

Public Abstract

First Name:Matt

Middle Name:

Last Name:Fotis

Adviser's First Name:M. Heather

Adviser's Last Name:Carver

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

Graduation Term:SP 2012

Department:Theatre

Degree:PhD

Title:The Harold: A Revolutionary Form that Changed Improvisational Theatre & American Comedy

The Harold is widely regarded as the foundation of long form scenic style improv. First developed in the late 1960's by the San Francisco group The Committee, work-shopped by Del Close in the 1970's, and transformed into a repeatable structure by Close and Charna Halpern at ImprovOlympic (now iO) in the 1980's, the Harold reinvented the possibilities of what could be done with improv on stage. Using the form's core principles--yes-and, make active choices, and support your partner--the Harold has become one of the most important and influential forms of performance. The comic philosophy of the Harold has ushered in an era of comedy marked by support, trust, and collaborative creativity.

Despite its vast influence on contemporary performance the Harold has been largely ignored by the scholarly community and thusly pushed to the margins. Therefore, this study will tell the story of the Harold, beginning with the development of improvisational theatre and the tensions and evolutions that led to the Harold's creation at iO, up to its use in contemporary comedic film making. I will be tracking the form's historical development by analyzing its deployment by the many as of yet undocumented house teams, as well as exploring the many ways that it has been used both within iO and in the greater improv community. Furthermore, I will be examining the ways in which the Harold has help transform American comedy by reshaping it to follow the principles and philosophy of the Harold.