Bare Descriptions

Group Description:
It's hard to believe, but Bare is just two men: Fuzzy Gerdes and Shaun Himmerick. They've been performing together in one group or another for ten years (with a break for Shaun's unmentionable Colorado years). They both have impeccable improv pedigrees, with training from institutions like the ImprovOlympic and Annoyance Theater and from instructors like Del Close, Mick Napier, and Keith Johnstone. These days they live in the same apartment in Chicago, argue over whose turn it is to do the dishes, and work on their wildly inventive improv.

Show Description:
Bare is two men who perform with the energy and presence of a 10-person group – a ten-person group with some acrobats, a fire-eater, and a rock band in there somewhere. Their show starts with a single audience suggestion, and from that tiny seed they grow an improvisational tornado of extraordinary characters, extraordinary situations, and usually at least one impersonation of a live animal.

"I can't remember the last time I saw character work that good."
— Paul Koster, Toronto Main Event

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Bare

Bare History

Shaun Himmerick and Fuzzy Gerdes have been performing together since 1993. They met through an improv group at Purdue University and went on to perform with a variety of improvisational groups, both separately and together—ComedySportz, TheatreSports, serious improvised drama, Chicago-style long form with the ImprovOlympic. Shaun and Fuzzy reunited in 1999 in Chicago. There they formed **Bare** to concentrate on all the possibilities of a two man ensemble.

Shaun and Fuzzy are constantly experimenting with the dynamics of two person improvisational theatre. They have performed and workshopped forms as diverse as a two man short-form show to a single thirty-minute scene.

As Bare, Shaun and Fuzzy have performed at festivals throughout the US, Canada, and New Zealand.

We've performed in:

Arizona
Colorado
Florida
Illinois
Indiana
Louisiana
Massachusetts
Minnesota
Missouri
Nebraska
New York
New Zealand
Ontario
South Carolina
Texas
Washington

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Bare Personalities

We are a professional company with two highly trained and skilled actors. We pride ourselves on being not just talented performers, but among the best writers, directors, and instructors anywhere in the country.

Fuzzy Gerdes has been improvising since 1990. He has trained at the Annoyance Theatre and the ImprovOlympic. He was recently seen in *The Instant Movie* at the Edinburg (Scotland) Fringe Festival. Several of his short films have made the semi-finals of competitive film festivals. He also maintains the wildly popular New Improv Page: http://www.fuzzyco.com/improv/

Shaun Himmerick has been performing and teaching improvised theatre since 1993. In the past he has performed with National Velveeta, Crazy Monkeys, and Denver TheatreSports. Shaun has done scripted theatre and a sketch comedy TV show. He enjoyed training at the Annoyance Theater, ImprovOlympic and the Second City. He currently does training for corporations around the country with Chicago Comedy Company. Shaun hopes to be involved when Improv takes over the world.

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Bare

More Quotes

"Bare is fucking awesome." — Scott Jennings, Improv Resource Center, NYC

"The evening flew by much too fast and was simply a joy to behold. … I can't wait for Bare to return to the Northland so I can put them back on our stage and make some more money off of them."
— Brian Matuszak, Renegade Comedy Theater, Duluth, Minnesota

"I can't say enough about how awesome Shaun and Fuzzy were. Great fun and pure class. Consummate professionals. Wonderfully talented and funny individuals. And a great team to work with, too."
— Matt Grabowski, Seattle Festival of Improv Theater

"showing just how refined and in-tune two people can be... simply amazing to watch …"
— Victor Hahn, Omaha Weekly

"Bare rocks. We learned a lot from Bare. Bare is where we are striving to be."
— Jason Baker, Noun,

"Awesome!"
— Dean Poyner, Columbia Improv Festival, South Carolina

"Their show was disciplined, innovative, and endlessly surprising."
— Lawrence Lee, Renegade Comedy Theater, Duluth, Minnesota

"Best theatre I've seen in a couple years… hard to believe it wasn't scripted."
— Jeremy Breningstal, the Boulder Weekly

"Thanks guys. I have recently awoken from the deepest 9 hour sleep in history. I'm so glad you guys had a good time. There was a lot of love in this theater this weekend. Your show was a highlight. Thanks."
— John Bowie, Upright Citizens Brigade coordinator for the Toyota Comedy Festival, NYC

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Bare

Press

"[Bare] oozed personality and integrity, and reminded me just how exciting and dramatic pure improv can be … it was the best improv I've seen in Chicago in over a year"

Fred Mowrey
theatrechicago.com

Chicago Tribune
NORTH SPORTS FINAL
154TH YEAR — NO. 159 © CHICAGO TRIBUNE ★ ★ FRIDAY, JUNE 8, 2001 50¢

THEATER SCENE

Bare seeks edginess, shuns the comfort zone

By Kate Zambreno
Special to the Tribune

When the two-man group Bare goes on the road, they call their improv show "Two Old Men Fishing."

