

Interview: ‘Joel Murray & Friends’ at the New iO Chicago Venue

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on August 28, 2014 - 12:48pm

- [Charna Halpern](#) [2]
- [Chris Farley](#) [3]
- [Del Close](#) [4]
- [Freddy Rumsen](#) [5]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [6]
- [Improv Olympic](#) [7]
- [Interview](#) [8]
- [iO Chicago](#) [9]
- [Jack McBayer](#) [10]
- [Joel Murray](#) [11]
- [Kevin Dorff](#) [12]
- [Last Man Standing](#) [13]
- [Laura Krafft](#) [14]
- [Mad Men](#) [15]
- [Mitch Rouse](#) [16]
- [Pat Finn](#) [17]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [18]
- [The Harold](#) [19]
- [The Mission](#) [20]
- [Tim Allen](#) [21]

CHICAGO – iO Chicago continues the Grand Opening at its new venue with one of its most famous alumni – the illustrious Joel Murray. Besides opening the seventh season of “Mad Men” with a brilliant monologue as Freddy Rumsen, Murray brings his “Joel Murray & Friends” show to the new iO Chicago on August 30th.

Murray is the youngest of the famous “Murrays of Wilmette, Illinois,” which includes brothers Brian-Doyle, Bill and John, plus sister Nancy. He is also one of the earliest members of the former Improv Olympics – now called iO – which grew from its modest beginnings in Chicago with founders Del Close and Charna Halpern to their latest multi-theater venue on Kingsbury Street. Joel Murray comes back to his roots with “Joel Murray & Friends” in The Mission Theater at the venue, which will feature some other famous iO alumni including Jack McBrayer (“30 Rock”), Mitch Rouse (“According to Jim”), Kevin Dorff (“Conan”), Laura Krafft (“The Colbert Report”) and Pat Finn (“The Middle”). To get more details and to purchase tickets, [click here](#). [22]



'Joel Murray & Friends' at the iO Chicago on August 30th

Photo credit: iO Chicago

Murray has also been busy as of late in his acting and voiceover career. Besides making a comeback on “Mad Men” with the Freddy Rumsen character, featured prominently in Season Seven, Murray was the voice of Don in last year’s “Monster’s University.” He will be also featured in an upcoming Chicago-based independent film, “Open Tables,” and will go back to TV directing for Tim Allen’s “Last Man Standing.”

Murray talked via phone again to HollywoodChicago.com, about his upcoming iO show and his latest career successes.

HollywoodChicago.com: Tell us about the origins of “Joel Murray and Friends,” and how did you assemble the dream team of players for this upcoming Saturday night?

Joel Murray: I was doing a show at ‘iO West’ in Los Angeles a couple times a month, and doing it with some old friends around my age. They weren’t necessarily the best improvisers, so I thought about all the guys who used to be so good, but wasn’t doing that type of comedy anymore. So I grabbed a bunch of people like Kevin Dorff and Mitch Rouse, and brought them back. On stage, I would tell the story, they would improvise, and half the time I would be able to improvise as well. It became a great thing – our ‘bowling night’ – and we’d all get together and have a really good time. It’s nice to surround yourself with great improvisers and funny people – it makes me look so much better [laughs].

The group for Saturday night at the iO Chicago came about because people happened to be in Chicago at the same time, doing other shows there. Then it became like a fantasy football draft, I picked up T.J.[Jagodowski] and Dave [Pasquesi] from their show off ‘the waiver wire.’ It’s a brand new theater – near where the hookers used to be when I was in Chicago in the early 1980s [laughs]. It’s a big joint, with four theaters, rehearsal rooms, beer gardens and a rooftop deck. It’s quite a complex.

HollywoodChicago.com: When you get back your improvisation roots, what feels best about a great performance in those shows, as opposed to great performance with a scripted show or TV or the Movies?

Murray: The immediate response, obviously, you have an audience laughing right in front of you. You know when you’re killing. When I’m doing a single-camera comedy show, you don’t know if stuff is working. In T.J. and Dave’s new theater at the iO, ‘The Mission,’ the audience is right at ground level, eye-to-eye with us.

HollywoodChicago.com: How does the audience help to create the atmosphere that allows the improvisation format to flourish?

Murray: Chicago has the most intelligent improv audiences in the country. They applaud connections, great moves, even attempts at connections. They are with us even when we know we did something wrong. It's a smart house, because apparently one out of every three people in Chicago are improvisers [laughs]. The energy you get off of a great audience when they're laughing, makes us that much better and keeps me on my game.

HollywoodChicago.com: How was iO an 'anti-Second City' when it started out, or do you consider it a sister theater to that Wells Street institution?

Murray: It was Del Close and Charna Halpern's baby, and Del taught a different and slower long form improv, with no time limits. You had time to feel things out and learn how to act. That's why I think some really good actors have come out of the iO. You do scenes to be in scenes, and the comedy comes out of the interruption of those scenes or the situation you're in, as opposed to it just being a funny premise. It's always been about 'following the fear,' as Del used to say, and you would just trust that you were heading somewhere.

