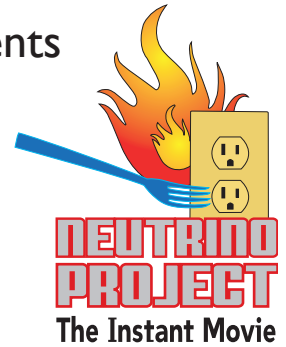


**For Immediate Release**

**FuzzyCo** presents

CONTACT: Fuzzy Gerdes  
773-865-7883  
fuzzy@fuzzyco.com



**Neutrino Project: The Instant Movie**

Neutrino Project: The Instant Movie is an extraordinary theatre/film hybrid that creates an original, hour-long movie in the time it takes the audience to watch it. At the beginning of the show, the audience provides objects that they have brought to the theater. Multiple camera crews and actors then race outside to various locations to film scenes inspired by those objects. Moments later, the audience inside the theater sees an uninterrupted movie that has been shot, edited, and scored, and contains the items they loaned the cast.

Joining the Neutrino Project as director is Lillian Frances. Frances appeared as an actor in four other runs of Neutrino and is thrilled to be directing the latest incarnation. Her other directing credits include a Second City National Touring Company, the all women's improv group Sirens, and assistant directing for Boom Chicago in Amsterdam. She teaches at Columbia College and is a core teacher at the Second City Training Center.

The Neutrino Project was inspired by the New York improv group Neutrino and their Neutrino Video Projects, which debuted at the Upright Citizens Brigade Theater. FuzzyCo has produced several sold-out runs of the show in Chicago and been showcased at the Chicago Improv Festival, the Phoenix Improv Festival, and Second City Toronto.

"Top 5 Innovative Productions" Top 5s of 2003 - Chicago Newcity

"This madcap fusion of nearly instantaneous filmmaking and anything-goes improv revels in the joys of spontaneous creation"

Nick Green - Chicago Reader

"a fresh, funny and remarkably inventive show", "an instant blast", "will become a big, deserving, late-night hit" - Chris Jones - Chicago Tribune

For more information on the Neutrino Project, please contact Fuzzy Gerdes (773-865-7883) or visit [www.fuzzyco.com/press](http://www.fuzzyco.com/press)

#####

## COMEDY

### Straight to video

FuzzyCo takes improv off of the stage and into the streets By **Mark Sinclair**



**SCREEN PLAY** All the world's a stage for the actors in *Neutrino Project*.

In most improv, you can create anything," says Fuzzy Gerdes, who does double duty as both producer and performer with the *Neutrino Project*. "You can say, 'Why look—we're in Borneo, and I have a laser gun.' You can just create it. In *Neutrino*, we're stuck with the real world."

The unforgiving real world is the backdrop for Gerdes's innovative show, in which a 50-minute movie is filmed and screened in just more than an hour. But while reality takes away some freedoms,

The Chicago *Neutrino* began in 2002, shortly after Gerdes and fellow improviser Shaun Himmerick saw *Neutrino*—the New York-based troupe that originated the concept—perform its version.

"We were just blown away by it," Gerdes says. "After the end of the show, Shaun turned to me and said, 'We need to do this.'"

Happily, the New Yorkers were more than willing to allow Gerdes and Himmerick to adapt their idea, asking only that the duo retain the name "Neutrino" in the show's

**"Why look—we're in Borneo, and I have a laser gun."**

the video element gives *Neutrino* performers something no stage-based improvisers have: quiet.

"The littlest reaction you can have on stage, you still have to exaggerate," Gerdes says. "When you want to whisper, you have to stage whisper," loud enough so that the whole room can hear. "We can do real whispers, and really subtle reactions."

Nuance is what makes *Neutrino*, which begins its latest run Friday 5 at Improv Kitchen, more than a gimmick. In a city where improv shows have featured a duo riding bicycles in place while onstage, avoiding gimmicks is far from easy.

The pair, along with Gerdes's troupe, FuzzyCo, launched its first run at the WNEP Theater with a two-show preview.