It's an inside joke for close friends Shaun Himmerick and Fuzzy Gerdes that keeps them from lapsing into a comfort zone on stage.

"We call it that, so we can never be two old men fishing," laughs Himmerick.

They also always have four chairs on stage, to not limit the number of characters they play at one time. "I've watched people when there's two chairs on stage, and they'll always sit where those two chairs are at," Himmerick says.

Bare began in Denver in 1997 as Bare Essentials, a group of eight actors who focused on dramatic discovery through improv. Himmerick and Gerdes have been playing improv together for almost 10 years, since their days at Purdue University, when they would drive up to Chicago on weekends to take classes.

Two years later, most of the company moved to Chicago, but, Himmerick says, it was difficult for many of them to concentrate on just one group. For one rehearsal only Gerdes and Himmerick showed up. And they decided to strip down Bare Essentials to the two-man Bare.

After polishing up their act for two years in festivals across the country, the two performers in Bare asked WNEP executive director Don Hall, known for his experimental absurdist tinges in shows like "Soiree Dada" and "Armaggedon Radio Hour," to direct them.

"We wanted Don to really push us past that 'Fuzzy and I have been doing improv for 10 years' thing," says Himmerick. During intense rehearsals, Hall has encouraged them to press each other's emotional buttons and focus on their moods to initiate scenes.

The result is "Actual Theatre," simply two friends on stage, exploring their relationship through fictitious characters. There is no safety net of suggestions in the hourlong show, the only structure being monologues to spur ideas.

So far, audiences from Omaha to Columbia, S.C., whose only exposure to improv may have been "Whose Line is it Anyway" on TV, have proved to be surprisingly receptive to the two-person long-form improv hydrid. However, Himmerick admits, they play to the audience while on tour. "If you're in a bar at 10:30, and the crowd's drunk, throwing dramatic improv at them is not the right thing to do," he says.

There is no safety net of suggestions in the show, the only structure being monologues to spur ideas.

For "Actual Theatre," Himmerick says, the audience should expect something different than standard improv. They intentionally didn't put that word on the poster, preferring the audience come in expecting a scripted show.

Again, the title of Bare's new Chicago show serves as a suggestion for the two performers. "It sounds so pretentious," Himmerick says. "But for us it's a reminder to make improv actual theater. Don't make it jokes, don't make it stand-up, it's theater. Make it actual theater."

"Actual Theatre" runs at 10:30 p.m. at the WNEP Theater, 3209 N. Halsted St. , through June 29. $8. Call 773-755-1693 for reservations.

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Bare

Press

"[The show] far exceeded even that high expectation. Next time you give a workshop up here, I'd expect twice as many people. ... Seriously, that was a tour-de-force performance."

Lawrence VanVactor-Lee
Renegade Comedy Theater

COVERING THE NORTHLAND'S LOCAL NEWS FOR 131 YEARS
Duluth News Tribune
WWW.DULUTHSUPERIOR.COM

fast on their feet

Comedy duo BARE stands up to the ultimate improv challenge: Be funny for a whole hour

BY V. PAUL VIRTUCIO
NEWS TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

Fuzzy Gerdes and Shaun Himmerick can create entire storylines within minutes.

The Chicago improvisation artists can become any character that audiences throw at them, complete with quirky behaviors and complex relationships. They can maintain those personae for up to an hour — and be funny while doing it.

The key to their improv comedy is agreement, Gerdes said. On stage, Gerdes will take the story in one direction and Himmerick follows, adding to it. They hope the audience agrees they're funny.

"I say one thing and Shaun agrees with it. That's the basic tool," Gerdes said. "You don't have a script and you don't have a set of rules that govern your reality until you get on stage and you build it together."

But the comic duo doesn't just create a series of one-schtick caricatures. They'll actually build whole personalities so audiences see not only what makes the characters hilarious but also understand why they behave that way.

"Character is our biggest thing. You can watch two people do anything, but we have a commitment to 'It's not what you do, it's how you do what you do,' " Himmerick said. "Us as different people is what makes the show interesting."

Gerdes and Himmerick, as the comedy duo called BARE, will perform at 9:30 p.m. Saturday in Renegade Comedy Theatre, 404 W. Superior St.

