

By [Dan Naumovich](#)

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Second City coming to Springfield

The old observation that “everybody’s a comedian” is probably more true today than ever before. Social media and YouTube have provided everyone with a stage to satisfy their need to bask in the laughter of others. So, has the glut of “funny” videos and “witty” blogs made life more difficult for those who make comedy for a living? Actress Nicole C. Hastings doesn’t think so. Hastings and the other cast members of the Second City sketch comedy touring ensemble will perform two shows Saturday in Springfield.



PHOTO/ TODD ROSENBERG/SECOND CITY

From left, Adam Peacock, Nicole Hastings, Sarah Shook, Pat Reidy, Emily Walker and John Hartman perform with one of Second City’s traveling troupes.

The Second City (sketch comedy)

- When: 5 and 8 p.m. Saturday
- Where: Hoogland Center for the Arts, 420 S. Sixth St.
- Tickets: \$26-\$48, available at 523-2787 or www.hcfta.org.

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So, has the glut of “funny” videos and “witty” blogs made life more difficult for those who make comedy for a living?

Actress Nicole C. Hastings doesn't think so.

"There is much more crap out there, absolutely. There are more mediocre videos. Anybody can put up a video of their cat playing with yarn," she said. "However, the people who are consuming it can pick what they like. They can forward things that they like. And so talent will still rise above the rest — it just happens in a different sort of way."

Hastings and the other cast members of the Second City sketch comedy touring ensemble will perform two shows Saturday at the Hoogland Center for the Arts (see accompanying information for details).

Hastings, a California native, is also quick to point out that some of the do-it-yourself comedy is quite good.

"People get to produce their own material at a lower level, which is really a cool thing. They don't have to wait for a studio or ("Saturday Night Live" producer) Lorne Michaels to say OK," she said.

While Second City has always been about live comedy, the comedy theater has started taking advantage of social media's ability to tap into a new markets and reach different demographics. The Second City Network is the iconic group's answer to comedy websites, such as Funny or Die, and features videos and other humorous materials. For example, a parody of a Kickstarter campaign to fund World War III has been viewed more than 2,600,000 times on YouTube.

"There is so much talent working for Second City and it's a way of getting more jokes and bits and ideas out there," Hastings said.

Work with them

The group is also thriving in its traditional live theater setting, even during a time when plays and musicals are losing their audience share.

"You can ask any theater owner in the country and they're going to tell you that people are seeing less live theater. However, weirdly, Second City is growing at the same time. They're selling out shows every night of the week, on more than one stage," Hastings said.

When Second City hits a new town on its tour — and especially if the actors will be playing more than one night — the cast will do some research so they can have some local references at the ready when performing improvised scenes.

"We'll talk to the tech crew on hand and find out what's going on in the area. Or we'll find out if there's an easy way to reference a restaurant that everybody all knows. And I'll also glance at the newspaper to see if there's anything major that we should hit," she said.

Improvisation, however, is a two-way street. The cast relies on suggestions from the audience and it works best when the interaction is spontaneous so that the performers are forced to respond quickly to the unexpected. This “by-the-seat-of-your-pants” element is lost when the audience has a one-track mind.

“You want to always say, ‘No, there’s no such thing as a bad crowd.’ But the fact of the matter is that there is. It doesn’t have to do with the size of the crowd. Sometimes, late at night, you get a really drunk crowd and they are only yelling out dirty suggestion after dirty suggestion. And we get that a lot,” Hastings said.

One nation, under comedy

Asher Perlman will be joining Hastings on stage this weekend. The Wisconsin native said that despite the mood of the audience, or its collective blood/alcohol level, the key to good improvisation is confidence.

“There’s an element of trusting your instinct and an element of trusting your training. And also just knowing that whatever you do, everybody else on stage has your back and they will make it work,” Perlman said.

Second City is known for its sharp take on current social and political issues. Even during a time when much of the country is split sharply along partisan lines on many of these issues, people will still laugh at their own side.

“When the country is divided, that’s kind of when comedy is at its best because it’s one of the only things that can unite people,” Perlman said.

The show coming to Springfield is called “Happily Ever Laughter” and includes a mix of classic Second City sketches, along with some newer scenes.

Hastings mentioned a spelling bee sketch, that had originally been performed by the cast that included Steve Carell and Stephen Colbert, as one as one of the bigger laugh-getters of the evening. Perlman, who said he likes the challenge of playing many characters in a given night, pointed to a sketch called “Veronica,” which has a more bittersweet tone.

“It’s the perfect combination of tender, yet still funny. I really like comedy that comes from that emotional, human place. There are moments that make you want to laugh and moments that make you want to cry,” he said.

Before they were stars

Second City in Chicago has provided any number of actors who gained fame on “Saturday Night Live” (Glida Radner, John Belushi, Chris Farley, Bill Murray, Tina Fey, etc.)

But did you know that these actors also spent time at the famous sketch comedy theater?

- Stephen Colbert ("The Colbert Report")
- Steve Carell ("The Office")
- Bonnie Hunt ("Jerry Maguire")
- Joan Rivers (stand-up comedian)
- Jeff Garlin ("Curb Your Enthusiasm")
- Dan Castellaneta ("The Simpsons")
- Peter Boyle ("Everybody Loves Raymond")
- Fred Willard ("Best in Show")
- George Wendt ("Cheers")
- Jack McBrayer ("30 Rock")
- Shelley Long ("Cheers")
- Neil Flynn ("Scrubs," "The Middle")
- Richard Kind ("Spin City")
- Melinda Dillon ("A Christmas Story")
- Ian Gomez ("Cougar Town")

-- Source: **SecondCity.com**

<http://www.sj-r.com/article/20131031/NEWS/310319882>