"We weren't sure if it was going to work. It's a challenging and technically complex show," Gerdes says. But it was a success, and FuzzyCo ended up doing seven shows at WNEP before taking the piece to I.O. for a month. Later, the troupe launched runs at the Lakeshore Theater and 3 Penny Cinema.

## Comedy

Although the details have been refined over time, the structure remains the same: The cast is split up into teams consisting of two or three actors, a camera operator and a runner, who transports the tapes between scene locations and the theater.

The actors solicit suggestions from the audience, and ask for objects to incorporate into the scenes—just to prove it's really improvised. Then the four teams race out into the streets and begin filming.

The first team has five minutes to get a scene on tape, while the audience watches an introductory video. After capturing two minutes of action, the runner hustles the footage back to the theater. The unedited tape immediately flickers on to the Improv Kitchen's many flat-screen TVs. The entire process takes about seven to eight minutes. During that time, the other teams have been taping their first scenes.

"When everything works perfectly, which it often does, just as tape one ends, tape two gets to the theater and is thrown into the player," Gerdes says.

Scenes from the third and fourth teams follow in the same manner, and by the time those end, the first team has shot its next scene. It's a frantic race to produce two minutes of film every eight minutes.

"It's nice doing it in the summer," says Lillian Frances, who has performed in previous runs and is acting as the show's director. "We were running in the snow and ice, and the runners really have to *run* those tapes back."

In the past, once the movie had begun, it continued uninterrupted for 50 minutes. But because the Improv Kitchen needs time to take orders and serve food halfway through, during this run, the cast will get a 20-minute break. The teams plan to use the extra time to tape fake outtakes and bloopers, which they'll show at the end.

All of this effort runs the teams ragged. "Because it's so challenging, at the end of every run Fuzzy and Shaun say, 'We're never going to do this again,'" Frances says. "And then a few months go by and they go, 'Let's do *Neutrino*,' because it's so rewarding."

**Neutrino Project is shot, wrapped and shown Fridays at 9pm at Improv Kitchen.**



# Making a movie in Wrigleyville—without a script

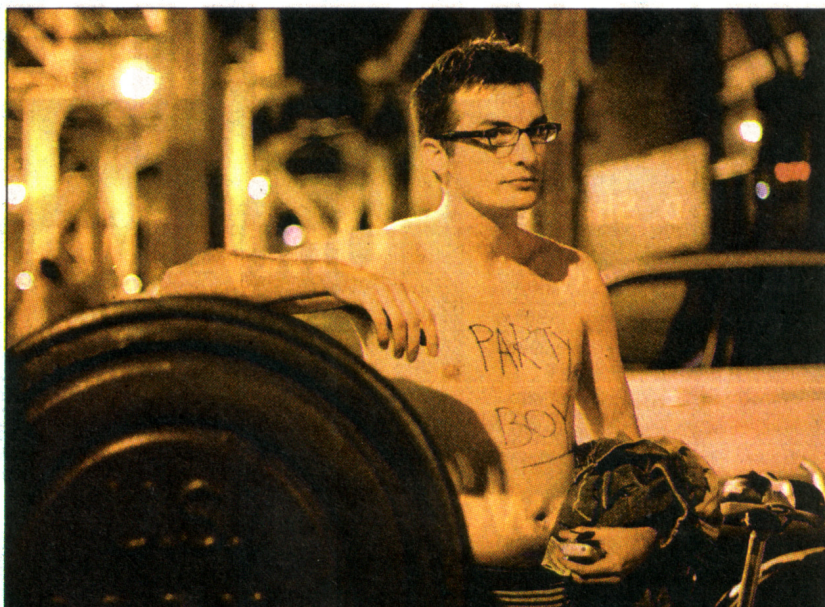
By **Nina Metz**  
Special to the Tribune

At the intersection of pop culture and instant gratification lies "Neutrino Project: The Instant Movie."

First developed by a New York improv troupe called Neutrino, the experimental hybrid combines unscripted, site-specific theater with do-it-yourself moviemaking. A handful of Chicago actors happened to catch early shows and borrowed the concept for a local version that premiered in the winter of 2003.

