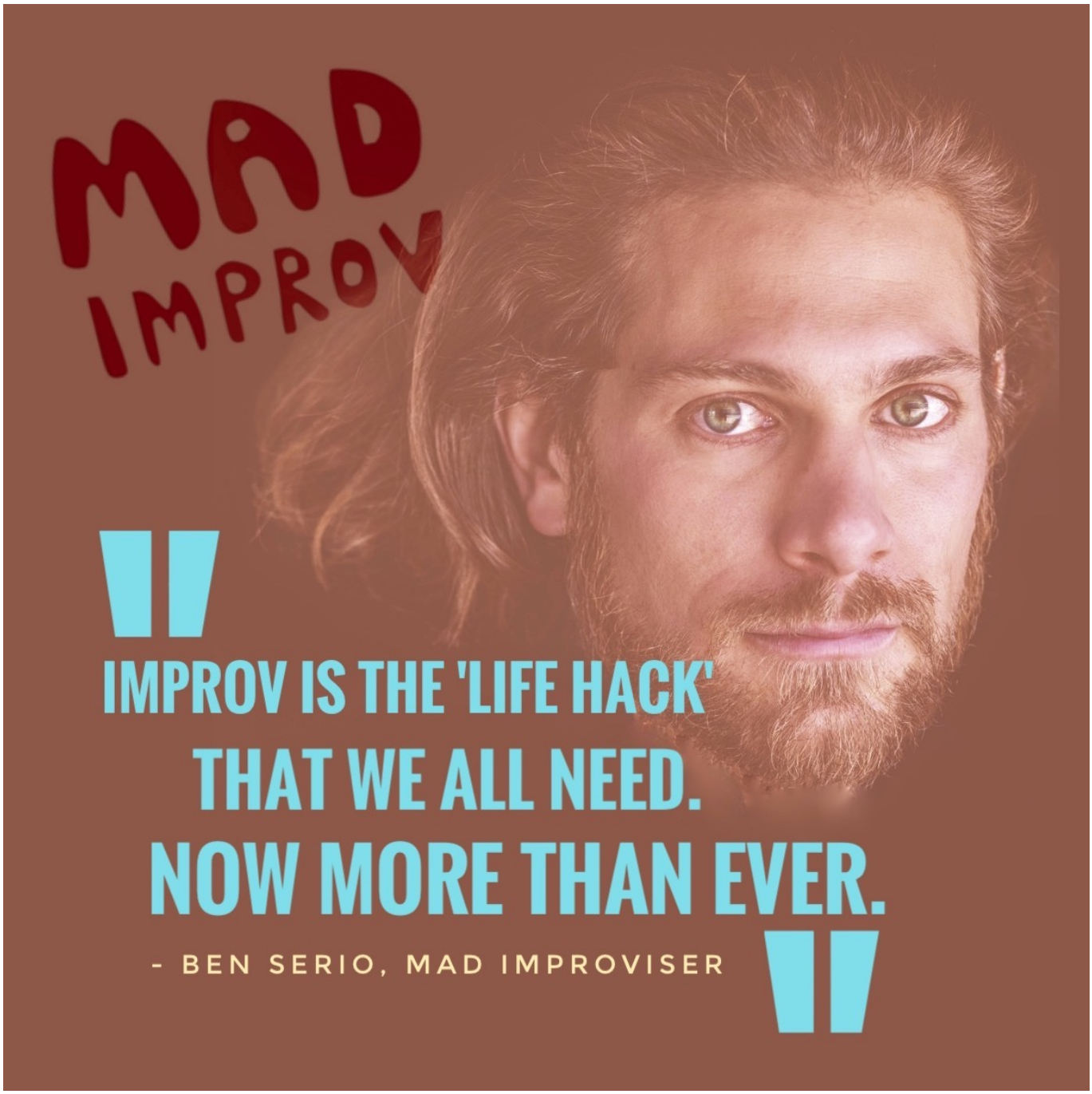
Mad Improv – shows and courses of the unexpected

If you've ever ventured to Lavapiés on a Thursday night you may well have felt the vibrant pulse of English language entertainment beating to its own rhythm at **La Escalera de Jacob**. The long-established indy theatre hosts **MAD Improv** – Madrid's go-to group for all things improv in English. The group offers up their **weekly show** (now in its third season) to audiences of native and non-native English speakers alike, as reflected in the multiple reviews on their **Trip Advisor page**.

They're now the 44th highest-rated show in all of Madrid, no less.

Their show formats include MAD About You, an improvised chat show complete with improvised interviews with audience members and an improvised house band, and MAD Monologues where fresh stand up material from comics on the local stand up scene inspires the mad improv that follows. But coming to see a MAD Improv show on a Thursday night is, for some, just the beginning of a deeper and ever-surprising journey into doing improvisation themselves.

Improv training



That's because MAD Improv, which began life in 2014, run **courses and workshops**. This month their flagship Green Course for beginners and near-beginners starts for the 7th time, as well as their Blue Course, specially designed for those with existing improv training, such as their own Green Course.

