

Artists meet Autism e.V.
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www.ImproBenefizFestival.de
www.ArtistsMeetAutism.org

**“Improv Meets Autism” - fund-and-awareness raising Improvisational Theater Festival
From 14-22nd June 2008 in Berlin and Internationally**

Berliner Initiative of Improvisational Performers are building bridges between autistic children, their family members, and professional therapy.

Berlin: From the 14-22nd of June (with supporting shows taking place throughout the entire month) the fund-and-awareness raising Festival “Improv Meets Autism” takes place in Berlin as well as internationally. More than 50 Improv Theater Groups world wide join forces to help children within the autistic spectrum. The producers of the festival will donate the proceeds, Improv players and teachers their salary to helping raise awareness and support for children and families affected by autism. From the crème de la crème of the Improv scene to smaller amateur groups, Improv lovers from around the world are uniting with a common cause. The Festival starts with a bang; a 12-hour Improv marathon in the Berliner theater Bühnen-Rausch, hosted by “The Wäm!,” the Improv group of Deniz and Christiane Döhler, the parents of three year old Luka, who at an early age was diagnosed with Autism. Famous Berliner groups such as “The Gorrillas” and “Theatersport Berlin”, well-known national groups such as “Drama Light” from Mannheim, and “Clamotta” from Cologne, and international stars such as “Unexpected-Productions” from Seattle, USA, and Rapid Fire from Edmonton, Canada, have all announced their support. Spectators interested in Improvisational theater can choose from over 25 shows and over 20 workshops in Berlin alone. All money and donations generated by the Festival go towards supporting families with autistic children as they develop and work with individual programs based on the Son-Rise® Program.

Luka’s story and the Son-Rise® Program

Until recently, Luka would not eat, or let anyone touch his face. He refused to be fed with a spoon. Eventually, he refused food altogether, and at only 1 year old, weighed less than 7 kilograms. He did not play like other children, instead spinning objects (such as bowls) for hours on end. In the presence of children his own age he seemed lost – he would not move, and cried as soon as the room became noisy. When the two Improv players and theater educators Christiane and Deniz Döhler heard their then 22-month old son diagnosed with Autism, their world seemed to crumble.

Until, that is, they heard about a program from the US, still quite unknown in Germany: The Son-Rise® Program. This program was developed in the seventies by two parents who worked intensively with their autistic child for three years. Over the course of those three years their child completely lost all autistic symptoms. This child, initially diagnosed with an IQ of under 30, whose parents were advised “it’s hopeless – the best thing you can do for your child is put him in an institution for life” went on to attend an Ivy League University, and today is CEO of the Autism Treatment Center of America.

Improvisation and Autism
“Improv Meets Autism”

In order to support Luka adequately, the family Döhler has had to rearrange their lives. Since the program is very costly as well as time-intensive, requiring near 24 hour participation, yet still has no established center in Germany, they did what their profession had prepared them for: they improvised! They asked friends, mainly Improv-players, to help them set up a program of their own. They soon discovered that Improv players have everything one needs to facilitate playing with an autistic child. The main goal of the program is to let the child know that they are accepted exactly as they are. This means joining the child in every activity, even in the repetitive behaviors common for children with autism. When Luka “spaces out” and nods his head for an hour, the facilitator simply joins in. There are few people in the world who can participate in this sort of activity wholeheartedly; Improv players adore it. Although the program showed quick success (Luka was suddenly capable of holding eye contact, and began to communicate his needs), it also became clear that even with the help of ten facilitators, the work load was enormous. The facilitators who work so hard to support Luka need support and training themselves, leaving hardly any time for Luka’s parents to continue with their professions. But the support increased – friends and allies of Luka and his parents founded the NGO “Artists Meet Autism e.V.” and started to explore this new connection between Improv theater and helping children with autism. The event manager, Mandy John, herself an Improv player and one of Luka’s facilitators, eventually came up with the idea of the fund-and-awareness raising Festival Improv Meets Autism, and began planning immediately.

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(Short Version)

Berliner and International Improv Theater Groups support Children with Autism

Berlin: An international initiative of improvisational theater groups will be staging the first fund-and-awareness raising Improv theater Festival "Improv Meets Autism" in Berlin and other locations across the globe from the 14-22nd June. Over 50 groups will take part. The producers will donate their proceeds, Improv players their pay, and Improv teachers their salaries. From the crème de la crème of the Improv scene, to smaller amateur groups, Improv lovers from around the world are uniting with a common cause. The Festival starts with a bang; a 12-hour Improv marathon in the Berliner theater Bühnen-Rausch, hosted by "The Wäm!," the Improv group of Deniz and Christiane Döhler, the parents of three year old Luka, who at an early age was diagnosed with Autism. Famous Berliner groups such as "The Gorrillas" and "Theatersport Berlin", national institutions such as "Drama Light" from Mannheim, and "Clamotta" from Cologne, and international stars such as "Unexpected-Productions" from Seattle, USA, and Rapid Fire from Edmonton, Canada, have announced their support. Spectators interested in Improv can choose from more than 25 shows and over 20 workshops. All money and donations generated by the Festival go towards supporting families with autistic children as they develop and work with individual programs based on the Son-Rise® Program. The motivation for this initiative is the successful treatment of Luka, the son of Improv playing couple, Christiane and Deniz Döhler, with a program based on this method developed in the US. The workshops taking place during the Festival are geared both towards experienced Improv players and interested newcomers. We are looking forward to welcoming you to the shows and workshops, and request that you publish the program, reports, web sites and bank account information.

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I would be happy to send you more information about:

I I Information about the Son-Rise® Program (Brochure und DVD In English language)

I I A list of the improv groups and players

I I A list of possible interviewees

I I An invitation to the press conference on the 11 June 2008

I I An invitation to the kick-off show on the 14 June 2008

Please refer to the web site for the festival program.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me under
+49-30-44024040/ +49-172-3914026.

Thank you in advance for you support and coverage.

Yours truly,

Fabian Böckhoff
Vorstand **Artists meet Autism e.V.i.G.**
PR- Verantwortlicher