

# Just two men flying by the seat of their pants

*'Whose Line?' vets bring Two Man Group improv show to LMC*

By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO  
Sight & Sound Editor

BENTON HARBOR — When asked to describe Two Man Group, his improvisational theater show with Brad Sherwood, Colin Mochrie references their day job as regulars on The CW's "Whose Line Is It Anyway?"

"We like to say it's just like a live version of 'Whose Line?' without the tall guy and the black guy," Mochrie says wryly, referencing fellow longtime TV cast mates Ryan Stiles and Wayne Brady.

"We completely make the show up," Sherwood adds. "We hand the car keys to the audience and have them take us where they want to go. It's all based on their suggestions. ... They're in control. They're the puppet masters. We just try to dig ourselves out of all these different situations."

Those situations could include impromptu song parodies from Bruce Springsteen or The B-52's Fred Schneider, or theatrical scenes where audience members fill in lines of dialogue that Mochrie and Sherwood must make sense of during their comedic high-wire act, which they bring to the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre on Saturday.

"We always start off getting one suggestion or more before every single game," Sherwood says. "We bring a lot of audience members up on stage for games where they are going to be doing sound effects or filling in parts of the dialogue or moving us around. For those who have seen 'Whose Line?' and love the show, you really get to see that we are truly just making it up."

"Whose Line Is It Anyway?," which was originally hosted by Drew Carey on ABC and ABC Family from 1998-2007, has seen a revival since it began airing on The CW in 2013.

The show, which consists of a panel of four performers who create characters, scenes and songs on the spot in the style of

## IF YOU GO

**Who:** Colin Mochrie and Brad Sherwood: Two Man Group

**When:** 8 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

**How much:** \$34-\$55

**Contact:** 927-1221 or [www.themendelcenter.com](http://www.themendelcenter.com)

**Artist info:** [www.colinandbradshow.com](http://www.colinandbradshow.com)

short-form improvisation games, has already been renewed for 2016.

The American version of "Whose Line?" is actually a spin-off of the British show of the same name created by Dan Patterson and Mark Leveson that lasted for 10 seasons from 1988-1999. In 1992, Mochrie became a series regular on the British series, the same year Sherwood became a recurring performer.

"It was one of those happy accidents where everything came together," says Mochrie, who was born in Scotland but largely grew up in Vancouver, British Columbia. "People have been trying to figure out how to do improv on television for years. ... Part of it was the timing. When we started, there were a lot of sitcoms on television where you could kind of see the joke coming. But with 'Whose Line?' nobody knew where the punch line was, where the setup was. In a way, everything was a setup for a joke. Because we were surprised, the audience got surprised, too. That made it fun for them and for us."

Mochrie, who describes himself as a "very quiet, studious child, and a real bookworm" who would read almost a book a day, had originally planned to go into marine biology when a friend dared him to audition for the play "The Death and Life of

Sneaky Fitch." Mochrie was cast in the role of the undertaker.

"During the run of that play, I got my first laugh," he says, "and from there it was pretty much game over."

After graduating from high school, Mochrie attended the Studio 58 theater school in Vancouver where he discovered improv, eventually becoming a member of the Vancouver TheatreSports League.

"It was totally improv, and I just fell in love with it," Mochrie says. "It became the big cult thing to do in Vancouver in the 1980s. We had this great theater and the theater owner was a fan. So after they had a main production, we would have our shows at 11:30 on Friday nights. That became Friday and Saturday and then Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and then became this big thing. It was a great springboard for me."

Mochrie then began performing with the Second City National Touring Company where he met his future wife, Debra McGrath, who was the director of the company at the time.

"I think Dan Aykroyd said it best. It really is a comedy college," Mochrie says. "You get to improvise every night, which is great because it really is a muscle that loses its tone if you don't do it every night. And you get to work with different people with different skill levels and points of view so you really learn how to interact with them and with the audience. You learn every aspect."

Sherwood, who was born in Second City's hometown of Chicago and grew up in Santa Fe, N.M., began acting at age 8 and never looked back.

"I did a children's summer theater repertory company, then from there on out I was always doing school plays and stuff," he says. "I went to college and got my degree in acting and basically never stopped."

After moving to Los Angeles, a friend suggested checking out an improv class he was taking.



Actors, comedians and improv masters Colin Mochrie and Brad Sherwood.

"I went and it was like the heavens opened," Sherwood says. "It felt like the musical instrument I was supposed to play the rest of my life was handed to me. There was this natural instinct I had always used as a person that now I could use as a performing tool."

Ironically, Sherwood met Mochrie on a Second City-based TV show directed by McGrath.



Photo provided

Mochrie, left, and Brad Sherwood perform Saturday at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.

“And four months later we were both shooting a season of the British version of ‘Whose Line Is It Anyway?’” Sherwood adds. “That was 25-26 years ago, and we’ve been performing together ever since.”

“We’re quite different in many ways,” Mochrie adds. “I’m more of the relaxed, whatever happens, happens guy. He tends to panic a little more, but he’s really into all the details. We sort of complement each

other that way. He teaches me to be more concerned with details. I try to teach him to be a little more relaxed at times. We also just like each other. We have almost a sibling relationship where he’s the younger, irritating brother and I’m the wise, older one.”

Still, in addition to their time together on the multiple incarnations of “Whose Line?,” Mochrie and Sherwood have been

performing their two-man show for 14 years now.

“The great thing about it is we’re not like a rock band who has to play our greatest hits every night,” Mochrie says. “Every show is totally different depending on the audience and how we feel. It keeps it fresh for us.”

And for the audience, whose members still ask without fail, if what they do is

really made up on the spot.

“Everyone tries to find the trick, like it’s a magic show,” Sherwood says. “Where are the mirrors? Where’s the wire? So, when they see us live and realize we really are flying by the seat of our pants, there’s this sense of wonder as well as a lot of laughs.”

Contact: [jbonfiglio@TheHP.com](mailto:jbonfiglio@TheHP.com), 932-0364, Twitter: @HPBonfiglio