The Neutrino Project was an unqualified success for the local improv ensemble FuzzyCo, which has produced various incarnations ever since. Last weekend the group unveiled its latest Neutrino production at the Improv Kitchen, where it runs Friday nights through the end of September.

The basic idea is simple. Instead of performing onstage before an audience, the ensemble breaks off into teams—each trailed by a cameraman/director and a runner—and ventures out into the surrounding neighborhood. Amid unsuspecting



Tribune photo by David Zentz

pedestrians and restaurant patrons, actors film short, completely improvised scenes.

Seconds after the director says "cut," runners scurry back to the theater, videotape in hand—picture Joan Cusack in "Broadcast News."

Backstage, tech manager Greg Inda loads each tape as it comes in. The entire process repeats several times, without pause, resulting in a one-hour movie that screens even as it's being shot.

Based on my observations during a recent

**Bob Ladewig bares his soul for the cameras as part of "Neutrino Project: The Instant Movie," in which teams disembark from Improv Kitchen and make an impromptu film.**

PLEASE SEE **NEUTRINO**, PAGE 21

AUGUST 12, 2005 FRIDAY

ON THE TOWN

C SECTION 7 CHICAGO TRIBUNE

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## NEUTRINO: Lights, camera, lots of action

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

show, Neutrino remains the freshest thing on Chicago's improv scene. The boundaries of unscripted performance have been pushed to the next logical step: improv for the digital age.

In hopes of deciphering the Neutrino code, I tagged along with a team of actors on opening night for a behind-the-scenes perspective. The trick, I learned, was an almost obsessive attention to detail and organization.

The cast gathered at the studios of Improv Kitchen, a Wrigleyville comedy club and eatery equipped with multiple 42-inch plasma flat screen TVs. (Previous runs of the show were staged in traditional storefront theaters equipped with a movie screen.) Director Lillie Frances divided the group into four teams and assigned the shooting locations: a bar, a Mexican restaurant, a nearby parking lot and the inside of someone's car. (The crews ask for permission to film from business owners or managers when they walk in to shoot the scene; according to Frances, they are rarely turned away.)

I was with the El Jardin posse. Our runner, Maureen McCabe, huddled with director Michael Starcevic, sorting through blank tapes and labeling them ahead of time. It was McCabe's first time on the job, and you could tell she was feeling the pressure. Everything depends on the runner's ability to keep the team focused to ensure the tapes get back on time; a late arrival at the theater means dead-air for the audience. "Help me!" McCabe mouthed as she walked by.

Before the performance, the cast jogged out to the audience and solicited a title suggestion, as well as the temporary use of objects that the actors would incorporate into their scenes. The first team left and, less than 10 minutes later,



Tribune photo by David Zentz

**Patrick Brennan (left) and Fuzzy Gerdes are videotaped by Michael Starcevic as they improvise a scene in the El Jardin restaurant as part of the Neutrino Project.**

their tape was back and the audience was watching the first installment.

With the clock ticking, we dashed down the street to El Jardin where the restaurant staff replied with bored nods when Starcevic asked for their blessing. Everyone else stopped to stare. Convinced nothing glamorous was going on, the crowd gradually returned to their conversations.

The actors in our group—FuzzyCo founder Fuzzy Gerdes, Erica Reid and Patrick Brennan—ordered a round of margaritas and began improvising a scene about old friends meeting for dinner. (Rule of thumb: When filming in a bar or restaurant, always spend a little cash to ensure the manager's good will.)

Because of the time crunch, all editing has to be done by the directors as they film. Each time

Starcevic wanted to change angles he would signal the actors, hit the stop button and shift to a different spot. Once in place, he'd press record and go from there. It's harder than it sounds, but the Neutrino videographers—most of whom are improvisers themselves—have become surprisingly adept at working within these constraints.

From an audience perspective, the film feels very different from a typical improv show, which can be plagued with agonizing moments of flop-sweat and awkwardness. Here the actors are more relaxed in their performances, more likely to allow silence to creep into their scenes. (Some scenes contain no dialogue at all; back at the theater, using hasty notes from the runner, the tech staff will add a soundtrack to suit the mood.)

