda, Peter Boyle, the entire cast of "SCTV Network," Philip Baker Hall, Mike Myers, Bob Odenkirk, Tim Meadows, Dan Aykroyd... the list goes on and on. This book was written in the '70s and is a collection of interviews w/ several of the company's key writer/performer/directors, among them Gilda Radner, Avery Schreiber, & Mina Kolb. A must-read for anyone who loves improv, sketch comedy, theatre technique, and, specifically, the Second City!

OK. True Confessions. I'm a huge fan of this book. I bought it a long time ago - the early 1980s I think. I was living in the UK at the time. I had studied with Viola Spolin in Los Angeles in 1978 and 1980 and was totally bowled over by her theatre games and what they taught me not only about Improv but about acting and theatre and, dare I say it, life. About the same time I moved to the UK and was looking for material to help me communicate the value of her work to my British students,

who, at that time at least, were part of a theatre culture that was highly skeptical about performed improvisation, Peter Brook and Mike Alfreds notwithstanding. Keith Johnstone, the British equivalent of Spolin in the genius teacher department, had chosen to leave the UK and go to Canada to develop his work. For the British Theatre Establishment, at that time, the idea that you would admit that you were improvising in front of a paying audience was a kind of crime against culture. Anyway, I don't remember where I found the book, maybe in French's bookshop in London, but once I started reading it, I couldn't put it down. I love stories about the beginnings of things and, being a total convert to Viola's approach, I was fascinated by how Spolin's son, Paul Sills, and his colleague, David Shepard used her games to create the basis of what would become a whole new form of theatre, and subsequently influence several generations of actors, directors, writers and teachers into the bargain. I used quotes from the book to convince skeptical students, colleagues and even employers that Improv was a genuine, disciplined and valuable form of performance. Now, of course, in the era of Key and Peele, Tina Fey, Amy Poehler and TJ and Dave, there are more books about Impro, Improv, and Improv Comedy than you can count but this remains among the best. Sweet has a profound understanding of what Spolin and Sills were on about and his interviews with the original and early cast members at Compass and Second City - Mike Nichols, Elaine May, Severn Darden, Shelley Berman, Alan Arkin, Alan Alda and a host of others - remain in my mind to this day. Elaine May's timeless advice for improvisers "When in doubt, seduce", Shelley Berman's reassuring, "If you've got The Funny in you, The Funny will come out" and Arkin's description of a scene between two builders working on a skyscraper hundreds of feet about the ground are just a few that still come easily to mind. And this isn't Jeffrey Sweet's only book about theatre craft. 'The Dramatists Tool Kit' and 'Solving Your Script' are invaluable workbooks for anyone interested in creating dramatic fiction and I have to say I'm looking forward to his new book "What Playwrights Talk About When They Talk About Writing". Not to mention his plays, TV and film work. So, if you're interested in Improv, how it works or how it got that way, this is the real deal. In the from-the-horses-mouth genre, 'Something Wonderful Right Away' gets the thoroughbreds to do the talking.

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