Steve Loader, one of the founding members of MAD Improv, is the teacher of their beginners course. He describes the experience as:

Witnessing a brilliant whirlwind of personal discoveries and

> *magic Eureka moments as participants grasp the basics of improv and run with them. The feedback we get from our alumni is proof that not only anyone can learn improv but also that improv turns out to be much more than just a type of performance, but something that feeds into everyday life.*

One student from their last Green Course, Carlos, put it like this:

> *It’s such a good environment, Steve is so enthusiastic and patient that we are all relaxed and lose our shyness and inhibitions. It’s more than educational, it’s therapeutic. I’ve received a training in spontaneity and I love it!*

Flexing creative muscles

As committing to regular participation on a course isn't for everyone, every Sunday at **Espacio en Blanco** the MAD Improvisers offer their weekly **MAD Improv Gym**, an open drop-in session for anyone who wants to try their hand at improv. The Gym also attracts a group of regulars and is always followed by post-improv drinks. According to Steve:

> *Between 10 and 20 people come every week to our Gym. It's always formed the foundation of our community. We love offering the sessions.*

Steve has been a Madrid resident for 6 years and also runs **courses in clown**, physical theatre and **scripted theatre**. In fact, the MAD Improv community acts not only as a meeting point for anyone interested in improv in English, but also as a skills hub for the wider English-speaking arts community.

So, maybe 2020 is the year to find your own creative beat with some mad improv of your own.

MAD Improv

- **Website**, **Facebook** & **IG: @mad_improv**
- **Show listings**
- **TripAdvisor**

Get interactive at “Mad Improv” theater workshops and shows!

Madrid’s theater scene is brimming with activity. You’ll find live micro-theater being performed in bathrooms and lingerie stores, as well as acting classes and alternative shows scheduled daily throughout the city.

But there isn’t much available in English, which is why I want to introduce you to **Mad Improv**, an English-speaking improv group that’s been shaking things up in Madrid’s interactive theater scene since 2014.

Mad Improv hosts shows and workshops on a regular basis, all run by its cast members in English. **Free improv workshops – called “gyms” – are held on Sundays from 5pm-7pm**. Gyms are purely donation-based and absolutely everyone is welcome so you never know who might show up. People have even come in on flight layovers!

They also hold **monthly open shows – called "jams"** – where anyone can get up on stage and play improv games. Jams cost €3 with a drink (which probably comes in handy).

Locations for gyms and jams vary from **Fundación First Team** in Sol to Retiro when the weather allows. And right now they have a new set of **upcoming shows** at La Escalera de Jacob!

So check out their **Meetup**, **Facebook** and **Twitter** pages to stay up to date. Once you attend an event you can also ask one of the organizers to add you to the whatsapp group.

My experience – great way to step out of your comfort zone

I had secretly always wanted to drop in on an acting class, but never got around to it until this summer when two friends, Riju (India) and Laura (Spain), enthusiastically agreed to join me at one of the Sunday gyms. This was in August so the workshop was held in Retiro behind the Palacio de Cristal.

An international group of about 15 people showed up – the different backgrounds and languages definitely added an element of fun and spontaneity to the mix. And our organizer, Summer Banks (in the photo below), did a great job at including everyone and making sure the exercises were easy to follow.

What started out with simple warm-up games quickly gave way to more challenging improv activities that admittedly made me feel ridiculous. But it’s a wonderful way to get out of your comfort zone, connect with people and laugh a lot. My friends and I left with the feeling that we wanted to try our hands at improv again (and hopefully do it better next time), which meant **the fun far outweighed the awkwardness!**

Chat with the founder, Ben

Just before going to the workshop, I had met up with Mad Improv's founder Ben Nathan-Serio at the newly opened **Plántate Café**. After studying drama in NYC and working in the field, Ben moved to Barcelona where he first started working in children's theater. Four years in he launched his own interactive theater production, *The Barcelona Time Detectives,* and was also a founding member of **BIG, The Barcelona Improv Group**.

When Ben came to Madrid, he quickly became involved in Madrid's English-speaking theater scene and founded Mad Improv in 2014. Ben says, "The reason I started Mad Improv was because there was no improv community here; I wanted to reach out to the community in a bigger way, to get people involved."

What makes improv and interactive theater so special is that it's empowering, says Ben, as it allows for genuine human interaction and connection. Not to mention, getting out of your comfort zone is both invigorating and fun.

LOMBARDI CASE

ASESINATO EN LA MOVIDA

LIVE IN THEATER
INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCES NYC

24 y 29 de Junio - 19:00h

La industrial - C/ San Vicente Ferrer 33

Tickets: Oficinas de La Industrial c/ San Andrés 8 Local

Tickets Online: www.liveintheater.com/madrid

CAN YOU SOLVE THE CASE?

AN INTERACTIVE MURDER MYSTERY

SPANISH & ENGLISH

In addition to Mad Improv, Ben also recently co-founded **Live in Theater Madrid**, a NYC-based group whose hit interactive show, *The Lombardi Case*, debuted here in summer. It's a truly unique and entertaining two-hour event where the audience tries to solve a murder mystery – **read our previous article about *The Lombardi Case* on Naked Madrid**!

More to come

While Mad Improv and Live in Theater are alive and kicking in Madrid, Ben just relocated to Austin, Texas, where he's taking part in a 9-month research lab called **The Interactive Deep Dive**. And he can't wait to "come back with some very fresh, invigorating ideas for Live In Theater, Mad Improv and just the city in general."

So stayed tuned, because we'll make sure to fill you in on what's in store.

Mad Improv Info:

- **Facebook**
- **Website**
- **Meetup**