



The Improv: An Oral History of the Comedy Club that Revolutionized Stand-Up

Budd Friedman, Tripp Whetsell (With)

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Have you heard the one about the aspiring Broadway producer who bought a closed restaurant and changed the course of American comedy?

It's no joke—his name is Budd Friedman, and his legendary club helped shape the stand-up comedy that is still a staple of entertainment today.

From the microphone to the iconic brick wall, the Improv has been the launching pad of the nation's most talented comedians. By providing a stage for them to riff on everything from race and religion to politics and sex, the Improv not only generated legions of comedy fans, it reinvented the art form by overturning the comedy traditions of the Borscht Belt.

Budd Friedman's legendary comedy club wasn't the first to feature comedians, but it was the first of its kind to present comedians in a continuous format, and the first one to give unknown performers the opportunity to try out new material in front of a live audience—with the opportunity to be discovered by talent agents and late-night TV bookers.

The Improv is an oral history of the most important comedy club in America, emceed by Budd Friedman himself, and featuring in-depth interviews with some of the most important names in comedy —including Jay Leno, Michael Keaton, Bill Maher, Larry David, Larry Miller, Jeff Garland, Jerry Stiller, Kevin Nealon, Gilbert Gottfried, Joe Piscopo, Tim Reid, Will Shriner, Roseanne Barr, Judd Apatow, Robert Klein, Richard Lewis, Leslie Moonves, Howie Mandel, Bill Engvall, Lily Tomlin, Rick Newman, Norman Lear, Billy Crystal, Alan Zweibel, Dick Cavett, Fred Willard, Jimmie Walker, David Steinberg, and many more!

The Improv gives readers an exclusive, insider look at what really happened on stage and off-mike. From the revelry and the rivalry to the smash hits, near misses, love affairs, show biz politics, chemical experimentation, exhilarating rises, tragic downfalls and just plain fun, *The Improv* features true insiders' accounts of a unique institution in America's cultural history and the man who unofficially provided the laugh track for an entire nation.

The Improv: An Oral History of the Comedy Club that Revolutionized Stand-Up Details

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From Reader Review The Improv: An Oral History of the Comedy Club that Revolutionized Stand-Up for online ebook

Naomi says

This book is really odd to me in its writing format. Good, but odd. I must admit the format drove me insane because it felt more like I was sitting in a room with a bunch of comedians sitting around having random conversations versus a set timeline format. It made for interesting reading, but one couldn't skim this book because it was very easy to get lost in doing so.

Given my love for Amazon's new show, The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel, I jumped on this book. That is the feeling this book had. Reading that bouncing around was totally different from watching it though.

Reviewed for publisher through Netgalley.

Keith Chawgo says

Budd Friedman and Tripp Whetsell have put together the history of The Improv which gave birth to many of our comedy genius in the past and present. Told from Budd's point of view, the history of The Improv is detailed from its grass roots beginning into the recognisable name that it is today.

Interspersed with interviews and soundbytes from comedians and there are some chapters dedicated to people like Jay Leno and Andy Kaufman. This is an interesting and thought provoking history of an iconic comedy institution though there are times this seems a little uneven. This is basically a warts and all tale of the rise and tragedy of comedy.

Budd Friedman should really be recognised for the talent that he has discovered over the years such as Jerry Seinfeld and Richard Klein to name just a couple. He has put a lot of blood, sweat and tears over the years and has suffered some serious setbacks as well. This is a brave and thought provoking history that should please anyone who is interested in the working of a successful comedy club especially a club that has stood the test of time in the ever changing environment that it finds itself in.

Overall, this is highly recommended and a few lessons are learned whilst reading through this insightful autobiography. All the emotions are there and there really always tears behind the laughs when it comes to comedy and this book surely delves into all the nooks and crannies. There are a few let downs which are probably more down to lawsuits and litigation but there is enough information to figure out who he is generally talking about.

This is a winner of a novel and enjoyable read that is highly recommended.

Stephanie says

I really enjoyed this history of The Improv, the institution that was instrumental in bringing stand-up comedy

to the front of pop culture. Budd Friedman, the owner and founder of The Improv, is the narrator, but he splices in sound bytes from dozens of comedians who became household names.

If you enjoy the inner workings of the stand-up circuit, you'll love this collection of stories. Some chapters are focused on the rise of the club and Budd's struggles/recollections, and others are focused on specific comics, like Jay Leno and Andy Kaufman.

The book rides this great high until the very end, which left me a little disappointed. Budd mentioned bringing a lawsuit against an unnamed comedian, and it didn't seem to fit with the celebration of the rest of the book. The rest of the book is so candid - so much so that Budd has included some less-than-flattering comments about him from comics - and bringing up this bad blood and then not naming the other party seemed unresolved. The rest of the book paints the struggles of The Improv while also celebrating the successes.

Phillip Frey says

Friend of mine and I had known Budd Friedman back in the 1960's and '70's, and we had spent a lot of time at the Improv. I thought it would be a boring book. It wasn't. A great trip through the world of stand-up, past and present.

Toni says

4.5++

I love comedy and really enjoyed this book about the comedy club, The Improv, and its start in NYC and later in LA. Many of our comedy legends started out doing stand-up on its stage, such as, Jay Leno, Richard Pryor, Jerry Seinfeld, Robin Williams, and on and on. Comedy clubs were really big in the 1970s through the 1980s, including, Catch a Rising Star, and the Comedy Store. There's a lot a great history from The Improv in this book so I highly recommend it.

