

# CELEBRATING IMPRO

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EVERY TWO YEARS, IMPROVISERS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD GATHER IN THE ITI INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE & FESTIVAL.

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*by Feña Ortalli*

Festivals have proven to be one of the best (and most fun) ways of helping connect people and making our art form grow. In 2019, there were over 50 international festivals only in Europe and we expect to have more in 2020. There are festivals in every continent and every improv community feels the desire and even the need to hold one. And that is great!

However, there is one very important part that's been left aside for too long: Theory. While most of the festivals worldwide are focused on performances and workshops, meetings, conferences, and theoretical classes are not that common.

Every two years, the **International Theatresports Institute (ITI)** -the largest improv network in the world representing 90 improv companies, schools and universities- holds a conference and festival that brings together improvisers from around the globe to talk, share, discuss, show and teach each other.

The 2019 conference, hosted by **Vancouver TheatreSports (VTS)**, will take place in beautiful Vancouver, on October 14 to 20 with over 100 improvisers from 18 countries, and 50 performances across three theatre venues. The event also celebrates the 40th birthday of VTS.

**Jeff Gladstone**, member of VTS and one of the main responsible for this event, told us a little more about it.

*What are the main goals of holding the ITI conferences?*

The main goal of the ITI Conference & Festival is to celebrate the three big formats by Keith Johnstone: *TheatreSports*, *Maestro* and *Gorilla*. Because these formats are played around the world, it's become increasingly valuable to have **a place where artists can meet, connect and share practises** on how to best engage their local audiences with these formats.

Improv is an ever-evolving art form, that meets unique challenges with every country, language, and performance space, so the more opportunities we all have to learn from each other's challenges, the better our work can be, and the stronger our connections. From this main goal, the conference also seeks to present **the latest achievements of companies and artists working in these formats**, this year in Vancouver, we will be presenting *The Bechdel Test*, *The Ferocious Four*, *Lugares*, *El Jaguar*, *Keith Johnstone's LifeGame*, and many many more exciting new formats.

### *How did you select the teachers and shows?*

We assembled an Artistic and Educational programming committee, made up of directors from the ITI and artists from Vancouver TheatreSports. **We invited anyone from across the globe to submit pitches for shows and workshops**, and spent a few months going through all the materials and selecting what we agreed was the strongest work, balanced against a commitment to have **gender equality and diversity** across the stages and workshop spaces. What we have now, we feel, is an impressive list of some of the top artists working in improvisation, and some new and exciting teachers and formats that are sure to make a splash.

### **The shows selected for this year's conference include:**

*The Bechdel Test* by Lisa Rowland.

*El Jaguar Fiesta Tour* by Derek Flores.

*The Ferocious Four* by Laura Doorneweerd.

*Frisky Friday* by VTS.

*Le Roundabout*, by Dan O'Connor.

*Lugares* by Patti Stiles and Felipe Ortiz.

*Masks Unleashed* by Steve Jarand.

*OK Tinder* by VTS.

*Our Play* by Patti Stiles and Joe Bill.

*Play Unscripted* by Dan O'Connor.

*The Time is Now* by Inbal Lori.

*The Toys Strike Back*, by Det Andre Teatret.

### *This year's theme is Improv & Ecology. What do they have in common?*

We came up with Ecology as a theme, out of a desire to host a conference that was built on honouring the original ideas behind the formats by Keith, as well as celebrating the **ongoing evolution of the work**.

We saw Keith Johnstone and the origin of *TheatreSports* like the roots and trunk of a great tree, with the expanding companies and artists across the branches and leaves. This also reflected our wish to hold space to explore some important themes like **safer workspaces, diverse and inclusive practises, equity and gender equality, and building stronger relationships with our indigenous communities**.

We all have a responsibility to uphold the ongoing health of our industry, just as we all hold responsibility in our own way for the health of our planet. By connecting, listening to each other, by sharing our struggles, by learning how to best support one another, we can ensure that the art of theatrical improvisation can sustain a long and healthy future.

### *How do Vancouverites feel about improv?*

I don't know of anywhere in the world that has as active and vibrant an improv scene, as Vancouver. We are the home to three major companies, three improv schools, many independent groups, a queer improv company that has been active for 15 years, many all-woman improv groups, an international improv festival, and of course Vancouver TheatreSports that performs 7 nights a week, 52 weeks a year!

Vancouver Loves Improv!

### *What do they like the most about it?*

**The variety and diversity.** You can see three or more improv shows across the city on any given night of the week, and that doesn't include the suburbs.

We know that our city and community is going to welcome the world with open arms, and can't wait to see what mischievous magic gets dreamed up at the 2019 ITI Conference & Festival!

### *What's going to make Vancouver 's conference special?*

We have been meeting with Quelema Sparrow, a First Nations Museum theatre artist, who is going to help us welcome the delegates and participants to this land, which many don't know, **Vancouver lies on the unneeded and ancestral territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, the Musqueam, Squamish & Tsleil' Watouth.** This means that the lands were never surrendered, and there is no treaties, so it's important for us to acknowledge the peoples who were here way before us, and who were the steward of the land for countless generations. We also have collaborated with the Ditidaht First Nations on Vancouver Island, where a young artist, with support from the elders, designed a beautiful logo for the conference. Welcoming the global improv community here in this way, we are able to share with them all the wonderful things this area of the world has to offer. Striking mountains, sandy beaches, forest walks, nature reserves, museums, contemporary and historical architecture, a rich cultural mosaic, and Granville Island, an arts and culture hub that houses the three venues

where all of the events will take place. One of those spaces, The Waterfront Theatre, is the same venue where Keith taught his first workshop here in 1980!

**Like we said before, the ITI Conference also organizes workshops, panels, and roundtables addressing different topics such as performance, storytelling, theatre arts, and business.**

*“One of the things I like most about my job is talking to people from the Impro community from every corner of the globe. The great thing about the conference is that it brings these people from everywhere in the world together and get a chance to meet in person”, says **Alana Marchetto**, ITI Office Administrator. “I always want, to connect with the people, to see the amazing performances and to be inspired by what other people are doing to make the Impro community alive, and vibrant in their part of the world”.*

**When improvisers meet, things happen. So we can expect much things happening at the 2019 ITI Conference and Festival.**



# 2019 INTERNATIONAL THEATRESPORTS FESTIVAL