



Showstopper! The Improvised Musical

at Palace Theatre, Manchester

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) February 2018

An improvised Musical? Entirely original with no preconception at all of plot, character or style with no rehearsed songs or choreography, but entirely made up on the spur of the moment? 'Impossible!', I hear you cry. And I have to admit that while watching the show this evening, I too was very sceptical. I was convinced that they must have had some pre-rehearsed material that they can somehow slightly alter or shoehorn in to whatever is necessary on the evening; however I now realise that that simply is not the case. This talented crew of 6 performers work together with each other truly improvising their way through a 90 minute (including interval) Musical which is completely original and therefore completely different every time.

How do they do it? I don't know. I am an actor and director and have been in the profession for almost 30 years, and yet there is absolutely no way I would have swapped places with any of the cast this evening.

The format of the show I imagine will be the same each time. A controller / MC walks on to stage to answer a ringing telephone. It is their producer, Cameron, and they are given the task of writing a brand new Musical using the six performers, a three-piece band and the audience as 'writers'. The MC takes suggestions from the 'writers' firstly as to the setting of the Musical. Last night we chose the Winter Olympics. We were then asked to shout out different Musicals, and throughout the show several or indeed all of these suggestions would be given a 'homage' sequence, as the cast sang in the style of that particular Musical. Finally we were asked to provide a title, and we voted in an overwhelming majority for 'Piste Off'.

This was enough information and gave the 6 enough time to formulate their game plan, and came on to sing their opening number.

On a simple set in red and black which could be used for basically any situation anywhere at any time (a sensible move), and the cast of 6 all wearing red and black too, they acted, sang, and yes even danced their way through this improvised extravaganza. We saw an American slalom ace with his young protege get into all kinds of sexual and romantic scrapes with an Irish lesbian, a tiny Russian skier with an incredible vocal range, a Brazilian wife with blond hair and a very suspect accent, a priest called Elvis Presley, and witnessed the world's first downhill luge without the luge! And of course, as most Musicals have a happy ending, this one did too. After witnessing their version of a Riverdance / Cossack Dance Stand-off, a 'Wicked' parody and an Avenue Q sequence which was a deal better than the actual Musical itself, the show ended with a full chorus number joyously flagging the Musical's title, "Love Is Enough To Keep You From Being Piste Off".

Of course, since these shows are entirely improvised, you will not see anything like this ever again. I have to admit, because the show was so unbelievably slick, and these 6 worked so well

together, a small part of me still refuses to believe that it was 100% new material, but I suppose that's a back-handed compliment to the genius of the players.

We mustn't forget the band either. A keyboardist, guitarist and percussionist played seamlessly throughout, accompanying the singing and improvising their music to suit too. Not an easy task at all, and full credit to them also. Theatrical risk-takers don't get better than this! If you like impro and you like Musicals, the you will love this show!