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Make 'Em Laugh

Andrew Junk '08 and Shannon Moffitt '10 train at Chicago's renowned Second City Conservatory.

Story by Danielle Kamp '15



Shannon Moffitt '10 and Andrew Junk '08 first met after enrolling at the Second City Conservatory.

The ability to fill a theater with laughter is a skill Andrew Junk '08 and Shannon Moffitt '10 have perfected as recent graduates of the sketch comedy and improvisation Second City Conservatory in Chicago. The conservatory is the most advanced program of the Second City Training Center, the largest school of improvisation and sketch comedy in the world.

During the 13-month, six-level program, students build upon their performance, music, improvisation and writing skills. Participants are introduced to new forms and styles of comedic improvisation while learning how to create material for a satiric comedy revue.

Although Andrew and Shannon are both IWU alums, the two were unaware of that fact until several weeks into classes. "Shannon and I came upon this path independently of each other," said Andrew. While Andrew was a theatre major at IWU, Shannon majored in International Studies and Hispanic Studies. Looking to experience something outside of the corporate world, she decided to start taking classes at Second City. "I never thought I would continue with it past the first level, but I became addicted," says Shannon.

The conservatory program concludes with a Second City-style show written and performed by the graduating class that runs for eight weeks in the Chicago e.t.c. Theater. Performing in front of a live audience can be quite nerve-wracking, especially for less experienced performers like Shannon. "I do a lot of pacing backstage, but performing in front of an audience is a blast," she says. "Making people laugh is wonderful. The best and worst is when the audience is laughing so hard that they can't hear the next funny thing that's said."

In addition to their conservatory studies, Andrew and Shannon hold full-time jobs. Andrew is a technical support representative at Braintree. He is also the producer and co-founder at Grey Ghost Theatre in Chicago and regularly performs with the iO Theater, The Playground Theater and the Upstairs Gallery. Shannon is a multicultural strategy supervisor at Initiative. With rehearsals and shows often running past midnight, managing time for other responsibilities can be incredibly difficult and stressful for performers. “The hardest thing about this training is the time commitment,” says Andrew. “Performing in the evenings after working a full-time job can be tough, but it’s worth it.”

Despite time conflicts and lack of sleep, the laughter made it all worthwhile. “The easiest part about training is the laughing,” said Shannon. “There are lots of surprising things that come out of improvisation scenes. We’ve both died many bizarre deaths: on the Oregon Trail, stabbed with spoons, shot in the Civil War and attacked by a gorilla.”

Now that Andrew and Shannon have graduated from Second City Conservatory, they face the option of trying to pursue a comedy or performance career full-time. “I’ve been working a pretty good day job and performing at nights for the time being,” says Andrew. “If the opportunity presented itself to be a full-time performer, I’d definitely jump at it.”

For her part, Shannon says, “Realistically, I doubt comedy would ever pay my bills. But I don’t plan on stopping, so who knows where it will lead me.”