

HAVING THEIR CAKE

*Comedian and
south Londoner
Marcus Brigstocke
is bringing the
improv scene
to Clapham*

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One of the UK's finest comedic talents, Marcus Brigstocke is on a mission to launch a new improv supergroup. This month, an all-star cast of south London comedians will perform in his brand new show entitled *There Will Be Cake* for five nights, exclusively at Omnibus in Clapham. Brigstocke will be joined by pal Rachel Parris of *Austentatious* fame (a show that presents an improvised version of a Jane Austen novel). Also on board is Pippa Evans of the *Showstoppers*, an Olivier award-winning improvised musical show, and comedy legend Paul Foxcroft of acclaimed two-player adventure *Cariad & Paul*.

The starting point for this particular show is the universal theme of birthdays. 'In improv, you often take a single word from which you build stories, and in turn build them out into scenes,' Brigstocke explains. 'The only thinking behind birthdays, and cake, is that they're joyful. It's nice when a springboard into a show is joyful. Not to say that everything afterwards will be!' Given that it's an improvised show, candles and cake are all that's for certain.

Is that what's so exciting about improv, I ask of the chatty trio of Brigstocke, Evans and Foxcroft, as the latter two join us? 'For me, it's the joy of not knowing what's going to happen, and the anticipation of what you're going to do next,' Evans offers. 'It's so magical. It's very rare that you have that experience of genuinely collaborating.' Evans, I am intrigued to discover, managed to



Pippa Evans, Marcus Brigstocke and Paul Foxcroft strike a pose

improvise for 26 hours during this year's London Improvathon. For Foxcroft, too, it's a unique experience. 'I don't know any other genre where performers make the discoveries at the same time as the audience,' he adds. 'Everyone in the room finds out at the same time. And you can't fake spontaneity.' Whatever happens, I suspect that all five incarnations of the show will be hilarious, silly, exciting and innovative.

Brigstocke, a stand-up comedian by trade, is actually the least experienced improviser of the group. 'I'm usually on my own. In some venues, literally alone,' he jokes. 'But playing with other people and creating that spark is just insanely fun. It's quite obscene that we occasionally get paid for it. The pleasure for us is in the exploration. Working with

experienced improvisers is fun because we're all at the top of our game, so the ego disappears and curiosity takes hold – allowing us to really explore a scene.' So would he say it's one of the most creative arms of comedy? 'It can't not be,' he affirms. 'There's actually been a massive swing towards improv in the UK. It's

always been hugely popular in the States and Canada. If you've done it once and it's not for you, you'd probably know –

but if you've done it and had fun, you'll know that it's thrilling.'

As a south west Londoner himself, another driving force for Brigstocke is to support the local scene, and Omnibus itself. 'I love what they've done here and what they're trying to achieve,' he enthuses. 'There's so many culturally switched on people and ▶

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families who live here. Omnibus is right in the middle of that, next to Clapham Common. I'm hopeful that it will become known as a venue for fun improv and as a comedy destination. It would be great to establish that as a regular thing,' Evans is nodding along: 'We're seeing the death of the mega club and the rise of smaller, boutique comedy clubs,' she chips in, 'like James Gill's in Kennington and Putney. Audiences are getting a bit more savvy.'

The project was also born of a simple desire to work with friends in the area. 'Besides wanting to support Omnibus Theatre, we all wanted to do something together close to home,' Brigstocke says. He's often found to be frequenting MILK in Balham for brunch, in the audience at Banana Cabaret at The Bedford or eating out with the family at Meat & Shake in Tooting. He's also a fan of Chadwick's the butcher, the local Waitrose in Balham, and Dip & Flip.



Omnibus counts Clapham Common as a neighbour

Talking about the UK comedy scene, and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in particular, where his own talent was first recognised, Brigstocke's passion is irrepressible. 'Edinburgh is like this injection of energy and creativity. It's the biggest annual selling ticket event in the history of the world and it's right here. Anyone that goes and takes a show is adding to that stew. I get quite emotional about it.' He's also been busy working on his latest TV show, *Joy of Techs*, and his Radio 4 show *Out of the Woods*. Curtain-up! **L**

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