Unlike popular TV shows, such as "Whose Line Is It Anyway?" or Renegade's Comedy Olympics, BARE performs long-form improvisation. Rather than three-minute skits or short games, Himmerick and Gerdes create one-act plays based on themes suggested by the audience that can last from 30 to 60 minutes.

The challenge is to be funny the entire time. One way BARE maintains its comedy is by not overdoing a funny bit. After establishing a character's humorous trait, the comedians build up other aspects of the character and then unexpectedly return to that trait, Himmerick said.

"We'd much rather have the audience be surprised to see it again, rather than 'Whoops, there it is!' " he said.

If you go

Who: Fuzzy Gerdes and Shaun Himmerick, the improv comedy duo BARE.
When: 9:30 p.m. Saturday.
Where: Renegade Comedy Theatre, 404 W. Superior St.
Cost: $7.
Call: 722-6775.

Their shows run from family-oriented to R-rated. They've played to college kids in campus venues and well-dressed audiences in museums. Although they tailor shows for specific audiences, they never show up with a prepared storyline or stock characters. The duo runs with whatever the audience gives them, Gerdes said.

"Shaun and I have big potty mouths, but we're also professionals," he said. "In improv, you never know where it's going to go."

Both comedians got their start in the same college comedy troupe at Purdue University. Gerdes, who eventually earned a computer science degree, was pushed to join the troupe by his friend, the Rev. Lawrence VanVactor-Lee, who now lives in Duluth and helped set up the local gig.

Himmerick planned a career as a track athlete. After he was called on stage as a volunteer at a show, he was hooked. After he injured his knee, he turned to comedy.

After college, the pair continued their collaboration at summer comedy and theater festivals. Before joining forces with Gerdes in Chicago nine years ago, Himmerick ran a theater group in Denver called Bare Essentials, where he said he was simply trying to "create good theater improvisationally."

While both have day jobs — Himmerick works for Midway Games, a computer software manufacturer, and Gerdes is a graphic designer for Playboy magazine — their focus is on their comedy careers.

"This is our art that we create and we think seriously about it all the time," Gerdes said. "It's wonderful that the serious art we create makes people laugh."

Brian McConkey

Fuzzy Gerdes (left) and Shaun Himmerick are the improvisational comedy duo BARE. They'll perform at 9:30 p.m. Saturday in Renegade Comedy Theatre, 404 W. Superior St. The Chicago-based comedians specialize in long-form improv, creating half-hour to hourlong plays based on audience suggestions.

V. PAUL VIRTUCIO *covers arts and entertainment. He can be reached at (218) 279-5536 or by e-mail: pvirtuci@duluthnews.com.*

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Bare

Press

Omaha Weekly
March 29, 2001
No Promises and No Holds Barred Fri-Sat., March 30-31 at the Shelterbelt
By Victor Hahn

… A group from Chicago called Bare played the second act of the night, showing just how refined and in-tune two people can be in this improvising genre. Fuzzy Gerdes and Shaun Himmerick were simply amazing to watch as they bounced off of a one-word suggestion from the audience-"bang." Bare has played coast to coast, and it's unfortunate they couldn't do more than just two nights last weekend in Omaha, because these are two highly gifted people that most theatergoers in town missed.

They are a cut above where Spot Theatre's at in terms of its refinement, but that's not a put down of Spot at all. Bare makes this look like fun, but you have to realize how much work is involved in this improvising craft. Spot Theatre can certainly rise to a higher level, if they get the exposure and practice to do this on a regular basis. Maybe they can be a third wheel in this theater space when the Shelterbelt and SNAP! Start sharing this stage in the near future.

"My actors are still talking about how great your workshops were… You guys were amazing in both shows. You hit the stage, seized the audience's attention and never let go. I can't wait to have you back next year."

Matt Martin
Director
Spot Theatre

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FuzzyCo

By Lucia Mauro

Fuzzy Gerdes majored in computer science; Shaun Himmerick majored in accounting—both at Purdue University. And they are the feverish brains behind FuzzyCo, a four-year-old Chicago improv-based production company that continues to push the boundaries of the form—especially the cross-pollenating of improv and film. Which goes to show that improv draws its inventive energy from sources as vast as audience suggestions for a long-form set.

Both men, friends since 1993, quickly found themselves taking the improv/theatre plunge—learning in crash-course fashion on the job how to balance the artistic and business sides of running a company. They met through an improv group—National Velveeta—at Purdue and went on to perform with a variety of improv troupes, separately and together: ComedySportz, TheatreSports, serious improv drama, Chicago-style long-form, ImprovOlympic and The Playground.