### PREVIEW

#### 'Neutrino Project: The Instant Movie'

When: 9 p.m. Fridays

Where: Improv Kitchen, 3419 N. Clark St.

Price: \$12; 773-868-6423

If this night's experience was any indication, the intrusion of film crews has apparently become passe around

town. This can lead to some of the funniest material of the night. Intentionally or not, Starcevic captured a full view of a man sitting just behind the actors, his dead-eyed expression showing his true feelings toward his companion. These moments, more than anything else, give the movie an aura of irreverent spontaneity.

Several scenes later, our team met up with the rest of the cast on the sidewalk outside the Twisted Spoke on Clark Street. The group talked briefly and determined the best way to converge their individual storylines. Looking up from my notepad, I realized two actors standing in front of me were missing their pants. I would have to wait for my chance to view the completed film to find out why—a birthday celebration gone awry, it turns out.

But as we filmed, passers-by barely glanced twice in our direction; just another crazy night in Wrigleyville.

"The rule is, on Neutrino night, wear boxers," Gerdes told me. "No one wants to be caught on film wearing tighty-whities."

Filmed outtakes are a new addition to the Neutrino Project, screened at the end of the movie. After shooting their main scenes, the actors take a few minutes to shoot their outtakes, provided the director remembers to load the tape.

The final scene completed, we trudged back to the Improv Kitchen to watch the outtakes with the audience. The best one of the night featured actor Sean Cusick, standing in a parking lot alone and conspicuously undressed, drawing befuddled stares from the lot attendant and occupants of a passing car.

Organization may be the key to Neutrino, but a little shameless exhibitionism seems just as vital.

onthetown@tribune.com



# NEW CITY

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a pink strapless dress, is sitting on a rooftop. In the background, there are stylized, colorful skyscrapers of a city skyline. The scene is set against a blue and purple sky with light rays emanating from behind the buildings.

9.25.03 BEST OF CHICAGO

## **Best use of a video camera**

### **THE NEUTRINO PROJECT**

The most ingenious idea to hit the camcorder craze is surely The Neutrino Project, that guerilla improv-film hybrid organized by Fuzzy Gerdes. Based on a single audience suggestion, director Gerdes, four different teams of camera crews and a slew of actors race out into the night and create a one-hour film, on the spot. It's a concept so winning (and seemingly obvious), it's kind of amazing no one thought of it earlier. Gerdes and company are back at it again this month at the Three Penny Cinema, launching an 8-week run of "Neutrino Project 30,000" a bigger and better version that features a live score improvised by musician Ben Taylor.

2424 North Lincoln  
(773)525-3449

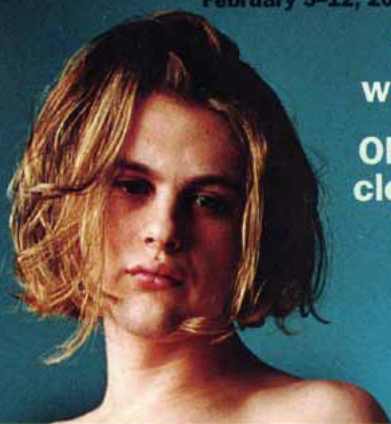
# BEST OF CHICAGO



# Time Out

## New York

The obsessive guide to impulsive entertainment  
February 5-12, 2004 Issue No. 436 \$2.99



**Chinatown bus  
wars turn deadly**

**Ol' Dirty Bastard  
cleans up his act  
(or so he says)**

**NYC's new  
folk explosion**

**Legal LSD!**

The D  
Mic  
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NC-17

PLUS  
Frank  
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a better

### COMEDY

## Let's take it outside

Neutrino brings improvised cinema to the streets—and to America's top comedy festival **By Joe Grossman**

The cast members of *The Neutrino Video Projects* can never quite tell how well a show is going—because they've never had the luxury of being in the theater during their own performances. "The biggest judge and jury for me is the applause when we come in at the end of the show," cofounder Bob Wiltfong says. "That's the only time we get to see the reaction to what we've been doing."