It wasn't an 'anti-Second City.' It was about doing the work. Nobody was anti-anything, it was just an additional level of training. We'd be doing a show on a Monday night back then, and often the guys from The Second City at that time would come and watch us. It wasn't about the competition, as it was just another art form going on. These guys were hip to comedy, and wanted to see what we were doing. We were firm believers in seeing other stuff, and then to go close the bar talking about it.



Joel Murray as Freddy Rumsen in the Seventh Season of 'Mad Men'

Photo credit: AMC Network

HollywoodChicago.com: There are so many myths and legends regarding the late improv guru Del Close. What can you us about him that you think the rest of the world doesn't know?

Murray: Here's a story that illustrates Del. The first time I met him was in the offices of 'Saturday Night Live,' during the period when my brother Brian was working for the show, and it was being produced by Jean Doumanian, who took over when Lorne Michaels temporarily left the show in the early 1980s. Brian was going in to pick up his paycheck, on a day when the atmosphere was really tense, you could tell.

So this guy walks into the office we're in, and he has green Dickey's pants on, with a safety pin for a fly – and that wasn't a fashion statement – and he started with, 'hey, the Murray boys, you guys got papers or a pipe?' That was Del Close. We told him we weren't carrying, so he scurries off. He came back with a loaded pipe – 'success!' – and sits at Jean Doumanian's desk, and lights up. Of course Jean walks in, but what had just happened was she'd just been fired from the show. She saw Del and said, 'it's not a good time.' And he blows out this enormous hit of pot, and replied, 'Yeah, for you.' We just all started laughing, we couldn't help it.

HollywoodChicago.com: That's a pretty fantastic introduction ...

Murray: Yeah, Del was just an odd bird. He was a guy who had cat hair on his shirt all the time, and the worst taste in shoes you ever saw. But he was a great teacher, who had no problem yelling at folks or kicking people out of class who weren't cutting it. They don't do enough of that these days, tell people that this work is not for them. But Del would do that, and very quickly, he didn't waste their time.

HollywoodChicago.com: When were the circumstances in bringing Freddy Rumsen back for the last season of 'Mad Men'? And what kind

of tone did you and Matthew Weiner want to set for that amazing monologue that begins Season Seven?

Murray: It was all about what Matt wanted to do to open it, I was kind of kept in the dark about what my role would be. All along in doing the show, he would tell me where I needed to be, it’s all in his head. It’s his baby, and he deserves the credit.

But the monologue did hit me like a ton of bricks – I’m opening the season? Wow. I worked hard at getting it memorized. I had it down, and it was a long spiel. We did the first take, which was a long camera pull-out from my enormous face. I did it all in one take. The cameraman came up to me afterward and said, ‘you know, you didn’t blink.’ That was an odd thing to say to an actor, but I knew I had at least four more takes. Apparently, I was so into it, I didn’t even blink my eyes for the whole two minutes [laughs]. After all was said and done, I really enjoyed it.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, after the recent one-two punch of ‘Mad Men’ and ‘Monster’s University,’ what job do you anticipate next as your career moves forward?

Murray: I’m excited to get back into TV directing, I’m going to direct Tim Allen’s ‘Last Man Standing,’ which is really getting much funnier since it has found its legs. I used to direct on ‘Dharma and Greg’ [Murray also had a supporting role on the show] ‘The Big Bang Theory’ and ‘Still Standing.’ The four-camera method is like a big Sudoku. At first, it’s hard to position the cameras and action, but once it’s in place, it’s an autopilot thing. I’ve always wanted to do that for later in my career, it’s a great gig, and I hope I get to do more of it.

As far as the actor’s life, who the hell knows? You audition and you put your hat in the ring. I keep doing these smaller films hoping that one of these director kids will be my Wes Anderson, and it takes off. I write, I direct, I act, I do voiceover and hopefully the fish will bite, if you put enough lines in the water.

HollywoodChicago.com: Anything else you want to say about the live shows coming up this weekend?

Murray: Well, with the team I have, they’ll also be working on Friday and Saturday. There is going to be good shows all weekend. The ticket prices also include all you can eat and drink, so ‘take [Chicago accent] dat dere.’ I’m looking forward to performing in Chicago, seeing some other performances and seeing the hometown folks.

“Joel Murray & Friends” will be at the iO Chicago, 1501 North Kingsbury Street on Saturday, August 30th, 2014. at 10pm. [Click here](#) [22] for details and to purchase tickets. For a complete schedule of iO events, [click here](#). [23]



[24]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [25]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [24]

© 2014 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Source URL (retrieved on Mar 28 2024 - 11:55am):

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/24454/interview-joel-murray-friends-at-the-new-io-chicago-venue>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/charna-halpern>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/chris-farley>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/del-close>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/freddy-rumsen>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/improv-olympic>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/io-chicago>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/jack-mcbayer>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/joel-murray>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/kevin-dorff>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/last-man-standing>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/laura-krafft>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/mad-men>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/mitch-rouse>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/pat-finn>
- [18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [19] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-harold>
- [20] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-mission>
- [21] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/tim-allen>
- [22] <http://ioimprov.com/chicago/io/shows/joel-murray-and-friends>
- [23] <http://ioimprov.com/chicago/>
- [24] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [25] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>