

IMPROV AND COMEDY AS A TOOL FOR CHANGE

Artist bio

Kez Vicario-Robinson is a queer non-binary artist from Kitchener-Waterloo. They practice in improv, stand-up, sketch, theatre, music, social justice and more. They work with The Making Box, Comic Sans, Page 1 Productions, The Canadian Improv Games, and they have been featured in JFL42, Guelph Comedy Festival, and Canadian Festival of Spoken Word. Their continuous goal as an artist is to be the representation that they didn't have, and to advocate for queer and trans people to be seen as happy and fulfilled in life.

Exercises

- Mirroring exercise: Start a physical movement and/or sound and everyone has to follow along with what everyone else is doing. Follow the follower. This exercise is good for awareness, listening, and teamwork. We all look silly together, no one is weird if we are all weird.
- "Yes, And" story to articulate building off of someone else's ideas. One person starts with a premise, the next person adds on by starting their sentence with "Yes, and".
- Empathy exercise. A character feels a certain way. They could express angry, or excitement, or sadness, and your job as their scene partner is to solely react with empathy. You express and mirror their emotion. Don't try to fix the problem or conflict they've brought to you, just feel their emotions with them. This is a great tool and skill to have for life, making the people you interact with feel heard and listened to and understood. Not trying to fix anything, just empathy and compassion.

Why Improv is Important

Improv creates an environment where people feel safe to fail, and failing is actually encouraged. It's freedom. It's problem solving in a group setting, where everyone needs to be looking out for everyone else. It doesn't matter how good of an improviser you are, if you're performing with people who aren't going to look out for you, you'll drown. It's the fundamentals of community and teamwork. The fundamentals of improv are listening, acceptance, and supporting. I believe this is why many queer individuals are drawn towards improv. I've never been the lone queer in any improv group I have ever worked in. I believe the aspect of creation, acceptance, limitless possibilities on who you can be, it opens a door that queer and trans folks are drawn to.

I work with mainly queer and trans improvisers and comedians because I think it's incredibly important to see those people being happy. Queerness has a dark and heartbreaking association. In media we see all of the reasons it's awful to be queer or trans. I see improv and comedy as disrupting that narrative we feel like we are forced to live in. Being the representation that you needed, and still need. It's about being living proof that being happy and trans/queer can be done and is very much possible. Making sure queer and trans is not synonymous with sorrow.