For the past two years, the Neutrino troupe's eight performers—Wiltfong, Jessica Allen, Rachel Biello, Steve Buck, Kurt Braunholer, Rebekka Johnson, Matt Donnelly and Ptolemy Slocum—have been honing their signature show, a hybrid of improv and cinema in which they make unscripted short films in public places. One by one, the newly completed scenes are rushed to the People's Improv Theater, where an eager audience watches while the cast proceeds to shoot follow-up scenes. All this takes place in a frantic 30 minutes.

Intricate and high-maintenance as it is, this new improv form is starting to catch on, and not just in NYC. Neutrino recently franchised its trademark format to groups in Seattle and Chicago, with Toronto and Washington, D.C., versions in the pipeline. And in March, the original *Video Projects* will become only

the third improv show ever to play at Aspen, Colorado's prestigious U.S. Comedy Arts Festival. "They don't like having improv there," Braunholer says. "So we're either going to get the shit beat out of us or they're going to love it."



The *NVP* concept originated in March 2002, when the octet performed regularly at *Cage Match*, the Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre's weekly improv competition. "We'd built a reputation for trying new things, and we just wanted to try something crazy," Braunholer recalls. "I said we should do a video show, and everyone was like, 'Yeah! But we didn't know how it could ever work.'"

It was Slocum who concocted the *NVP* formula, which involves split-

ting the group into three teams, each made up of one to three performers, a cameraperson and a runner, who shuttles between the "sets" and the stage. After collecting some everyday items from the audience (to inspire the action to come), each team bolts from the theater and shoots a three-scene film outside, rushing its vignettes back to the theater for the crowd to enjoy while the actors continue to weave their stories out in the real world. In the grand finale, the triptych of disparate threads converge—meaning the teams must also find time to fill each other in on their respective story lines and close with an organic conclusion.

At first, the troupe was skeptical about the project's feasibility, but

"I'm banned from Gristedes," Braunholer says, recounting an incident that occurred when Neutrino neglected to ask permission to shoot in one of the supermarket chain's stores. "The manager stopped the camera during our final scene. We needed to get the tape back to the theater in 30 or 45 seconds, so I just grabbed it and started running, and he tackled me. Matt had to tell the audience, 'We don't have a final scene because it was confiscated by the guy at Gristedes, and the cops are on the way. But if you guys just wait five minutes, we'll shoot another final scene for you.'"

Luckily, some civilians are more willing to play along, particularly when the cast gets clearance before rolling tape. Khaled Kaid works at Gourmet Deli and Pizza at the corner of 29th Street and Seventh Avenue, and he still isn't exactly sure why these strange people come into his store with video cameras—or why, for example, one of them recently pretended to be an indignant magician seeking vengeance on the night clerk. But he's learned to expect the unexpected on his Saturday shifts. "They're like friends to us," Kaid says of the young actors. "They always buy stuff. They're cool." And the feeling seems to be mutual. "The deli guy that we did the scene work with tonight, he's actually improved throughout the run," Wiltfong says. "He's become a better improviser."

Neutrino performs Saturdays at the People's Improv Theater. See listings.

### COMEDY

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- 77 Funny business

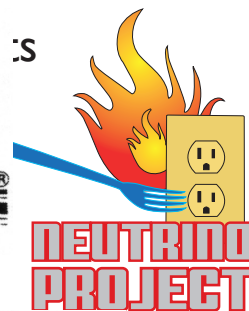
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free events!**



# READER



stant Movie

PHOTO | AARON GANG



FuzzyCo

**CRITIC'S  
CHOICE**



Neutrino

## Neutrino and FuzzyCo

**P**ushing the envelope has yielded fantastic results for Neutrino, one of the longest-running Harold teams at New York's Upright Citizens Brigade. Its eight members have a reputation for pulling off stunts: they disrobed in the middle of one infamous performance. And tireless experimentation within the Harold form led them to their biggest epiphany last spring: videotaping a fully improvised 25-minute Harold performance on New York City streets, then editing and projecting it (with a three-minute delay) in a theater. This madcap fusion of nearly instantaneous filmmaking and anything-goes improv revels in the joys of spontaneous creation, and Neutrino's mastery of the form is simply awe inspiring. When Chicagoans Fuzzy Gerdes and Shaun Himmerick, masterminds of Chicago's improv troupe FuzzyCo, saw the show during a trip to the east coast, they fell head over heels and imported it to