FuzzyCo's "empire" also stretches beyond creating their own improvised shows to producing other artist's work (like Andy Eninger's *One Man,* seen last year at WNEP Theater), photography, videography and graphic design.

"FuzzyCo is a production company, not a theatre company," stresses Gerdes.

Continues Himmerick, "We wanted to really push improv—to get it out of the theatre. That's why we're a production company."

Most recently, FuzzyCo pushed its improvisers into the streets of Chicago to shoot a fully improvised film on location over 22 minutes based on a one-word suggestion. A hit that moved from WNEP Theater to ImprovOlympic earlier this year, *The Neutrino Project* concept was inspired by Manhattan-based improv group Neutrino during a Del Close Marathon. In it, the audience essentially watches what just happened a few blocks away with only a couple of minutes' delay. And, from there, tape after tape is delivered and an entire show unfolds onscreen.

Gerdes' latest film-improv hybrid, *Cinema 2.0*, is running through May 4 at The Playground. Inspired by Woody Allen's *What's Up, Tiger Lily?*, the live actors fill in new improvised dialogue for a classic B-movie—like *Laser Mission* with Ernest Borgnine or *One-Eyed Jacks* with Marlon Brando. FuzzyCo—a regular on the improv festival circuit—will be featured in the Chicago Improv Festival May 15-16.

Himmerick believes that "digital video brought improvised film to the masses" and contends, "We're barely scratching the surface of what we can do with video."

But FuzzyCo does not restrict itself to cinematic improv either. Other productions since Gerdes and Himmerick moved to Chicago and officially formed the company in 1999 include Bare's *Actual Theatre* and *Armando Diaz's Eventé.*

After graduating from Purdue, they polished their improv/theatre skills in other cities. Gerdes stayed in Lafayette, Ind., where he improvised and performed in scripted plays, like *All in the Timing* and *The Imaginary Invalid*, at Lafayette Civic Theatre. Himmerick—who discovered improv when asked to be an audience volunteer in a show—moved to Denver, where he served as executive director of the Denver Civic Theatre from 1997 to 1999. While there, he streamlined the theatre's budget and started an improv series. He also ran Denver TheatreSports for a while.

Both agree that they had a chance to hone their management and public relations skills in smaller markets. Himmerick, who handles FuzzyCo's press, says he was able to apply skills from his day job as a business project manager to publicity. Their Web site (*www.fuzzyco.com*) is an excellent and regularly updated resource for the Chicago improv community at large.

In 1999, Gerdes had been taking improv classes at the Annoyance Theatre. Then he enrolled at ImprovOlympic and got tired of the commute between Lafayette and Chicago. "It was easier for me to move here than drive back and forth," says Gerdes.

The same year, Himmerick reached his improv limits in Denver and joined Gerdes in Chicago. They immediately formed Bare to explore the possibilities of a two-man ensemble. Bare's *Actual Theatre* debuted at WNEP Theater under WNEP's Don Hall's direction, who pioneered the idea of an improv show that did not have a definitive ending. Either performer would often storm out of the theatre as a deliberately ambiguous finale.

"The show was basically us working out knowing each other for so many years," explains Gerdes. "Shaun and I are very good friends but very different people. What we were trying to do was not therapy on stage, but putting our pain on display for other's enjoyment."

"We pushed each other's buttons," adds Himmerick.

With Bare (which falls under the FuzzyCo umbrella), they performed at the Seattle Festival of Improv Theater, Minneapolis Improv Festival, Chicago Improv Festival, SAK Orlando Foolfest, Toyota Comedy Festival, New York Improv Festival, Columbia Improv Festival and Toronto Main Event.

"The festivals allow you to see what everyone else is doing," says Himmerick. "I think it's very important for Chicago improvisers to see as much improv outside the city as possible."

After all, *The Neutrino Project* was inspired by New York's Neutrino. Besides taking in the broad possibilities of the form, both men seek out ensemble members who are improvisers and highly trained actors.

Gerdes, who realized his natural improv acumen when a friend asked him to join Purdue's National Velveeta, continues to be intrigued by the art of improv: "What keeps me interested in improv is the notion of making something artful right away with instant feedback from the audience—then it's gone."

Would FuzzyCo ever consider consolidating its vision into a permanent space?

"Quite intentionally, we don't want our own space," responds Himmerick. "We love the flexibility of not being tied to a space. For what we do, we don't need to be in a true theatre—we can perform in a bar, in a movie theatre—really anywhere."

For more information, contact Fuzzy Gerdes at fuzzy@fuzzyco.com or Shaun Himmerick at shaun@fuzzyco.com. Website: www.fuzzyco.com.

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