Patti says

Not bad. I had expected detail on more comics rather than the select few he profiled.

Ana Garza says

I love reading the behind-the-scenes about just about anything, and this book did not disappoint. It was a fascinating look back to The Improv, a comedy club, and how so many greats frequented there. If you like comedy, I would strongly recommend this wonderful book.

Thank you to NetGalley for my ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Ellen Klock says

If you are fascinated by all things Broadway, yearn to read memoirs full of namedropping, and love the world of comedy, then *The Improv: An Oral History of the Comedy Club Which Revolutionized Stand Up* written by Budd Friedman with the help of Tripp Whetsell and an introduction by Jay Leno is the book for you.

Full of comments and tributes from the recognizable major players who found the Improv a haven, Budd tells his saga of the hows and whys of the Improv's existence and the details which led to not only its success but its role in launching many a comedian into the national spotlight on both coasts. Surprisingly readable, this is the opportunity to be the fly on the wall and discover the behind the scenes scuttlebutt of what happened when both the newbies and established members of the "Biz" let their hair down. A good book to add to your voyeur collection.

Four stars and a thank you to Netgalley for providing this ARC in exchange for an honest review.

This review also appears on my blog Gotta Read:

<https://ellenk59.wordpress.com/2019/0...>

P says

Interesting read, littered with facts and factoids, but ultimately disjointed (at least when enjoyed as an audiobook) and barely more than superficial.

Michael Emond says

There are much better books I have read lately about the history of comedy (*I'm Dying up Here* and *The Comedians*) but this was still a very enjoyable read of THE most influential comedy club ever. As I have seen in some other reviews - the format of the book is a little shot gun in the sense there isn't a clear narrative and the timeline speeds up as we get into the 80's and 90's. We get some quotes from comedians and people who worked at the club and we get Budd (the founder of the Improv) interjecting his thoughts. Even though that can be jarring, I think it worked well because a) the quotes from the people who are there were the most interesting and b) Budd is the perfect example of the unreliable narrator. I got the feeling from what he wrote (and a few choice quotes about him) that he tried to paint himself in a nicer light than he was in reality. That isn't to take away from what he did to help so many comedians and how he changed the idea of stand up by offering comedians a venue to practice their art in - but I get the feeling he wasn't as magnanimous as he tried to come across. He glosses over a lot - e.g. His divorce and what led to it and how he treated many of the comics.

I have also seen a few reviews who are upset with how he portrays Mitzi Shore- a competing comedy club owner in LA (because she is dead and can't defend herself). But I actually thought that was done fairly. It is from his perspective and by any accounts I have read of her she doesn't come across as a likeable person.

Overall it felt like a long read because of its format but it was always an enjoyable read. If you are interested in the history of stand up I would consider this a must read. 3.5 stars (Come on Goodreads! - let me give out half stars :)

Neil says

I received a free copy via Netgalley in exchange for a honest review.

First the negative part about this.

It mentioned a lot of American comedians that I had not heard of.

But other than the above I found this to be a fascinating insight into the growth of stand up comic's.

Highly recommended.

Christian says

THREE AND A HALF. I will literally read anything as long as it is in an oral history format. I could read about every bone in my body being broken, and, as long as it is presented as an oral history, I will read it. The chapters that are page after page of praise for Leno or Budd himself are tedious, but the chapters on Andy Kaufman and Freddie Prinze make up for them.

Jill says

Budd Friedman changed comedy. In 1963, a would-be Broadway producer opened a little after-hours place where theater performers could come and find a welcoming stage. Singers like Liza Minelli and Bette Midler would come and sing with the house piano player, Barry Manilow. Actors like Jason Robards and Albert Finney would hang out at the little coffee shop in Hell's Kitchen.

But it wasn't until the The Improvisation, later renamed The Improv, turned into an outlet for young comedians that the club and Friedman himself become the iconic star-maker that it still is today. Comedians such as Robert Klein, Robert Lewis, and Jay Leno learned their comic chops on the stage of the Improv, and they in turn made it famous. Now it's hard to name a comedian who hasn't known time before that famous brick wall: Billy Crystal, Larry David, Robin Williams, Drew Carey, Lily Tomlin, Andy Kaufman, Jerry Stiller and Anne Meara, Bob Saget, Howie Mandel, Jerry Seinfeld, and so many more. Dustin Hoffman would show up to play the piano every once in awhile, and none other than Danny Aiello was the bouncer. It was the place to be in New York City.

All of the stories are here in The Improv: An Oral History of the Comedy Club that Revolutionized Stand-Up, from the beginning of Budd Friedman's dream through his success and his mentorship of some of the greatest comedians of the last fifty years. A wealth of comedy shows, movies, books, and television shows can all trace their origins to the comedians who learned on Friedman's stage, and the next generations of comedians will no doubt still have much to thank him for. The man turned comedy into art, and we are all the better for his contribution to popular culture.

Anyone who is interested in comedy should devour this book. With contributions from names throughout the

world of entertainment, The Improv is a masterclass in making people laugh, in learning timing, and in the history of all our modern stand-up comedy legends. Required reading for all would-be comedians, most certainly, and fun reading for those of us who love to laugh. Very highly recommended.

Galley for The Improv were provided by BenBella Books through NetGalley.com, with many thanks.

JZ says

Budd Friedman had no idea what would happen. So interesting, I listened twice to some sections. Amazing!