Chicago, where it played to packed houses at WNEP and ImprovOlympic for two months earlier this year. FuzzyCo's take on the Neutrino concept differs from its source slightly: since FuzzyCo has a cast of 11, the piece is longer and delves a little more deeply into any tensions that develop. As part of the Chicago Improv Festival, FuzzyCo opens a joint program at 7 PM with a reprise of their late-night hit, and Neutrino—in its first-ever Chicago appearance—closes out the first show after a short intermission. At 9 PM, both troupes divide into seven crews to prowls Lakeview for a jam session, during which time Gerdes promises to create 21 short films based on a single audience suggestion. There goes the neighborhood. WNEP Theater, 3209 N. Halsted, 773-755-1693. Thursday, May 15, 7 and 9 PM. \$15.

—Nick Green





Beth Melewski (from left), Lillie Frances and Adam Devlin-Brown (holding camera) create a scene for "The Neutrino Project," a one-time film that's prepared, performed, shot, distributed and exhibited in less than an hour.

## THEATER REVIEW

# 'Neutrino Project' yields positive charge

By Chris Jones  
Tribune arts reporter

In this improv-soaked city, there are hundreds of actors who can riff for hours on any subject under the sun and in whatever aesthetic style a fevered, youthful imagination can conjure. Be the improvisation vehicle long-form, short-form, musical, satirical, ethnically based, relationship-driven or merely based on an inanimate object, you can be sure that a striving someone in Chicago already will have driven it to death in some squalid little theater on the North Side.

And that historical reality makes a fresh, funny and remarkably inventive show called "The Neutrino Project" at the WNEP Theater all the more remarkable.

It's only once a week — late on Saturday nights — and it only runs for about an hour. But it's not to be missed.

The concept here needs a little explanation. Poorly titled, "The Neutrino Project" purports to be a fully improvised movie. Granted, the likes of the great British director Mike Leigh have experimented with unscripted filmmaking for years, but the FuzzyCo production company goes a good deal further. "The Neutrino Project" is composed of a one-time film that's prepared, performed, shot, distributed and exhibited in less than an hour. Fuzzy Gerdes directs.

The night begins with a group of actors, directors and camerapeople standing in the WNEP Theater. They solicit a title in the typical long-form fashion (last Saturday it came back as "Surfing") and borrow objects (a Herman Hesse volume, say) from the audience. But they then run out of the theater and split into groups on the street. Scenes are then filmed simultaneously in the Lakeview blocks surrounding the thea-



Cesar Jaime (from left), Jen Ellison and Andrea Swanson in one of the many interlocking narratives in "The Neutrino Project."

ter — and runners rush the material back to the theater, where it's shown to the audience just a few seconds after it was stuck in the can.

Remarkably, the result is a funny full-blown movie with several different interlocking narratives (think "The Hours") which all come together in the closing scenes. Last week, there was the sad tale of lonely urban souls all looking for the pleasures of summer: the epic drama of two Florida-bound vacationers with a lost car, an inappropriate office summer romance, lost luggage causing sisters to fall apart, and a tale of newfound love and interconnected betrayal in a local restaurant.

The concept — which originated at the Upright Citizens Brigade, recently kicked out of

## "The Neutrino Project"

**When:** Through Feb. 1

**Where:** WNEP Theater, 3209 N. Halsted St.

**Phone:** 773-296-1100

its little space in the less-hospitable Manhattan — is not only very clever, but it also creates the kind of tension-filled petri dish in which the best improv finds fertility. The cinematic form expands the improv vocabulary — riffing camera-people can focus in on objects or bewildered bystanders to great comic effect — and it engenders a terrific sense of immediacy. In few other theatrical entertainments can one keep constant watch on one's illegally parked car across the street — and watch with horror as an errant valet parker bangs its bumpers.

