

Here & Now

UPCOMING EVENTS

2018 MOJA Arts Festival
Sept. 27-Oct. 7



Charleston's 35th annual MOJA Arts Festival is a celebration of African-American and Caribbean Arts. The line-up of events include displays of visual art, music and dance.

A Star is Born
Opening in theaters
Oct. 5



Bradley Cooper and pop icon Lady Gaga star in this film about a struggling artist and a famous musician that come together to navigate life in the music industry.

A Spark of Light
Out in bookstores
on Oct. 8



Written by *New York Times* bestselling author Jodi Picoult, the novel focuses in on a shooting in a health clinic. The book tells the story of people at the clinic and how their lives intertwine during tragedy.

Big Bang final season 12
Sept. 24 on TBS



After 11 seasons of this beloved TV sitcom, this last season is the cast's opportunity to go out with a bang.

Stop Light Observations
Oct. 20
Music Farm



The local rock band Stoplight Observation will be returning to South Carolina to perform at the Charleston Music Farm. Tickets are currently being sold online for \$10.



The audience waits at Theatre 99 before one of its comedy improv class performances on Aug. 24. photo // Camryn Teder

99 ways to get a laugh

Improv comedy provides Charlestonians with lots of humor

CAMRYN TEDER | *Co-Writing Editor*

A few things come to mind if I were to ask myself what is hidden behind an old brick building downtown on 280 Meeting Street. Maybe a quirky collection of rusty old typewriters or -- even more likely -- something much more sinister, like a murderous clown.

Peeking behind the long standing store The Bicycle Shop in downtown Charleston, I was surprised to find out that those images don't apply here. Behind the old brick structure is not a sad graveyard where beach cruisers go to die, but a comedy show where the audience runs the stage.

This is Theatre 99. The pinnacle of all things hidden and hilarious. Every night from Wednesday through Saturday, comedians take the stage and exude hilarity with little more warning than a suggestion from the audience.

I was incredibly excited to attend this show. A humid Friday night, August 21. Two hours of unexpected comedy -- for myself, the audience, and the comedians alike. To make my excitement grow, I only had to spend \$12 on my ticket -- \$12 for two whole hours of comedy plus an intermission. People, that is luxury for less.

If \$12 is a little too much for you and your part time job, there is a show for just \$5 twice a week affectionately labeled "Laugh for a Lincoln." That is not a joke. You're gonna wanna buy a ticket.

When I first arrived at the shared address of the bike shop and the comedy club, there were already streams of people leading the way to the back of the

building. If I didn't already know that is where Theatre 99 is located, I would have been slightly weirded out. I followed the crowd, the sign for the theatre assuring me that this was in fact the right place, to the back of the wide, white building. The entrance to Theatre 99 is a tall black metal staircase with a cord of LED lights curled along the railing.

I climbed the steps and pushed open the door.

Now, I wasn't sure what to expect from practically the attic of a bicycle store but I assure you it was not what I was picturing. The small entry hall, curved in a sort of L shape around the stage, was lined with eccentric and outlandish pictures from local artists. The lights were dim and sort of reminded me of a dingy hole-in-the-wall in a city.

Which, come to think of it, is exactly what Theatre 99 is.

One of the walls of the hallway was exposed brick from the original building while the other was painted with a sort of dusty golden color.

There was a small bar where you could purchase all kinds of cherry cokes, oatmeal creme pies and t-shirts with a little bit of cash.

Going out into the theatre, I was surprised at the bohemian ambiance. The room itself was completely black with splashes of vibrant color to contrast with the environment. The seats were cherry red and plushy and they RECLINED. I'm sorry -- that is incredible. I felt like I was splayed out on my broken-in couch at home.

The stage was small and bright with another string of happy-looking bulbs floating across the ceiling in a sort of zig-zag fashion. There were abstract and brightly colored panels set up on stage, all depicting different shapes and colors.

I would be perfectly happy just staring at the room and slouching in my chair. That was enough for me. But of course, it gets better.

Even though I had arrived there half an hour

early, the seats were filling up fast. By the time the show was about to start, the house, or the attic rather, was packed with people.

The show started promptly at 8 p.m.

The lights dimmed and six comedians took the stage with nothing but their quick wit to guide them. The audience roared.

As I came to find out by a show of hands, the majority of the audience were returning fans. That is always a good sign.

I reclined in my seat and prepared for everyone's incredible animal-sounding laughter to blend into a beautiful cackling chorus.

I was a little curious to see exactly how improv worked as I had never seen it done before (except in an episode of "The Office"). Basically, one of the six comedians would ask a question pertaining to a specific topic, and the audience simply yells out a response. As most of the people surrounding me were middle-aged drunk adults, nearly all the suggestions were nothing short of hilarious in and of themselves.

One of the funniest improv skits of the night was when the audience offered up their phones so that their text messages could be read aloud as the only form of dialogue. I'm sure you can imagine how that went.

I've always seen comedy as an art form in and of itself. It was incredible to see these stories be shaped on the spot out of thin air. I was so captivated by everything that was happening on stage and laughing so hard that I cried.

Theatre 99 and all of its talented comedians are worthy of any stage, beyond even that of SNL.

The show is at a low, low price, but the comedy is of the highest quality. The hole-in-the-wall location makes the show that much better, like you know some sort of secret place. If you are a local in Charleston and have never been to Theatre 99 get over there and laugh your night away.