This idea is, of course, not easy to do well. The producers need to think of inventive ways to better cover up the inevitable pauses between scenes. And there were times last week when some of the mainly theater-trained actors were too overblown for acting on camera.

But those are minor quibbles. Gerdes' instant movie was an instant blast. The place already was packed last weekend. And as word of mouth builds, "The Neutrino Project" will become a big, deserving, late-night hit.



TIP OF THE WEEK  
THE NEUTRINO PROJECT



Combining long-form improv with gonzo filmmaking, "The Neutrino Project" is the logical outgrowth of "The Blair Witch Project"; if you can make a movie using a video camera and improvising actors, why not flip the concept around and make an improv show using a video camera and, well, improvising actors? The result is a completely spontaneous one-hour flick created on-the-spot Saturday nights at WNEP Theater. Here's how it works: A group of actors, videographers and runners led by director Fuzzy Gerdes gather on stage at the start of the show and solicit an audience suggestion. Then they break off into four teams and dash out into the Lakeview neighborhood, where they begin shooting brief improvised scenes. In about five minutes, the first team completes their shot, a runner grabs the video and hauls ass back to the theater where technical manager Greg Inda cues it up and starts the movie. As the runner ventures back out into the cold to track down his comrades, a runner from the second team shows up with the next scene. The process is repeated multiple times, and what evolves is an almost-real-time episodic film that manages to tie all the disparate scenes (and teams) together by the final shot. While the performances are hit-and-miss (Dan Izzo and Beth Melewski are standouts), the sheer novelty of the concept, first created at New York's Upright Citizens Brigade, makes this experiment a success and a compelling first step in exploring the boundaries of improv. (Nina Metz)

*"The Neutrino Project" plays Saturdays at 10:30pm at WNEP Theater, 3209 North Halsted, (773)296-1100.*

# NEW CITY





*Cameraman Michael Starcevic shoots actors Beth Meleuski and Dave Colan for a 2003 improvised performance by Neutrino Project 30,000.*

## Instant cinema

*Meet the hot new couple: improv and digital video*

BY CHRISTOPHER ZARA

**S**O HOW DOES making movies compare with live theatre? To some, the two forms are like apples and oranges, but a new improv franchise has staked out a spot somewhere in between the two media.

The Neutrino Video Projects can best be summed up as near-live presentations of improvised movies. They are conceived, shot, scored, and edited all in the time it takes audiences to watch. A risky premise, perhaps, but with seasoned improv-theatre talent, the show can entertain in a way unlike any other kind of performance.

Like conventional improv, Neutrino performances begin with troupe members soliciting story ideas from their audience. Once armed with enough raw materials for a film, the cast members join forces with guerrilla camera crews and

take to the streets. Using real locations, real props, and even recruiting real extras, the teams shoot an entire movie based on audience input. For the audience, the playback is almost live. It takes about five minutes for crew members to shoot the first scene, rush it back to the theatre, perform minimal edits, and dub in some appropriate music. (A few of the performers stay behind in the meantime, keeping the audience entertained with amusing onstage banter.) But with three or more separate crews at work, a seamless movie follows the initial delay. Neutrino is, in the end, a movie-going experience. But unlike standard cinema, the show's success hinges on its players' ability to interact with a live audience.

The concept originated in 1999, when Neutrino was a long-form improv

group and regular participant in the New York-based CageMatch competition, a weekly face-off between two improv teams who each have twenty-five minutes to perform. "We were competing in Cage-Match for about two years, and each time we tried to do something different," says Neutrino co-creator Kurt Braunohler. "One day, we were just kind of brainstorming and came up with the idea to do our show completely video."

After figuring out the logistics of an improv-movie performance, the troupe brought its new format to CageMatch and blew the competition out of the water. "The response was overwhelming," Braunohler adds. "We won CageMatch for like five weeks straight. From there, the idea just took off."